



## Review

*50 Finds from Somerset: Objects from The Portable Antiquities Scheme.* By L. Burnett. Amberley Press, Stroud, 2023. Pp. 96, illus. Price £15.99. ISBN 9781445662367.

This short volume represents the latest instalment in the well-established '50 Finds' series, with each volume celebrating 50 discoveries (from a total of over 30,000 in Somerset) recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), presented by county or by period. This book, and the series in general, is designed to appeal to a popular and amateur readership, representing a well-priced and easily accessible and attractive introduction to elements of the archaeology of Somerset. While the volume focuses on 50 individual finds, many of these are nicely contextualised, often shown against other photographic examples, which prevents in most cases this being a 'beauty show' of attractive artefacts.

A short introductory chapter describes the discovery, reporting and analysis of finds recorded by the PAS, which is followed by an attractively illustrated section on Somerset's Landscape. Although brief, this chapter aims to present Somerset's diverse landscape, which it summarises well. The chapter presents a map presenting the distribution of all finds recorded by PAS in Somerset, which, it is argued, suggests that settlement favoured the boundaries between areas of high terrain and lowlands. This may in general be the case, particularly for more recent periods, although the short discussion does not account for nuances that can affect the distribution of artefacts, including constraints on metal-detecting, such as the distribution of arable land and woodland, and restrictions (generally not permitted within Exmoor National Park, for instance), nor that the settlement pattern may have changed over time, particularly in later prehistory, as a result of the impacts of deforestation, intensive agriculture and climate change (though this is hinted at in Chapter 4). Nevertheless, the chapter forms a useful backdrop to the rest of the volume.

The subsequent six chapters present the 50 selected artefacts conventionally, by period, before concluding with three final sections, each a page long, presenting a 'Conclusion', 'Useful Sources' and 'Information about The PAS'. The period-based chapters are well balanced, providing in general a solid, regional contextual background of the periods before specific finds are introduced. Given that most finds reported to the PAS are metal artefacts found by metal-detector users, Burnett has done a commendable job in ensuring that earlier prehistory is not neglected. As might be expected given the abundance of Roman period metal finds in the archaeological record, Chapter 5 'Roman (AD 43–410)' forms a substantial component.

The volume is written in a personal way, for example 'when this was brought in for recording I hoped the iron pan might have preserved some of the organic handle so arranged to have it X-rayed', and I felt this narrative approach assisted in the book's accessibility for amateur readers. The volume is very well illustrated throughout with photographs of artefacts, although in some cases reconstruction drawings for incomplete objects would aid the uninitiated reader to gain an appreciation of the original appearance of an artefact, particularly for horse harness and stirrup accessories presented on pages 59–60. As an archaeologist, I would also prefer to see a scale shown against the artefacts, although I can understand the decision not to include one for purposes of space and aesthetics, and the length (or diameter in the case of coins) is provided in a summary box for each of the 50 selected finds.

One area I feel that the volume would have benefited from substantially is a short section, perhaps in the 'Landscape' chapter, describing the historical development of the county, particularly regarding temporal geopolitical changes. Modern administrative boundaries would, of course, have been unrecognisable to prehistoric and Roman inhabitants of the region. This is hinted at occasionally (e.g. reference to the territory of the Durotriges based upon Iron Age coin distributions in Chapter 4), although an explicit statement about the changing nature of territory and administrative boundaries over time would assist the

casual reader. Given multiple references to the Durotriges, a map plotting their postulated territory would also have been beneficial. Given the intended audience, brief references to external geopolitical territories such as the Danelaw would have benefited from further explanation, and I find it odd that while the Danelaw is mentioned, the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Wessex (of which modern Somerset was a part) is not, despite reference to King Alfred.

However, as a book aimed to introduce the amateur reader to the types of objects characteristic of each of the main periods of Somerset's history, the volume presents a well-contextualised, very attractive and affordable introductory guide.

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doi: 10.1017/S0068113X24000047