

NOTES

BONUS EVENTUS AGAIN: A CORNELIAN INTAGLIO AT CHALGROVE

Ten years ago a broken cornelian intaglio was found at Frilford and identified as *Bonus Eventus*, the male personification of prosperity, especially of rustic prosperity.¹

Another gem, in the same material and of about the same date (mid-2nd century AD) but evidently engraved by a different hand, has now been found in a different part of the county (Fig. 1). It was spotted lying on the surface of arable land at Langley Field Farm, Chalgrove,² on 7 April 2003 by Mr Peter Malin. It had recently been raining and the gem showed up clearly on the surface of the field. The gem was submitted to the Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum and passed to the present writer for study. The intaglio remains in private possession.³

The gem has a slightly convex upper surface and sides, which bevel inwards. It measures 9 mm. by 7 mm. and is some 3 mm. in thickness. The build of the figure is chunkier than that of the Frilford *Bonus Eventus*. He carries in his right hand two ears of corn, the glumes of which are clearly indicated; the patera in his outstretched left hand is shown simply as an ovoid blob.

Like the intaglio from Bridewell Farm,⁴ which represents *Bonus Eventus*'s female equivalent, Ceres, the new gem reinforces the agrarian basis of the rural economy in Oxfordshire. Gems such as these were undoubtedly the signets of farmers who tilled the rich soils of our county during the heyday of the Roman Empire.



Fig. 1. Cornelian intaglio depicting *Bonus Eventus*, the male personification of rustic prosperity.

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¹ R. Goodburn and M. Henig, 'A Roman Intaglio from Frilford', *Oxoniensia*, lxiii (1998), 239–40. A full discussion of the type will be found there.

² This was only about 20 or so metres from the 3rd-century Chalgrove II hoard, discovered on the same day, but it should be emphasised that there is no direct evidence to associate the two finds.

³ The writer is grateful to Dr Chris Howgego and Mrs Roslyn Britton-Strong of the Heberden Coin Room for help, including the provision of a photograph, and for urging publication of the gem.

⁴ M. Henig, 'A Cornelian Intaglio from Bridewell Farm, North Leigh, Rediscovered', *Oxoniensia*, lxviii (2003), 423–5.

SEVEN 'TREASURES' FROM OXFORDSHIRE: RECENT PURCHASES BY
OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM SERVICE

The operation of the Treasure Act 1996 has broadened the definition of 'treasure' and clarified and simplified the process whereby detectorist finds are made known to, and available for purchase by, the museum community. A steady stream of items of a quality which for various reasons is rarely, or never, found in excavations locally is now coming to the attention of the Oxfordshire Museum Service, and from these a selection has been made for purchase this year. Criteria have included geographical location (items illustrating daily life in places, like Upperton and Bletchington, not well represented in the county's collections), historic or documentary value (inscribed and dated objects), and educational value (objects illustrating a range of periods) as well as intrinsic beauty and richness of iconography.

Roman coin hoard from Wendlebury (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1. Wendlebury hoard coin number 83. *Sestertius* of Hadrian, AD 119–21, mint of Rome. RIC II, 414 no. 583(a).

The hoard¹ was discovered by Mr M. Whitford in October 2000 in the parish of Wendlebury, close to (but not within the scheduled area of) the Roman town of Alchester, where a legionary fortress was succeeded by a town possibly of Hadrianic/ post-Hadrianic foundation (although Dr Eberhard Sauer has told us that he considers the town was more likely to have been founded in the third quarter of the 1st century AD). Sixty-three silver and twenty-six copper alloy coins of the 1st and 2nd centuries were found with the base of a delicate greyware bowl or flagon. The date of the hoard's deposition is likely to have been *c.* AD 138.

The coins, which are in very good condition, consisted of: silver denarii of Galba (AD 68–9; two coins), Vitellius (AD 69; 1 coin), Vespasian (AD 69–79; 17 coins), Titus (AD 79–81; 5 coins), Domitian (AD 81–96; 12 coins), Trajan (AD 98–117; 18 coins) and Hadrian (AD 117–38; 8 coins); and copper-alloy coins of Caligula (AD 37–41; 1 coin), Vespasian (1 coin), Domitian (4 coins), Nerva (AD 96–8; 1 coin), Trajan (10 coins) and Hadrian (9 coins).

¹ Oxfordshire Museums Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.139; *Treasure Annual Report 2000*, 111–12 number 241; Jonathan Williams, 'Coin Hoards 2001', in *The Numismatic Chronicle* 161 (2001), 331–2 (hoard no.15).

Medieval silver gem-set seal from Crowmarsh (Fig. 2)

The seal² was found in January 1999 at Cold Harbour Farm, Crowmarsh, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire. The silver setting measures 24 mm. x 21 mm. and shows it to have belonged to one Nicholas of Padworth (S'NICOLAI DE PADDEHALE). The seal is of 13th-century date, and there is a suspension loop on the back.

The intaglio is of a leached or burnt chalcedony (possibly a cornelian) with inward-bevelled sides. It depicts a satyr holding a *thyrsus* and looking towards a column on which stands an urn. The type is characteristic of the Augustan period (later 1st century BC), cut in the Wheel Style.³

Roman gems were quite frequently reused in seals between the 12th and 14th centuries, partly because of the high value placed on them in contemporary lapidary books.⁴ Roman gems were traded across Europe and reused not only in seals and rings but in shrines in churches, abbeys and cathedrals, so the gem was almost certainly not found in Britain.



Fig. 2. Gem-set seal from Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire.

Medieval miniature circular silver brooch from Upperton, Brightwell Baldwin (Fig. 3)

The brooch⁵ was found by Mr A. Irvine in September 2001 at Cadwell Farm, Upperton village, Brightwell Baldwin. The 12 mm.-diameter pure-silver brooch with intact silver pin is decorated with engraved chevrons illustrating a late use of this Romanesque decorative form. The type suggests a 13th-century date. The chevrons may once have been picked out with *niello*, a sulphide of silver and copper.



Fig. 3. Silver brooch from Upperton, Oxfordshire.

² Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.140; *Treasure Annual Report 1998/99*, 72, Fig. 167 (J.P. Robinson); Treasure Trove reference no. T89; Martin Henig, 'English Gem-Set Seals', in *Datasheet 27, Finds Research Group 700-1700* (2000), 3

³ M. Maaskant-Kleibrink, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems in the Royal Coin Cabinet, The Hague: The Greek, Etruscan and Roman Collections* (1978), 171 no. 340.

⁴ Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (1922).

⁵ Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.141; *Treasure Annual Report 2001*, 54 Fig. 81 (J.P. Robinson); Treasure Trove reference no. 2001 T42.

Silver-gilt late medieval ring from Radley (Fig. 4.)

The decorative silver-gilt ring⁶ was found by Mr Keith Lyddiard in February 2000 at Lower Radley Farm, Radley, Oxfordshire. The ring, presumably for a man, has internal dimensions of 20 mm. x 19 mm. With ridged bezel with two mullets⁷ and simplified sprigs, and double-channelled hoops with pinched shoulders, the ring can be compared with examples from London of the late 15th century, although these usually have devotional scenes.⁸

Appliqué or button from Bletchingdon (Fig. 5)

The gold dress appliqué⁹ was found at Home Farm, Islip Road, Bletchingdon, Oxfordshire. It is in the form of a floral knop with cloisons formerly enamelled – there are traces of white enamel remaining. The delicate filigree can be compared to the back-plate of a cameo in the British Museum 1984.3–4.1 dated c. 1580/90, which has glass paste in the design.

The appliqué (or button) was almost certainly one of a suite of similar jewels sewn to a luxurious garment, a type well known from portraiture: the white, red and black enamelled buttons which decorate the gown and doublet of an unknown lady, possibly painted by William Seger c. 1593–5, may be noted.¹⁰ These very rarely survive in quantity save in exceptional circumstances like the remarkable assemblage of dress jewels from Hall near Innsbruck.¹¹ Such jewels would in all cases have related to people of very high status. As for the possible owner, it may be noted Bletchingdon Hall was owned in the Elizabethan period by the wealthy Annesley family.



Fig 4. Silver-gilt ring from Radley, Oxfordshire.

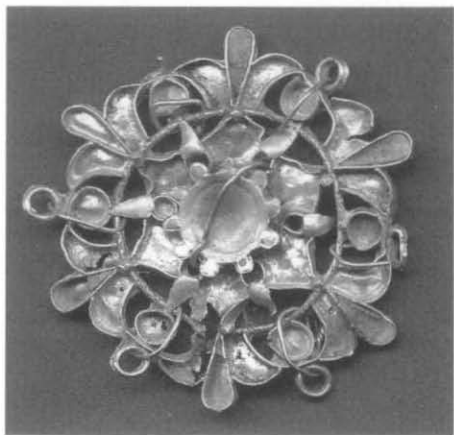


Fig. 5. Appliqué from Bletchingdon, Oxfordshire.

⁶ Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.142; *Treasure Annual Report 2000*, 67–8 Fig. 111 (M. Redknap, whence the notes that follow); Treasure Trove reference no. T231.

⁷ According to the OED, a mullet, 'the figure of a star having five or more straight points', was given as a mark of cadency to the third son.

⁸ T. Murdoch, *Treasures and Trinkets: Jewellery in London from Pre-Roman Times to the 1930s*, Museum of London (1989), nos. 73–4.

⁹ Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.143; Treasure Trove reference no. 2002 T131 (Dora Thornton, whence some of the notes that follow).

¹⁰ Janet Arnold, 'Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd', Maney (1988), 297 Fig. 391, and details 350 Figs 464, 465.

¹¹ A.G. Somers Cocks, *Princely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1630*, Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition catalogue 15 October 1980 – 1 February 1981, 70–71 no.72, especially 72e, consisting of a number of examples with similar enamelling.

16th-century silver-gilt dress-pin from Cholsey (Fig. 6)

The silver-gilt dress-pin, with spherical head and small loop attached to the junction,¹² was found by Mr Steven Deacon in August 1998 in Cholsey, Oxfordshire. The head is applied with filigree and granulated ornament in the form of small circlets punctuated by knops. A raised horizontal band divides the head into two equal hemispheres. The pin is 52 mm. long with a head diameter of 13 mm.

This seems to be a de luxe version of a great farthingale pin used for pinning heavy silks into position over the farthingale frame.¹³ The long or 'great' pins required for such heavy fabrics were put under considerable strain. The pin is bent at right angles at approximately the mid point along the shaft, perhaps the result of this strain, or possibly deliberately as a superstitious offering ('killing' it – pins were bent and thrown into 'pin-wells' until recently and the practice may still persist), which would account for its unusually good condition.



Fig. 6. Silver-gilt dress-pin from Cholsey, Oxfordshire.

Silver strap-end from Bicester (Fig. 7)

The post-medieval silver strap-end¹⁴ was found at Bicester in September 2001. It depicts a wild man holding a floriated sceptre and sitting astride a lion. The strap-end is incomplete but would originally have included an architectural surround. The two columns, one on each side of the figure, which would have supported an arch, are broken. The figures stand on a cabled ground beneath which is an elaborately scalloped foliate terminal. The strap-end had already been broken, at the point where the figures are attached to the surround, when found. It dates from the first quarter of the 16th century. The length is 38 mm.

The wild man is an interesting figure in pre-Reformation iconography, reflecting a Pagan or folklore element which persists both in portable art as here and in fixtures in churches such as misericords¹⁵ and architectural framing.¹⁶



Fig. 7. Silver strap-end from Bicester, Oxfordshire.

¹² Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.144; *Treasure Annual Report 2000*, 94 fig. 191 (David Gaimster, whence many of the observations which follow); Treasure Trove reference no. T214.

¹³ Cf. Arnold op. cit. (note 10), 218–19.

¹⁴ Oxfordshire Museum Service accession number OXCMS: 2003.145; *Treasure Annual Report 2001*, 84 fig. 164 [J.P. Robinson]; Treasure Trove reference no. 2002 T57.

¹⁵ Christa Grossinger, *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords* (1997), 144–8 nos. 217 in Hereford Cathedral and 218 in Chester Cathedral.

¹⁶ Richard Marks and Paul Williamson, *Gothic: Art for England 1400–1547*, Victoria and Albert Museum (2003), 294 no. 157.

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ST EBBE'S CHURCH, OXFORD

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an excavation of foundation trenches for the extension to the parish rooms to the south of the church.

Below the existing churchyard soil, and disturbed by several phases of burials, evidence of early medieval St Ebbe's was uncovered in the form of pits with finds dating from the late 11th century. One of these features may have been a cellar-pit. A slightly later pit cut a series of gravel surfaces.

Three sherds of early to middle Saxon hand-built wares, AD 450–850, were recovered from later deposits. This is only the fifth such find in the city.¹

The earliest burials encountered are thought to date to the 12th century. These were on a slightly different alignment to the later burials and the alignment of the present church. This may suggest that an earlier church existed on the site within a plot to the north of the investigation area. The earlier church may not have had a graveyard, with burials being reserved to St Frideswide's and St Aldate's until the 12th century. The churchyard appears to have been extended both to the west and south in the 12th century, creating an area in which the earliest burials of this investigation were interred. The possible rebuilding of the church would have followed relatively shortly. Seven later phases of burials dating from the later 12th century to the 19th or 20th centuries were identified. The graveyard diminished in size on the west with the building of a new boundary wall in the later 18th century.

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¹ Dodd, A. (ed.) 2003, *Oxford Before the University: The Late Saxon and Norman Archaeology of the Thames Crossing, the Defences and the Town*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No. 17, Oxford University School of Archaeology and Oxford Archaeology (2003).