

A Selection of Interesting Finds from Cuckney (or 50+ finds from Cuckney)

The following finds were selected from many recovered from Cuckney by combined archaeological fieldwalking and metal detector survey in 2020, with a few metal detector finds not previously reported on from 2018 also included where they prove informative. Some of the more interesting finds from these episodes of fieldwork are presented here.

Prehistoric flaked stones:



The earliest finds recovered were flaked stones. There were not many, and it is most likely they were dropped by people passing through, rather than living in the areas investigated. The earliest is the blade-like flake FNA (left) which is Mesolithic or possibly early Neolithic. Of a similar date is likely to be the piece of Derbyshire chert (centre, GCX): this material is found in the Peak District and may have been preferentially selected by Mesolithic hunter-gatherer groups as they moved across their territories. The large chunk (right, GOQ) is a flake of Lincolnshire/Yorkshire Wolds type flint. This may have been collected in the Wolds, but the presence of large quantities of unworked nodules of this type of flint at the Mesolithic site of Misterton Carr in North Nottinghamshire suggests this material was also available in north Nottinghamshire, perhaps brought by glaciers or rivers. The crude method of working of this piece suggests it is of later Neolithic or Bronze Age date, when less care was taken over flint knapping than in earlier periods. All three pieces are waste from the production of tools, though blade FNA could have been used for cutting.

Post Medieval flaked stones:



The flaking of flint to make tools did not end with the Iron Age. Though there was no continuity of tradition, post medieval and modern flint knappers used exactly the same techniques as prehistoric people to manufacture gunflints, to be used to ignite flintlock weapons. This example is made of a typical East Anglian black flint with grey mottling. When the trigger was pulled an arm struck the flint against the steel frizzen to produce sparks, which (hopefully) ignited the powder in the priming pan, which in turn ignited the charge within the barrel of the gun. Each time the trigger was pulled and the flint was struck against the frizzen the edge of the flint was subject to damage. The flints could therefore only be used for a certain number of shots before they had to be replaced. The East Anglian gunflints were particularly highly prized due to their durability. The damage visible at the edge of this gunflint suggests it had seen use and had been discarded as it was exhausted. This piece is of gunspall type rather than the blade type of the 19th century, and is likely to be of 18th – 19th century.

Late Saxon pottery:



The two sherds pictured are the rim of a jar in Lincoln Kiln Type shell tempered ware (left), made in a kiln on Silver Street in Lincoln, and part of the body of a jar or pitcher in Torksey ware (right), made at Torksey on the east bank of the River Trent in Lincolnshire. Both are rather worn and abraded from their time in the plough soil. Lincoln Kiln Type ware was produced from the mid-late 9th century to end of the 10th century. The clay used contained many broken fragments of fossil shell, which have dissolved during its burial in the acid soil of Cuckney. This shell may have made the pot particularly able to cope with thermal shock, for example during cooking, and shell tempered cooking pots from Lincolnshire were sought after throughout late Saxon and medieval times for use in the kitchen. Torksey ware production began around the same time, with the potters arriving (probably from the continent) in the town not long after the Viking Great Army had overwintered there. However, Torksey's products were not widely distributed until the 10th century, with the industry dominating a large area (including being the main supplier of pottery to York) in the 11th century, though production appears to have ended around the time of the Norman Conquest.

These sherds (and the other late Saxon pottery discovered in the survey) are particularly important as, unlike later in the medieval period, in late Saxon times domestic waste such as broken pottery does not seem to have been mixed with the manure that was spread on the fields, and consequently is not usually found far from contemporary settlement. The discovery of this and several other late Saxon pottery sherds close to the modern village core adds weight to the findings from the 2018 excavations, which suggest that the settlement of Cuckney was established in its present location by the late 9th or 10th century. This is significant as, while place names suggest settlement of the period in this part of Nottinghamshire, actual physical evidence such as archaeological finds of this date are very uncommon, meaning the early settlement pattern is poorly understood. Essentially, we suspect that people were living here from evidence such as place names, but we don't know where they were living, or even if they were living together in villages or in dispersed farmsteads dotted across the parish. The evidence from the excavation and now from the fieldwalking strongly suggests that people were living in a nucleated village around and to the south of St Mary's church.

Amongst other things, the location of settlements may have an important bearing on the location of battles fought in an area!

Medieval pottery:



The strength of investigations such as this is that they provide the opportunity to look at how the fields, pasture and woodland around the settlement were used and when, which can allow changing ratios of arable to pasture in a parish, as well as the assarting of woodland (clearing trees to produce, often temporary, arable), to be mapped. Perhaps more importantly for the wider knowledge of past Nottinghamshire, they can also allow the types of pottery in use in a settlement to be understood, as well as how this changed over time. This is not just of academic interest for the few medieval pottery specialists who exist (including the present writer); it helps us to understand where the people of Cuckney went buying the essentials they needed at weekly market, and from annual fair, and may be able to help us understand how they viewed themselves culturally.

In the medieval period pottery and other waste was disposed of by spreading it on the fields with manure. As the medieval fields were communal and the strips were assigned to different households year on year, the pottery that was disposed of into the fields will usually provide a representative sample of the types of pottery that were in use in the settlement as a whole. By studying the non-plastic inclusions in the clay (such as quartz, feldspar, ironstone, mica, fossil shell, etc) under a microscope, pottery specialists can get an idea of where pots were likely to have been made (fossil shell, for example, must come from Jurassic outcrops the nearest of which are in Lincolnshire, with some further south in Northamptonshire); comparison of the geological inclusions in your sherds with those from excavated kiln sites can allow the source of the pottery to be determined.

The samples pictured above include part of a jug in Hallgate B ware from Doncaster (top left, EKA); the late 12th-13th century products of this kiln were widely distributed but are uncommon, especially in this area; two more jugs, these made in Nottingham (ERG; EZM) and mid 13th –early 14th century; the rim of a jug in Coal Measures White ware, possibly made in South Yorkshire near Rotherham (EFP) c.13th-15th century; the rim of a bowl made at kilns at Brackenfield / Little Ogston, near Clay Cross in Derbyshire (EHW) dating 13th-15th century; a body sherd from a jar / cooking pot in Potterhanworth ware, made in the village of the same name near Lincoln, 13th-15th century (EJI); the handle of a jug or cistern and the rim of a bowl (GGF and EXJ) both in Coal Measures White ware very likely made in kilns either at Firsby Hall Farm (Conisborough) or Rawmarsh (Rotherham), 15th-16th century. The bottom row is late medieval to early post medieval, with a nice lower handle attachment from jug or cistern in Coal Measures Purple ware from Firsby or Rawmarsh, late 15th-16th century (FMA); the main contemporary rival, Midlands Purple ware from Ticknall, South Derbyshire (EZH) next to it, and another Ticknall product, Cistercian Ware, used for drinking cups (GDE). While

these Ticknall products are present there were only a few sherds of each, with the South Yorkshire industries being the almost exclusive suppliers of late medieval and early post medieval pottery to Cuckney. This is in distinct contrast to the situation a little further south in the area around Mansfield, where Ticknall pottery is usually the main supplier, and South Yorkshire products never reach 50% of the total late medieval assemblages. The last sherd is also a Ticknall product, being Midlands Yellow ware (FDI) that evolved out of Cistercian ware and was one of the main ware types in the 17th century.

While the sources of all the pottery have not yet been identified, on the whole the assemblage seems to suggest that markets further south in Nottinghamshire, most likely that at Mansfield, were probably used by the residents of Cuckney, but that there seem to be strong links to the north west into South Yorkshire, and that these increase dramatically towards the end of the medieval period. It is possible that the people of Cuckney saw themselves as more closely affiliated to the people of South Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire than they did to those further south in places like Mansfield or Edwinstowe.

The pottery also revealed information about the changing pattern of arable land around the settlement. The further from the settlement we looked, the more recent the pottery became: for example close to the modern village core the full range of late Saxon, medieval and post medieval pottery was present. As we investigated the fields further from the modern settlement medieval pottery was not found, with only the late medieval and early post medieval South Yorkshire Coal Measures wares present. This is unusual, as it is traditionally believed that the high point of medieval agriculture was before the Black Death in the 14th century, and that after this, due to a range of factors including the significantly reduced population, the amount of arable around settlements reduced in favour of pasture. The evidence so far seems to suggest the opposite was happening at Cuckney, with an increase in the extent of arable in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, without surveying the whole parish, it is not possible to know if this apparent increase represents a genuine increase in the total area under plough or if other fields in the settlement contracted at this time.

Scabbard chape:



This is a folded sheet metal chape for a scabbard. There is a seam down the back (not pictured) that has traces of brazing. The open end is damaged but traces remaining suggest that the opening was decoratively scalloped. Such chapes were designed to protect and decorate the end of a scabbard made of leather. Archaeological finds from well stratified urban excavations in towns such as London and York indicate that folded sheet metal chapes of this type belong to the late 14th century to c.1600.

Personal Effects:



The purpose of an investigation like this is not to recover individually interesting artefacts but to try to understand more about the people who lived in a place in the past. There is perhaps little that can get you closer to the people who lived in a settlement than such personal items as dress accessories. These are mostly from belts, worn at the hips or waist. A metal belt buckle may have been the only copper alloy accessory the poorer members of society could call their own, particularly before the 15th century. From top left, we have a buckle with integral plate of 13th-14th century date. These are often considered to be spur buckles although it has been pointed out that some are a bit flimsy for this purpose. This one has the loop distorted as though it wasn't strong enough for the purpose to which it was put. On urban sites such as London, York, Winchester, etc., buckles of this type are present in much lower numbers than the contemporary belt buckle types. Next to it is a rather fancy buckle complete with pin, of 14th century date. FNK is a strap loop of late 13th-14th century type; these were riveted to the belt and held the loose end in place. Also related to the end of a belt beyond the buckle, the three piece sheet metal strap end to the right of FNK was attached to the end of a long belt and was intended to weigh it down so that it dangled straight down, a fashion of the 14th century. Many buckles were attached to the belt via a metal buckle plate; an example is shown top right. This one has worn through the loops, probably causing the belt to fail; the piece of copper alloy sheet visible under the two rivets may suggest it had previously been repaired.

On the bottom row are a range of late medieval to early post medieval examples: EZE is a locking buckle; the most complicated type of buckle made in the medieval and early post medieval period. They had a 'U'-shaped bar that projected from one edge of the frame (broken off on this example) that located in the recess on the outside of the frame; these may have been to secure purses or knives to the belt. They are of mid 14th to 16th century date and a complete one can be seen carved onto a wooden statue of St Roch in the Rijksmuseum, c.1500. Broken double looped buckle EOW retains its sheet metal pin, and also has traces of white metal coating. It and the two double looped buckles to its right are part of a late medieval and early post medieval fashion for this type: the closest parallels for EOW are found in burials at the Austin Friars in Leicester and the Crutched Friars in London, suggesting it is likely to be pre-dissolution in date. EXZ typifies the relatively plain form these buckles had reached in the post medieval period: more or less identical examples were found on the wreck of the Mary Rose, which went down in 1545, as well as deposits of 16th and 17th century date in places such as Winchester, Chelmsford and London. These small buckles may have been for shoes or some other specific purpose but none has yet been found in-situ, or seems to be depicted in contemporary art, for this purpose to be known.

Harness pendants:



Pendants, suspended from mounts, were used to decorate horse harness, dog collars, items of clothing and armour, amongst other things. The most commonly found types are heraldic, and may be enamelled. These are predominantly 13th to 14th century in date. More recently it has been realised that pendants of 12th century date were more widespread than originally thought. These earlier pendants tend to be geometric forms with gilded surfaces, with the design chased or hammered into the surface. Very few of these early pendants have been recovered from datable archaeological contexts, and there is quite a bit of debate about how early they began in the 12th century.

Only two pendant parts were discovered in the survey; that on the left a mount and that on the right a pendant. The damaged mount has a single spike on the back, which was originally pushed through a hole in a leather strap and bent over to hold it in place. It was probably gilded originally, and these small circular or oval mounts were often used with pendant bells or with gilded but otherwise undecorated circular or teardrop shaped pendants. They are seen on medieval dog collars and also were used on reins, where a number of them would have provided a glittering and jangling spectacle.

More significant is the pendant. This is broken along the bottom edge, although parallels for the form suggest not much may have been lost. The surface is gilded and a design, which can possibly just be seen in the photo, has been chased into the surface. The design includes a cabled border surrounding a design of tendrils. The significance of the piece is that the design, though admittedly somewhat poorly executed, has more in common with the late Viking Ringerike art style of the 11th century than the subsequent Romanesque art of the Norman conquerors. As such, this piece seems to provide important evidence to suggest that gilded pendants began earlier than is currently accepted; though on the basis of one or two others with Ringerike affinities reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme an early date has been proposed by other find specialists.

Cooking pots:



Once broken, a pottery vessel is of more or less no use to anyone (but archaeologists), so was discarded. In contrast, the other materials from which vessels were made in the medieval period, such as wood and metal, had a use. Metal could be recycled or sold as scrap, while a broken wooden dish or bowl could be used as free firewood when it was too far gone to repair any more. As a result, while pretty much every piece of pottery ever made (providing it was fired well enough) was likely thrown out and should still survive in the ground, only a very small proportion of the vessels made in other materials will have made it into the ground at all.

As such, the number of copper alloy vessel parts is perhaps surprising. They are, from left to right, the rim of a large cast cooking vessel such as a cauldron, still retaining the soot from its last use; the rim of a thin walled probably cast and turned bowl; part of the leg of a cauldron, posnet or skillet, and a very large leg from probably a large cauldron. The outer surface of the latter has spalled and been damaged by its use in a fire.

Cooking pots tended to be made from cast copper alloy, while basins and bowls tended to be beaten from sheet. Both methods were in use in the medieval period. Cast metal cooking vessels became more common from the 13th century onwards, to the extent that even peasants may have had a copper alloy cooking pot by the 14th century. This was often the most expensive object they owned, or was sometimes supplied as part of the fittings of the house by the lord of the manor. These vessels were well cared for and were carefully repaired when broken. Larger households and monastic establishments had several, usually in a range of sizes. As the metal from which they were cast is brittle, the loss of legs as the pot was dragged around the fireplace was not uncommon.

The thinness of the metal of FMO is typical of post medieval examples; the others may be medieval (13th century or later) or post medieval and can be paralleled by examples from both periods. The use of copper alloy for such vessels was replaced by cast iron at some time in the 17th to 18th century, with the date varying in different parts of the country.

Post Medieval Personal Effects:

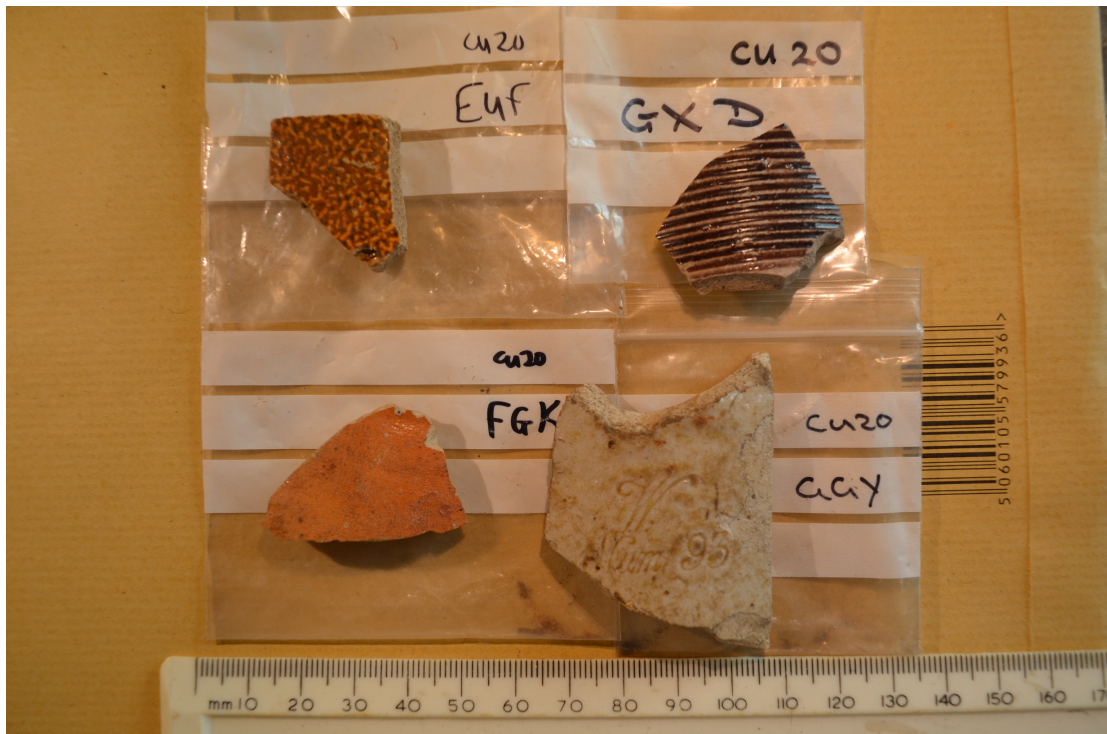


There were a range of post medieval dress accessories found in addition to the medieval examples detailed above. In the post medieval period there were a wider range of options for fastening clothing, and buckles had a wider range of purposes, not just the fastening of belts. Buckles became fashionable (Samuel Pepys for instance recorded in his diary that he first put buckles on his shoes on 22nd January 1659) for fastening shoes and knee breeches in the second half of the 17th century (previously ribbons had been used): these buckles became larger and showier as the 18th century progressed. They had rectangular, square or oval frames and complicated back parts comprising chape and tongue, held in the frame by a pin, usually of iron. Early forms of chape include the fancy anchor shaped chape top left (FYD) with stamp "IH", belonging to the period c.1659-1720. The chape was inserted through a horizontal slot on one strap of the shoe and turned through 90 degrees to anchor the buckle in place. Removal and adjustment of the shoe was made by pulling the other strap through the buckle and securing it with the buckle tongue, which may have had one or more prongs. The small buckle top right (XBX) has a twin pronged tongue. Small buckles like this, lacking chapes, were possibly for use with clothing items such as cravats and garters; it is of 18th century date. No complete shoe buckle frames of the type under discussion were found, but the two fragments in the middle of the top row are parts of such frames. These can easily be mistaken for more modern material. The openwork form of FUD was a style particularly popular in the last three decades of the 18th century. However, despite the petitions of the Birmingham buckle makers to King George III (Birmingham being the main centre of manufacture and likely source of all these examples) to continue wearing shoe buckles, by c.1800 the use of buckles was largely replaced by a new fad for lace up shoes and boots, which is still with us today.

Clogs were also worn. In the 19th and early 20th century they were associated with poverty and the working class. They had wooden soles (often with iron fittings) and leather uppers, and were fastened by small stamped metal tabs, as seen on the bottom row. This two-part system comprised clasps (EYK and EEQ) and hasps (XBV), which were attached to straps on the clog uppers by pushing an anchor-shaped tab through a slot on the strap. A small hook on the clasp could then be hooked and unhooked from one of the slots in the hasp to fasten and unfasten the clog, with limited adjustment possible by selecting a different slot in the hasp.

While associated with poverty in the 19th century, gold and silver clog clasps with 18th century hallmarks indicate this was not always so. Copper alloy examples are usually very difficult to date and are typically ascribed a 19th century to c.1930 date range. In this regard clasp EEQ is important, as the decoration on this example is a crowned GR.

German stoneware pottery:



Some of the artefacts found in the investigations travelled a very long distance to get to Cuckney. The production of stoneware (pottery fired to over 1200 degrees Celsius, producing an impermeable vitrified body) was perfected in Germany by the start of the 14th century. Unlike earthenware, stoneware is not porous, so does not leak or absorb what is put in it, and is also hard wearing, able to withstand knocks and rough handling. The superiority of these wares lead to them being increasingly widely distributed throughout the medieval and into the post-medieval period. The area around Aachen and Cologne in modern day Germany was the source of most of these pots, and the port books of Hull and London testify to their arrival in this country in their tens of thousands. Quality varied – some vessels were considered important enough to be given silver and gold mounts; other more everyday examples may have had pewter mounts or lids; while many were cheap pots, sometimes battered in production and no more than seconds, for use as durable tavern pots and in the houses of the poor and middle classes.

There were a number of different sources for these pots, with the dominant exporting industries changing over time as towns were destroyed by the wars that ravaged continental Europe or the potters were thrown out of towns due to concerns of pollution and fire risk and had to move elsewhere.

Cuckney has none of the medieval German stonewares from Siegburg or Langerwehe, which were not very widely distributed this far inland except to high status sites; it also has no examples of early post medieval Raeren products that were dominant in the period c.1485-1550. The earliest piece of German stoneware is part of a Frechen-type bottle or jug, with the distinctive mottled brown 'tiger' glaze (top left, EUF). These sturdy vessels, primarily used for the transport and storage of liquids, usually alcoholic, often had an applied face-mask of a bearded man at the neck. The face-mask gives them their German name 'Bartmann'; they are sometimes known as Bellarmine in Britain and America, though the earliest examples were produced long before Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (a catholic thinker much hated for his persecution of protestants) achieved fame in protestant England. Plain globular jugs and drinking vessels were also produced. The Frechen industry became the dominant German stoneware exporter after potters expelled from Cologne in the middle of the 16th century arrived in the town, and it was the main German stoneware export during the late 16th-17th century.

Frechen was succeeded by potters in the Westerwald area. They mainly produced light grey stoneware decorated first with cobalt, producing a blue colour, and from the middle of the 17th century with manganese, producing a purple colour. The earliest Westerwald piece

from Cuckney is the neck of a vessel with external reeding and manganese colour (top right, GXD). Luckily the production was sufficiently standardised that we can be certain this comes from a round-bodied jug with cylindrical neck, and that this vessel was almost certainly decorated on the body with a central medallion with 'G R' for either Gulielmus Rex or Georgius Rex (King William, 1689-1702; King George I II or III, 1714 – 1820). The various motifs on the body were highlighted in blue and the neck was coloured purple. These were a major line of export pottery produced by the Westerwald potters.

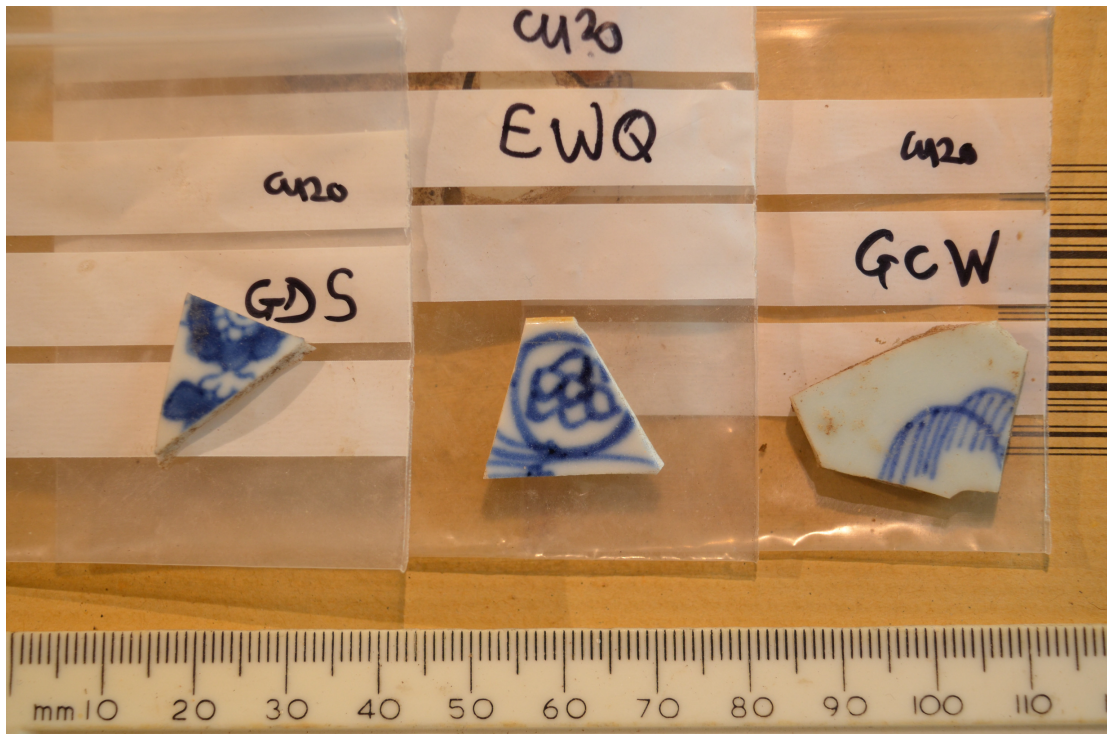
Westerwald was the last of the major German stoneware pottery exporters as stoneware production had become established across Britain in the early 18th century. Despite this the Westerwald potters continued making stoneware, though this was now exported, not as vessels, but as the disposable packaging for products from the Westerwald area. The increasing fashion for mineral waters in the 18th century, both for medicinal purposes and for pleasure, meant that the products of Westerwald potters continued to be exported around the world as containers for the mineral waters of nearby Selters and Neiderselters. Several examples of mineral water bottles were found at Cuckney. The more common pale brown / orange 19th century type were represented by a few sherds, including that on the bottom right, while a single sherd of the less common pale grey 18th to 19th century type (bottom right) is stamped with an inscription, not yet traced.

Lead Tokens:



These circular lead discs with cast patterns are fairly regular finds on archaeological sites. They have been considered as 'non-regular' tokens and the great scholar of post medieval artefacts Geoff Egan suggested that they may have circulated as small change. Their main period of use coincides with a period where the Royal Mint considered that base metal currency was below its station, and as a result when there was a desperate need for some sort of token coinage to facilitate low value transactions. These lead pieces occur in a range of forms with a range of different decoration, including the present type which is reminiscent of the reverse of official medieval coins with long cross and pellets in the quarters. Based on the London evidence it has been suggested that the latest issues of such tokens are simple uniface types, like ECA. One example of very similar size to ECA with the same decoration from London was found in deposits of c.1675-1700, a smaller example with the same decoration in deposits c.1630-1650, suggesting they were most likely current in the 17th century, or perhaps into the 18th century in the provinces.

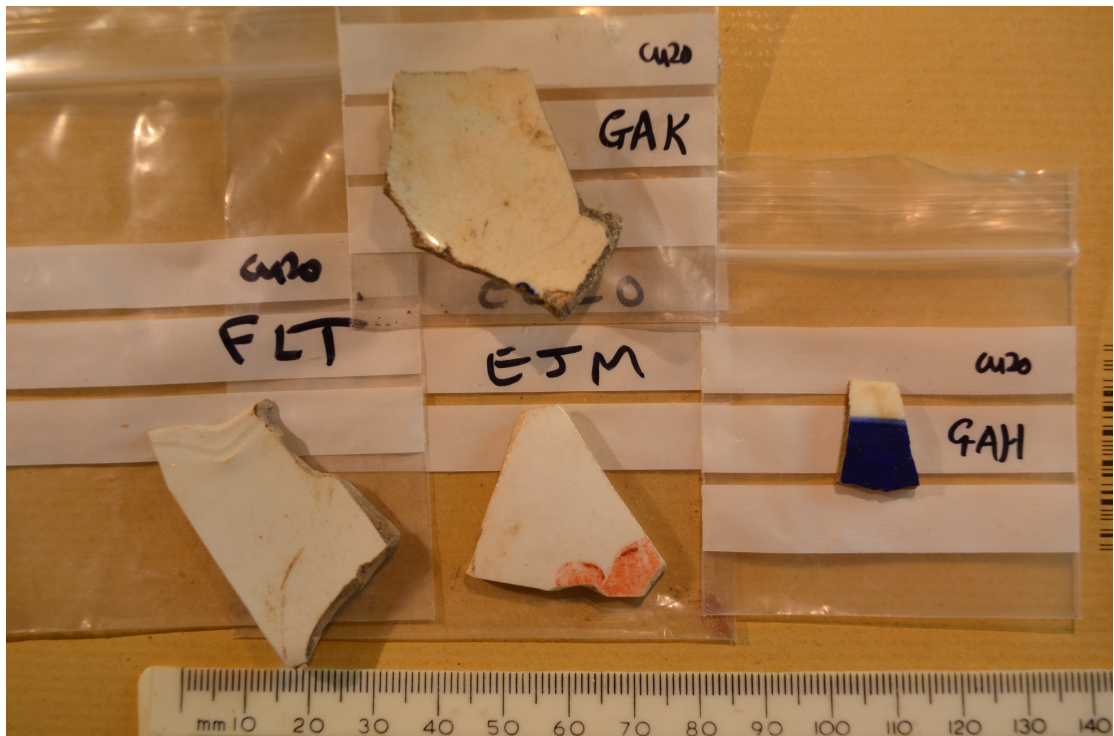
Chinese Porcelain:



Only a few sherds of Chinese porcelain were found. Such vessels passed through a great many hands, first in their creation, then in their transportation from the inland kiln sites to the port of distribution; they survived a hazardous trip across the seas and the survivors finally made it to British consumers. Initially tea wares and novelties were favoured and were expensive; it is possible that one of the sherds, from a bowl (left, GDS) painted with the claw of a Chinese dragon on the inside and a flower on the outside (pictured) may be an early example, but more research is required to confirm the dating of this piece. The saucer sherd in the middle, with yellow lined rim and vine scroll is more typical of the products of the middle of the 18th century. By the late 18th century Chinese porcelain was becoming relatively affordable for all but the lowest sectors of society, and plates and dishes as well as tea wares were increasingly affordable. The sherd to the right is from a typical late 18th century plate from a dinner service. It is painted with a willow tree. It can be seen that the porcelain body is not as white as the earlier examples: then as now you get what you pay for and different qualities of Chinese porcelain were available; in addition the Chinese tended to use the higher quality whiter bodied preferentially for overglaze enamel decorated pieces rather than the underglaze blue painted vessels. Chinese porcelain was always hand painted, not transfer printed like the English copies. The willow tree on the right hand plate or dish is a link to the Willow pattern design popular on English transfer printed earthenware of the 19th century; while Chinese influenced, the Willow pattern is actually an English invention, produced as the result of a web of influence: Chinese pavilion landscapes influenced English potters, who influenced Chinese interpretations of the English versions, and English copies of the Chinese versions – a veritable orgy of cross cultural fertilisation leading to the codification (in Britain) of the standard Willow pattern. Willow pattern has remained in production from the start of the 19th century until today.

These Chinese porcelain sherds, especially the earlier examples, suggests that at least some of the waste we are looking at may be from high status residents living in Cuckney. It is interesting to consider the Chinese porcelain alongside the high quantities of earlier 18th century Nottingham Stoneware also found in the survey, as a similar range and proportion of pottery was found in the contents of a cess pit filled during the clearance of a wealthy household's property at Halifax Place, Nottingham, in the middle of the 18th century.

English Porcelain:



Potters in England were making glassy, translucent pottery commercially by the middle of the 18th century. Though this was not made of the same ingredients as Chinese Porcelain, and unlike Chinese porcelain had to be fired twice (once to fire the pot, a second time to fire the glaze), it was known as porcelain, or china. Initially it was very expensive, though the price began to drop as improved manufacturing techniques allowed higher output. Price was also affected by the decoration: a plain pot cost less to make than one with underglaze decoration; a pot with overglaze enamel cost more again as the enamel colours required additional firings to fuse them to the surface, whereas underglaze painting was fixed in place when the glaze was fired. Underglaze colours are durable, while enamels, being on the surface of the pot, may wear off during use, and may be susceptible to decay on burial in the ground. It is often the case with excavated sherds that enamel decoration only survives as a 'ghost': a slight change of texture in the glaze in the shape of the former decoration where the enamel had slightly fused into the glaze.

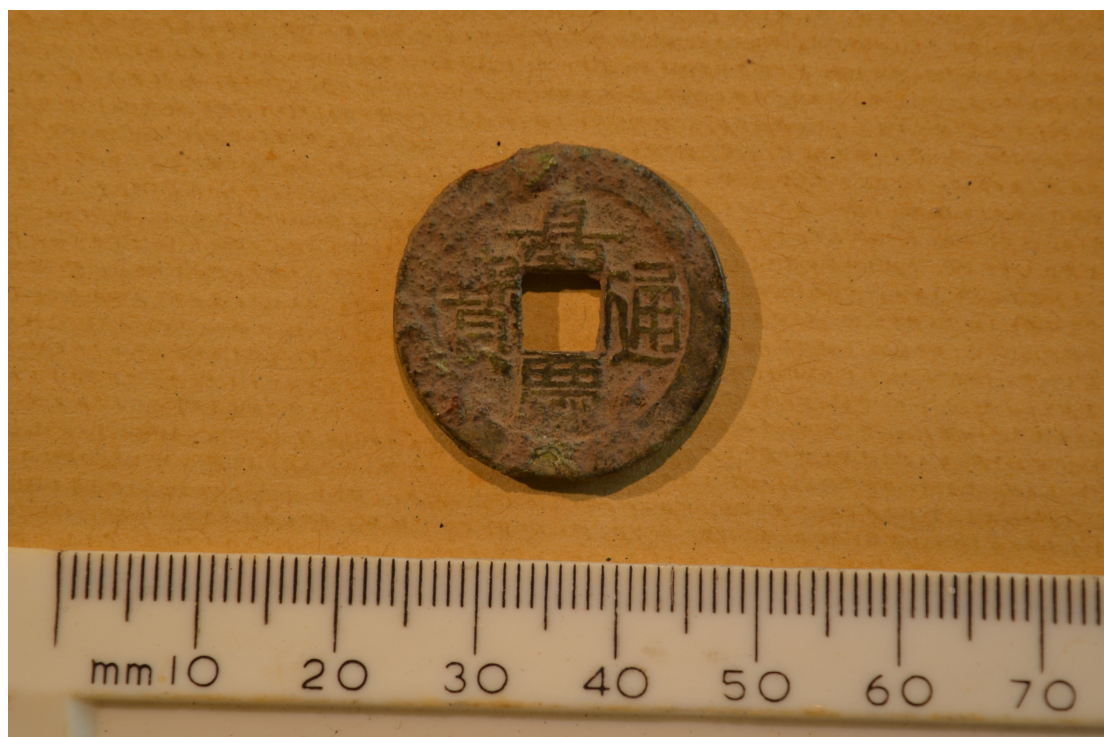
18th century English porcelain is far less common as archaeological finds than Chinese porcelain, although the cessation of imports of Chinese porcelain by the East India Company at the end of the 18th century left a gap in the market that English producers were now well placed to fill.

The above sherds are a few of the late 18th to early 19th century English porcelain vessels found. They include, at the centre top, part of a teacup. This must have been an expensive piece as it is decorated with a floral pattern using both underglaze blue



(though there is only a tiny fragment of this visible at the bottom corner of the sherd) and different enamel colours which now only survive as faint ghosts. Bottom left is part of the moulded rim of a plate; the purchase of dinner sets by those lower down the social scale was becoming more possible at this time. In the middle bottom is part of a teapot with overglaze enamel decoration in different shades of red. These colours were particularly popular for floral decoration of roses, as well as strawberries and raspberries, in the last decades of the 18th century. The sherd on the right has a rather obvious blue band but would once have been more complicated: it was most likely part of a Japanese Imari style pattern of the type that the Derby Porcelain company was famous for, though other producers made this style of pottery, and other blue ground designs are known. Originally, this piece had overglaze enamel and gilded decoration combining with the underglaze blue line, as can be seen in the inset example of a Derby plate with Japan / Imari pattern from the writer's collection. This has the hand painted red crowned D, indicative of a date c.1800-1820, and these Japanese designs first became popular in the first decades of the 19th century, when GAH was likely manufactured. It is possibly a Derby product. These sherds and the other early English porcelains represent a relatively unusual assemblage in the writer's experience, that may, as with some of the other objects, suggest the waste we are analysing includes rather wealthy residents.

Chinese Cash:



Individual coins are generally of much less value for understanding the history of a settlement and its people than items such as pottery, for the pottery was usually in use for a short time, broken, and then thrown out with the manure in large quantity, meaning you can be pretty confident that the pottery you find in the fields, especially if you are looking at an assemblage rather than single sherds, was originally used by the people living in the settlement in question (as long as you can discount Victorian night soil deliveries from nearby towns). Coins, on the other hand, may circulate for a long time after they are struck so may not help much with dating (you can tell when it was made, but not necessarily when it reached the settlement in question or when it was dropped), may be kept as charms or curiosities when they were no longer legal tender, potentially to be lost at some much later time. They can also be lost by travellers passing through an area who had nothing to do with the local residents. Coins, especially those made of precious metals, may also be picked up and moved at a much later date (for example roman or medieval coins discovered during post medieval or modern ploughing), put in a pocket to take home, and subsequently lost somewhere completely different to where they were originally dropped.

This Qing Dynasty Chinese coin is a prime example. Unlike the Scottish, Irish and Low Countries coins also found in the investigations, this coin is not a type that could have been passed off as currency in Britain. The reverse of this coin has Manchu script stating that it was minted at the Board of Revenue mint; the Manchu script places it within the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), and the ruler's name on the obverse (pictured) indicates it was minted during the reign of the Emperor Jianqing (personal name Yongyan). Born in 1760, he reigned from 1796 to 1820. Notable events of his reign included the quelling of internal rebellions, attempts to stem the smuggling of Indian opium into China by the British, the (re)naming of Vietnam (as Vietnam), and the inclusion of Christians under the 'prohibitions concerning sorcerers and sorceresses' in The Great Qing Legal Code. The top and bottom characters on the obverse are for the Jianqing reign – those on the right and left, 'tong bao', translate as 'universal' or 'circulating' currency.

While the inscriptions date the minting of this coin to 1796-1820, we unfortunately have no idea when it was lost. As a result it is impossible to know if its presence here suggests that one of the Cuckney residents was involved in trade with China, most likely as part of the East India Company, or if it was brought back as a curio by a much later visitor to China and subsequently lost, or even if it was obtained by a modern day coin collector and, for some reason, lost. Unfortunately, unless there is documentary evidence that someone living in Cuckney at the start of the 19th century was involved in trade with China, it is likely that this mystery cannot be solved.

To add to the intrigue, Chinese coins appear to rarely be encountered in archaeological excavation; they seem equally rare as casual finds, with only 45 examples recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. It is not known if the latter reflects a genuine rarity of such finds, or merely that their finders choose not to record them: this is a major problem that can significantly limit the research potential (=value) of the Portable Antiquities Scheme data.

Nottingham Stoneware:



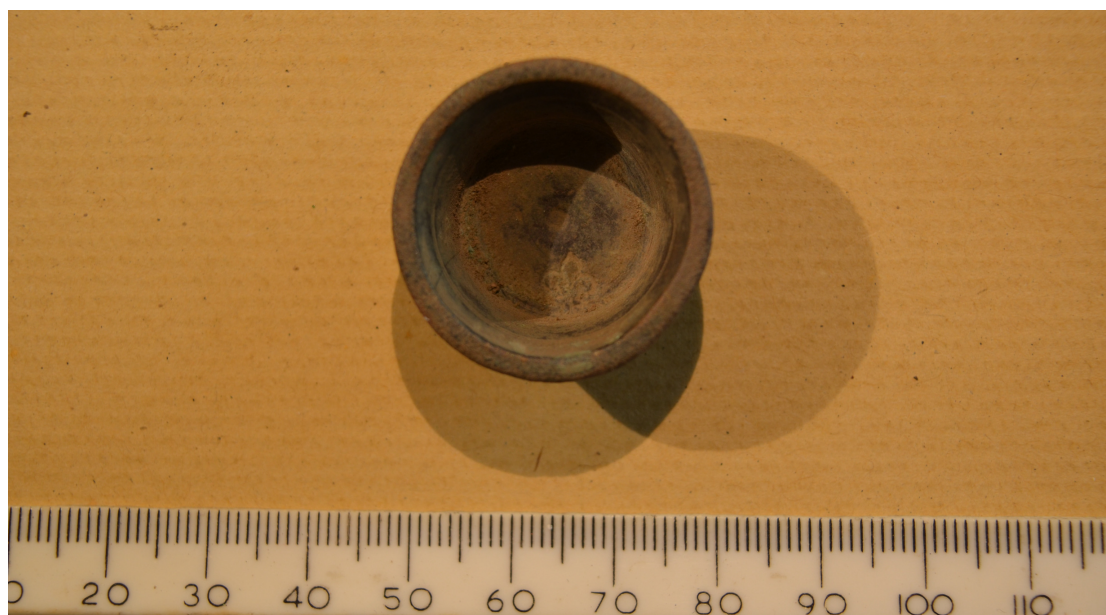
A large proportion of the pottery assemblage comprises brown stoneware of the types manufactured in Nottingham and Derbyshire. After a few abortive attempts at manufacture throughout the 17th century, it not until the last decades of the 17th century that English production of stoneware began on a meaningful scale. In the Midlands, production centres were set up by the Morley family at Nottingham and at Crich in Derbyshire. The Nottingham industry was famed for the quality of its output, beginning c.1690 and the last pottery closing c.1799. The industry mainly produced tableware and vessels for display, including mugs,

large two handled loving cups, porringers, jugs and decanters, and chamber pots. Many dated presentation pieces survive in museum and private collections, though the majority of examples discovered archaeologically are plain, and the production of plain, uninscribed pieces was the mainstay of the potteries. This decorated sherd is therefore quite an unusual find. The sherd is doubly nice as the decoration is identical to several dated examples in museum collections. These have inscriptions and dates centred a few years either side of 1720 and it has been noted that the handwriting appears to be the same on all the known examples. From the way the pattern is drawn on this vessel, and in particular details of the way the leaves are drawn, we can be certain that the same hand executed the decoration on the Cuckney sherd as the vessels in the museum collections. The latter were made at John Morley's pottery in Beck Barns, Nottingham (more or less where the modern Beck Lane is). Morley, the successor of the James Morley who originally started the Nottingham industry in the late 17th century, operated Beck Barns pottery from c.1715-1727, though the pots with identical leaves to this one are all dated within a couple of years of 1720. The products of John Morley during this period are considered to be some of the finest examples of stoneware ever produced by the Nottingham industry.

This sherd represents one of the very rare cases where not only can we date the manufacture of a given (undated) pot to within a few years, we can say exactly where it was made and can even give a name to the potter who may have made it, although not enough is known of the structure of Morley's pottery at this time to know if he also had assistants and apprentices working with him.

There were also a range of other pieces of Nottingham stoneware that can be dated to the first two or three decades of the 18th century; these include part of the base of a decanter, an unusual find, and parts of mugs, cups or bowls. They indicate that Nottingham salt glazed stoneware was available in Cuckney from very early in its production and was a popular type of pottery in use in the settlement at this time.

Weight:



Cup weights such as this, available from the 13th century in nesting sets contained within a cast copper alloy box, are believed to have been used for measuring coin and quantities of gold and silver, with the result that accuracy was most important. This one has two thin incised lines on the exterior and is stamped with the device of a fleur de lis on the inside. It may have been made in Nuremberg or elsewhere in the Low Countries as cup weights of identical size and with an identical fleur de lis stamp are known from Nuremberg, which was a major exporter of copper alloy metalwork to Britain in the post medieval period. Identical examples are known from the 16th century and may have continued to be made until the 18th.

Small but informative fragments!

Small, broken, fragments of metalwork are scorned by some, but can provide a valuable and informative window into the past lives of the occupants of a village. The assemblage from the Cuckney work seems to include an unusually rich assemblage of 18th century domestic metalwork. Even large scale urban excavations and big landscape scale surveys such as Shapwick, in Somerset, where almost the whole parish was systematically surveyed using archaeological fieldwalking and metal detector survey, do not seem to have produced such a rich assemblage of later post medieval and early modern metalwork. It is not clear if this is because certain unknown circumstances at Cuckney lead to the deposition of a genuinely unusual assemblage, or if such assemblages are more common but are for some reason not reported or published in the literature. The following fragments help shed light onto the lives of the 18th and early 19th century residents of Cuckney.



A selection of pewter and copper alloy eating implements, including stamped spoons and cast spoons or forks. These are mostly low status, everyday items.



Fragments of two pairs of 18th century copper alloy candle snuffers. These were necessary to trim the wicks of candles which, if left untrimmed, might result in the flame getting out of control, smoking, or just going out.



Part of the base of a square candlestick or box in pewter. It is cast with cabled decoration. If this was part of a square candlestick, these are much more common in silver and copper alloy than pewter. The square base was produced in brass from the mid 18th into the 19th century, and in the 'pewter bible' it is stated that pewter candlesticks were very rare in the 18th century, having been displaced by brass. This may, however, be a product of survival of the more expensive, and therefore probably more carefully curated, copper alloy (and silver) examples compared to pewter; and it is only by the recording and reporting of such pewter examples from archaeological investigations that we can start to better understand how frequent, or otherwise, such objects truly were in the past.



Part of the handle of a pair of 18th century nutcrackers. These belong to a type that can be dated to the (late) 18th century and this particular form is depicted in 18th century trade catalogues

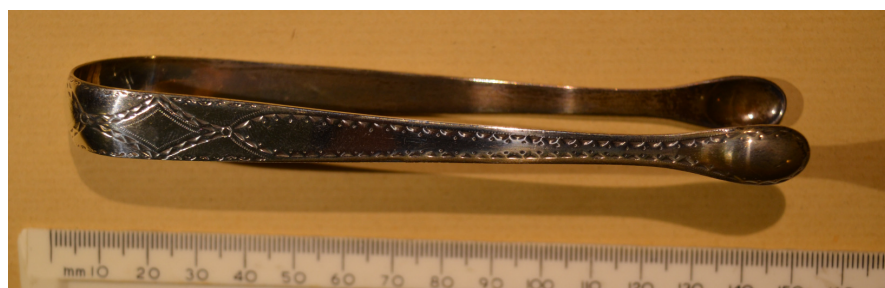
Tea Equipage:



The drinking of tea became a particularly popular form of conspicuous consumption in the 18th century. To show one's civility to one's peers it was necessary to be seen to consume tea. The correct drinking of tea involved a whole range of ancillary equipment, which was employed to display one's cultured status. Most essential, of course, was the teapot. The concept of matching sets was not current at this time, an ideal teapot in the middle of the 18th century probably was a Chinese Yixing red stoneware example. Tea cups, or at this time rather tea bowls (no handles), sat on deep Chinese style saucers, and were ideally of Chinese porcelain. Additional equipment, if you could afford it, included slop bowls (for used tea leaves) and a range of other vessels. Once the excessive import duties on tea were reduced in the 1780s, even the poorest aspired to drink the stuff, though they may have had to save up to buy a tea pot, probably in the English Creamware or pearlware, then save up some more to be able to afford a tea bowl and maybe saucer.

These items belong to the period where tea was a rather expensive commodity. The Chinese porcelain saucer (left) we have already seen, and would have been desired by the upper classes and unavailable to the lower, unless they were gifted a (probably chipped) hand-me-down for long domestic service in the household of a major family. In the middle, the teapot spout is in early creamware. This refined earthenware was developed around the middle of the 18th century and was popularised by Wedgwood and contemporaries in North Staffordshire. It is an earthenware, but the white body allowed decoration in vibrant colours using metallic oxides in the glaze. One very popular form from the middle of the 18th century to the 1770s or 80s were tea and coffee pots (and ancillary vessels) moulded in the form of cauliflowers (also pineapples, melons, etc) and decorated with bright green glaze: a form that looks very modern if you see a whole one! This vessel suggests early take up of creamware, mostly from Staffordshire, as well as early adoption of the cult of tea drinking in Cuckney, and also suggests an audience of peers to whom the tea drinkers of Cuckney were displaying their civility.

The final displayed item of tea equipage is part of the copper alloy arm of a pair of sugar tongs. The decoration on this example



(probably not visible in this photo) is virtually identical to the border design on the late 18th century silver sugar tongs shown in the inset (not from Cuckney – private collection): silver examples are now far more common survivors than copper alloy, but copper alloy would have been cheaper at the time.

Knob-hooks:



Sometimes objects may not be what they first appear to be. These two pieces have a shank terminating in polyhedral heads that look very much like Anglo-Saxon polyhedral headed pins. However, unlike such pins the shank is quite fat, and the more complete example on the right shows an expanded end with traces of rusty iron. This was originally an iron screw thread, and an examination of late 18th century trade catalogues indicates that these objects were known as 'Knob Hooks' and were, like the associated coat hooks, intended to be screwed into wood (such as the back of a door) and were used to suspend objects from.

Mouth Harp:



This copper alloy frame has extensive file marks all over. The recess where a thin iron tongue was attached can be seen on the side pictured in the image. These simple musical instruments were held in the mouth and used the resonance of the skull to amplify the sound, which was produced by striking the iron tongue. The pitch was controlled using the mouth. This one is of typical post medieval shape.

Personal Effects, Buttons:



A large number of buttons were recovered in a wide variety of types. Like the shoe buckles these were perhaps less personal items than the medieval belt accessories, though they were still deliberately chosen and curated by their users: unlike in the medieval period though where only a single buckle might be owned, late 17th and 18th century fashion required the ownership of multiple buttons. These might still have been carefully curated and moved from garment to garment though.

This is a very small selection of some of the earlier examples, with the bulk of the assemblage from Cuckney being datable to the 18th and 19th centuries. Buttons are known from the medieval period but did not become common until the post medieval period, with the vast majority of metal buttons being of late 17th to early 19th century date. The earliest example found at Cuckney is probably GCU (middle top row), cast in a mould with a separate wire shank cast in place and now lost. Buttons of this type have been recovered from deposits dating c.1550-1650 in London. A number of the other buttons are types found in archaeological deposits of the first half of the 17th century in towns such as London, Norwich and Amsterdam: these include the two solid cast copper alloy buttons within integral shank at bottom right, the broken decorated ?nickel button EYB (centre bottom) formerly with wire shank cast in place, and the globular ?pewter button FTA top right. The two crowned hearts on the possibly silver button (bottom left – though it reacts to a magnet) are a motif said to be associated with the marriage of Charles II and Catherine of Braganza in 1662, and were used before and after this time. Such buttons often formed linked pairs, probably used as cufflinks. The copper alloy wire shank on this example has been lost at some point in the past. To the left and above (XCI, FUB, FAG) are decorated examples of just a few of the 18th to early 19th century buttons found: the two biggest were for coats. The final object, GBF is made of lead and a number of these items were found. They can be mistaken for buttons but are actually weights, intended to be sewn into the hem of ladies dresses to keep them down, with additional possible use in curtain seams, for similar reasons.

Thimbles:



Sewing thimbles have a long history. Medieval thimbles were cast from copper alloy with each of the dimples manually drilled. In the post medieval period thimbles were another of the metal artefacts produced in vast quantities in the Low Countries and imported into Britain. It was not until the late 18th century that the stamping of thimbles from sheet was perfected in Britain, and this advance in production saw the demise of the cast copper alloy thimble as well as British manufacturers becoming dominant. Several of these late sheet metal thimbles were found in the survey; most of them rather squashed and damaged from their time in the plough soil. However, this example is, as well as the best preserved example found, also the earliest. It belongs to the last of the series of cast thimbles produced, datable to c.1700-1780, and may be of either Low Countries or English manufacture.

Manufacturing waste:



This fragment of a fork is another oddity. As can be seen, this fork has been stamped from sheet but the tines have not been finished, indicating it is production waste. However, no other evidence of production was found, suggesting it has been brought here from elsewhere for some reason. Nearby Sheffield was noted as the centre of cutlery production in Britain in the 19th and early 20th century, when this fork was (half) made.

Presently Unidentified Objects: Golf Tees:



Some objects at first seem like they are going to be impossible to identify, but with a bit of research resolve themselves into fragments of recognisable and documented types. Sometimes, however, parallels for a particular object are difficult to come by, and when found they shed frustratingly little light on the original use of the object. These objects are such.

They are cast with a hollow cup and a stem that has been filed into shape by hand. The interior of the cup has spatters of solder and the stem, under magnification, appears to have been forced into an orifice which has burred the edges, suggestive of twisting once inserted into the putative orifice. They are both different sizes, and the stems are also slightly different lengths, with one much more tapered than the other.

Despite an extensive search of the literature only a single parallel has been located. This was found at the site of Barentins Manor (Oxfordshire) in a deposit of late medieval date, though the artefact was recovered from the uppermost context in this deposit directly below the plough soil. The Barentins Manor example is more complete than the present examples as the shank is wrapped with a sheet metal strip, while the top of the cup is closed with a sheet metal disc soldered or brazed in place; this has a central small hole drilled into it. The finds specialist who wrote the Barentins metalwork report was equally unable to offer any suggestions as to the likely origin of the piece.

Unfortunately current restrictions on access to museum collections have stymied attempts to further identify these artefacts. I suspect they are likely to be of relatively modern date and that the one from Oxfordshire may be intrusive in its late medieval context; I suspect I am most likely to discover the use for these objects in one of the Heath Robinson-esque pieces of agricultural machinery of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However right now, unfortunately, I am unable to say what these were once part of. If anyone reading this document knows what these were used for, please let me know!

Obituary plaque:



Apparently most people like shiny gold things, whether they can tell us much about the past occupants of Cuckney or not. This lenticular plaque, carefully beaten out of the tiniest fragment of gold, is inscribed "ML/obt 17 June/1778". This piece was originally glued to some sort of item, probably a box or some other kind of small, expensive, item of furniture. Commemorative pieces like this were popular in the 17th and 18th centuries as a way of remembering the dead: it was sometimes specified in wills that mourners should get a valuable item, such as a ring, spoon or other item inscribed with the name and date of death of the donor at the funeral.

I have been unable to locate an ML (or other possible permutations) with date of burial around 1778 in the Cuckney burial records, so it is possible that the person commemorated here was not a Cuckney resident - either they lived elsewhere and this item of furniture belonged to one of their relatives who lived at Cuckney, or someone moved into Cuckney later on and brought this item with them, to be lost at some later date. This mystery ultimately requires an avid local historian to research the possibilities: I would be keen to hear from any who are willing to take up the challenge!

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