

THE MAKING OF A GOLF COURSE

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After reading the title of this article you may be wondering what on earth the making of a golf course has to do with metal detecting. Well, to me it means heavy earth moving equipment, and thousands of yards of soil being stripped, sifted, and replaced. It also conjures up visions of Celtic, Roman and medieval coins and artefacts. Of course, reality is not always the same as the things we dream of. But there are occasions when it can be.

Some years ago a sign went up on some fields near to where my detecting partner Bob lives. It announced that planning permission had been granted for an 18-hole golf course. The fields concerned were ones that we had already been detecting on for some time. One field in particular had produced some Roman coins, one silver Celtic coin, and eight or nine groats of Edward IV.

We therefore had high hopes of finding some nice bits and pieces if we could gain permission to search the area while the construction work was taking place. When we walked across the first field we could see square trenches everywhere, and the next field was in the same condition. "Arco trenches", I thought. And yes, Arco had been and gone leaving behind assorted nails, plastic and other rubbish to irritate the local wildlife. (In fact, some time later we dug up a spade, from a depth of 2ft which some careless person had left behind.)

Eventually we bumped into the contractor who was in charge of the site. After having a chat with him, he agreed to allow us to detect. His one condition was that after the graded soil had been replaced and seeded we had to leave it alone.

Over the next few weeks we took advantage of this search permission, mostly detecting at evenings or weekends so as not to be in the way. We found Roman coins, some Georgian, a few medieval, and a great deal of the

usual scrap and junk. One of the better finds was a nice silver Celtic unit of Eppaticus that I recovered from underneath a stationary earthmover.

The field that we thought had the greatest potential was a huge disappointment. Apart from the Celtic coin, very little of interest was found on it. The patch of ground that had yielded the groats some years before was now devoid of signals. However, I had mentioned to the contractor that we had found some nice coins in that area, and he said that he would inform us when they started to move the soil.

We missed a couple of days on site due to bad weather, and by the time we returned the whole patch had been bulldozed. All of the removed topsoil had been piled up in a heap some 120ft long by 15ft high. I detected on the heap but nothing came to light. I therefore tried to relocate the area where the coins had been found. However, after the machinery had been at the field the whole site looked completely different. After some time, my detector eventually managed to locate a target in the gravel. I unearthed my find and - you've guessed it - it was a groat of Edward IV, York Mint, a bit chewed from where the bulldozer had rammed it into the gravel.

I looked at the coin, then at the spoil heap, and then back to the coin again. How many more, I wondered, were in that heap? For a fleeting instance I then wondered whether it was possible to go through a couple of hundred tons of soil with just a garden fork. With a Gallic shrug of my shoulders I then turned away and stumbled off home with tears misting my eyes. Metal detecting can be a frustrating hobby at times.

However, it wasn't the end of the world, and I did manage to find an attractive 17th century silver thimble on our next visit. We also unearthed quite a few grotty Roman coins in one particular area.

On our next visit we decided to try

another field. On our arrival a bulldozer was busy at work removing topsoil and we wandered over to take a look. Almost immediately I noticed black patches in the subsoil and fragments of Roman pottery. We waited until the bulldozer had trundled away to another part of the field and then set to work. A fair number of Roman coins started appearing, the bulk of them unfortunately in poor condition. These were mainly 1st century in date and included examples of Augustus, Claudius, Nero and Vespasian. We detected over the whole of the cleared area and were more than satisfied with the amount of material we found.

Some time earlier Bob had mentioned that a Roman villa was thought to lie under the old farmhouse that was nearby. As that was where the bulldozer was now working we set off to try our luck.

As we approached we could see one huge area of black soil that had been uncovered by the bulldozer, and what was more it was just in the process of uncovering another one. Both areas were circular and I guessed that they were Roman rubbish pits. Even from a distance it was possible to see the presence of Roman pottery and tile in the black soil.

We stopped to have a cup of tea from our flasks and allow the driver to finish the area. He gave us a "thumbs up" when his task was completed, and we set to work with a will. Roman coin after Roman coin came to light. These were mostly late AE3s of Valens, Valentinian and Gratian but the majority were in nice condition. We also found the odd silver *denarii* scattered in amongst the bronze coins.

I finished detecting on my patch and went over to see how Bob was getting on. He had a tidy pile of coins in his tin, but remarked that the black soil was really mineralised and some of the coins had been very hard to find. As we were using different detectors, we decided to swap patches. On doing this



Cannon ball?



Nicely decorated pot shards.



The handle from a high quality Roman glass jug.

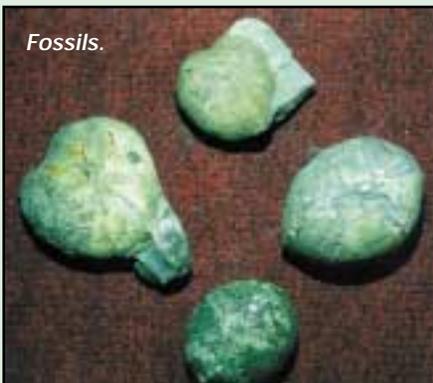


A good quality Roman bowl, view of rear.



Obverse and reverse of Verica gold stater.

Selection of finds made during our search of the golf course



Fossils.



Roof tile showing paw print.

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I started to find coins straight away, as did Bob.

Some time later we took a well-earned break and discussed what we should do next. We decided to bring a fork and spade on the next visit in the hope of bringing some of the deeper coins within detecting range. We okayed this with the developer and said that we would fill in the holes. At the latter comment he laughed and said that he had plenty of machinery to do that.

We returned the next day and starting turning over the soil. More coins started appearing, and I also found the bowl of a lovely Roman silver spoon. Strangely enough, this was to be one of the few artefacts that we recovered during our search of the whole site.

At this point the developer drove over to see how we were getting on. We showed him our finds and explained what they were. He then asked if he could have a try with one of our machines. We readily agreed, and the developer found his first Roman coin after about 30 seconds! He returned back to work more than pleased with this find.

Bob, meanwhile, was down about 3ft below the surface and was recovering large amounts of pottery from a small area. As the soil was very wet, it was possible that he had stumbled on to a Roman well. We would have liked to have dug down deeper, but the developer advised against this on safety grounds.

Bob and I therefore moved to another area and started the process again. As soon as we started to dig here a Roman quern stone came to light (Fig.1.), followed by some fragments of



Fig.1. Roman quern stone.

a Roman mortarium (Fig.2.). Putting the pieces of the latter together on site, we found that we had a complete - if broken - pot. At home later I reconstructed this with the help of a little plaster of Paris. All of the breaks were fresh and the mortarium had been complete before suffering the weight of the bulldozer (Fig.3.). We later found some fragments of a better type mortarium, together with some shards of "Cowley ware" (Fig.4.).

We were still finding coins in the same area and moving slightly down-slope, my detector gave a large signal. The only evidence of the source, however, was some jagged pieces of a pot sticking out of the gravel. I called Bob

over and asked him to run his detector over the spot where the signal had come from. His detector also gave a large, wide signal. I measured the width of the pot using my Sidewinder, and it ran from the coil to the control box. With evidence of both a big signal and big pot it was equally big grins all round. Unfortunately, our vision of gold, silver, treasure and wealth beyond the dreams of avarice were all cruelly shattered. After digging around the pot with screwdrivers and trowels, and going down into the gravel 2ft I could wait no longer. I started to clear the soil from inside the pot. What I found was lead. The remains of the pot were full of lead

Fig.3. Pieces of the Roman mortarium.



Fig.2. The Roman mortarium restored.



Fig.4.
Shard of
Cowley
ware pot.



that had been melted, poured inside and then allowed to set. What a choker!

I had to sit down with a strong coffee and a cigarette or two to revive my spirits. All my hopes had been dashed yet again. I suppose I should be getting used to it by now. Gritting my teeth and wiping yet another tear from the corner of my eye I decided to soldier on.

We started to dig in another spot and began to uncover a flint wall. This turned out to be the remains of a kiln or oven with orange clay packed into its base. We also found quite a few shards of samian ware (see Figs.5. and 6.).

Later that same day Bob called me over to where he was working. He had found a large sheet of lead, and underneath this was the biggest Roman steelyard weight I had ever seen. It even had the iron links remaining from which it would have been suspended (see Fig.7.)

Over the course of our search we did find quite a number of Roman lead weights, and this probably explains the presents of the pot full of lead; they must have been making their own weights on site.

All of the spoil from the area we had been searching was piled in a heap near by. We detected over this and recovered some more Roman coins. Bob also found the Celtic silver coin shown in Fig.8a&b.

Another spoil heap was also in the vicinity, which a grading machine was removing by a layer at a time before spreading the earth around the field. I just had enough time to detect over each layer before the machine returned to take off another one. There were very few Roman coins in this heap, and the majority of finds consisted of later material including 17th century tokens, buckles, musket balls, and thimbles, together with a couple of medieval hammered pennies. When the heap had been removed the grader then took a couple of scrapes off the slope where it had been standing. Here some more tokens were found, mixed in with Roman and Georgian coins.

A large earthmover had been working down-slope and we decided to search this area next. The machine had bitten quite deep into the gravel and as a result we didn't expect to find very much. However, we were proven wrong



Fig.5. Shard of samian ware.



Fig.6. Shard of samian ware.



Fig.7. Large Roman lead steelyard weight.



Fig.8a&b. Obverse and reverse of Celtic silver coin.

Fig.9a&b. Obverse and reverse of rare gold quarter stater, early Atrebatian type.



and started to unearth a lot of molten bronze lumps of quite ancient appearance. Bob then shouted over to me from where he was working, and interpreting our own particular form of semaphore I realised that he had found quite a good Celtic coin. When I reached him he was holding a gold quarter stater (Fig.9a&b) of a type I did not recognise.

Later research, thanks to Chris Rudd and the Ashmolean Museum, revealed this to be only the third known example to be found. One had come from Selsey, another from somewhere near Wittering, and now Bob's from the Berkshire/Oxfordshire area. All three coins appear to have been struck from the same set of coin dies and the type is early Atrebatian/Kentish.

What this coin was doing so far from the others and buried so deep in the ground is something of a mystery. Even without realising how rare a coin Bob had found, we went home happy and content.

On our next planned visit I arrived earlier than Bob, and started detecting lower down the field. The landowner and the developer drove over for a chat just as I was digging a signal. At the same time as talking to them I was try-

ing to locate the target that had caused my detector to respond. To my amazement up popped a gold stater of the Ambiani type with a blank obverse and the usual horse on the reverse. The coin is not in very good condition, but a nice find nevertheless.

Bob eventually arrived on site and asked whether I had found anything. I nonchalantly dropped the stater into his hand and watched him grin from ear to ear. We continued to detect in the area of this find, but apart from a few early Roman brooches little of note came to light.

On a later visit I did manage to find a Celtic silver coin of Eppillus (Fig.10a&b) and Bob found a similar but slightly more scruffy coin on a further return to the site.

We were concentrating all our efforts on this particular field, but were still making finds at regular intervals. These included more grotty Roman coins and the odd medieval hammered penny. The next find of note was the gold stater recovered by Bob that I described in a previous article. This was found in the patches of black soil that we had dug over. Some earth had been replaced over this in order to build a green, and the coin had obviously come in with the new topsoil. We have no idea of the exact location of where this coin had been originally buried as the earth it was in had been moved from field to field.

The find area of the gold quarter stater was now being refilled with soil. As soon as we started to detect on this finds started to show themselves. Bob found an attractive Georgian gilt fob seal and a few hammered. I continued to find 17th century tokens, but for some reason Bob seemed to have little luck with unearthing these. A little further down the field we found another productive Roman area. Although most of our finds were "grots" in amongst



Fig.10a&b. Obverse and reverse of Celtic silver coin of Eppillus.

these were a couple of *denarii*. Fate was particularly cruel to Bob in the little matter of a silver *denarius* of Galba. This had been run over by a bulldozer and was lying on the surface broken into three or four pieces!

More and more soil was being replaced in order to build greens and bunkers, so we continued detecting on this field. A couple of Celtic silver coins turned up at different times, both bearing the mint name of CALLEVA (Seaby 99). At one time this was an extremely rare coin - but not any more.

Eventually the field on which we were working was seeded and this meant that we could not detect on it. However, there were still a couple of fields being landscaped that were left to try. Both proved to be disappointing, and little of note was found. At the same time more and more areas were being seeded, and places to detect were diminishing. Eventually there was only one area, close to an old cottage, left to search.

I was detecting alone, working

Fig.11a&b. Obverse and reverse of my first ever Roman gold coin, an *aureus* of Vespasian.



behind the grader and in front of the seeder. My finds consisted of a few Georgian buttons, a couple of Georgian coins, and one 17th century token. The sky had turned black some time ago and now the heavens opened. I took shelter under a tree until the storm decided to pass, but meanwhile the machines had carried on working reducing the land available to search with each minute that passed.

Once the rain had stopped I retraced my steps and carried on detecting. My detector gave a good signal, and expecting another button I dug down into the freshly graded soil. However, rather than a button there in my hand was my first ever Roman gold coin, an *aureus* of Vespasian (Fig.11a&b.). It was a bit battered looking but the first such coin I had found in my 24 years of detecting.

I have searched in many parts of the country and on many well-known Roman sites, but had found nothing like this. The irony was that this fantastic discovery was made only about a quarter of a mile from Bob's house. I put the coin into the container that I reserve for my better finds, and had just placed it in my pocket when the seeding machine trundled passed me and over the spot where the coin was found. I was standing on the newly laid footpath.

The driver stopped and opened the cab door of his tractor. "Sorry", he said, "the field is all seeded now". Life just isn't fair is it. However, we had an agreement with the developer and had made some fantastic finds. We were therefore reasonably content. As a footnote, nothing of any interest had been found by the archaeologists who had excavated the site before us.

Some time later we did have the opportunity to detect on another golf course that was being built....but that's another story. TH

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