

THE STATER TAKER

HOPENSCOPE

The farmland in my part of East Anglia is generally kind to bronze, a fact underlined with what came out of my first earthy scoop of the new detecting season. It was a 14th century hinged strap-end in such a fine condition that it still swung after cleaning with hot soapy water (Figs.1 & 2). So smooth is the metal that if it wasn't for its dark green colour, you'd think it was made yesterday.

After placing it in my finds pouch, I let my mind wander to the folk who'd wandered over this particular acreage down the centuries. Some would have lived their entire lives in long-vanished houses, whilst other folk just passed through, their random losses leaving a record of their journey here. As the farmer drove by giving me a cheery wave, I also thought back to the plough teams who worked here when it became empty farmland. The calm months of crop growth would have first been shattered by the noisy work of the harvest, followed by the powerful driving teams of man and beast (Fig.3). With so many involved with the task, it's little wonder that larger artefacts and coins, especially the bright, shiny yellow ones are few and far between.

A Good Year for Hammered

2024 was turning out to be a good year for hammered for me, with the next examples appearing in the guises of a Henry III Short Cross penny (Figs.4a & b) and a beautiful example of a young head Henry VIII groat (Figs.5a & b). The portrait on this coin was striking, though there was a downside in that all of my previous Tudor examples looked a bit shabby when this one was placed next to them!

Out of the blue, I'd received a text message from one of my landowners telling me that a previously 'lively' field was now in a condition to walk over. Quickly I arranged with work for a few holiday days to take advantage. My first good signal on the site produced a mysterious bronze hook (Fig.6). This puzzled me for a while, but luckily one of the experts on the UK Detector Net website posted a complete example of a Late Saxon 'shroud pin'. Similar artefacts had also been found in excavations in Norwich,



Fig.1. Side-view to show articulation of medieval hinged strap-end.



Fig.2. Front-view of medieval hinged strap-end.



Figs.4a & b. Obverse and reverse of Henry III Short Cross penny.



Figs.5a & b. Obverse and reverse of Henry VIII groat.



Fig.6. Saxon shroud pin.



Fig.3. 1920s ploughing team.



Fig.7. Roman key Handle.



Figs.8a & b. Obverse and reverse of siliqua of Honorius.



Fig.9. Roman 'propeller' belt stiffener.



Figs.10a & b. Obverse and reverse of Roman bronze coins.

though its macabre function now made me look at it in a different light. Next to appear was the far less spooky form of a Roman key handle (Fig.7), and a gorgeous *siliqua* of Honorius in very fine condition, albeit clipped (Figs.8a & b). A 'propeller' belt stiffener was another unusual recovery for me (Fig.9), whilst in the background of these 'bits' came a steady stream of bronze coinage, with some in a pleasing state (Figs.10a & b). A sunny day became even brighter with the appearance of a nice Tudor 'sovereign' penny (Figs.11a & b), quickly followed by the stubby shape of a late Saxon copper-alloy strap-end decorated with the familiar ring and dot pattern out of the side of a hole (Fig.12). A final surprise was the middle section of an ancient Bronze Age chisel (Fig.13). It seemed people had certainly favoured that particular bit of land down the centuries.

Most Unexpected Phone Call

My surveying in that village was paused due to a most unexpected phone call. I was thrilled to learn my partner had managed to get me a new area to search, though this wasn't the usual request we detectorists hear asking us to look over a friend's garden or overgrown paddock. There had been a dairy farm near to where I live for many years, though when Covid struck the herd was moved out and never returned. The location was legendary in the local detecting community not just for its intriguing position, with no less than three Iron Age hoards allegedly found close to its borders, but also for the fiery temperament of the elderly owner who would accost any walker straying too close to its boundaries.



Fig.11a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Henry VIII sovereign type penny.



Fig.12. Late Saxon strap-end.



Fig.13. Bronze Age chisel.

It certainly was not somewhere anyone would get permission, nor even dare ask. But on the phone now was my Helga, telling me she'd gained me permission via a new work colleague, who was the gentleman's daughter! I asked her if she was sure we were talking about the same place, and she described the land exactly. I learned that Arthur, the owner, had started to wonder what went on in his fields in days gone by. He'd even toyed with getting a detector himself, but his severe arthritis would have hampered his digging. Now that some of the previous pasture had been ploughed behind his farmhouse, if I were to go along at the weekend, I could help find out the story. The whole scenario was one of the 'quirks' of our hobby – when you're not looking for something, then it's sure to turn up!

I duly met with Arthur in front of his former cowsheds and within a minute wondered how I could've misjudged someone so much. He really was the friendliest guy, until he recounted his dealings with 'lost' ramblers, motorcyclists and quad bikers who'd strayed from the footpaths when the cattle were out to graze. Then I saw his eyes flash, a look that chilled even me, a former Prison Officer!

Romano-British Pottery & Tile

After being shown around the land that was now under plough, I was left to it. There were only two fields for now, but others would be available in future as the farm transitioned from livestock to arable. I certainly wasn't complaining, for the first one was some thirty-five acres that sloped down to a river. It had been rolled as flat as a pancake, with the drilling arranged for the following week.



Fig.14. A good day's detecting!

Unlike some farmers, Arthur assured me I could carry on sweeping until the crop peeked through, as long as I was careful to backfill any holes. I assured him that I'd be very careful and he was welcome to join me on the search anytime with my spare detector. He mumbled an unconvincing "Maybe next time," and then the search was on! I'd like to say I only walked three yards, and was straight onto the coins, but sadly that wasn't the case. One edge of the field runs alongside a busy road and the number of drinks cans and silver foil here was ridiculous, made all the worse as Romano-British pottery and tile was quite clearly in evidence. I worked slowly across the expanse, digging up lead and the usual 'field finds' of buttons and worn copper coinage. Whilst walking up the gentle slope on the third 'empty' visit I began to ponder if I'd overestimated the farm's potential. It wouldn't have been the first time that my research guided me to 'somewhere amazing', only for the reality to be quite the opposite.

Welcome Whaddon Chase

Then it happened. My C-Scope CS6MX-1 ripped out the shrill tone of a good target. I'd thought I'd moved well away

from the foil-contaminated section, plus cartridge caps here were a rarity. So what could such a belter of a signal be? Beneath the smooth surface of the field, there were still heavy clods, and in one of these I glimpsed a bright yellow edge with 'tiger stripes'. Breaking it out, I imagined the target would be some sort of squeezed foil top. Instead, I realised with a jolt that there now sat a crisp Whaddon Chase stater in my hand. My heart thundered in my chest and my mouth went horribly dry.

Acting on auto-pilot, I placed the heavy disc into my coin pod, filled in the hole, then carried on swinging. This was exactly the thing I was looking for and added to the context of other Iron Age coins allegedly coming up in the vicinity, it underlined what an important site this had been just before the Roman Invasion. Turning before the hedge to go back towards the findspot, another sweet signal rang in the air. I dug a plug with my superb Detecnicks spade, then saw another encrusted circle of orangey-yellow. Collecting it up, I could see it was plain on the back. But hang on, I thought as I rubbed it with my thumb. Two reversed 'S' shapes peeked back at

me. This was the rare Trinovantian type that Chris Rudd speculated were struck by the ruler of an enclave sited in their neighbouring Iceni territory.

Field of Dreams?

Two gold coins in a day, had I finally found my 'field of dreams'? Fifteen quiet minutes started to bring a dashing to my hopes, only for a third lovely signal to break the silence. That third Stater should have really brought a 'gold dance' out of my old bones, or at least a wiggle, but I was in plain view of the traffic whizzing by on the nearby road. However, when the fourth stater came up, then the fifth, I was certainly playing out the lead of *Swan Lake* in my mind (Fig.14).

Arthur was just as dumbfounded as me when I took them down to his farmhouse. The whole family came to marvel at their condition and age when they'd had a rinse (the coins that is, not the family). I was instructed to get back out there, but explained I was pretty tired after the four-hour wander. However, I promised to return the next day. There hadn't been many signals besides the coins, just the occasional bit of lead and buttons. Every findspot had been



Figs.15a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater.



Figs.16a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.17a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.18a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.19a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.20a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.21a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Whaddon Chase stater.



Figs.22a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater.



Figs.23a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater.



Figs.24a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater



Figs.25a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater.



Figs.26a & b. Obverse and reverse of a North Thames stater.

recorded on the What3Words App, and even though there was a 'cluster' on the map, there were still gaps between each individual stater.

Another Seven Staters

These patterns continued during my next two visits when my C-Scope signalled the presence of another seven examples, and a small band of high-purity gold (Figs.15a-29). Six of the coins were of the scarce North Thames type, with the others being Whaddon Chase, including some derivatives. I informed the local archaeological unit, and the hoard was deposited to go through the Treasure Act procedure. To me it doesn't feel like it was a single deposit, but rather that some Celt

took a tumble in his Biga chariot whilst travelling down the steep hill, with their money flying out of the wickerwork basket beside them. Who knows what further finds might add to the story though? The farmer's family and I certainly look forward to finding out.

Retreat to Other Fields

After the highs of that intensive two weeks of searching, I retreated to some of my other fields as the wheat came through. Bringing me straight back to earth was the next find, a Nuremberg jetton (Figs.30a & b), though to be fair it was certainly one of the best I'd ever found. A local token was in worse shape, but from an issuer I hadn't dug up before which made me smile

(Figs.31a & b). Taking me back a few centuries was a Henry VIII halfgroat with a 'ghost' of a portrait (Figs.32a & b).

Leaving that area to the tractors, I spotted a previously busy field that was still in stubble. Thankfully, the stalks had softened enough for me to swing through without too much resistance. A good handful of poor condition Roman bronzes turned up before the first real find of interest, this being a Tiberius *denarius* (Figs.33a & b), otherwise known as the 'Tribute Penny'. They are reasonably common finds in East Anglia and there were multiple examples in George Ridgeway's amazing Suffolk hoard of early silver *denarii* and Iron Age gold coins.

I was mulling over the amazing prices that hoard had fetched at auction when I got my next signal. Talk about wishful thinking, although on a much lower scale! The C-Scope had found me a tiny gold quarter stater, of the 'Essex Wheel' type (Figs.34a & b).

Overdue 'Gold Dance'

Out here in the middle of nowhere I could do that long overdue 'gold dance', and I span around so many times I nearly fell over. Raising my machine in the air, I quietly gave it the deserved nickname of 'The Stater Taker'. On the very next line, I was stopped by another clear signal. Would this be another coin to make it a lucky 13? With rising anticipation, I located a thin disc in the loose spoil. But there was to be no yellow 'chubbie' this time. Instead, I was holding a beautiful little Roman disc brooch with a heavy British influence (Fig.35).

You can't win them all, but by mastering your detector, and seeking out the most historic land, good fortune doesn't need to be relied on. It's taken me over three decades to have my golden opportunity, which I hope will inspire you to keep persevering until you too can share your story on these pages.



Fig.27. 12 Golden horses.



Fig.28. Ready for recording.



Fig.29. Small band of gold.



Figs.30a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Nuremberg jetton.



Fig.35. Romano-British disc brooch.



Figs.33a & b. Obverse and reverse of a Tiberius denarius.



Figs.31a & b. Obverse and reverse of a 17 century Boxford based trader's token.



Figs.34a & b. Obverse and reverse of an Essex Wheel quarter stater.



Figs.32a & b. Obverse and reverse of Henry VIII halfgroat.



Me out in the field with my CSCOPE CS6MX