

The Oxford Times

Treasure hunter finds at least £1m worth of Viking artefacts in Oxfordshire

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By Sophie Mogridge

A TREASURE hunter who found Viking artefacts in Oxfordshire worth at least £1m has said he is "not bothered" about the money.

James Mather dug up 186 silver coins, seven items of silver and gold jewellery and 15 silver ingots believed to be from the ninth century on a Watlington farm last October.

But the 60-year-old said he is more concerned with the "historical benefit" the Hoard would have for the county.

It is believed the Hoard was deposited in Watlington in the late 870s by a Viking for safe-keeping.

James Mather, 60, said: "I was out with my metal detector on a farm, with the permission of the farmer, and at first I only found a few corroded coins and some shot gun cartridges.

"I was preparing myself to give up and go home when I saw some higher ground and I thought I'd give it a go because that's quite often where people would settle.

"I was doing the zig-zag motion over the land when my metal detector went crazy and after digging seven inches down I found a single silver ingot.

"I suddenly had an epiphany and realised it was something I had seen in a previous Viking Hoard, although they were not particularly active in the South of England."

Mr Mather, from Reading, decided to venture out further when suddenly his metal detector went off again and he found a handful of silver coins a few inches below the surface of the ground.

He said: "It was a fabulous and surreal moment full of shock and excitement when I realised what it might have meant."

Dr John Naylor from the Portable Antiquities Scheme at the [Ashmolean Museum](#) said the findings would "revolutionise" the study of Vikings and improve the historical prestige of the county.

He said: "What James has found really is quite something and it will make a big difference to what we already know about that time period."

Mr Mather added that some of the coins were exceptionally rare and some of them had never been seen before.

If an object is composed of greater than 10 per cent precious metal – and is more than 300 years old – it could potentially be treasure, according to the Treasure Act 1996.

He said: "I don't want to speculate as to how much the hoard might be worth because it's the job of the valuers to work it out, but what I do know is that some of those coins have gone for £24,000 each at auction.

"So we're looking at a seven figure sum at the very least."

The ruling, made at Oxford Coroner's Court, means items effectively belong to the public and are likely to be put on display at the Ashmolean Museum.

If bought by a museum the money would be split between the finder and landowner.

Other items declared treasure at an inquest yesterday include a complete silver dress fastener dating to the Anglo-saxon period found in Harwell, a silver medieval hooked tag from Aston and a 16th century silver openwork filigree button from Nettlebed.

In addition, a late medieval silver spherical bell found in Highmoor and a pair of silver cuff links also from the medieval period found in Wytham were declared treasure.

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