

Everyone's History

20 years of the Portable Antiquities Scheme and the Treasure Act

Introduction

20 years ago a unique programme began - its aim was to record archaeological artefacts found by the general public, whether metal detectorists, field walkers or even gardeners. Today, over a million objects have been recorded and many important artefacts and sites discovered.

This exhibition celebrates not just 20 years of the Portable Antiquities Scheme and the Treasure Act but also the archaeology that is discovered by the general public.



Roman coins from a hoard found in County Durham.

In 2015 nearly 600 County Durham objects were reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme

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An Anglo-Saxon pyramid mount from a sword scabbard. This was declared to be Treasure and acquired by the Museum of Archaeology.

Treasure

In 1997 the common law of Treasure Trove, in place in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for more than 500 years, was replaced by the Treasure Act 1996. This marked a radical change, allowing thousands of important finds to be acquired by museums for public benefit.

You may have seen local or even national news reports describing how metal detectorists have uncovered important objects which have then been acquired by a local or national museum. Behind every such story lies a lengthy legal process, which is usually coordinated by the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

What is Treasure?

Treasure finds are rare, but are extremely important in telling unique histories of people and places. According to the Treasure Act, any object which is at least 10% precious metal (gold or silver) and at least 300 years old when it is discovered, is considered legally to be Treasure and must be reported to the local coroner. Groups of coins from the same find spot and prehistoric metal assemblages, whether or not they contain gold or silver, are also classed as Treasure. When these objects are found, they are then offered to the British Museum, the National Museum Wales, or a museum local to where the item was found. The finder and the landowner are offered a reward recommended by the independent Treasure Valuation Committee, although many finders also choose to donate the items to a museum to help tell local stories.

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The Museum of Archaeology's collections were acquired in a number of ways. Some came from the collections of Victorian Antiquarians; some were uncovered by professional archaeologists; and some non-treasure items have been donated by members of the public. We also have a number of objects acquired through the Treasure Act.

Some of the objects on display in this exhibition have been generously loaned by metal detectorists and finders from the local area. These objects are spread throughout the gallery, and are accompanied by information from the finders.

You will also see objects found by underwater archaeologist Gary Bankhead which have been loaned to the Museum of Archaeology. You will find these marked as 'River Wear Collection' under the object labels.

The objects that have been acquired through the Treasure Act have this logo nearby, as part of the 20 year celebration. We have also displayed for the first time a recently acquired Treasure Case. A Bronze Age hoard found by metal detectorists.



If you have found anything or want more information about the Portable Antiquities Scheme, then have a look on their webpage <https://finds.org.uk/>. Details on how to contact your local FLO can be found on the Contacts Page. We also have some guidance sheets in the gallery.



Coins from a Tudor hoard found near Durham City. Some of these were minted in Durham.

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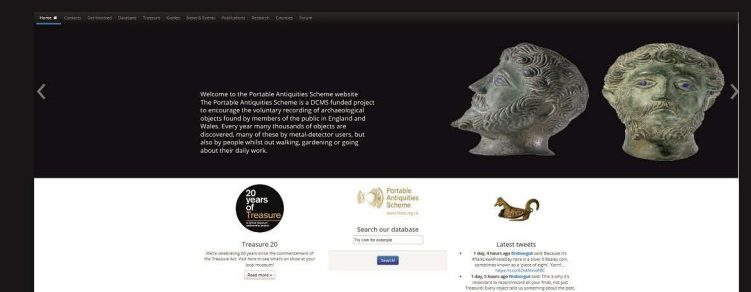
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Archaeology is everywhere. Some is discovered and recorded through research archaeology or through commercial archaeology connected to the planning system, but much more lies hidden waiting to be discovered. This hidden archaeology can often be accidentally uncovered as a result of everyday activities such as walking or gardening, but there are also people such as metal detectorists or fieldwalkers who actively try to discover the past.



A medieval silver brooch found by a metal detectorist.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme funds a countrywide network of Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) to whom finders can report their objects. FLOs are trained to examine the objects reported to them and to provide the finders with information on these finds. They record the finds, their function, date, material and location, and then add this information to an ever-growing database which can be accessed online. If needed, they can also get experts to identify the objects, as well as offering advice and support to those wanting to know more about the site and finds. Many previously unknown archaeological sites have been identified through the scheme, and it has contributed greatly to our knowledge of the past.



There are now over **1,297,027** objects on the PAS database online <https://finds.org.uk/>