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Fine Find from the Mud and Crud

By Peter Rodgerson

In the December magazine we had a story entitled 'Richard's Bucket List', which highlighted various artefacts detectorists often discard. Although Peter didn't throw away his remarkable find, he could easily have done so. This is his story ...

Searching in Cumbria

Since moving to the Isle of Skye I have managed to find many items including beautiful James I and Elizabeth I groats, an Elizabeth I sixpence and a Viking sword pommel. All have been declared and reside in Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland. I also joined the Inverness MDC and have been out on a few weekend digs, but my story is based in Cumbria where I used to live.



On a recent visit, I called to see a farmer friend to gain permission to detect on his land. A corn crop had just been removed and the ground was saturated but I had set aside a date to detect, so had no choice but to trudge through the mud.

On this first day, the weather was horrendous and detecting was difficult due to the stiff stalks from the corn. I had taken my XP Deus, which replaced my backup machine, a Laser Rapiet, as it is easy to use and has cordless headphones. I normally detect with a Minelab SE.

I had grown very fond of the Deus, but on this outing the first few finds were lead rubbish, Georgian and

Victorian coins and the odd ointment tube. I had little to record of any great interest.



On the next day and undeterred, I struggled on in the corn field, but soon moved onto a site where detecting was easier and finds were more frequent with the usual bits of lead, foil and then to my surprise an interesting copper alloy tube with two fixings pins, one at either end. The jury is still out on this item. I don't know what it is.

The second notable find was a sixpence. Then a silver earring, more rubbish and then another silver sixpence. I have noticed the Deus is excellent on finding silver items.

Another interesting but unknown artefact that found its way into my pouch was an owl mounted on three horse type legs. I thought it may have been Roman but the bird is mounted using a steel pin through the base.

On the third day I joined up with a good metal detecting partner of mine, George Robinson, and we set out for pastures new. The weather was kind to us. We enjoyed a morning's detecting, finds were a little thin and the Deus was not too



happy on this site because of background chatter on mineralised ground. However, it only took a second to reset the sensitivity before it was running at 100% again.

By lunchtime I had nothing notable in my finds bag other than dross lead, ring pulls and other rubbish. After lunch and within the first 20 feet detecting I'd found an Elizabeth I sixpence, pretty worn but nonetheless a hammered coin and yet another piece of silver. The afternoon got better as I pulled out another silver sixpence, a cut-half Scottish hammered coin, a love token and a couple of buckles.

As dusk fell we called it a day and compared finds, George had found a nice barrel tap and a really nice buckle and a few other small interesting pieces.

What I missed

I have spent some time telling you about the finds from three days of detecting. The artefacts were okay, but nothing spectacular and I wasn't too excited ... until I carefully examined my trash box!



Back home it was time to clean the finds and sort out the re-cyclable rubbish. Lead goes into a bucket and every now and again I weigh this in to pay for batteries and fuel for detecting trips. Copper and brass go into their respective tubs; aluminium and rubbish find their way into recycling.

Whilst sorting out all the items I always run the hosepipe over the 'rubbish' to wash off the mud. At this point I noticed something in amongst the lead that didn't look 'quite right'.

A heavily clad mud item and with what appeared to be some kind of decoration – soon got my heartbeat racing. It didn't take too long to clean off the crud and what I was left holding I now believe to be at least 9th century silver. I cannot believe I didn't spot this on the day. Luckily I'm always careful to remove everything I dig up and

never throw anything away.

George and I did a spot of research and believe the item may be one part of a tri-decoration from a Saxon/Viking drinking horn and possibly fitted at the sharp end. The terminal is in the form of an animal head.

What is really interesting is that there is one silver pin still in place and there appears to be attempts to preserve the last remaining zoomorphic head by a hole being bored through it, which would have prevented losing this one too. The item weighs one ounce.

It goes without saying that we will return to the sites detected and do a thorough investigation where hopefully we will be able to find other artefacts.

I have been detecting now for some 25 years and without doubt this, an artefact

retrieved from the trash bin is my best ever find. I have found silver denarii, long and short cross hammered coins, enamelled brooches, a silver hawking vervel but none of them compare to this one. Eventually I hope that more people can get more pleasure from this handcrafted piece of treasure, but we will have to wait for a full identification and details of where it might be displayed.

In summary, I conclude that one must be careful with finds. The crux of the story is to examine your items very carefully before you throw them away. My silver zoomorphic terminal may easily have been binned. It's unbelievable that this incredibly rare item has appeared out of the mud and crud. *Take care!*

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