

Treasure Valuation Committee Part 3

By Trevor Austin.

Continuing with the in depth look at the *Treasure Valuation Committee*, this months article describes some of the work done by the Treasure Registrar and also the criteria for submitting valuations to the committee.

One of the problems highlighted by the NCMD and others during the recent review of the Treasure Act was the great difficulty in establishing precisely the point a treasure item had reached in the system at any in time. There appeared to be a need for a person whose main responsibility task would be record and then monitor the progress of potential treasure material from the initial reporting stage through to the Treasure Valuation Committee. It was recommended that a” Treasure Registrar “should be appointed.

Lisa Voden-Decker had been employed by the British Museum since 1993 as an Assistant, Information Manager and Research Assistant in what is now the Department of Prehistory & Europe. She subsequently transferred to take up the post of Treasure Registrar in October 2001. Her new task was to carry out the administration administer the treasure procedures for such material reported found in England (finds from Wales are reported to the National Museums & Galleries of Wales, and those from Northern Ireland to the Environment and Heritage Service). Lisa is currently based in the Portable Antiquities Voluntary Reporting Scheme Office (020 7323 8546; lvodendecker@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk) which is located at the British Museum.

Background

Since Lisa’s appointment, the number of treasure cases reported has increased sharply: from 214 in 2001: 306 in 2002: 413 in 2003: 413, to over 250 by June 2004, This latter figure suggests a possible total of around 500 for the current year. This increasing number largely reflects the greater awareness of the Treasure Act no doubt assisted by the expansion of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk) during 2003 and the proactive role that Finds Liaison Officers have in encouraging the reporting of archaeological finds. In those areas where FLOs were appointed for the first time in 2003 there was an average five-fold increase in the reporting of cases of potential treasure material.

Role

The centralization of the administration of treasure at the British Museum has resulted in benefits arising from a single and informed point of contact. Lisa’s primary role has been to co-ordinate reported treasure cases to enable the Museum to carry out its statutory responsibilities in relation to treasure. She registers all treasure finds reported to the Museum and maintains files relating to each case in addition to a computer tracking list to monitor what stage each case has reached. This information allows her to manage the treasure case load and actively chase all the parties involved in the process to aim to ensure both object and coin cases progress to the point of inquest, or, are disclaimed within a reasonable time-frame. Lisa’s wider remit is to advise both professionals, finders and landowners involved in the process, explaining the definition of treasure and the Code of Practice. She thereby ensures that the various persons involved are provided with the information they need to enable them to carry out their responsibilities under the Treasure Act 1996 and helps with any queries they may have. She gives talks on

Treasure, to interested groups such as Coroners and archaeologists, collates statistics, and co-edits the Annual Report on treasure published by the DCMS. Information and guidance is provided for press purposes (Note - not finders' names or findspots)

A key aspect of her work involves keeping finders informed about the progress of their cases. Once a find is received from the local reporting centre by the British Museum, finders receive a letter of confirmation which includes a brief guide to the treasure process. Later in the process they are copied in on the Museum's correspondence with the Coroner or receive a letter confirming that their find has been disclaimed. In both cases finders receive a copy of any the available specialist report

The purpose of the Treasure Act is to allow the national or local museums to acquire Treasure items and to this end Lisa works closely with Finds Liaison Officers, who act as local co-ordinators, in the acquisition of treasure finds. Reports on treasure finds are commissioned and circulated and a response obtained from the relevant museums which may have an interest in acquiring them. If an interest is expressed Lisa provides the Coroner with the relevant information on the find so that an inquest can be held. Once a verdict has been reached the Coroner notifies Lisa and she then puts the Treasure Section at the Department for Culture, Media & Sport in the picture so that the final part of the process, the valuation, can be set in motion. At that point, the DCMS takes over the role of liaising with the finders and other interested parties.

If there is no interest in acquiring a treasure find Lisa reports to the recommends to the Secretary of State, that the material should be disclaimed on behalf of the Crown. Once disclaimed, the treasure material is usually returned to the finder via the local Finds Liaison Officer.

Key Criteria for submitting valuations to the Treasure Valuation Committee.

The Treasure Valuation Committee has drawn up a list of key criteria for the submission of valuations. It will be necessary for valuers to observe these criteria whether commissioned by the finder/landowner or by the Committee themselves.

GUIDANCE FOR SUBMITTING VALUATIONS

TO

THE TREASURE VALUATION COMMITTEE

KEY CRITERIA

1. Valuations should be made in good faith, without conflict of interest and paying regard only to matters concerning the value of the object.
2. Valuers should keep in mind that the purpose of valuations is to enable the Treasure Valuation Committee to arrive at a fair *ex gratia* award for finders, landowners and other relevant parties.

3. Valuations should be based on valuers' own commercial knowledge and experience. Particular weight may be given to valuations from members of relevant trade associations or holders of relevant professional credentials.
4. Valuations should reflect the price that would be paid for the object in a sale on the open market between a willing seller and a willing buyer. They should correspond with the hammer price that would be received at a public auction of the object within the UK, exclusive of commission and VAT, and taking account of all relevant circumstances.
5. Valuations should reflect the 'as found' condition of the object at the time it was found. It is expected that the Committee will be aware of the potential value of the object in its conserved state, after the deduction of notional cleaning and conservation costs. The valuation of newly discovered objects from a previously examined find may take account of that previous discovery.
6. Valuations should be supported by reasons. They should, wherever possible, refer to relevant comparable objects that have achieved an open market price at auction, to the values accorded to such objects and to any relevant distinctions between those objects and the object under valuation.
7. Valuers should use appropriate language, avoiding terminology that might reasonably be expected to occasion offence to finders or others.

Note: The inappropriate cleaning or other treatment of objects may adversely affect any award made by the Treasure Valuation Committee and may make it difficult to assess the value of the object in the condition in which it was found. Such cleaning or other treatment may also impair the archaeological value of the find and make it less desirable to potential acquirers.

Obviously the aim of the criteria is to obtain a fair and consistent valuation, whether commissioned by the finder/landowner or the *Treasure Valuation Committee* and a clearer understanding of why and how the valuation was arrived at.

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