

## Metal Detecting Day

26<sup>th</sup> September 1999

Ewelme News, Christmas 1999, Spring 2000

Serious fund-raising efforts were needed to fund the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Millennium Exhibition, and one avenue was an organised metal detecting day on the Cow Common and surrounding farmland. The initial response from local farmers and landowners was very favourable and included 350 acres of stubble fields farmed by Alec and Richard Davey, and 40 acres of Common courtesy of the Parish Council. Thanks to their generosity and courage in being the trial guinea pigs, the Millennium account was boosted with half the amount needed to fund the video.

The sub-Committee approached the day with some trepidation as it was a totally new experience at fund raising. Would there be too many detectors for the amount of land available, or not enough to cover the cost of the organisation? The professional organiser, Leisure Promotions of Newbury, predicted 250 to 300 detectors would answer the advertisements placed in the two 'enthusiasts' magazines, and as it happened 237 detectors arrived from as far afield as Wales, Nottinghamshire, Huntingdonshire and Surrey in vehicles which encompassed a Daimler down to traders' trucks, complete with ladders! These disgorged dedicated types of all ages, mostly very large men, but also a few couples complete with the Labrador.

Fortunately for us our forebears were careless with their loose change and buttons and as the day progressed the detectors' passion for their hobby became apparent. (When questioned, the serious detectors confided they were looking for rare early Saxon 'sceates' as one had been found in the area of Grindon Lane at one time). The all trudged methodically over the favoured plough (apparently over the years metal sinks down too far under grassland) and to the observers it put a whole new meaning to the phrase 'opening oysters'. The organisers had display cases set up at the HQ (Sports Pavilion) and as detectors filtered in they emptied bits and pieces from pockets and bags to display for the benefit of all. One man dressed in camouflage gear was asked what he was trying to find. His reply was surprising - *"Nothing in particular, I just want to hold something in my hand that was last held by someone who died centuries, or even thousands of years ago."*

**"Roman Coins found here"** - Future maps will be able to record the above words on the field behind Hampden Way, near the crossways of Swyncombe Woods and on the Common. One exciting site proved to be by the junction of Huntinglands track and the Icknield Way where Roman coins spanning over two centuries were uncovered, indicative of a fort or settlement. The 'experts' requested Mr Davey's ploughman to keep a look out for pottery shards to confirm this and hope to investigate the area further. The organisers will present Mr Davey with a case displaying these coins when they are formally identified.

The detectors' powers of identification and knowledge of history was most impressive. A rough finger passed over a muddy coin and the declaration that it was a '*Constantine II circa 337 AD*' was confirmed by the two resident experts stationed at the HQ. There were several Anglo-Saxon strap ends, one in good condition with fine scrollwork. A Henry VII coin unearthed behind Hampden Way, and another interesting find was a Seal Matrix Vessica shape inscribed 'Richard of Curea\*\*run' circa 15th Century. It was so unusual and in relatively good condition that it was photographed, and the Surrey lady finder was sternly tasked to take it to the British Museum for possible identification. We requested her to inform us when she has an answer. On the Common a young lady, from a USAAF base in Huntingdon found a small, misshapen gold wedding ring with an unreadable hallmark. One can only guess at the tears shed for its loss many years ago.

The finds, though ancient and fascinating, were not commercially valuable and many of the detectors donated artefacts to the Ewelme Society and the village. One was predictable for the area being a cow ear metal tag with the copperplate inscription "T. Orpwood - Ewelme". All those pieces found on the Common were requested to be handed in as technically they belong to the village. The better-preserved finds we received included the Constantine II coin already mentioned, a William & Mary coin, several Georgian coins, and a Victorian 'bun' penny. One wonders what other 'treasures' would have been more easily found when Mr Fred Chamberlain was annually ploughing the common in the last war.

An inventory was taken, and the artefacts were displayed at the Exhibition and then archived. Although the inventory makes an impressive read, unfortunately most of the finds were fragments, damaged by centuries of ploughing or corroded by modern fertiliser.

As each participant paid £10 for the privilege, even after the deduction of Leisure Promotions fees for organising the event, the Millennium Fund was able to bank a most welcome sum.

(The writer's own 'find' in conjunction with a Maidenhead detector at the top of Heartbreak Hill, proved to be disappointing - a 20th century faucet!)

### **Update on the finds (Spring 2000)**

The Surrey metal detector Christine Squires, who found the seal matrix which had caused some excitement amongst the experts at the metal detecting day, very kindly forwarded the results of her research to us. Prof Arthur MacGregor of the Dept of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford had looked at the reflection of the matrix in a mirror and thought he could make out *Ricardi de Avrebruy* or Richard of Avebury. The Medieval Curator of The Museum of London wrote that the style and lettering was in the Lombardic alphabet suggesting it belonged to the 14th Century. The vessica shape, when used for a man's seal, usually indicated he was a priest or ecclesiastic of some sort, but the small size suggested he wasn't someone of great importance. We cannot remember if it was bronze or lead, but bronze would have indicated a more important cleric than one using a lead seal. Richard probably lost it whilst trudging to or from Avebury along the Icknield Way nearby. Chris wrote that she had only been detecting since January and finding the matrix was very exciting and it was a much-treasured possession.

As a thank-you for their co-operation in allowing their land to be used, more 'treasure' was forwarded to Alec and Richard Davey in the form of a framed collection of Roman coins found in the area near the Swyncombe Wood/Huntinglands crossways. These spanned the period from AD 260 to AD 361. The professional organisers had identified and dated fifteen recognisable coins representing Postumus 260-268, Tetricus 270-273, Probus who reigned 276-282; four of Constantine I reigned 307-337; one of Constantine II reigned 337-340; two of Constans reigned 337-350; and five of Constantius II reigned 337-361. [Postumus or Tetricus were not Emperors, maybe they were VIP's who were sufficiently important to issue coinage]. There were a further 28 unidentifiable coins. The time span indicated a settlement of some kind in that area.

Alec kindly allowed us to display these items at the Ewelme Society Supper where they were keenly examined. Also his grandson was taking the collection to School where he hoped to gain 'marks' for his House - as his class was 'doing' the Romans.

### ***Ewelme Village Archive***