

# Wymeswold Field Walking Survey Report

Report prepared February 1993 by

**Bob Trubshaw**

2 Cross Hill Close, Wymeswold,

Loughborough, LE12 6UJ

This PDF version of the report was prepared March 2017. No editorial changes have been made. However the original font used is no longer accessible. As a result of using a different font the pagination has shifted slightly compared to the 1993 printed edition.

An appendix of relevant photographs has been added to this addition. There are no other changes.

# Summary

The previously-inexperienced field walking team, with the support of Peter Liddle, systematically surveyed approximately 17% of the arable fields in the parish of Wymeswold (c.7% total area of parish) using a 10 x 30m traverse and stint method. The areas chosen for walking were generally in close proximity to notable Roman or Anglo-Saxon finds by metal detector users. However, the Roman town of Vernemetum, in the extreme north-east of the parish, has not so far been investigated.

One previously-unknown Romano-British settlement was discovered with third century pottery and what may be fragments of opus signinum flooring. The occasional sherd of grey ware was found in nearly half the other fields walked. While not strictly field walking, a watching brief on a building site within the present village revealed an iron age/early Roman site which was subsequently excavated by Leicestershire Museums staff.

Despite previous finds of high status Anglo-Saxon metal jewellery and the close proximity of an early Anglo-Saxon church, the field walking activities failed to find more than 3 sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery; the possible reasons for this are discussed.

Early medieval pottery (typically Nottingham ware) was found in about one-half of the fields and late medieval pottery (with midland purple strongly represented) in two-thirds of the fields. With the exception of one field which might contain medieval settlement, the distribution suggests either individual objects or 'manuring scatter'.

Post-medieval pottery was abundant (within living memory Nottingham night soil was applied to the fields) and was not normally collected and only exceptional items are reported here.

Interestingly, no flint artifacts or debitage have been collected, although the prevailing boulder clay contains a substantial amount of flint and chert which makes identification of smaller man-made artifacts difficult.

Apart from the overt benefits of improving the knowledge of the often-overlooked archaeology of the region, field walking has provided the team with a rewarding opportunity to be involved in the investigation of their own area. The efforts of Leicestershire Museums, particularly Peter Liddle, in promoting such 'community archaeology' are gratefully acknowledged.

However, in comparison to the time involved, field walking has failed to offer an effective method of identifying new Romano-British settlements, or for making any useful assessment of iron age or Anglo-Saxon settlement. Further actions are proposed, but closer liaison with the prolific activities of metal detector users would appear to be more desirable than walking fields not associated with known finds.

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# Acknowledgements

Everything which is reported here is, to a greater or lesser extent, a result of the enthusiasm of Peter Liddle of Leicestershire Museums. Apart from giving up several evenings to assist with identification of finds, his more general advice has been freely available whenever sought. Without exception the landowners have been not only generous in allowing access to their fields but also taken an interest in the activities and finds. Assistance from various members of the Loughborough Coin and Search Society has also been most helpful.

The Wymeswold Field Walking team offers grateful thanks to all these people.



# Description of Wymeswold parish

Wymeswold lies in a shallow valley in the gently rolling area straddling the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border, known as the Wolds. The parish ranges from nearly 120m OD in the north-east to about 62m in the west where the River Mantle runs.

The northern boundary of the parish forms the county boundary with Nottinghamshire. The Fosse Way (A46) now defines the eastern extent, although prior to the boundary changes in 1974 the parish was slightly smaller, as the eastern edge was defined by the Kingston brook. There is no specific geographical feature which defines the southern boundary, which runs one or two fields north of the Burton on the Wolds to Six Hills road. The western boundary also is not marked by any geographical features.

The soils are heavy boulder clay with pockets of sand and gravel in the village and along the course of the Mantle. Beneath this is a bed of limestone of variable thickness which has been used in the making of plinths for some of the older houses in the village. As might be expected, the boulder clay contains a high proportion of pebbles of varying types. The presence of flint and chert, especially after being hit and fragmented by the plough, had direct implications for field walking activities. Other rock types presented no significant difficulties.

The Mantle, grandly titled a river, is little more than a brook with its origin to the south east of the parish, close to Six Hills. Although subject to flash flooding, the course normally dries up in summer until it meets the copious output of the Stockwell. This spring emerges at the side of the churchyard in the village, although it is now culverted until it meets the Mantle towards Hoton Road.

The total area of the current parish is close to 4,000 acres. Approximately 57% area of parish is under pasture or developed, leaving 43% which was ploughed at least once during the period of the survey. Of this 43% we were able to

systematically field walk approximately 17% (i.e. 7% of the total area of the parish); a number of other fields were also less-systematically inspected.

## Existing archaeological information

No prior field walking activity had taken place in Wymeswold or in any of the surrounding parishes. However, metal detector users had regularly covered most of the fields in the parish and a substantial number of their finds had been brought to Leicestershire Museums in recent years.

A copy of the Sites and Monuments Records for the parish was kindly supplied by Bob Jarrett of Leicestershire Museums. This confirms that there are no standing earthworks of pre-medieval age. Furthermore, the soils are unsuitable for crop mark formation (and the parish is within controlled air space for East Midlands Airport, making aerial photography difficult to arrange).

The only evidence for pre-Roman activity was a flint scraper fragment of indeterminate age, an early bronze age flint arrowhead and a late bronze age axe, all found to the west of the present village. It is reasonable to suppose that the Fosse Way was a major trading route before the Romans, as it follows a clearly-defined ridge. Just to the south-east of the parish the Fosse crosses the so-called 'Salt Way' which is also considered to be a probable pre-Roman trade route.

Further north on the Fosse Way, at what is now the north-east of the parish, is the site of the Roman town of Vernemetum. The name has been translated as 'Great (or Especially) Sacred Grove' and generally supposed to denote a major pre-Roman sacred site. The original course of the Fosse Way is slightly to the west of the present dual carriageway and has been detected by Peter Liddle.

Vernemetum presumably had a significant impact on the surrounding farming economy. However,

no evidence of brick or tile 'villas' has been reported in any of the surrounding parishes (although it is worth noting that pasture predominates in most of the surrounding district; Wymeswold is exceptional in having nearly half the fields regularly ploughed). On the basis of evidence elsewhere in the county, it would be reasonable to expect isolated mud-and-thatch farmsteads from iron age to mid-Saxon times.

Two hoards of Roman coins have been discovered by metal detector users, with another just to the north of the present parish. The significance of these for locating settlements is, of course, doubtful, but field walking activities did concentrate on surrounding fields.

According to eighteenth century antiquarians, there were local tales of the ruins of a Saxon church to the south of the Vernemetum site. Discoveries by metal detector users of late Saxon metalwork (including eleven or more strap ends; over half the total for the county) appear to confirm the existence of a church burial yard here. A Frankish brooch and a Kentish style disc brooch have also been recovered from this area. The otherwise fairly regular spacing of Saxon minster churches leaves a gap in the northern part of the county. In the absence of any other candidates, this Saxon church may be such a minster site - although this suggestion would be very difficult to prove. To the north-east of the Vernemetum site, just outside the parish, two Saxon burial mounds were excavated during the construction of the interchange bridge. Note, however, that the Vernemetum site or adjoining fields have, so far, not been field walked.

In the earliest recorded versions of the name, Wymeswold appears as 'Wymund's wald', which may indicate a connection with 'Wymund's ham' (Wymondham) in the east of the county.

Where the south-east of the parish touches the Fosse Way is a level plateau of land now known as Six Hills, although shown on early maps as Segs (or Seggs) Hill [N.B. singular]. Indeed, pre-1974, no less than eight parishes formed a star-like pattern, each with a finger of land reaching towards Six Hills (although the north-west segment was a small area of extra-parochial land). Six Hills marks the crossing of the Salt Way with the Fosse and, in recent centuries at least, would appear to have been a stopping place for drovers

(cf. the Durham Ox hotel which now occupies the site).

This clearly-planned land division strongly suggests that at the time of parish formation (?mid Saxon period) Six Hills was seen as a 'central place' such as a wapentake or hundred moot. There is an antiquarian report of a tumulus at Six Hills, but no evidence for this has ever been forthcoming. Tantalisingly, a known medieval moot site and Anglo-Saxon burial mound existed in what is now the centre of Milton Keynes, known as the Secklow. Earliest spellings give the alternative Seggs Low, which comes close to the Seggs Hill origin of Six Hills, especially if there was a burial mound there.

The adjoining parish of Burton on the Wolds (also reaching out to Six Hills) is almost certainly a *burgh tun* i.e. military camp created at the onset of the Danish invasions to protect a major Anglo-Saxon site. This adds a further suggestion (albeit of a very tentative nature) of 'something important' happening in the vicinity in the mid-Saxon period.

More significantly, a mid-Saxon silver-gilt disc-headed pin and a gilt-bronze 'plate' brooch whose quality makes them of national importance together with other bronze brooches have been discovered in a small area to the east of the village (and this site formed the focus of extensive field walking activity). It is reasonable to suppose that these high-status artifacts were associated with royal burials.

Although very few Saxon coins have been found in Leicestershire, at least five have been found in Wymeswold parish. The design suggests trading links with East Anglia at this time.

Three burials, one with a knife, were excavated to the west of the village and tentatively dated as Anglo-Saxon.

Wymeswold parish church is sited on a raised mound, with the Stockwell issuing from the south-west side. The combination of medieval church and spring with a mound may infer a pre-Christian sacred site. A small boulder can still be seen to the north-east of the churchyard wall. Until earlier this century this was situated closer to the main road and stood about twice its present height. It just may have served as a boundary marker or even 'moot' site (as for

instance with the now-lost Council Stone at Thringstone and the Blue Stone at Rearsby which is well-documented as a meeting place). Whatever the truth of these speculations, the church does occupy a central position in the village and suggests that the village has remained fairly 'fixed' since its original formation.

The SMR contains a substantial number of finds of metal coins and jewellery which have been reported by metal detector users. To what extent this represents all such finds is debatable, not least because some local detector users are based in Nottinghamshire and ask Nottingham Museum staff to identify finds. General suspicions that detector users do not always notify museums of finds must be offset by the fact that several of the most active (and, on the basis of information provided to Leicestershire Museums, most successful) detector users in this area do report all significant finds.

It would be reasonable to suppose that within the present parish there has been significant activity in the immediate pre-Roman period (a 'Great Sacred Grove'), throughout the Roman period (Fosse Way and Vernemetum town), the pagan Anglo-Saxon period (high status burials and known burial mounds) and the christian Saxon period (church or ?minster; parish 'planning' around Six Hills focus), followed by the formation of the present village.

This list of more-or-less tangible evidence of pre-twelfth century activity set expectations for some dramatic discoveries by field walking. However, as this report will detail, evidence for settlements during these periods recovered by field walking activities was fairly meagre. This is approached in more detail in the Discussion section.

## Planning of survey

The above information (including every SMR entry) was plotted onto maps of the parish and combined with knowledge of the known arable areas. As will be seen from Fig 1, the distribution of permanent and semi-permanent pasture is far from random.

Although the high-status Anglo-Saxon jewellery was recovered from a field under permanent pasture, the surrounding fields are regularly

ploughed. This region, to the east of the village, formed a 'priority area' for field walking activities. Only the fields to the north of the find-spot remain unwalked. Within the fields in the eastern part of this field walking activity was the location of a Roman coin hoard.

A second area, in the vicinity of the three ?Anglo-Saxon burials found at Hillside farm, was also intensively investigated. This region also includes the location of a Roman coin hoard.

Other fields were walked outside the priority areas. These typically result from activities later in the season, when crop growth prevented access to unwalked 'priority area' fields, but help to 'fill the gaps' in what would otherwise be a restricted sample of the parish.

At one stage, again late in the season, a non-systematic inspection was made of fields away from the priority areas. This involved nothing more than four or six traverses of each field and would, at best, have revealed only major scatters of Roman or medieval pottery. These cursory inspections revealed only small quantities of post-medieval pottery and no attempt has been made subsequently to walk these fields more systematically.

As a result of all these factors, systematic field walking has mostly been in the western half of the parish, centring on the present village.

## Method

Systematic field walking was based on traverses at 10 metre spacing (with 30 metre 'stints') and each person inspected a path with a nominal width of two metres. Theoretically, 20% of the field surface was examined.

The field walking team comprised of individuals, mostly drawn from the Wolds Historical Organisation, with no previous experience and little familiarity with the types of pottery or other artifacts of greatest interest. Anyone volunteering to take part was welcomed and 'training' was limited a brief description of the methodology and examination of a few typical sherds (although three or four of the team did attend Leicestershire Museums' training day for field walkers). It should be emphasised that examples

of small items of worked flint were not available for such 'on-the-job-training' and this may have resulted in such items being overlooked among the fragments of plough-damaged flint and chert present throughout the boulder clay.

As post-medieval pottery was ubiquitous (probably from manuring scatter and distribution of Nottingham's night soil) this was not normally collected and, with a few notable exceptions, has not been recorded in this report.

Efforts were made to collect glass which was not obviously post-medieval and also slag; in one instance possible opus signinum was collected. Iron and bone was also occasionally present, but never in contexts which suggested any great age.

Field walking usually took place on alternate Sunday mornings from September to March. Only severe adverse weather (heavy rain or residual hoar frost) resulted in activities being postponed. As a result, a number of fields were walked with bright oblique sunlight, which does not help recognition of smaller fragments of the coarser types of pottery.

Without exception, fields were selected which had received heavy rain since last being ploughed, harrowed or seeded, in the expectation that this would remove surface dust and make recognition of artifacts more reliable. In general, fields were not walked after the crop had sprouted. This was mostly because the clayey soils remain very sticky for most of the winter, risking damage to the crop from walking. Only in the exceptional instances when soils had dried out sufficiently could we walk on sprouted crop.

Any finds were kept in polythene bags (marked with traverse and stint and date of collection), washed and then marked in ink with grid reference, traverse and stint. At the time of writing all sherds remain in the possession of the author. Towards the end of each season Leicestershire Museums staff (in practice, Peter Liddle) assisted with preliminary identification. The results of these preliminary identifications were prepared in rough form.

Unfortunately no copies of these rough notes

were made and the originals were subsequently lost. At a much later date (early 1993) the notes were re-compiled to form the basis of this report. With the exception of some details of when the field walking took place and a guide to the traverse and stint layout, little information appears to be lost; more accurately, the information which was to hand seemed to fit together with few ambiguities. Clearly, however, it would have been preferable to have prepared this report when the events were still clearly remembered.

Although Peter Liddle's ability to identify and date pottery greatly exceeded that of any members of the team, there remain a number of instances where minor finds were ambiguous. The identification of sherds which forms the basis of the detailed results of this report should be considered provisional. However, the overall impressions and conclusions would almost certainly still be valid.

## Abbreviations used in reports

In the following reports each field is identified by a six-figure OS grid reference and, where known, the field name.

The traverse is abbreviated to a number; the stint to a letter (e.g. '35G' would denote 35th traverse, stint G.) The sketch maps give details of traverse and stint identification.

Century is abbreviated to 'C' (e.g. 'C3' for third century AD)

The following abbreviations are used for dating pottery:

IAP - Iron age pottery

RBP - Romano-British pottery

ASP - Anglo-Saxon pottery

EMP - early medieval pottery (approx. C12-C14)

LMP - late medieval pottery (approx. C15-C16)

PMP - post-medieval pottery (C17 to present)



The total weight of each of these categories of pottery is given, for comparative purposes.

## Records of fields walked

### SK598239:

reference number 1 on fig 2

Walked 12th November 1989 by Ian Thorpe, Colin Lines and Bob Trubshaw.

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: sunny

Soil: ploughed, damp

24 traverses, C stints

Three ?Anglo-Saxon burials previously discovered when erecting nearby barn.

2A 1 x Slag (undated)

2A 1 x EMP

2A 1 x LMP

3A 2 x EMP

3A 4 x LMP

4B 1 x RBP

4B 1 x EMP

6A 1 x LMP

17A 1 x LMP

1B 2 x LMP

4B 1 x LMP (?Nottingham Ware - traces of green glaze on buff body)

4B 1 x RBP (foot fragment with red colour coat)

5B 1 x LMP

11B 1 x LMP

11B 1 x LMP (Midland Purple)

15B 2 x LMP

18B 1 x LMP

21B 1 x LMP

21B 1 x LMP (Midland Purple)

24B 1 x Slag (undated)

5D 1 x LMP

50g RBP

45g EMP total

325g LMP total

160g slag total

### SK598242:

reference number 2 on fig 2

Walked 16/9/90 by Peter Shaw, Ian Thorpe and Bob Trubshaw.

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: sunny

Soil: dry; slightly dusty

15 traverses; F stints

Late bronze age axe reported in this area by metal detector user.

1 x RBP (sherd since lost)

Copious PMP (not collected)

### SK601241:

reference number 3 onfig 2

Walked 10/12/89 & 14/1/90 by Ann Deeley, Dave Marshall, Colin Lines, Ian Thorpe and Bob Trubshaw

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: Misty; cloudy

Soil: damp

12 traverses E stints. Pond at B11.

10A 1x Slag (undated)

17A 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

2B 1 x LMP

3C 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

4C 1 x LMP

17C 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

20C 1 x RBP (grey ware foot fragment)

20C 1 X emp (Nottingham ware)

21C 1 x LMP (Midland purple foot fragment)

8D 1 x LMP

11D 1 x LMP

cont./...

22E 1 x LMP (Midland purple rim fragment)

20g RBP total

30g EMP

225g LMP total

### **SK603243:**

reference number 4 on fig 2

Walked 1/10/89 & 15/10/89 by Ian Thorpe, Richard Hood, David Marshall, Bob Trubshaw.

Also walked late 9/89 by Bob Trubshaw. Two sherds of either IAP or ASP recovered c.2E to 5E; most unfortunately these were lost before being professionally identified.

Rewalked 6/10/91 by Pat Bradford and Bob Trubshaw in dry soil conditions after lifting of potato crop - no finds.

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: cloudy

Soil: dry ploughed-in stubble.

Hedge removed 16E - 33E approx. 4 weeks before.

33 traverses G stints. Pond at 1C.

Roman coin hoard previously found by hedge 16G-20G (?SK60152415). Metal detector users previously reported RBP in this field.

21A 1 x IAP or ASP

21A 1 x RBP (grey ware)

21A 1 x LMP (Midland purple ?spout fragment)

23A 1 x LMP

10B 1 x LMP (C16 Midland purple complete foot 60mm dia.)

11B 1 x LMP

30B 1 x EMP (?Nottingham ware - trace of green glaze)

10C 1 x LMP (C16 Midland purple handle)

1D 2 x LMP

10D 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

11D 1 x LMP

12D 1 x LMP

14D 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

17D 1 x RBP (?colour coat)

14E 1 x LMP

18E 1 x LMP

24E 1 X LMP

30g IAP or ASP total (but see note above re lost sherds)

30g RBP total

20g EMP

240g LMP & ?LMP

### **SK604245:**

reference number 5 on fig 2

Details lost

3A 1 x LMP

1B 1 x LMP

3B 1 x LMP

9B 1 x LMP

21C 1 x LMP

1D 1 x LMP

9D 1 x RBP

10C 1 x RBP

10D 1 x RBP

8E 1 x LMP

20g RBP total

80g LMP total

### **SK602228:**

reference number 6 on fig 2

Walked 23/2/90 & 11/3/90 by Joan Shaw, Ian Thorpe, Peter Shaw, David Marshall, Bob Trubshaw

Owner: R. Hubbard

Conditions: cloudy, windy and cold

Soil: damp ploughed

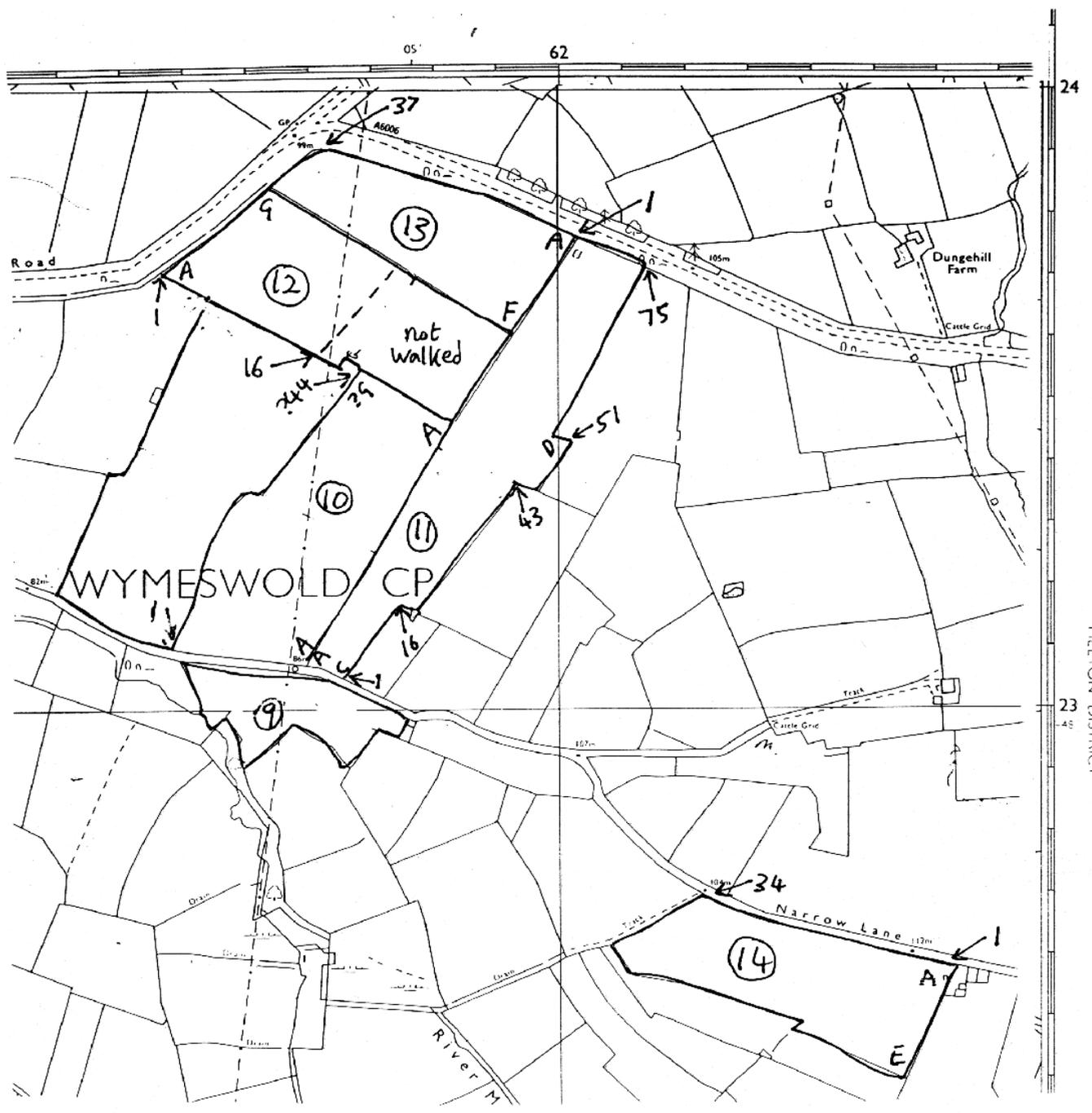


Fig 3

27 traverses E stints

Subsequently informed that substantial pieces of iron age pottery had been found by metal detector user previous autumn (immediately after ploughing) in small group approx. 3B to 5C on a small hump in the field. Just possibly this is a ploughed out barrow (it is on the crest of the ridge overlooking the valley created by River Mantle).

cont./...

19B 1 x EMP (?Nottingham ware C13)

19E 1 x EMP (?Nottingham ware C13)

40g EMP total

### **SK609227:**

reference number 7 on fig 2

Details lost (second field walked by group, during first day's activities).

1A 1 x LMP

2A 1 x LMP

7A 1 x LMP

4B 2 x LMP

5B 1 x RBP (Rim fragment)

5D 1 x LMP

8D 1 x LMP

11D 1 x LMP

10E 1 x LMP

8H 1 x LMP

20g RBP total

215g LMP total

### **SK610230:**

reference number 8 on fig 2

Details lost (this was the first field walked by the group).

6E 1 x LMP

30g LMP total

### **SK616230:**

reference number 9 on fig 3

Walked 22/3/88 (when hedge removed) and early autumn 1992 (when whole field ploughed following removal of turf) by Bob Trubshaw.

Owner: John Clarke

Conditions: cloudy

Soil: wet

Hedge removal 100% inspection.

Ploughing inspected by unmeasured traverse and stint.

Before ploughing field showed clear ridge and furrow.

No finds except some PMP.

### **SK616233:**

reference number 10 on fig 3

Details lost but this was walked by a larger than usual team, many of whom had no previous experience. Although recovery of Romano-British and medieval pottery was no doubt fairly good, it is likely that if iron age or (more possibly) Anglo-Saxon pottery was present, it would have been overlooked. Clearly, this field deserves further attention.

Owner: Phillip Beeby

Conditions: sunny

Soil: dry ploughed

At least 44 traverses and H stints.

3A 1 x LMP

5A 1 x EMP

5A 1 x Slag (undated)

6A 1 x EMP

7A 1 x EMP

11A 1 x LMP

11A 1 x PMP (Late Cistercian C17/C18)

18A 1 x PMP (C16/C17)

20A 1 x glass (see note)

21A 1 x EMP

21A 1 x PMP (C16/C17)

28A 1 x RBP (grey ware)

35A 1 x RBP (grey ware)	9D 1 x LMP
35A 1 x LMP	10D 1 x RBP
38A 3 x RBP (grey ware)	11D 1 x EMP
38A 1 x RBP (mortaria rim fragment)	20D 1 x LMP
38A 1 x LMP	20D 1 x glass (see note)
2B 1 x glass (see note)	23D 1 x RBP (grey ware)
6B 1 x LMP (Midland purple handle 'root')	34D 1 x RBP (grey ware)
7B 1 x EMP	44D 1 x glass (see note)
8B 2 x EMP	6E 1 x EMP (rim fragment)
9B 2 x LMP	13E 1 x LMP (Midland purple)
10B 1 x LMP	15E 2 x LMP
38B 1 x ?whetstone (??Roman)	15E 1 x glass (see note)
38B 4 x RBP (grey ware)	26E 1 x LMP
1C 1 x PMP (C16/C17)	38E 1 x RBP (? Nene Valley colour coat; C3)
4C 1 x EMP (?Nottingham ware - green glaze on buff body; substantial handle)	41E 1 x RBP (grey ware)
5C 1 x EMP (Nottingham ware c.1300)	43E 1 x RBP (grey ware)
5C 1 x EMP	2F 1 x EMP (Nottingham ware c.1300, base segment)
8C 1 x EMP	14F 1 x LMP
8C 2 x PMP (clay pipe bowl and stem fragment)	15F 1 x LMP
9C 1 x RBP (grey ware)	17F 1 x LMP
10C 1 x LMP	31F 1 x LMP
18C 1 x EMP	15G 1 x EMP
18C 1 x LMP	15G 1 x LMP
20C 1 x RBP (mortaria foot fragment)	166 1 x LMP
23C 1 x RBP (grey ware)	19G 1 x EMP
23C 1 x RBP (mortaria rim fragment)	19G 1 x LMP
30C 2 x RBP (grey ware rim fragments)	21G 2 x RBP (grey ware)
30C 1 x RBP (grey ware)	25G 1 x PMP (C16/C17)
32C 1 x LMP	32G 1 x LMP (Midland purple)
35C 1 x RBP (Nene Valley colour coat rim fragment; C3)	33G 1 x LMP
35C 2 x RBP (grey ware rim fragments)	35G 1 x LMP (Midland purple handle fragment)
42C 1 x RBP (grey ware rim fragment)	38G 1 x RBP (grey ware)
1D 1 x EMP	41G 1 x LMP
5D 1 x EMP	11H 1 x PMP (clay pipe bowl)
	21H 1 x PMP (C16/C17)

Glass fragments: Undated. Green with thick, opaque patina. 4 to 9 mm thick. Appear to be fragments of bases and ?shoulders.

750g ?opus sig. from various traverse and stints (more not collected)

565g RBP total

305g EMP total

175g LMP (C15/C16)

320g LMP other

85g PMP (C16/C17)

85g PMP (clay pipe fragments)

(1200g other PMP not shown on list; substantial quantity other PMP not collected)

415g Glass total.

### **SK617235:**

reference number 11 on fig 3

Field name: Brakelands

Walked 18/9/89; 2/10/89; 16/10/89 by David Marshall, Peter Shaw, Joan Shaw, Rachel Flynn, Ian Flynn, Richard Hood, Sonia Bate, Claire M., Ian Thorpe, Rob Midwinter, Bob Trubshaw.

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: sunny or thin cloud

Soil: dry

75 traverses D stints

2A 1 x LMP

9A 1 x Slag (undated)

14A 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

14A 1 x Slag (undated - fragment of distinct cylindrical tube)

21A 1 x Slag (undated)

24A 1 x ?PMP

24A 1 x Slag (undated)

25A 1 x RBP

25A 1 x ?EMP (??Nottingham ware but glaze lost)

56A 1 x ?PMP

64A 1 x LMP

12B 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

13B 1 x ?LMP

35B 1 x Slag (undated)

43B 1 x EMP (?Nottingham ware - traces of green glaze)

21C 1 x Slag (undated)

31C 1 x LMP

43C 1 x LMP

48C 1 x EMP (??Nottingham ware but glaze lost)

50D & 51D lots bricks and mortar

50g EMP & ?EMP total

100g LMP total

20g ?PMP total

145g Slag total

### **SK616236:**

reference number 12 on fig 3

Field names: Wardle and Hardacre

Walked 30/10/88 & 13/11/88 by Peter Shaw, David Marshall, Ian Thorpe, Joan Shaw, Bob Trubshaw

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: oblique bright sunlight

Soil: not recorded (seeded but not sprouted)

16 traverses G stints (N.B. eastern part of Hardacre not completed).

4B 1 x ?EMP/?LMP

11B 1 x LMP (rim fragment)

2D 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

4F 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

7G 1 x LMP

110g LMP & ?LMP total

### **SK618237:**

reference number 13 on fig 3

Field name: Turnpost

Walked 11/12/88 & 8/1/89 by Colin Lines, Ian Thorpe, Joan Shaw, Peter Shaw, Richard Hood,

Ann Deeley, Dave Marshall, Bob Trubshaw

Owner: Harry Mills

Conditions: cloudy

Soil: damp

37 traverses F stints

1A 1 x EMP

3A 1 x LMP (Midland purple rim fragment)

11A 1 x LMP

15A 1 x ?EMP

15A 1 x LMP (Midland purple rim fragment)

24A 1 x LMP (Midland purple rim fragment)

4B 1 x LMP (handle fragment)

8B 1 x LMP

11A x LMP

11B 1 x LMP

cont./...

31B 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

14C 1 x EMP

4D 2 x EMP

3F 1 x LMP (Midland purple)

70g EMP & ?EMP total

190g LMP total

### **SK634226:**

reference number 14 on fig 3

Walked 4/11/90 by David Marshall; Gilbert Sharma; Isobel Foster and Bob Trubshaw.

Owner: P. Beeby

Conditions: sunny

Soil: wet, drilled for seed

16 traverses; E stints

No finds.

### **SK606235**

reference number 15 on fig 3

Roman Gardens site

Walked 24/2/90 by Bob Trubshaw

Owner: Mendwest Homes

Conditions: cloudy

Soil: bulldozed in top soil piles pending excavation of footings.

Non-systematic 100% inspection followed by excavation by Leicestershire Museums.

10 sherds RBP (C1 grey ware and colour coat plus ?C2/C3 ?Derbyshire ware and small fragment of grey ware cheese press) were collected from the top soil dump. 100g total. Subsequently, the base of an upturned iron age pot was disturbed by earth moving equipment.

At the stage Leicestershire Museums staff visited the site and, with the kind co-operation of Mendwest Homes, spent three days excavating what proved to be a late iron age ditch and an intersecting early Romano-British ditch. These suggest a settlement close by, perhaps under the present Wymeswold Hall. The upturned iron age pot was recovered almost complete and subsequently reconstructed by the Museum. Details of this excavation have been reported separately by Richard Knox.

## **Additional activities**

After several seasons of field walking with no significant finds team moral was at a low ebb. In an attempt to identify fields which would produce 'something exciting', non-systematic inspection was made of two areas (c.612222 and c.630227). This involved nothing more than four or six traverses of each field and would, at best, have revealed only major scatters of Roman or medieval pottery. These cursory inspections revealed only small quantities of post-medieval pottery and no attempt has been made subsequently to walk these fields more systematically.

## **Summary of activities**

Of the 43% of the parish which was ploughed at least once during the period of field walking, approximately 17% was systematically field walked (i.e. approximately 7% of the total area of the parish); a number of other fields were also less-systematically inspected. The known major

Roman site of Vernemetum has not, so far, been investigated.

One previously-unrecorded Romano-British settlement was discovered (field reference 10 on fig 2, SK616233). This field also contained exceptionally high quantities of EMP, LMP and PMP, which may imply that this site was settled (continuously or otherwise) over an exceptionally lengthy period. Interestingly, the fields to the east and north did not produce any RBP and only very small quantities of EMP and LMP.

A watching brief by members of the team on a building site near the edge of the present village also revealed RBP. Excavations by Leicestershire Museums revealed two ditches, containing late iron age and C1 Romano-British pottery, plus a metal Roman brooch. This is probably associated with a settlement just outside the area of development, perhaps under the present Wymeswold Hall.

With these exceptions pre-C15 pottery was never found in any quantity to suggest settlement. In summary, ignoring the two occupations sites (references 10 and 15), this leaves 13 fields, of which 6 contained one to three sherds of RBP; 6 contained EMP and 9 contained LMP.

As previously noted, the presence of natural flint and chert together with the inexperience of the team, may account in part for the non-collection of flint material.

Lack of experience, perhaps combined with bright sunlight, may also account for the poor recovery of IAP and ASP - three sherds in total! Field reference 4 may contain some Anglo-Saxon, or perhaps iron age, activity, although it is frustrating to note that the main recovery was from a non-systematic inspection, whereas two subsequent and systematic surveys revealed no more sherds of this period.

The attempts at field walking in Wymeswold have, so far, failed to identify any settlement associated with the high status Anglo-Saxon activities, or even as many Romano-British or late iron age settlements as might be anticipated by the proximity of Vernemetum.

## Discussion

The apparent contradiction between the high expectations for observing Roman and Anglo-Saxon activities and the poor finds deserves further discussion.

Although, initially at least, the team were very enthusiastic this must be countered by their lack of experience. Man-made flint and coarse hand-made pottery (e.g. IAP and ASP) are not the easiest of objects to recognise in boulder clays. The generally small quantities of RBP (outside the clearly defined settlements) is, however, most probably a real reflection of the distribution in the fields walked.

Although not previously emphasised, the activities of metal detector users in Wymeswold is at a high level. Few, if any, ploughed fields will escape the attention of at least one user in any season, and the pasture fields are also regularly investigated. By the time field reference 9 was walked some four or five weeks after ploughing the farmer reported to me that - to his knowledge - at least 14 metal detector users had been over the field. This may be exceptional, as this field had not been ploughed for many years, but is indicative of the numbers of users active.

Regrettably, it cannot be assumed that all metal detector users will report interesting finds to a local museum. Some, it is known, will ask Nottingham Museum staff for identification of material found in Wymeswold, which may mean that the Leicestershire Museums SMR is less complete than might otherwise be the case. But, nevertheless, many finds are being reported to the museum (and, in some instances, to the author). This includes RBP and, in at least one recent instance, IAP.

On the basis of discussions with a number of metal detector users it seems very unlikely that any major scatters of RBP remain 'undiscovered' in Wymeswold, at least in fields which are regularly ploughed. This may seem surprising, given the usual 'isolated scatter' of Romano-British settlements at about 1.0 to 1.5 km distances which has been observed in the Medbourne region, combined with the close proximity of Vernemetum. If this impression is correct, then it implies that this area of the Wolds was being farmed in a different way to the Welland valley.

The poor durability of IAP and ASP, together with the difficulties of recognition in less-than-ideal weather conditions, means that this is always recovered in far smaller quantities than, say, RBP. The inexperience of the team must further reduce the recovery rate. To what extent such coarse pottery is rapidly destroyed by frost action has not been clearly established but it is perhaps worth noting that the majority of field walking took place after the onset of heavy frosts.

The situation concerning field reference 6 is perhaps worth repeating again. A metal detector user found (and removed) several fairly substantial pieces of IAP from a small area, soon after it was ploughed (probably before any hard frosts). When this area was walked at the end of the following February no traces of IAP were noted. Perhaps the tight grouping of sherds fell between traverses; perhaps there was only one vessel (associated with a burial?) and all evidence was removed by the detector user; perhaps a winter of frost action had removed any remaining IAP on the surface; perhaps the cold and windy conditions were not conducive to good observation.

In a similar manner, the 'chance' discovery of two IAP or ASP sherds in field reference 4 during a preliminary and non-systematic inspection was not followed by further finds of such pottery when systematic field walking took place a week or so later, or when the field was rewalked several seasons later.

The finds by metal detector users of Anglo-Saxon coins and jewellery, together with other 'secondary' evidence, leave little doubt that Wymeswold was of importance in this period. Clearly, the absence of evidence for IAP and ASP in the field walking record provides no usable information about the presence or absence of activity during this period.

The successful discovery of a Romano-British settlement in field reference 10 was an early success. This was followed by two full season's activity in which nothing of any importance was found. While there is some value in establishing that RBP pottery is absent from specific fields this was insufficient to retain the enthusiasm of group members. At the same time, increasingly good contacts with various metal detector users led to the opinion already expressed, i.e. that there

were no more major RBP scatters in regularly ploughed fields.

In comparison to the time involved, field walking by a wholly amateur group in Wymeswold has failed to offer an effective method of identifying new Romano-British settlements, or for making any useful assessment of iron age or Anglo-Saxon settlement. With the exception of the following remarks, no regular programme of systematic field walking is planned.

One final topic for discussion is the initial choice of 10 x 30m traverse and stint. Clearly, if 20 x 60m had been adopted twice as many fields should (in theory) have been covered for the same time. Although this would have allowed the major RBP distribution to have been identified, the chances of finding more thinly-distributed scatters (especially IAP and ASP) would have reduced still further, especially considering the relative inexperience of at least some of the team walking any particular field.

While it is essential to stick with a sampling method - either 10 x 30m or 20 x 60m (otherwise meaningful comparisons are difficult or impossible) - in retrospect it would seem that the identification of new sites would have been no less successful with a 20 x 60m survey. Because twice as much could have been achieved for the same time, the loss of 'detail' (thinly distributed scatters) would have been offset by the larger sample of fields. The psychological benefit of reducing the time to check an 'empty' field would, in all probability, have been a big bonus to team enthusiasm. With 20:20 hindsight the team may well have adopted a 20 x 60m survey method.

## Further actions

Continuing contact with as many metal detector users as possible is a high priority, as their activities are more likely to reveal and report pottery scatters (as well as metal artifacts) than the resumption of intensive field walking activity.

Fields which are normally pasture but ploughed will, of course, receive prompt attention. Should any building take place, particularly in the present village, then team members will attempt to keep a regular watch on activities.

The initial discoveries in field reference 10 deserve following up, not least by a team containing members more experienced in recognising coarse hand-made pottery fragments, in the hope that continuity into the early Anglo-Saxon period might be demonstrated (or, less likely, continuity back to iron age settlement).

Although the supposed location of Vernemetum is regularly ploughed, the farmer promptly seeds with winter wheat. Only by organising an intensive campaign of field walking could any substantial part of this site be completed before the soil became so sticky that the crop risked damage from being walked over (this is bearing in mind that this area probably contains a high density of artifacts to collect, which slows down progress compared to walking an 'empty' field). Such an intensive spate of activity is incompatible with most of the team's other commitments. At present, therefore, this potentially richly-informative site awaits the team's attention.

Although the majority of fields around Vernemetum are under permanent pasture, future activities might usefully attempt to walk all arable fields within a two or three km radius, including fields in adjoining parishes and across the county boundary.

## Appendix for digital edition



Wolds Historical Organisation field walking team in action for the first time March 1988. Ian Thorpe on far right.



Roman finds from field at OS 616233. Fragments of *mortaria* on the top row



Early medieval finds from field at OS 616233.



Late medieval finds from field at OS 616233.



Fifteenth and sixteenth century finds from field at OS 616233.