

The Staffordshire Hoard

Posted by Peter on 29 September 2009



Two of the pieces of Anglo-Saxon metalwork found in a field in Staffordshire.

Before beginning today's podcast, I need to explain a few words. The first word is "treasure". Treasure means things which are very valuable; generally, "treasure" means things made of gold or silver or precious stones. The second word is "hoard". If someone collects a lot of valuable things, and then hides them or keeps them secret, we call that a "hoard". And finally, a "find" is of course something which you find - but normally it means something very special or unusual or valuable which you find.

But that's enough vocabulary practice. On with today's podcast.

Terry Herbert is 55 years old. He lives in a small town called Bloxwich, about 16 kilometers north-west of Birmingham. His hobby is metal-detecting. A metal-detector is a tool which tells you when there is metal in the ground. You move the metal detector slowly over the ground, and it goes 'bleep' if it finds anything made of metal.

In July this year, Terry went metal-detecting in a field in Staffordshire owned by a friend of his, and found something completely amazing. He discovered a large number of gold and silver objects. He told the [authorities](#) what he had found, and a team of [archaeologists](#) then explored the site carefully and found more objects. When they started to clean and examine the discovery, they realised that Terry Herbert had found over 1500 objects dating from about 700AD. It was the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon treasure ever found in England.

The Anglo-Saxons were people who invaded and settled in England as the Roman Empire collapsed in about the 4th century. They came from northern Germany and the language which they spoke - which we call Anglo-Saxon or Old English - was the ancestor of modern English. They were skilled metal craftsmen; they made [delicate](#) and [intricate](#) designs on gold and silver, and often [inlaid](#) the metal with precious stones, such as garnet, which is a dark red stone. After they arrived here, the Anglo-Saxons divided England into a number of kingdoms and spent most of the next several hundred years fighting each other, and the Danes and the Scots. The largest and most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was called Mercia. It covered all of central England, including the area where the Staffordshire Hoard was found.



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Gold inlaid with garnets, from the Staffordshire Hoard.

Almost everything in the hoard is connected with the Anglo-Saxons' favourite hobby, fighting. There are gold decorations from swords and knives, from [shields](#) and [helmets](#), from belts and [buckles](#). There are no "women's things", like personal jewellery, and no household things like plates or cups. So what is the hoard? Many experts think that the treasure was collected after a battle. Quite simply, the victors went around and took all the gold and precious metal from the weapons and clothes of the enemies they had killed. Who were these victors and who were their enemies? We do not know. And afterwards, the victors hid what they had collected. Why? Again, we do not know. Nor do we know what happened later, and why the victors did not come back and collect the treasure which they had hidden.

In England, if you find gold or silver objects which are more than 300 years old, they belong to the Queen. Normally, however, a [reward](#) based on the value of the find is paid to the person who found it and to the owner of the land. Often a museum buys the treasure, and in this case the Museum in Birmingham together with other local museums want to [acquire](#) the Staffordshire Hoard so that it remains in the area where it was found.

We English are not generally very interested in museums or art galleries. We prefer zoos, pubs, theme parks and beaches. But there has been a lot of interest in the Staffordshire Hoard. Perhaps popular archaeology programmes on television have made people more aware of the importance of things from our history. There is a temporary exhibition of a few of the most important objects from the Staffordshire Hoard at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery until the middle of October. Yesterday, together with hundreds of other people, I stood in a queue for over an hour to see the exhibition. It is quite fascinating. Many of the objects still have dirt from the field in Staffordshire on them, because there has not been time yet to clean them. Suddenly, Anglo-Saxon England, 1300 years ago, seems much closer and more real.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=488>.