In 2008, a total of 3571 objects discovered in Somerset were recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), in 899 records. The detailed database records and images are available to view at http://www.findsdatabase.org.uk. The finds described in detail below are a selection of those designated 'Finds of Note' (objects that are considered particularly interesting or unusual for the county) in 2008. The PAS database reference is included in each description. The online database contains colour images of each object.

**Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age chisel from Tatworth and Forton (SOM-F34156)**

This incomplete flaked greensand chert implement (Fig. 1), discovered in Tatworth and Forton parish, probably formed part of a chisel of Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date. The surviving part of the implement measures 41.5mm by 20.1mm by 12.3mm and weighs 8.9g. It tapers to a rounded point and probably represents the butt end. It has a lenticular cross-section and both surviving faces have been invasively retouched. A total of 59 pieces of worked flint and chert have been recorded from the same field, of which 29 are retouched forms.

**Iron Age vessel escutcheon from Huish Episcopi (SOM-305556)**

This cast copper alloy bowl suspension-ring escutcheon of Iron Age date (Fig. 2) was found at Huish Episcopi. The incomplete, broadly oval escutcheon measures 30.9mm by 18.8mm by 11.2mm and weighs 12.1g. The front is convex and the back is concave, damaged and uneven. The front is also rather pitted but less so than the back and some decoration can be discerned. The cast linears define several areas: two long ovals with pointed ends which are near vertical, but bend outwards slightly towards the centrepoint of the edge on each side, and a central triangle. The lower section is damaged but there is a further curving linear on the surviving side. The escutcheon is similar to an example from Hod Hill, Dorset, which features in Jope's *Early Celtic Art* (2000, 104, pl. 169.g). Jope lists a number of bowl fittings of this type, all of which have been found in the West Country. The decoration on the Hod Hill example is thought to represent a stylised human face. Stray finds of Iron
Age metalwork are not particularly common in Somerset.

Roman seal box lid from Curry Rivel (SOM-6891F3)

This is an enamelled cast copper alloy seal box lid of probable mid-2nd to mid-3rd century AD date (Fig. 3). It was uncovered at Curry Rivel, in an area where other Roman finds have come to light. The flat circular lid measures 23.4mm by 18.4mm by 2mm and weighs 2.4g. A rounded lug projects from the edge. This has a recess on the front, which contains a trace of red enamel, and a small central projection on the back, which would have been used to keep the lid in the correct position in relation to the bottom part of the box. One half of the box’s hinge would have been located opposite the lug but it has broken off and only a small stub remains. The front of the box is decorated with two moulded concentric circles, one around the edge and one in the centre, which create recesses for enamel. The central recess has worn through to the back and no enamel survives. In the outer ring there are traces of four panels of red enamel that alternate with millefiori roundels. These are formed from red, yellow and blue enamel, the blue in the centre with red and yellow alternating around the edge. A broadly similar lid was discovered during excavations at Aldborough, North Yorkshire (Bishop 1996, 36–7, no. 201), although this example features three rather than two concentric circles. Only one other seal box from Somerset has been recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. The other example (SOM-FEF451), from Chedzoy, was the lower part of a lozenge-shaped box. There are five seal boxes with Somerset provenances in the collections of the Somerset County Museum, three from Shepton Mallet (accession numbers TTNCM 101/2001/A294/a, TTNCM 101/2001/A294/b and TTNCM 53/2004/237) and two from Ham Hill (TTNCM A.1265 and TTNCM E18HH). One of the examples from Ham Hill is circular.

Roman zoomorphic buckle from Ilminster (SOM-D07208)

This apparently complete late-Roman cast copper alloy zoomorphic buckle (Fig. 4) was found at Ilminster. It dates from the late 4th to the mid 5th century AD. The buckle is 25.5mm in width at its widest point, 62.1mm in length and 5.6mm in thickness. Its total weight is 9.8g. Only two buckles of this type from Somerset have been previously recorded on the PAS database.

The highly decorated frame is ‘D’ shaped, with two projections, shaped like horse heads, extending from the outer edge of the curved side. This is an example of a Hawkes and Dunning type 1B. According to Hawkes (1961, 23) this type is likely to be of British manufacture, but influenced by continental styles. Hawkes (ibid., 26) commented that buckles of this type are difficult to date but suggested that they probably began to be made only towards the end of the 4th century, continuing to be used into the middle of the 5th.

The buckle’s plate is rectangular in shape, with slightly rounded corners. The reverse face is decorated with an engraved design running around the outside of the longer edges and the shorter edge furthest away from the frame. The end of the plate where the frame is attached is divided into two strips,
with a central slot formerly intended to hold a pin. Originally these strips were likely to have culminated in a second plate, which would sit parallel to the surviving one, allowing a strap to be fixed in the centre with rivets and the frame and pin to sit in place at the fold. However, in this case, the plate appears to have been secured to the buckle frame by bending these strips around it. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the buckle plate has become damaged at some point, before being reattached to the buckle frame. Furthermore, it is possible that the frame and plate of two different, damaged buckles have been reused to form this object. The plate is noticeably simpler in design and decoration than many found with similar type 1B buckles, lending further weight to this theory. Mark Corney (pers. comm.) points out that the style of the plate, with its simple decoration, is not in keeping with most late-Roman buckle plates (examples of such plates may be seen in Hawkes and Dunning 1961, 46–7, fig. 15, illustrations M-Q). Instead it is much more characteristic of medieval buckle plates, which may even indicate that a later damaged plate was attached to a much older frame. Corney is aware of a handful of similar buckles, which were lost, rediscovered and then reused with the addition of a new (or in this case second-hand) plate during the early-medieval period and suggests that this may be an example of such reuse. Stuart Laycock (pers. comm.) agrees that this may be a possibility, but does point out that simpler plates belonging to late Roman buckles are occasionally found, though they are rare (see for example PAS database record BERK-EB3477).

Early-medieval sceat from Charlton Mackrell (SOM-5492A7)

This series E silver sceat (Fig. 5), which dates to c. AD 735–50, was found at Charlton Mackrell. The coin is 11.2mm in diameter, 1.4mm thick and weighs 0.7g. On the obverse the coin has a very stylised, so-called ‘porcupine’ portrait – a quilled crescent above a pellet-outline dolphin shape with central band containing two pellets toward the right-hand end and two lines below. The reverse is of the standard type with a central annulet and the ‘letters’ VIXT. Such a coin is notable as only three other sceattas have been recorded on the PAS database from Somerset so far, making this find extremely rare.

Early-medieval cheek-piece fragment from Chedzoy (SOM-C97807)

This object is an incomplete early-medieval cast copper alloy bridle cheek-piece (Fig. 6), which was discovered at Chedzoy. The fragment measures 52mm by 27.8mm by 5.6mm and weighs 36.9g. It is very worn and there is an old break at one end. According to David Williams (pers. comm.) the upper face is decorated with the head of a beast in profile, facing right, with a flowing mane. Such decoration suggests that this is a type 1 cheek piece (see for example BH-FEBCD7, a broad parallel from Ware, Hertfordshire). The reverse face, has two concave mouldings, but is otherwise undecorated. There is a circular hole through the centre of the object. The edge of the hole that would have originally held a bridle bit can also be seen on the right edge. Although this example is rather thick, both Kevin Leahy (pers. comm.) and David Williams (pers. comm.) have confirmed the identification.
Williams believes that the object is likely to date to the mid 11th century and is a good example of its type.

**Medieval ampulla from Westbury-sub-Mendip**

(SOM-B4C778)

This cast lead ampulla (Fig. 7) of late-medieval date was discovered some years ago at Westbury-sub-Mendip and was recorded by the PAS in 2008. The flask-shaped ampulla measures 53.9mm by 33.5mm by 11.9mm and weighs 61.6g. It has a slightly expanded neck and a small pointed suspension handle projecting from each side. On one face are the letters ‘S.B’, surrounded by moulded cross-hatching within a roundel. The other side is decorated with moulded vertical lines, in imitation of a scallop shell. Brian Spencer (pers. comm. to finder, 1988) suggested that ‘S.B’ might refer to Saint Bridget of Sweden, as her cult (based at Sion Abbey, Isleworth, Middlesex) was popular during the second half of the 15th century.

Medieval ampullae are not uncommon in Somerset; to date 13 examples from the county have been recorded on the PAS database. However, only two examples that are similarly inscribed have been recorded of over 700 from England and Wales: NMGW-A7E456 and NMGW-FAEA63, both from Wenvoe, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales. The form of the letters on both examples is very similar to the Westbury ampulla and they must all have been made in the same workshop. The record for NMGW-FAEA63 refers to a third ‘S.B’ ampulla from the same farm and the concentration in this particular location could potentially suggest a local origin. Wenvoe is only three and a half miles north of Barry Island, where the 6th-century Welsh saint St Barruc is said to have been buried, and where a chapel was dedicated to the saint. Could ‘S.B’ refer to St Barruc?

During the Middle Ages, Barry Island was separate from the mainland and there was little else on the island other than a chapel and priest’s house. Anyone visiting would have had to make a special journey. St Barruc’s chapel was a free chapel, so its resident priest would have relied on donations from visitors (Knight 1981, 33). During excavations at the chapel in 1967–8, part of a stone box was discovered (Knight 1981, 47–51). This was thought to be the relic-container that contained the saint’s remains. These bones were the reason that the chapel had been built and why individuals made the journey there. Whilst on his travels in the mid-16th century, John Leland noted that ‘much pilgrimage was usid’ at St Barruc’s chapel (Toulmin Smith 1964, 24).

There is a connection between the veneration of St Barruc and Wenvoe. In the late medieval period, the income from a meadow known as ‘Saynt Barrowgis acre’ in Wenvoe parish was used to purchase candles to burn in front of an image of St Barruc in Wenvoe church (Knight 1981, 33). Perhaps an enterprising local produced these ampullae to sell to pilgrims visiting St Barruc’s chapel, who might also travel the short distance to Wenvoe church to light a candle before the saint’s image? This must remain speculative as medieval pilgrim souvenirs are not known to have been made for any other Celtic saint (Geoff Egan, pers. comm.).
Medieval strap-end from Martock (SOM-AAC236)

This cast copper alloy hollow-ended strap-end (Fig. 8) of late-medieval date was discovered in a garden in Martock. The broadly trapezoidal strap-end measures 41mm by 37.2mm by 5.5mm and weighs 25.8g. It is constructed from a cast front plate with backwards projecting edges, which is riveted to a sheet back plate. The four rivets would have held a leather strap in place and part of the strap has been preserved inside the strap-end. At the narrow end of the front plate there is cast openwork decoration in the form of projecting flowers (three in total) which alternate with leaves (of which there are two). The rest of the front plate is decorated with an incised motif within a rectangle. This consists of a central four-petalled flower within a circle, which is surrounded by leaves arranged in a spiral around the flower. The dating is probably c. 1400.

Post-medieval hooked tag from Chilton Trinity (SOM-887CE3)

This cast silver dress hook or ‘hooked tag’ (Fig. 9) dates from the 16th century and was found at Chilton Trinity. As it is made from precious metal and is over 300 years old it was reported as Treasure (reference 2008 T96). The Somerset County Museum hopes to acquire the find. The hooked tag measures 20mm by 9.8mm by 5mm and weighs 1.8g. It has a flat rectangular plate with six rounded knops that project from the corners and the centre of three of the four sides. The other side features a projecting trefoil. The backwards-curving hook is soldered onto the back of the plate and projects from the side with the trefoil knop. A flattened attachment loop has been soldered to the other end of the back of the plate and a fragment of a light brown textile has been preserved underneath. The front of the plate is decorated with a moulded letter A, within a rectangular border. This was originally parcel-gilt.

Sixteenth-century hooked tags, usually of silver or silver gilt, are fairly commonly reported as Treasure under the 1996 Treasure Act and as a result the number known has increased dramatically in recent years. The Chilton Trinity hooked tag is an interesting example because the letter A appears to demonstrate the intended orientation of the object (sideways on), presumably indicating how it would have been worn. A similar example from Soulbury, Buckinghamshire was reported as Treasure in 2005 (Bland 2008, no. 644, Treasure reference 2005 T332).

Post-medieval coin forger’s die from Ashill (SOM-105780)

This lead roundel from Ashill (Fig. 10) was probably associated with the forging of coins during the post-medieval period. The flat sub-circular piece of lead
measures 74.9mm by 66.9mm by 6mm and weighs 216g. On one side there is the impression of a coin. The lead is pierced by two circular perforations close to the edge and opposite each other. On the other side there are several incised lines that form no coherent pattern.

Richard Kelleher (Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum) identified the impression as a French silver *quart d’écu* of Henry III (king of France 1574–89), which was struck between 1578 and 1589 (Kelleher 2008, 297). Kelleher has suggested that a thin foil of silver would have been placed over this impression and on a corresponding impression of the other side of the coin, so that a base metal core could be inserted in between. The holes would allow two plaques to be fixed together to achieve this. The die was donated to the Somerset County Museum (accession no. TTNCM 115/2008).

**Acknowledgements**

We extend our thanks to the finders of the objects for their co-operation in bringing forward their discoveries for recording. We are also very grateful to the following individuals who commented on the objects featured: Colin Andrews, Barrie Cook, Mark Corney, Geoff Egan, Richard Kelleher, Stuart Laycock, Kevin Leahy, John Naylor, Anne Pedersen and David Williams.

**References**


Fig. 10 Coin forger’s die from Ashill