



THE SEARCH FOR STATHERN HALL



FIELD SURVEY REPORT 2025

PILLBOX FIELD
SK 775 306

A LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION INVESTIGATION



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Preface

On Friday 21st March 2025, The Field Detectives began a survey on the Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve at Stathern in Leicestershire. The survey was part of a local community historic landscape study collaboration that formed in 2018, with the shared goal of finding the lost 17th-century home of Colonel Francis Hacker.

The background to this investigation, which also details prior archaeological digs and related avenues of research, can be found in 'The Search for Stathern Hall Report 2023', which is available to view for free on The Field Detectives website at: www.the-field-detectives.com

The field in focus hosts a World War II pillbox and we have used this landmark feature for georeferencing by incorporating the name into the field survey.

As the Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve investigation is an integral part of the broader historic landscape study collaboration, The Field Detectives forfeit any claim to Treasure Trove. All artefacts recovered during the search for Stathern Hall investigation activities on the Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve, will be returned to the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust.

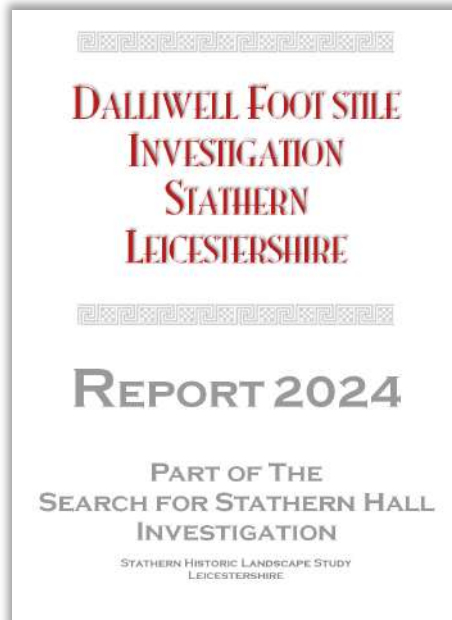
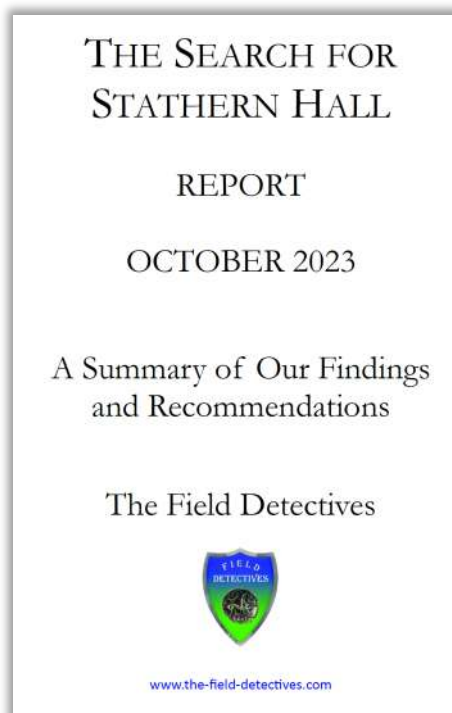
What we hope to achieve, is to record artefacts dating to the 17th century. The archaeological dig which will take place on Pillbox Field later this year, could reveal part of the building we are searching for. If the house where the Hacker family lived is close by, then the landscape should be littered with clues. The problem is, we have been reliably informed that the fields on what is now known as the Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve, have been metal detected over many years by lots of people.

Thanks to the kind permission and ongoing support of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, we have been presented with permission to carry out a field survey on Pillbox Field to see if we can fathom what was taken away from what was left behind.

This report presents our findings.

The Field Detectives

2025



COOMBS MEADOW NATURE RESERVE PERMIT



**Leicestershire
& Rutland**
Wildlife Trust

The Old Mill
9 Soar Lane
Leicester
LE3 5DE

0116 262 9968
info@lrwt.org.uk
www.lrwt.org.uk

This permit authorises: The Field Detectives (Richard Pincott et al)

To visit: Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve

Purpose of visit: Hacker Project: metal detection activities

Date/period of validity: 12th to 31st March 2025

Date of issue: 12th March 2025

Conditions:

1. This permit should be carried whenever a visit is made to the reserve and be produced on demand to the warden.
2. Except with the written permission of the Senior Reserve Officer, no collections of any kind may be made. You are particularly requested not to disturb nesting birds and to generally respect the wildlife of the reserve at all times.
3. On geological sites the use of hammers is normally strictly forbidden.
4. No vehicle or caravan may be taken into the reserve and no tent or hide may be erected without written authority.
5. Any dogs with the group must be on leads.
6. Smoking and lighting of fires is strictly forbidden.
7. Visitors will be expected to comply with the above regulations and also with any proper request of a warden or other official of the Trust.
8. It is an expressed condition of the issue of this permit that the Trust accepts no responsibility for any loss or injury occurring on the reserve.
9. The Trust retains the right to withdraw this permit at any time.
10. No research programme may be carried out on the reserve without special permission from the Senior Reserve Officer. Details will be required of the nature and purpose of the research and the methods to be used.
11. All results of any research or surveys must be communicated to the Trust office in writing within six months of completion, and all publications resulting from this study, in part or in full, must acknowledge the authority of the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust.
12. Any artefacts recovered during the investigation will remain with the respective landowners.
13. Any land disturbed during investigations will be returned to its original state before permit holders leave the site.
14. Any livestock present must be given plenty of space. Do not feed livestock. All gates and property must be left as they are found.

Signed:

Senior Reserve Officer, Sarah Bedford

Signed:

Permit holders

Creating a wilder Leicestershire and Rutland

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust Limited is a registered charity in England and Wales (no. 210531). A company limited by guarantee registered in England (company no. 561833). Patrons: Sir David Attenborough OM, CH., Lady Gretton DCVO, JP, Sir Laurence Howard KCVO, OBE, Vice President: P L Ward, MA, LLB. Chief Executive Officer: Mat Carter

FIELD SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Field Detectives are a group of enthusiasts who share a common interest in local history. Since 1999, the group has sought the permission of local farmers and landowners to explore their fields for evidence of past historic activity using field walking, metal detecting and, where feasible, limited geophysical survey methods.

The field was initially visited to determine by surface inspection whether it would be suitable for metal detecting and to note any interesting landscape features such as humps, mounds, hollows, ponds, ditches, areas of different coloured soil etc. A field survey map was created by downloading an aerial image of the field from Google Earth and superimposing graph paper over the field image.

One copy of this was taken into the field on the field survey clipboard. In the field, grid areas were marked out in advance of each field survey visit (20 x 20 metre grid sections, marked with canes featuring coloured tape), utilising both the online Google Earth metric measure resource and the physical on-site tape and stride method. The grid areas were transposed onto the field survey map, and the location of the finds recorded on the map as they were found.

The finds were bagged, and their locations noted on-site; the finds were later cleaned and identified, the identification and location find number being written on the relevant finds identification card enclosed within the bag/coin envelope. Photographs of the grid area and the finds recovered were taken on-site, with further photographs taken after cleaning if necessary.

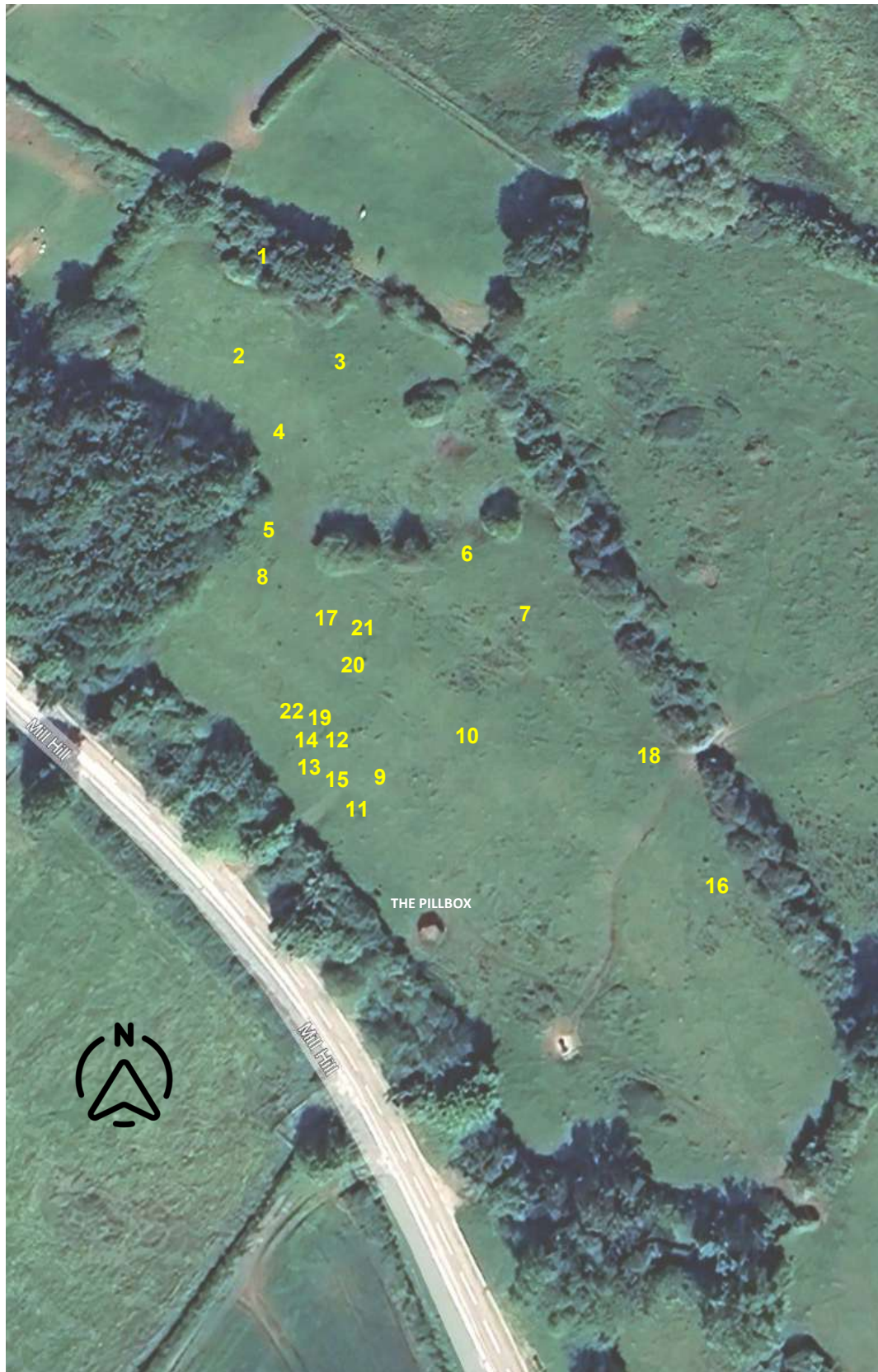
FIELD SURVEY OVERVIEW MAP



**COOMBS MEADOW NATURE RESERVE, STATHERN, LEICESTERSHIRE
LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND WILDLIFE TRUST**

FIELD SURVEY FINDS LOCATION MAP & FINDS LOG

Map featured below, showing the find locations of the artefacts found and recorded during the Coombs Meadow, Pillbox Field Survey on Friday 21st March 2025.



Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust - Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve
Pillbox Field - SK 775 306

The Search for Stathern Hall - Field Survey, Pillbox Field SK 775 306	
Palaeolithic 800,000 BC to 10,000 BC	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Mesolithic 10,000 BC to 4,000 BC	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Neolithic 4,000 BC to 2,350 BC	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Iron Age 800 BC to AD 43	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Roman AD 43 to 410	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Early Medieval 410 - 1066	No artefacts from this period were recorded
Medieval 1066 - 1485	No artefacts from this period were recorded

No artefacts from the above timelines were recorded during the Pill Box Field survey.

Bronze Age 2,350 BC to 800 BC			
Ref.	Artefact/Coin	Size/Weight	Era/Date
8	AWL - Bronze Age small tool	5.8gms; 51.7 mm L x 5.3 mm	c. 2350 - 800 BC



There was only one artefact that could be reliably dated to the Bronze Age.

It was a small tool that was most probably used for piercing holes or making marks in materials such as leather, wood and bone. It has also been suggested that it could have been used for scribing or tattooing.

The transition from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age was an evolving process of technological advances that blurred the timelines considerably.

While advances in tool manufacture were adopted quickly in some places, the old ways of doing things would have slowly slumbered along in others.

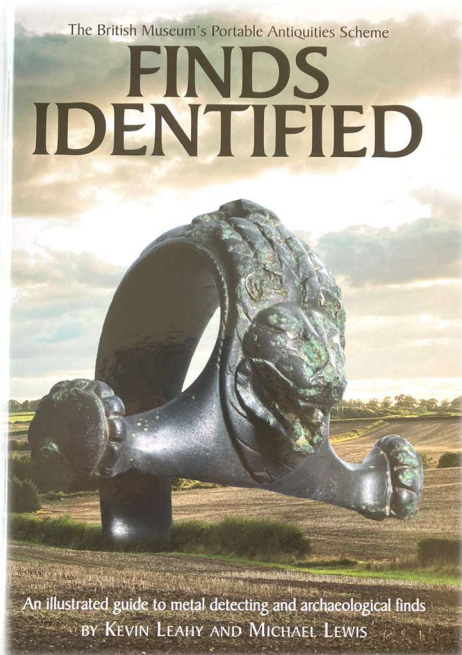
Dating a Bronze Age Awl without any additional contextual information is difficult so therefore, we have adopted Kevin Leahy's and Michael Lewis' broad timeline of c.2350-800 BC.

This is the date they have attributed to the Awl on page 221 of their book, Finds Identified, which was published by Greenlight Publishing in 2018.

Archaeological excavations at Tavsanlı Hoyuk in 2024, located in Turkey's Kutahya province, have unearthed a bronze awl with a bone handle (pictured right) along with a pair of tweezers, both dating back 3,200 years.



SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

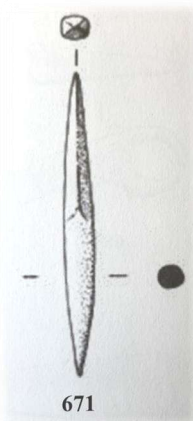


Page 221



BH-8196E7, 54mm, Nether Wallop, Hampshire (2350-800 BC)

Simple tools, like this awl, are difficult to date, but it is likely to be Bronze Age.



SOURCE: Identifying Detector Finds by Brian Read
Greenlight Publishing 2021 p.129 ref: 671

Described under the heading, small tools and implements as; 'half is a tapering pyramidal cross section tang, and the other half is a conical tapering to a sharp point'. Measuring L 48.4 mm x D 5.00 mm, Brian's example is a close match to the measurements of the one Steve found on pillbox field. Crucially, Brian goes on to state that; 'also known is square cross-section with a spade end'. A perfect description of the Pillbox Field Bronze Age Awl.

SOURCE: Celtic & Roman Artefacts by Nigel Mills
Greenlight Publishing 2000 p.32 ref: C54 (M21)

Although the one in Nigel's book is a larger example than the one found on pillbox field, the description applies to both artefacts: 'it is solid, has a point at one end with a bevelled edge at the other. This may have been used as a chisel, while the point could have been used for pricking as an awl. Alternatively, it could have been a form of early stylus'.

FURTHER LEARNING - EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Steph and Neil at the Prehistoric Workshop have the knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate an experimental archaeology study on the Pillbox Field Bronze Age Awl. It would be educational and a fascinating insight into the Bronze Age world to learn more about this amazing small tool. What was it used for, how was it used and how were they made are just a few of the questions that Steph and Neil could help us to resolve.

Post Medieval 1485 - 1900

Ref.	Artefact/Coin	Size/Weight	Era/Date
16th-18th CENTURY			
Other than the musket ball, which bears a tentative association with the 17th century, there was nothing to suggest that the field saw a lot of human activity during the time that Colonel Francis Hacker lived here, which is puzzling.			
19th CENTURY			
2	Tombac Button	2.0gms; 21.5 mm D x 0.6 mm	c. 18th Century
17	Tombac Button	5.5gms; 17.9 mm D x 9.6 mm	c. 18th Century
21	Button	4.8gms; 26.7 mm D x 0.9 mm	c. 18th Century
3	Pewter Spoon Handle	INCOMPLETE	c. 18th - 19th Century
5	Button	4.2gms; 19.4 mm D x 1.3 mm	c. 18th - 19th Century
14	Button - Fine Cut	3.7gms; 20.9 mm D x 1.0 mm	c. 19th Century
15	Button - Decorated	3.1gms; 20.6 mm D x 4.7 mm	c. 19th Century
16	GEORGE III Sixpence	2.5gms; 19.3 mm D x 0.7 mm	1819
12	VICTORIA Halfpenny	3.7gms; 24.8 mm D x 0.8 mm	c. 1860-1894
4	VICTORIA Halfpenny	4.2gms; 25.0 mm D	1861
7	VICTORIA Penny	8.2gms; 30.5 mm D x 1.3 mm	1879

The post-medieval period covers four hundred years and therefore, to help make sense of the finds from the field, we have split the finds log for that period into two sections. The 16th to 18th-century section allows us to examine the transitions from the Tudor period, then into and through the troublesome civil wars and finally, the journey into the Georgian era. The finds from the survey evidence human activity on the landscape during the 18th and 19th century, but human activity on the landscape during the 17th century would appear to be missing from the artefactual record.

TOMBAC BUTTONS

Buttons made of zinc and copper alloy were widely used during the 18th century. The Americans named them, 'tombac', and they were created to provide a silvery appearance on clothing.

Tombac buttons can usually be identified by their raised soldered cone on the back which was used to house the attachment loop. There are also ones where the loop has been soldered directly onto the flat reverse side of the button.

Apart from being used to fasten coats, they were also used to adorn waistcoats, pockets, hats, breeches, leggings, cuffs and shoes. No wonder we find so many!

They were made in a vast array of designs and have the potential to make a fascinating collection for further study and enjoyment.





C. 19TH CENTURY BUTTONS



Pewter Spoon Handle
INCOMPLETE
c. 18th - 19th Century



Post Medieval 1485 - 1900



VICTORIA
r. 1837-1901



Modern 1900 to Present Day

Ref.	Artefact/Coin	Size/Weight	Era/Date
18	.303 Bullet Casing	Incomplete 13.1 mm D Head Stamp	1943
10	ELIZABETH II Sixpence	2.4gms; 18.8 mm x 0.8 mm	1956
19	JULIANA Koningin Der Nederland 5 Cent	3.2gms; 20.8 mm D x 1.1 mm	1975
6	ELIZABETH II 50 New Pence	13.1gms; 29.8 mm x 2.1 mm	1976
13	ELIZABETH II 5 New Pence	3.0gms; 17.5 mm D 1.2 mm	199_
11	Badge featuring a tankard - Whitbread	2.3gms; 14.7 mm D 1.3 mm	Modern Day
22	Plastic Comb	4.7gms; 130.8 x 26.8 x 3.0 mm	Modern Day

There were 7 artefacts that evidence human activity on Pillbox field following the end of Queen Victoria's reign. There were also a few flattened lager cans that suggest more modern day activities on the field. Many of the Terramycin ointment tubes recovered during the survey were disposed of. Only a small number were retained to evidence their presence on the field.



The .303 began life as far back as 1889 and was originally used in the Lee-Enfield rifle. It was the main cartridge used by the British army until it was finally replaced in the 1950s by the 7.62 X 51 Nato cartridge. The main method of identification to determine the origin and type of a .303 cartridge is the headstamp.

SOURCE: Stephen Taylor - WWII Historian

RG	Ministry of Supply Factory (later Royal Ordnance Factory) Radway Green, Cheshire
43	1943
VII	The most common round of .303 as used in Lee Enfield rifles, and in Vickers, Bren and Lewis machine guns



Modern 1900 to Present Day



Juliana Louise Emma Marie Wilhelmina was Queen of the Netherlands from 1948 until she abdicated in 1980 at the age of 71 in favour of her eldest daughter, Beatrix.

Juliana suffered terribly in her later years from Alzheimer's disease and passed away in her sleep at the age of 94, on Saturday 20th March 2004.



Enamelled badge featuring the roped horse symbol on a tankard that is mostly associated with the Whitbread brewery.

The back mark reads: JR Gaunt, London



The Plastic Comb from Coombs Meadow

Modern 1900 to Present Day



ELIZABETH II

Sixpence

1956



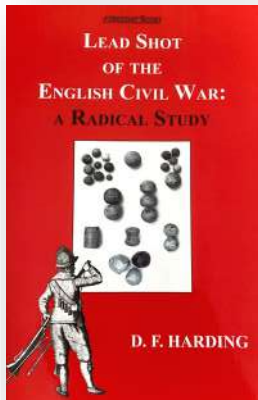
Terramycin ointment is a broad-spectrum antibiotic which kills many types of bacterial infections in cats, dogs, cattle, sheep and horses.



Lead Projectiles, Musket Balls & Lead Shot 1550 to early 19th Century

Ref.	Artefact/Coin	Size/Weight	Era/Date
9	Musket Ball	7.8gms; 11.1 mm D	c. 1550 to early 19th Century

There was one musket ball found during the Coombs Meadow Pillbox Field Survey.



Much of what we know about the lead projectiles we are recording during our historic landscape studies are informed by the masterly piece of work pictured left, written by David Harding.

At the core of David's book is an intensive analysis of 1,800 projectiles that were fired in practice in a Northamptonshire deer park during the English Civil Wars of 1642-1651.



Musket Ball and Lead Shot Timeline

c. 1550 to early 19th Century

A wide dating range has been applied to the majority of the musket balls and lead shot recovered during the field survey activities. Musket balls & lead shot were used for military, hunting and sporting activities for many years and so therefore, it is extremely difficult to narrow down a specific timeline without a set of associated artefacts or coins to help date them.

The finds can be made available for examination at a later date by experienced firearms and ammunition experts towards narrowing down the timeline. It is envisaged that this would then inform our understanding in regard to the activities that these lead artefacts were involved in and perhaps, something about the people who used them.



Source: Independent - Sunday 5 April 2015

The skeleton of a soldier killed in the Battle of Waterloo (Sunday, 18 June 1815).

Military historian Gareth Glover believes the soldier to be Friedrich Brandt, 23, a private in the King's German Legion of George III, who was killed by a musket ball that was still lodged between his ribs when he was found in 2012.

As you can see, musket balls remained in use long after the English Civil War (1642-1651).

**Research conducted by Sean Gallagher - January 2019*

To be Identified & Dated

LEAD

Pieces of lead bearing no identification marks, functional design features or any other way of forming an opinion in regard to their use or purpose, make them a difficult group of artefacts to date with any reliable certainty. Knowing that lead was one of the earliest metals discovered by the human race and was in use by 3000 B.C. tells us that objects made of this material have been with us for some considerable time.

Ref.	Artefact/Coin	Size/Weight	Era/Date
Lead Artefacts			
There were no lead artefacts recovered during the survey warranting further research			

Artefacts

1	Iron Ring	15.8gms; 47.0 mm D	To Be Dated
20	Metal Ring	47.5gms; 62.5 mm x 54.7 mm	To Be Dated

POTTERY

The field survey did not include a detailed field walking examination of the field.

There are 2 artefacts that we have not been able to identify from the Far Hill Field survey.



DETECTIVES IN THE FIELD

The Pillbox Field metal detecting survey on Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve began and was completed on Friday 21st March 2025. In total, The Field Detectives were on site for 6.5 hours, visiting the field on one occasion.



Pictured above is a Huddle of Field Detectives. From left to right: Colin, John, Catherine, Steve and Richard. Jill is missing from the photograph.

Pictured right in the bucket, are just some items of rubbish that other people had left behind for us to take away.

Artefact Recording Overview Pillbox Field SK 775 306

Finds Recorded 22
Identified 20 (90%)
Finds Unidentified 2 (10%)



Metal detecting is something that anyone is lawfully entitled to do. However, you cannot trespass to do it. You need permission from the landowner. The best practice is to ensure that the Portable Antiquities Scheme ("PAS") Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales (2017) ("Code of Practice") is followed.

[Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales \(2017\) \(finds.org.uk\)](https://finds.org.uk)



The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) is a voluntary programme run by the United Kingdom government to record the increasing numbers of small finds of archaeological interest found by members of the public. The scheme started in 1997 and now covers most of England and Wales. Finds are published at <https://finds.org.uk>

Summary

On Friday 21st March 2025, The Field Detectives concluded the Pillbox Field survey on the Coombs Meadow Nature Reserve at Stathern in Leicestershire. The purpose of the survey was to find and record artefacts from the ground that could be associated with the location of a 17th-century house.

Prior to the survey, we were reliably informed that the Coombs Meadow fields had been regularly visited over many years by people using metal detectors. With this information in mind, The Field Detectives adjusted their survey expectations accordingly. It would now become an interrogation of the field to see if we could fathom the extent of what had been taken away from what was left behind.

Sadly, one solitary musket ball became the only piece of evidence that could have had an association with the timeline of the lost hall. However, musket balls were in use right up until the beginning of the 19th century, so therefore, it is a tentative association at best.

There was plenty of evidence to confirm human activity on the field during the 18th and 19th centuries. There was also a modern-day plastic comb, which lends itself to an ironic play on the word, 'coombs'.

Interestingly, there were enough finds to confirm that those metal-detecting people of days gone by, had missed quite a lot of datable evidence in the ground. But, the question remains; what did they take away?

The 1st century BC Bronze Age Awl was a remarkable and somewhat surprising find. Artefactually, it was akin to hearing a whisper from someone on the landscape from well over two thousand years ago.

Turning whispers into voices requires much more evidence and it would help our broader historic landscape study if those people who carried out those metal detecting activities all those years ago, came forward and told us their stories. Without that information, we are missing crucial pieces to the investigation jigsaw.

The Pillbox Field survey proved to be informative and laid the foundation for future avenues of investigation. It also opened a door onto a Bronze Age landscape that we didn't know anything about - how amazing is that?

The Field Detectives
2025



Working closely in partnership with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and our broader heritage sector colleagues, we will be focusing on preparation for the 2 trench investigation on Pill box field later in 2025.

We will also seek to learn more about the broader landscape, by reaching out to people to ask if we can gain their permission to record artefacts that have been found on the neighbouring fields over the years.



To Sarah & colleagues at the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, as we would be a lost historic landscape away from knowing what we know today without your support.

Steve Wells has once again produced a magnificent set of artefact/coin images.

To all of you Field Detectives who freely give up your time to chase the real treasure of telling the unknown stories of people who are now sadly, long gone.

To Roger, Barbara, Geoff, Carrie, Margot and all of our fellow heritage sector colleagues, farmers and landowners, because, we couldn't do this without you.

To Sean Gallagher, Alan Stevens, Mel Steadman, Bob Hammond & Peter Baker, because you helped to make us who we are today - Thank You, will never be enough...

THE FIELD DETECTIVES

THE FIELD DETECTIVES

On the Field or Not on the Field - We are All on the Field

Today we number 21

This number is confirmed or adjusted at the Annual Field Detectives Huddle

We are a Historic Landscape Investigation Team

Although we utilise the technology of metal detectors during our field surveys
we are not a Metal Detecting Group

As our activities are planned historical survey and research activities, in the case of **TREASURE**:
50% of any reward goes to the Landowner

50% is shared equally by the remaining 21 Field Detectives

No matter who found the artefact or artefacts in question Whether on the Field or Not on the Field

CUSTODIANS: HISTORIC LANDSCAPE STUDY COLLECTIONS

Once the field survey reports have been processed, the artefacts, coins and pottery are assembled as a Historic Landowner Collection where they are safeguarded for further research and study

TELLING OUR STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Through, Talks, Performances, Displays, Installations, Reports, Books, Website, Podcasts



Money Received From Talks,
Books & Performances Is
Ploughed Back Into Historic
Landscape Investigations

We Are a Self Funded
Not For Profit Group

On community partnership collaboration investigations
The Field Detectives forfeit any claim to Treasure Trove

SHARING THE LEARNING - During the years 2023 & 2024, thanks to the trusting 'custodian' partnerships with farmers, landowners and our colleagues across the heritage sector, The Field Detectives presented talks, displays and performances to around 24 community groups and 480 or so people.

Since The Field Detectives website was launched in 2023, we have reached a broader audience where many of our stories from the field have been read, continued to be studied and enjoyed.

The Langar Odd Balls lecture at the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds, in 2024, reached over 5,000 people.

**“ONLY BY
SHARING OUR
EXPERIENCES
DO WE LEARN”**

The Field Detectives

Historic Landscape Studies

Who We Are & What We Do

The Field Detectives seek opportunities to survey fields that can tell us more about how our historic landscapes evolved - by sharing the stories that we uncover from our field survey activities, we help to inform a better understanding of how our historic landscapes evolved over the centuries. On completion of the field survey activities, a field survey report is produced that precisely records all of the associated survey finds (coins, artefacts, pottery etc.).

Once the field survey reports have been processed, the artefacts are curated as a landowner-held Historical Landscape Study Collection where they are safeguarded for further research and study. With landowner approval, a community presentation/display can then be arranged where the information is shared and an opportunity is provided for the local community to get involved in future research activities.

By submitting the completed field survey reports as an exact finds location record, and by working closely with our heritage sector colleagues, we are establishing a growing archive of landscape-focused historical studies. These context recorded studies are held in trust by the respective farmers & landowners who act as heritage custodians, which in turn, safeguards a unique set of rich historical landscape investigations for further study and learning.

If you want to be the focus of our next investigation, give us a call - Every Field Tells a Story...

Mob: 07896 225 691 Tel: 0115 9377 318

email: fielddetectives@talktalk.net website: www.the-field-detectives.com



Richard Pincott
Survey Director &
Historic Landscape Detective



Catherine Pincott-Allen
Family Historian, Author & Historic
Landscape Detective



Steve Wells
Finds Photographer, Treasurer
& Historic Landscape Detective



Sophie Chell
Historic Landscape
Detective



Brian Lovett
Farmer & Historic
Landscape Detective



Julie Penaluna
Artist & Historic Landscape
Detective



Jill Barlow
Historic Landscape
Detective



John Barlow
Historic Landscape
Detective



Tim & Jenson Elsworth
Historic Landscape Detectives



Jane Morris
Dowser &
Historic Landscape Detective



David Bate
Geologist & Historic
Landscape Detective



Cherry Bishop
Historic Landscape
Detective



Peter Ball
Historic Landscape
Detective



Aileen Ball
Historic Landscape
Detective



Roger Whitehead
Historic Landscape
Detective



Lady Helen Nall
Historian, Artist &
Historic
Landscape Detective



Justin Russell
Archaeologist &
Munitions Consultant