



## Book Reviews

### **50 FINDS FROM WILTSHIRE. OBJECTS FROM THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME BY RICHARD HENRY**

*Amberley Publishing, Stroud. 2017. 96pp including numerous colour illustrations and maps, ISBN 978-1-4456-6312-2, pb, £14.99*

In this book Richard Henry has written about just 50 of the 5000 objects recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) each year in Wiltshire. He has chosen an interesting and diverse selection, a choice which must have been very difficult to make. As stated in the Introduction, each object has a story to tell and gives a unique insight into the daily lives of people who inhabited Wiltshire in the past. Many of the objects discussed in the book are on display in either Salisbury Museum, The Wiltshire Museum in Devizes or in the British Museum.

This compact 96 page book describes the 50 objects in seven chronological chapters ranging from the Neolithic to the Post-Medieval, with a Foreword written by Dr Michael Lewis, the Head of the PAS from the British Museum. The author has been employed by the PAS as the Finds Liaison Officer for Wiltshire for the last four years and his local knowledge shines through in the text and choice of objects he has described.

Each chapter of the book starts with a concise history of the main developments in each period. This is useful, although a little too briefly for some periods. Each chapter has a distribution map with the objects identified by number. Again this is useful although a little more topographical information on the maps would be beneficial. Each object described has a date and its PAS database number. An added bonus to the object descriptions and illustrations are the four short sections on experimental archaeology. In these the author gives a short description of experiments he has been involved with, including flint knapping, copper smelting, iron smelting and casting pewter objects.

Within each chapter most objects have a single page devoted to them with a brief description and a photo and/or illustration and in some cases x-ray images. The illustrations and images are rather good and one of the most attractive elements of the book. The descriptions usefully include comments on the manufacturing process of some of the objects and on how common or rare the objects may be. Unsurprisingly, metalwork hoards feature highly in the choice of 50 objects, and these are some of the most interesting parts of the book.

Having been involved in the excavation of the extraordinary Wardour and the Hindon Hoards in 2011 and 2012 (Objects 11 and 12) it is pleasing to see six pages devoted to them in this book. Both hoards are now on display in Salisbury Museum. The author makes the highly significant point about the good fortune that the finder of both left these hoards *in situ* to be excavated by archaeologists and the benefits this has generated to their preservation and our understanding of them. The same point is made about in relation to the Object 19, the Roman Kingston Deverill Hoard excavated by Wessex Archaeology in 2005.

One of my favourite objects in this book is the Roman Minerva Spatula from Highworth (Object 22). Unusually, the small statue is still attached to the spatula blade that was probably used for wax associated with writing, which is very apt as Minerva was the Roman god of wisdom and learning. This object was found in an excavation in 2007, although this is not made clear in the description nor is the wider context of the find and the other objects found in association. This is perhaps a minor weakness in the book, that where objects have been found in excavation more detailed context could be given. The same applies to the fascinating Roman ritual miniature iron hammers (Objects 28 and 29) found during the Past Landscapes Project excavations.

In the Early Medieval Chapter, the Pewsey Hoard (Object 30) deservedly has a three page spread and I agree with the author's reference to it as one of the most exciting finds from Wiltshire. The three bronze vessels and four pans were found located inside an iron rimmed cauldron. They have been dated to between AD 380 and 550 but have a Roman stylistic influence. Unusually, organic remains packed between the vessels has been preserved.

One of the most interesting of the several coins featured in the book is in the Post-Medieval chapter (Object 45). This well preserved gold coin found near Salisbury is a Crown of the Double Rose of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon which had been minted in the Tower of London. It is a reminder of how objects have been used as part of propaganda at tumultuous times in history.

The PAS, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport aims to encourage the public to report objects they find so they can be added to the PAS database. It has been in existence for 20 years now and this book helps to celebrate the success of the Scheme for which funding must be sustained into the future. The development of expertise in artefacts for a particular county, as well demonstrated by the author of this book, is hugely valuable.

This book which is well written and with good illustrations of some impressive objects clearly demonstrates the significant contribution to our understanding of the past delivered by the objects recorded in the PAS. Many of these objects would not have seen the light of day without the Scheme. This is a really useful book and I hope it will be part of a regularly published series.

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*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*