

Brislington Community Museum News

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Following on...

...from our previous newsletter, which looked at examples of pottery types originating in the 17th and 18th centuries, and from potteries operating at that time.

This issue focuses on a variety of materials manufactured in the 18th and 19th centuries (some earlier perhaps).

Ken Taylor, chair

Contact us

Email us - secretary@brislington.org - to enquire about any of our community museum's exhibits, to provide feedback or new information etc about them, or to contribute items for this newsletter. We aim to produce this quarterly, but our schedule is flexible so we can react quickly to urgent important events (also, during quiet times we can focus on other matters such as out-reach activities and sourcing and researching new exhibits).

Metal finds from Eastwood Farm

Items in this section were all kindly contributed by Dave Setter & Rod Webb and found in ST 6371.

Georgian coins

Cartwheel penny

The copper coin depicted on page 1 is from the reign of George III and is of a very distinctive type being unusually large and having a wide border around its rim - giving rise to its nickname of a 'cartwheel' penny. The only date this type was issued was 1797.

This example is very worn, which is understandable both due to the relatively soft metal and also to the coin remaining officially in circulation until 1860.

The seated figure of Britannia is still discernible (facing our left), holding her trident under her arm. Some traces of lettering are visible on the border around the king's portrait (GEORGIUS III. D:G. REX.).

Halfpennies

These two copper coins are both halfpennies, and although it's hard to be sure with coins found in this worn and corroded condition, they probably date to the 1770s and the reign of George III (his portrait is faintly discernible).

The right-hand coin has been cleaned using a vinegar-based (acid) solution, which has stripped away the surface layer and exposed bare metal - giving it a characteristic brightness. This home experiment was, thankfully, only performed after the coin had been identified and deemed expendable. This sort of chemical cleaning is essentially destructive and drastically reduces the value of artefacts - both in terms of archaeological evidence as well as financially (a valuable coin may be ruined and made worthless by such well-intentioned efforts). The cleaning

and conservation of metal objects is a delicate art, and professionals spend a long time learning how to do it without damaging the artefacts. If in doubt, it's probably best to leave it dirty - and safe.



Acquisition number (penny): 120224a2

Acquisition number (halfpennies): 120224a4

Bronze oval ring

This bronze oval is crudely made, but nevertheless has a complex shape.

The cross section is roughly hexagonal with a flat top and bottom. The outside edge has been filed (the striations left by the teeth of the tool are clearly visible) into an obtuse V shape. The inside is similar although the angle is nowhere sharp, and striations are almost absent. The narrow ends of the oval completely lack any internal angle - either a deliberate feature of the



manufacture, or a feature caused by gradual wear during its day-to-day use (or, most likely, a combination of both).

The choice of metal argues for a use in an environment that had to be water resistant (for example wet weather). The pattern of wear indicates it was not simply a link in a metal chain, but it still apparently subject to considerable abrasion, almost a polishing action - possibly as part of a leather harness (perhaps for a horse employed in agriculture).

Acquisition number: 120224a9

Lead

Lead waste

This lump of lead probably gets its shape from having been spilled as a hot liquid onto the ground where it cooled and solidified. The silvery metal is covered in a crumbly coating with patches of white powder, lead oxide, which can be a hazard because lead is a toxic metal. Finds of this distinctively heavy and soft metal should be securely bagged as soon as possible to keep them from contaminating the work or home environment.

Acquisition number: 120224a7



Lead sphere

This lead sphere may have been a musket ball and, if so, it has probably been fired as embedded in its surface is a thin strip of silvery metal.

The strip of metal could have another origin, and may have been deliberately inserted when the object was made. What we see may not even be its full original form (it may, for instance, have been longer with, perhaps a hole from which it could be hung, as a weight).

Acquisition number: 120224a3



The railways

Railway key

This wrought iron object was found on the route of what was the Bristol and North Somerset Railway, which opened in 1873.

The key wedges the rail into place on a metal 'chair' that's fixed to the wooden sleeper that rests on its bed of ballast. It appears this key was accidentally left beside the line when the rails were dismantled after it finally closed in 1963.

Find spot: National Cycle Network Route 3, Brislington, Bristol. ST 614687
Exhibit contributed by Kai Taylor
Acquisition number: 110521a1



Graffiti on stone

This sandstone nodule is one of a pair excavated in 1837 by Isambard Kingdom Brunel for the Great Western Railway from Number 1 Tunnel, Brislington. It's more than 1m in diameter and was presented to the University of Bristol in 1983. It now stands at the junction of Woodland Road and Cantocks Close, Bristol.

The initials "V W" are carved on the nodule (from the centre of the stone, look toward the 4 o'clock position: the initials are about a third of the way to the edge).

There's no date but the lichen that covers most of the nodule's surface extends across the bottom of the gouged lines. The graffiti is below the centre of the stone, which is neither a convenient nor an obvious place to leave one's mark but, when it was in Brislington (St Anne's Park station, now demolished), it stood on a sizeable plinth, raising it to prominence.

Find spot: Nightingale Valley, Brislington, Bristol. ST 622721
Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor
Acquisition number: 110814a1



Brislington Brook valley

Figurine

This figurine is something of a mystery, but the most likely view is that it is 17th century in date, and Dutch or Flemish in origin.



The item and photographs of it have passed through many hands in the effort to give it a date and meaning. People often recognised feature close to their own interests. The prominent ruff, for example suggested a late Tudor date, say around 1530, but that didn't match the other costume elements such as the crossed straps which became a feature of English military wear common with the Cavaliers during the English Civil War a century later.

The material of which the figurine is made is still uncertain. Was it Parian Ware, a popular white pottery developed in the mid-19th century that was used to produce a wide range of delicate figurines. But it seems more like carved stone than cast pottery. It's likely to be a metamorphic rock such as marble, but it has an MOH rating close to 7, which is harder than ordinary marble (more like quartz) and therefore much more difficult to carve.

It appears that somebody went to great effort in sculpting this figurine, and for now, we have more questions than answers.

With thanks to Simon Cawley for help in bringing this intriguing local curiosity to our attention.

Find spot: Brislington Brook, Nightingale Valley
Exhibit contributed by Leila Denny
Acquisition number: 190206a1

Intaglio seal fob



The lower image has been photographically reversed to assist legibility.

This lovely curio was found in St Anne's Wood in 2010. The Portable Antiquities Officer at Bristol City Museum identified it as a Victorian intaglio seal fob.

Although the gold gleams like treasure it is actually gilt on brass, and the 'stone' is merely glass. Nevertheless it is a remarkable and intriguing trinket.

The design cut into the glass is a sort of riddle called a rebus - a message composed with pictures taking the place of words - and it has so far proved impossible to read entirely. Take a look at the full image by clicking on the small picture above, and see if you can work it out (we have digitally reversed the photograph so we can read it). Stop reading now if you wish to avoid a spoiler containing our best interpretation.

The stone would have been used to seal an envelope or sheet of folded paper. A blob of molten wax would have been poured over a join in the paper, and the stone would have been pushed carefully into it, printing its message. The special wax cooled quickly into a hard disc, retaining a clear impression of the intaglio, gluing the edges of the paper together.

The words and images form a question that was intended to puzzle the recipient of the note to

which the seal was attached: "Who the [devil] [can] this [bee] from". For almost a year, the interpretation of the image of the tankard eluded us, and we are very grateful to Noel Boothroyd for the resolution to this mystery. Tankards were known as canisters (due to their cylindrical shape) - shortened to 'cans' - and this certainly fits with other seals of this period and slightly earlier, where the message was written completely in words.

Did this seal conceal the identity of the author of a sincere message of love - along the lines of a modern Valentine's card? Or was it used simply as a fashionable jest? Traces of red wax remain in the engraving, showing it was used at least once. Archaeology can only tell us so much of the story, the rest is left to our imagination.

Find spot: St Anne's Wood, Brislington. ST 621720

Exhibit contributed by Uri Ben-Avraham

Photographer: Jill Ben-Avraham

Acquisition number: 101001a1

Hampstead Road

Slate pencil

This stick of slate would have been used for writing on a sheet of a harder variety of slate. Once common, particularly in schools in the 19th and 20th centuries, where it would be used to practise handwriting etc, this technology has become completely obsolete.

Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington, Bristol. ST 612710

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 120302a3



Ammonite

This part of the coil of a large ammonite (originally at least 0.5m in diameter) shows the radial ridges that ran around the coils, and also part of the internal shell structure (the straight lines on the underside of the fossil).



It didn't come from Brislington but was brought here by human hands, almost certainly from Keynsham, possibly in the late 18th or early 19th century when it was fashionable for the large, estate houses to exhibit nature's curiosities. It's this human intervention that transitions this from geology to archaeology.

The market town of Keynsham, just 4km (2.5 miles) southeast of Brislington, is well-known for its ammonites that swam there in the Lower Jurassic period, at least 175 million years ago. Many specimens are embedded in garden walls there, and examples are even enshrined in the exterior wall of the parish church (recalling, perhaps, the medieval legend of St Keyna who reputedly petrified the local serpent population, and gave the town her name).

Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington, Bristol. ST 612710

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 110618a3

Oyster shell

Unlike today, oysters used to be commonly eaten by poorer people, and so they're not a high status indicator. While some oyster shells found in Brislington may be souvenirs from the seaside, most would have come from the tidal River Avon as a staple food for the villagers.



Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington, Bristol. ST 612710

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 110618a2

Cast slag block

This large piece of a cast block of copper slag dates to around 1760 (the white and brown markings are superficial and recent). It shows characteristic bubbling and swirls where the molten metal cooled, as well as patches of iridescence (top left of close-up, bottom left of front).

Although damaged around the edges, its parallel front and back allow measurement of its width (pictured with the bubbling), which varies between 195mm 200mm, indicating an original specification of a maximum 8 inches.

The blocks were cast by filling moulds with waste products from the smelting works at Crew's Hole, an industrial operation that was owned in the mid-18th century by William Reeves who lived in what is now Arnos Manor Hotel, Bath Road.

Reeves used them to build his stables and offices that are now known as The Castle public house, Junction Road, a Grade 1 listed building.

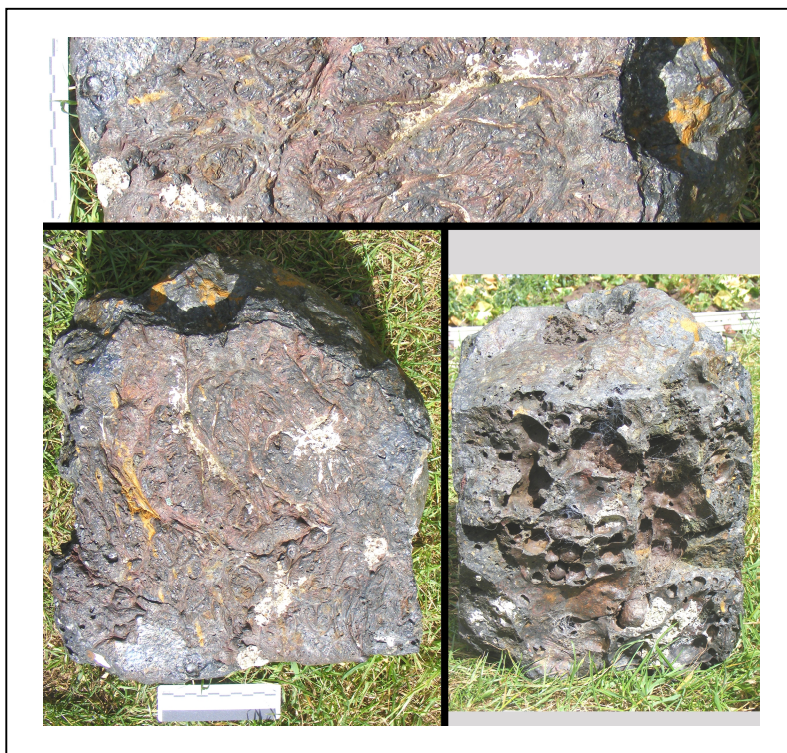
Similar blocks can be seen in many parts of Brislington, as well as further afield, particularly

as rounded triangles used as coping stones on the top of walls, and rectangular building blocks are also found. It would be interesting to know just how great a quantity of this waste material was recycled into a unique and occasionally beautiful building material that has clearly stood the test of time.

Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington, Bristol. ST 612710

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 110618a1



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