

A Record of Finds made by Simon and Toby Shew 2016-2018

Mr Parsler's Field, south of Mill View Garden Centre, West of Coombe Wood, Wheatley

Field Centre: 51°43'57"N 01°08'43"W

Context:

Today Coombe Wood is 23 Acres but in 1086 it was part of the Abbot of Abingdon's Wood which measured 1 mile by 8 furlongs - 320 acres. The present wood was enclosed at the end of the 16th century and the entrance gate was shown on the wonderful All Souls College maps drawn in 1593. In 1683 Coombe Wood was a warren of 60 acres surrounded by dry stone walls made of the local ironstone to keep the rabbits in. We do not know on which side, or sides, the additional acreage lay.

Our field lies on a line that connects the sites of Olde Whateley to Olde Horsepath, medieval settlements, originally founded on higher ground close to water sources but which relocated to their current valley locations in the 14th century.

A communal method of strip farming in large village fields had its origins in the Early Medieval period (circa 880-1200). The layout of All Souls strips and the ownerships adjacent strips is recorded in the 1593 maps. The ridges and furrows are still visible more than 400 years later in the low evening sun or when lying snow starts to melt. The east part of the field was called 'Nether Heathe Furlonge'. All Souls neighbours in this field included Peter Polkins, Marie of Archdall, Tho. Symes, Garbrand Herkes, Tho. Gobbett and Peter Polkinges.

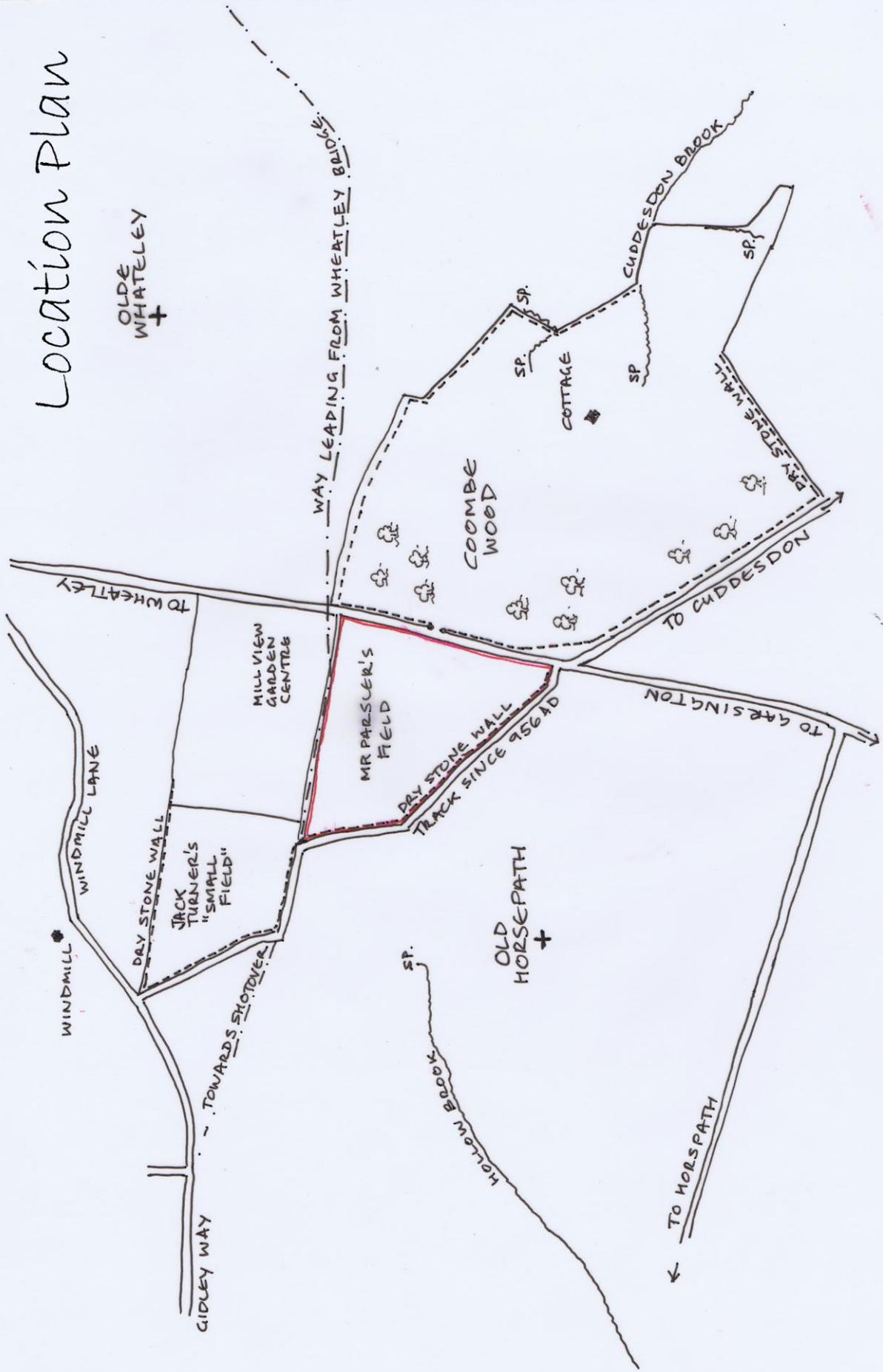
The field is bounded on the south and west side by a track, dating from 956, which would have linked Cuddesdon to Wheatley windmills and on towards Oxford over Shotover. This side of the field, like Coombe Wood, has a dry stone wall which extends almost all the way to Windmill Lane and returns along the north side of Jack Turner's "A Small Field in Oxfordshire" (the inspiration for this study).

The 1593 maps show 'A way leading from Whateley Bridge towards Shott Over' or 'Shotover' via the non-boggy route that avoided Wheatley High Street with its open stream. This runs along the north side of our field.

The east side of the field is bounded by the road from Wheatley to Garsington which was also the Church Way for funeral processions which passed along this route from Wheatley to the Parish Church in Cuddesdon before the chapel of ease was built in Bell Lane in the 18th century.

The tracks and the road make the field into something of a large traffic island. In history, as now, good transport links may have been the reason for the commercial activity which we conjecture took place in this field.

Location Plan



Finds of Note: (The references in square brackets are unique PAS record numbers.)

Neolithic: Our oldest artefact was an eyes-only find, the white standing out starkly against the rusty red-brown soil in the field. It dates from 4000-2500BC. It is a Neolithic polished axe head, regrettably damaged by the plough over the centuries, but the cutting edge is intact and still sharp. [OXON-EA22C3] The Neolithic period was the cradle of agriculture and a settled existence when the skills to create sophisticated tools were developed. Neolithic people were responsible for the Rollright Stone Circle and Silbury Hill.



Three views of the eyes-only find

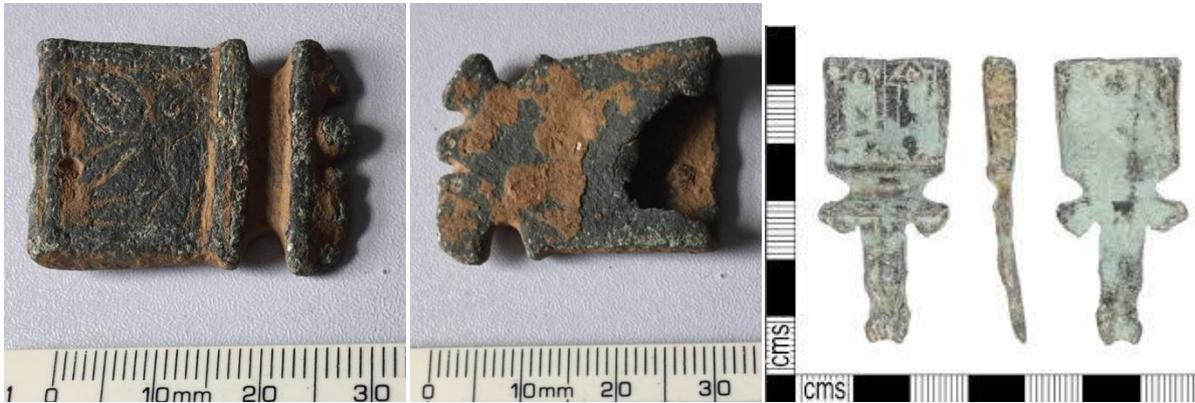


An example of a hafted axe and a complete polished Neolithic flint axe head

Roman: Our next finds date from the Roman occupation period some 3000 years later. The bronze coin of the Emperor Licinius dates from 308-324AD. [OXON-E8008A] Licinius, with Emperor Constantine I, granted toleration to all Christians in the Roman Empire. The Finds Officer identified another coin-shaped object as a Roman 'Securitas Republicae', c.364-378AD. We have only found one other Roman copper coin but it is too worn to attribute or date.



14th Century: We move on to the medieval Box Chape of the Lyre Box type which has been recorded as dating from 1390-1420. [OXON-EA7F59] Most of the Lyre decoration is missing. (shown with a complete example from PAS database)



There is also a slender copper alloy pot leg which was made somewhere between 1250 and 1700 [OXON-EA4546] and a more robust pot leg foot, 1400-1700 [OXON-EA5770].



We found two lead alloy uniface tokens or tallies of Late Medieval to Early Post Medieval date, 1400 to 1700, it is circular, and flat. The smaller one is slightly damaged and the obverse design consists of a feather [OXON-E8D56B]. The larger one has a five-branched tree on the obverse. An unrecorded fragment has the characteristic cross-hatched pattern reverse and a design on the obverse.



16th Century: Evidence of commerce comes to light starting with a rare coin-weight from Antwerp, double sided with a double rose surmounted by a crown on one side and possibly a open hand which was the symbol of Antwerp on the other, 1580-1600 [OXON-E85B4B] and two jetons from the Nuremburg maker Hans Krauwinkel III produced 1586-1635. One has the motto "Gotes Sagen Macht Reich" - God's blessing brings riches. [OXON-E87021] Jetons were used as counters for accounting purposes on a chequer-board (hence Exchequer) much in the way beads are moved on an abacus.



An early complete crotal bell, 16th to mid 17th century indicates sheep farming in this field. [oxon-582779] After cleaning we were the first to hear the bell ring for more than 300 years! Various mounts, some silvered, some gilt are from leather belts and harnesses. They range in date from 1500-1700.



We found a Tudor style dress hook, 16th -17th century [OXON-E9FE54]. These were sewn onto skirts and allowed the wearer to secure the skirt to keep it out of the mud.



The hook is missing.

We found a lead weighted pewter candle holder base, 16th to 17th century [OXON-796E8] On its own it probably isn't enough to suggest habitation in the field, but we also found a coat hook with chamfered cube head and part of a small drawer handle and a spur buckle.



17th Century: More evidence of commerce starting with a James I Rose Ryal coin weight, stamped XXXs for 30 shillings, a lot of money in 1619-1700. [OXON-E84028] We found a few coins in the field scattered generally but with a concentration on one area where we found 7 Rose farthings which were minted 1625-1649. [OXON-E81DB2].



There are 2 Charles II farthings, 1672-78 and a William VI farthing dated 1700. When coins were in short supply tradesmen were licensed to mint tokens which could be exchanged for

goods or services. The field has given up three farthing tokens which have all been recorded under the PAS. From Rob White, Silk weaver in Oxford, 1657 [OXON-E8FF7D]; from the City of Oxford (Mayor), 1652-57 which carries the Arms of Oxford [OXON-E91E4A] and Humphry Bodicott, Vintner in Oxford, 1652-60 Humphry was the Landlord of the Three Tuns near All Souls College [OXON-E94593].

Finally one of two silver coins from the field is a much clipped and pierced Commonwealth penny, 1649-60.



Other artefacts from this period include 2 leather workers palm guards made of lead and possibly cast in oyster shells to curve into the palm. [OXON-57FB67][OXON-581285]



18th Century: Only three coins from this century are more likely to result from the random scatter of history than from commercial activity. There are 3 halfpennies, George II, 1745 and 1746 and George III, 1799.

We found a Georgian fob seal with two overlapping hearts representing Jesus and Mary with crosses symbolising willingness to suffer for the love of God and neighbour. The monogram might be "MM". "NOU" is the only legible lettering of the motto, could it be French? Artefacts include a pastry jigger and a clog clasp.



19th Century: A few lost coins have been found. A George III halfpenny, 1806; two George VI farthings, query 1826 and 1829; Queen Victoria farthings dated 1876 and 1895. There is also a French mystery, two thirds of a 10 centimes of Napoleon III, 1852-65, the cut edge has been sharpened and the side opposite the "blade" has been deformed by hammering. It may have been used as a tiny chisel?

20th Century: We found our second silver from the field, a George V sixpence, 1930.

Appendix:

The next collection of items have been discovered whilst recording the vast number of less significant pieces of metal that we have unearthed during our search of this field. They will be submitted to the Finds Liaison Officer in due course for more definitive identification and recording.



Other finds from the field:

We find a lot of lead -



We find iron and copper alloy slag, indicative of metal working in the past -



We find toys and thimbles -



We find formed metals -



We find buckles -



We find bits and pieces -



1. Bird ring
2. Toy train wheel
3. Strap guide
4. Cup hook
5. Base of coat hook
6. Another thimble
7. Part of ornate Georgian buckle
8. Georgian watch winders
9. Base of pewter vessel
10. Silver modern earring
11. Fragments of buckles
12. Fragment of Greek Key design
13. Folded hat badge, Army Ordinance Corps, shield design with three cannons

The rest include pewter, bronze, and manufactured modern bits, all of which provide clear encouraging signals to our metal detectors, signals that cannot be ignored.

We find buttons -



Lots of buttons (and another Georgian watch winder) -



Details of decorated buttons below -



The floral button at the top is 12mm diameter, a tiny masterpiece. The 21mm diameter livery button has crown over what appears to be a bull. Research would enable us to identify the rank from the crown and the family from the design. Many buttons from 19th century onwards have makers' names on the back, similar to that shown on the front, top right. These allow a keen collector to date them, with research – but life is too short!

Finally we have found a small collection of tacks, hobnails and copper alloy rivet fastenings.



No doubt we will return to the field again when the soil has been turned in the hope of finding more evidence of Wheatley's past. We are very grateful to farmer David Parsler for granting us permission to enjoy so many hours pursuing our hobby on this piece of his land.