



Metal detecting as ploughzone archaeology: the case of West Hanney, Oxfordshire, UK

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Portable Antiquities Scheme

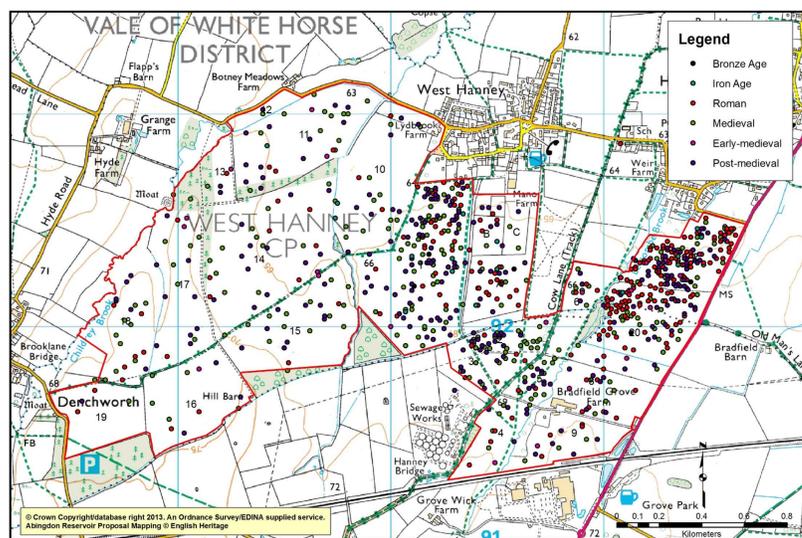
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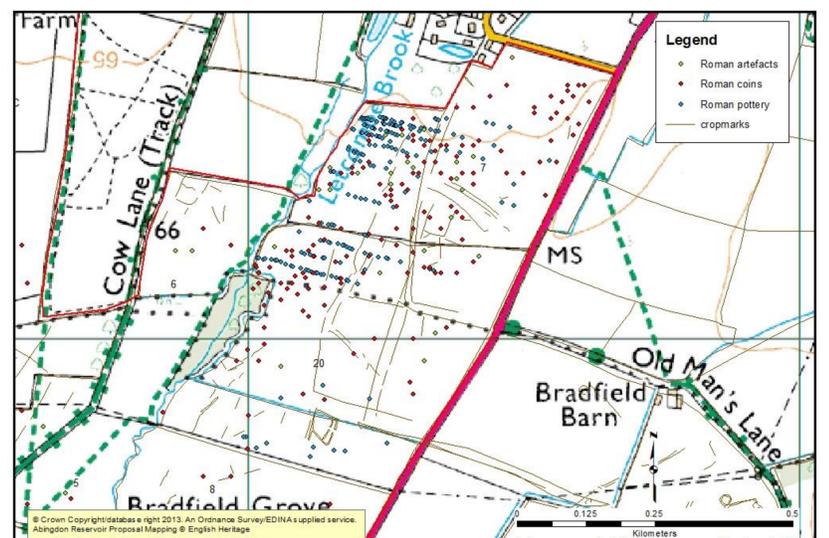
Ploughzone archaeology is not a new concept however traditionally it has concentrated on fieldwalking for its main source of information. The large body of data created by metal detector users and recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme provides the opportunity to address the concept of ploughzone archaeology through non-surface yet out-of-context artefact type and distribution analysis.

Although metal detecting is used on an increasing number of archaeological projects in the UK, it is still viewed with scepticism and suspicion by some archaeologists, and is not routinely employed. Two large metal detecting rallies in Oxfordshire, UK, afforded the opportunity to evaluate the development of a small study area by plotting the distribution of finds.

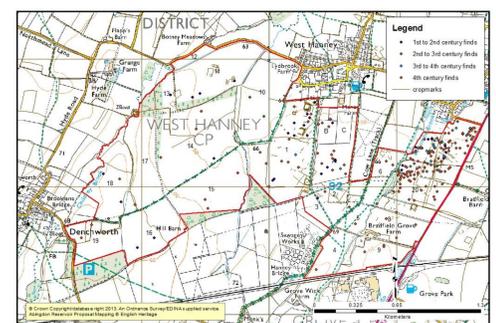
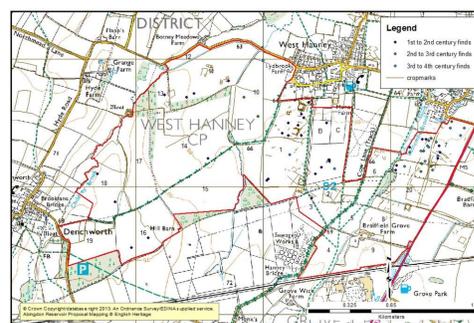
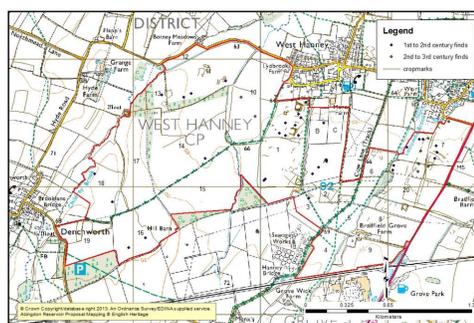
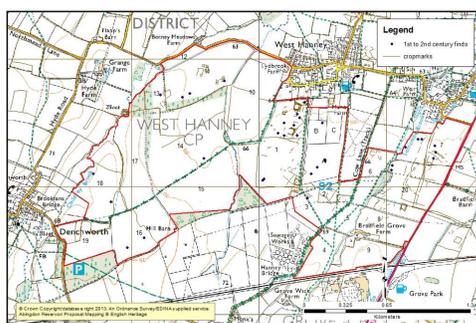
Metal detecting data can highlight varying levels of activity across a landscape:



The rally covered 435 hec / 1200 acres, over 1300 finds recorded. Based on the distribution data, targeted fieldwalking then took place to compare the robustness of the data against fieldwalking (results show Roman period data):



Metal artefacts can be closely dated, allowing chronological reconstruction of the landscape without pottery



Metal artefacts can 'stand alone' as a data source, but can be combined with fieldwalking data

This is especially evident in the pre-medieval periods, where pottery either does not survive or is absent. For medieval and later periods, by using a combination of documentary evidence and metal detected data, it was possible to show changing foci and land use; the western part of the study area saw low human influence until the later medieval period. An increase in finds identifies the transition from meadow to cultivated land in the later medieval period; there is little need to manure pasture land and one would not expect much pottery on such land. The metal detecting data has shown that human activity is still evident in the modern ploughzone when ceramic data may suggest otherwise.

Conclusion: Metal artefacts are able to provide a chronologically robust and distinct dataset; the personal nature of many metal artefacts has the potential to tell us more about the lives and activities of those who lived and worked in the landscape, adding flesh to the ceramic bones of traditional field survey techniques. Through not using this technique as a matter of course we are intentionally excluding an important and informative dataset from our research.



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