

4th April -“Treasure beneath our feet”

Speaker: Mr James Mather

James, a keen metal detectorist, took us through how he became interested in metal detecting 25 years ago; how the hobby is regulated by the Treasure Act of 1996; and how any finds of significance have to be recorded by one of 38 Government appointees.

Most of the finds consist of odd coins, some of which may be centuries old, some relatively recent, axe heads, agricultural equipment and the like. If gold or silver is found, this must be reported to a coroner within 14 days to assess its value and to see if any museum is interested. If not, the finds are returned to the finder. However, what sets our speaker apart is that one day in October 2015, as he was thinking of packing up and going home after 5 hours walking up and down a farmer’s field near Watlington, his detector suddenly went wild. He realised that he had found a large hoard of silver coins. He covered his find, alerted the farmer and made contact with a Government assessor.

It turned out that the find was not only valuable, (about £1.5 million), but of great historical importance. The find consisted of 200 Anglo-Saxon silver coins, 15 silver ingots and 7 items of jewellery. They were dated to between 875 and 880 AD and are the first Viking hoard to be found in Oxfordshire, on the edge of King Alfred’s Wessex and Mercia.

The Watlington Hoard can be viewed in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.