

2022 biggest year for treasure finds as latest exciting discoveries revealed

Images: <https://bit.ly/4aZjZri>

- Latest report marks highest number of Treasure finds from England, Wales and Northern Ireland ever reported.
- An intricately carved bone rosary bead, a 3,000-year-old beautifully preserved gold dress fastener and a hoard of Iron Age gold coins concealed inside a hollow flint container are today revealed to be among the most significant finds.

LONDON, 23 January: Today, the British Museum launched the latest Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) Annual Report. This showed that in 2022, 53,490 archaeological finds were recorded, including 1,378 Treasure cases, the highest ever reported in a single year.

The record-breaking figures highlight the huge contribution that members of the public are making to increasing archaeological knowledge in the UK today. Most objects have been found by people metal-detecting, and most of the finds were made on cultivated land where they otherwise could be lost to ploughing. A small proportion were found through mud-larking, which involves scouring muddy riverbanks for finds.

The counties recording the most PAS finds in 2022 were Lincolnshire (5,101), Norfolk (4,265) and Suffolk (2,727) - all agricultural counties where detecting is popular. In the same period, Norfolk (95), Hampshire (83) and Kent (81) had the highest number of Treasure finds.

The cover star of the PAS annual report is a tiny, intricately carved bone rosary bead of *memento mori* (remember that you die) type, showing the face of a young woman (possibly intended to represent the Virgin Mary) on one side and a skull (representing mortality) on the other. It was found by Caroline Nunnely, while mudlarking on the River Thames foreshore at Queenhithe, City of London ([LON-78B66F](#)). As required under the conditions of her Port of London foreshore permit, Caroline recorded the find with Stuart Wyatt, Finds Liaison Officer for London.

Also featured at the launch was a 3,000-year-old gold 'dress fastener' from Staffordshire ([DENO-A4D394](#)). This remarkable gold object illustrates cultural links between Ireland and Britain during the Bronze Age. At this time Irish smiths were producing some of the most exquisite goldwork in Europe. As confirmed by detailed examination by British Museum scientist Laura Perucchetti and curator Neil Wilkin, the large, enigmatic fastener is formed of a solid, cast, bow-shaped body connecting two skilfully raised cone-shaped terminals. It may have been worn on the body to hold together the cloak, skirt or dress of an important person. One of only seven discovered in England or Wales, the Staffordshire find is one of the best-preserved examples from Britain. The dress fastener was found by Jonathan Needham while metal detecting and is likely to be acquired by a museum.

Also on display was a hoard of 26 Iron Age gold coins found at East Garston, West Berkshire ([BERK-EE5FDB](#)) hidden inside a flint container. The naturally occurring flint nodule is roughly spherical and the coins were tightly packed inside its hollow interior. Several other hoards using this method of concealment are known from the Iron Age, including a hoard from Westerham, Kent in the British Museum collection. The gold coins are all *staters*, of a type locally produced in the East Wiltshire area in the late Iron Age (c. 50–20 BC). One side features traces of an abstract design of crossed wreaths and the other features a horse running to the right with a spiral motif above and a wheel below.

Mark Jones, Interim Director of the British Museum, said: "The British Museum is proud of its role managing the Portable Antiquities Scheme and overseeing the administration of the Treasure Act 1996 in England. The information about finds is being recorded by the PAS to

advance knowledge of past peoples, where and how they lived. As such, it reflects every part of human history, from the Palaeolithic to more modern times, across the whole of England and Wales. Most of the finds recorded have been found by members of the metal-detecting community and I wanted to especially thank them for recording these items with the PAS.”

Michael Lewis, Head of PAS and Treasure at the British Museum, said: “2022 was another successful year for the Portable Antiquities Scheme with a further 53,490 archaeological items recorded onto its database, bringing the total to almost 1.7 million finds. Although finders are required to report Treasure most finds are reported on a voluntary basis, which makes this a truly remarkable contribution.”

Pippa Pearce MBE, Senior Conservator at the British Museum said: “Many of the hoards brought to the Museum require cleaning before they can be studied by curators. Every coin is a miniature document. To be understood, it has to be read and the role of conservation is to make this possible, revealing the hidden detail from beneath the concretions and corrosion built up during burial.”

Notes to editors

In the UK the definition of Treasure is any metallic object, with at least 10 per cent of its weight being gold or silver, that is at least 300 years old when found.

Last year the definition was updated. If found after 30 July 2023, an object may be potential Treasure if it does not meet the above criteria but is made at least partially of metal, is at least 200 years old, and provided exceptional insight into an aspect of national or regional history, archaeology or culture by virtue of one or more of the following:

- its rarity as an example of its type found in the United Kingdom
- the location, region or part of the United Kingdom in which it was found, or
- its connection with a particular person or event

The Portable Antiquities Scheme at the British Museum

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database finds.org.uk/database holds information on over 1,608,000 items all freely accessible to the public. Most of these finds were found by metal-detectorists – 96% in 2021. The British Museum supports a responsible approach to searching for finds as outlined in the *Code of Practice for Responsible Metal-detecting in England and Wales* that helps protect archaeology and advance our knowledge of the past.

The PAS records archaeological finds discovered by the public to advance knowledge, tell the stories of past communities and further public interest in the past. It is a partnership project, managed by the British Museum in England and through Amgueddfa Cymru (Museum Wales) in Wales, working with almost 100 national and local organisations, and delivered through its network of locally based Finds Liaison Officers and supported by key staff at the British Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru, as well as the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, National Finds Advisers, Finds Liaison Assistants, interns and community volunteers.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme

Managed by the British Museum in England, and in Wales Amgueddfa Cymru Wales Museum, the PAS is a partnership project, working with almost 100 national and local partners to deliver the Scheme’s aims. It is funded (in England) through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport’s grant-in-aid to the British Museum with local partner contributions. All the Finds Liaison Officers (in England) working for the PAS are employed locally but work as a national team directed by the British Museum.

Thousands of archaeological objects are discovered every year, many by members of the public, most by people while metal-detecting. If recorded, these finds have great potential to transform archaeological knowledge, helping archaeologists understand when, where and how people lived in the past. The PAS (www.finds.org.uk) offers the only proactive mechanism for recording such finds, which are made publicly available on its online database.

The PAS has also benefited from internships funded by the Headley Trust, providing opportunities for people to develop a career in archaeology. Also, the Graham and Joanna

Barker Fund, which has enabled extra support for the PAS in areas where resources are low. The PAS welcomes anyone interested in supporting its work locally to contact the British Museum.

Many organisations have also supported the acquisition of Treasure finds, including Art Fund, the Headley Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. Without these, as well as public donations, many important archaeological finds would not be in public collections.

The Treasure Act 1996

Under the Treasure Act (www.finds.org.uk/treasure) finders have a legal obligation to report all finds of potential Treasure to the local coroner in the district in which the find was made. The success of the Act is only possible through the work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, advising finders of their legal obligations, providing advice on the process and writing reports for coroners on Treasure finds.

The Act allows a national or local museum to acquire Treasure finds for public benefit. If this happens a reward is paid, which is (normally) shared equally between the finder and landowner. Interested parties may wish to waive their right to a reward, enabling museums to acquire finds at reduced or no cost. Rewards are fixed at the full market value of the finds, determined by the Secretary of State upon the advice of an independent panel of experts, known as the Treasure Valuation Committee.

The administration of the Treasure process is undertaken at the British Museum. This work involves the preparation of Treasure cases for coroners' inquests, providing the secretariat for the Treasure Valuation Committee, and handling disclaimed cases and the payment of rewards.



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