Reviving the study of late medieval 'boutons-enseignes' in England [in "Portable Antiquities Scheme Report"]

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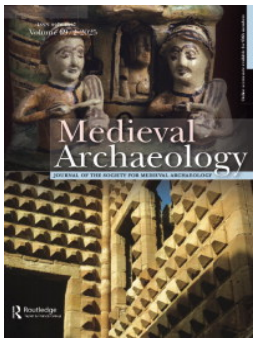
Portable Antiquities Scheme Report

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Portable Antiquities Scheme Report

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The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) records archaeological finds discovered by members of the public in England and Wales.[3] Many come from places that have been damaged or eroded, usually by agriculture, leaving the objects as the only evidence of past activity; others are of interest in their own right. By end of 2024, the PAS database contained 46,958 records (68,938 finds) of early medieval date (c 410–c 1066) and 275,318 records (327,557 finds) of high and later medieval date (c 1066–c 1500).[4] A proportion of these are subject to the Treasure Act 1996 which gives museums the right to acquire them; in 2024, there was a total of 1,452 Treasure cases from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.[5]

In 2024, 79,621 finds (53,606 records) were recorded,[6] of which 20,034 were of medieval date including 3,392 pre-Conquest finds and 16,642 post-Conquest finds. Stray finds of coinage accounted for 5,935 finds, 384 of pre-Conquest date, and 5,551 post-Conquest coins.[7]

This round-up of finds and research from the last year includes summaries of interesting and important finds plus a short research note by Robert Webley.[8] This discusses English finds of continental button-like badges known as *boutons-enseignes*.

FOCUS ON COINAGE IN 2024

Early medieval

A gold pendant found at Attleborough (Norfolk; NMS-F8E66D; Fig 1a) is something of a conundrum.[9] Comprising a coin, or coin-like object, with an added

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[3] Full details of all finds recorded by PAS can be found at: <*https://finds.org.uk/database*>.

[4] Date accessed: 7 May 2025.

[5] Finds reported via the Treasure Act 1996 are now included on the Portable Antiquities Scheme Database (PASD). PAS and Treasure Annual Reports are free to download (<*http://finds.org.uk/publications*>).

[6] As of 31 December 2024 (data correct as of 7 May 2025). Figures include finds reported under the Treasure Act 1996.

[7] Coin finds include all medieval rulers up to and including Henry VII (1485–1509). Date accessed: 7 May 2025.

[8] Thanks to all PAS FLOs, volunteers and specialists (both within and outside of the PAS) for their work in identifying and recording the thousands of medieval objects brought to the PAS every year, as well as providing broader context for many of our finds, and to the finders who offer their discoveries for recording. This round-up would not have been possible without their expertise and input into the individual records that are discussed. These records form the basis for the discussion of the items included. Any errors remain the responsibility of individual authors.

[9] Reported as potential treasure in 2023 (2023T153), the find was only made public in 2024.

suspension loop, the design imitates a group of late-Roman *solidi*, with the obverse inscription naming the Emperor Honorius (393–423) within a literate copying of the original legend. Its date, however, is harder to assess. A 5th or 6th-century date was suggested by its recorder from the relatively close, if somewhat stylised, copying of the design and inscriptions, and its interpretation as having been produced specifically as jewellery rather than as a coin (Marsden 2023). Its style, though, could equally point to a 7th-century date, placing it within the broader corpus of early gold coinage from southern Britain. The rendering of the bust and facial features is remarkably similar to those seen on another group of pendants which is dated to the second quarter of the 7th century, the reverse of which have a cross-on-steps design copied from Byzantine *solidi* of Heraclius (610–41; cf KENT-5E6A92).

Gold Anglo-Saxon coinage of the 7th century is mostly comprised of shillings, weighing approximately a third of a *solidus*, and those belonging to the first 'substantive' phase of c 620–45 are rare finds. Four were recorded last year, all important additions to the corpus. Two belong to those struck in southern England, a LEMC-type found at Lenham (Kent; KENT-738EAB; Fig 1b) is the first stray find of this type discovered, the only other examples known from the Crondall Hoard discovered in 1828 (Sutherland 1948, 75–6, type I.iii.7–9); the other found at East Garsten (West Berkshire; BERK-5C5DB1; Fig 1c) belongs to the 'Witmen-derived' group, the most common group in Crondall and well known as stray finds, albeit in small numbers. The other two finds belong to the 'York group', struck in southern Northumbria, perhaps York itself (Abramson 2019). One from Easington (East Yorkshire; YORYM-AA9654; Fig 1d) is only the second example of variety Aii, its design clearly showing a standing figure holding a cross either side of its body, whereas the other, from Newton (North Yorkshire; YORYM-E758CB; Fig 1e) is later, belonging to the more devolved variety C.

The silver early pennies, often called *sceattas*, struck from c 665/70 until the mid-8th century, were the most common group of early-medieval coins recorded with 140 added to the PAS database. A Series D (type 2c), struck in the Netherlands, was found at Abbotskerswell (Devon; DEV-D2A3A9; Fig 1f), the first find of an early penny from the county. Most examples discovered in south-western England come from the eastern areas of Dorset and Wiltshire, and all but one SW find from last year fall into this region (DOR-E117FE, DOR-175FB5 and SUR-5CE69E), only a Series E from Chewton Mendip (Somerset; SOM-007F94; Fig 1g) found further west. A find of Series W from Granby (Nottinghamshire; LEIC-6AD718; Fig 1h) is an outlier from a relatively tightly distributed type struck in Wessex around the turn of the 8th century, and the most northerly example recorded by the PAS whose overall distribution suggests that a maritime dispersal is plausible for these further-flung examples.

The broad flan silver pennies of the later 8th and 9th centuries are found in fewer numbers, with 40 recorded last year, over half of which were issued in the names of Mercian kings highlighting their power and territorial control for much of this time. Two finds, however, hint at the political pressures and change that occurred during the second quarter of the 9th century. Both found in Wiltshire, one from Tisbury (BERK-C196B1; Fig 1i) marking an important moment when the balance of power
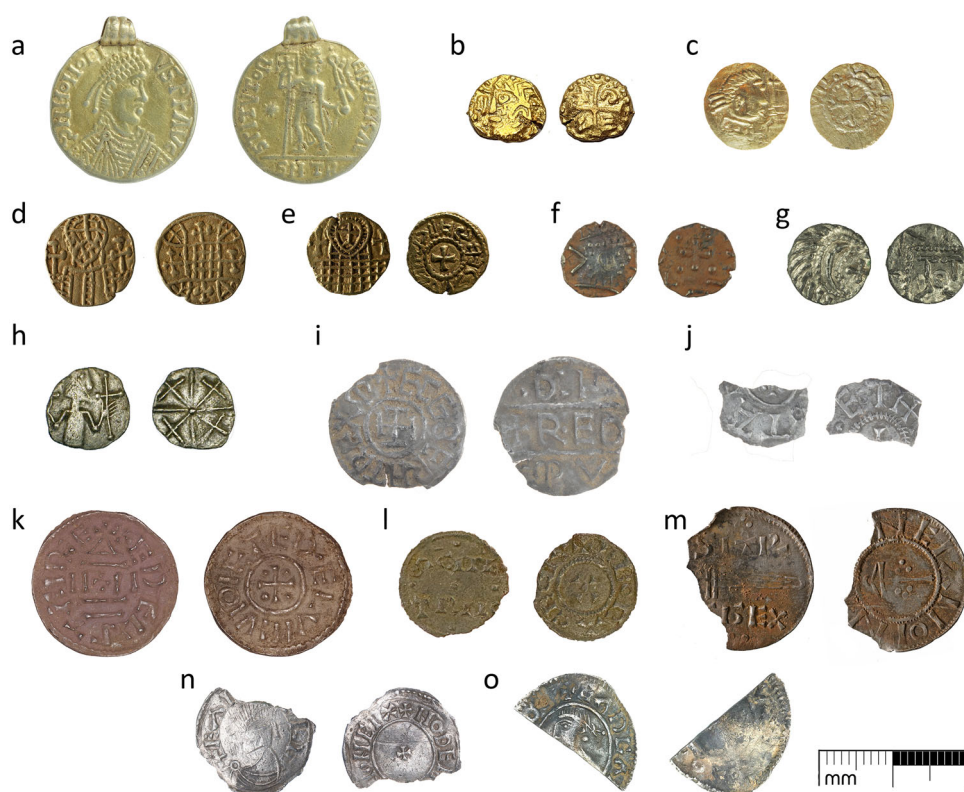
FIG 1
Early medieval coins (a) NMS-F8E66D – Anglo-Saxon *solidus* pendant. (b) KENT-738EAB – gold shilling of LEMC type. (c) BERK-5C5DB1 – gold shilling of 'Witmen-derived' type. (d) YORYM-AA9654 – gold shilling of the York group. (e) YORYM-E758CB – gold shilling of the York group. (f) DEV-D2A3A9 – early silver penny of Series D (type 2c). (g) SOM-007F94 – early silver penny of Series E. (h) LEIC-6AD718 – early silver penny of Series W. (i) BERK-C196B1 – penny of Ecgberht of Wessex. (j) BERK-C196B1 – penny of Æthelstan of East Anglia. (k) PAS-D68238 –penny of Guthrum/Æthelstan II. (l) LEIC-7E4DFA – halfpenny of 'swordless' St Peter of York type. (m) YORYM-E6B2E0 – penny of Sihtric Caoch of Northumbria. (n) ESS-493E0C – penny of Eadred. (o) WAW-401E78 – cut halfpenny of Edgar. Scale 1:1. *Images by A Williams (a), I Diggle (b), P Smither (c, I, j), R Griffiths (d, e, m), D Perryman (f), L Beckwith (g), M Harvey (h, l), W Scott (k), L Rogerson (n), M Adams (o). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

began to shift from Mercia to Wessex. Issued in the name of Ecgberht of Wessex (802–39), it was struck in London during the short-lived period of Wessex rule over the city in 829–30. A plain, non-portrait design, the obverse inscription reads ECGBERHT REX M (Ecgberht, King of the Mercians) and it must have been intended as a piece of political propaganda. Its reverse shares a moneyer, Rædmund, and design with one of the issues of Wiglaf of Mercia (827–9, 830–40), although it is not clear whether they were first used on Ecgberht's or Wiglaf's coins (Naismith 2017, 156). The other find, from Bishopstone (BERK-C196B1; Fig 1j), also attests to Mercia's decline, being in the name of an otherwise unknown king of East Anglia, Æthelstan (c 825–45). The PAS has recorded 30 to date, their distribution

unsurprisingly focused on East Anglia, outside of which the circulation appears quite thin and patchy, although this new find can arguably be grouped with five others found across Hertfordshire (BH-03D113), Bedfordshire (BH-76ED85), Northamptonshire (NARC-BBF44C) and Buckinghamshire (BERK-6BFBED, BUC-5E1D33) which are perhaps related to broader overland E/W routes.

Another East Anglian-minted coin recorded last year, a penny found 'near Thetford' (Norfolk; PAS-D68238; Fig 1k), is of national importance. Also struck with the name Æthelstan, it relates here to the baptismal name of the Viking leader Guthrum. Defeated by Alfred the Great's forces at the Battle of Edington (Wiltshire) in 878, he and the Viking Great Army subsequently settled in East Anglia (Pestell 2019, 24–5). The coin belongs to a group of issues from the region whose obverse copies the Carolingian Temple type and reverse the issues of Edmund of East Anglia (855–69), some in the names of otherwise unknown East Anglian kings, Æthelred and Oswald, and three in the name of Æthelstan, two of which have quite blundered inscriptions and one is a striking on lead (Blackburn 2005, 26–30). The new coin has neatly made dies with literate inscriptions, the obverse reading EĐELSTAN REX (King Æthelstan) and the reverse DVNNO MONET (either Dunno moneyer or coin of Dunno). As such, this coin can be considered the earliest coin of a Viking ruler yet known, and it became the first object to be declared Treasure under the new criteria based on the significance of the object, intended to cover finds which would not normally come under the Treasure Act 1996.

Two other important Anglo-Viking coins were also recorded last year. The first is a rare silver halfpenny of the series struck at York in the name of St Peter, York Minster's patron saint, found at Tixover (Rutland; LEIC-7E4DFA; Fig 1l). The first halfpenny of the issue recorded by the PAS, it belongs to the early 'swordless' phase of the coinage dating to the 910s—later coins include a sword between the two lines of inscription to the saint, SCI PETRI MO, 'Coin of St Peter'—and although not naming a king, there are strong reasons to suspect these issues originated from secular rather than ecclesiastical authority (Naismith 2017, 295–7). The second coin is a damaged penny of Sihtric Caoch of Northumbria (920/1–7) found at Appleton-le-Moors (North Yorkshire; YORYM-E6B2E0; Fig 1m), its design reproduces that of the contemporary Sword St Peter types, and replaces the saint's name with that of the king; it is an important addition to a small corpus of only around 20 coins, and the first recorded by the PAS (Blackburn 2006, tab 7). Hoard evidence and the moneyers named on these coins suggest their mint place should be attributed to Lincoln, highlighting the geographical reach of Sihtric's power as king of Northumbria, and challenging the extent to which Edward the Elder and Æthelflæd had expanded and taken over Danelaw territory south of the Humber (Blackburn 2006, 212; Naismith 2017, 302).

Eighty-eight coins dating from Æthelstan (924–39) to Harold II (1066) were recorded last year, just three belonging to the period before Edgar's (959–75) reforms of the early 970s, including a Bust Crowned portrait type of Eadred (946–55) from Radwinter (Essex; ESS-493E0C; Fig 1n) probably struck in East Anglia from the style of the portrait. An early post-Reform cut halfpenny of Edgar found at Shawbury (Shropshire; WAW-401E78; Fig 1o) is the first coin of Edgar recorded by the PAS from the West Midlands—indeed, the most westerly example we have yet recorded—but forms part of a broader spread of late-Saxon coinage found between Worcester and Chester, forming the western edge of their general distribution. Cut halfpennies

accounted for just under a quarter of finds from this phase of early-medieval coinage, most finds being whole pennies, while just six cut farthings were recorded.

High and later medieval

There were 157 Norman and Plantagenet coins (1066–1180) recorded by the PAS in 2024 including a number of interesting finds. A penny of Henry I (1100–35) found at Sandhurst (Gloucestershire; GLO-B9734A; Fig 2a) is a unique variant of Henry's Type 9. Usually showing a crowned bust facing and holding a sceptre on the obverse, and a cross patteé within a quatrefoil on the reverse, this example has a bare-headed bust, slightly turned holding the sceptre. The reverse shows a cross fleury within the quatre-foil, its somewhat garbled reverse inscription indicating the coin was struck at the London mint. New types or variant designs in this period are exceptionally rare, and difficult to interpret. Martin Allen (2024, 222) suggested the piece may be experimental, representing, 'an early stage in the development of type 9' but it is hard to say anything with certainty given the single example of this variant type. The coin itself was also folded in half when discovered (see below for discussion of folded coins).

Three coins relating to Stephen's (1135–54) reign and the period of civil war known as 'The Anarchy' are also important finds. A find from Arley (Warwickshire; WMID-F7B902; Fig 2b) belongs to Stephen's 'Watford' type, the most common of his issues, but it is one of very few from the central or western Midlands and is the first example recorded by the PAS to have been struck at the Stafford mint from where only a handful of coins are known. During 'The Anarchy' period, coins were issued by the king and other members of the nobility, representing both sides of the conflict. A cut halfpenny issued by William of Aumale, Earl of York, and found at Burstwick (East Yorkshire; YORYM-8987C4; Fig 2c) belongs late in this phase, the lack of reference to Stephen on the coin and its militaristic design of a helmeted figure with sword suggest his earlier support for the king had waned (Fairbairn 2017, 48–9). The coin is only the fourth known example of this type. Alongside this, another find associated with 'The Anarchy' is a penny of David I of Scotland's (1124–53) 'cross fleury' type found at Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange (Lincolnshire; SWYOR-3E61BB; Fig 2d). David's coinage was the first struck by a Scottish king and was issued at Carlisle which had been captured by his forces while supporting the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, and Stephen's opponent for the throne (Bateson 1997, 39–40).

Finds of coins dating pre-1180 from Wales are uncommon with only 15 recorded by the PAS to date for the period 1066–1180 and so two finds of Henry II's 'cross-and-crosslet' type recorded last year are important. One found at Kerry (Powys; WREX-4FD9EF; Fig 2e) is the first PAS-recorded example from Mid Wales, and a regionally rare discovery with very few examples known from Shropshire or Herefordshire. The other find, a cut halfpenny from Dinas Powys (Vale of Glamorgan; DYFED-5CCE1F) joins a small cluster of these coins in South Wales in the coastal zone between Cardiff and Porthcawl.

Almost 1,900 finds of the 'short cross' (1180–1247) and 'long cross' (1247–79) coinages struck under Henry II (1154–89) to Edward I (1272–1307) were recorded last

FIG 2

High and late medieval coins (a) GLO-B9734A – penny of Henry I. (b) WMID-F7B902 – penny of Stephen. (c) YORYM-8987C4 – penny of William of Aumale, Earl of York. (d) SWYOR-3E61BB – penny of David I of Scotland. (e) WREX-4FD9EF – penny of Henry II. (f) NMS-A35DD1 – halfpenny of Henry III. (g) YORYM-16A3DD – hoard of folded coins. (h) LIN-D954CE – halfpenny of David II of Scotland. (i) NMGW-272FB2 – sterling of Henry IV of Luxembourg. (j) CORN-5703E7 – *blanca de 2 Cornados* of Juan II of Castile and León. Scale 1:1. *Images by K Adams (a) S Williams (b), A Rivett (c), I Whitehead (d), S White (e), P Hughes (f), R Griffiths (g), R Trevaskus (h), N Kelly (i), L Miucci (j). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

year. An 'immobilised' coinage, all have the same designs and name Henry as king. For the bulk of this period, only pennies were struck, fractions—the halfpenny and farthing—being produced by cutting or quartering the coins, such as the rare find of a cut farthing from NE England, a short cross of uncertain type found at Sheraton with Hulam (County Durham; YORYM-731F7C). It is only the ninth cut farthing recorded from the region, highlighting variations in the circulation of coinage across England during the period. A short-lived attempt to introduce round fractions occurred in 1222 with a small number of examples known of Class VIIa halfpennies struck by a small number of moneyers in London (Stewartby 2009, 53). An example found at Suffield (Norfolk; NMS-A35DD1; Fig 2f) is the first to be recorded by the PAS.

Just over 2,600 coins covering the period from Edward I to Henry VII (1279–1509) were recorded last year, of which 1,837 belonged to the reigns of Edward I–III (1279–1377). A small hoard found at Askham Bryan near York (YORYM-16A3DD; Fig 2g) is of interest and probably represents broader ritual practice. Comprising three, possibly four, coins each folded in half and placed within another, the lettering style on the outermost penny suggests the coin belongs to the issues struck from Edward I–III.

This coin is folded with its reverse side facing outwards, showing its design of a large cross. A number of such hoards have been discovered, all no more than a few coins in size and ranging in date from William II (1087–1100) to the late 14th century.[10] The folding of coins is a documented act during prayers for the sick, but they have been discovered in a wide range of locations, including many rural finds recorded by the PAS. Richard Kelleher (2018, 74) has suggested their deposition during activities such as Rogation processions around the parish may be an explanation for such discoveries.

A number of interesting non-English coins were also recorded. A halfpenny of David II of Scotland (1329–71) found at Croft (Lincolnshire; LIN-D954CE; Fig 2h) was struck at Berwick-upon-Tweed in the early 1330s as part of a small, short-lived coinage issued prior to the town's siege and capture by Edward III in 1333; this coin is one of only seven recorded by the PAS. A continental sterling imitation, copying the designs of Edward I's pennies, from Llancarfan (Vale of Glamorgan; NMGW-272FB2; Fig 2i) is a rare example of this large and varied group of coins issued by nobles and bishops across the Low Countries. Struck for Henry IV of Luxembourg (1288–1309), it is one of only four PAS-recorded examples from South Wales and is of numismatic interest with its reverse inscription not listed in Nicolas Mayhew's (1983) corpus. A *blanca de 2 Cornados* of Juan II of Castile and León (1405–54), struck at Burgos (Spain) and found at Corsley (Wiltshire; CORN-5703E7; Fig 2j) is only the second coin of this ruler recorded from England (see Cook 1999, no 294 for the other find).

FOCUS ON NON-NUMISMATIC FINDS IN 2024

In 2024, the PAS recorded 14,099 medieval objects (excluding stray and hoard finds of coinage), encompassing a wide variety of object types and materials that shed light on everyday life. Some highlights and insights into our dataset are outlined below.

Early medieval

A late 6th- to mid-7th-century ceramic St Menas flask, or ampulla, recorded from Dereham (Norfolk; NMS-843E62; Fig 3a) last year is a highly unusual discovery. Found in the early 1970s in a garden in the town, it is unclear if it should be considered a modern or ancient loss, although the likely location of an Anglo-Saxon monastic foundation less than a kilometre away may give some context to its findspot (Pestell 2004, 89). The flask itself has a discoidal body with a short neck, flared rim and two looped handles. The body is decorated on both sides, one showing St Menas, a soldier martyred under Diocletian (284–305), standing in an *orans* pose with camels either side and two cross shapes formed of pellets above his shoulders. The other side has a central cross, although oriented to appear as a saltire, with Greek inscription reading 'St Menas'. The shrine and likely production place for the flask is at Abu Mina in Egypt, but finds are known from across the Mediterranean and, in small numbers, from N Italy, France and Britain where nine or ten examples have been found (Griffiths and Bangert 2007; Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2016, 7.1; Anderson 2007, fig 4). If an ancient loss or deposit, it is possible that the flask perhaps reached Britain via pilgrimage rather than networks of trade; recent work by Helen Gittos (2025) highlights the potential for long-distance

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[10] Eg two folded pennies of William II (BH-E654B1) and one whole and two halves of coins probably dating to the reigns of Edward III (1327–77) or Richard II (1377–99) (LEIC-36F6BE).

FIG 3
Early medieval objects 1 (a) NMS-843E62 – St Menas flask. (b) OXON-B4DF83 – saucer brooch. (c) NMS-F22B63 – fragment of zoomorphic penannular brooch. (d) DUR-F98604 – lead tank. (e) LANCUM-CCA36F – lead tank. Scale 1:1 except d–e (not to scale). *Images by A Williams (a, c), A Bolton (b), B Westwood (d), P Clarke (e). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

travel in this period with the likelihood of Anglo-Saxon elites undertaking military service in the Byzantine wars against the Sassanians.

An annular brooch of quoit form found at Kirtlington (Oxfordshire; OXON-8AD8A4; Fig 4a) is one of several interesting dress accessories recorded last year. Belonging to Barry Ager's Type D (probably D2) of late 5th to 6th-century date, its Upper Thames Valley findspot is in the heartland for this brooch type (Ager 1985, 2, 16, fig 1; PAS finds are predominantly from the southern Midlands area north of the River Thames and Chilterns). While the brooch is quite corroded, elements of the decoration survive, three concentric rings of triangular stamps, the outer two facing inwards, the inner ring outwards, a design comparable to, but neater than examples from Standlake Down (Oxfordshire; ibid, fig 27b) and 'near Faringdon' (Oxfordshire; FAJN-03B792). Finds of brooches of this type are relatively rare, the PAS having recorded only ten examples to add to the 44 included in Ager's aforementioned study.

Another Oxfordshire find of interest is a gilded copper-alloy saucer brooch found at Middle Aston (OXON-B4DF83; Fig 3b). Two fields of decoration, separated by a raised ridge, comprise a main, central field with a repeating pattern of four animals in Anglo-Saxon Style I and an outer ring of pointed, eye-like oval shapes, all around a riveted disc-headed stud placed in the centre of the brooch. The brooch itself is incomplete, missing an area of the raised rim with a crack running from here into the body of the brooch. Three rivet holes are visible around this, indicating repair work undertaken on the brooch. It is unclear whether the brooch was damaged or if this represents an error in the casting process. A number of other contemporary objects have been found in the parish and recorded by the PAS suggesting this may be the location of a plough-damaged cemetery. Middle Aston borders the River Cherwell, along which a number of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been discovered, although this would the first in the area to the west of the river (Booth et al 2007, 419).

Two penannular brooches recorded last year are of note. A fragmentary brooch found at Somerleyton, Ashby and Herringfleet (Norfolk; NMS-F22B63; Fig 3c) is of a 9th-century type with zoomorphic terminals of which one survives here. This shows a dragon-like beast with gaping jaws holding four pointed teeth, pointed snout and two triangular projections at the back of the head; the mouth is outlined by two curving lines behind which the cheek is decorated with five ring-and-dot motifs and two lines cross the ring where it meets the terminal. Two very close parallels found in Norway, including an almost-complete example from Ferkingstad and another terminal fragment from Kaupang, suggest this new find may be an import from its production place in western Norway (Graham-Campbell 2011, 99–100). The other brooch, found at Caerwent (Monmouthshire; NMGW-3324A4; Fig 4b), belongs to a small group of 7th- to early 8th-century penannulars whose distribution suggests a likely Welsh origin (Youngs 2007, 94). The copper-alloy brooch has a hoop of circular section decorated with four groups of ribbing, two at the junction with the terminals. These are spatulate in shape, tinned and decorated with three ring-and-dot motifs—one at the hoop end, two at the terminal—joined by incised lines running along each edge; a part of the pin survives. This group of spatulate-headed brooches is known from just seven finds all recorded from Wales or bordering counties of England (Redknap 1991, 31; Edwards 2009).[11]

Early Anglo-Saxon objects are rare in Wales, so a small, tinned copper-alloy shoe-shaped stud found at Penllyn (Vale of Glamorgan; NMGW-B9521B; Fig 4c) is an

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[11] Two of these were recorded by the PAS, see LVPL2035 (Shavington cum Gresty, Cheshire) and GAT-9271F5 (Ty'n y Coed, Pentreath, Anglesey).
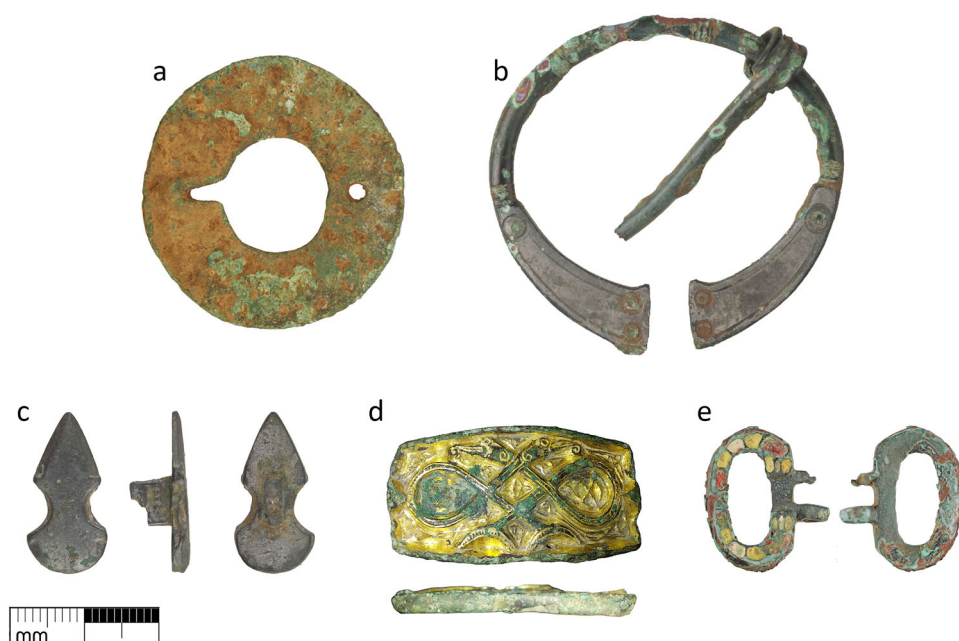
FIG 4
Early medieval objects 2 (a) OXON-8AD8A4 – annular brooch of quoit form. (b) NMGW-3324A4 – penannular brooch. (c) NMGW-B9521B – shoe-shaped stud. (d) HAMP-53AFFA – mount. (e) YORYM-703BA0 – buckle frame. Scale 1:1. *Images by E Caswell (a), G Whatley (b, c), A Thom (d) R Griffiths (e). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

important discovery. Such studs appear to have been parts of belt sets including buckles of Marzinzik's type I.2 which are of early to mid-6th century date (Høilund Nielsen 2013, 139). Predominantly found in burials in SE and E England, the PAS has recorded around 20, the majority discovered within coastal counties along the eastern and southern coasts from the River Humber to the Isle of Wight. This new find is far removed from these, although another has been recorded from the other side of the Bristol Channel at Otterhampton (Somerset; SOM-DFE383) and one is also known from Woverley and Cookley (Worcestershire; WMID-B3429C) located between the rivers Stour and Severn.

Irish objects are now regularly recorded by the PAS with small numbers reported every year. Two finds of interest from 2024 include a gilded copper-alloy mount from Corhampton and Meonstoke (Hampshire; HAMP-53AFFA; Fig 4d) and a copper-alloy buckle frame from Rowley (East Riding of Yorkshire; YORYM-703BA0; Fig 4e). The former is sub-rectangular but incomplete, missing parts of each end. A complete, gilded panel of decoration survives, however, showing two near-identical opposing interlaced bird-like creatures, their elongate bodies curving over to each form a tear-drop shape. The space within and around the creatures is decorated with various interlaced motifs. This zoomorphic style is paralleled to varying extents on a number of objects produced in Ireland in the 9th century, including an openwork mount found at Roxby cum Risby (Lincolnshire; NLM-DA7151), a decorated plaque from Inchboffin Island (Co Westmeath, Ireland), possibly from a cross or altar, and a likely shrine mount from

Valle (Norway; Youngs 1989, nos 144 and 146). The other find appears to be earlier in date, probably from the mid-7th–mid-8th centuries, and comprises a D-shaped buckle frame from which two hinge loops, one broken, protrude. The front is decorated with ten sub-rectangular cells of red, yellow and white enamel with two groups of three smaller enamelled cells either side of a half-round pin notch. It is comparable to another buckle frame found 'near Marlborough' (Wiltshire; WILT-41265C), the complete buckle, including its plate, from Lough Gara (Co Sligo, Ireland) and the buckle from the Moylough (Co Sligo, Ireland) belt shrine (Youngs 1989, nos 46–7).

Two lead tanks or vats of probable 8th–10th-century date are the most northerly examples recorded by the PAS to date. One from Newsham (Stockton-on-Tees; DUR-F98604; Fig 3d) is formed from lead sheet to which two triangular, wedge-shaped escutcheons had been attached from which iron fittings for carrying protrude. A number of bones, possibly caprid, were found closely associated with the tank. The other example was found 'near Carnforth' (Lancashire; LANCUM-CCA36F; Fig 3e), is equally plain, and also has a triangular handle fitting on the side. Both tanks are mostly complete but folded, in both cases with the sides pushed in towards the centre and flattened as much as possible. The function of lead tanks remains uncertain, suggestions ranging from their use as measuring vessels, perhaps for grain, to objects indicative of ritual action such as the preparation of medicine or judicial practice; some, such as the tank from Flixborough, contain hoards of iron tools (Cowgill 2009; Ottaway 2009; Blair 2010). The folding of tanks prior to deposition is common, and most—both excavated examples and those reported to the PAS—were discovered in locations associated with water (Naylor 2015, 134–6). The two new finds fit this pattern, the Newsham example found close to the River Tees, the 'near Carnforth' example not far from the coast, Carnforth being near the mouth of the River Keer and coastal saltmarsh environments.

High and later medieval

A copper-alloy sword pommel of Type M found at Otterburn (Northumberland; NCL-41D1B2; Fig 5a) belongs to the last phase of lobed pommels beginning with Viking-period types, of a form seen on effigies and monuments dating to around 1250–1350 (Oakeshott 1964, 97). Formed of five lobes, increasing in size towards the centre, the tight curve of the pommel's base suggests its date is very late in Type M, and appears to be the only example of its type recorded by the PAS. Its findspot is within the area of the registered site for the Battle of Otterburn, where Scottish and English forces clashed in 1388.

With the exception of spindle whorls, over 400 of which were recorded last year, evidence for textile production is not recorded as often as expected for such an everyday activity, so two finds from Suffolk recorded last year are of interest. Found at Hopton (SF-04C2BB; Fig 5b) and 'near Woodbridge' (SF-1A0FFA; Fig 5c), these are 15th–16th-century harbicks (also known as havettes or shearman's hooks) which would have been used to secure newly woven cloth to a padded bench in order that the nap—the rough, raised surface of unfinished cloth—could be removed (Lee 2018, 59). Both harbicks belong to Read's Class A, type 1, with hooks either side of a rectangular central block. Brian Read (2008, 202–4, fig 37) notes that these are decorated with saltires on the central block, a motif also seen on the arms of the Clothworkers Company of London.

FIG 5
High and late medieval objects 1 (a) NCL-41D1B2 – sword pommel. (b) SF-04C2BB – harbick. (c) SF-1A0FFA – harbick. (d) SUR-A1A0F8 – livery badge. (e) SUR-9EC546 – nummular badge. (f) SWYOR-C8613C – pilgrim badge of St Andrew. (g) SUSS-99E46F – seal matrix of the Flexborough hundred. (h) SWYOR-20E5C2 – personal seal matrix. Scale 1:1. *Images by A Agate (a), A Booth (b), L Smart (c), S Maslin (d, e), P Holmes (f) J Clark (g), I Whitehead (h). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

These two finds are also damaged in the same manner, one of the hooks having broken away rendering the object unusable.

Seventy-two badges, 50 of which are pilgrim's badges, were recorded last year. Two secular badges are of interest. A pewter livery badge in the form of a lion *passant guardant* found at Cathedrals (Greater London; SUR-A1A0F8; Fig 5d) is probably of later 14th–early 15th-century date. In the same pose as the lions on the arms of England, the badge is probably intended as an expression of loyalty to the crown and country (Spencer 1998, 283, cf nos 272–4). The other badge is very different, a nummular type broadly copying the reverse design from an English penny of the later 13th–15th centuries, with its long cross and pellets in each angle; a nonsense inscription replaces the mint name around the outer circle. Found at Thamesfield (Greater London; SUR-9EC546; Fig 5e), the badge might be considered in the same way as coins modified into badges or brooches where it is the cross that tends to be exhibited and this is often interpreted as a form of religious expression (eg Williams 2001; Cook 2007). In discussing badges comprising a purse holding a coin, Brian Spencer (1990, 116) has suggested an alternative, the badge as an amulet, worn to bring good luck and wealth, some including inscriptions such as 'God, give me great reward'.

Of the pilgrim's badges, one of St Andrew found at Austwick (North Yorkshire; SWYOR-C8613C; Fig 5f) is important as only the eighth recorded by the PAS for this saint from a total of nearly 950 pilgrim's badges, and an unusual find from the western side of the Pennines. An openwork badge, it shows St Andrew's martyrdom on a saltire cross, a design paralleled by only two other finds, from Leicester and St Andrews (Fife; Kunera nos 09122 and 09078) which are considered to be of 14th-century date.[12] Spencer (1998, 271–2) has noted the popularity of St Andrew in medieval England, speculating that at least some badges recorded outside Scotland may have been acquired during English military campaigns.

Almost 400 seal matrices were recorded in 2024 including a range of official and personal examples as well as many impersonal ones, generic types with religious or secular devices. One found at South Heighton (East Sussex; SUSS-99E46F; Fig 5g) provides an interesting glimpse at regional administration and the levels of control held over people in the period. Dating to the late 14th century, the matrix reads *hVNDRDE FLEXBERGh: around the edge and COItAt SVSSEX across its centre, identifying it as a seal of the Flexborough hundred, a part of the rape of Pevensey in East Sussex (King 1962, fig 119). Such seals were required to stamp documents allowing labourers to leave their home area according to the 1388 Statute of Cambridge which also stipulates the designs to be used on the seals although this one reverses the positions of the county and hundred (Harvey and McGuiness 1996, 41). A personal seal of 13th-century date found at Burton in Lonsdale (North Yorkshire; SWYOR-20E5C2; Fig 5h) reads + S'STEPHANI LE (k)AV(DE)R[-] with a central design showing a hammer and pair of tongs, and provides an insight into medieval occupations. The person named, Stephen, describes themselves as a 'chaudronnier', a maker of metal cooking vessels. It is one of relatively few seal matrices recorded by the PAS to include an occupational surname.

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[12] <*https://database.kunera.nl/en*> [date accessed: 9 July 2025]

FIG 6
High and late medieval objects 2 (a) NMS-C1D619 – posnet. (b) LANCUM-DA7471 – cauldron. (c)
LANCUM-F50F1D – axehead found underneath (b). Not to scale. *Images by A Williams (a), P Clarke (b, c).*
Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Such metal cooking vessels are rarely discovered complete or near-complete, in most cases only fragments of the legs or vessel body surviving. Two largely intact examples were recorded last year, however. A copper-alloy posnet—a small three-legged cooking vessel with an elongate handle—dating c 1300–1600 is a remarkably complete example with a diameter of around 162 mm, and appears to belong to Roderick Butler et al's (2009) earlier forms with rounder body and C-shaped brace under the handle. Found at Harling (Norfolk; NMS-C1D619; Fig 6a), subsequent small-scale excavations to lift the vessel were not extensive enough to determine the type of feature it was recovered from but other finds included animal bone and pottery. A larger three-legged copper-alloy cauldron, around 275 mm in diameter, of probable 14th-century date was found at Casterton (Cumbria; LANCUM-DA7471; Fig 6b). The body is now damaged but the overall shape of the vessel is clear, with wide rim with two opposing handles curving into spherical body above the legs, one of which may be a repair as it does not match the other two. The cauldron was discovered upside-down in the ground, underneath which was an axehead (LANCUM-F50F1D; Fig 6c), suggesting the burial of both of these objects was a deliberate act related to aspects of medieval magic (eg Gilchrist 2019).

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviving the study of late-medieval boutons-enseignes in England[13] by Robert Webley

In England, the copper-alloy, continental button-like badges discussed here were a notable component of the swan song of both medieval pilgrimage signs and devotional badges. Dating to the half century or so before the Reformation, they have not received the same scholarly attention as lead-alloy pilgrim badges. This is due to a lack of examples prior to the PAS recording of detector finds. This note aims to revive the study in England of these badges—generally termed *boutons-enseignes* following literature in France (where most have been found)—by aligning insular scholarship with recent work on the

Continent. Specifically, I focus on examining those designs present within the current English corpus to try to identify distinctive patterns and practices.

Historiographically, *boutons-enseignes* have returned to wider prominence recently, after a hiatus of more than 100 years. In England, they were brought to general attention in the early 20th century by Sir John Evans, following a presentation of his sizeable collection to the Society of Antiquaries of London (Evans 1909); French publications of isolated examples date back to the 1850s (Cahanier 2017, 1, note 9; Ansorge 2021, 199). Far later, in France, the epicentre of the *boutons-enseignes* phenomenon, a thorough study by Simon Cahanier (published in 2017) built on Loïc Berton's work to collate recent detector finds (eg Berton 2003). Similarly, in Germany and the Netherlands, recent articles by Jörg Ansorge (2021) and Willy Piron (2012), respectively, alongside recording by Kunera,[14] have reinvigorated their study, again often using metal-detected material. In turn, this note will survey *boutons-enseignes* found recently in England and recorded through the PAS (Fig 7a–r), to build on the publication of isolated examples.[15]

Archaeologists are largely in agreement on the fundamentals of the *boutons-enseignes* phenomenon, with much building on antiquarian observations which retain validity. Their copper-alloy composition, which distinguishes them from lead-alloy pilgrim signs, was suggested on visual inspection by Evans (1909, 103) to often be a 'speculum metal'—that is, a high-tin bronze with a shiny, silvery surface, akin to that used for mirrors. Recent XRF analysis by the PAS has confirmed that an English find, depicting St Barbara (Fig 7q), does indeed contain elevated tin levels—which, at 28.7%, approach the 32% of speculum metal.[16] A German find depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary's robe was also analysed using pXRF and found to contain c 30.5% tin.[17] There is debate about the exact method of production; but the fineness of the lines, combined with repetition of designs, suggests the use of a template in the process.[18]

Also distinguishing them from leaden pilgrim badges is their means of attachment: via an iron loop or eyelet towards the centre of the reverse, rather than a pin or integral lateral loops. A single example known from England has two drilled perforations (Mills 1999, 102, no NM.273; Kunera no 20994; depicting St Catherine), presumably for re-attachment following the loss of the eyelet. Despite their button-like appearance, it is supposed that they were worn on hats or cloaks (Evans 1909, 103)—as with pilgrim badges. Their function will be discussed below, giving particular consideration to the English context.

The dating of *boutons-enseignes* is similarly perceived much as it was by Evans (1909, 103), who suggested a date range between c 1475 and 1550. An example found in England provides a useful terminus post quem of either 1491 or 1499 as it commemorates the marriage of Anne of Brittany to either Charles VIII or Louis XII (Cahanier 2017, 9). This badge is so far unique, as the only type known depicting a secular motif rather than a religious one (Fig 7r).[19] Otherwise, *boutons-enseignes* have generally been

[14] A repository of pan-European pilgrim signs founded at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in 1998 <kunera.nl/>.

[15] For example, for SF-C555E9 (Fig 7k) see Burnett and Webley 2021, 293–4; for NMS-3D99F3 (Fig 7f) see Burnett and Webley 2024, 56, no 27.

[16] WMID-C2E4D4; Kunera no 18173; published by Cahanier (2017, 3–4, 26, note 23) and Ansorge (2021, 197).

[17] An average of the readings taken of the front and reverse (Ansorge 2021, 199, tab 1).

[18] Evans (1909, 103) suggested that designs were to an extent cast in; Berton (2003, 12) and Ansorge (2021, 220) concurred, while Piron (2012, 62) argued that designs must have been etched.

[19] Cahanier type 75; LEIC-26BFC6; Kunera no 26095.

dated stylistically: on grounds of lettering, costume depicted, and by reference to late-medieval woodcut images, for example in incunabula (Cahanier 2017, 2; Ansorge 2021, 218). It may be noted that their serialised style is distinct from contemporary objects made uniquely in England and decorated in the 'iconographic style', principally finger-rings (Hindman 2021, 487). The consensus is that they were made primarily between c 1475 and 1525 (Cahanier 2017, 2; Ansorge 2021, 196), for devotional purposes and sale in shrine sites concentrated in modern-day NE France and Belgium (Fig 8; Cahanier 2017, 12, fig 5; Ansorge 2021, 219, abb 12).

Prior to the advent of the PAS, few examples of *boutons-enseignes* were known as English finds: Piron (2012, 62) noted just four.[20] Apart from the occasional publication of chance finds (Mills 1999, 102, no NM.273; Bailey 2004, 31, fig 8.1), most of the *boutons-enseignes* now known from England come through PAS recording: 18 out of a current corpus of 24 identified.[21] While only three of the 14 geometric shapes identified by Cahanier (2017, 4, fig 3) are so far known in England, both datasets are dominated by
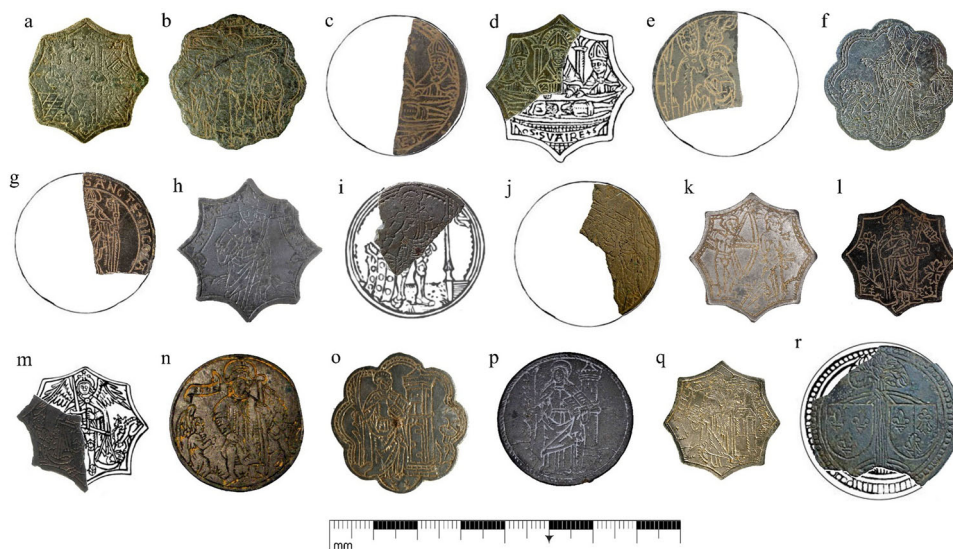

FIG 7
Boutons-enseignes found in England and recorded by the PAS (a) Christ Child (NMGW-A82A97). (b) Crucifixion (ESS-302D31). (c–d) Holy Shroud at Chambéry (NARC-E68D80; LVPL-B4FF62). (e) St Hubert (SOM-DB8BAE). (f-g) St Nicholas (NMS-3D99F3; WAW-97956F). (h) St Claude (BERK-5BBA4B). (i) St Quirinus (NMS-174F29). (j) Mass of St Gregory (WILT-E7CFA4). (k) St Sebastian (SF-C555E9). (l) John the Baptist (WMID-14FEE6). (m) St Michael (SWYOR-25ACE7). (n) St Roch (YORYM-CEA5E7). (o–q) St Barbara (NMGW-22A74E; SF-8B6CEF; WMID-C2E4D4). (r) Heraldic (LEIC-26BFC6). *Images by Anon (a), L McLean (b), R Webley (c), A Lockwood (d), A Williams (e), S Ashley (f, i), S Burford (g), P Smither (h), K Hinds (j), R Caravello (k), V Allnatt (l), A Downes (m), L Andrews-Wilson (n), A Bricking (o), A Booth (p), T Gilmore (q), M Gard (r). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

[20] These are presumed to include various examples in Evans' collection, geospatial information for which was less than certain.
[21] Ansorge (2021, 200) noted ten PAS finds when preparing his article. After the present note was prepared, a 19th PAS example was recorded (OXON-6939E9), bringing the overall total to 25. Depicting St Andrew, this is the first *bouton-enseigne* to show this saint known from England.

badges that are either circular or octagonal (with concave edges). More revealing is consideration of the devices used.

Before considering general trends, three significant examples within the English corpus are worth highlighting, beyond the secular badge noted. First, the aforementioned badge of Catherine of Alexandria is a rare variant of Cahanier type 62, on which the saint is shown under an arch supported by columns, and without a palm of martyrdom; of eight *boutons-enseignes* of Catherine currently on Kunera's database this design is unique. Second, a fragmentary badge found in Clyffe Pypard (Wiltshire; WILT-E7CFA4; Kunera no 27610) was erroneously put through the Treasure process due to the shininess of its surface (Hinds et al 2010, 150, 339, no 317). The 'resurrection of Christ' described in the report is in fact a detail from the eucharistic miracle of Gregory the Great (Fig 7j), with only one other badge of this type currently known (also incomplete);[22] they are distinct variants. Finally, a depiction of the Christ Child holding an orb (*globus cruciger*) found in Calne (Wiltshire; NMGW-A82A97; Kunera no 20099), is seemingly unique and an unpublished type (Fig 7a), not present in Cahanier's list of 77 types, including four Christological scenes. The Tau cross held in Christ's other hand prefigures his death and is echoed on a type of St Helena, probably from Trier (Germany; Cahanier type 63); she also holds the Holy Coat, and is surrounded by instruments of the Passion (Ansorge 2021, 58, abb 9).

What unites these three rare, or currently unique, examples is that none can be tied to specific shrine sites. Similar observations have led authors to suggest that *boutons-enseignes* comprised a mixture of devotional badges showing individual religious figures, together with a lesser group of actual pilgrim signs (Piron 2012, 62; Cahanier 2017, 14). Already, Evans (1909, 106) had queried any assumption that *boutons-enseignes* were exclusively pilgrim badges due to the large number of examples depicting St Barbara in his collection. The popularity of Barbara has been noted as characteristic of the English-(20.8% of examples) and Dutch datasets (Ansorge 2021, 201), but her representation in the French corpus is also notably strong (18.5% of examples; Cahanier 2017, 9). However, when all of the saints identified as thaumaturgic by Cahanier (2017, 10) are combined—including Barbara, for example, who was thought to protect against lightning and sudden death—they form a higher proportion of the total in England than they do on the Continent.

While various *boutons-enseignes* found in England may have come directly from pilgrimage, such as one depicting St Claude probably from Saint Oyand-de-Joux abbey in France (Fig 7h),[23] their general absence from the Channel coast (Fig 8) suggests that, for England, their devotional quality should be emphasised. In conclusion, this now larger English corpus—while still small and clearly comparable to the material from France and imported from there—appears to show differences both in specific types and in potential function(s). At the waning of the Middle Ages, these items provide an example of a continental phenomenon often adapted for insular religious practice.
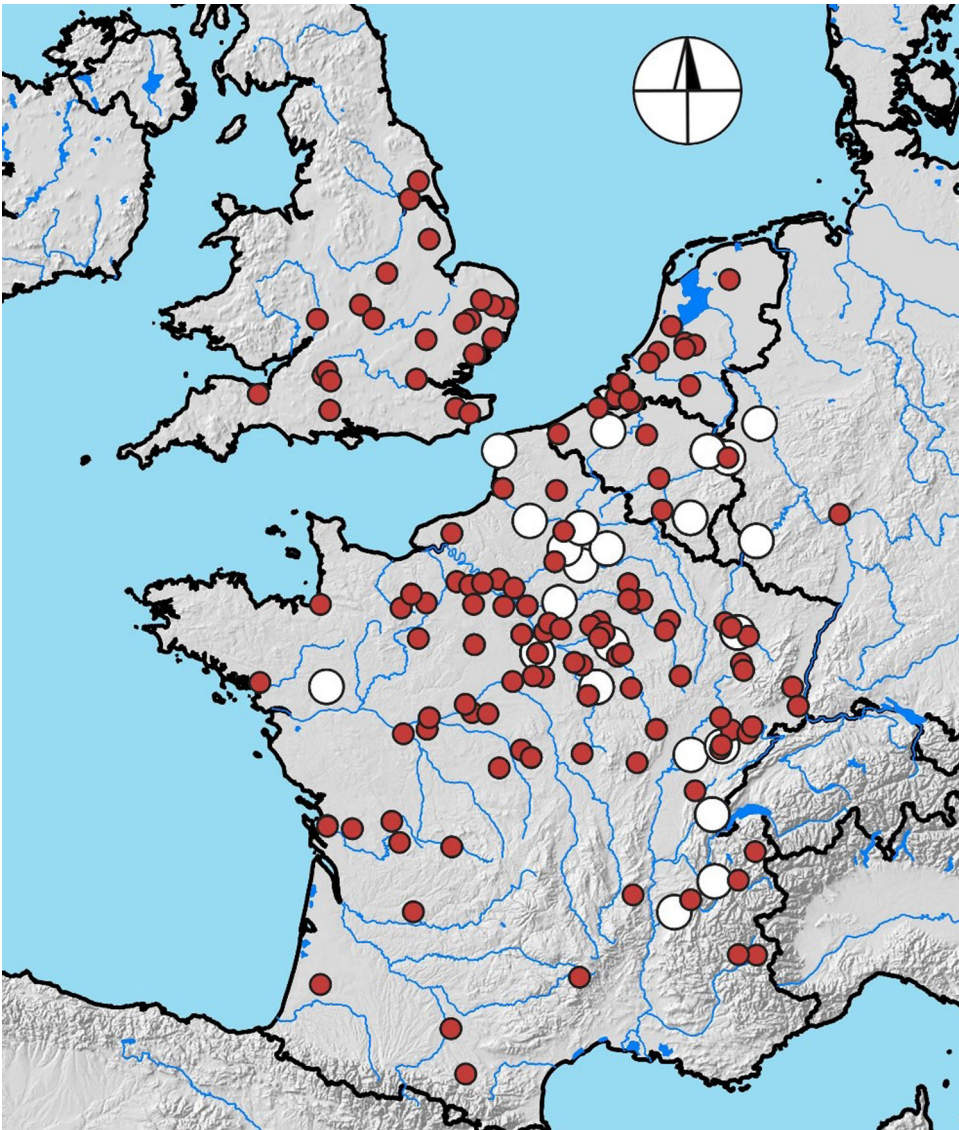
[22] Kunera no 18061.
[23] BERK-5BBA4B; Kunera no 27069.

FIG 8

Map of *boutons-enseignes* found in England and continental Europe (red dots) and shrine sites (white dots). Data kindly provided by PAS and Kunera, with shrine sites informed by Cahanier (2017, 12) and Ansorge (2021, 208–9, tab 2).

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