

Detectives at Work in Hillam

We were fascinated one morning in August to draw back the curtains to the view of about 15 searchers spread out in a long line abreast, spanning the field at the back of our house working from the Austfield Lane end. They were a group of metal detector enthusiasts setting out on their day's investigation of the recently harvested field. As the day progressed, they methodically scanned the field, with individuals stopping and digging intermittently, as they worked their way along.

Given, to my knowledge, it had only ever been an agricultural field in a historic backwater, I thought them perhaps overly optimistic. So saying, early afternoon I went out to speak to a couple of the detectors. They were, it transpired a group from the Yorkshire Searchers Club. I asked if they had found anything of interest. I was amazed.

One of the men I spoke to had himself found some lead musket balls, one whole and round, and one flattened, he thought the effect of being fired. What dark deeds may have happened in the past in the quiet fields of Hillam? He had also found a thimble and an old coin, a Victorian penny. He told me they often find thimbles in fields and assumed that perhaps it was because, in earlier days, maybe sacks were sewn in the fields. The other man showed me his find, an interesting embossed lead coin like disc with a hole in the centre. Its origins and use were open to speculation. He suggested perhaps a lead weight needed for spinning? They reported that very day, within the wider group they had found, amongst other things, several thimbles and various much older coins, and what was most interesting to me, what they believed to be a roman ring and a very old, maybe Saxon, brooch.

That ordinary field now has new significance. Those simple artefacts found at the bottom of our garden had a great impact on me, and I returned home with a similar feeling to when I visit St Wilfrid's; that of having a strong sense of centuries of community and continuity wrapped around me. A comforting, balancing feeling that gives a sense of perspective and illuminates the fact that we living here now represent only a transient moment in the long, long history of our village.

Hillam resident