Product Review

ArteSeal Kit for Conserving Finds

by Adrian Gayler

When it comes to the conservation of our finds, some objects require attention while some don't. This can be largely dependent on the type of metal or alloys that your coins or artefacts are composed of. I recall way back in the day where my grandfather used anything from beeswax to even engine oil in an attempt to preserve his finds. As advised by the Portable Antiquities scheme, you need to carry out a simple assessment as to what your find is made from, along with the initial condition. As previously indicated, not all metal objects are 100% pure – they comprise of a base metal but will almost certainly also have other metals mixed within in it, which can cause a multitude of undesirable issues regarding corrosion and other aspects.

Those lucky to have unearthed gold will know that, in its purest form, it does not corrode but can nonetheless be easily damaged, whilst varying alloys of gold can illustrate discoloration and elements of corrosion. Silver can often appear very bright if preserved well in the ground, whereas a hammered coin may also appear tarnished and cracked. However, when it comes to copper-alloy (where the corrosion products are toxic!), this metal needs stabilising to prevent further damage which can take a wide variety of forms including 'Bronze Disease'.

The same toxicity issues are evident to a greater degree regarding lead, whose structure gets weaker over time and whose oxide is also poisonous and highly toxic to the skin. When dealing with this metal it is always advisable to wear gloves and never brush off the white, purple, or reddish powdery oxide if present.

Fig.1. The ArteSeal kit tested with varying solution strengths.

ArteSeal and its Conservation Benefits

Once you have your finds at the end of a day's detecting, corrosion and decay can start slowly or relatively quickly depending on the environment that you have removed it from, placed it in and the type of metal involved.

This is where ArteSeal (Fig.1) may hopefully come to the rescue, especially for those looking to not only conserve and preserve their finds, but also to improve their appearance.

I took a selection of my finds from one Saturday afternoon to assess the benefits of the product. A major component of ArteSeal is the well-known Paraloid™ B-72, a product which has been around for many years now, acting as a coating and adhesive agent and which is commonly used and appreciated by conservators.

ArteSeal Product Range

The range of sizes and ratios ArteSeal offer is impressive including 50ml, 100ml, or 150ml, as either a 3%, 10%, or 20% solution. The very low solution of 3% they provide aligns with the Portable Antiquities Scheme's minimum recommendation and gives a more matt appearance than the higher solutions. The 10% solution is ideal for coins and very smooth surfaced artefacts. The 20% solution is much thicker and takes longer to dry but offers the ultimate in protection. These premixed packages come with a microfibre cloth and two application brushes, which make the whole experience so much smoother. Most usefully, application guides can be found on both their Instagram and YouTube channels.

After removing as much of the 'crud' from each of the coins and artefacts in Fig.2 and ensuring any water had totally evaporated, I started off with the 3% solution. Upon first opening the container you notice a very strong chemical aroma, reminiscent of the modelling adhesive I used in my old Airfix kit constructing days. Within the pot is a brush connected to the lid which I used at first to apply to the

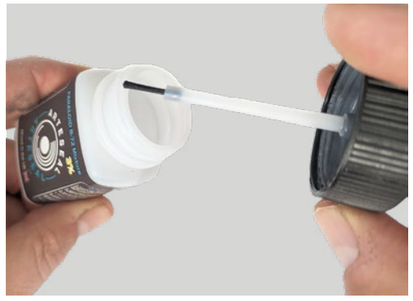

Fig.2. The built in-brush and Paraloid™ B-72 mixture.

Fig.3. The finish on a copper-alloy coin when applying 10% ArteSeal.

Fig.4. Toxic lead now safely encased with ArteSeal.

Fig.5. Using the supplied brush enabled complete coverage on this awkwardly shaped thimble.

face of the coin – the ArteSeal went on very easily and you could see it being absorbed and spreading across the coin and drying very quickly (Fig.3). Within seconds the coin was dry and the patina was enhanced, having a very natural looking appearance.

I carried on applying ArteSeal to a wide range of metals including a lead token (Fig.4) and a thimble (Fig.5) which are always awkward artefacts to conserve, especially trying to get into the intricate grooves and dimples. The 10% solution took a little longer to dry and provided a higher level of gloss than the 3% solution and I found the supplied larger brush easier to use when applying. This worked well on the coins I chose and since doing more examples I did find that the 3% solution seemed to give a more natural appearance on some of the older coins.

The 20% solution was of a more viscous nature and I found that one had to apply it more evenly to prevent brush strokes appearing when testing it out on the coins. This concentration worked far better on the much smoother surfaces, but where I had applied at first to the crotal bell, its finish resembled when you first let your child try using gloss paint. Fortunately, with ArteSeal, once dry it can easily be removed with acetone (my wife's nail varnish remover). This was as simple as dipping a cloth into a small pot of the acetone and rubbing it off. Re-applied more carefully, the 20% solution worked a treat on the crotal bell and I have since applied it to the many others I own as it really makes them stand out.

Conclusion

What is the best option for preserving your artefacts and coins? Well that is one of those very long discussions often had with fellow detectorists down the pub, many of course having their own preferred choice. For me, the thing I particularly liked about ArteSeal was that its main ingredient (Paraloid™ B-72) is tried and trusted as an established choice and is already the preferred medium for many detectorists and professional conservators.

Being able to select between the three levels of concentration for protecting your find works very well, especially if you want minimal impact on the visual presentation. I found that I needed less on some items and more on others based on the shape, metal and surface smoothness. The higher levels may be too glossy for some, but like I said, it can easily be removed if it is not to your liking. Application can be a little tricky on some items but it really absorbs well on awkward shapes, especially the lead token which, being potentially toxic, was something I definitely wanted encased in ArteSeal. The effectiveness and appearance of ArteSeal pre and post application on a few of my finds can be seen in Figs.6 & 7.

Overall, a fantastic product which will preserve your detecting finds for many years to come and at a great price. The website www.arteseal.co.uk has a wealth of information on the product, along with a detailed Q & A section, and of course, the ability to purchase the products.

Fig.6. Before ArteSeal application.

Fig.7. After ArteSeal application.