

# Detector Field Test

## Laser Rapier Part Two

### David Drummond

Photographs: Peter John Field

Following on from where I left off in my first part of this report (*Treasure Hunting* June 2003), the next site I visited was with a friend and one of my brothers. This was an area that had produced Roman coins and the odd hammered in the past.

When we arrived one of the fields showed the results of the recent heavy rain and was totally waterlogged. To me it looked as though it was going to be not only difficult to search, but also potentially quite dangerous. However, this didn't deter my friend John who spent the rest of the day searching the field and was rewarded with a lovely Roman silver *denarius* for his troubles.

I spent the day searching two adjoining stubble fields, and left John and my brother to stumble around in the mud. My first course of action was to head for a spot where, in the past, I had found some hammered silver and copper coins (remember that I live in Scotland, and hammered copper coins are quite common).

Both fields had been "done to death" in the past by other detectorists and myself, but it gave me the opportunity to see if anything else would come to light. As is so often mentioned in this magazine, one of the first things to do with a new detector is to try over old ground.

On this occasion I set sensitivity to 9.5 and discrimination to 2.5. Working in a methodical fashion, I noted that

David Drummond searching with his Rapier.



the discrimination was doing its job as I was hearing a light "clicking" from the rejected smaller pieces of iron. But when a good target was registered it came through loud and clear and produced a "two-way" signal. Not all of these two-way signals came from non-ferrous objects, as these fields are heavily contaminated with coke. However, on most metal detectors coke registers on the same scale as cut half and quarter hammered pennies, and although you can cut back on sensitivity or increase discrimination to knock it out - if you are looking for hammered coins then it is best to suffer this minor inconvenience.

From my past experience of using a detector that possesses a mode switch such as that of "Quick Check" pinpoint facility, it is sometimes possible to identify a suspect signal such as that caused by coke. The signal may sound loud in normal motion mode, but if you go over it again with the pinpoint button kept depressed it is possible to recognise a slight tone difference or the signal from coke may sound weaker from that of a wanted non-ferrous target.

My time on these well-worked fields brought a number of finds to light, each giving a good, clear two-way response and recovered within the first 4in. They included a couple of worn copper hammered coin (Scottish turners), several lead seals, three trouser buttons, and an unusual diamond-shaped military button with a crown and the number "93" under the crown. The button looks to be 19th century in date, but I have not yet had the opportunity to carry out any research on it.

While I was searching the two fields I noticed a number of other fields that looked as though they would be in a condition for searching by the following weekend. Before we left for home, I therefore paid a courtesy visit to the farmer to make sure that a search of them would cause no problems for him. He was happy for us to search them, and I arranged that we would be back the following weekend.

The following week saw us on these alternative fields. They had again been

left in stubble, and one was very narrow compared to the field we had searched on the previous week. It, too, had been heavily searched in the past.

The narrow field proved to be the best option; plenty of good targets were coming to light and we ended up concentrating our searches here over two weekends. Coke contamination was still a problem, but the amount of non-ferrous targets recovered far outnumbered the pieces of coke.

Target depths were also quite respectable here with items coming up from 6in or more. These included small coin-sized items as well as bigger finds. Over the two Saturdays that we searched this field I recovered over a dozen coins, about the same amount of buttons, some lead seals, and other nondescript items that looked to be fairly old in date.

One find that I thought at first not to be very exciting, in fact turned out to be a heavy lead medieval weight in good condition. This was found by the Rapier at about the 8in mark.

### Pylons, Telegraph Poles, & Electric Fences

Whenever I field test a new detector I always try to include areas that can generally effect its performance. This can sometimes be so severely that I have had to move on to another area. The sites in question are ones that have electricity flowing around them, in the form of electricity pylons, telegraph poles with overhead cables, and electric fences.

Some detectors work fine in these conditions, while others have proved unusable. Of course, many modern metal detectors have controls that can

Diamond-shaped button possibly with a military connection. It shows the number 93 with a crown above.



counteract to some degree any electrical interference problems encountered (ie frequency controls).

The Laser Rapier does not have such a frequency control, but I found that I could work in close proximity to a small electric sub-station, and giant electricity pylons without noticing any real problems. However, I did notice a change when searching fields that have telegraph poles and overhead cables crossing them. This caused the Rapier to give an intermittent clicking that increased the closer you worked to one of the poles. However, it was still possible to pick up the signals through this, and turning down the sensitivity slightly and adjusting the threshold tone will make the detector more stable.

### General Performance

As stated above, fields with heavy coke contamination can be a problem in my part of Scotland. Fortunately, this is not too widespread and some sites are fairly clean if not totally free of this nuisance. On these the Rapier's discrimination worked a treat. I was able to use the detector on higher settings, and I noticed that some really good depths were being achieved.

One good example was a site where I managed to search using the settings that Bryan Oram suggested in his Field Test Report on the Silver Sabre U-Max (eg setting the sensitivity at just over the "10" mark and into the MaxBoost range, and with discrimination on "2"). I also adjusted the threshold up to 3 o'clock and found that the Rapier was performing very well.

When good signals started to come through it was evident that depths were a lot better than those of my previous searches with a lot of targets (small coin-sized objects) coming up at well over the 6in mark. With such conditions I was also able to listen out for the fainter two-way signals that I felt deeper targets might give, and one of these signals fell exactly into this category.

On receiving one of the fainter two-way signals I dug down a hole to the depth of about 6in, and then scanned the search coil over the spoil. This gave no response so I swept over the hole where the signal sounded again. I scooped out another trowelful of earth from the bottom of the hole where I caught sight of a small disc perched on its edge against the side.

I pulled out the object to find that I had discovered my first silver coin with the Rapier, a Bull Head sixpence of George III, dated 1816. It was buckled, and had a hole pierced through it, but



was nevertheless a pleasing find. The fact that the coin was on edge probably accounted for the faint but two-way signal.

The field, situated in the Angus countryside and where the sixpence was found was next to another field where a castle had once stood. In previous searches a number of good finds had come up from this latter field, including Scottish hammered copper turners. These had been recovered in fairly presentable condition and it was possible to see the thistle on them quite clearly. This was quite unusual, as turners fare badly in the ground and usually come up in very poor condition. Other interesting coins such as Scottish "hardheads" had also been found here, once again generally in quite good condition.

Unfortunately, on the day that I found the silver sixpence the castle field was already under crop, so we decided to check out some of the neighbouring fields instead. At the time of this search it was early January and although only 4.30pm already starting to get dark. As we headed back to the car I pointed out to John and my brother an interesting looking but massive field that was still in stubble, and suggested that it could be worth searching on the following weekend. On our way home we checked in with the farmer to make sure that it was okay for us to search this large field. I also wanted to establish the extent of his land, and to see if there were any other fields that were not yet in crop that we could search.

Permission was readily granted for

*A selection of finds from a field that was quite narrow in shape, but kept the Rapier busy over two weekends.*

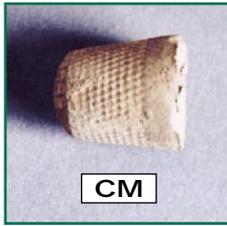
the large stubble field, that we had hopes of searching the following weekend. However, in metal detecting as in other aspects of life, things do not always go as planned or as we would like. For the first part of the week we had continual rain, which was then followed by a severe frost. This not only caused havoc on the roads in many parts of the country, but also on the pavements. On Saturday it was back to weak winter sunshine again, but on our arrival at the site we found the field totally frozen and the conditions more resembling permafrost than anything else.

It was therefore to be another week of slightly better weather before we could return to this field and make any attempt to search it. The field itself is on a slope that runs down to a line of trees running along the course of an old burn.

In the event we spent two weekends here, mainly searching at the lowest part of the field near the burn. On our first outing John, who was using his Cortes, managed to find 10 coins. These included turners, a couple of early Georgian coppers (one with a hole punched through the middle of it) and a very worn hammered silver coin of Elizabeth I. I found three coins, half a dozen buttons, a small medieval knife terminal, a thimble (one of three to be found that day) and a small fragment of a decorative buckle.

What we couldn't immediately understand at that point was why a comparative large concentration of

One of three thimbles found.



CM

A lead palm guard.



CM



CM

Large lead medieval weight.



CM

Silver brooch of a bird.



CM

Musket balls and smaller pistol ball



CM

Lead spindle whorl.

finds should be coming from just a small part of a massive field. However, when John showed me roughly where he had found his hammered silver coin I could see a slight rise in the ground and also a slight dip. This set me to wondering whether a building might have once stood there.

My brother had been picking up bits and pieces from the area and another friend, Ian, who had joined us on this search, said that he had found a number of coins and metalwork that looked as if it could have come from doors and windows.

In the interval before our first and second search I decided to carry out some research into this part of the Angus countryside to see if I could uncover any clues indicating that a building had once stood in or near the productive part of the field.

Spending a number of hours trawling the Internet I eventually found a site that offered old Statistical Accounts of various Angus parishes, together with some old maps. When I called up a map of the area in question it showed that in the 1700s there had indeed been buildings on the field. According to the map this was not just a house or two but a "Cotter town", otherwise known as a "Cottage town" or - in this case - a "Cotton" with quite a fanciful name attached to it.

I informed John and Michael of my findings and then at the weekend we went back to continue our search. While I was talking to the farmer about my research, he said that he didn't believe the buildings formerly representing the Cotton were in the large field but rather in a smaller field next to

it, which had always been known by that name. By today's standards the place was more of a hamlet than what we would now think of as a town, and apparently there had been around 37 of these small hamlets clustered in close proximity. The reason there had been such a busy community in this part of the Angus countryside was all down to the early spinning and weaving trade.

During our second and last search of the field (for this season anyway) we managed to make a lot more intriguing finds and pieces of metalwork that seemed to support the idea that spinning and weaving played a large part in the lives of the former community. Besides the thimbles that we had found in our first search, the Rapier found a lead palm guard, and a nicely decorated spindle whorl.

Our other finds included musket balls, buttons and coins, but no more hammered coins on this occasion. However, at that point Michael came over to tell me that he had just found a silver brooch of diamond shape; it was missing its pin and looked as if it may have had stones set in it at one time but was a very nice find. While he was talking to me I was busy recovering a target from a hole I had just dug. In its recovered state it felt like a piece of misshapen lead, but on wiping some earth away an attractive image of a bird appeared and when I turned the object over and cleaned away more of the soil I realised that I, too, had found a silver brooch.

My brooch, like Michael's was missing its pin and a clawed foot, but as both of the brooches have no hallmarks they could be quite old. The bird on my

brooch appears to have a worm in its beak and may represent a Scottish gaming bird. Although I would like to think the two brooches are medieval, it is more likely that they derive from a later period although exactly which century I cannot at present state.

### Summary

To sum up my experiences of using the Laser Rapier, I would say that it is capable of finding small and ancient finds at very good depths. I cannot wait to see how it does during the summer on the beaches (dry sand in particular) but equally cannot wait to get back onto the fields with it at the end of the year.

It is a detector light enough for all-day use, and so simple to operate that anyone should be able to master it very quickly.

### Specifications

**Model:** Laser Rapier

**Type:** Quick-Check, Pinpoint/Motion, Silent Search Discrimination

**Manufacturer:** Tesoro Electronics Incorporated, Arizona, USA

**Sole UK Importers:** Treasure World, 192 Albany Street, London NW1 4AP. Tel. 020 7387 3142

**Recommended Retail Price (inc VAT):** £429.00

**Operating Frequency:** 10kHz

**Search Coil:** 8in concentric provided as standard, although a wide range of accessory coils are available

**Battery:** 1 x PP3 (alkaline recommended)

**Battery Life:** 10-20 hours

**Weight:** 2.2lb

**Guarantee:** One year parts and labour.