

Finds such as the Chew Valley Hoard, a collection of rare Conquest-era coins, have helped change our perception of Britain's past



Unburied treasures

From Bronze Age cups to souvenirs from Hadrian's Wall to coins hidden at the height of the Viking wars, the British public has discovered hundreds of thousands of archaeological finds, many of which have been recorded with the **Portable Antiquities Scheme**. Now, 23 years after it was found-

ed, the PAS – run by the British Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales – has recorded more than 1.5 million finds. To mark that milestone, we asked six PAS archaeologists to nominate 10 discoveries that they believe have done most to transform our knowledge of the past...

COMPILED BY MICHAEL LEWIS



The Ringlemere Cup's rounded base suggests that it may have been passed around like a modern-day communion vessel

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1 A taste of the Bronze Age

The Ringlemere Cup gives us the rarest of glimpses of life in Britain more than three millennia ago

We know very little about the people who occupied the south-east corner of the British Isles 3,500 years ago. Yet a little light was shone onto this distant world on 4 November 2001, when metal-detectorist Cliff Bradshaw started scanning the fields of Ringlemere Farm, near Sandwich in Kent.

What Bradshaw found nestled beneath the surface that day is one of the oldest treasures ever discovered in Britain. It was a Bronze Age gold vessel dated to 1700–1500 BC, and such was its age and rarity (it is one of only two gold Bronze Age cups found in England) that it was acquired by the British Museum.

The Ringlemere Cup was

originally 11cm high with corrugated sides. I say 'originally' because, when Bradshaw discovered the vessel, it was severely misshapen – presumably after being hit by a farmer's plough. Had Bradshaw not chanced across the object, it might have been lost forever.

So what was the cup used for – and by whom? We can only guess. But a clue is provided by the fact that it has a rounded base. This means that the vessel could not stand alone, suggesting it might have had a ritual use – perhaps it was held or passed around, a bit like a modern-day communion vessel. Maybe it was made to carry an alcoholic or herbed drink as part of a ceremony – although that is, of course, firmly in the

realms of speculation!

What we are more confident of is that the cup was deposited (perhaps ritually) within a barrow in a prehistoric complex that dates back to c2300 BC, but with activity on the site going back even further in time. We also know that the Ringlemere Cup is one of six stylistically similar Bronze Age vessels that have been discovered across Europe – suggesting that, even at this distant point in history, ideas and skills were transmitted across the continent.

Yet it is unlikely that the cup itself was created on the continent. Archaeologists believe that this cup was probably made locally, maybe fairly close to its findspot – all of which means that the metalworking expertise required to create a high-status object like this almost certainly resided in Bronze Age Britain.

Michael Lewis, Head, PAS & Treasure, British Museum



The Chalgrove (II) Hoard consisted of a jar containing 4,957 Roman coins, including one bearing the portrait of an emperor almost lost to history

2 Following the money

The discovery of thousands of coins suggests that Roman Britain may have been an agricultural powerhouse

'Grots'. It's not the most glamorous of words. But to historians of Roman Britain, it's a thing of beauty.

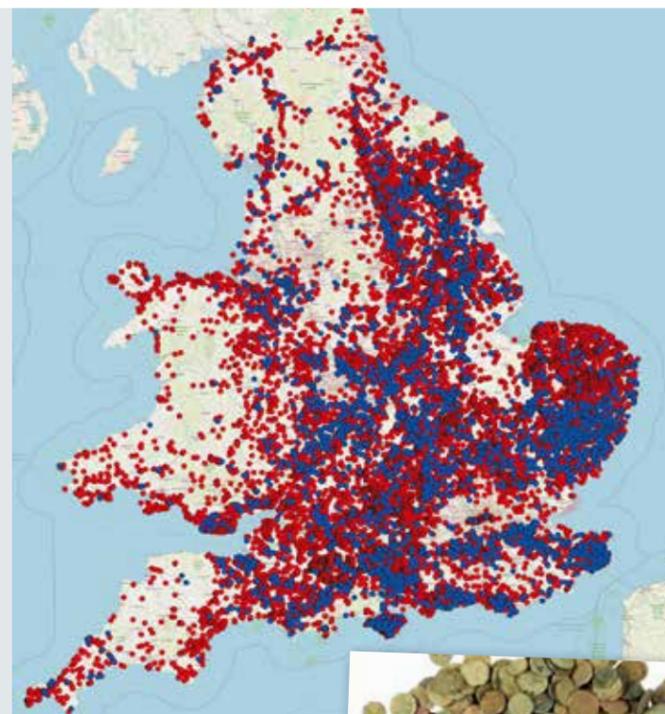
'Grots' is a term sometimes used to refer to the worn and corroded base-metal Roman coins discovered across England and Wales in their thousands. Every Roman emperor (not to mention almost all usurpers) issued their own coinage. This makes Roman coins a uniquely valuable source of information for the evolution of Roman Britain from Claudius's invasion in AD 43 through to the collapse of the province more than three centuries later.

What is perhaps most remarkable is the sheer number that have been identified. By 2005, the Portable Antiquities

Scheme had recorded just over 34,000 Roman coins. In the intervening 15 years, the numbers have grown to 320,000 – the largest dataset of its kind worldwide.

But it is where these coins have been discovered – every bit as much as their volume – that has done most to shape our understanding of the province of Britannia. In short, the regions that have yielded the highest numbers don't necessarily correspond with those that traditionally come to mind when we think about 'Roman Britain'.

Take what is known as the Valentinianic period (AD 364–378). These 14 years in the second half of the fourth century have yielded high concentrations of coinage in the rural landscapes of the South



PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME/FICKR

This map depicts the distribution of all Roman coins recorded by the PAS – like those shown right – across England and Wales; up to 2005 (in blue) and to date (in red)



West (notably Wiltshire), East Anglia and Yorkshire. That is perhaps surprising in itself. But, when combined with other forms of evidence, it has helped cast Roman Britain in a whole new light.

The fourth century sees a growth of the rural landscape, villa construction, the fortification or reinforcement of rural settlements like Mildenhall in Wiltshire, and the appearance of other objects such as Late Roman military belt fittings. Meanwhile, literary sources highlight the importance of grain ships plying their trade between Britain and the Rhine.

This suggests that the rural Roman landscape may have been an important grain bowl in the late fourth century for the Roman armies on the Rhine, a conclusion almost unreachable prior to the PAS – and had it not been for the many 'grotty' Roman coins recorded.

Andrew Brown, assistant finds adviser and treasure curator, British Museum

3 The face that didn't fit

Few historians had heard of Domitianus – until a single coin suggested he may have been Roman emperor

Back in 2003, a metal-detectorist called Brian Malin was scouring farmland near Chalgrove, not far from Oxford, when he discovered a jar containing 4,957 Roman coins dating to between AD 251 and 279. The Chalgrove (II) hoard, as it's known, was a significant find but, seemingly, nothing out of the ordinary – after all, more than 600 hoards are known to have been discovered in Britain from this period.

But then the coins were taken to the British Museum to be conserved and identified – and everything changed. For staring out from one of the coins was an individual that no one expected to see. He was a Roman emperor named Domitianus – and, until then, many historians didn't even believe he existed.

This wasn't the first time

that Domitianus had appeared on archaeologists' radars. An identical coin, rediscovered in 2003, was found in a hoard in France in 1900, yet some scholars rejected it as a hoax because there was no supporting evidence for Domitianus. We now have that evidence, and it has enabled us to paint a partial picture of this little-known emperor.

Domitianus was, it seems, a

very short-lived emperor of the Gallic empire, a breakaway state that existed north of the Alps between AD 260 and 274. A general of the same name was involved in a failed revolt in Milan in AD 268, but it is unclear if this is the same individual.

What we do know is that Domitianus became emperor in Gaul for a few days or weeks in AD 271. It was, it appears, the shortest of reigns – but time enough, at least, to mint a few coins!

Sam Moorhead, national finds adviser, British Museum



Those who doubted that there was a Roman emperor called Domitianus were forced into a rethink when this coin emerged from the Oxfordshire soil

4 Northern exposure

The Staffordshire Moorlands Pan is a remarkable souvenir of life guarding Hadrian's Wall

For 300 years after its inception in AD 122, Hadrian's Wall was the most monumental element of a grid of garrisons and roads that formed Roman Britain's northern frontier. This mighty piece of Roman engineering would have made quite an impression on the many soldiers from across the empire who travelled north to man it. We know this from the letters and diary entries they wrote recording their experiences. We also know it from the works of art they commissioned as souvenirs of their time on the empire's edge – the most striking surviving example of which is surely the Staffordshire Moorlands Pan.

Discovered by detectorists at Ilam in the Peak District in June 2003, this artefact is one of a group of enamel-decorated pans that were

crafted to celebrate the wall's existence. Around its rim are inscriptions naming the four forts on the western end of Hadrian's Wall – Bowness-on-Solway, Drumburgh, Stanwix and Castlesteads – each of which is placed, we're told, "on the line of the Wall of Aelius". The pan even name-checks its likely owner, one Draco. To the veterans who took such items home – of which Draco was perhaps one – the sequence of garrison names recalled a route endlessly marched from the Solway flatlands west of Carlisle to the Pennine hills.

Beneath the text are swirling polychrome enamel circles, a decorative technique originating in northern Europe but favoured by military consumers. Not even the loss of the pan's



The pan name-checks four forts on the western end of Hadrian's Wall, as well as its likely owner – a man named Draco

handle and base can detract from its beauty. And you can see it for yourself at one of the three museums at which it is on rotational display: Tullie House Museum (Carlisle), the Potteries Museum (Stoke-on-Trent) and the British Museum.

Sally Worrell, national finds adviser, UCL



A sheet gold plaque (left) and a section from the cheek plate of a helmet (below) discovered in the Staffordshire Hoard, which showcased the early Anglo-Saxons' artistic exuberance

5 Anglo-Saxons seize the spotlight

The discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard propelled early medieval England into the nation's consciousness

Some finds add a few brushstrokes to our understanding of a historical period. Others, like the Staffordshire Hoard, change the picture completely.

Detectorist Terry Herbert's discovery of 4,600 fragments of seventh-century war-gear and other objects in a field near the village of Hammerwich in 2009 was the find of a lifetime. But it was a lot more than that. It turned the early Anglo-Saxon period, swathes of which have long been shrouded in obscurity, into a topic of genuine public interest. Suddenly – thanks to exquisite pieces such as a possible

representation of a Jewish priest's crown, and the Staffordshire helmet, pieced together from hundreds of precious fragments – the world saw the craftsmanship and sheer exuberance of Anglo-Saxon art.

The Staffordshire Hoard – parts of which are on display at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery and the Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent – raised many questions, of course. Was it buried as loot, or hidden for security? Could it have been a ritual offering? Why is feminine jewellery – the gold object most commonly recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme among



seventh-century finds – entirely absent?

Attempting to get to the bottom of these puzzles will only increase our fascination with this remarkable find, and the period in English history that produced it.

Kevin Leahy, national finds adviser, PAS

BRITISH MUSEUM-PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME



Some of the Viking silver ingots, jewellery and Anglo-Saxon coins buried near modern-day Watlington, probably by a member of the Viking Great Army

One of the 13 'Two Emperors' coins found in the hoard. It copies a Roman coin but is, perhaps, intended to show an alliance between Alfred and Ceolwulf II of Mercia

6 Alfred the Great strikes back

The Watlington Hoard is evidence of the struggles between Vikings and Anglo-Saxons as the tide turned in Alfred's favour

The late ninth century was a time of great tumult in Britain. In England, the Viking 'Great Army' conquered the kingdoms of Northumbria and East Anglia, and seized control of much of Mercia. Then, in the mid-870s, it turned its sights on Wessex. Even the soon-to-be great King Alfred was forced into hiding on the Somerset Levels.

But, in 878, Alfred emerged from Athelney, defeating the Vikings at the battle of Edington. The Viking leader, Guthrum, sued for peace with Alfred and agreed to leave Wessex. After spending the winter of 878/79 in Cirencester, the Vikings headed to East Anglia to settle, probably taking a route along the Icknield Way in southern Oxfordshire. It was here, near to the small town of Watlington, that detectorist James Mather made a

discovery that sheds light on this moment in history.

The find, known as the Watlington Hoard, is made up of Viking silver jewellery and ingots, plus 203 silver coins. It is the first large Viking hoard from the Upper Thames Valley, made even more significant by the presence of the coins. These consist mainly of rare pennies of Alfred the Great (reigned 871–99) and Ceolwulf II of Mercia (874–c79), produced using the same design for both kings.

Two-hundred of the pennies belong to two joint designs: the Cross-and-Lozenge (of which there are 187) and the Two Emperors (of which there are 13). Depicting two rulers below an angel, it is the latter design, copying a late Roman gold coin, that has attracted the most attention. But both types essentially suggest the same

thing: a recognition of the benefits of economic cooperation.

Wessex and Mercia had issued coins using shared designs since the 860s, an alliance that the coins show continued under Alfred and Ceolwulf, even if historical documents said otherwise.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (written in Wessex from the 890s) described Ceolwulf as "a foolish king's thegn", a puppet of the Vikings. Historians now see him differently, accepting him as the king of the Mercians, with the coinage an important part of his rehabilitation. The coins indicate that Alfred and Ceolwulf's pennies were probably struck in large numbers, too, so this was no fleeting alliance.

This is not the only way in which the coins are important: differences in inscriptions, the



style of the coin design and the names of moneyers reveal a great deal about the chronology of the coin production and the mints where they were struck, probably at Canterbury, London and Winchester, with another in Mercia.

The Watlington Hoard (now on display at the Ashmolean Museum) may bring to light new knowledge about Alfred and Ceolwulf, but the chances are it was buried by a member of the Viking Great Army as it made that journey to East Anglia. In fact, the hoard may have been part of the peace deal struck between Alfred's Wessex and Guthrum's Vikings following the great clash at Edington.

John Naylor, national finds adviser, Ashmolean Museum

7 The price of change

The Chew Valley Hoard is a time capsule from those turbulent few years when William the Conqueror's new regime was at its most vulnerable

The Norman Conquest is one of the most famous examples of regime change in medieval Europe. But how great was the rupture that followed William the Conqueror's victory at Hastings? Following the discovery of 2,581 silver pennies and halfpennies in Somerset last year, we are now in a better position to answer this much-debated question.

Buried in the chaotic early years of William's reign, the Chew Valley Hoard is the largest ever recovered from this period in English history. Its contents, divided between Harold II's only issue and the first coin-type of William's reign, increase the number of coins

available for study hugely, doubling those for Harold and increasing by five times those for William.

The size of the find is key to our understanding of the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Norman rule. With such a large sample size we'll be able to compare England's coinage each side of the Conquest – where it was minted, the names of the moneyers who produced them, the numbers of dies used – and explore exactly how radical change was after 1066.

As well as opening a window on the late 1060s, the Chew Valley Hoard also threw up some surprises – including two coins using the obverse (heads) of one of Harold

II's coins and the reverse (tails) of one of William's. Using coin dies from different issues (known as 'muling') is a rare find in this period, and might reflect a paucity of new dies or an attempt to (illegally) cut costs when William's issue was introduced, by reusing an old die. Another coin reuses a die of Edward the Confessor, with one of William's dies.

These oddities aside, the Chew Valley hoard provides a remarkable glimpse into a turbulent moment which had long-reaching effects on England's state and society.

John Naylor



The Chew Valley hoard contained more than 2,500 coins minted for Harold II (top) and William the Conqueror. It may have been buried during the insecurity and insurrection following the Norman Conquest

8 All the world in a cup

Viking treasures from Ireland to Afghanistan were hidden – possibly from advancing Anglo-Saxons – in the Vale of York Hoard



The Vale of York Hoard featured everything from a gold arm-ring to silver ingots. Much of it was packed into a silver-gilt cup – shown right and, inset left, after conservation

Incredibly, much of the Vale of York Hoard fits into its little silver-gilt cup. Yet this is a treasure that punches way above its weight. That's because, contained within its gold and silver arm-rings, jewellery, ingots, coins and the cup itself is the story of the Vikings' elaborate and wide-ranging trade links – all embellished with a good bit of thieving.

The hoard contained treasures from across the known world. The cup was probably looted from a church in Carolingian France, much of its jewellery

came from Ireland – and, as for its 600 or more Anglo-Saxon, Carolingian and Islamic silver coins, they were minted as far afield as Afghanistan.

The hoard was found by father and son David and Andrew Whelan near Harrogate in 2007. What the Whelans found was, historians believe, buried not long after 927, when King Æthelstan seized the kingdom of Northumbria, forming the first united English kingdom. This dating may give us a clue as to why the hoard was buried in the first place. Was it deposited here by Vikings for safe-keeping as the English drove them from the kingdom?

Kevin Leahy



GETTY IMAGES/PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME

9 Mud, blood and martyrdom

The depth of devotion to the cult of Thomas Becket was revealed by a find on the banks of the Thames

In 2016, Tony Thira was mudlarking along the Thames foreshore when he chanced upon a medieval badge, seemingly of St Thomas (Becket) of Canterbury. On the face of it, there was nothing particularly extraordinary about his find: pilgrim badges are not excessively rare discoveries, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme has recorded many souvenirs associated with St Thomas. But the pristine condition in which this fragile badge emerged from the Thames mud – where it had lain for perhaps 700 years – marked it out as special.

The badge, which probably dates to the 14th or 15th century, appears to depict Becket's murder in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. It's believed that four knights struck the blows that sent Becket to his grave, though the badge has room for just one – and, if you look closely, you can see the hand of God descending over the archbishop at the point of his martyrdom.

The killing of such a high-ranking ecclesiastic in his own cathedral, on the apparent orders of King Henry II, shocked all of Christendom – it was, in many ways, the 9/11 of its day. As Geoffrey Chaucer recounts in his *Canterbury Tales*, pilgrimage to holy places became a phenomenon in the Middle Ages, with people of all backgrounds travelling sometimes great distances. Soon the cult of Becket was drawing hundreds of pilgrims to the spot where he died.

Pilgrim badges are a testament to this practice. They were not only proof of pilgrimage, but people believed that they turned into a kind of lucky charm once they'd touched holy relics. Illustrations show people wearing badges on caps, but they might have been worn anywhere. Some were fixed to books, others hung up around the home. The basic principle was that if you touched the badge its spiritual qualities would be passed on to you too.

Michael Lewis

The pilgrim badge depicts the killing of Thomas Becket – "in many ways, the 9/11 of its day"



10 The mark of death?

How a discarded boar badge helped inspire a rethink on Richard III's final moments

Richard III has been associated with the emblem of a boar for centuries – and not always in a way the Yorkist king would have enjoyed. In his play of 1593, *Richard III*, William Shakespeare has the Earl of Richmond declare the king a "wretched, bloody, and usurping boar, That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines." It was a description that helped secure Richard's place in infamy.

Shakespeare may have applied more than a little artistic licence when describing Richard's life, but there's no denying that this animal was indeed the king's emblem. It is known that, in 1483, boar badges were made for Richard's coronation and also the investiture of his son, Edward, as Prince of Wales.

A number of boar-shaped objects, as well as items with the



It's believed that the Bosworth boar badge was dropped by a member of Richard III's personal household not far from the spot where the king died in battle

boar-motif, have over the years been recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. None, however, are more significant – or evocative – than a silver-gilt livery badge in the form of a boar found at the site of the battle of Bosworth, where Richard so famously lost his life.

Although broken, the badge (which is now on display in the Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre) must have been lost on the spot by a member of the king's personal household. It was discovered during a metal-detecting survey to better place the

location of the battle – and (along with other evidence as part of the 2005–09 survey) it has moved the epicentre of the battle about 3km from where previously thought,

and led to a reassessment of the course of the clash. Indeed, some people now think that the badge identifies the actual spot where King Richard perished, but that might be reading too much into it! **11**

Michael Lewis

WEBSITE To find out more about the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and the Code of Practice for Responsible Metal-detecting, go to finds.org.uk

WATCH You can catch up with the BBC Four comedy series *Detectorists*, starring Mackenzie Crook and Toby Jones, on BBC iPlayer. Go to bbc.co.uk/iplayer



With thanks to Gareth Williams, Neil Wilkin and Richard Abdy



PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME/BRIDGEMAN