

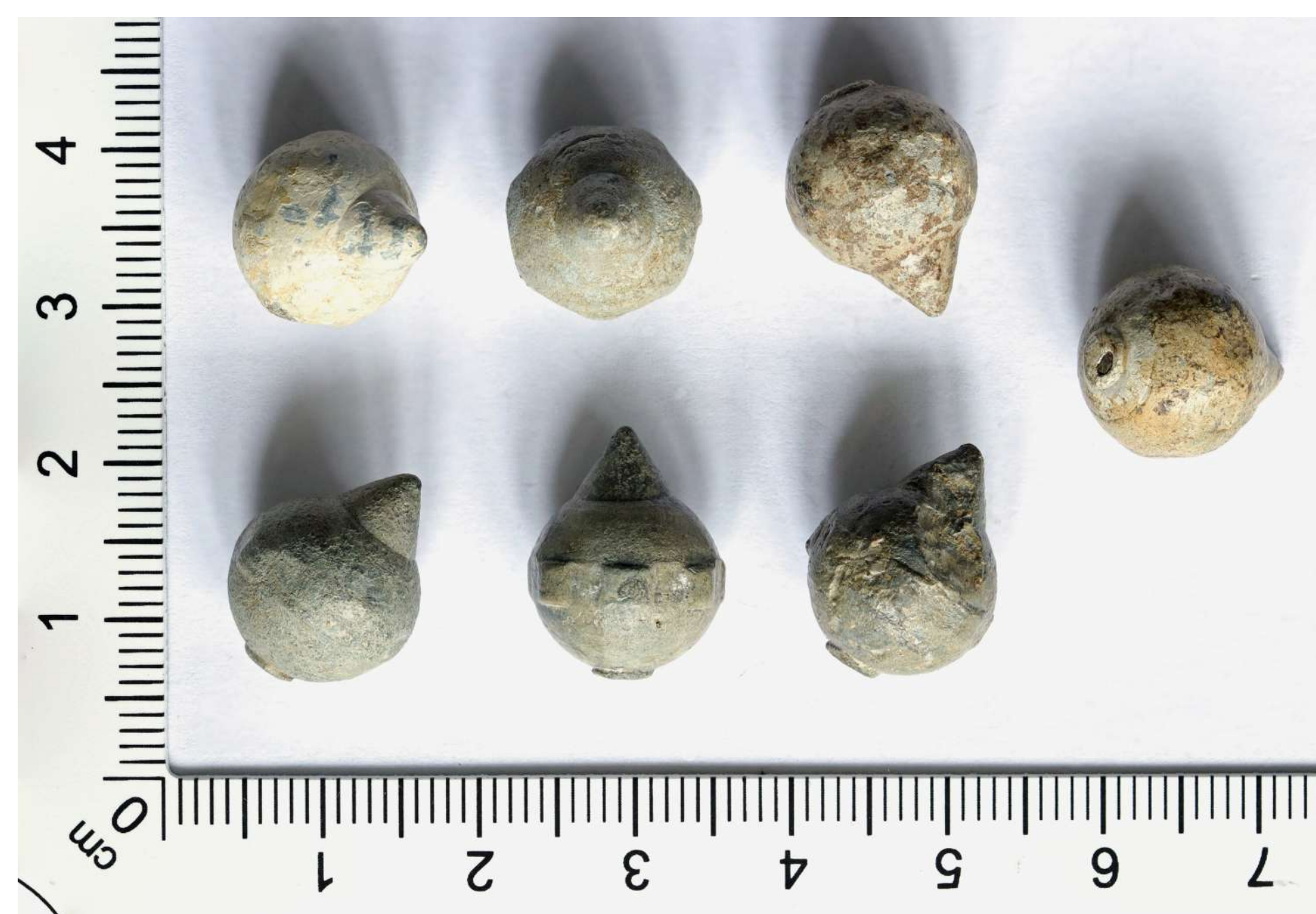
THE MYSTERY OF THE LANGAR ODD BALLS

THE LANGAR STUDDED SHOT

MUSKET BALLS WITH PARTY HATS ON

In 2018 the Field Detectives began a historic landscape investigation focusing on three fields situated to the north of Langar Hall in Nottinghamshire. The first phase of the investigation was a metal detecting survey. The finds recovered from the survey revealed a rich history, incorporating Roman, Medieval and Tudor artefacts, but a sizeable proportion of the finds were lead projectiles, which would have been used on the field for hunting, sporting activities and possibly military training.

Included amongst these were approximately 80 pieces of round shot, numerous pistol/revolver bullets, 6 bobbin shot and 3 plug shot, the latter two of which suggest a connection to the English Civil Wars. In addition to these, 24 projectiles were recovered which exhibited characteristics that did not fit into any of the standard identifiable patterns of historic shot or bullets, henceforth referred to as the Langar Studded Shot.



A TANGLED WEB OF RED HERRINGS

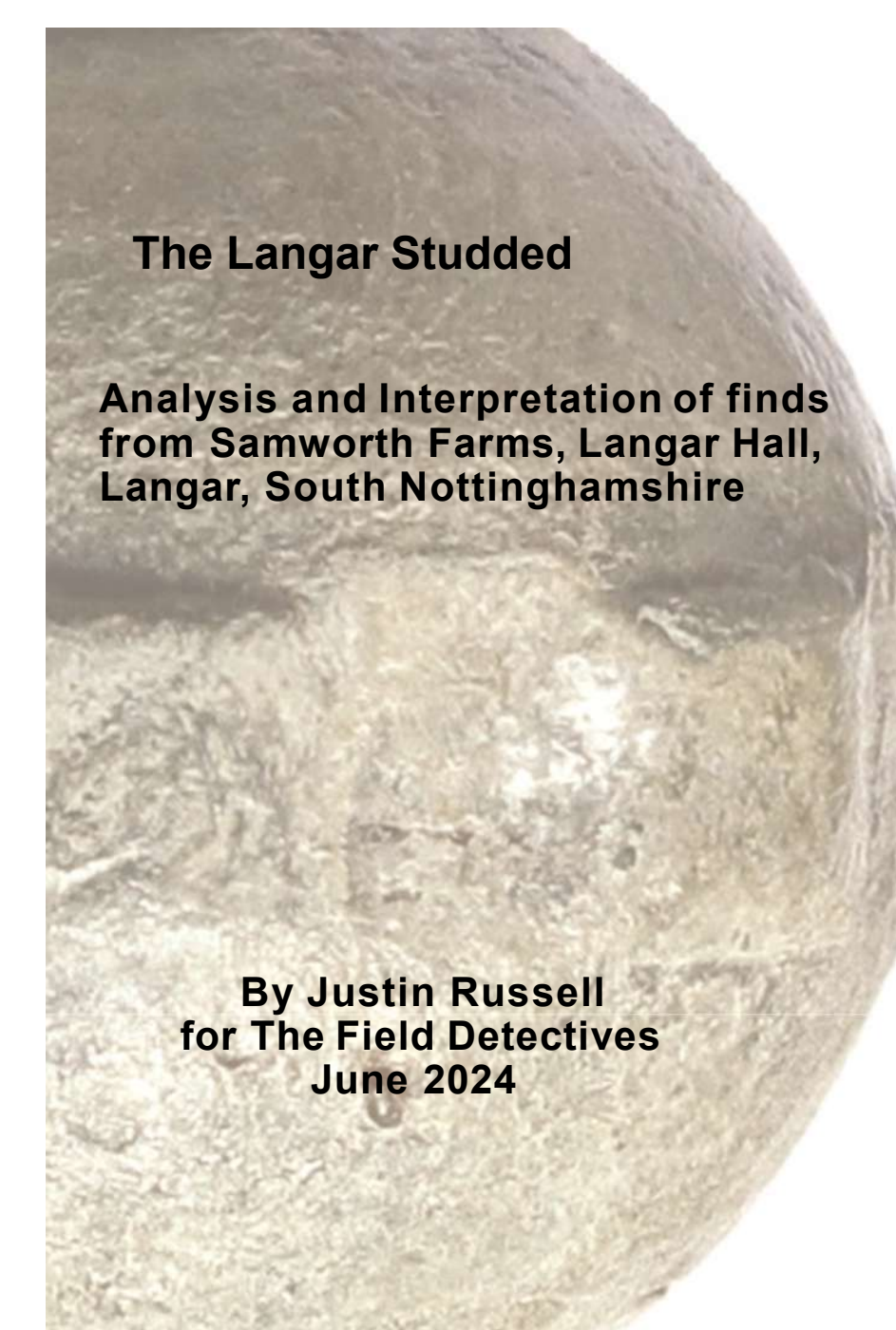
The first course of action was to find out how many of these odd balls had been found around the country, and to do that we visited the Portable Antiquity Scheme's online database of finds. Justin made a concise record of the details relating to similar shaped lead projectiles featured on the database, and although the exact finds location of the artefacts in question were not made available to us, we were able to make an informed judgement based on the location descriptions.

What this told us was that these type of lead projectiles were being found on or close to large country estates and that they appeared to have one thing in common and that was, Deer Parks. To cross reference our findings, we contacted people who were involved in the metal detecting rallies where the similar shaped lead projectiles featured on the Portable Antiquity Scheme's database were found. Thanks to the trusted confidence of these people, we could now confirm that the find locations of our similarly shaped cousins were from the ground of large country estates.

With this information on board, we pursued a line of enquiry focusing on the timeline of several families, their country estates and deer parks from the late 17th century through to the late 19th century. We were hoping to find out something that would lead us to the origins of the Langar Studded Shot and in the meantime, Justin would be trawling the archives for any patent records featuring similar designs.

What followed was many years of research that would bring to light stories about the American Civil War, assassin's bullets, the French and Indian Wars, the history of deer parks, the local militias, master of the horse for George I, navigating financial difficulties and yet, not a sniff about anything to do with our illusive Odd Balls.

Justin, however, was having more success on the patent front, but once again, it was nothing conclusive and it was taking us to Germany.



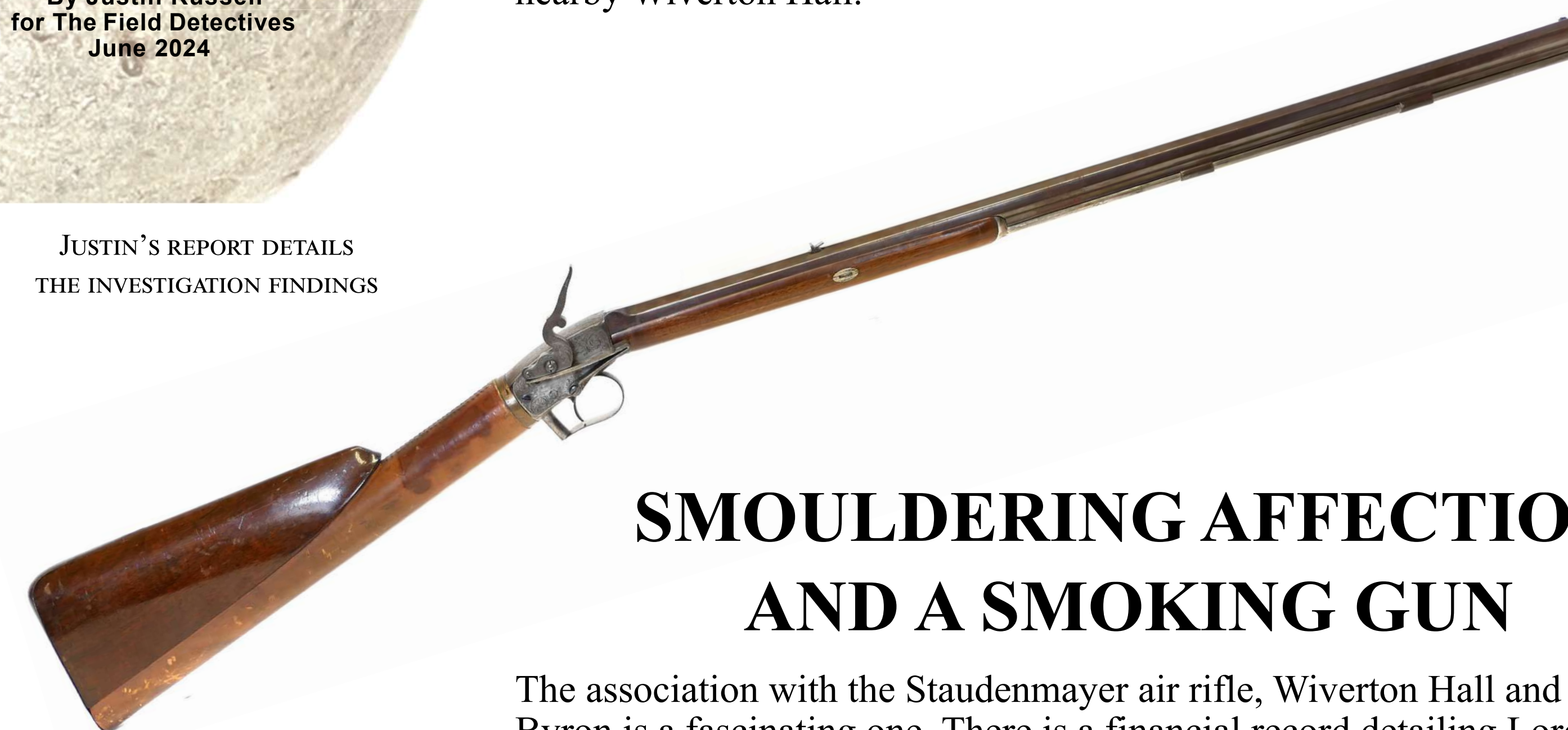
JUSTIN'S REPORT DETAILS THE INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

A MYSTERY NO MORE

Six years after the fellowship of the odd balls had set out on the road to discover the history behind those musket balls that were wearing party hats, the mystery had been solved.

The Langar Studded Shot had been fired from the barrel of a Samuel Henry Staudenmayer Air Rifle at the very beginning of the 19th century for sporting pursuits.

We know that Langar Hall Park had fallen into a sorry state of repair by 1790, and that the Hall and the Estate were sold in 1818, so therefore the people who were out on the field shooting these bullets were most probably from nearby Wiverton Hall.



SMOULDERING AFFECTION AND A SMOKING GUN

The association with the Staudenmayer air rifle, Wiverton Hall and Lord Byron is a fascinating one. There is a financial record detailing Lord Byron's purchase of 'Staudenmayer guns and swords dated July 24th, 1813', and the Mad, Bad & Dangerous Lord's love for Mary Chaworth is well known as testified through his poems. Mary Ann is considered to have been the first love of his life. They first met in 1803, he was 15 and she was 17 years old. Byron later wrote, 'Had I married Miss Chaworth perhaps the whole tenor of my life would have been different.'

Mary gave Lord Byron a ring, and it was the discovery of this gift which doused the smouldering embers of unrequited love. John Musters discovered the ring among Byron's clothes one day when he and Lord Byron were bathing together in the Trent. He recognised it, picked it up, and put it in his pocket. Byron claimed it, and Musters declined to give it up; and then, to quote the Countess Guiccioli, who is the authority for the story:

"High words were exchanged. On returning to the house, Musters jumped on a horse and galloped off to ask an explanation from Miss Chaworth, who, being forced to confess that Lord Byron wore the ring with her consent, felt obliged to make amends to Musters by promising to declare immediately her engagement with him."

Lord Byron would visit Mary at Annesley Hall frequently, riding with her, and practiced pistol shooting on the terrace, so wouldn't it be amazing if one of these Langar Odd Balls were to be found on those grounds.

We think it is more likely that the Staudenmayer air rifle used to fire the Langar Odd Balls was owned by John Musters, and that if further evidence in the form of these projectiles were to be found on the grounds of Wiverton Hall, Annesley Hall and Colwick Hall then that would go a long way towards proving it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Mr Russell Price of Samworth Farms for permission to study his field and for his continued support. We would like to thank The Fellowship of the Odd Balls, our wealth of colleagues and friends across the heritage sector, those who tread the fields searching for history and especially to Justin Russell who has worked tirelessly in pursuit of the truth.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE ODD BALLS

The discovery of these unusual lead projectiles set in motion a bombardment of emails targeting a broad ocean of experts in the field of lead projectiles and their provenance. What emerged from this initial wave of enquiry was the realisation that these odd balls were, indeed, a mystery on a national level.

As the dust settled on this first leg of the quest to identify and date these odd balls, a small group of investigators stepped forward to join us in the pursuit of a mystery that we were all determined to solve.

Russell Price (Samworth Farms), Justin Russell (archaeologist), Jonathan Ferguson (The Royal Armouries Museum), David Harding (author of Lead Shot of the English Civil War), Glyn Hughes & Kevin Winter (The National Civil War Centre) joined The Field Detectives to become, The Fellowship of the Odd Balls'.



CINDERELLA'S SHOE

Justin announced towards the end of 2023 that, 'I think I may finally have made a valuable connection in relation to the shot. I won't say any more just yet'. A meeting with Jonathan at the Royal Armouries in Leeds was arranged for Tuesday 27th February 2024 and a selection of air rifles and accompanying rifle carrying cases were presented for observation.

One of the Langar studded shot had been brought along and an amazing discovery was made. The bullet mould sitting in the case of a Staudenmayer air rifle was a perfect match for our langar musket ball with its suitably adorned party hat.



THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE ODD BALLS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT; KEVIN WINTER, RUSSELL PRICE, JONATHAN FERGUSON, CATHERINE PINCOTT-ALLEN, RICHARD PINCOTT, GLYN HUGHES AND JUSTIN RUSSELL