

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



We are very grateful to Colin Hart, who has over 30 years experience of using a metal detector. He came over from Exmouth with a large number of finds and with the help of Alan Hancock, who spoke to us on the subject at Christmas, spent the evening of our meeting, Thursday 19th April, showing us all sorts of objects he had found and explaining their significance. I am sure that everyone there had their favourites. Mine were the three bronze age palstave axes and a beautiful Romano-Celtic cat or horse emblem. Also extraordinary were two Medieval pilgrim flasks, made of lead, which were used to bring oil or holy water back from pilgrimage to the shrines of saints. Many of us were interested in the large number of coins of all periods, including a tiny beautiful gold 'vivara fanum' or gold coin from India, found in the River Otter, which used to be navigable and a trading route. There was also a coin which had been bent and exchanged as a love token, a not uncommon find as if there was a lover's tiff, then the coin might be thrown away! Very uncommon was the metal rosette from a piece of medieval armour, together with a shield from the Berkeley family, but in contrast, metal buttons and badges from later military uniforms are regularly found and Colin had a large number of them from the 19th and 20th centuries, all identifiable from the inscriptions. His most common finds are buckles from horse harnesses, frequently lost on the land when working. Shoe buckles, seal matrices, livery buttons of all kinds, rings, clasps and fasteners, case shot, a thimble, a Georgian pipe tamper were just some of the many other objects we looked at. We finished with three mystery objects which we could not identify, but which turned out to be a ladies skirt lifter, a goffering iron and the top of a drinking stein!

Colin pointed out that his motivation was the interest of discovering the history of the objects he found, and not the gain. Whereas 'nighthawkers' illegally trespass to try to find valuable things and give metal detecting a bad name, a proper detector gains a permit and always has permission to search on the land. For Colin, it is the excitement of the discovery and the research to find out what the object is and what it was used for and how it could have come to be there. When he started, the detectors could search the ground to a depth of 2 inches or so, but now they can find things at a depth of 18 inches.

As a 'Honiton boy', Colin Hart puts a case of his discoveries in the Museum there every year, and I shall make sure I look for it when I visit.

NEXT MEETINGS

May 10th

Phillipe Planel 'Using Tithe maps in Local History'

June 9th

A Saturday afternoon outing to Poltimore House and Gardens with tea and cake. Details next month.

Sept 20th

John Allen the Cathedral archaeologist will speak on 'The Building of the Bishop's Throne and

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Norton, Newton St Cyres'. He will tell us how the area around Norton (a little to the north east of the Beer Engine) was important in the building of the Cathedral. This meeting will be held in the big hall and groups from other villages will also be very welcome.

All meetings are on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm. Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £1.50 which includes tea and biscuits.