



There's Gold in Them There Shires!

To paraphrase an axiom: "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach him to use a metal detector and he'll be RICH!"

Something like that, anyway. Terry Herbert, an up until now amateur metal-detector enthusiast, of Burntwood, England, found a treasure trove of gold buried in his friend's field on a farm near Lichfield in Staffordshire, England.

The local representatives of the Crown have examined pieces of the find and have declared it to officially be a "treasure" and therefore it officially belongs to the Queen. Fortunately for Herbert and his friend the farmer, the Queen is financially stable and has graciously renounced her claim on the hoard, and Herbert and his friend will share the treasure, which is estimated to be worth in excess of £1 million.



Despite his demonstrated prowess as a treasure hunter, Herbert is no archaeologist, and so an experienced team of archaeologists from the University of Birmingham and the Staffordshire County Council have uncovered and catalogued the various pieces of the treasure. Given the importance and monetary value of the find, however, the exact site of the discovery has been kept secret. Come to think of it, until that day in July when Herbert was out with his metal detector, the exact location of the hoard had been kept secret for over 1,300 years!

The hoard is the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold ever unearthed. The trove is said to amount to over 11 lbs. of gold and 2.9 lbs. of silver. Preliminary dating methods have estimated that the artifacts date to around the year 700 A.D. The particular reason why the gold was buried is, not remarkably, unknown. Early analysis by experts has established that the hoard probably was not associated with a burial, as there are no traces of buildings, graves, or other structures that would indicate such a connection.

As for what reason the former Anglo-Saxon owners might have had for dumping this fortune, Michael Lewis, the deputy head of Portable Antiquities Scheme at the renowned British Museum, speculates that two possibilities compete for the most likely reason for the burial. First, the gold may have been shoveled into the ground as an offering to a god (the Anglo-Saxons of the region were pagan in the eighth century); more likely, however, is that a treasure chest was buried and the owner forgot where he buried it. Lewis says, "From my 21st Century perspective, I find it bewildering that someone could shove so much metalwork into the ground as an offering. That seems like overkill."

Regardless of the true purpose for the burial of the treasure trove, the significance of the find indisputable. Leslie Webster, the former keeper of the Department of Prehistory at the British Museum reckons this discovery "is going to alter our perceptions of Anglo-Saxon England as radically, if not



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more so, as the Sutton Hoo discoveries.” The Sutton Hoo discovery to which Webster refers was found in 1939 near the town of Sutton Hoo, England, and was the previous record holder for the largest Anglo-Saxon treasure to be unearthed.

The items discovered in what has come to be called the “Staffordshire Hoard” include finely worked silver and gold sword adornments, including 66 gold sword hilt collars and gold hilt plates, some of which are inlaid with garnet. Apart from the martial component, the hoard contained three crosses, as well. An object found in the hoard of particular interest is a small strip of gold inscribed with a Latin phrase that translates as: “Rise up, Lord; may Your enemies be scattered and those who hate You be driven from Your face.” Based on the script used in that engraving, scholars believe that the items date from somewhere between the seventh and ninth centuries.

Anyone interested in seeing the Staffordshire Hoard may visit the British Museum where they will be on display as soon as scholars have completed their examinations of the pieces and the surrounding soil.

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