



# 2021 NATIONS' GREATEST FINDS COMPETITION

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## AND THE WINNERS ARE...

Judging the Nations' Greatest Find competition is always an entertaining occasion, thanks to the kind hospitality of Tim Loughton (MP for East Worthing & Shoreham, Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group and also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London). This year judging took place in a committee room in Portcullis House, on a sweltering day in London. Somewhat ironically, further down the corridors of power, there was another vote – for Tory party leader – albeit their crop of 'finds' less impressive than ours!

Unfortunately, Alistair MacKay (coin expert) and Harry Bain (Searcher) were unable to join in person, so we went 'hybrid'. Following some tech issues, a switch to Zoom, Tim remembering his password was 'dishyrishi', we were connected ...

This year we had nominations from England, Estonia, Flanders, the Isle of Man, the Netherlands, Scotland and Wales.

Firstly, we looked to identify the 'top find' for each nation/region, and then the overall winners. It's probably fair to say that the finds from England and the Netherlands – being most populous in nominations – impressed us most, but there were some important discoveries from all areas, as you will see.

**ISLE OF MAN** Firstly, we had to agree on the top finds for each 'nation'. Easiest in this respect was the Isle of Man, which had nominated a Viking Age Hoard containing silver coins (mostly minted in Dublin) and hacksilver.

**SCOTLAND** From Scotland was an eclectic crop of interesting finds, including an Iron Age sword hilt guard and a couple of Bronze Age hoards. Harry was particularly struck by a Roman snake ring, which came third, and Tim and I were quite taken by an 'Elf-shot' pendant – an intriguing item made from a Bronze Age arrowhead set into a silver bezel and engraved 'If I should fall, thank God of all!' This came second. Our top choice, especially catching the eye of Alistair, was a contemporary copy of a gold noble of Edward VI.

**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND SCOTLAND WINNER** CONTEMPORARY COPY OF A GOLD NOBLE OF EDWARD VI



**SCOTLAND RUNNER-UP** 'ELF-SHOT' PENDANT



**SCOTLAND THIRD** ROMAN SNAKE RING



**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND ISLE OF MAN WINNER** KATH GILES – VIKING AGE HOARD CONTAINING SILVER COINS (MOSTLY MINTED IN DUBLIN) AND HACKSILVER



**WALES** Wales nominated several important finds, many of prehistoric date, perhaps reflecting the interest of colleagues in PAS Cymru. That said, it was a well-preserved example of a Roman trumpet brooch that we picked in third place. Second, was a probable vessel escutcheon in the form of an ox-head. It dates to the Iron Age. In first place, a lead trial piece for a penny of King Stephen. Certainly, a very interesting find.

**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND WALES WINNER** LEAD TRIAL PIECE FOR A PENNY OF KING STEPHEN



**WALES RUNNER-UP** PROBABLE VESSEL ESCUTCHEON IN THE FORM OF AN OX-HEAD



**WALES THIRD** ROMAN TRUMPET BROOCH



**FLANDERS** Flanders offered a couple of nominations, which we unanimously judged an Anglo-Saxon sceat (or sceatta) the most interesting, not least because it is a rare find for inland Flanders. Second, was the tip of a Bronze Age spear. There was no third place this time...

**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND FLANDERS WINNER** ANGLO-SAXON SCEAT



**FLANDERS RUNNER-UP** TIP OF A BRONZE AGE SPEAR



**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND NETHERLANDS WINNER** HOARD OF COINS AND JEWELLERY FROM TUBBERGEN



**NETHERLANDS RUNNER-UP** IRON AGE BELT HOOK



**NETHERLANDS THIRD** NEW YORKE PENNY



**NETHERLANDS** Our colleagues in Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands presented some strong contenders for greatest finds, including a Roman gold finger-ring that Harry quite liked, and a couple of interesting coins that stood out for Alastair, including an aureus of Vespasian and a pseudo Madelinus tremissis. But the coin that 'did it' for us was a New Yorke penny, the only one found in the Netherlands, which we voted third. An item I quite liked, an Iron Age belt hook, came in second, with the top choice being a hoard of coins and jewellery from Tubbergen, to which we will return.

**ESTONIA** Estonia stood out for having some remarkable items. In third place, we went for a 'bracteate' coin of Bishop Alba of Riga (Latvia), from the Kirimäe Hoard. 25 coins of Albert are known, of which 23 have been found in Latvia – this is the first from Estonia. I was a great fan of a heraldic seal matrix in the name of Hermann 'of Paisgele', though this place has not been identified. We voted this second. All of us were amazed by the Vetiku Hoard, which contains lots of jewellery hidden in a tripod vessel. It is thought it was buried during the Livonian War (1558–83) – between Russia and mostly Scandinavian countries, the Famine of 1601–3, or the Swedish-Polish Wars (1600–29). All a reminder of the panic caused by war.

**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND ESTONIA WINNER** VETIKU HOARD



**ESTONIA RUNNER-UP** HERALDIC SEAL MATRIX IN THE NAME OF HERMANN 'OF PAISGELE'



**ESTONIA THIRD** 'BRACTEATE' COIN OF BISHOP ALBA OF RIGA (LATVIA)



**ENGLAND** Finally, and most importantly (... for recorders with the PAS in England), the English finds. Now Tim said he was a bit disappointed with the English nominations this year, but (to be fair) there were some interesting finds in the mix, including a decorative openwork Iron Age strap fitting and a figurine of a boar. Also, several Roman figurines, and a lock component in the form of a duck. Further, a well-preserved Anglo-Saxon great square-headed brooch, and a lovely example of Irish metalwork. Not ignoring the coin finds, including a Greek Tetradrachm of Alexander 'the Great', a gold aureus of Claudius I, and a groat of Henry VIII struck at Tournai.

**MOST SIGNIFICANT FIND ENGLAND WINNER** EARLY MEDIEVAL FIGURINE WITH HIS THUMBS UP



**N**ext was the hardest part – to rank the finds overall within the categories 'most significant artefact', 'most significant coin' and 'most significant hoard'. This always causes some confusion, especially regarding whether artefacts and coins that have not already been chosen are out. Tim reckoned it was okay for us to choose anything that had been nominated, which frankly confused me. But it is not as if MPs and us public follow the same rules ...

In terms of the 'most significant hoard', Harry voiced surprise by the lack of nominations from England (or Wales). Let's face it, these are mostly Roman coin hoards – important to record, but hardly that unusual! The nominations from across the Channel were much more impressive, to my mind. Although we had a consensus on the top three hoards, we could not easily agree on the order. Somewhat, disappointingly, in my view, the aforementioned Estonian hoard of an ewer and jewellery came in third. Second, was the Viking Age hoard from the Isle of Man, with links to Ireland, England and continental Europe. Impressing us all most was the Tubbergen Hoard, which made first place.

What then, was more important than these? To be honest, we were a bit divided. Taking third slot, was a pretty amazing bone 'memento mori' type rosary bead showing a head of a woman on one side and a skull on the other. This was probably my favourite! Certainly, a top choice for Alastair and Tim was a gold 'penny of 20 pence' (!) in the name of Henry III.

**ENGLAND RUNNER-UP** GOLD 'PENNY OF 20 PENCE' (!) IN THE NAME OF HENRY III



**ENGLAND THIRD** BONE 'MEMENTO MORI' TYPE ROSARY BEAD



This hoard was found scattered across three findspots close to each other and encompasses at least 58 gold and silver coins, 48 coin fragments, and many other jewellery and silver fragments. It was thought the items had been ritually deposited next to a row of wooden posts in the early 8th century.

Coins are not really my thing, but there was no doubt we had some impressive examples, and so we were all especially thankful to Alistair for his thoughts. Although Tim was slightly disparaging of the trial piece for a penny of Stephen, it was an item we thought deserving of third place. Second for us was a coin not mentioned already, a silver penny of Eadberht Praen, King of Kent. This is a new type for the moneyer Asne and only the fourth coin of this late 8th century ruler recorded by the PAS. In first place was the already described gold coin of Henry III.

There is no doubt this coin is excessively rare and important. However, our first choice was an early medieval figurine with his thumbs up, but his penis flaccid: this is (apparently) typical for English-made figures compared with their Scandinavian-made parallels!

Finally, to 'most significant artefact'. Here again (as with the coins) the 'home nations' were to rule the roost! Tim and I had been very taken by the 'elf-shot' charm pendant, which we ranked third overall. Second, was the striking bone rosary bead from London – certainly an unusual (though slightly morbid) find. In first, place, quite aptly, was the early medieval thumbs-up man. This is an important addition to a small, but growing group, of Anglo-Saxon figurines. We have no idea who he is or understand his exact purpose, but we have given him the 'thumbs-up' as a 'great find'.

## HOARD WINNER

NETHERLANDS TUBBERGEN HOARD



## COIN WINNER

ENGLAND GOLD COIN OF HENRY III



## ARTEFACT WINNER

ENGLAND EARLY MEDIEVAL THUMBS-UP MAN



This year's judges were Harry Bain (Searcher), Michael Lewis (Head of PAS), Tim Loughton (MP) and Alistair Mackey (coin expert), with much appreciation to Ayla (Treasure Registrar) for collating this year's nominations. Also, those that nominated finds: Kurt Adams, Adelle Bricking, Andrew Brown, Sophie Flynn, Allison Fox, Anouk Hazelof, Mirjam Kars, Tuuli Kurisoo, Kevin Leahy, Mark Lodwick, John Naylor, George Whatley, Sally Worrell and Stuart Wyatt.



# OVERALL RUNNERS-UP COVERING ALL NATIONS

## HOARD RUNNER-UP

ISLE OF MAN VIKING AGE HOARD



## COIN RUNNER-UP

ENGLAND SILVER PENNY OF EADBERHT PRAEN



## ARTEFACT RUNNER-UP

ENGLAND STRIKING BONE ROSARY BEAD



OVERALL HOARD **THIRD**  
ESTONIA VETIKU HOARD  
OF AN EWER AND JEWELLERY



OVERALL COIN **THIRD**  
WALES PENNY OF STEPHEN



OVERALL ARTEFACT **THIRD**  
SCOTLAND 'ELF-SHOT'  
CHARM PENDANT

