

# The Rusted Lynch Pin & The Little Winged Horse

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*Photographs by Dave Stuckey*

The Pastfinders were somewhat at a loss. The rains and flooding had ceased and all of a sudden so many sites had become available that we were inundated with possibilities. The recent heavy rains had flooded many sites, but as they slowly became available to detect on again we found many new artefacts had been washed to the surface. One site that we had really concentrated on to the extent that finds became really scarce, revealed a further 175 non-ferrous items once the flooding had abated. As stated in a previous article many of our Roman sites have been flooded, but when these dried out many building stones and pottery fragments were visible on the fields' surfaces.

As in all detecting groups, individuals within the Pastfinders have their own goals and a "finds wants list". Cliff, despite finding many marvellous coins and artefacts, really wanted to find a hammered coin. These thin silver discs have evaded him now for three years. We have a site called the "Rectory Field" and this, as a rule, is quite good for hammered. At least 12 have been found there in the past two years, which is not a bad average.

"If you're going to find hammered it will be on the Rectory." Cliff had heard these words on almost every visit we had made to this site for the past few years. However, none came his way while he was forced to watch

his colleagues unearth short-cross and "Lizzies" galore.

On a recent Saturday Cliff telephoned to say that he had a few hours to spare so we decided to pay the "Rectory" a visit. There is a very slight depression in this field, where the villa had been, and since this area is good for Roman coins that's where I headed. A few "grots" later I was certain that I could hear a thumping noise. Turning round I could see Cliff running towards me. When he arrived, out of breath and almost speechless, he stuck out his clenched fist and then opened it to reveal a small hammered coin. It was not one that I had encountered in the field before, but something quite special.... a little Irish Dublin Mint Edward I penny. The reverse is cross and pellets, but the obverse side shows a bust enclosed in a triangle. It was yet another first this season for our group.

Nothing else turned up in the area so we went back over to the far side. Near the footpath, my detector indicated a target. "Probably a shotgun shell", I rather gloomily thought. The clay was sticky but at last I located the item. Relieved of its covering of clay this proved to be a healthy section of head stud brooch. I say "section" as the brooch had been snapped halfway

down its shank. However, a head stud variety brooch is a first again for our group.

At home later, careful cleaning revealed some linear decoration on the wings and several rectangular cells that had been provided on the bow for enamel. One cell still showed some reddish brown colour, which was possibly a decayed red. There were traces of the same on the actual head stud. Dave and I examined the brooch with the help of one of Richard Hattatt's excellent books, and saw that it was of a standard type.

As this was another new type of brooch for us, it made me reflect on the series of brooch finds that had been made by the Pastfinders in the last three years. Out of curiosity I decided to tabulate our finds. This table concerns areas of Hertfordshire mainly, although our searches sometimes take us into Cambridgeshire.

Back on the field a few further "grots" and some pieces of bronze dross were recovered before we headed off for home. However, on the next opportunity that presented itself we were back on this site. I have a feeling that something marvellous awaits us buried in the soil here. (This is a feeling I get about most of our

Three brooch fragments, the middle one being of the "head stud" variety.



**Roman brooch finds made by the Pastfinders in the last three years**

Note : Quantity of Colchester, Polden and Hod Hill includes fragments

Type	Quantity	Type	Quantity
Colchester	40+	Plate	2
Polden Hill	20+	Composite	1
Hod Hill	10+	Knee	2
Langton Down	10	Horse and Rider	1
Disc	9	Running Dog	1
Umbonate	4	Peacock	1
Disc (Glass boss)	2	Small Cat or Weasel	1
Sawfish	2	Swastika	1
Tutulus	1	Head Stud	1

good sites, and it's often proved true).

A slight squall of blustery wind and rain developed within five minutes of our arrival. I therefore took shelter in a hedge of decaying ground elder, unfortunately evicting some common partridges that departed in a chattering explosion. Later, I made my way to where Cliff was sheltering. He was examining a small pile of finds and even from a distance there was one that caught my eye. Carefully laid out on Cliff's plastic bag was a shiny silver denarius. "What do you reckon of that?" floated out from the wet hedgerow. "Not sure" I said, "can't read the legend and don't know that bust. The reverse is strange too." This showed two bound captives below a pole supporting a suit of high-ranking Roman soldier's armour.

I forced my way backwards into the dead elder until at last I was level to Cliff. "Nice denarius" I said, "but I reckon I can match it with this small Tasciovanus bronze unit from over there in the corner of the field".

Cliff had found the very first Celtic coin from this site over a year ago and that had been it until now. My coin was not in bad condition and showed a prancing Pegasus on its reverse. On the obverse was a wavy haired head and the word TASC. The letters "VER" (for *Verulamium*) should have been below the winged horse but the flan is a little too small. I was really pleased with this discovery as Celtic artefacts and coins are



Obverse and reverse of Celtic unit showing stylised curly haired head and prancing Pegasus.

amongst my favourite finds... although all too few have come to light so far. However, I do remember a period some years ago when within the space of a few weeks I found three gold quarter staters! Curiously, one of these also had a prancing Pegasus on its reverse, and was a Tasciovanus issue.

After showing the coin to Cliff I carefully placed it back in a separate finds bag. Several hours later it had been cleaned, lacquered and was in my main collection, rescued at last from the dark confines of 20 centuries of being lost in the soil and 60 years of agricultural chemicals.

Further searching revealed about six more "grots", mostly local copies of Claudius Gothicus Antoniniani. Another example of a curious bulb shaped object was also located. Jeff, Tony and now myself have all located these from this site. They are wonderfully patinated, but not to the degree that would suggest Roman origins. They are bulb shaped, fitted with a screw thread, and have a hole at the top of the bulb. The bulb has two deep cuts in it possibly to assist with gripping. Perhaps they are some sort of furniture fitting, or possibly relate to some piece of horse harness. Any help with identification would be gratefully received, as always.

Having a half-day's holiday during the week, Dave and I thought we would spend a few hours on our main Roman site. It is true that the surface of the field is by now showing quite a few footprints, but there are numerous unsearched areas still remaining. My first find was a lead pottery repair staple. (None of us had a clue as to what these items were, until last year one was found still attached to a fragment of samian ware). Dave then located two very "spend worn" asses, one of Domitian, the other unidentifiable. It was then my turn to start finding coins. It is strange that on some sites you can find coins straight away, while on others it may take an hour or more for the first one to appear. Within minutes I had five "grots". The sixth target was covered in sticky clay, as were my gloves. However, it looked curious and I

thought it merited washing in a field-side puddle. This done, I could see that the object was clearly Roman, but what it was, I could not say. It almost resembled a small bell, but was too thickly cast. The top showed three lugs or bubbles in triangular format, with a central one pointing upwards. The dome section was slightly squashed and filled with either iron or a hard stony accretion. The only decoration outside the dome appeared to be two incised or cast lines. This was similar again to some Roman bells. We know that there was a temple nearby from past finds, so perhaps this is a religious ceremonial staff mace finial. These seem to bear knobs and protuberances similar to those on the item I had just found. The similarity to a chess piece is also obvious, so perhaps my find is a gaming piece. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who has found anything similar, or could confirm that the item is of a religious nature.

One further possibility comes to mind. That is that it might be some sort of seal matrix. The domed end could once have retained a cut intaglio. My assumption is purely based on the shape and weight of the item.

Another one of our favourite sites is a quite extensive Roman settlement alongside a river. This tranquil setting has yielded hundreds of coins over the years. We parked up in a very muddy gateway, full of hope that we might increase the total. Like so many of our sites, this one is patchy with different soil colours; it also has an extensive stone and pottery/tile scatter. Setting up I heard a shrill call and glanced up just in time to see the flash of orange and sapphire blue streaking upstream. A kingfisher! The others hadn't even noticed, but I knew their minds were concentrating on the artefacts of



Mystery artefact. Probably medieval, any ideas?



The mystery Roman artefact. The top of a religious mace or perhaps a seal matrix?



## RUSTED LYNCH PIN

Roman Britain, within seconds so was mine.

It was just Cliff, Dave and myself on this search, and starting up we were soon a fair distance apart. Guiding the search head over a tractor track I had a signal. This turned out to be a large section of bronze sheet with rope and



The piece of bronze sheet with rope, ring and dot decoration.



Large mushroom headed tack fitting from the villa site.



Small lead weights. The loop of the steelyard weight is made of bronze.

ring and dot designs on it. It is possibly a bangle fragment, and could be yet another Roman mystery. Cliff came over showing me a small piece of silver dross he had just found, reinforcing the evidence of the presence of a silver-smith on this site (as well as a neighbouring one) some 20 centuries ago. The site of the actual Roman building has been very well worked this season. However, I wanted to take advantage of the recent rainfall, so I detected over the area very slowly and carefully. Searching slowly helps to reduce the effect of Roman iron nails and other ferrous fragments that abound here.

It was not long before finds began to materialise. Firstly came a corroded *antoninianus*, and then what must be a belt/horse tack fitting or the largest dome-headed pin/tack I have ever seen. We have had several of these from similar sites ranging from 20mm to 45mm in width. Carefully and slowly guiding the search head through the large stones I winkled out six "grots". Then up came a crud-covered coin that I cast a suspicious eye at before placing it into my finds bag. The surface crud adhering to this coin was quite smooth and of a different colour to the "grots". "Another denarius trying to escape detection?" I wondered. It was followed by a small tinned section of Hod Hill brooch, which in turn was followed by lots of lead fragments. My next find was also lead but was a complete steelyard weight with a bronze strip loop. Most weights found on here and other sites have no loop remaining, just two

small iron stains where the iron loop has rusted away. The weight is about 15mm across, but more intriguing is the loop's lack of patination. It is still bright and shiny with not even the vestiges of green or black coloration. Perhaps this may have something to do with the lead oxidising. Has anyone else out there experienced a similar find?

How can we have missed all these targets before? Perhaps it's just a case of different soil moisture, worm activity, different detecting speed, or even a slightly different search head angle. There are so many variables to our hobby, but it's great fun learning about some of them to increase your finds rate.

Later that afternoon I placed the suspicious coin in a solution of citric/formic acid (NB this is okay for suspect high silver content coins but do not use it on any bronze or copper coins, as it often totally strips the patination. Also, only use in a well ventilated area). Next morning I noted a blue green hue around the coin in the solution, washing it under the tap the dark crud coating simply flaked away, and there was a

reasonable *denarius* of Julia Soemias. Talk about *deja vous!* I seem to remember the Pastfinders having a run on the Julia issue *denarii* last year.

One other discovery from the area of the Roman building was an almost perfectly round fossil sponge. This lay forgotten for a day or so in my jacket pocket. The surface was punctuated by several various sized holes. I wondered if it had been converted by the Romans to some type of striking or grinding utensil, but the surface was not abraded in any way. The sponge stood out amongst the building material like a giant egg. Just as we do, I am sure the Romans removed curious shaped stones or fossils from their fields to take home as curios. One small local Roman site has a great many fossil sea urchins mixed in with the building stone scatter. They are quite uncommon fossils locally, but are common on this site. It would appear that they had been specifically gathered. Also, the urchins are of many varieties of rock, so it seems they were "gathered" from some distances too. Might they possibly

Small bronze ring and fragment of a statue showing moulded hair.

Denarius of Julia Soemias.



have been used votively? As a group we find we have a curiosity about everything we find or observe, but are often left wondering has anyone else experienced or found the same, or found one of these etc? We would be delighted to hear from anyone, whether fellow detectorists or archaeologists involved in a temple excavation etc who have noticed abnormally high levels of fossils on such Roman sites.

After some heavy rain we were back on the Roman site that yielded the fossil sponge. Incredibly the rains had washed out another one of almost the same size, just several feet from where I had recovered the earlier one.

The recent rains had washed even more coins into detecting range, but not any artefacts as such. We retrieved a total of 39 coins. Incredibly, 10 of these were Urbs Roma and Winged Victory reverses of Constantine. Just as we were about to leave I couldn't resist one more sweep across the site of the main building. I was rewarded with a spend-worn *sestertius*. Also from this area came a small section of cast bronze with incised wavy lines on it. I think this is a fragment of a larger item, perhaps a hollow cast figurine of a lion etc, which was

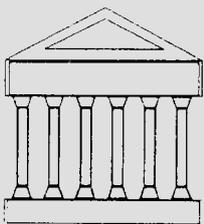


The rusted lynch pin from the Roman site. It is 6in long and 2in across the top.

broken and then possibly saved for re-smelting. It would appear very similar to the wavy decoration representing hair that was present on the paw section from the leopard knife handle also recovered from this site last year.

Another item located from the site of the Roman building, which I had forgotten about for a few days, also lay in my wax jacket pocket. This was a large iron artefact that kept giving a good signal. As there have been some interesting Roman iron artefacts from this site I subjected it to a good clean. There was a heavy gravel concretion on one end. This was partially removed, but during the process some cracked metal also parted company. This larger end was

clearly looped, which accounted for the good signal. However, as cleaning progressed I began to see the unmistakable outlines of a Roman iron lynch pin. Amazingly under the rusted layer there was metal that still shone as though it had just been smelted. I will attempt to buff off the remainder of the rust and lacquer what remains. The good metal beneath seems to be rather grainy and striated. I have seen similar effects on steels from aeroplane crashes, where this texture is due to intense heat. This may be evidence of a serious fire in the iron smelting section of this settlement. TH



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