

LOST IN THE WOODS

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What with the weather being so wet of late, I have been in two minds as to whether I should be attempting to get out detecting or spend my time in the garden building an ark! Being short of timber, I went for the first option. However, this was easier said than done. The only dry days seemed to fall when I had no option other than to get certain jobs done. Eventually, however, a day arrived when it was misty but not actually raining.

After an initial tour of the available land, it became obvious that finding a place to search was going to be a problem. Field after field was flooded, and after wasting an hour of my valuable time just driving around and with frustration setting in, I decided to opt for one of the few places I hoped would be dry, a wood on high ground. I parked as near to the wood as I could. After stopping briefly to check that I had all the equipment I would require, I walked quickly across the small field that bordered the wood. I noticed that this field was reasonably dry, and concluded that I could always search this should the wood prove unproductive.

I eventually reached the border of the wood and stepped inside. It was strangely silent and deserted with no evidence of anyone walking a dog or even a bird to be seen. When I started detecting every twig I snapped sounded like a gun going off. A signal from my detector soon concentrated my thoughts and digging my first hole of the day I turned up a cartridge case. This was to set the pattern for the next 20 or so signals over the following



Fig.1. Obverse and reverse of Elizabeth I sixpence.

hour. To make matters worse, I noticed that the light had turned several shades darker. Peering upwards through the trees I could see that the sun, which had briefly put in an appearance and was starting to dissipate the mist, had now disappeared. What had been mist was now fast turning to fog.

I have been in an open field before when fog has come down, and know that to get out it is a simple matter of walking in a straight line until you hit a boundary. You then follow the boundary back to a gateway or to where you have left your car. But a wood, and this was quite a large one, is a different proposition. I do not have a great sense of direction, and I only have to turn round twice to lose my bearings. I stood for a few minutes looking for familiar features and then set off, detecting as I went. My only targets still came up in the form of cartridge cases, and some 15 minutes later I was quite relieved to find myself back at the edge of the wood, even though it was some 200yd from my original entry point. I decided to follow the boundary back to the entrance and restrict my

detecting to that area of the wood so as not to get lost again.

This proved to be the best decision I had made all day. My first signal produced not the expected shotgun cartridge case but a Georgian shoe buckle. I was relieved to be finding something other than junk, and wondered if things were about to take a turn for the better.

The next two signals represented a return to the shotgun cartridges, but the next signal had a different sound. Although quite faint it was constant. After going through the spoil I found myself holding a hammered sixpence of Elizabeth I dated 1575 (Fig.1.). Although this was not in the best of condition and was suffering a small crack, the find did wonders for my concentration. I checked the hole and the surrounding area but nothing more came to light. However, I decided to stay within the area and go no more than 50yd in any direction.

This decision soon started to pay off. My next target was a costume jewellery butterfly made of copper alloy (Fig.2.). It has a bar with two holes in it across the front wings, probably

Fig.2. Victorian costume jewellery butterfly.



Fig.3. Toy, possibly Victorian, of dog pulling cart.



Fig.4. Bronze weight of George II.



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Fig.5. Silver ring showing hallmark.

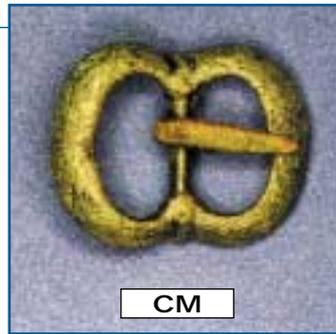


Fig.6. Spectacle buckle.



Fig.7. Mystery object in copper alloy.

made to contain decorations such as feathers or flowers. Instead of having the usual pin at the back, it had only a large suspension loop. The butterfly is decorated on both sides, and I believe likely to be Victorian in date.

My next find I suspect to be of about the same age, this being a dog pulling a cart (Fig.3.). This was damaged but still a pleasant find.

I was still being tormented by cartridge cases, but at least now other finds were starting to appear amongst them, my next being a small bronze weight of George II (Fig.4.).

As a result of the fog the trees were now dripping constantly, and I might just as well have been out in the rain. With that thought I sunk up to my knee in a rabbit hole. There had been no sign of this until I trod on the leaves that had hidden it. This was one occasion when I was glad there was no one about, as I must have looked quite a sight as I struggled to get my leg out. Luckily I was unhurt, and had a laugh at myself before I carried on.

My next target was a man's silver ring (Fig.5.). This was in much better condition on the inside, than the outside and the hallmarks were clearly visible. This ring turned out to be a little older than I had expected; it dates 1882/1883 and was made in Birmingham by Hilliard and Thomason (known at that period for making card cases, caddy spoons and jewellery).

Fig.8. Tudor belt buckle.



The ring was followed by a small spectacle buckle (Fig.6.) with its pin intact, dating to around the 15th century. My next two targets were 19th/20th century horse buckles. Finding myself close to the boundary, and having spent some five hours searching, I decided I would make my way back to the car around the edge of the field searching as I went.

My first two targets were only pieces of scrap lead, but the third target remains a mystery (Fig.7.). It is made of bronze and hooked at one end. My last target of the day was the Tudor belt buckle shown in Fig.8. This had an iron pin long rotted away, but was very ornate and the best example I have found to date. It is decorated with what look like cherubs. With that stowed safely in my finds bag I headed for home. As the field looked encouraging, however, I decided to return to it on my next day out.

My next opportunity to get out detecting was some three weeks later. On my return I noticed that the bottom of the field looked much wetter; however, this was not a great worry as I still had the wood as a second option. The first target to put in an appearance was a rumbler bell. It always amazes me how many of these, when cleaned, still have enough of the iron ball left to "rumble".

My next target I dismissed as simply a piece of scrap lead but later, when I cleaned it, I was sure I had a small lead dish. This seemed to be backed up by a

second piece of lead I found, which was shaped like a small basket (Fig.9.). I believe items such as these were used as toys in the Georgian period. However, the ones I had found were quite crude and probably homemade.

My search continued with the next two targets being more 19th-20th century horse buckles. On reaching the border of the wood a loud signal produced another, larger rumbler bell. Peering into the wood I noticed how different it all looked without the fog, and I was tempted to try my luck once again inside. But with only an hour left before I needed to set off home I decided to leave it for a later date. I resolved instead to spend the remainder of my search time criss-crossing the field.

My next target was a 1943 sixpence, followed by a 1929 halfpenny. Then I came to a small area that produced only rubbish. When I hit a patch like this I often persevere and dig every signal in the hope that one good item will show up amongst the junk. In this case - after digging up 19 targets including two pieces of bicycle pump, seven ring pulls, and four lumps of lead - the nearest I could get to anything remotely interesting was a large BP brass petrol can cap, probably of 1930s vintage (Fig.10.). My time had now run out, so I had to head for home.

Four days later I found myself with a day free and once more headed off for the wood. It was a nice clear day, and I soon found I had wandered out of sight of the boundary. Fog or no fog I still needed to be aware of the dangers of

Fig.9. Lead dish and basket.





Fig.10. Vintage "BP" petrol can screw cap.



Fig.11. Two Georgian shoe buckles.

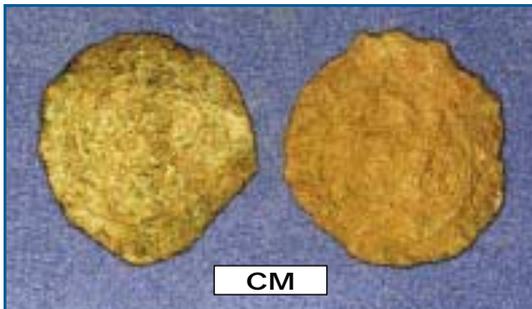


Fig.12. Two jettons in their usual poor state.



Fig.13. Obverse and reverse of Victorian sixpence dated 1892.



Fig.14. Boy Scout badge.

getting lost. After another half dozen cartridge cases I was beginning to wonder if I would have been better off on the field. However, the next signal produced my second Georgian shoe buckle from the site (Fig.11.). The buckle was followed by four very grotty modern coins all within a foot of each other. This at least proved there were likely to be other targets to be had. Within 10yd I had uncovered two examples of what I thought at the time were 17th century tokens. On cleaning these later I found they were actually two very worn jettons (Fig.12.).

After another hour of searching with only a couple more 19th-20th century harness buckles to show for it, I decided to find my way back to the field and finish off the day there. This as it turned out was a good move for within minutes I had found a Victorian sixpence (Fig.13.) followed by the Boy Scout badge shown as Fig.14. (age unknown). My next target announced itself with a very loud signal and turned out to be a trademark plate (Fig.15.). One of the fixing pins still remained, and on the front was an image of Hercules with his name across it. There is also, I believe, a Latin motto. I know the plate cannot be that old, but am curious as to what it came off. My only guess is possibly the door of a safe (now that would have been a nice find!) There was unfortunately nothing else in the ground nearby to give me any clues.



Fig.15. A trade plate showing the bust of Hercules.

Fig.16. William III love token.



My next target was a lead-headed nail. This one, for a change, had a couple of inches of the iron nail remaining.

I now decided to move lower down the field. Although the ground was somewhat damper and not so pleasant to work, the targets kept coming. The first was a William III sixpence (Fig.16.) bent into a love token. This was followed by a Victorian farthing and then, less than an inch below the surface, the book clasp represented as Fig.17. This showed some decoration on the front and probably dates 16th-17th century. The last target of the day turned out to be half of a bull's nose

ring. When I first saw this still in the hole I thought I had found an early bronze bracelet. Although this last find was a bit of a let down, I still went home with some reasonable finds. With so few fields available I considered myself lucky to be able to get out at all.

It was to be two further weeks before I was once again to get out detecting. With a reasonable part of the small field still not searched, it seemed sensible to spend my time there before the farmer drilled it. I decided to start at the far end and then work my way back towards where I had parked my

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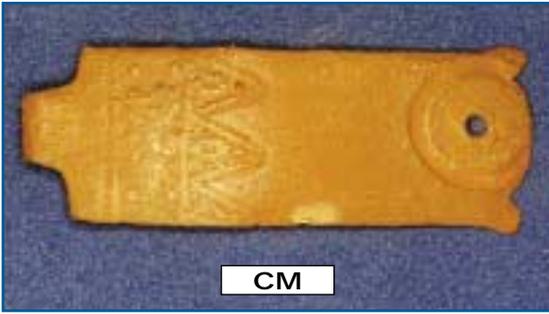


Fig.17. Book clasp.



Fig.18. 17th century button.

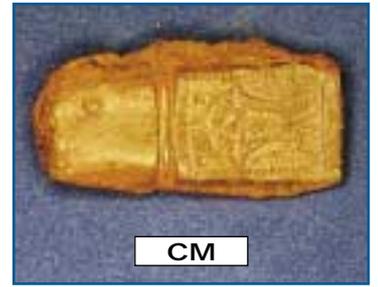


Fig.19. Part of penknife handle.

car. I often choose to do this as I find that if I have a good day with plenty of targets I do not seem to get tired, but if on the other hand I spend six to eight hours detecting and find nothing I am always very glad to return to my car.

The far end of the field was somewhat damp and I found working it quite hard going. My first target of the day was a musket ball, followed by a large 17th century button (Fig.18.). As usual the latter was minus its fixing ring, which had been made of iron and had long since rotted away. My next target



Fig.20. Three rumbler bells.



Fig.21. Obverse and reverse of George III farthing dated 1807.



Fig.22. Victorian costume jewellery ring.

was a harness pendant retaining both of its fixing pins on the back. Although the front is decorated the design is now quite worn. My next target was a small bronze object with a corroded iron back. After cleaning this turned out to be a piece of 17th century penknife handle (Fig.19.). The fragment is quite well decorated and it would have been nice to have found it complete. However, I know the soil conditions of the land I detect on make this a highly unlikely eventuality. (You can see a variety of 17th-18th century penknives in excellent condition on Gordon Bailey's web site at www.gbantiquities.co.uk).

Moving on I was to find yet another bell (Fig.20.). This was quite a small example but was stamped with a hammer founder's mark and dates to the 16th century. Not 2ft away, and only 3in deep I was to find the best condition George III farthing (Fig.21.) that I have ever encountered. The coin was dated 1807, and could not have been in circulation very long when it was lost.



Fig.23. Lead token.

Staying on the same line of search I found my second ring (Fig.22.). This example is copper but still retains a lot of its original gilding. It is probably a Victorian (or possibly slightly older) "poor man's wedding ring".

My next find was a 17th-18th century lead token (Fig.23.), and on checking the spoil a second signal produced an 18th century livery button showing a stag's head. My next signal produced what I consider to be one of the most



Fig.24. Harness stud with two family crests.

interesting finds to come from the field. This was an 18th century harness stud (Fig.24.) in good and complete condition. All four fixing pins remained on the back, while on the front there were two coats of arms. This probably meant that members of two wealthy families had married and both kept their coat of arms. The stud would have been situated on the martingale piece, which is the leather strap that ran around the front of the horse.

My next target was a small Victorian thimble its only marking being a number "6". I found myself at this point very near the edge of the wood, and a detour inside produced a piece of army badge on which was the motto "Be Pre-



Fig.25. Obverse and reverse of Edward III jetton.



Fig.26. Harness stud with design of dog's head.



Obverse and reverse of George IV token.

pared". Just ahead of me in the wood I could make out a very narrow but used track. I decided it was probably only used by deer but had followed it for 20yd when a faint but constant signal drew my attention. This target was not buried but came up from just under the leaves. I could not believe it when I picked up a permanent marker pen. What was more upon removing the cap I found that the pen was still working (so much for my theory about the deer). This recent loss was enough to make me turn around and head back to the field. Here I spent my last hour of detecting on a "walkabout".

This soon resulted in my next target, which was a pastry jigger wheel. An earlier find followed in the form of

an Edward III copper alloy jetton (Fig.25.) in good condition. Next to follow was another piece of harness pendant. This time the pendant was broken but showed a dog or demon's head (Fig.26.) with its tongue sticking out.

By now I was fairly close to the car and wandering back towards it picked up my last target of the day. This I believe is a token of George IV but is quite worn (Fig.26.). The next time I passed by the field I noticed that the farmer had already started to drill it. But hopefully I will be able to return next season and see what else the turn of the plough has in store for me.

Footnote

The events described above took place before the dreadful outbreak of foot and mouth disease. As with every other reader my sympathies go to the farmers, and I shall be avoiding farmland sites until we are given the "all clear".

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