

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS

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It never rains but it pours, as the old saying goes, and I think the last 12 months must rank as the worst period for metal detecting that I have known. I realise that I am a relative newcomer to the world of detecting, but in all my 10 years of swinging the coil this one must rate as a disaster.

It started with the awful weather that we have been experiencing for months on end, and which has been bad for our farmer friends as well as us. At the beginning of the year some of last season's crops were still in the ground. And then, just when things were starting to look up (or rather dry up), along came foot and mouth disease. Pat and I called a complete halt to our searching as soon as the restrictions were announced. Most of the farms in this area are arable, but we weren't taking any chances. On that score I was pleased to see the latest FID bulletin carried a warning to members not to detect on farmland. The only plus side of the situation has been that we have completed one or two jobs around the house that wouldn't have got a look in under normal circumstances. All the searches I am about to describe were carried out before FMD was announced.

Fig. 1. shows the sceatta that I mentioned in the March issue of **Treasure Hunting**. It came up fairly unexpectedly from ground that has produced very few Saxon finds in the past. Actually, the print doesn't do the coin justice; like many paintings, it is better viewed from a distance.

The coin's description from the **Early Medieval Corpus 410-1180**, reads:

"Series R East Anglia 730-750. Obverse, Radiate Crowned Bust Right, with pelleted band of drapery below, inscription before face and ornaments behind neck. Reverse, Square Military Standard inscribed with ToT/II or similar (derived from series A), Cross on each side, strokes radiating from corners, Ts replaced..."

I thought I'd just treat you to that



Fig. 1. Obverse and reverse of Saxon sceatta.

Fig. 2. Part of Roman bracelet.



Fig. 3. Medieval buckle and part of silver shoe buckle.

description. It just shows how coin types are being taken very seriously these days, so just make sure you get yours recorded. Mind you, I had some difficulty in sorting out the radiate bust on the obverse. The coin shows a bit of Saxon artistic license there, I think. One of the problems with these coins is that the flan is almost always too small for the design. They were obviously a bit tight with the silver.

I did have one or two more finds that day, although the conditions weren't exactly perfect. The stubble was quite long and covered with weeds that caught round the coil continuously. Pat was detecting on an area that had been stripped to provide soil for a bank the farmer had built to restrict access to some sheds he kept his machinery in. She therefore had no problem with stubble or weeds, just lack of finds.

My collection varied from Roman to post medieval. The Roman find was part of a bracelet (about one third), crenulated and with toothing between the crenulations. The bent end is the original, overlapping terminal (see Fig. 2.).

Fig. 3. (left) shows a small medieval buckle that is very similar to larger Saxon ones we have found in the past. It is just possible to see traces of gilding here and there. The right hand artefact is part of a silver shoe buckle. Just the hinge and part of the double-pronged pin have survived. It is stamped with what looks like a leopard's head. Although Pat didn't find anything to write home about on this trip, I found two crotal bells as a parting gift for her collection.

At this time the soil everywhere was so wet that we had to be highly choosy where we searched. One area that tends to remain if not dry then at least easily detectable because it is sandy, is the Saxon market and its surroundings. The market itself still had a crop of potatoes awaiting harvesting, but one of the adjoining fields, which belongs to a different farmer, had been drilled with wheat. This farmer is quite happy for us to detect on cereal crops until they start to shoot vertically, so I had a morning's search. Pat is very reluctant to detect on crops so I had a morning alone.

The day was very cold and damp (give me dry cold every time), and I fully expected it to rain. I plodded up and down the field determined to find something worthwhile to justify searching in such miserable conditions.

Eventually I came away with four artefacts and a coin. The coin was a royal farthing token, very corroded as they usually are, of either James I or Charles I. The artefacts comprised part of a silver or tinned spoon (just the bowl) and, of rather more interest, the two items shown in Fig.4.

I thought the top object was part of the handle of a spoon, but it is decorated on both sides, and I couldn't find a similar type in any of our reference books. Stephen Ashley, who produces the blazons on heraldic designs I find so fascinating, agrees that it could be the shank of a spoon with abstract curvilinear designs on both sides, but adds that Andrew Rogerson suggests



Fig.7. Lead pattern for a Saxon strapend.

that it may be part of a Romano-British pendant. Can anyone confirm either way? The lower find is most of a middle Saxon strapend of a very simple type made out of a folded sheet of bronze. It has a transverse moulded design and one remaining attachment hole. A very nice button with a stag design came up last (Fig.5.).

Pat decided she had had enough of housework and accompanied me on our next expedition. We decided on a field that is about half a mile from the one I was on earlier, and with the same sort of finds pattern. In fact, all the fields within sight of the Saxon market can produce finds from any period, Bronze Age onwards. The difference, in deference to Pat's reluctance to detect on crops, was that this field was covered with the dreaded stubble.

We weren't exactly overwhelmed with finds. Pat's contribution was a



Fig.4. Spoon handle or Roman pendant (?) and Saxon strapend.

Henry III voided long cross cut halfpenny, North 988 (Fig.6.). You may be sure I kept the plug in the sink when I washed it this time. I didn't want to be locked in the coal cellar again. I found a lead trial piece or pattern for a Winchester style strapend, unfortunately broken and with the attachment missing (Fig.7.). I'm pretty sure that Barry, one of our group members, found a similar trial piece when we were assisting the Time Team.



Fig.8. Nuremberg jetton with lion of St. Mark reverse.

My next find was a Nuremberg jetton, the reverse showing a lion of St. Mark (Fig.8.). Gordon Bailey depicts a similar one as No.20 in **Detector Finds 2**.

I need a bit of help identifying the next find I made. This was a livery button featuring a snake being pierced by five arrows (Fig.9.). Perhaps a button enthusiast can tell me if this was a commercially produced button or one used by a particular family?

Fig.9. Livery button showing snake pierced by arrows.



Fig.5. Livery button showing stags.



Fig.6. Obverse and reverse of voided long cross cut halfpenny of Henry III.

We had a couple of hours to spare one evening, so we had a tour round in the car to see if any of our favourite haunts were available. One Roman site looked promising. Some of the crop had been taken off leaving a very rutted surface, but this was better than nothing. The next day I managed a two-hour session all by my self while Pat went for a hair appointment. My two hours were worth it, in my opinion. I found 10 AE coins, and a short cross cut halfpenny of King John, 1205-10, moneyer Wilhelm, North 970, (Fig.10.).

That information - most of which I would have had no chance of deciphering from a cut half of a short cross coin only minted in the name of Henry II - was provided by Adrian Popescu who has taken over the job of coin expert for the Norfolk Museums Service at Gressenhall. Expert he definitely is. Other finds included a small medieval buckle plate, its rim decorated with tiny notches (Fig.11., left).

The other artefact on the right is a simple strapend, again from the medieval period with a bar-mount on the rear edge. I also found one of those enigmatic brooch or suspension/link rings that can date from a variety of periods.

Pat came with me the next time and we covered the rest of the harvested area.

We found 13 AE coins between us,

Fig.10. Obverse and reverse of short cross cut halfpenny of King John.



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12 of which are shown in Fig.12. There should have been the baker's dozen in the frame, but 12 made a neater arrangement. For those of you who are not in the fortunate position of being able to detect on Romano-British sites, and who normally only get to see the better examples, this is a fairly average collection of coins from such a site.

The coins range from recognisable to virtually illegible, although it is usually possible to give a rough date to any of them. Many detectorists refer to the more illegible examples as "grots". Many other detectorists would give



Fig.12. Roman "small change".

their right arm just to find one or two, "grots" or otherwise. I take the view that we are the first persons to handle these coins that were last in circulation nearly 2000 years ago, and I feel very privileged to do so whatever their condition.

About a week later, after two whole days without rain, we chanced the stubble field again, although I wasn't expecting much if the last two sorties were anything to go by. However, you know what it's like. I had only taken a few steps when the Compass caught the edge of a signal off to my right. I never ignore any signal from the Compass, no matter how faint. There have been a number of occasions when the find has turned out to be at least a foot away from the side of the coil right at the furthest limit of my swing. I can only assume that I tilt the machine slightly at that point. I moved over to the point where the signal appeared to come from, and there was no doubt this time. The first spadeful brought out the most part of a middle Saxon pin decorated with ring and dot on a faceted head (Fig.13.). That makes at least four examples of this type of small pin that we have found, and they have all lost



Fig.11. Medieval buckle plate and small strap end.



Fig.13. Saxon pin minus tip of shaft.

the end of the shaft. It is very seldom that we find a complete Saxon pin. Mostly, it is just the head that makes an appearance. It would seem that thin shafts and bronze don't go well together, the bronze being too brittle.

I made three other finds consisting of a ring brooch of standard type, a very neat nickel button (Fig.14.) and a very corroded Charles II farthing. This coin was very unusual for our area. We find very few Stuart coins.

My next expedition was to the sports field, a site which I have visited every year since I started detecting. It contains a small plot that revealed the finest *sestertii* it has been my good fortune to find. It is also the only site in the whole of our detecting area that has ever produced Commonwealth pennies, even though there was a serious amount of

activity in Lynn during the Civil War.

This time it didn't produce much. Fig.15. shows my first find. This looks like a trigger from a gun, and it wouldn't be the first time that I have found a gun part. But to my untrained eye there is nothing to engage with the firing mechanism, so I am inclined to think it is part of some sort of agricultural machine. Will somebody prove me wrong? Two radiates were the only Roman finds (Fig.16.). The chap on the left, who looks as if he is wearing a hat rather than a radiate crown, is meant to be Victorinus. At least the engraver got most of the lettering right. The right hand emperor is Tacitus II.

We always find plenty of buttons wherever we go. Most of them are very plain, but occasionally a nice one turns up that I think deserves a photograph. So far I have shown three. This is the fourth that Pat found the next day (Fig.17.).

At this point we were requested to carry out a recce of the area surrounding a grid reference on one of the farms we search. A field walker had picked up a quantity of Romano-British pottery. Andrew Rogerson, our field archaeologist contact, hoped we could supply some further detail in the form of metal finds. When I identified the position, I



Fig.14. Nickel decorated button.



Fig.15. Trigger or part of agricultural machine?

Fig.16. Two radiate coins (Victorinus left, Tetricus right).



thought, "We won't find much there, it is too high up".

As it happened, we did find one more shard of grey ware at the point we had been given. Pat also unearthed a somewhat corroded AE4 of the House of Constantine, reverse GLORIA EXERCITUS, about 100 metres from the pottery find. Obviously the occupants of this site weren't particularly well off.

This sort of work for archaeologists may not sound very exciting, but it does give them a clue to the occupants of these small sites. Obviously, if coinage is not being used, then the folk had something else to use as currency such as their crops or a product. Or, of course, they may have been simply self-sufficient.

There are several other sites we have found, purely by metal detecting, where the only evidence of occupation has been metalwork and coins. Two of



Fig.20. English jetton of Edward I/II (1302-10).

these sites were high up and overlooking Roman roads. The inference is therefore that they were either military or some sort of civil establishment such as a posting station. In fact, that was confirmed on one of these sites by our finding parts of seal boxes. Obviously, the staff working there would have been paid in coin. I find it all very interesting.

The last area we visited before the dreaded FMD made its appearance seemed to have great potential, but as yet we haven't realised it. It is not too far from a medieval castle and we

Fig.21. Drawer handle, 1690-1715.



Fig.17 Moulded and decorated button.



Fig.18 Small medieval mount of fleur de lys design.

thought we would find plenty of evidence from that period. So far though, although the finds have been mostly from that period, the "plenty" has eluded us.

Our first session, on a west-facing field, did yield two finds that would have been associated with medieval aristocracy. Pat found the halves of two bronze hawking bells. These were somewhat squashed so are not worth a photograph, but are promising finds all the same. I found a small fleur de lys belt mount not far away (Fig.18.), followed by about half of a very ornate shoe buckle (Fig.19.). Pat finished off with a damaged English jetton, just recognisable as being from the period of Edward I/II, 1302-10, Michiner 186 (Fig.20.).

The next day we had a look at an adjoining field. My first find, a drawer handle, is duplicated on page 16 of **Detector Finds 2**, and dates according

Fig.22. Obverse and reverse of French jetton, Tournai, 1415-1457.



Fig.19. Part of ornate shoe buckle.

to Gordon, to 1690 to 1715. The hole in mine is plugged by the remains of the iron staple that held the fitting to the drawer. It is shown in Fig.21. It was also my turn to find a jetton, a French one this time in quite good condition except for a punched hole (Fig.22.). It features a coat of arms with three fleur de lys, and a rather crude stranded cross on the reverse. Adrian identifies it as a stock jetton of Tournai, 1415-1457, Michiner 686. My last finds comprised a radiate of Victorinus, a small strap slide, and another strapend. This was slightly shorter than the earlier one, but again with a bar mount (Fig.23., left and right respectively).

On the treasure front, the odd reader who follows my stories may remember that I have twice mentioned the foot of a silver-gilt Saxon brooch that was featured in the April 2000 issue of **Treasure Hunting**, but which I found in November and reported in December 1999. You know what is going to come next, don't you? I have heard nothing since July 2000, when I was told an inquest was imminent, except to be informed unofficially that the artefact has been disclaimed. When this happened last time, with Pat's pommel, I continually phoned to inquire after progress and to get some action. This time I'm doing nothing. I'm just going to see how long it takes. Things don't change, do they? **TH**

Fig.23. Small strap slide and strapend with bar mount attached.

