

## **A Very Scary Moment**

*A story told by Mike Gaines the lead metal detectorist for the Meon Valley archaeology project*

The photo shows Mike displaying a Roman "Colchester" type brooch in Winchester.

It started off as a very satisfactory mornings detecting. The weather was perfect for it, cloudy but dry, with just a slight breeze as my colleague John and I climbed over the five barred gate into one of my promising but difficult fields. It was difficult because about a quarter of it was very stony on one side, parallel to a hedge line, as if it had been a river bed at



some time. I had queried this with the farmer who told me that a nearby river had been diverted back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of flooding problems, so maybe it had run through this field many years ago. It was promising because previously I had found a few Roman grots and a Saxon escutcheon from a hanging bowl, although that was along the hedge line. The farm was dairy so the fields were all pasture and today this one was just about perfect, the grass was only a few inches high with the occasional dried up cow pats here and there, so wishing each other good luck we started detecting. There is always good natured competition between the two of us, mainly because we use different detectors, me with my non-motion C.Scope 1220XDP and John with his deluxe Minelab, but usually our finds tally end up about equal at the end of the day.

I chose to detect away from the stony area today, while John was tempted by the lure of potentially good finds in a possibly dried up river bed. This was good because we use different search patterns which meant we shouldn't get in each other's way, but we were still in calling distance if a particularly good find turned up. I decided to start in the centre of the field and it wasn't long before I had a really strong but fluffy positive signal which I interpreted in my mind would be a lump of scrap lead. It was lead alright but not scrap as I had thought; it was a superb conical Roman steelyard weight (Fig.1) with the stained remains of an iron hook on one end and weighing in at about 750grams. Although not a particularly exciting find it was further evidence of Roman activity in the field area. I looked around for John but didn't disturb him because he was poised over a pile of spoil he had dug up over by the hedge line, so I

carried on with my preferred systematic search pattern. I had just started to dig down for another good signal when out of the corner of my eye I saw John striding purposefully towards me and I immediately sensed that he had made a good find. He certainly had as with his face beaming he held out a hand clutching a superb Saxon stirrup mount. (Fig.2).

I congratulated him because it really was a quite a rare artefact, but not only that it showed the field had exciting prospects because it had now yielded two quality Saxon artefacts plus the chance of even more Roman finds. Returning to my interrupted signal I dug down a little further and to my delight I unearthed a small bronze bead (Fig.3). It looked ancient but was smooth and perfectly formed (a bit like me really) but I was astonished to discover when I had it recorded that it was probably Bronze Age c.2000 B.C. Wow! What else did this field have in store. A quiet spell followed, John was continuing his stony search along the hedge line, so I moved forward twenty yards or so and after a few minutes was rewarded with the classic sharp, positive plink that has coin written all over it. Just an inch or two beneath the turf up came a very nice Edward penny (Fig.4). I thought at first it was probably an Edward 3<sup>rd</sup> but my ID is poor on hammered so I strolled over to show John but he wasn't sure either but it was later confirmed as an Edward 2<sup>nd</sup>. The morning was now turning out to be very enjoyable and quite fruitful. I had another couple of good signals which turned out to be the perennial buttons and was just thinking of turning and wending my way back when another very healthy signal had me digging again. It was quite deep so I loosened the soil in the base of the hole and dropped to my knees to scoop the soil out by hand, testing each handful in the time honoured way against the head of my detector. It worked and in my hand I held what I can only describe as a heavy duty Strapend (Fig.5.) I just looked at it in astonishment, its zoomorphic design screamed Saxon but it was really quite heavy duty, certainly the heaviest I had ever handled.

As I stood up a snorting sound made me suddenly aware of something behind me and I turned round, hearing John yelling and pointing frantically as I did so. To my horror standing about six feet away were two massive black bulls, their nostrils flared and tails swishing as they edged forward towards me. I froze momentarily and at that moment was very close to adding to the dried out manure lying around as I calculated my chances, the scenario was a detectorists nightmare but this time it was very much

for real. John was standing by the hedge about forty yards away, pointing towards the gate where we had entered the field and where two men were now watching the drama unfold. My instincts screamed at me to run for it but then I suddenly felt very calm and saying to myself, surely if the bulls mean any nasty business they would have done it by now so pick up your gear, walk away slowly and get out of their territory.

I seemed to be acting in slow motion as I obeyed my brains command and walked casually away towards the hedge line, resisting the instinctive temptation to run. When I joined up with John I looked back and saw the bulls sniffing around the hole I'd made before starting to graze leisurely. Phew! That was an experience I never want to have again. On our way out of the field John explained that two farm workers had let the two stock bulls in to it, obviously not aware that we were detecting there, and he had watched helplessly as the bulls made a beeline for me. The farmer told me later that the bulls were of a breed that was not particularly aggressive but there again I didn't know that. We all had a hearty chuckle about it afterwards but I think it's worth pointing out to all detectorists not to take chances if there are cattle in a field, especially if there are calves around.



**Fig.1.**



**Fig.2.**



**Fig.3.**



**Fig.4.**



**Fig.5.**

**About Mike Gaines:** My name is Mike Gaines and I am an enthusiastic Metal Detectorist which is a pastime I have enjoyed for over twenty five years. The Meon Valley is a very beautiful part of England and must have been a magnet to invaders over the centuries and it is where most of my detecting opportunities have been. My favourite period in history is the Anglo-Saxons who were very artistic people and created many beautiful artefacts all delightfully decorated, and I have been fortunate enough to find some of these whilst detecting. I look forward to working with the Archaeologists on the Meon Valley Project, and I hope the Saxon artefacts I have found will help illustrate the history of the Meon valley.