

The Portable Antiquities Scheme; Finds recording and Research in Essex
Clemency Cooper and Ben Paites
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Report by David Townend

The British Museum through its department of Britain, Europe, and pre-History coordinate the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), an initiative to record archaeological objects found by the public. The department is also responsible for administering the treasure act 1996 for the UK government. PAS is administered by a network of finds liaison officers (FLOs) based throughout the country.

Ben Paites (FLO) spoke about his work in Essex and showed photos of finds. Finds are described, given a reference number, a map reference, and entered onto a database which allows the sorting of finds by a number of criteria. Some metal detectorists bring in finds from a number of sites, not necessarily in the same county. Finds can be brought in as casual finds by the public, but a large number of finds are by detectorists. Ben is in contact with seven clubs in Essex (there may be more). Also rallies, email enquiries and drop-offs at museums also contribute. Some very common finds such as medieval buckles may not be recorded due to the very large number of objects found. Once on the database the object is recorded for posterity. Also if detectorists find objects in the same place in later years it will show up as clusters in data searches which would indicate organised, localised activity. Only objects over 300 years old are recorded.

The FLO is responsible for the entries onto the database in his area. The knowledge of the sites of finds is restricted as it could be used for searches without authorisation. Permission would be given for genuine research use of data.

The Treasure Act 1996 recovers and records objects, often coins, over 300 years old

- (a) Anything 10% of gold or silver
- (b) Prehistoric objects with any % of gold or silver
- (c) Ten or more base coins known as a hoard. This can occur over a number of visits when one or more are found. Objects found with the hoard are considered as part of the hoard.

Some objects will be added to museum collections or just maintained by museums. The finders can be compensated. Historical environmental records can be compared with finds data. PAS has links to other specialists in museums and research facilities. Heritage crime prevention was mentioned including night hawking and looking at objects offered on e-bay.

Clemency Cooper spoke to us about the developing national plan for PAS which is lottery funded and administered through the British Museum. She spoke of developing outreach contact with the local community and an increase of participation and local knowledge. She discussed the need for volunteers by PAS, training and retention of volunteers. She spoke of outreach activities, finds exhibitions, visits to schools, and the use of PAS data for research. Volunteers could bring useful knowledge to the scheme from their own interests, photographic knowledge useful. She spoke of self-recording of some objects by suitable volunteers and said there were plans for internships and new finds specialists. She said it was hoped that the public contact with PAS would increase and work continues on this idea with closer participation between PAS and the public.