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Abstract

This article examines the use of the database of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) for England and Wales, which records archaeological finds made by the public (particularly metal detector users). The PAS database is generally considered a valuable resource for archaeological research, but its use as such is rarely critically examined. In this case study, artefacts related to the specific material culture of the historically-attested Jewish community in Britain are examined as a potential source of archaeological information about a specific historical social group. The article highlights several challenges in interpreting records deriving from information received from collectors and hobbyists as a substitute for data recovered by archaeological methods. Several false leads and misinterpretations have been identified, and the lack of contextual information for the artefacts is especially problematic. The PAS records are of limited utility as a standalone source of evidence, and cannot lead to meaningful conclusions about Jewish lives in Britain. The artefacts primarily serve as material illustrations of existing written records rather than independent sources of information.

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KEYWORDS
- Jewish
- kosher
- seal matrices
- England
- metal detecting
- portable antiquities

Introduction

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) was set up in 1996 to create a permanent record of archaeological finds made in England and Wales by members of the public and their findspots in order to make the data available for further use. The main contributors of artefacts recorded there are Britain's estimated 40 000 metal detector users (c. 37600 in England and Wales) who search available land looking for collectable items. The PAS database at the time of writing (June 2023) contains in excess of 1,073,188 records of 1,643,639 artefacts, and is widely portrayed by archaeologists and others as a valuable resource for archaeological (and especially artefactological) research. This is one of the main reasons that most British heritage professional have few objections about artefact hunters and collectors selectively emptying the archaeological record of artefacts and taking them for themselves. This is also the justification given by collectors in other countries indicate the British model as worthy of emulation elsewhere in the place of legislation restricting private artefact hunting and collecting.[1]

There has, however rarely been any critical assessment of the basic proposal, the suitability as a basis for research of second hand and selective data deriving from the unsystematic activities of collectors as a substitute for data obtained by archaeological methods. In recent years, some case

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[1] See for example Słapek 1999; Murawski 2015.

studies have been undertaken[2] and they reveal the problems with attempting to treat this information as an archaeological source. In fact, the PAS database could have more to tell us about modern collecting activities, and collectors' attitudes to artefacts than it does about the sites and contexts that the loose items it records actually came from. One noticeable feature from the critical examination of past attempts to use the information recorded by PAS is the way that a principle means of investigation consists of approaches based on dot distribution maps and unreflexive ethnic labelling of the artefacts concerned.[3] In handling these data, it may be remarked that British archaeology of the 2020s seems to have reverted to methods akin to those of Kossinna over a century ago.

The present study has its origins in a chance remark made in a recent online discussion by a British metal detector user about the contribution allegedly made to our understanding the past by the information deriving from responsible artefact hunters reporting their finds. The case of artefacts related to the presence of a sizeable historically-attested Jewish community in Britain seemed to offer an opportunity to examine some of the issues relating to the use of material deriving from metal detector use as a source of information about a particular social group in the past of Britain. The historical Jewish community (or at least part of it) comprises a notable example of the use of material culture to express and reinforce identity which makes the artefacts related to judaica suitable as a useful way to examine the use of material culture deriving from public finds as an information source.

The History

Although there may have been Jews present in Britain earlier, the evidence we have suggests that Jews arrived in significant numbers in Britain (specifically England) only about 1070. Initially, they settled mainly in London, but by the mid-12th century there were some 30 towns where Jews lived among, rather than separated from, Christians. It is estimated that the population was between 3,000 and 5,000 at its peak, but with persecutions, large scale conversions to Christianity and other factors, this fell rapidly to about 1,200 from the 1250s. In 1290, the entire remaining Jewish population was expelled from England by order of the King Edward I.[4]

Settlement of Jews was allowed again during the short-lived republic that followed the abolition of the monarchy (1649–1660). Again the main area where they settled was London, but by the 1740s there were some 6000 Jews in the country, and Jewish communities began to be established in nearly forty towns in many regions of England and Wales. By 1800, the numbers reached 20,000 and in 1880 there were some 60,000 Jews living in England and Wales.[5] Between 1880 and 1914, another 120,000–150,000 Ashkenazi Jews entered Britain due to the persecutions in the Russian Empire, and others came from Europe in the early 20th century in the wake of Nazi persecution.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) is a voluntary programme run by the British government (and administered by the British Museum) to record the increasing numbers of small finds of archaeological interest found by members of the public. The scheme was started in 1997 and covers most of England and Wales at a direct cost to the public purse of upwards of 1.5 million pounds a year (not counting the running and staffing of 44 regional offices, which is partly paid for by local government of those regions – the total cost of the latter may be roughly estimated at between 2.8 and 3.5 million pounds). Through the PAS, individuals are encouraged to report their discoveries of portable antiquities, such as coins, jewellery, tools, and other objects that are at least 300 years old. Most of these objects are of metal as the main source of information is the reported results of the activities of hobbyist artefact hunters and collectors with metal detectors. The idea is that by bringing these finds to the Scheme, archaeologists and experts can examine them and make a permanent online descriptive and visual record of each of them under a unique number, and the objects are returned to the finder-collector. The record has two levels of access, in the public facing one (used in the present article) available at https://finds.org.uk/database, the personal details of the individual finder are hidden, and the findspot is given in only general terms. In the second level, available only to approved users, more precise and sensitive details are recorded. The records are compiled by PAS staff (FLOs, Finds Liaison Officers) aided by supervised volunteers (including metal detectorists).

Searching the PAS Database

A search using the database's built-in search engine and entering the keyword 'Jewish' reveals 185 items; inserting other possibly relevant keywords

[2] Barford 2016; Barford 2020a; Barford 2020b, see also Bonsall 2019.

[3] Barford 2016; Barford 2020a; Barford 2020b.

[4] Hessayon 2011; Marks 2014.

[5] Marks 2014, table 2.2.

adds a considerable number more to the total. Closer examination of these results reveals that there are a considerable number of false leads produced by searching in this manner, for example Record SF-813A68[6] is of a commemorative post-medieval jetton found by metal detecting near Worlingworth, Suffolk. This had been struck in Gelderland (now Netherlands) in 1599, and shows up in a database search for Judaica because of the reverse showing a Biblical scene with (as its record says) a 'divine cloud inscribed Jehovah in Hebrew above'. This is a well-known jeton type and has nothing to do with Jewish communities in England.

Another false lead is the frequency with which medieval personal items (pendants, rings and brooches primarily) bore the four-character amuletic charm 'AGLA' in the Latin alphabet, popular in the Medieval period. Most of the 49 items in the database of this group were a specific form of equal-armed crosses with a broad flat disc in the centre and rounded knobs at the terminals, all of them were dated on typological grounds by the PAS to the period 1250–1400. The reason they appear in the database search is that the letters are said by the PAS to stand for the Hebrew phrase *Ata gibor leolam Adonai* [*You are mighty forever, O Lord*], which is the beginning of the second set of invocations (the *Gevurot*) in the Amidah prayer. This is an interpretation found in a number of popular accounts (such as Wikipedia and books on magic lore). In fact, this interpretation of these letters was only coined after the late 14th century and 15th centuries, and thus a couple of centuries after AGLA begins to appear in magical writings.[7] The origin of the word is still unresolved and may have nothing to do with the Hebrew language. These items are not further discussed here.

A further theme that has become tangled in the mind of PAS recorders with the presence of Jews is the use on a variety of objects of the symbol of a star (hexagram) made of two overlapping equilateral triangles, one inverted. This is labelled the Seal of Solomon or Star of David, and several PAS recorders see this symbol as evidence of a Jewish presence when found on objects such as seal matrices (e.g., SUR-FD14B3; CORN-7BBEB7; SF-BAA2B6). Nevertheless, the hexagram has been used in the past in various religious (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism) and cultural contexts, including as purely decorative motifs on various documents, objects and monuments. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the combination of opposing triangles in the hexagram has a symbolic role, followers of Islam took an interest in the occult associations of the so-called Seal of Solomon (pentagrams as well as hexagrams) due to the medieval Jewish legend of Solomon's power over demons. In this sphere, the six-pointed seal of Solomon was a widely used apotropaic or magical motif in the Medieval period.[8] It also figures in freemasonry. As the Star of David (Magen David), it was locally related to Jewish communities in central Europe in the 14th to 16th centuries, probably deriving from its use there on medieval Jewish protective amulets (*segulot*). Its adoption as a distinctive symbol for the Jewish people and their religion dates back only to 17th-century Prague.[9] The symbol began to be more widely used in this meaning among the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe only in the 19th century, and from there becoming adopted as representative of Zionism and the Jewish national symbol at the First Zionist Congress in 1897.[10]

There is no reason therefore to link the medieval seal matrices with hexagram designs found in Britain with the presence of Jews that had avoided the medieval expulsion. In particular this concerns a discrete group of 14 circular dies of pedestal or pendant form of the 14th century[11] with an incised hexagram, the centre of which may be blank, or incised with an initial, or may hold some kind of a symbol. Around the exterior there may be a small number of letters in the Latin alphabet that form some formulaic motto in English or Latin.[12]

There are also a number of other cases of confusion due to the use of the hexagram. One set of misinterpretations relates to a failure by some recorders to realise that they are dealing with cast copper alloy falus coins of the Alaouite dynasty of Morocco of 18th and 19th century date. While the database includes references to a surprising number of these coins (presumably modern collectors losses), some PAS recorders seem not to have been familiar with this artefact type and misidentified them as lead seals of some kind (another case where some lead seals with hexagrams on them have been confused with kosher food seals is discussed below).

[6] References are to the database entries under those numbers. Readers are referred there for illustrations of the artefacts mentioned in this article. All dates cited are AD.

[7] Mesler 2019, 88.

[8] Egan and Pritchard 1991, 203.

[9] Berlin 2011, 463.

[10] Scholem 1949.

[11] Harvey and McGuinness 1996, 88.

[12] SUR-FD14B3; ESS-342F65; CORN-7BBEB7; CORN-159308; LEIC-E5C7E7; SF-BAA2B6; SF-08E8C2; NMS-D3682E; NMS-8C24D3; WMID-242782; BERK-DF0E92; GLO-62FA55; KENT3841; HAMP-CA5DA0 and related designs OXON-27D48E, KENT2763 and IOW-6A58A8.

The recorder of a disc-shaped two-sided amulet/talismanic pendant, amulet (LANCUM-DB6B05, Bury, Lancashire) links the object to Hebrew magic. It has engraved decoration on both faces, on the obverse it is incised with a magical square with sixteen fields with 16 Hebrew letters in them, and on the other side planetary symbols and numbers with a Latin inscription *Confirmo, Deus Potentissimus*. This talisman is often called a Jupiter talisman and may have its roots in Renaissance magic. This type of medallion is still sold today (for example on eBay and Etsy) as the 'Joseph Smith Talisman' because the founder of Mormonism reputedly owned an example in silver. The example in the PAS Database looks to be of very modern manufacture, and seems unlikely to have any connection whatsoever with the Jewish community.

Judaica in the PAS database

It is, however, possible to find a number of objects in the PAS database that actually do reflect a Jewish presence. The vast majority were found with the use of metal detectors in the ploughsoil of cultivated fields, though a smaller number were found in so-called 'mudlarking', eyes-only searching the edges of bodies of water (in almost all cases the foreshore of the Thames estuary).

The main class of items are lead kosher food seals, and one matrix for making wax (?) kosher seals (see below). The representation of other classes of artefacts is less consistent. In a number of further other cases, the identification of items as Jewish is uncertain, for example, a dozen or so medieval mounts of several types in the form of a Star of David which, as discussed above, are not likely to be Jewish symbols at this period.

Another doubtful case are the three small items (all 37 mm long) in the form of a hand with index finger extended that have ruffled cuffs forming a triangular fan in the middle of which is a rivet fixing it to an object now lost (LIN-EEA138, Sotby area, Lincolnshire; IOW-7D7A53, Isle of Wight (Fig. 1:A); WILT-E7EA86, Broughton, Hampshire). The authors of these records suggest tentatively that these are pointers for reading a text, and indicate that they might even be examples of a Jewish *yad*. All three are so similar that they may even be from the same manufacturer, but the recorders have varied ideas on their dating (c. 1400– 1700; c. 1400–c. 1900; c. 1800–c. 1900). The form of the glove however with the decorated wristband and flared cuffs is that of men's gloves of the 16th and 17th centuries which would seem to be the date of these items. There is a variant socketed form where a pointer extends from an oval plate (ESS-F4D462 from High Easter, Uttlesford, Essex). Pointers for reading are not restricted to Judaism and the British examples are so dissimilar to the post-medieval examples in use in central Europe, which are cast in one piece, that a Jewish interpretation seems unlikely.

That Jewish objects were treated as something worthy of inclusion in the database because of their exotic nature (despite the nominal 300 year-old cutoff date as a criterion for recording) is shown by NARC-EB4245, a modern charm bracelet from somewhere in Northamptonshire, probably only a few decades old (PAS date it to 1960–2009). This simple chain bracelet had three pendants cast in a tin alloy (a fish, key, and the Star of David with the Hand of Hamsa in the centre) which are interpreted as being Jewish symbols.

There are two post-medieval or modern items of cast lead alloy called 'dreidle' in the database (IOW-918A57 from Isle of Wight (Fig. 1:B) and SWYOR-4AB8C9, from Beal Selby district, North Yorkshire). The objects are roughly cube-shaped with a pointed base and a small projecting handle at the top, each face has a Hebrew letter in raised relief. The toy is of a well-documented type that was used in a gambling game in Jewish communities, one that was traditionally allowed at Hanukkah. The form developed on the Continent from a similar 16th century German game called *Trendel*. The top was spun and the letters on the side uppermost when it stopped spinning instructing the player how many tokens to take or put into a central pool.[13] The PAS dates these objects to the post-medieval or modern periods in one case and 'the 18th or 19th century' for the other.

There is a discoidal silver pendant (KENT-5B2CB9, from Stockbury, Kent) probably made from a post-medieval milled coin filed flat. The disc has been pierced near one edge and has a Hebrew letter *He* and a double *gerresh* or *gershayim* indicating an abbreviation roughly- engraved on one face (Fig. 1:D). The engraving is highlighted with some black substance. The letter most likely represents an abbreviation of the term *HaShem* (Hebrew: השם), which translates literally as 'the name' and used as a title for God in much of Judaism. The PAS date the object to the late 17th or early 18th century (1655–1760) but in fact its diameter (though not weight) corresponds with that of George III sixpences (1760–1820), though the coin could equally have been a foreign issue.

[13] The PAS database also contains other forms of spinner of 19th to 20th century date for a non-Jewish variant form of these so-called 'put and take' ('Teetotum') games of chance. This consists of a six-sided top usually of copper alloy with a different instruction on each side. All of them have been found in NE England (LVPL-BA323E; LANCUM-6A3DF2; LVPL-139116; LANCUM ABF3D9).

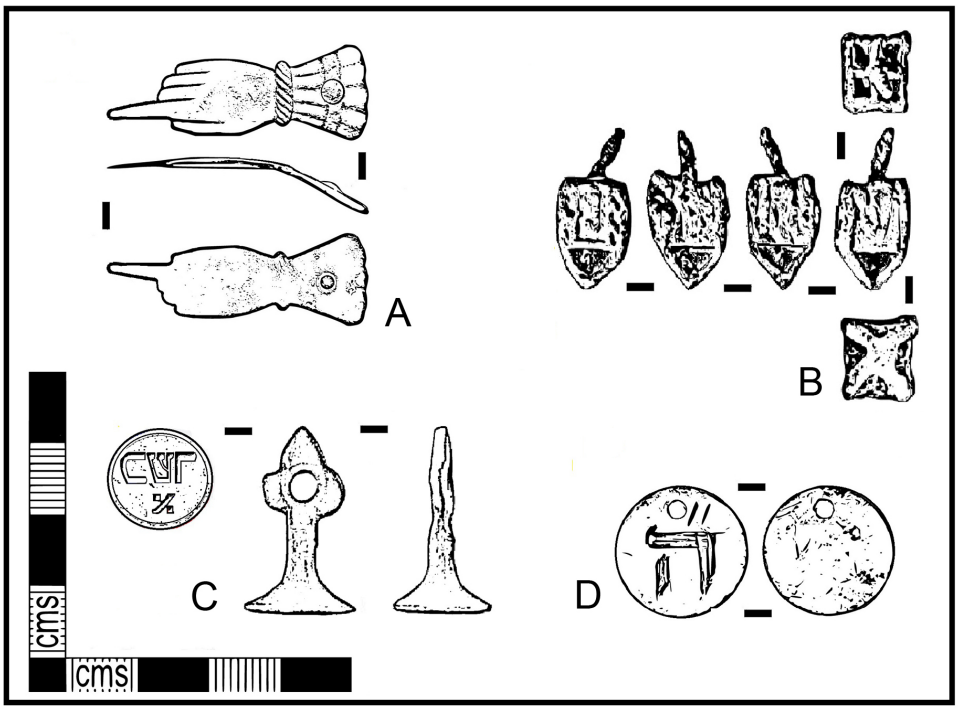

Fig. 1. Selected objects discussed in the text: A – Post-medieval copper alloy hand-shaped 'pointer' of unknown function, 16th/17th centuries (IOW-7D7A53); B – Post-medieval or modern lead alloy dreidl, gaming piece (IOW-918A57); C – Post-medieval copper alloy seal matrix probably c. 17th-18th century with Hebrew inscription (SUSS-E11826); D – Post-medieval discoidal silver pendant, late 17th to early 19th century (KENT-5B2CB9). Images courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme under a Creative Commons BY 3.0 license, modified.

Also of clear association with the Jewish community are a few items connected with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Two of them are cast copper alloy rings (NLM-ED32A5 from Low Burnham, North Lincolnshire; NLM-2BA845 Ulceby with Fordington, Lincolnshire) with flat rectangular section and incuse decoration, including the inscription MIZPAH and on one of them panels with simple vegetal scrolls in low relief. The suggested date of both is Post-Medieval, 1850–1900. A third item is a copper alloy Bar Mitzvah badge in the form of paired hearts with an ivy leaf between them and a pin and catchplate on the back (NLM-81D2AC from Owmby, Lincolnshire). On the front it bears the legend MIZPAH with a six-line prayer in English on the heart on the right and vegetal scrolls on the other. The suggested date is 1920–1950.

Personal Seal matrices

Several cast copper-alloy personal seal matrices for making wax seal impressions on documents and other items might tentatively be related to Jewish owners. Previously, only five other examples had been known.[14] Most of them are the typical 14th century form with a circular face and behind it a tapering conical handle, sometimes facetted and often with a suspension loop (often trefoil) at the top.

One of the clearest examples of this (LANCUM-37898D from Burton-in-Kendal, South Lakeland Cumbria), dating from c. 1290–1400. The device is a central sun, between the two arms and pans of weighing scales, all above what looks like water or waves. The inscription reads +SABRAM AVPOI, who may have been a Jewish man. The seal's design may suggest he had the job of customs official, money lender or some kind of weights/measurements official, perhaps relating to a connection with trade and possibly money changing which has been historically often associated with Jewish groups in Medieval Europe. In the PAS record, it is noted that the shape of the handle might indicate that the seal matrix is of French rather than English origin because the obverse shows similar markings to those on the handles on French 14th century seal handles in the British Museum collections. Since the seal matrix probably dates from after the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, it may indicate a trade connection with the Kendal region and Western France. Alternatively, the unusual condition of the patina might support the idea that it could be a modern collectors loss.

Two medieval seal matrices bear surnames that might be Jewish and perhaps belonged to Christian converts. One seal matrix (BERK-A09C0E, Basildon West Berkshire), dated 1200–1400 has on its face an incised design based on a six-pointed hexagram or the Star of David, a cross extends from its top point, and around the external edge of the matrix is a personal inscription that appears to read IOH. MASSOD, or possibly MASSOO, followed by the ichthys, the Christian fish symbol. It seems that this seal was the property of a John Massod, which the recorder, perhaps influenced by the presence

[14] Harvey and McGuinness 1996, 81.

of a hexagram motif (see above) suggests could be a Jewish surname. A late 13th or 14th century seal matrix SF-1F0772, from Near Bury St Edmunds Suffolk shows in the centre of the die what appears to be a squirrel or hare with human face and a mitred head facing right, all within an inner circle, with the circumference legend reading *SOHOV LEVESKE. The recorder suggests that this in turn may relate to the name l'Eveske that is encountered in the Jewish community in England during the 13th century.[15]

Another possible example is the vesica-shaped seal matrix IHS-7B4697 from Wingham near Dover in Kent) dates 1250–1350. This bears on the face the medieval device of a 'pelican in her piety'. The legend reads +SSALOMONIS· FIACOBI· DEW]GHAM [Latin: The S[eal] of Solomon, son of Jacob (or James) of Wingham]. Was this a Jewish name?

The final copper alloy seal matrix to be considered is SUSS-E11826 (from Steyning near Horsham, West Sussex). This is a small object, 26 mm high, with a conical body and handle, which is surmounted by a trefoil suspension loop with a countersunk circular loop hole (Fig. 1:C). On the face, which is somewhat oval in shape (14×16 mm), inside an incised border are the well-formed Hebrew letters כשר, which indicate that the sealed product is kosher, probably in reference to the preparation of meat. An aleph (א) is engraved below the larger characters, which refers to an unidentified characteristic of the product. In the database it is suggested that this was probably c. 17th–18th century in date.

The largest group of objects in the PAS database that can be associated with Jewish communities are a series of some 40 lead kosher food seals of post-medieval or modern date and of several different types. These items, known in Yiddish[16] as plumbas (i.e., leads), were used to mark food that was certified kosher, prepared according to appropriate procedure within the Jewish community. Most are broken, originally they had consisted of a lead bar that had two broad discoidal or spatulate terminals. When the seal was used, the bar was folded around a string or cloth and the two ends were clasped together and sometimes impressed with a die leaving an inscription. When the package was opened, the seal was broken. As a class, they often bear the abbreviation for Chief of the Rabbinical Court, Beth Din, and may include the word kosher. It is generally considered that these seals were used for kosher chicken or meat, wine, cheese, mustard or other products.

Seals like these were discussed by Egan[17] who dates them to the 17th/18th centuries. They are also included in a metal detectorist's website devoted to his research on lead bag seals.[18] Incidentally, this resource is a good, though rare, example of the sort of dedicated amateur artefactological research artefact collectors can do on the loose objects they find. A large assemblage of similar items is reported by van Oostveen[19] from metal detecting at Nieuwkoop, in the province of South Holland, and he interprets them as having been brought in night soil from Amsterdam, 27 km to the NW, with its large Jewish community (1700-present). He gives different examples various date ranges from 1700–1925 (and in one case up to 1950) but no literature and dating criteria are cited to support these dates.

The items recorded in the PAS database are dated to various timespans in the post-medieval period. Again, virtually no literature and dating criteria are cited to support these dates, which may be mere surmise. The PAS dates need more work done on them, and are ignored below. Likewise in the PAS records, the Hebrew inscriptions are not often transliterated and properly translated, and often do not show up well in the photos, and likewise need more work done on them, and for this reason are ignored below. The lead kosher seals can be divided into the following groups (Fig. 2):

A) Circular (discoidal) terminals with a central ridge and circumferential inscription made when the object was cast. These were usually found as broken-off circular terminals that vary in diameter from 12 to 17 mm in diameter attached to the broken stub of a connecting rod that was circular in section and continued across one face of at least one of the discs as a pronounced mid-line rib. They were probably made in two-piece moulds. They have similar circumferential inscriptions on both faces, and they often incorporate a five-pointed star symbol. LANCUM-7AF5D however is single-sided and BH-D374D4 has an inscription arranged circumferentially on one face, and in three lines on the other. Only one seal was found distorted but complete and it had two circular terminals of different size, SUR-6AF962 – terminals 11 and 14 mm diameter, total length 37 mm. A number of these seals (numbers 17–21) have irregular holes near one margin. These holes may have been used to fasten the terminal of the seal to a cloth by means

[15] Brown and McCartney 2003, 72.
[16] Powell 2012, 1.
[17] Egan 1994, 123-124, cat. 356.
[18] Elton 2011.
[19] van Oostveen 2016, 52-78, cat. 104-201.

of sewing or a wire, but the irregular shape of all of them suggests they may instead merely be a result of some error in the casting process:

1. YORYM-3C78B5: North Duffield North Yorkshire;
2. YORYM-3C78B5: North Duffield North Yorkshire (featureless disc terminal, connecting rod broken off – probably of this type);
3. YORYM-5E7D62: Suffield-cum-Everley, North Yorkshire;
4. LANCUM-7AF5D6: Bedale, North Yorkshire;
5. NMS-00A145: Great Dunham, Norfolk;
6. NMS-B0C6C4 (no image): Scole, Norfolk;
7. SF-307747 (no image): Barking, Suffolk;
8. SF-6E1E15: East Bergholt, Suffolk;
9. SF8443: Brantham, Suffolk;
10. SF8443: Brantham, Suffolk (probably of this type- poorly legible);
11. SF8444: Brantham, Suffolk (probably of this type- poorly legible);
12. SF7018: 'No spatial data available' (!);
13. BH-D374D4: Streatley, Central Bedfordshire;
14. SUR-38E7CF: Charlwood, Surrey;
15. SUR-70854E: Cobham and Downside, Surrey;
16. SUR-6AF962: Cliffe, Medway, Kent;
17. BUC-C6A87C: Eggington, Central Bedfordshire;
18. NMS-176352: Hemblington, Broadland, Norfolk;
19. SF-1A2781: Nacton, Suffolk;
20. SF-7E3B65: Bentley, Suffolk;
21. SF-71D675: Hemley, Suffolk.

B) Similar to Group A seal terminals, with a midrib and circumferential inscription, but with central raised area. A broad projecting circular element in the middle is on the underside of the disc. Perhaps this interacted with a hole in the opposing element when the seal was closed to get a better grip (see type H below):

22. NLM-A0D658: Swinhope, Lincolnshire;
23. NMS-E0F330: Scole, Norfolk.

The connecting rod of seal NMS-E0F330 was twisted and snapped off when the seal was removed from the package. There was iron corrosion on NLM-A0D658, possibly from iron wire used to close the package in addition to the seal. Both these seals may be of later date: 19th/early 20th centuries (?).

C) This group consists of a connecting rod between a centrally-ribbed inscribed circular ovoid or disc-shaped terminal (16 mm diameter), and a smaller uninscribed one. The characteristic feature of is a pair of symmetrical holes either side of the midline in the larger terminal. This seems not to be a casting flaw and possibly was used to sew one side of the seal to the cloth packaging of the certified food:

24. BUC-4A8C18: Wendover, Buckinghamshire. Circular terminal only;
25. PUBLIC-9B0318: Borden, Swale, Kent. Complete seal with one circular terminal and the other uninscribed spatulate. Apparently unused (43.5 mm long).

D) This group is similar in concept to the previous one and is the same as the complete example illustrated by Powell.[20] They consist of a circular sectioned connecting rod between a centrally-ribbed inscribed circular disc-shaped terminal (11–14 mm diameter) with a single small off-centre perforation and a smaller but imperforate spatulate terminal. Both terminals have a Hebrew inscription on both faces, though in the case of NMS-6FB796 this took the form of a single Hebrew letter. In the case of SUR-69A253, it can be seen that on one side of the spatulate terminal the inscription is cast, but on the other was applied by stamping (off centre) with an inscribed die when the seal was closed. The other one may also have been similarly impressed:

26. NMS-6FB796: Field Dalling, North Norfolk. Complete but distorted, length c. 43 mm;
27. SUR-69A253: 'mudlarking' find from the Thames foreshore in: Greater London (length 42.5 mm).

E) This group contains broken off spatulate terminals from seals of unknown form with circular-sectioned connecting rods. They may bear Hebrew inscriptions on both faces. In better preserved examples they may form parallel lines, while on the other face may be a single letter):

28. LIN-071D38: Welton, Lincolnshire;
29. NMS-18F273: Scole, Norfolk;
30. SF-7DC7D2: Bentley, Suffolk;
31. SF7374: Stutton, Suffolk (two seals from the same findspot);
32. BH-1919AD: Sarratt, Hertfordshire.

Apart from the ones recorded on the PAS database, there is also one from Maidstone in Kent in the bag Seals database.[21]

F) Folded tag seal, consisting of two flat terminals, one disc-shaped, the other more spatulate, 13–15 mm in diameter joined by a short rod. They were clasped onto something by bending the strip so the two discs touched. On the larger disc-shaped terminal there are short Hebrew inscriptions arranged circumferentially on both faces, on the other the arrangement of the inscriptions is in one case in parallel lines, and on the outside it was indeterminate (possibly made by impressing with a die to clasp the seal). SF8101 is complete and found in

[20] Powell 2012.

[21] Elton 2011; http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=4621.

unopened form, it has a straight edge to the smaller terminal where a casting sprue has been cut off:

33. SF8101: Nacton, Suffolk;
34. OXON-007BAA: Boarstall, Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire (the recorder failed to recognise what this was).

This may simply be a variant of Type A seals without the midrib on the terminal.

G) Single-character seal, consisting of snapped off circular terminal 16 mm diameter with the stub of a circular-sectioned connecting rod, single cast Hebrew letter on one fact, stub of a small rectangular rivet on the underside (though this may in fact be a distorted letter):

35. SF7041: Stutton, Suffolk (the recorder failed to recognise what this was).

H) 'Pegged' seals. This is van Oostens[22] Type 2A and is a common type of construction for lead alloy bag seals. At the end of the circular-sectioned connecting rod are two circular terminals 22 mm diameter, one has a large hole running through it, giving it the form of a ring, the other has a corresponding projecting peg. In use the two are crimped together with a tool that flattens the peg as a rivet and leaves the impression of an inscription on both faces:

36. KENT-9760FC: 'mudlarking' find from the Thames foreshore, Dowgate City of London.

Seems a distinct type of fastening from Type G.

J) Slotted bag seals, these flat circular or ovoid seals of varied diameter were cast by a process that gave them an internal slot-like hole running through the body parallel to the faces. This accommodated a cord or wire for attachment that would be held by crimping the seal with a tool that left an inscription or device on both faces. This is also a method of closure for modern (1850–1950) lead bag seals:

37. KENT-702281: Manston, Kent (27.57 mm in diameter). Hebrew lettering on both sides;
38. NLM-35FCC1: South Ferriby, North Lincolnshire (this has an inscription MEAT in English and on the reverse an unclear design, in the slot are traces of rusted iron wire, 13 mm diameter).

It is not certain that NLM-35FCC1 is actually a kosher seal.

K) Perforated disc seals, this is a disc-shaped seal with perforation, probably once containing cast-in iron wire, near edge stamped with a Hebrew inscription (?) on one side. This is van Oostens[23] type 1B, which he in fact ascribes to use on metal vessels and not kosher food:

39. NMS-07AA92: Long Melford Suffolk (incomplete, 26.3 mm diameter).

A number of other items recorded on the PAS database as kosher food seals could not be assigned to the above groups:

40. DEV-D6B7E8: West Buckfastleigh, Devon. Three incomplete lead alloy post-medieval kosher food label seals, the form of the object is not clear and there is only a photograph of one side. Recorded remotely by the finder during the Covid-19 lockdown, these have a thickened rim due, apparently, to having been stamped rather than merely crimped. It is a shame that the record is so imprecise;
41. PUBLIC-623F15: Codicote, Hertfordshire (this is probably a variant form of group A).
42. DENO-A5D197: Alderwasley, Derbyshire ('A Probable 19th century lead kosher seal width: 13.3 mm', no further information, no photos);
43. NMS-0C8745: Shotesham, Norfolk ('Post-medieval lead kosher meat seal, inscribed on both sides 17×21 mm', no further information, no photos).

L) Fertiliser bag seals. A discrete group of lead bag seals is recorded in the PAS database as kosher food seals, but no clear references or parallels are cited, and it appears that in fact they are no such thing. Furthermore, arranging the records in chronological order and closely examining their texts indicates that PAS recorders were copying from earlier database entries rather than presenting original research. A characteristic feature is that on one side there is a cast hexagram in relief, on the other a number. The seals in question belong to at least two types, those with a connecting rod between two circular terminals, and those with a slot running through the middle of a thick disc (cf. Type 7 kosher seals above). The first three reported (LIN-290B62, ESS-FE7782, SWYOR-6518 found 2007-9) had PAS staff puzzled and they only tentatively suggested that the design might relate to sealing kosher goods. The recording of SOM-6518A0 from a metal detecting rally at Spaxton, West Somerset in November 2012 however established a pattern, the type was more firmly assigned the role of a seal from packaging 'meat or some other goods where similar restrictions apply, and denotes that the merchandise is kosher; the number probably relates to the manufacturer or butcher'. The latter suggestion owes more to the assumptions and imagination of the recorder rather than genuine knowledge about the realities of Jewish food production and consumption. Various elements of this initial description were later repeated and sometimes expanded on in

[22] van Oostens 2016, 16.
[23] van Oostens 2016, 16.

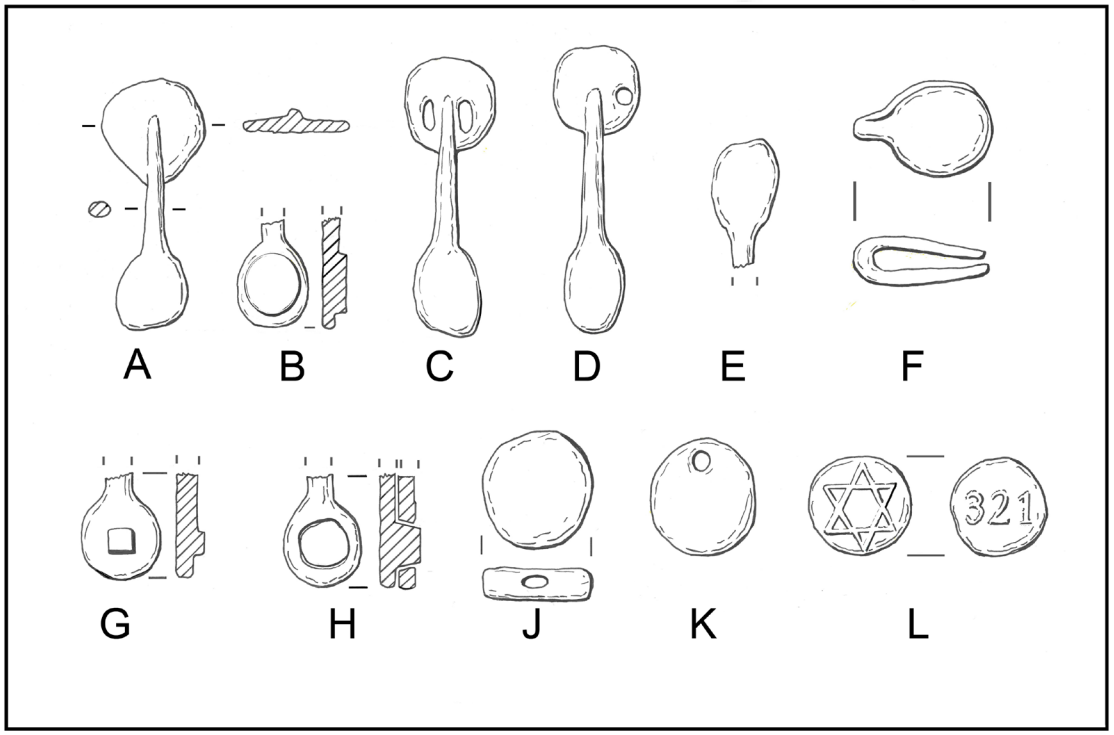

Fig. 2. Attempted typology of post-medieval lead alloy kosher seals (A-K) and bag seal (L) in the PAS database, not to scale, dimensions in text. Hebrew inscriptions omitted. Grapic design: P. Barford, based on images in PAS database.

subsequent data entries concerning finds of similar seals.[24]

It was only later, in May 2021, that comments were included in the database entry PUBLIC-2D63D2 made by a volunteer recorder (apparently a metal detectorist familiar with the contents of Stuart Elton's Bag Seals database), that the identification of these items by PAS as kosher seals was false. In fact, these seals were artificial fertiliser bag seals from Leeds Phosphate Works operating between 1894 and 1921 (the entry DUR-2D5F1C was apparently updated with similar wording at this time). This error had been created by FLOs simply repeating each others' entries without researching properly. There of course were no 'numbered rabbis' in Britain, the numbers from 20 to 976 on the reverse were chemical fertiliser production batch numbers. Had the FLOs looked, they would have found that since July 2008, in fact, there had been a bag seal in the database (YORYM-04D992) with a Star of David on the obverse and with the reverse inscription LEEDS/PHOSPHATE/WORKS and a capital HP. After 2021, a few other examples were correctly identified by PAS recorders from the outset (SWYOR-72FFE3, PUBLIC-B5C573).

[24] NLM-F33BB3; NLM-BF46D1 (reported to have been found 'along with a mount from a Bar Mitzvah gift' – not in Database); WILT-38AFE0; BERK-3E1CC1; IOW-734161; SOM-2AD653; NMS-BFAF0F; LANCUM-88E0EC; PUBLIC-6E0F3F; LANCUM-1069D5; PUBLIC-C7CA92; NLM-0247E9; NLM-77F82E; PUBLIC-B41230; SUR-702C27; PUBLIC-2D63D2; PUBLIC-8563B6; DUR-2D5F1C; NLM-A5BB67; LVPL-5BBF25; NLM-352FAB).

Discussion

Of the c. 200 object records first suggested by the PAS search engine as relating to medieval and post-medieval Jewish communities in England and Wales, by a process of source criticism discarding irrelevant and highly dubious records, the list is reduced to less than sixty items. This is quite notable, as in adding up the successive Jewish population estimates for the (nominally) 14 generations in the centuries since 1650, these items represent a historical community encompassing the lives of a total of c. 1.7 million individuals over the years, furthermore one that is sharply defined by various very specific cultural traits.

One possible reason for a limitation of numbers is that the PAS is intended to be a record of finds older than 300 years (i.e., pre 1700), but with the inclusion of 'notable' objects at the FLO's discretion. It is quite obvious that a number of items identified as Jewish (the charm bracelet, some amulets, bar mitzva gifts and possibly some at least of the kosher food seals) are later than the official cut-off date. Here perhaps the exotic nature of these objects may have persuaded the recorder to include them in the database. Another, more ideologically inspired reason might be the fact that they evidence cultural diversity in the past, a topical issue in post-Brexit Britain. We cannot know however whether these items include all the Jewish objects presented to the recorder, or whether the database contains only a sample of what was submitted before being returned to the finder. This lack of consistency undermines the

value of the PAS database as a source of information. Also it is noticeable that these items cluster regionally (with most in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk), perhaps different FLOs adopted different criteria for what gets recorded and what is ignored?

As suggested above, it can be argued that the PAS database provides more information about collecting habits than it does about the archaeological record. From this point of view, we have to accept that we do not know whether some detectorists are filtering out culturally 'foreign' artefacts from their collections of historical relics, or the way they report them. Given such uncertainties, it is impossible to base any interpretations on even the most simplistic of presentations of these records, as dot-distribution maps.

Another important element limiting the visibility of the Jewish population through this material is that in the UK, Jewish communities were almost exclusively restricted to the larger towns and cities. Indeed, they were mainly constricted to London until the 1740s. For most of the post-medieval period, unlike the situation in central Europe, in Britain very few Jews lived in the smaller towns and rural settings. This means that much of their material culture was deposited, lost and abandoned in places where modern artefact hunting with metal detectors does not take place. Almost the only exceptions to this are the two kosher food seals dropped into the river muds in the middle of London where they were found on the exposed foreshore by 'mudlarking'.

In order to interpret this material therefore, it is first necessary to consider how it got into the fields where they were found. The FLO reporting the material from Suffolk noted that many of the examples came from the south of Ipswich (where there was a Jewish community) and suggests (record SF8101) "their distribution may help to reconstruct Jewish picnicking or rubbish-dumping activity". In particular, this cluster might be a good illustration of the use of human and animal waste transported from large towns (so-called 'night soil') as manure in agriculture in the 18th and 19th centuries. The distance from the town centre of the cluster of sites around Ipswich shows this material was transported fairly locally (6 km ×2, 10 km ×10, 12 km ×6, 14 km, with one possible outlier at 31 km distance). This seems reasonable to interpret as disposal of waste taken from the city. In other cases, the clusters around other centres known to have had Jewish communities in the 18th century onwards such as Oxford, Norwich and Hull were far more dispersed, with little material in fields near the towns, and object scattered at considerable distance (Oxford: 16, 27, 38 and 46 km; Norwich: 17, 31 km ×3; Hull: at distances of 15, 17, 29, 35, 36 km, but across the River Humber). The scattering of artefacts in night soil in Britain needs further study. Other post-medieval Jewish items (primarily kosher food seals) were far distant from any known centres of Jewish communities, and they are less easy to explain using this model. Some may have been left behind by somebody travelling. As always when dealing with such material found loose in fields, it cannot be excluded that some were modern collectors' losses.

A feature that is also noteworthy is that (with the exception of the medieval seal matrices that might bear Jewish names) the majority of the Jewish items discussed above are relatively late in date, with the possibility that many of them date from the 19th and 20th centuries. That is precisely the period when there was a rapid expansion of the Jewish population in Britain (but is also the period when nightsoil collection in British cities was better organised than in previous centuries).

Another situation worth highlighting is that the intention of the PAS was that archaeological 'experts' would be reliably identifying and commenting on the material found by amateurs. In the event, the outcome in the case of this body of items is that very few FLOs had access to the knowledge required to describe these items (particularly the inscriptions on the kosher seals), and instead of seeking specialist advice, they tended to simply copy information one from another. Indeed, in an interesting development on the theme of the relationships of professional and amateurs, it can be seen that in several cases, the mistaken opinions of the FLO were corrected by the artefact collectors themselves (the fertiliser bag seals and two misidentified Moroccan coins). More worrying is the FLO reports are now presented anonymously (this started happening only in Autumn 2019) and it is impossible for the reader to know if the description has been made by a specialist recorder or one of the Scheme's volunteers, which reduces confidence in the body of records as a whole. This is important because one needs to have confidence that all the information visible in and on the artefact (for example a faint and poorly-legible inscription in a foreign script) has been properly recorded before the item is returned to the finder and disappears for ever into a private collection. Initially, the intention was that each entry would be vetted by a specialist, this has not taken place (at the time of writing, 735,263 records of a total of 1,073,188 await validation). This is a serious problem.

Conclusion

The Jewish objects in the PAS database, accumulated by the collective work of dozens of archaeologists and tens of thousands of artefact hunters with metal detectors and other members of the public (and recorded at huge cost to the public purse) have in fact very little to tell us about Jewish lives in Britain that we did not already know. They are material illustrations of the written records, they do not act as a source of information in their own right. One reason for this is that we know little about the manner in which the data were acquired, and the objects lack any kind of context. In the case of kosher seals that could be evidence of picnics by Jewish community groups or nightsoil – we lack even the basic evidence of a note on the presence/absence of associated broken crockery etc. that might be test the first interpretation. These items are just floating trophies from the past that one can only create speculative stories about, rather than use as a concrete source of evidence. This is a pattern that seems to repeat when examining the claims about this database in more detail.[25]

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