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## THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE MILDENHALL TREASURE

Richard Hobbs, FSA\*

*Discovered at the height of the Second World War, the Mildenhall treasure has been a cornerstone of the national collections of the British Museum ever since its acquisition in 1946. But the circumstances behind its discovery have always been problematical. Although it is indisputable that it was found by tractor-worker Gordon Butcher, and then hidden away by Sydney Ford, is there more to the story? Archaeologists such as Tom Lethbridge and Gordon Fowler certainly thought so. A fascinating set of documents in the archives of the British Museum, discussed here for the first time, helps to provide the answers.*

The Mildenhall treasure was undoubtedly one of the most significant archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century and is still one of the very few surviving sets of late Roman silver tableware. It has been on permanent display since its acquisition by the British Museum in 1946, with only occasional trips beyond Bloomsbury (as part of the ‘Buried Treasure’ exhibition, which recently toured four UK venues, for example).<sup>1</sup>

Despite its significance, surprisingly little has appeared in print about the find. After acquisition, the museum published a slim handbook of twenty-four pages,<sup>2</sup> principally to serve the interests of the academically curious. It was not until thirty years later that a more comprehensive publication appeared,<sup>3</sup> although this too was primarily a handbook designed to replace and update the earlier one and is not a ‘definitive’ catalogue. In addition, selective pieces from the treasure, or discussions of the wider context of Mildenhall, have made their way into a number of other publications.<sup>4</sup>

Also published in 1977, the year that Painter produced his handbook – and entirely by coincidence – the writer Roald Dahl published a story entitled ‘The Mildenhall treasure’.<sup>5</sup> The story was a revision of an article Dahl sold to the *Saturday Evening Post*, an American magazine, which published it in 1947. Dahl based his tale on an interview with the finder of the treasure, Gordon Butcher. But it was another man, Sydney Ford, who kept the treasure in his house during the war years, the two men having excavated the hoard together, probably in January 1942.

Dahl addressed one of the principal aspects of the story, which neither Brailsford nor Painter – the authors of the handbooks – spent more than a few lines discussing: namely, how the treasure was actually discovered and what happened to it afterwards.<sup>6</sup> For after the hoard was declared treasure trove on 1 July 1946, doubts began to be expressed about the manner in which the two men – and particularly Sydney Ford – claimed the treasure had been found. A rumour that the treasure came from somewhere in the

\* R Hobbs, *Department of Prehistory and Europe, The British Museum, London WC1B 3DG, UK.*  
E-mail: <rhobbs@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk>.



Fig 1. Dr Hugh Alderson Fawcett, general practitioner and antiquarian. Fawcett alerted the British Museum to the discovery of the Mildenhall treasure after being shown it by Sydney Ford in Easter 1946. *Photograph:* courtesy of John Gadd

Mediterranean quickly gained currency, and was still being propagated as late as 1997.<sup>7</sup> In addition, two archaeologists, Tom Lethbridge and Gordon Fowler, seriously doubted Ford's version of events, having failed to pinpoint the supposed burial pit, despite substantial field survey. Lethbridge and Fowler became increasingly convinced that the treasure was linked with an earlier failed attempt to locate a 'buried treasure' in 1923, claiming that the hoard had actually been found elsewhere and reburied at Mildenhall. Others have claimed that the hoard is not complete; they say that other pieces, and possibly coins, were not declared to the police. And there has also been a claim that the hoard was not found in January 1942 but earlier.

Is there any truth in any of these claims, and how did these rumours emerge? This paper examines a set of letters, memoranda and documents in the British Museum



Fig 2. Sydney Ford in later years with his collection of lithics. *Photograph: courtesy of John Gadd*

archives and in the hands of other parties in order to try and find some answers.<sup>8</sup> What emerges is a picture of mistrust and antagonism between the archaeological establishment and a small rural community and a fascinating insight into post-war attitudes to archaeology and the place of Britain in the Roman Empire, which differs markedly from attitudes and perceptions held today.

#### HUGH FAWCETT, THE BRITISH MUSEUM AND THE TREASURE'S CONCEALMENT

The first time the British Museum became aware of a spectacular discovery at Mildenhall was on 8 May 1946. Hugh Fawcett (fig 1), a doctor in general practice based at Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire, called in to the museum and spoke to Christopher Hawkes,<sup>9</sup> assistant Keeper in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities,<sup>10</sup> and possibly also to Thomas Kendrick, the departmental Keeper.<sup>11</sup> Fawcett had visited Sydney Ford (fig 2), of Grove Villa, West Row, Mildenhall, throughout the war years,<sup>12</sup> because the two men had a mutual interest in antiquities, principally lithics.<sup>13</sup> But it was not until Easter 1946 – probably Easter Monday, 22 April – that Ford first showed Fawcett the hoard, which had been split between two rooms of his house. Fawcett urged Ford to report it, but Ford was reluctant. After the discussion with Christopher Hawkes, Fawcett agreed to write to Ford to ask him to send some pieces of the treasure for analysis, in order to establish that the pieces were made of silver. Fawcett suspected this to be so, but Ford told Fawcett he believed the hoard to be made of pewter.

On 14 May, Ford sent Fawcett 'two' small pieces 'which have broken off the plates'.<sup>14</sup> It is no longer possible to establish which items in the treasure these pieces came from; it seems likely that they became detached during Ford's cleaning of the find (see below). On 15 May, Fawcett wrote to Hawkes enclosing 'three or four very small, thin fragments'.<sup>15</sup>

A week later, on 21 May, Ford sent Fawcett '1 spoon 1 cup and 1 handle' for analysis. Fawcett had written to Ford to explain that the silver fragments were not suitable,<sup>16</sup> and the sending of three small but complete and identifiable items was the result. A few days later, on 27 May, Fawcett brought these pieces in person to the British Museum. They consisted of one of the inscribed spoons, a 'cup or bowl' and a detached handle.<sup>17</sup> They were examined by Kendrick, who confirmed them to be characteristic late Roman vessel types, and by Harold Plenderleith, Head of the British Museum Research Laboratory, who confirmed that the pieces were silver.<sup>18</sup> Fawcett took the objects away on the same day, for he had arranged to return them to Ford on 31 May.<sup>19</sup>

It was at this point that Thomas Kendrick, though not having actually seen the hoard as yet, still felt he knew enough to begin to consider the issue as treasure trove and, consequently, to ponder which witnesses would be useful at a coroner's inquest. With this in mind, he wrote a memorandum to Edgar Forsdyke,<sup>20</sup> Director of the British Museum, suggesting that Gordon Fowler and Charles Phillips would be good for this purpose, as both men were experienced Fenland archaeologists.<sup>21</sup> He also suggested Frank Leney of Moyse's Hall, Bury St Edmunds, unaware of the fact that Leney had died the previous year.<sup>22</sup> In a postscript, he stated that the coroner will 'no doubt give access'. This was said either in the mistaken belief that the hoard had already been declared, or, perhaps, with confidence that it was only a matter of time before the hoard would be given up. For it should be remembered that, at this stage, no one at either the British Museum or within the local archaeological community, apart from amateur antiquarian Hugh Fawcett, even knew the identity of the finder.

On 13 June, Ford wrote to Fawcett again.<sup>23</sup> Ford's conscience was clearly troubled. In the letter he accused Fawcett of being 'on the side of the BM'. He went on to say:

As I see it I am to give up these things & take whatever I am offered. I feel I would rather put them back where they came from than part with them on these terms and am not so sure it wouldn't be the best thing to do and let the Crown come and find their property.

Clearly Fawcett had been continuing to put pressure on Ford to declare the find and was reiterating that under the common law of treasure trove he had a duty to report it, hence the reference to Crown property. Ford went on to say: 'I am not worried about getting into trouble as I don't feel I have committed a crime by picking up something of value off my land'. Fawcett added a handwritten comment to this letter that demonstrated – despite any subsequent attempts at obfuscation on the part of Ford – that Fawcett must have been told by Ford at their initial meeting in Easter 1946 that it was Gordon Butcher who had originally discovered the find, *not* on Ford's land but on someone else's (namely that of Fred Rolfe, tenant farmer of land owned by Mrs Aves, as detailed below).

Fawcett wrote to Christopher Hawkes again on 16 June, suggesting that he come in for another meeting, at which he intended to reveal Ford's name and address.<sup>24</sup> After a discussion with Kendrick, Hawkes replied to Fawcett's letter the next day, enclosing a

copy of the treasure trove guidance.<sup>25</sup> He made an excuse regarding the request made by Fawcett for a further meeting – he previously stated that Fawcett was ‘inordinately talkative’,<sup>26</sup> so it seems likely he wished to avoid having to humour the doctor once again. Instead he asked that the identity of the finder be sent to Kendrick directly in writing. This letter is the first time in which the museum seemed to be concerned that the hoard was in danger of being lost and began to ratchet up the pressure on Fawcett to ensure that it emerged from hiding.

Fawcett immediately forwarded the treasure trove regulations on to Ford. Their official nature clearly did the trick. On 22 June 1946 Ford typed this indignant missive (fig 3) to Fawcett:

Dear Dr Fawcett

I reported the find to the police at Mildenhall on the 21<sup>st</sup> inst, who promptly came along and pinched the lot.<sup>27</sup>

The hoard was taken to Newmarket police station,<sup>28</sup> and the first press reports began to appear almost immediately through a member of the Press Association and a local Bury photographer (the press reports are discussed below).<sup>29</sup> The first correspondence was made between Forsdyke and Thomas Wilson, the coroner for Bury St Edmunds.<sup>30</sup> On 26 June, for the first time, the whole hoard was inspected by professional archaeologists, namely Tom Lethbridge, lecturer in Anglo-Saxon and Roman antiquities at the Cambridge Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, and Major Gordon Fowler, who had already been suggested by Kendrick (see above). Forsdyke suggested Plenderleith for the coroner’s inquest, and reassured Wilson that it would not be necessary for the hoard to be transported to London for examination. He went on to recommend Gordon Fowler and Mr Leney of Moyse’s Hall as suitable witnesses regarding the archaeological, historical and local knowledge aspects of the case, taking the advice from Kendrick given in a previous memorandum (and therefore also unaware of Leney’s death).<sup>31</sup> In amongst all this, Fawcett made a rather desperate attempt to thrust himself into the spotlight, fretting that his role in the matter would be overlooked.<sup>32</sup>

On 26 June, the day he saw the hoard for the first time, Charles Phillips wrote a postcard to Hawkes in which he made the first connection between the treasure and the remains of a Roman villa found nearby in 1932 by Lethbridge and Leaf (fig 4).<sup>33</sup> The day after, Sir John Tilley, President of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History, wrote to Forsdyke to put in a local claim for the find, suggesting Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds as possible repositories.<sup>34</sup> On 27 June, Hawkes sent a long letter to Phillips (also copied to Fowler), principally to ensure that the Fenland Research Committee was fully briefed on what the British Museum knew about the discovery to date.<sup>35</sup> Hawkes (himself a member of the committee) made some interesting political points and speculations in this letter. He explained that he had offered Plenderleith to give evidence at the inquest and no other British Museum staff members (therefore excluding himself): ‘so that local archaeological interests shall not fancy themselves elbowed out by any BM arrogance’. This was given even greater emphasis later on in the letter, where he stated that: ‘as matters stand the BM can only properly assist the Coroner by its laboratory evidence, and must advise him that the archaeological aspects of finds are matters for local and not national archaeology’.

But of course, the Fens, on the edge of which West Row is sited, not being dictated by county boundaries, allowed some flexibility in this stance, a fact that was perhaps not



Grove Villa,  
West Row,  
Via Bury St. Eds.  
22. 6. 46.

Dear Dr Fawcett

I reported the find to the police  
at Mildenhall on the 21st inst, who  
promptly came along and pinched the  
lot.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely,

signed..... Sid Ford.

Fig 3. Sydney Ford's letter to Dr Fawcett, 22 June 1946 (MA, doc. 012)



Fig 4. Remains of a hypocaust system of a small Roman building excavated by Tom Lethbridge on Fred Rolfe's land in 1932; photograph by Revd M Tyrell Green, 1933.  
*Photograph: courtesy of John Gadd*

lost on Hawkes. The matter of local politics, however, seemed to have had a bearing only on the assessment of the find's context, not on eventual disposition. In the same letter, there is an implication that the British Museum would be the eventual resting place for the find: 'Once a Treasure Trove verdict is given, of course, I shall automatically come in again on a new footing, that of the BM official concerned.'

In the same letter, Hawkes also discussed his view of the archaeological context, knowing that in order for it to be declared treasure trove an 'intention to recover' needed to be demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> The Sutton Hoo ship burial would have loomed large in this respect – it was only seven years earlier that the spectacular Anglo-Saxon finds were *not* declared treasure trove, because Sutton Hoo was clearly a funeral monument, the contents of which were not intended for recovery.<sup>37</sup> Hawkes speculated that the Mildenhall treasure's burial site would have been: '[in] Late Roman times ... inaccessible swamp or swampy pools, exactly suitable for the depositing of a hoard of this kind'.<sup>38</sup>

Hawkes also modified his view of the dating of Mildenhall. His initial impression of the three items brought in by Fawcett for analysis was of a fourth-century date, but on seeing images of the whole find<sup>39</sup> he revised this opinion and stated that the: 'great embossed pieces' (which meant the Great Dish and probably the covered bowl), 'cannot, on grounds of style ... be later [than] the middle third century'. He went on to suggest the dates '230–280', and burial during the 'Allectus–Constantius war of 296'.

Beyond any stylistic considerations, why Hawkes changed his opinion on the burial date is unclear. Maybe it was because the Allectus war was the best-attested period of civil unrest in late Roman Britain. At the time it was natural for an archaeologist to make a causal link between a period of civil unrest and the burial and non-recovery of a hoard; today it is recognized that a more complex range of interpretations might be invoked.<sup>40</sup> One also wonders if the grim spectre of a Nazi invasion, only relatively recently repelled, was also in Hawkes's mind, as it must have been in many others. Whatever the reason, the link with the events of the late third century was certainly wrong, for the material principally dates to the fourth century.

Phillips told Hawkes, in a letter of 28 June, that he was happy to help but that he was not available for the inquest, the date of which had now been set for 1 July.<sup>41</sup> However, he was able to find the time to visit the coroner on 29 or 30 June to apprise Wilson of the situation. In another letter of 30 June, Phillips explained that both Lethbridge and Fowler had been signed up by the coroner for the inquest.<sup>42</sup> He also made an interesting remark about the completeness or otherwise of the find:

Lethbridge and Fowler believe that there is more of the stuff in existence which has not yet been traced by the police and the stir about the whole thing has led to dark hints of what an unnamed potato-king has in his private possession, found on another occasion.<sup>43</sup>

As events showed, this would not be the first time that the suggestion was made that there was more material from Mildenhall than that seized by the police at Ford's house on 21 June. In addition, it seems that Fowler (and possibly Lethbridge) got Ford to show them the findspot before the inquest.<sup>44</sup> Phillips wrote to Hawkes:

I shall represent to him [the Coroner] the desirability of getting some actual evidence about the conditions of deposition of the treasure and perhaps he will think it good to hold up proceedings until this can be brought to court ... I am told Mr Ford is very obstinate in refusing to point out the exact spot.<sup>45</sup>

## THE TREASURE TROVE INQUEST: 1 JULY 1946

The inquest was held at Mildenhall police station on Monday 1 July at 3pm.<sup>46</sup> There was a jury of twelve local men, with Robert Pizzey, the local bank manager, elected as chairman (fig 5). Sydney Ford was the first called to speak. His testimony established the following:

- the hoard was found in January 1942 (not 1943 as is sometimes suggested);
- it was found by Gordon Butcher (fig 6) at a depth of 10 inches (254mm) in an arable field (Ord. No. 1673) under the tenancy of Fred Rolfe. Ford produced a sketch plan 'which I made showing the exact spot' (see below);
- the first piece removed from the earth was 'the big tray';<sup>47</sup>
- Ford implied that he was the principal excavator; he stated (author's italics): '*I recovered all articles*', and '*I put them in a sack and took them to my house*', but went on to say '*We got home at 5 pm*'. Whether he meant that Butcher physically helped him carry the material back, or that they got to their respective homes at around 5 pm, is not clear;
- Ford 'cleaned them by continual working'; 'they were all black and very dirty with a thick crust very hard'; '*I started with the big tray, it took me nearly two years to clean that*'; and afterwards '*I stood them on a kind of sideboard in my room*';
- Ford stated: '*I thought they were pewter*';
- Ford stated: '*The spot where I found these articles was about 30 yards (27.43m) from the site of a Roman villa*';
- Ford made certain remarks about the context: '*We did not have to dig very deep*'; '*No signs of a box*'; '*no signs of human remains*'; '*no signs of brick work or any bump in the ground*';
- Ford stated: '*Everything that I found I handed to Sergeant Cole and it is here today*'.



Witnesses at the Treasure Trove inquest. Left to right—Mr. S. Ford, Mr. G. W. Butcher, Mr. T. C. Lethbridge, Dr. H. J. Plender-Leith, and Dr. H. A. Fawcett. LAF

Fig 5. Witnesses summoned to the treasure trove inquest held at Mildenhall police station on 1 July 1946. From left to right: Sydney Ford, Gordon Butcher, Tom Lethbridge, Harold Plenderleith and Hugh Fawcett. *Photograph: Bury Free Press & Post, 5 July 1946*





Fig 6. Gordon Butcher driving his tractor, c 1947. *Photograph:* from the American publication, the *Saturday Evening Post*, 20 September 1947, in which Roald Dahl's story 'He plowed [*sic*] up \$1,000,000', first appeared



Fig 7. The pair of pedestalled platters from the Mildenhall treasure (P&E 1946.1007.13-14). Fawcett claimed he had seen four of these when he was first shown the treasure in Ford's house. *Photograph:* © Trustees of the British Museum

At the end of his testimony, Ford said he had lied on a previous occasion. He told the inquest that he made a statement to the police in which he said that *he* had found the hoard on a field: 'belonging to my brother and myself' at 'Ord No. 1672 marked x', but that this statement was made in order to stop 'ignorant people digging on the site'.<sup>48</sup> Finally, Ford stated that before Fawcett's involvement, he 'intended to keep the articles'.

The second person called to the witness stand was Hugh Fawcett, the Buckinghamshire doctor. Fawcett confirmed what he had told Hawkes already, which was that he first saw the material at the 'end of April 1946'. He also revealed that he had visited Ford from the time of the discovery (in other words January 1942) sporadically throughout the war and was not aware of its existence during that time. Given that Ford certainly had it on open display by 1944 (see below), it would appear that Fawcett had not visited for some time, unless he was not allowed into the room in which the treasure was kept.

Fawcett's most interesting statement concerned the completeness of the find: 'I cannot suggest any article I saw [when Ford first showed Fawcett the assemblage] that is not here today except I have a vague impression of their [*sic*] being four small cups on stands instead of two.' This statement implies that in addition to the two pedestalled platters (P&E 1946.1007.13-14) (fig 7), which for many years were thought to be goblets,<sup>49</sup> there was an additional pair. A similar observation was made in a statement Fawcett gave to the police before the inquest (see below).

Next to speak was Gordon Butcher, who made a brief statement:

- he confirmed that it was he who made the discovery in January 1942 when employed by Ford;
- he also stated that the field belonged to Rolfe;
- he claimed the two men dug the objects up together and after putting them in a sack 'took them to Mr Ford's house'; this slightly contradicted Ford's own version of events, as Ford suggested that he alone took them to his house (not that it has much bearing on the matter, the key point being that no suggestion was made that any of the material ended up in Butcher's hands);
- Butcher stated that Ford told him that they were 'pewter or lead';
- Butcher stated that he received no payment from Ford above and beyond his wages.

At the inquest, earlier statements given by both Ford and Butcher to the police were also shown to the jury (exhibits 4 and 5). Both statements (as Ford admitted at the inquest), had been given to mislead others. Ford's statement was given to Superintendent S W Hammond at Mildenhall police station on 21 June 1946, on the day that the hoard was seized (see below). Butcher's statement was given a couple of days later, when Ford had decided to return to the station and amend his story, although it was obvious that Butcher had been fully briefed by Ford as to what he should say, for the two men's statements (in Ford's case, his second) were very similar.

Some of the ambiguities surrounding the Mildenhall treasure derive from the discrepancies between these earlier and later statements. At the time of seizure, Ford was clearly worried about the fact that he had not told Rolfe, the tenant farmer, that the treasure had been found on his land. In the statement he gave to the police at that time, Ford gave the second of what were a number of suggested findspots, as well as a rather

different version of events as to the recovery of the material, and indeed as to when the discovery occurred:

- he said that the field on which the hoard was found was the one backing on to the engineering works owned by himself on the Beck Row Road;
- he said the hoard was found on 6 January 1943, one year later than stated in court;
- Ford implied that he had virtually stumbled upon one of the pieces 'lying partly on top of the soil' (ie, sticking out of the ground), and had then pulled it out of the soil (ie, it was not struck by a plough as stated at inquest);
- He returned later 'after dusk', at which point he dug out 'another large tray, four soup pattern plates, two smaller plates, two finger bowls, two cups, one salad pattern bowl with handles detached, five ladles with four handles detached, one tureen and eight spoons'.<sup>50</sup>

Butcher's false police statement was broadly similar to that of Ford's, which is hardly surprising given that they had colluded, although Ford initially said he excavated the find alone and made no mention of ploughing. Butcher stated that he was ploughing a field belonging to his boss Sydney Ford just after 'Christmas 1942', correlating with Ford's claim that the hoard had been found in January 1943. Butcher also claimed that one of the largest vessels emerged first, and that the two men returned after dusk to finish digging up the rest of the find.

After these police statements had been presented to the jury, Lethbridge and Fowler gave their opinions as expert witnesses on the likely date of the material in the hoard and the burial context. Lethbridge suggested 'a range in time of 50 years between construction of different pieces', and that '[the hoard] could not have fallen in grounds [*sic*]'. Fowler said: 'I am convinced hidden. We saw the same thing in this last War.' Both archaeologists were keen to stress that the hoard was a burial for subsequent recovery, as opposed to grave goods or items abandoned to the gods, a theory which, in any case, did not have much currency at the time. This would have presented Fowler and Lethbridge with few difficulties, intellectually; it was clear that Mildenhall was not another Sutton Hoo. They could confidently argue, therefore, that there *had* been an intention to recover, and thus meet the requirements of treasure trove.

Lethbridge also referred to exhibit 7, which was essentially a report he wrote for the coroner's reference. This report made a number of points:

- that a villa (see fig 4) had been found in 1932 on Ford's land, with evidence of a hypocaust system, brick piers and a stokehole being found 'just outside the building' (in fact the villa was on Fred Rolfe's land);
- the building itself consisted of only two small rooms with an external outbuilding at one end (little more than a 'shed or lean-to');
- very little was found except 'large slabs of painted wall plaster', and a few fragments of late Roman pottery;
- Lethbridge made comparison for Mildenhall with material in both Traprain and Coleraine, which at the time were the only large assemblages of late Roman silver known from the British Isles;<sup>51</sup>
- Lethbridge correctly picked up on the fact that the 'chi rho' symbols on some of the spoons must date the hoard after the toleration of Christians by Constantine

(thus ensuring that Hawkes' theory (see above) that the hoard was linked with the Carausius-Allectus episode could be discounted).

The jury adjudged the hoard to be treasure trove. The summary of proceedings settled on the date of finding as 'January 1942' and the Ordnance Survey field reference as 1673. The only oddity came in the description of the find itself (author's italics):

Two large silver dishes four large flanged bowls with beaded rims two smaller similar bowls one large flanged bowl with Niello rim and cover two shallow dishes with beaded rims one large *pented* [*sic*] *hanging bowl* two small wine cups on pedestals [*sic*] five spoons with dolphin handles eight cochlenia [*sic*] spoons.

Presumably the 'pented hanging bowl' refers to the fluted bowl with drop handles (P&E 1946.1007.15-17), rather than any additional object, which is not in the British Museum.

#### Ford's sketch map of the supposed findspot

At the inquest, Ford handed the coroner a sketch map (fig 8; indicated in the inquest notes as 'Exhibit 1'). The problems concerning this and the supposed findspot were summarized a few months later by Fowler (author's italics):<sup>52</sup>

Before the inquest Ford ... showed me a place on *his* land where he said he had dug it up ... with Butcher ... still earlier Ford had shown [Fawcett] another place on that field ... It transpired at the Inquest that Ford had shown the Police yet a third spot on his land ... But at the Inquest Ford stated that all these spots were incorrect and that the real spot was as shown on a plan which he ... handed to the Coroner folded ... [a] spot ... *on his neighbour's (F. Rolfe's) land* about 30 yds. [27.43m] from where Lethbridge and I excavated a small Roman villa in 1932. After the Inquest Ford told F. Rolfe that the spot was on Rolfe's land just east of the villa. Butcher told Rolfe it was still further east on *Ford's* [*sic*] *land* [Fowler must have made a mistake – he surely meant Rolfe's land].

When Lethbridge and I were authorised to investigate the whole matter we went to Ford and asked him to show us the real spot. He thereupon showed us one on Rolfe's land about 60 yards [54.86m] south of the site of the Villa. He said it was the same as the spot he had marked on the plan he had handed to the Coroner at the Inquest.

However, when Lethbridge and I proceeded to dig there we found no signs whatever of any hole ever having disturbed the soil or sub-soil at or near that spot.

Various attempts were made to extract Ford's original sketch from Wilson. Fowler appealed to Kendrick for help.<sup>53</sup> Kendrick was not particularly keen to get involved, although he did ask Forsdyke if he would mind writing to the coroner, 'as you and he are buddies'.<sup>54</sup> Forsdyke sent Kendrick a typically caustic response:

I see no reason why we should burn our fingers at several fires for these local antiquaries ... I must say it does not mean much to me, and that the precise spot from which the treasure was dug seems to bear rather upon future search than upon our present find. In any case Fowler has as much right to approach the Treasury solicitor as I have, and better course and ground.<sup>55</sup>

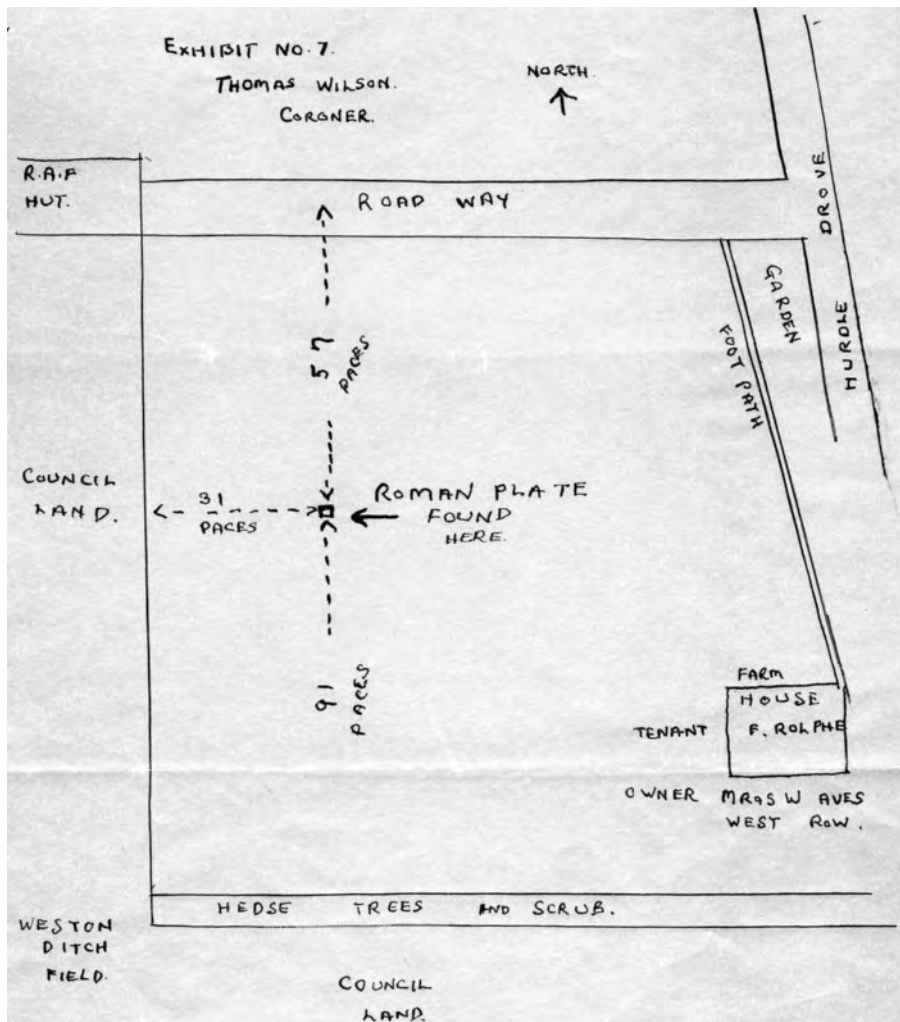


Fig 8. Sydney Ford's sketch handed to the Coroner at the inquest on 1 July 1946. Additional annotations were added in a second hand by an unknown party (MA, doc. 024)

The sketch eventually sent to the British Museum with the inquest documents in 1955<sup>56</sup> is unsigned, and so is open to debate as to who actually drew it, but the handwriting suggests that it probably is Ford's original sketch. The sketch has been annotated by two different hands, one of which wrote with widely spaced letters (for example 'ROMAN PLATE FOUND HERE'), while the second formed letters differently and slightly closer together.<sup>57</sup> The first hand is almost certainly Ford's as it matches that on another document signed by Ford (fig 9), consisting of a sketch Ford was asked to make of how the treasure lay in the ground. On this sketch, the style of the writing of capital letters and the spacing matches the widely spaced capital letters of the findspot sketch's first hand. The second hand filled in some more detail. For example, in the bottom right-hand corner of the sketch, the first hand (arguably Ford) wrote 'HOUSE'. The second hand added 'FARM', and the details 'TENANT F. ROLPHE [*sic*]' and, below the



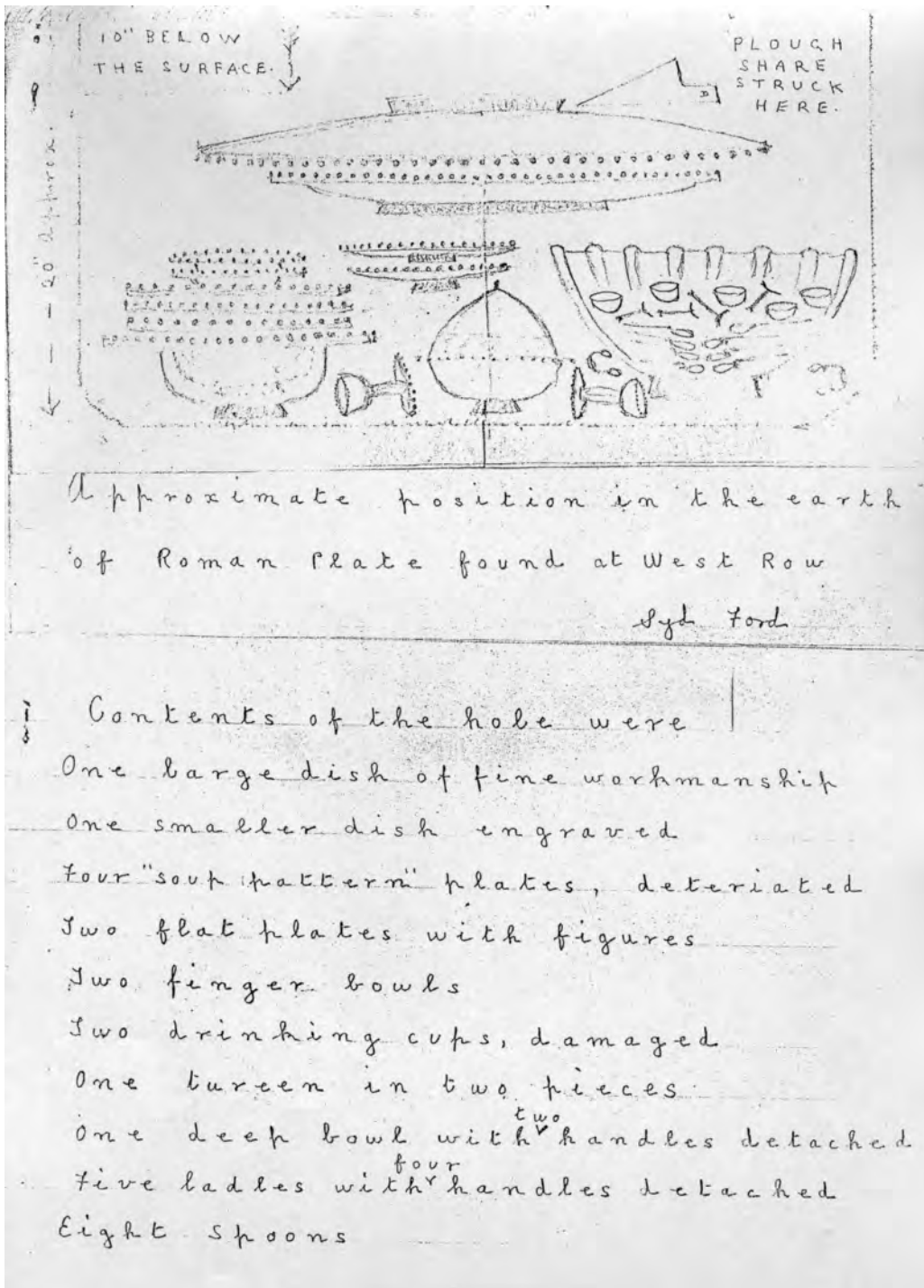


Fig 9. Sydney Ford's recollection of how the objects lay in the ground. *Photograph: courtesy of John Gadd*

house, 'OWNER MR & S W AVES WEST ROW'. The second scribe made a mistake with the spelling of Rolfe's name – it would seem inconceivable that this was Ford, who had known him for many years. The second hand also added, at the top of the sketch, 'EXHIBIT NO. 1 THOMAS WILSON. CORONER'; in the coroner's report, exhibit 1 is Ford's sketch (although the '1' looks rather like a '7', just to confuse matters!). It is possible that the second hand is Wilson himself or one of his staff.<sup>58</sup>

### Post-inquest fallout (July 1946)

After Mildenhall was declared treasure trove, there was concern that the find site would be targeted by treasure-hunters and thus needed to be scheduled as soon as possible. Notes from a conversation with Lethbridge indicate that Christopher Hawkes was worried that Mr Rolfe, feeling hard done by at having no claim to any reward,<sup>59</sup> might decide to see if there was any more silver to be found.<sup>60</sup> At the time in question the field was under crop, so Lethbridge advised Hawkes that a dig should take place immediately the crop was harvested.

Gordon Fowler also urged 'practical action' on the part of the British Museum.<sup>61</sup> He was convinced that the hoard had been buried in two lots, on the basis that there were 'bowls without their lids' (although, in fact, none is missing) and 'fewer ladle handles than ladles' (which is indeed the case, although, in actuality, only one handle is absent). He made the rather odd claim that this was because *two* persons originally buried the hoard, one in a shallow pit subsequently struck by Butcher's plough, and the other in a deeper pit, 'being the work of a better digger'. Where he got this rather strange idea from is unclear, even if there was a general consensus that the service was incomplete (see below). He suggested that no subsequent digging took place by Sydney Ford because the findspot was on Rolfe's land. He therefore urged the museum to mount a rescue excavation to find the second hole as soon as the crop was removed from the field. Fowler also suggested that Butcher had been bought off 'long ago', which would 'account for Butcher becoming a smallholder soon after the silver was discovered'.<sup>62</sup>

After the inquest, the treasure was taken from Mildenhall police station back to Newmarket, although it seems that as a matter of course it was destined to go to the British Museum (fig 10),<sup>63</sup> as it was standard practice at the time (even if it was an unwritten rule) for treasure trove finds made on English soil to go to the British Museum and Welsh finds to the National Museum of Wales.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of these fears regarding the site and the possible presence of more objects, Hawkes contacted Bryan O'Neil, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments at the Ministry of Works.<sup>65</sup> O'Neil said that he could not go ahead with scheduling without the precise location of the findspot of the treasure and the location of the villa excavated in 1932 (fig 11). A further letter on 10 July from Raby, also of the Ministry of Works, explained that the site of the treasure could not be scheduled but that the site of the villa could.<sup>66</sup> Hawkes provided a marked map to show where the villa had been found. This appeared to make the assumption that the treasure must have been found within the confines of the area covered by the villa estate, even though there is no particular reason to believe this to have been the case. A letter from Forsdyke to Raby clarified that what was asked for was the scheduling of a large area around the Roman villa: 'likely to contain its outbuildings and other appurtenances'.<sup>67</sup>

All the archaeologists involved at the time seemed to have made the same assumption. By extension it is likely that they believed that the owners of the treasure

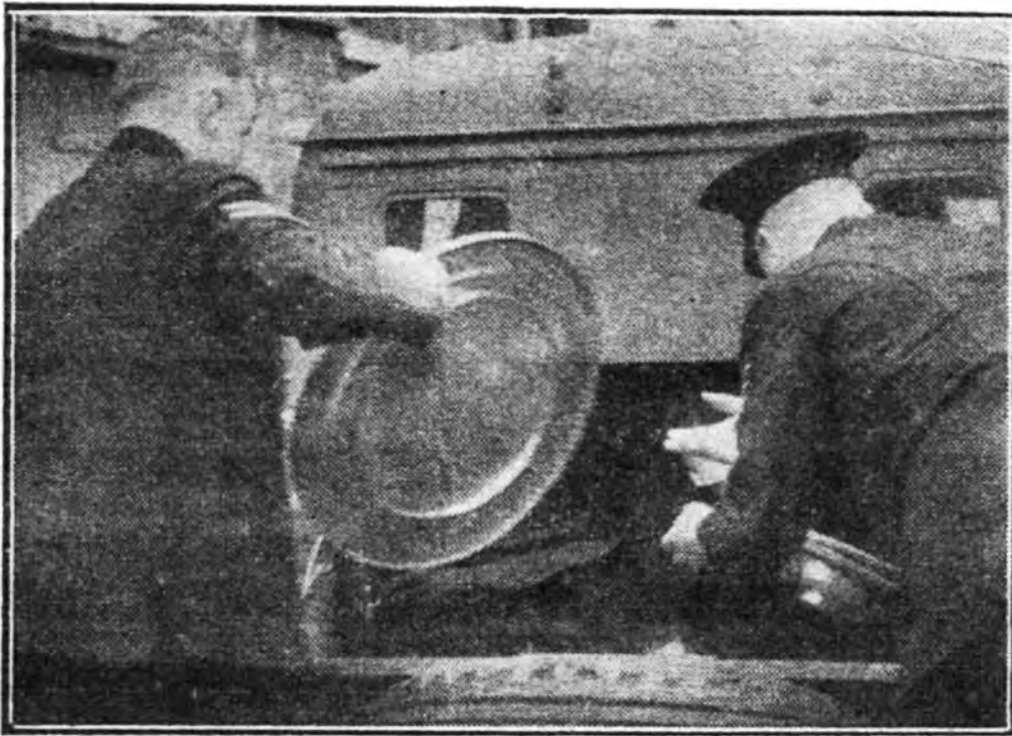


Fig 10. Sgt O Cole and Sgt D Collis unloading the treasure from a police van for the inquest. *Photograph: Bury Free Press & Post, 5 July 1946*

were the villa occupants, although none of them stated this explicitly. At the time they probably thought this must be the only logical conclusion. Nowadays we would be rather more cautious. We would consider the possibility that the owners lived some distance from the burial spot (recalling Samuel Pepys's burial of his cache by his wife and father at his father's house some distance from Pepys's home in London)<sup>68</sup> – for instance, in either the towns or hinterland estates of important nearby centres like Colchester or London, or perhaps even further afield, in a place such as Cirencester, which was arguably the most important town of late Roman Britain.<sup>69</sup>

Discussions also proceeded with regard to the treasure trove reward that should be paid to the finders. The Secretary of the British Museum wrote to the Treasury to suggest that: 'the *ex gratia* payment of full market value ... which will probably be assessed at about £20,000, is not payable in this case'.<sup>70</sup> He communicated that Forsdyke suggested that a reduction of 90 per cent should be placed on the reward, given that the finders 'concealed the fact of its discovery'. The sum of £2,000, to be shared between Butcher and Ford, was indeed the reward paid in the end.

On 10 July, P E Robertson, town clerk at Bury St Edmunds, wrote to Hawkes to tell him that the hoard would be transported to the museum two days later. The letter requested that the hoard be displayed in the Regalia Room of Bury's borough offices for a day before it went to London. It is unclear if this public display ever happened, although the Treasury had no objection, and asked that the decision be made by the British Museum trustees.<sup>71</sup>



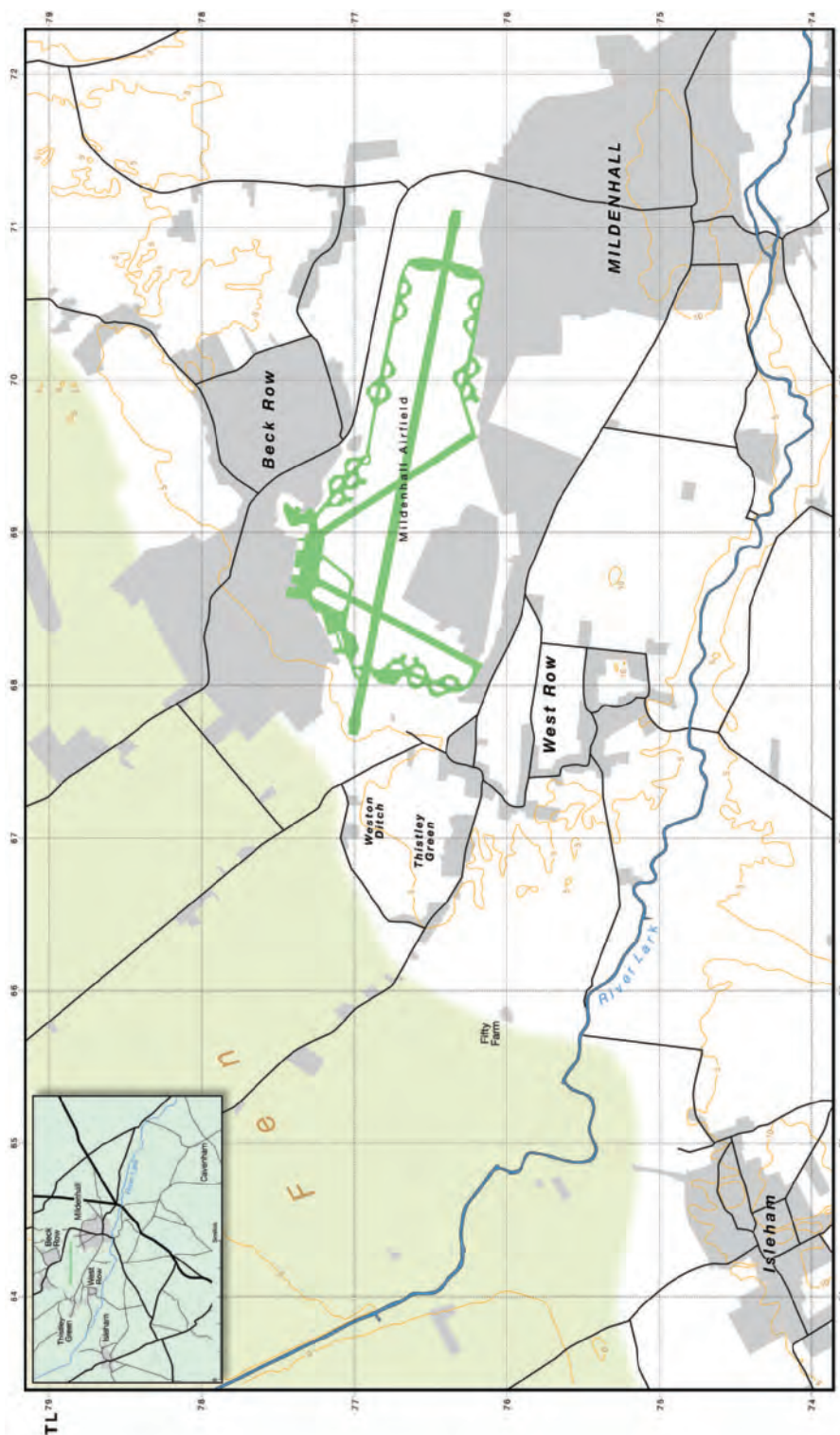


Fig 11. Plan of the area where the Mildenhall treasure was discovered. Despite repeated attempts, the exact spot where the board was dug up has never been located. *Drawing: Stephen Crummy*

The museum was also informed by the solicitors representing Ford and Butcher that they had served a writ against the coroner, Thomas Wilson, 'to restrain [him] from parting with the chattels'.<sup>72</sup> A further letter from Robertson then asked that, as the decision on the injunction was not to be taken until 16 July, that the treasure should stay in the locality for public exhibition for a few more days – not in the Regalia Room, as originally suggested, but on council premises, guarded by a pair of local police constables.<sup>73</sup> The museum did not seem to think that the Borough Council strong room would 'afford adequate protection',<sup>74</sup> and sought to get the treasure brought to London as soon as 'it can be delivered'.<sup>75</sup> It seems unlikely that it was ever displayed locally and the Mildenhall treasure was finally delivered to the British Museum on 19 July,<sup>76</sup> under armed guard, and went on public display the next day in the Edward VII gallery (fig 12).<sup>77</sup> The action against the coroner was 'discontinued within seven days of the issue of the writ'.<sup>78</sup>

#### THE TREASURE REWARD, DISPLAY AND THE INVESTIGATION OF THE FINDSPOT (JULY 1946 TO JANUARY 1947)

It had taken only two-and-a-half months from Fawcett's original approach to the museum for the Mildenhall treasure to become Crown property and part of the national collections of the British Museum.<sup>79</sup> Attention then refocused on two issues: the assigning of an appropriate treasure trove reward to the finders and the investigation of the findspot.

Confirmation that O'Neil had agreed to schedule the site was passed on to Lethbridge on 25 July. It was suggested by Hawkes to Lethbridge that he make arrangements for excavation as 'soon as the barley is off the field'.<sup>80</sup> Hawkes seemed to think that there was a real danger that Mr Rolfe, the owner of the field on which the treasure had been discovered, would attempt a clandestine excavation: 'The legal notices [will be issued] very shortly. Rolfe will then be unable to subsoil or dig treasure-holes without leave ... he [O'Neil] is of course eager to ... let you go ahead, so as to be able to tell Rolfe that the joke is over.'

In actual fact, there is no evidence to suggest that Rolfe had even considered that there might be more of the treasure located on his land, or indeed that he was even particularly concerned about the fact that he had not benefited from the discovery. When Fowler and Lethbridge approached the Rolfe family, they found them extremely amenable to their proposed excavation. In fact, so confident was Fowler that the landowners were not a threat to the findspot that he suggested it was no longer even necessary to schedule the site,<sup>81</sup> although O'Neil went ahead anyway,<sup>82</sup> largely because by the time he discovered this he had already sent the scheduling notices and it was too late to stop the process.<sup>83</sup>

As regards paying a reward, various people, both local and based at the British Museum, made an attempt at valuing the find.<sup>84</sup> Tom Lethbridge gave a value of £5,000 to the Great Dish and a total valuation for the whole find of £15,700, although he suggested that it might reach between £30,000 and £40,000 at an 'unrestricted sale'.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, Plenderleith weighed the treasure on 26 July to calculate its bullion value (fig 13). The calculation was based upon the weight of each vessel multiplied by the trade price of pure silver, which, at the time, was 44 pence per ounce troy. As the treasure weighs 1,042½ ounces (29.55kg), this resulted in an overall value of £191 2s



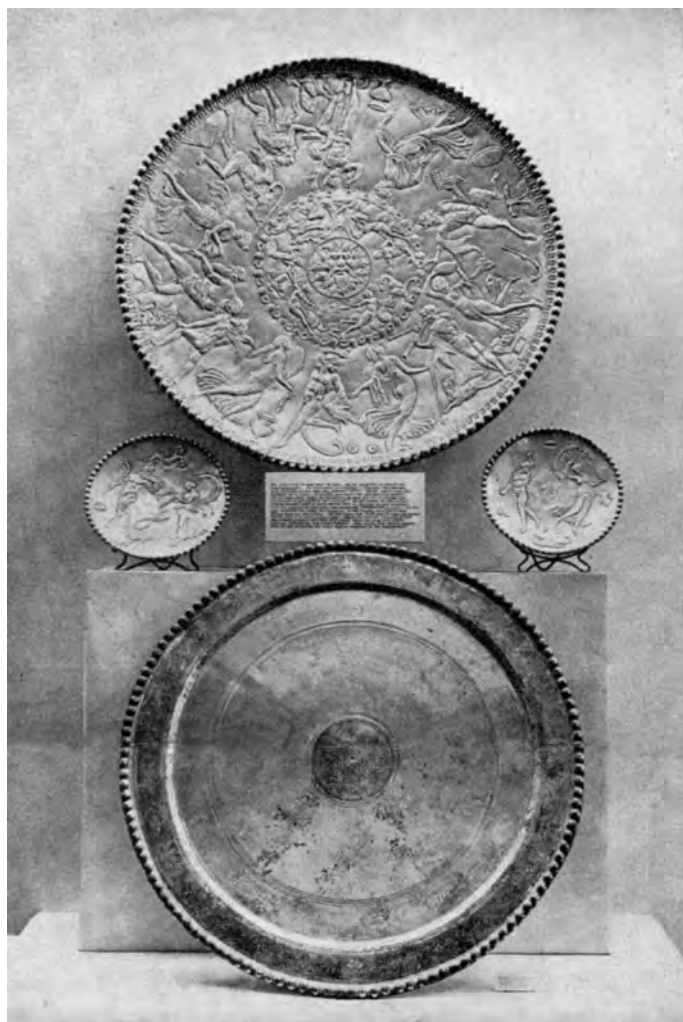


Fig 12. Some objects from the Mildenhall treasure on display in the Edward VII gallery at the British Museum in 1946. *Photograph: Saturday Evening Post*, 20 September 1947

and 6d. Fowler suggested that the finders should get £2,000 each, otherwise ‘in future no finders ... will have much inducement to divulge their finds’.<sup>86</sup>

Forsdyke asked one of the museum’s trustees, Lord Ilchester, to help resolve the matter.<sup>87</sup> The departmental Keeper, Thomas Kendrick, tried to push for a reward of ‘at least £2000’, although it is unclear if he was suggesting this sum for each finder or that it should be shared. It is also interesting to note that the question of the treasure’s eventual resting place did not seem to have been completely decided, even though the British Museum already had it on display. Kendrick naturally argued that the British Museum was the best place to exhibit the treasure ‘with dignity’ and provide it with a ‘proper publication’, and that it ‘does not come within the acknowledged scope of any museum in Suffolk’.<sup>88</sup>

## THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE MILDENHALL TREASURE

395

<u>Mildenhall Treasure.</u>		Weight. Oz. Avoirdupois
1	The largest decorated tray	292
2	The large plain tray	176
3	The fluted hanging bowl	59 $\frac{1}{4}$
4	Hanging handle for same (containing some lead)	8 $\frac{1}{4}$
5	Ditto	8
6	Pair shallow dishes with classical figures	21 $\frac{3}{4}$
7		19
8	Four "Alexandrine" bowls	47
9		60 $\frac{3}{4}$
10		46 $\frac{1}{4}$
11	(with fragments)	46
12	Pair striped ornament bowls	21 $\frac{3}{4}$
13		22 $\frac{1}{2}$
14	Covered bowl, - the bowl	36
15	Ditto, - the cover	29 $\frac{3}{4}$
16	Pair standing cups	14 $\frac{1}{2}$
17		14
18	Eight long-handled spoons <i>Rural</i>	1
19		1
20		1
	<i>longer handle silver</i>	1 $\frac{1}{4}$
22	<i>inscribed</i>	14
23	<i>s/w</i>	14
24	<i>s/w</i>	14
25	<i>s/w</i>	12
26	Five ladles without handles	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
27		2
28		13 $\frac{1}{4}$
29		13 $\frac{1}{4}$
30		13 $\frac{1}{4}$
31	Four "dolphin" handles	13 $\frac{1}{4}$
32		13 $\frac{1}{4}$
33		13 $\frac{1}{4}$
34	(incomplete)	12
Total Weight		947 $\frac{3}{4}$ Oz. Avoirdupois = 59 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.
Add one tenth		94 $\frac{3}{4}$
Total Weight		1042 $\frac{1}{2}$ Oz. Troy
<u>Quoted market value 26th July, 1946</u>		
Standard Silver 40 $\frac{1}{2}$ pence per oz. Troy		
Sterling Silver 44 pence per oz. Troy		
Bullion Value assuming pure silver and ignoring the presence of solder, incrustation etc.		1042 $\frac{1}{2} \times 44$ pence = £. 191-2-6

Fig 13. Harold Plenderleith's calculation of the bullion value of the Mildenhall treasure, 26 July 1946 (MA, doc. 049a)

Forsdyke was not impressed with a value in excess of £2,000 – he replied to Kendrick that the money would need to come from the departmental purchase fund, and not from the Treasury. This would ‘exhaust your buying power for a good long time’. He went on to say: ‘That is one reason, in the face of our very small reserve, why I am still inclined to think that £1,000 is enough.’<sup>89</sup> The matter of a reward appears to have been resolved by 9 August, after the museum’s trustees – or at least a sub-committee of trustees, presumably including Lord Ilchester – had met to discuss the issue. Forsdyke wrote to Druitt, at the Treasury, to state that the museum would effectively purchase the material from the Crown at a price of £2,000.<sup>90</sup> Two orders for the payment were sanctioned: one for Sydney Ford, and one for Gordon Butcher. The payments were sent to their solicitor on 16 August.<sup>91</sup>

By September 1946, Fowler and Lethbridge had been given permission by Rolfe to dig on his land. At the end of August, they visited Ford, and asked him once more where the hoard had been found. This time he indicated the number of paces from the edge of the field in question. On 1 September 1946 ‘Lethbridge, his wife and daughter, and a Mr Tebutt and I [Fowler] commenced to dig on the spot’. The excavation team

found no signs of any hole ever having been dug on that spot, but ... did find near the surface ... three pieces of metal ... on ... inspection they turned out to be made of base metal, one being part of a teapot, the other the lid of a water jug and the third the handle of a tureen, and all of late Georgian origin ... This led us to wonder whether the site had been ‘salted’ with the view of trying to lead us to believe it was part of the Treasure and that we had the right spot where it had been found.

Fowler also stated that they went back to the area on later occasions, and still found no evidence for the original hole.<sup>92</sup> Lethbridge’s account of the attempt to locate the original burial hole formed part of his memoirs, published many years later in *Antiquity* (fig 14).<sup>93</sup> Conspiracy theories started to circulate, with Fowler and Lethbridge beginning to suspect foul play.

#### PRESS REPORTS AND ROALD DAHL (1946 ONWARDS)

The discovery of the Mildenhall treasure provoked a huge amount of press coverage. The first press report appeared in the *Sunday Express* on 23 June, two days after the hoard was declared to the police by Sydney Ford. *The Times* ran a piece the next day, entitled ‘Roman silver unearthed in Suffolk’, that included a summary of the treasure trove law, and another piece the following day that included images. The rest of the reports came out after the inquest.

Extended reports, which also mentioned the 1932 villa, appeared on 2 July in the *Eastern Evening News*, the *Eastern Daily Press* and the *East Anglian Daily Times*. The *Manchester Guardian* ran a piece on 3 July. *The Times* ran a special article on the treasure including images on 11 July. The *Field* (now defunct) ran a piece on 13 July, but concentrated principally on treasure trove controversies. The London *Evening News* ran a piece entitled ‘Hundreds do not see treasure’,<sup>94</sup> complaining that it had been placed ‘unostentatiously’ in the Edward VII gallery (now the Joseph E Hotung gallery, room 33).

A letter to the *East Anglian Daily Times* from a Reginald Carter offered an amusing insight into the impact the first British Museum display had on visitors:



Fig 14. Gordon Fowler (left) and Tom Lethbridge (right) using a mine detector to try to pinpoint the findspot, c 1947. Photograph: courtesy of Suffolk County Council

Evidently [the treasure display] is widely appreciated ... I took note that of forty people who came in from 11.30am to 12 noon, only three failed to look at it. Among those who did were a group of five Cockney boys, one of whom proudly remarked 'Blimey, Pete, that stuff's werf a million quid!' and an old lady, with an ear trumpet, also fit for the museum, who insisted on having the inscription read loud to her by another viewer, then loudly said 'But how silly of the man to drive his pickaxe through that one!'<sup>95</sup>

The reports regarding the £1,000 reward, which had been sent to each of the finders on 16 August, began to appear on 27 August in the *London News Chronicle*, *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Advertiser*, the latter of which was entitled 'Two finders of "Priceless Treasure" get big reward'. The *Daily Express* took a different tack. Its headline ran '£50,000 treasure men are offered £2,000'.<sup>96</sup> Despite tabloid hyperbole, both Butcher and Ford expressed contentment at the reward; Butcher was quoted as saying: 'I didn't expect to get anything like as much.' This is perhaps not surprising, given that the average wage for a working class man in 1946 was about £5 a week; £1,000 would have been a very large sum.<sup>97</sup> The figure of £50,000 was reported to have come from a Mr J H M Maltby, of Bury St Edmunds Museum, although he was never quoted directly. A very similar piece, entitled 'Two share £2,000 for their £50,000 treasure find', appeared in the *Daily Mail* the same day. The vicar of Mildenhall, the Revd J E Sawbridge, inadvertently anticipated the revision of the treasure trove law in 1996, when he said: 'the owner of the field – Mrs Sophie Aves and her brother, Mr Frederick Rolfe ... should have some reward'.<sup>98</sup>



A reporter for the *Daily Herald*, London, broke the news of the reward to Butcher, who apparently reacted nonchalantly by saying: 'I've got the cows to feed.' Forsdyke reminded the press that 'The intrinsic value [of the hoard] is about £190.'

An extended piece appeared later that year in the *London News Review* on 5 September (which also mentioned the discovery of the mosaic pavement at Low Ham, Somerset), and a lavishly illustrated piece appeared in *Everybody's London* on 30 November.

One reporter went a stage further. Roald Dahl, the well-known children's author, saw an opportunity to write a human interest piece on the discovery that he could sell to a magazine. He drove to Mildenhall from his home in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire,<sup>99</sup> to investigate.

One morning in April of that year [1946], I read in the newspaper about a remarkable find of Roman silver.<sup>100</sup> It had been discovered four years before ... I got [to Mildenhall] at lunchtime, and ... found the small house where Gordon Butcher lived with his family ... I asked him if he would mind talking to me about how he found the treasure.

Although Butcher was at first reluctant, Dahl persuaded him to tell his story, maintaining that it would be a 'truthful' account.<sup>101</sup> Dahl subsequently sold the story to the *Saturday Evening Post* in America, and it was published on 20 September 1947. It was revised when re-published in a collection of short stories, and this is the version that appears in a book with accompanying illustrations by Ralph Steadman.<sup>102</sup>

In 1997, I published an article in *Antiquity* that set out to discover the validity of Dahl's account.<sup>103</sup> In essence, all that I could establish was that none of the claims made in Butcher's account to Dahl regarding the discovery were outlandish, or contradicted anything anyone else said, including anything stated by Ford. In summary, Dahl's story said that Butcher, under sub-contract to Ford, had struck the hoard while ploughing in a field that belonged to Rolfe. Butcher had been asked to plough deeper than usual, because the field was to be used for sugar beet (the ploughing of a field in January might seem odd, but sugar beet tends to be planted in March or earlier). Butcher struck the hoard late in the day, and, after fetching Ford, the two men took what remained of the day to dig it up, as a snow storm bore down on them. At the end of the day, Ford left the site with most of the hoard in a sack and the Great Dish tucked under his arm.

As a fiction writer, Dahl clearly made a conscious decision to create caricatures of Butcher and Ford. Hence Butcher is portrayed as straightforward and honest, Ford as conniving and cunning. This is Dahl's description of Butcher in the version of the story he sold to the *Saturday Evening Post*: 'He had a good, sharp, lean face, which was without a trace of malice or cunning or greed ... his thoughts were only for his wife, his son, his two daughters.' Ford however is described as 'middle-aged or a little older, baldheaded, long-nosed, with a clever, foxy look about his face'.

Dahl used this good guy/villain construct for his description of their respective reactions to the potential of the discovery: 'whereas the simple, unscheming Butcher had become alarmed, Ford, the businessman, became excited and possessive'. And after they had dug up the hoard and put it in a sack, Dahl continued the charade:

Ford gathered the top of the sack in his hands, then bent down and picked up the large plate [the Great Dish]. He checked, stood up again, and holding the sack in his hands, looking to one side, he said, 'Well, Gordon, I don't suppose you want any of this old stuff.'



No answer.

'I don't suppose you'd mind if I took it along home. You know I'm sort of interested in old stuff like this.'

Gordon Butcher's blue-white face turned slowly towards the bulging sack.

'Of course' he said very quietly. 'You take 'em along, Mr Ford.'

In a letter from Dahl to John Gadd (see below), after the story had been re-published in 1977, Dahl stated:

the fact that my story may not be at all accurate doesn't worry me in the least. I am a fiction writer anyway and my job is to entertain ... This is about the only non-fiction story I have ever written, so it is hardly surprising it turned out to be partly fiction!<sup>104</sup>

Accounts from locals who knew both men described Ford and Butcher rather differently. Basil Jarman (an employee of Ford) described Butcher not as a 'simple farm labourer' but as a 'skilled artisan' with respect to his ploughing.<sup>105</sup> He did not wear 'an old raincoat tied at the waist' as Dahl suggested (no doubt to get his readers to picture him as a country bumpkin). As for Ford, he believed that Ford would not have wanted to 'keep the hoard for gain, but to preserve it'. He also stated that local people knew about the find 'as pewter', although 'in his opinion Ford ... would have known it was silver'. He went on to say that '[Ford's] love of antiquities was well known in the area ... anyone who found anything old would "take it down the lane" to show Ford (probably in the hope that he would buy it).' Local resident Margaret Langley said in later correspondence (see below) that her father, the vicar, 'regarded [Ford] with favour', but that Butcher had made 'a very poor impression on [her]', although what Mrs Langley meant by that is not clear.<sup>106</sup>

Ford's family was naturally extremely upset by Dahl's portrayal of Ford. His granddaughter Nora wrote to John Gadd:

It is downright wicked that a most good and respected man & father of a large, caring family should have his character defamed in such a wicked way ... he was a good, caring, honest man who delighted in all that was old and was always willing to help everyone.<sup>107</sup>

#### CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE MILDENHALL TREASURE

It has been seen that the standard account is that the treasure was struck by the plough of Gordon Butcher on a field under the tenancy of Fred Rolfe in West Row, near Mildenhall, in January 1942, in the same field in which, ten years earlier, Lethbridge and Fowler excavated the remains of a small Roman building. Butcher and his boss Syd Ford dug the treasure up together, and it was taken back to Ford's house. Ford spent some years cleaning it, after which he displayed it on his sideboard. In April 1946, amateur antiquary Hugh Fawcett persuaded him to declare it, which he did on 21 June 1946, the British Museum having confirmed that it was made of silver. Ford originally told the police that he had found it on his own land and that he had dug it up himself – he then admitted he had dug it up with Butcher. At the inquest it was further admitted that the hoard had actually been found on land belonging to Rolfe; after the treasure trove inquest it was acquired by the British Museum, and went on public display on 20 July 1946.

Although this sequence of events presents few difficulties, archaeologists nevertheless became increasingly doubtful that this was the whole story. Lethbridge, Fowler and Phillips all seemed to think that Ford was being dishonest and had attempted to mislead and obfuscate. Other archaeologists, including staff at the British Museum such as Christopher Hawkes, also began to wonder if there was more to the story than met the eye. The discovery of pieces of Georgian metalwork on Rolfe's land only added to this growing sense of disquiet (see above).

There were other reasons why archaeologists began to have doubts. The first was that, at the time, the Roman province of Britannia was viewed as an imperial backwater. Aside from Hadrian's Wall and the remains at Bath, Britain had none of the monumental architecture of provinces such as Mauretania or, rather closer to home, of Gaul. It had even less by way of high-quality metalwork: individual pieces were known, such as the Corbridge Lanx, found in the eighteenth century on the bank of the Tyne, and the rather plain and modest dish from Mileham in Norfolk. *Hacksilber* hoards were known from Traprain Law in East Lothian and Coleraine in County Londonderry, but these were viewed principally as 'barbarian' loot and found outside the province anyway.<sup>108</sup> In addition, although a connection was immediately made with the 'villa' on Thistley Green excavated by Fowler and Lethbridge, East Anglia was not a region awash with opulent villas. So many began to ask: what was a set of such high-quality silver vessels doing there?

The other problem archaeologists had was that they thought the assemblage must be incomplete, that it was simply not big enough. Where were the jugs for pouring wine? Where were the drinking vessels? Why were there so few spoons? Fowler thought there must be another pit (see above). In retrospect, we now know that such sets of tableware are rarely 'complete', and there probably was no such thing as a 'standard' set of tableware vessels.<sup>109</sup> Hoxne, for example, has only a modest number of silver bowls, all of which are undecorated, yet has a large number of spoons, ladles and other utensils such as pepper pots. And, as it was extremely well excavated, it has never been suggested that there are 'missing' vessels, although the original owners may have possessed them.<sup>110</sup> Thetford had no vessels at all, only spoons and jewellery.<sup>111</sup> The idiosyncratic composition of the material in many late Roman silver hoards is also true of Continental discoveries, for instance the large hoard from Kaiseraugst, Switzerland, which has five flanged bowls to Mildenhall's six, yet eleven large platters to Mildenhall's two.<sup>112</sup>

As a result of all these suspicions, two conflicting theories emerged. The first theory was that the hoard had come from outside Britain, and the second that it was an earlier find that had been reburied at West Row.

### Conspiracy theory 1: the treasure was war loot

The first conspiracy theory was that the treasure was flown into the air base at Mildenhall during the war. It is unclear who first suggested this, but it was certainly not long after 1946. According to Paul Ashbee:

It was in [Rupert] Bruce-Mitford's mind that it had possibly been brought into this country from North Africa or even Italy ... Anglo-American forces invaded North Africa in November 1942 and Italy in September 1943. Had a great silver assemblage been acquired by some means ... and needed transport ... an aircraft returning to England would have been ideal for the task.<sup>113</sup>

Ashbee also said that Charles Phillips was of a similar persuasion. In his autobiography Phillips set out the following even more convoluted theory:<sup>114</sup>

during the war, planes often made the direct flight back and forth between [Mildenhall airfield] and the various seats of war in the Mediterranean area. It was notorious that some quite valuable objects of flint and bronze were often found during the course of activities round wartime airfields and Mildenhall was no exception. There was a regular trade with dealers in the pubs of the district and a certain doctor [*meaning Fawcett*] was prominent in this.

Phillips went on to say (author's italics):

One day he had called without warning on one of his cronies [Ford] ... Ford claimed that he had ploughed [the treasure] out of a field in the neighbourhood which was his own property. But the soil in the field ... was very shallow, and had been ploughed many times. *It is inconceivable* that such large objects could have remained in the field after ploughing unless they were deposited in a hole dug in the underlying chalk to receive them.

When this matter came to a treasure-trove inquest, it was demonstrated by excavation in which I took part, that such a pit had never been dug in Ford's field ... Equally there was the possibility that it might have been found during military activity in North Africa, smuggled back in a plane and temporarily hidden on the edge of the airfield, accidentally found by Ford, and removed by him before those who had imported it had been able to take any action.

There are an enormous number of holes in Phillip's arguments. Firstly, it is entirely possible that the hoard could have been missed on previous occasions when the field had been ploughed – Butcher was ploughing deeper than usual, with the ploughshare set at 10 inches (254mm), because the field was to be used to plant sugar beet. In any case, experience of the last thirty years, since metal detecting took off as a hobby, has demonstrated that hoards can lie undisturbed for many centuries before deep ploughing brings them to the surface – not least the enormous hoard of coins, gold jewellery and silver plate found at Hoxne, Suffolk, which lay largely undisturbed until its discovery in 1992.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, the idea that the treasure was flown in to Mildenhall from the Mediterranean and then buried temporarily on the edge of the airfield is extremely far-fetched. Butcher never ploughed the edge of the airfield – all the evidence points to a discovery of the treasure on Rolfe's land, not any fields owned by Ford, although Ford did own land adjacent to the airfield (see fig 11).

Yet this is another factual error made by Phillips, because in actuality Ford admitted under oath that it had been discovered on Rolfe's farm. And who is supposed to have flown the hoard in? Phillips does not speculate. It cannot have been American airmen, because they were not stationed at Mildenhall until after the war, so it would have had to have been the Royal Air Force.<sup>116</sup> And when is this supposed to have occurred? And would it not be an extraordinary coincidence that Butcher happened to plough the exact spot where the cache had been secreted? There is no evidence either that Phillips was even directly involved in Lethbridge and Fowler's dig. Lethbridge makes no mention at all of Phillips in his unpublished memoir,<sup>117</sup> and neither Fowler nor Lethbridge mention Phillips when discussing their attempts to pinpoint the findspot. Phillips' only involvement seems to have been a visit to the coroner before the inquest (see above).

Lethbridge dismissed this theory in his unpublished autobiography, this time bringing in the Nazis as well:

The treasure seemed the sort of thing which might have been looted by some Nazi boss and later captured by the British. But it was all wrong. The find had been made at West Row a year before the sergeants<sup>118</sup> went to Italy and, although a lot of loot was said to have been flown back to West Row, it was mostly drink.

Others too claimed that the treasure was linked to the airfield at Mildenhall, albeit in a slightly different manner. Derek Allen, an assistant keeper in the British Museum's Department of Coins and Medals between 1935 and 1947 said in a letter: 'the following story ... was told to me by C E Stevens, mad though it is, in all seriousness. It appears that Lethbridge, when he was deeply in his cups,<sup>119</sup> would tell the true story of the origin of the Mildenhall Treasure.'<sup>120</sup> Allen claimed that Stevens told him that, according to Lethbridge, the treasure was found at 'another airfield in Cambridgeshire', and that the 'finders ... decided to plant it on the next airfield being developed in the neighbourhood [ie, that at Mildenhall] ... A witness to these happenings was a doctor from Maidenhead, whose name Stevens could not remember ... someone called Lawrence (or Laurence) was involved.' Derek Allen concluded that 'Stevens was absolutely clear that the true find spot was in Cambridgeshire'.

The 'doctor from Maidenhead' – the supposed 'witness to these happenings' – must be a reference to Hugh Fawcett, who lived in Chalfont St Giles, which is only a relatively short distance from Maidenhead. Fawcett never claimed that he had personally witnessed it being planted, so there is nothing in that. 'Lawrence (or Laurence)' cannot be G F Lawrence, the celebrated antiquarian, because he died in 1938.<sup>121</sup> It seems most likely it was a simple case of Chinese whispers – by 'Laurence', Allen probably meant Fawcett.

Not that Lethbridge can be said to have been immune from the 'conspiracy virus' either. Part of the reason he did not believe the North Africa connection was that he and Fowler had become convinced of a connection between Mildenhall and an earlier failed attempt to discover 'buried treasure' in West Row: the treasure of 'Black Jack' Seaber.

### Conspiracy theory 2: 'Black Jack' Seaber and the 'silver bells' on Cavenham Heath

This theory seems to have originated with Gordon Fowler, whose suspicions were fuelled by a story he was told by someone (it is not clear by whom) in West Row village. As Lethbridge described it, 'Fowler was a great man for finding things out'.<sup>122</sup> In either 1922 or 1923, F R Wilson and E Exeter, a firm of solicitors based in Bury St Edmunds, received a letter from an unknown person in Canada. In the letter, the person said that he had obtained information from his father at his death that his grandmother,<sup>123</sup> the second wife of a gentleman known as 'Black Jack' Seaber (fig 15),<sup>124</sup> had buried a treasure on Thistley Green. The treasure was variously described as 'money ... buried in a pot',<sup>125</sup> and 'a treasure or hoard of coins'.<sup>126</sup> The Canadian, whom nobody has ever succeeded in identifying, sent a sketch map with exact measurements 'to a certain stile on a certain footpath',<sup>127</sup> or in an alternative version a spot by 'an old meadow gate'.<sup>128</sup>

Three individuals visited West Row in an attempt to locate the hoard. They consisted of one of the lawyers, F R Wilson, an acquaintance of Wilson called P P L Galley, who was the licensee of the Prince of Wales hotel in West Ham, London,<sup>129</sup> and



Fig 15. 'Black Jack' or John Seaber (1787–1867). Lethbridge and Fowler were convinced that there was a connection between Seaber and the Mildenhall treasure.  
*Photograph: courtesy of John Gadd*

Judith Kett (née Sheldrick), a West Row girl who worked as secretary to the solicitors. They had apparently been instructed to look for the hoard and that 'no expense should be spared'.<sup>130</sup> William Ford, Sydney's father, was supposedly paid £20.<sup>131</sup> Fowler also claimed that four witnesses told him that they saw these strangers' attempts to locate the material on a number of different Sundays. According to Fowler, one of the witnesses, Human Nicholas, also claimed to have seen the individuals dragging a large sack and burying it in the field.<sup>132</sup> The strangers dug a trench in a field by a gate that led across the road to the airfield (see fig 11). Crucially, at least to Lethbridge, it was also claimed that Syd Ford, who would have been 35 at the time, 'had apparently taken a great interest in all this'.<sup>133</sup> (In 1978, John Gadd (see below) and his team re-excavated the stranger's trench and found nothing.)

Lethbridge and Fowler became more and more convinced that there was a connection between the events of 1923 and the discovery of the Mildenhall treasure roughly twenty years later. As the 'strangers' had failed to find anything, Lethbridge was struck by the thought that they might have been digging in the wrong place.<sup>134</sup> After the inquest, when Ford had been showing Lethbridge and Fowler the supposed findspot, and when they found the pieces of Georgian metalwork, Lethbridge had noticed that, in a hedge between Ford and Rolfe's fields, there was an old pintle for hanging a gate. According to Lethbridge, Ford told him that this was on the line of an old footpath that



had once passed over Rolfe's field. So it occurred to Lethbridge that the old lady's 'treasure' had been buried there, and not by another 'meadow gate'. And when he and Fowler sank a trench into the spot they 'found some pieces of a yellow enamelled tin box'. For Lethbridge, what had really happened was now clear: 'Sid [*sic*] had waited twenty years for a chance to plough Rolfe's field in bad weather. He had realised that the solicitors had dug by the wrong gate. All he had to do was to dig at the correct number of paces from the gate and he had it.'<sup>135</sup>

Lethbridge and Fowler went further, heaping hypothesis on hypothesis. Fowler apparently questioned 'hundreds of people' in his quest for the truth,<sup>136</sup> and eventually

found somebody who had a Bible belonging to a grandfather who was a shepherd. In this was a note that about 1860 he had found ... silver bells on Cavenham Heath [about 7 miles (11.27km) from West Row] ... the bells were in all probability the Mildenhall bowls.

Fowler and Lethbridge therefore believed that the treasure had been buried by 'Black Jack' Seaber – presumably in the 1860s – after acquiring the treasure found by the shepherd on Cavenham Heath. He had then passed the information on to his wife, who, nearing death, decided to pass it on in turn to her relative in Canada. This relative asked the solicitors to dig for it, but they dug by the 'wrong' gate. Ford, witness to these events, waited for the opportunity to dig by the 'right' gate, which did not arrive until 1942.<sup>137</sup>

It is all extremely convoluted stuff, and, in retrospect, it seems incredible to believe that intelligent men like Fowler and Lethbridge could have got so carried away with the idea. The obvious question is why would 'Black Jack' Seaber bury a hoard of late Roman silver and never return to recover it? Why would his widow have not tried to excavate it herself during her lifetime? Aside from these problems, there is also the fact that there is never any suggestion that the hoard was *not* struck by Butcher on open farmland. No one ever suggested it had been struck on the line of a hedge. If Syd Ford knew about it as a young man, why would he wait a further twenty years before attempting to locate it, and why would he send Butcher out to plough a field in the vain hope that the plough would strike it, especially if he thought that it had been buried on a field boundary? It seems far more likely that the old lady or her husband had buried a tin or pot of coins somewhere in a field in West Row, and decided to pass on this knowledge to a relative, maybe to stop other family members getting their hands on it.

Who was 'Black Jack' Seaber? Although there were a number of Seabers in the area at the time, genealogical research suggests that the most likely candidate is John Seaber, born in 1787 and listed in the 1841 census as resident at Mildenhall Drove. At the time of the census he was married to Sarah, who died two years later in 1843. Seaber married again ten years later, when he was fifty-six, to a Mary Ann Slack, aged thirty-five, and she inherited his estate at his death aged eighty in 1867. Mary Ann herself died in 1907; she is listed in the 1891 census as a 'widow farmer' of Fodder Fen Drove, West Row, Suffolk.<sup>138</sup>

Fowler was told that the woman in question was 'an old widow who had a small bit of land, four cows, and a son, who eventually went abroad',<sup>139</sup> and later added that she 'owned land before William father of Sid Ford purchased it. She was very sick and very miserly. Used to go about in rags. No one seems to know who was her heir. But the Grandmother of Owen Ambrose of Stuntney was a Seber [*sic*].'<sup>140</sup> The Ambroses mentioned by Fowler were another large landowning family in the locality, and there

was a great deal of intermarriage between such Fenland families at the time. A relative also described Mary Ann Seaber to Fowler: 'Tony Ambrose ... says that old Mrs Seaber [was] his ... grandmother's stepmother. He says it was alleged she once went to London hardly able to walk because of the weight of the sovereigns sewn into her clothes.'<sup>141</sup>

John Gadd (see below) obtained a copy of Mary Ann's will; not surprisingly, there was no mention of any items that might be related to the Mildenhall treasure. But maybe Mary Ann Seaber buried her gold sovereigns in a field near West Row, and tried to alert the relative – perhaps the 'son, who eventually went abroad' – to their location? We shall probably never know. Whatever the truth of the matter, there appears to be no connection between the Mildenhall treasure as we know it, 'Black Jack' Seaber or his second wife, or the 'silver bells on Cavenham Heath'.

#### ADDITIONAL OBJECTS, COINS, ADDITIONAL FINDERS?

On 4 July 1946, Superintendent S W Hammond compiled a report containing a number of snippets of information that did not all come out at inquest.<sup>142</sup> Particularly interesting was a statement made by Fawcett to a local police officer on 27 June at his home in Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire. Although in essence it set out the facts of the case as known, and Fawcett's role in bringing the hoard to light, Fawcett made some further observations concerning what he recalled seeing at Ford's house the first time the material was revealed to him. It should be remembered that this was only a couple of months earlier, so it is reasonable to suggest that some credence should be given to Fawcett's remarks (author's italics):

From my recollection I saw two large circular plaques [*sic*], one ornamented in high relief with classical mythological figs and the other engraved with patterns including an interlocking triangles design; propped up in a bowl were several spoons, some with inscriptions, and one at least engraved with small 'C.H. – R.O.' [*sic*]. There were also at least two smaller plates decorated with figs. Most of these articles had been carefully and, I think, harmlessly polished. Among the uncleaned, or partly cleaned objects, in a cupboard, were a large fluted bowl with swan shaped drop-handles detached, two to four very small bowls which fitted into ornamented handles, *four, I think goblets with stems and feet, two to four larger and more massive stands with bowl tops on stems and feet and drop-handles*. There seemed to be some other pieces, but which were not properly seen or fully brought out. This is all I can tell you in the matter.<sup>143</sup>

Although parts of what Fawcett stated – and to what extent the policeman taking the statement recorded his words accurately is impossible to establish – can be equated with known parts of the Mildenhall treasure, other parts cannot. 'Two to four very small bowls which fitted into ornamental handles' sounds curious, but on closer inspection it is a reasonably straightforward reference to the four ladle bowls and the five detached dolphin-form handles (P&E 1946.1007.18–26). More problematic is: 'four ... goblets with stems and feet'. This conforms with what Fawcett stated at the inquest, namely, that he thought that there were four, *not two*, of the pedestalled platters (see fig 7). The 'two to four larger and more massive stands with bowl tops on stems and feet and drop-handles' is very puzzling; maybe Fawcett was referring to the four large flanged bowls, which have footrings ('stands'), but these can hardly be described as 'massive'. 'Bowl

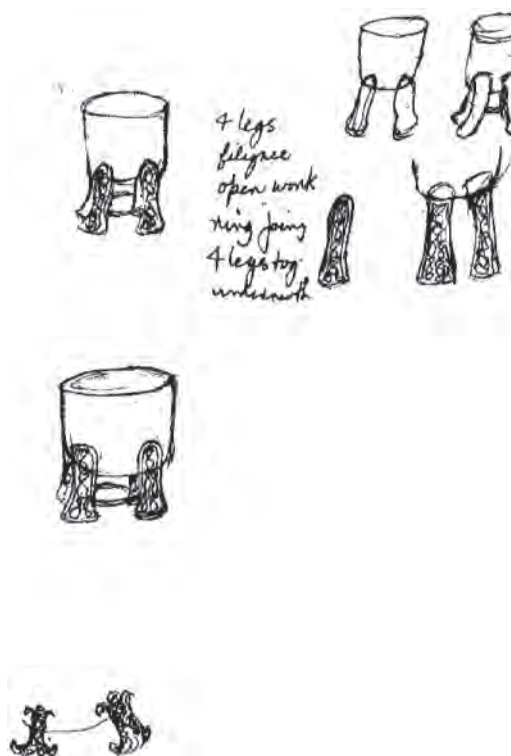


Fig 16. Jack Thompson's description of an item he remembered seeing in Sydney Ford's workshop during the cleaning of the treasure during the Second World War.

*Image: courtesy of John Gadd*

tops' might be one way to describe them, but 'stems and feet and drop-handles' do not compare well with these items in the least. The only explanation that comes to mind is that the police officer struggled to make sense of a dictated list of unfamiliar objects, none of which he himself had seen, and this is where the discrepancies crept in.

Another individual connected with the find also claimed that there was another object that the museum did not know about. Jack Thompson, who worked for Syd Ford, described a 'missing goblet', which he claimed to have seen when the hoard was being cleaned. Some rough sketches were drawn under Jack's instruction (fig 16).<sup>144</sup> He described the vessel as having '4 legs filigree open work ring joining 4 legs tog[ether] underneath'. There are no such vessels in the Mildenhall treasure itself, and the only vaguely comparable items with such a form are the pair of Hippolytus situlas in the Sevso treasure.<sup>145</sup> In 2003, the local doctor Colin Dring also sent the following statement regarding Jack Thompson: 'Jack Thompson ... died recently and I am now at liberty to reveal what he told me a year or so ago [thus in about 2002]. Syd Ford ... had 3 silver bracelets made for his daughters from silver that was found with the hoard. Jack is sure that Syd would not have destroyed any good pieces and thinks these must have been more spoons or a mangled piece.'<sup>146</sup>

Around the time of Kenneth Painter's publication of a handbook on Mildenhall,<sup>147</sup> an independent researcher became interested in the story.<sup>148</sup> A Dorset-based writer and

journalist, John Gadd, began to correspond with locals involved in the discovery. Gadd's interest was sparked by his acquisition of the Lethbridge archive.<sup>149</sup> Gadd sought out the help of Dr Colin Dring, the local GP, who was instrumental in setting up the Mildenhall Museum.<sup>150</sup> Many of Gadd's papers and letters have since found their way into the British Museum's archive.<sup>151</sup>

Dring interviewed Toby Butcher<sup>152</sup> (no relation to Gordon Butcher, although he lived at West Row all his adult life)<sup>153</sup> when Toby was aged forty-nine. Toby Butcher told Dring that he went to work for Ford after he left school, at the age of fourteen (as he was born in 1927, this would have been in 1941). He thought that he had been 'working full time for some months or a year or so' before the treasure was discovered, which correlates well with a date of discovery of January 1942. Toby Butcher claimed that he was present when Gordon Butcher struck the treasure with his plough, and that *he* was sent off to fetch Ford. This aspect of the story did not feature in either of the accounts of the discovery given by Sydney Ford or Gordon Butcher, and would arguably have meant that there were three finders, not two.<sup>154</sup>

The most significant of Toby Butcher's claims was that 'as two dishes were lifted apart a very large number of greenish coins was seen'. Later he claimed that he 'never again saw the coins', but that 'Ford was often seen in his workshop over the following months working on individual pieces of the hoard – straightening pieces out on wooden blocks etc'. During the same interview, Toby's wife said that she had worked for Syd Ford as a maid during the 1960s. She claimed that Ford possessed a large coin cabinet which 'was never opened in her presence'.

After Dring's interview, Gadd wrote to Toby Butcher to ask him to verify some details of his story.<sup>155</sup> In his reply, Butcher said that after the plough that had struck something in the soil had been pulled back: 'it was then that we saw a grey looking object looking like pan or a dish. As we started to lift it up we saw that there were some coins underneath.'<sup>156</sup> Gadd also interviewed Gordon Butcher's son Peter.<sup>157</sup> He claimed that the treasure had been found next to Gage Farm itself (which was where Rolfe lived), in a corner of a field made by an old orchard and a hedge to the south west. This was, according to Gadd, a spot 'close to where Lethbridge finally discovered his pit'. He went on to say that it was 'only a few yards out from the hedge ... next to an old tree which is still there'. Gadd claims that Peter Butcher was 'quite adamant about this site'. This only broadly correlates with Ford's sketch of the supposed findspot (see fig 11), and makes one wonder: why did Lethbridge not ask Gordon Butcher where he had struck the hoard? After all, Ford had clearly been annoyed about losing it.

Gadd next interviewed Frank Rolfe.<sup>158</sup> Rolfe took Gadd and Dring to talk to Bob Butcher, whose father was Gordon Butcher's cousin: 'He confirmed that it was the field at the back of Rolph's [*sic*] farm [where the hoard had been found] and not Toby Butcher's field.' He 'rather doubted Toby Butcher had been there when the hoard was discovered'. Gadd then returned to re-interview Toby Butcher and his wife. In this second interview Gadd gathered more details regarding the coin cabinet.<sup>159</sup> According to Mrs Butcher, there were actually two coin cabinets. One of them contained '15 to 20' coins only, and Ford was happy for her to clean it. It apparently belonged to a local coin dealer, Adolphus Bacon, who was said to have left it to Mildenhall Museum at his death, although it cannot be traced.<sup>160</sup> A later piece of correspondence states that the collection it contained was not particularly numerous.<sup>161</sup> The other cabinet, by contrast, was always kept locked, and it was only by chance that she had seen it. It appeared to



contain many trays of coins, and Ford locked the coins away rapidly when he saw her looking at them (this does not necessarily mean that he had something to hide regarding Mildenhall). Fawcett, when very elderly, also stated in an interview with Gadd that Ford had a coin cabinet with 'several gold aurei in it' (although again Fawcett made no claim that these were anything to do with the treasure, particularly as in any case he had already seen these coins before the war).<sup>162</sup>

Were there coins with the Mildenhall treasure, as Toby Butcher claimed? The truth will probably never be known. I recently asked Mrs Bowers, granddaughter of Syd Ford, if she thought that there were coins with the find – her mother Vera, Ford's daughter, said that she did not recall seeing any. As a curious coincidence, a group of thirteen siliquae were published in the *Numismatic Chronicle* in 1942; they were said to be 'the only portion now recoverable of a find made several years ago'.<sup>163</sup> Could it be that these coins were from the treasure, possibly sent to the museum for identification, perhaps by the person to whom Ford sold them? Unfortunately a search of the British Museum's archive failed to find any documentation recording the name of the person who submitted them for an opinion.<sup>164</sup> This is another strange anomaly which will almost certainly never be resolved – in all likelihood the coins published in 1942 are not related, and really were found several years earlier.<sup>165</sup>

After the publication of my own *Antiquity* article in 1997, further testimonies began to appear. The principal reports came from Mrs Langley, a cub reporter for the local newspaper at the time, who objected strongly to any suggestions that Ford was somehow in collusion with the military.<sup>166</sup> Mrs Langley also pointed out that the claims occasionally made by Fawcett that the hoard might have been dug up after nightfall – a claim also made in Ford's original (and, he admitted, false) statement to the police – cannot be substantiated for one simple reason:

In the blackout? They found the place in the middle of the field in the dark without a torch? Torches in the blackout came under the heading of "Aiding and Abetting the Enemy", and were the bottom rung of a ladder whose top rung was High Treason and the death penalty.<sup>167</sup>

#### A DIFFERENT DATE OF DISCOVERY?

One of the most intriguing of all the claims came about as a result of the British Museum's Buried Treasure exhibition.<sup>168</sup> While the exhibition was showing in Cardiff, in 2004, a letter was sent to Richard Brewer at the National Museum and Galleries of Wales and passed on to the British Museum. The letter came from John Hicks, who made the following claim:

I wish to confirm that the Mildenhall treasure was actually discovered in January 1941 ... on 4 August 1941 [I] attended the wedding of our brother Courtney Hicks at Grove Villa [Ford's house] to Vera Ford [Ford's daughter] ... I and my twin brother Derek, handled the Great Dish and some of the other items.<sup>169</sup>

He also included a photograph of a young girl, seated in a similar position to Jack Ford (figs 17 and 18). Both images show the treasure on the mantelpiece behind. He accompanied the image with the following caption:

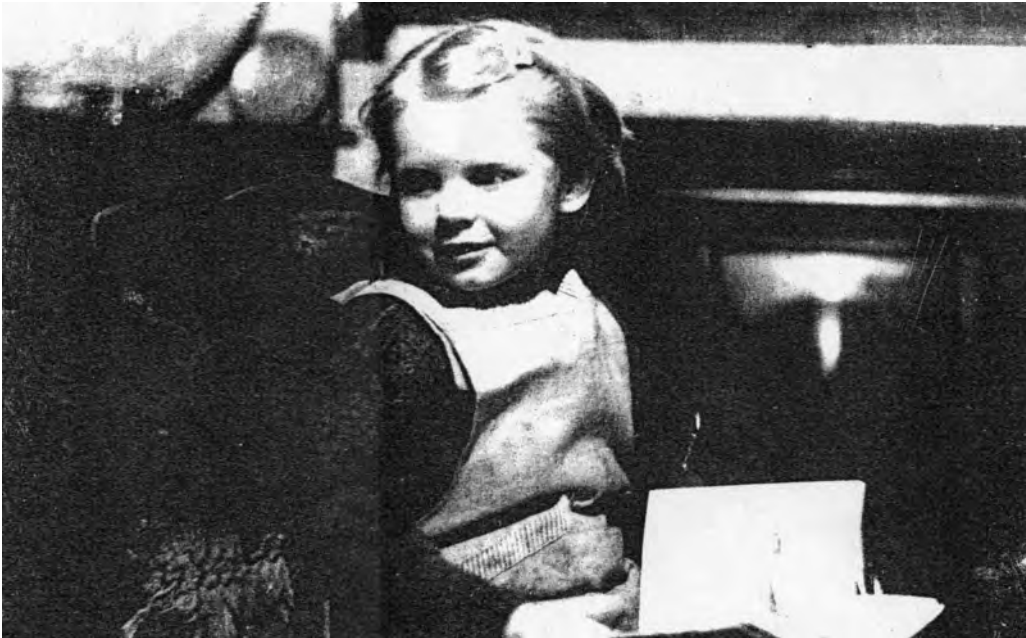


Fig 17. Helen Moore, niece of Vera Hicks, Sydney Ford's daughter, with parts of the Mildenhall treasure visible on the sideboard in the background. The picture was taken in about 1944. *Photograph:* courtesy of John Hicks

Helen – niece to Vera Hicks (nee Ford) West Row Mildenhall. Taken at “Grove Villa, West Row 194 [sic] – 1943 period with part of the Mildenhall treasure (Great Dish) and other pieces of silver on the sideboard. I handled some of the treasure (pewter?) in August 4<sup>th</sup> 1941 when attending my brother's wedding to Vera Ford.<sup>170</sup>

I verified through Suffolk Record Office that the wedding did indeed take place on 4 August 1941.<sup>171</sup> In a telephone conversation Mr Hicks reiterated that he had handled the treasure on that day. He was not able to describe what pieces he had handled, nor the state of the treasure – hardly surprising, given that he was only eleven years old at the time. The idea that the Mildenhall treasure was discovered in January 1941, however, seems highly unlikely for a number of reasons. The general consensus amongst other surviving family members is that the hoard *was* found in January 1942 and Mr Hicks must be mistaken.<sup>172</sup> Syd Ford was undoubtedly an avid collector of antiquities – a number of testimonies confirm this – and the likelihood is that Mr Hicks remembered handling something metallic, perhaps a pewter vessel,<sup>173</sup> and it was only after the treasure came to light, receiving such a huge amount of publicity, that he began to believe that this is what he had handled.

As for the photograph of Helen Moore, it seems unlikely that this was taken much before 1944 as she was not born until 28 July 1941.<sup>174</sup> By this stage, Ford had finished his cleaning, and had placed a number of pieces on open display on the sideboard. Both this image, and that of Jack Ford, Syd's son, show the Great Dish, the two Bacchic platters on either side, the two small flanged bowls and what looks like an unrelated object between them, probably a piece of crockery (see fig 18).



Fig 18. Jack Ford, Sydney Ford's son, at Grove Villa, in about 1944. Parts of the Mildenhall treasure, including the Great Dish, are visible on the sideboard.

*Photograph: courtesy of Sydney Holder*

#### A LEGACY OF WHICH TO BE PROUD

The Mildenhall treasure is not alone in being a Roman silver treasure steeped in controversy. When the Kaiseraugst treasure was dragged to the surface by a bulldozer in the early 1960s, a number of pieces were spirited away – reappearing only in 1995 as a result of a private legacy.<sup>175</sup> The provenance of the 'Sevso' treasure, the largest hoard of late Roman silver ever discovered, is sadly mired in legal wrangling, as a lecture at the Society of Antiquaries in February 2008 proved.<sup>176</sup>

Whatever the real facts of the case – and, as has been shown, there are no concrete reasons to doubt the finders' version of events – it should never be forgotten that we are extremely fortunate to have the treasure at all. Most late Roman silver would eventually have been hacked into pieces, or melted down and recycled, and probably converted into far less imaginative objects. This was never the intention of Sydney Ford. In fact, there is every reason to believe that he simply wanted to keep the treasure and admire its beauty. Even so, Ford should not be seen as someone who wanted to keep the treasure exclusively for himself. In 2002, the BBC broadcast a special episode of *Meet the Ancestors* called 'The top ten treasures in the British Museum'.<sup>177</sup> Syd Ford, Sydney Ford's grandson, told the BBC that the Great Dish was used as a fruit bowl at Christmas: 'apples, oranges, pears and nuts [were arranged on the Great Dish] in a pyramid shape' and one of the spoons was used by Syd 'every day for his breakfast and dinner'. Not only that, but the silver was often shown to visitors, and 'it was never locked away. In fact the front and back doors of the house were never locked even at night'. He also said, 'The house always seemed full of pieces [Syd] had collected or people had brought him.'

Syd Ford may have been upset to lose the treasure – he may even have enjoyed leading a few archaeologists on a merry dance – but he would surely not have objected to the huge amount of enjoyment millions of people have derived from seeing the treasure at the British Museum, with Bacchus leading his followers on their own merry dance in an eternal circle on the magnificent Great Dish, heaved out of the Mildenhall soil on that bitter winter's day over sixty years ago.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Every effort was made to establish the birth and death dates of the participants; unfortunately this was not possible in all cases.

##### *Finders and relatives and others directly connected with the discovery*

Aves, Sophie (?)	owner of land on which treasure was found
Mrs Bowers	Vera's daughter; Sydney Ford's granddaughter
Butcher, Gordon (1904–?)	original finder of the treasure
Butcher, Toby	claimed to have been riding the tractor when the treasure was found
Fawcett, Hugh Alderson (1891–1982)	general practitioner, The Croft, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks
Ford, Sydney (1886–1970)	Grove Villa, West Row, Mildenhall, Suffolk
Hicks, John	brother of Courtney Hicks and brother-in-law of Vera Hicks (née Ford)
Hicks, Vera	daughter of Sydney Ford
Rolfe, Frederick (?)	tenant and occupier of land on which treasure was found
Seaber, Mary Ann (née Slack) (1818–1907)	
Seaber, John ('Black Jack') (1787–1867)	

##### *British Museum staff*

Ashmole, Bernard (1894–1988)	Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 1939–56
Bruce-Mitford, Rupert (1914–94)	Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities, 1954–76



Forsdyke, Sir John Edgar (1883–1979)	Director 1937–50
Hawkes, Charles Francis Christopher (1905–92)	Assistant Keeper in Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, 1928–46
Kendrick, Sir Thomas Downing (1895–1979)	Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities 1938–50
Plenderleith, Dr Harold James (1898–1997)	Head of Research Laboratory, 1931–59

*Local archaeologists and other officials*

Fowler, Major Gordon (d mid-1950s)	Vice-President of the Fenland Research Committee
Lethbridge, Thomas Charles (1901–71)	lecturer at Cambridge and Director of Excavations for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 12 Sedley Taylor Road, Cambridge
O'Neil, Bryan (?)	Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments at the Ministry of Works, 72–78 Onslow Gardens, South Kensington, London SW7
Phillips, Charles William (1901–85)	9 Madingley Road, Cambridge; head of the Fenland Research Committee
Raby, F J E	Ministry of Works
Wilson, Thomas QC (?)	coroner for the Mildenhall district

NOTES

1. The Buried Treasure exhibition opened at the British Museum on 21 Nov 2003 and ran until 14 Mar 2004. It then toured to the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff (14 May to 5 Sept 2004); Manchester Museum (1 Oct 2004 to 15 Jan 2005); Hancock Museum, Newcastle (12 Feb to 26 June 2005); and Norwich Castle Museum (23 July 2005 to 15 Jan 2006).
2. Brailsford 1947.
3. Painter 1977.
4. Eg, Kent and Painter 1977; Cahn and Kaufmann-Heinimann 1984; Toynbee and Painter 1986; Baratte 1988; Baratte et al 2002; Guggisberg and Kaufmann-Heinimann 2003; Hobbs 2006.
5. Dahl 1977.
6. Brailsford (1947, 4) simply referred those interested to the report in *The Times*, 24 June 1946, whilst Painter wrote a single summary paragraph. Neither suggested that there were any reasons to doubt the story behind its discovery.
7. Ashbee 1997; *Sunday Times*, 5 Jan 1997.
8. I am particularly grateful to John Gadd for allowing me to consult his archive of Lethbridge papers and his own research.
9. Presumably this was by prior appointment, as Hawkes spent some considerable time with Fawcett.
10. Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities was first proposed as a sub-department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography (BME) in 1945 (Wilson 2002, 255). It did not become an independent department until 1969, with John Brailsford as its first Keeper, and Rupert Bruce-Mitford as Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities. The departments have since been re-amalgamated, with the formation in 2002 of the Department of Prehistory and Europe. Thomas Kendrick was Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography from 1938 to 1950.
11. The early correspondence is between Fawcett and Hawkes. However, it seems possible that Kendrick was also present at the initial meeting, because in a handwritten summary (MA, doc. 010, aide-mémoire written by Thomas Kendrick, entitled 'Roman silver treasure from West Suffolk', 17 June 1946) Kendrick stated that he had also met Fawcett on 8 May. Curiously, though, throughout all the correspondence Fawcett alludes to a meeting with Hawkes only.
12. MA, doc. 024, Fawcett's statement at the treasure trove inquest held on 1 July 1946. The archive is kept in the Department of

- Prehistory and Europe, British Museum, London WC1B 3DG, and is available for consultation by prior appointment. Some of the documents are kept with the museum's central archives. All the documents were converted into Microsoft Word documents and each has been numbered. Other documents belong to John Gadd.
13. Before his death in 1982, Fawcett's large collection of around 8,000 items was purchased by the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. A large part of Ford's collection, principally prehistoric material, was left to the Mildenhall Museum after his death in 1970. The material was donated by his son Jack (Colin Pendleton, pers comm).
  14. MA, doc. 002, handwritten letter from Sydney Ford, Grove Villa, West Row, Mildenhall, Suffolk to Hugh Fawcett, The Croft, Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire, 14 May 1946.
  15. MA, doc. 003, handwritten letter from Hugh Fawcett to Christopher Hawkes at the British Museum, 15 May 1946.
  16. Although Harold Plenderleith, Head of the British Museum Research Laboratory, had established that these were made of silver (MA, doc. 010, see note 11).
  17. The 'PAPITTEDO' spoon (P&E 1946.1007.28), we learn from MA, doc. 010. The 'cup or bowl' is one of the bowls from the dolphin-handled ladles (P&E 1946.1007.18-22); it is not clear which one. This is clarified by Ford's statement at the coroner's inquest (MA, doc. 024). The handle was one of the drop handles from the fluted bowl (P&E 1946.1007.16 or .17).
  18. MA, doc. 010, see note 11.
  19. MA, doc. 006, handwritten letter from Fawcett to Hawkes, 31 May 1946.
  20. Forsdyke was Director of the British Museum between 1937 and 1950. MA, doc. 007, internal memorandum from Kendrick to Forsdyke, 2 June 1946.
  21. Fowler was Vice-President of the Fenland Research Committee and Phillips was President. Phillips was a figure of some standing, having been in charge of the excavations of Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo in 1939, and later head of the Archaeology Department at the Ordnance Survey, an appointment he took up in 1946.
  22. MA, doc. 019, typed letter from Thomas Wilson QC, 88 Guildhall Street, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, to Forsdyke, 27 June 1946.
  23. MA, doc. 008, handwritten letter from Ford to Fawcett, 13 June 1946.
  24. MA, doc. 009, handwritten letter from Fawcett to Hawkes, 16 June 1946.
  25. MA, doc. 011, letter from Hawkes (on behalf of Kendrick) to Fawcett, 17 June 1946. The regulations are set out in Hill 1936, 242. Presumably Hawkes gave Fawcett a copy of this text.
  26. MA, doc. 010, see note 11.
  27. MA, doc. 012, typed letter from Ford to Fawcett, 22 June 1946.
  28. Presumably because the police station at Mildenhall itself was not felt secure enough.
  29. The *Sunday Times* ran a piece, as did *The Times* on Mon 24 June, under the heading 'Roman silver unearthed in Suffolk'. The way in which the hoard was first publicized is provided by Hawkes (MA, doc. 020, letter from Hawkes to Charles Phillips, 9 Madingley Road, Cambridge, 27 June 1946).
  30. MA, doc. 013, letter from Wilson to Forsdyke, 24 June 1946.
  31. MA, doc. 015, letter from Forsdyke to Wilson, 26 June 1946.
  32. MA, doc. 016, handwritten letter from Fawcett to Hawkes, 26 June 1946. John Gadd also adds: 'I interviewed Fawcett 3 or 4 times. He hated the BM people because of competition with them over his exhaustive flint artefact collection' (John Gadd, pers comm). It is hoped that this paper is one way of acknowledging the crucial role that Hugh Fawcett played in ensuring that the Mildenhall treasure was declared. Fawcett died in 1982.
  33. MA, doc. 017, typed postcard from Phillips to Hawkes, 26 June 1946. The results of the excavations were never published.
  34. MA, doc. 018, handwritten letter from Sir John Tilley to Forsdyke, 27 June 1946.
  35. MA, doc. 020, letter from Hawkes to Phillips, 27 June 1946.
  36. This requirement was dispensed with when the old law of treasure trove was replaced by the Treasure Act 1996.
  37. See for example Bruce-Mitford 1975 and Marzinzik 2007. It was only due to the generosity of Edith Pretty that the finds were gifted to the British Museum.
  38. If waterlogged conditions were to be suggested today as the context, it is likely that such burial conditions would be interpreted as votive. 'Inaccessible swamp' would be a good place for an offering to

- chthonic deities, ironically rendering the Mildenhall treasure a deposit made with no intention to recover and thus negating its status as treasure trove!
39. And in discussion with Bernard Ashmole, Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities.
  40. Hobbs 2006.
  41. MA, doc. 022, letter from Phillips to Hawkes, 28 June 1946.
  42. MA, doc. 023, letter from Phillips to Hawkes, 30 June 1946.
  43. 'Potato king' perhaps being a derogatory term for a Suffolk farmer, rather than a reference to a specific individual. It has been pointed out that the expression 'spud baron' might be used today (Chris Mycock, pers comm).
  44. MA, doc. 064, letter from Fowler to Kendrick, 8 Jan 1947.
  45. MA, doc. 022, see note 41.
  46. MA, doc. 024, transcript of the treasure trove inquest proceedings held at Mildenhall police station, 1 July 1946. These proceedings were obtained by Rupert Bruce-Mitford in 1955 (MA, docs 071-073).
  47. Probably the Great Dish (P&E 1946.1007.1) not the niello platter (P&E 1946.1007.4).
  48. John Gadd says that having examined the Lethbridge archive, Ford mentioned several other sites to other people as well (John Gadd, pers comm).
  49. Painter (1977, 29) described them as a 'Pair of goblets', when in fact they are small platters with cup-shaped bases. The issue of the use of cups and small bowls in the late Roman period, including the vessels of that type from Mildenhall, is discussed further in Baratte *et al* 2002.
  50. This is an accurate description of what is known from the find. The first piece would have been the Great Dish (P&E 1946.1007.1); the 'large tray' corresponds to the niello platter (P&E 1946.1007.4); the 'soup pattern plates' to the four large flanged bowls (P&E 1946.1007.5-8); the 'two smaller plates' to the Bacchic platters (P&E 1946.1007.2-3); the 'two finger bowls' to the pair of smaller flanged bowls (P&E 1946.1007.9-10); the 'two cups' to the pedestal platters (P&E 1946.1007.13-14); the 'salad pattern bowl with handles detached' to the flanged bowl (P&E 1946.1007.15-17); the 'five ladles with four handles detached' to the ladle bowls and handles (P&E 1946.1007.18-26); the 'eight spoons' to the spoons (P&E 1946.1007.27-34); and, finally, the 'tureen' to the covered bowl (P&E 1946.1007.11-12).
  51. Comparable pieces of late Roman silver tableware were known from Mileham, Norfolk, and Corbridge, Northumbria, but these were only individual items, or, in the case of Corbridge, a small group (the famous 'lanx' and probably 2 further vessels no longer extant, a cup and a basin).
  52. MA, doc. 064, letter from Fowler to Kendrick, 8 Jan 1947.
  53. Ibid.
  54. MA, doc. 065, internal memorandum from Kendrick to Forsdyke, 13 Jan 1947. The use of such a colloquial American term such as 'buddy' demonstrates the impact of the Second World War and American cinema on British language. It is not clear if Kendrick meant that Wilson, the coroner, was a 'buddy' of Forsdyke or the Treasury solicitor – the latter seems more likely.
  55. MA, doc. 067, internal memorandum from Forsdyke to Kendrick, 18 Jan 1947.
  56. MA, doc. 073, letter from Wilson to Bruce-Mitford, 28 Feb 1958.
  57. I am grateful to Stephen Crummy for pointing this out.
  58. For a time, the possibility was entertained that the sketch was done by Tom Lethbridge, Gordon Fowler or even Charles Phillips. However, none of the samples of handwriting I have for any of these individuals matches that of the sketch.
  59. Under the current Treasure Act system, rewards are split 50-50 between finder and landowner. Under the treasure trove system in place in 1946, only the finders were eligible for any reward.
  60. MA, doc. 025, handwritten file note by Hawkes, 2 July 1946.
  61. MA, doc. 030, aide-mémoire written by Fowler and marked 'Private and Confidential', 4 July 1946.
  62. This seems to be pure speculation on the part of Fowler; there is no evidence that any kind of 'deal' was struck between the 2 men. Perhaps we should also dismiss as local gossip comments reported by Chris Mycock, curator of the Mildenhall Museum, that 'At least a couple of local people who have talked to me about the Mildenhall treasure have commented on Gordon Butcher's advance to self-employment (one said "he got his own

- tractor”) shortly after the treasure’s discovery’. For Butcher to have acquired his own tractor could hardly be described as unusual.
63. MA, doc. 027, handwritten note from Hawkes (?) to Forsdyke, 3 July 1946.
  64. Catherine Johns, pers comm. Johns also believes that it was not until 1962, in the case of the Canterbury treasure – which was acquired by Canterbury Museum and not the British Museum – that the status quo was challenged by the coroner.
  65. MA, doc. 026, handwritten note of telephone conversation Hawkes had with O’Neil, 2 July 1946.
  66. MA, doc. 035, letter from F J E Raby, Ministry of Works, Dean Bradley House, Horseferry Road, London, to Forsdyke, 10 July 1946.
  67. MA, doc. 039, letter from Forsdyke (?) to Raby, 12 July 1946.
  68. Latham and Matthews 1974, 262–80.
  69. Mattingly 2007, 228.
  70. MA, doc. 029, letter from Frank Francis (Secretary of the British Museum) to Prendergast, Office of the Treasury Solicitor, 4 July 1946.
  71. MA, doc. 038, letter from S W Green, Treasury Chambers, Great George Street, London, to Francis, 12 July 1946.
  72. MA, doc. 037, letter from Wilson to Forsdyke, 11 July 1946.
  73. MA, doc. 040, letter from P E Robertson, Town Clerk, Bury St Edmunds, to Forsdyke, 13 July 1946.
  74. MA, doc. 042, 13 July 1946. It is not clear who in the Director’s office at the British Museum originated this document.
  75. MA, doc. 043, letter from Francis to Robertson, 16 July 1946.
  76. Although according to an article in the *Daily Sketch*, of 18 July, the transportation took place on the 17th: “I watched these pieces ... unloaded from a small Army van”, writes a *Daily Graphic* reporter.’
  77. MA, doc. 057, letter from Forsdyke to the editor of the *East Anglian Times*, 8 Aug 1946. The Edward VII gallery, which was completed in 1914, is now room 33, the Joseph E Hotung gallery.
  78. MA, doc. 046, letter from Druitt, a treasury official, to S W Green, copied to the British Museum, 22 July 1946. Butcher and Ford paid their solicitors just over £157 for the various costs associated with issuing and discontinuing the writ (MA, doc. 063a, 27 Sept 1946).
  79. Fawcett wrote one long, final letter to Hawkes at the museum. He obviously still felt that his role in the affair had not been properly acknowledged: ‘Had I swum out and rescued a drowning dog, I should no doubt have received full measure of commendation & public applause – such is our queer sentimentality and sense of values!’ (MA, doc. 045, c 22 July 1946). In a reply to Fawcett, Hawkes clarified that although the treasure was in the museum, it was only there provisionally, as ‘the Inquest is still under review’ (MA, doc. 047, 23 July 1946). Hawkes finished his reply: ‘At all events I should like to end by assuring you that it is fully appreciated by us here, and I hope you will presently come and see the display of the Treasure which you have been so instrumental in bringing to light.’
  80. MA, doc. 048, letter from Hawkes to Lethbridge, c 25 July 1946.
  81. MA, doc. 051, letter from Fowler to Hawkes, 29 July 1946.
  82. MA, doc. 048, letter from Hawkes to Lethbridge, c 25 July 1946.
  83. MA, doc. 060a, letter from O’Neil to Lethbridge, 12 Aug 1946.
  84. It was not until 1977, with the formation of the Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee (Roger Bland, pers comm) that the valuation system was formalized. The committee was renamed the Treasure Valuation Committee in 1997 to reflect more accurately its role (see The Treasure Act, Code of Practice (Revised), Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Cultural Property Unit, 2002).
  85. MA, doc. 049, handwritten schedule of weights and bullion value, 26 July 1946. Incidentally, Lethbridge also claimed that Thomas Kendrick had suggested that the material would fetch in a saleroom ‘Not less than £60,000’ (Lethbridge 1997, 725). Kendrick later denied this: ‘... I can’t believe I was ever wicked enough to give unofficial hints of the value of the treasure in cash’ (MA, doc. 074a, letter from Kendrick to Kenneth Painter, 15 May 1974).
  86. MA, doc. 051, letter from Fowler to Hawkes, 29 July 1946. Fowler also wrote in this letter: ‘... we have interviewed all the members of the Rolfe family on the spot and they are quite willing to let us explore the site in any way we wish’.
  87. Lord Ilchester is described as one of the ‘most energetic members’ of the Trustees



- (Wilson 2002, 258). MA, doc. 053, letter from Forsdyke to Lord Ilchester (trustee of the British Museum), 2 Aug 1946.
88. MA, doc. 054, internal memorandum from Kendrick to Forsdyke, 7 Aug 1946.
  89. MA, doc. 055, internal memorandum from Forsdyke to Kendrick, 7 Aug 1946.
  90. MA, doc. 060, letter from Forsdyke to Druitt, 9 Aug 1946. Forsdyke said in the letter: 'I suppose the proper way to put it is that the Trustees acquire the treasure from the crown at that price' (ie, a payment of £1,000 to each of the finders).
  91. MA, doc. 062, letter from Druitt to Forsdyke, 16 Aug 1946.
  92. MA, doc. 068, summary document written by Fowler and sent to Hawkes, 4 Mar 1947.
  93. This section of Lethbridge's memoirs was published posthumously in September 1997, in *Antiquity*, 71, 721-7.
  94. A verbatim piece was published on 3 Aug 1946 in the *Overseas Daily Mail*, London.
  95. MA, doc. 052, letter from Reginald Carter to the editor of the *East Anglian Times*, Ipswich, 1 Aug 1946.
  96. The press invariably exaggerates the true value of treasure finds. For comparison, after the Hoxne treasure was found in 1992, the front page of the *Sun* newspaper ran a headline 'Eric finds £10 M booty' (*Sun*, 19 Nov 1992). The hoard was eventually valued at £1.75 million.
  97. Catherine Johns, pers comm.
  98. See note 59 regarding the revised law.
  99. Although Dahl's sister claimed that she remembered him catching a train (MA, doc. 086, letter from Amanda Conquy (Dahl Estate) to Richard Hobbs, 29 Mar 1996).
  100. Dahl 1999, 5-6. Dahl is mistaken to suggest he read about the discovery in April 1946, because the first press reports did not appear until the end of June.
  101. Dahl attempted to speak to Ford as well but was rebuffed (Dahl 1999, 6).
  102. Dahl 1977 and 1999.
  103. Hobbs 1997.
  104. MA, doc. 080a, letter from Dahl to Gadd, 28 Mar 1977.
  105. MA, doc. 091, a statement given by Jarman to Chris Mycock at Moyse's Hall, Bury St Edmunds, in reaction to a newspaper report, 15 Apr 1997.
  106. MA, doc. 092, letter from Margaret Langley to Richard Hobbs, 16 Apr 1997.
  107. MA, doc. 085a, letter from Nora Ford to Gadd, 1 Oct 1979.
  108. Curle 1922; Bateson 1973.
  109. See for instance, Guggisberg and Kaufmann-Heinimann 2003, 300: 'The assembly of the silver was not motivated by the owner's wish to possess as complete a dinner service as possible. It is much more likely that it came together in far more diverse ways, influenced by chance, through the exchange of gifts ... and through legacies, purchases and other forms of acquisition.' Although these comments concern Kaiseraugst, they are applicable to other finds of late Roman silver. Painter made a similar point in his discussion of the silver service from the House of the Menander at Pompeii: 'A service ... could consist of pieces of very different material and value, and was not necessarily a homogenous set of silver vessels made by a single craftsman' (Painter 2001, 21).
  110. Johns forthcoming.
  111. Johns and Potter 1983.
  112. Cahn and Kaufmann-Heinimann 1984; Guggisberg and Kaufmann-Heinimann 2003.
  113. Ashbee 1997, 75.
  114. Phillips 1987, 87.
  115. Guest 2005; Johns forthcoming.
  116. MA, doc. 088, 16 Jan 1997. A letter from the editor of *Stars and Stripes* magazine to the editor of *Antiquity* confirmed: 'U.S. forces were not based at Mildenhall until years after the treasure had been discovered'.
  117. Lethbridge 1997. Lethbridge called his memoir 'Ivory Towers', yet its official title was 'Reminiscences of Archaeology at Cambridge 1920-1950'. It was written in about 1968 but was never published (aside from the extract concerning Mildenhall published posthumously in *Antiquity*, see note 93) (John Gadd, pers comm).
  118. Lethbridge was referring to Ford's sons-in-law, who were sergeants in the Royal Air Force and had been stationed at Mildenhall (Lethbridge 1997, 726).
  119. 'Deeply in his cups' means when he was drunk, for those who have not encountered the phrase before.
  120. MA, doc. 075, handwritten letter from Derek Allen, Grenna House, Chilson, Charlbury, Oxon, to Ian Longworth, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, British Museum, 25 May 1974.
  121. Macdonald 1996.

122. Lethbridge 1997, 726. It should be noted that Colin Dring did a great deal of research on the Seaber family, none of which has been published.
123. MA, doc. 070d, handwritten letter from Fowler to Lethbridge, 16 June 1947. In the letter he said that a certain Walter Cowell showed him 'black edged death cards in support of the following pedigree', which included a Mary Levett of Mildenhall, born about 1845, and implied that this might be the second wife of Seaber. This was not correct.
124. 'Black Jack' Seaber supposedly featured in a story by the Victorian Church of England clergyman and author Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924). A 'black jack' was someone who exerted pressure on others, which conforms with Lethbridge's own description of him: 'he bought up everything he could lay his hands on' (Lethbridge 1997, 726). Although Baring-Gould wrote a large number of novels, the most likely candidate is *Cheap Jack Zita* (London, 1893), which is set in the Fens. 'Black Jack' might be the wealthy landowner Hezekiah Drownlands, one of the suitors of the young Cheap Jack Zita (a 'cheap jack' is a vendor of household goods). The novel features a host of diverse Fenland characters.
125. MA, doc. 068, summary document written by Fowler and sent to Hawkes, 4 Mar 1947.
126. MA, doc. 070a, letter from Fowler to Lethbridge, 19 May 1947.
127. MA, doc. 067c, letter from Fowler to Lethbridge, 12 Feb 1947; MA, doc. 070e, postcard from Fowler to Lethbridge, 20 June 1947.
128. MA, doc. 068, see note 125.
129. MA, doc. 070e, postcard from Fowler to Lethbridge, 20 June 1947.
130. MA, doc. 070a, see note 126.
131. MA, doc. 070m, summary document written by Lethbridge, c late(?) 1948.
132. MA, doc. 068, see note 125.
133. Lethbridge 1997, 726.
134. Ibid.
135. Ibid.
136. Lethbridge 1997, 727.
137. Lethbridge even went so far as to suggest that Ford waited for his father to die before acting (MA, doc. 070m, summary written by Lethbridge, c late 1948).
138. By curious coincidence a Mary Ann Slack was servant of another John Seaber living in the area, as a Mary Ann Slack is listed as a member of the household of John and Eliza Seaber. That John Seaber was born in 1810.
139. MA, doc. 070d, letter from Fowler to Lethbridge, 16 June 1947.
140. MA, doc. 070e, postcard from Fowler to Lethbridge, 20 June 1947.
141. MA, doc. 070h, letter from Fowler to Lethbridge, 25 Aug 1947.
142. MA, doc. 031, police statement compiled by Superintendent S W Hammond, Mildenhall police station, 4 July 1946.
143. In later years, Fawcett told John Gadd that he was 'sure Ford or someone had some "further objects", and that "I have my doubts that all was declared."' (John Gadd, pers comm).
144. MA, doc. 097, e-mail from Colin Dring to Richard Hobbs, 2 Dec 2003.
145. Mango and Bennett 1994.
146. MA, doc. 097, see note 144.
147. Painter 1977.
148. Gadd describes himself as 'an amateur archaeologist and archivist'. He purchased Lethbridge's papers in 1975, which is how he became interested in the treasure in the first instance.
149. Now passed to Dr Patrick Zutshi at the Cambridge University Library.
150. Colin Pendleton, Suffolk County Council writes: 'Dring was instrumental in securing the future of Mildenhall Museum and in acquiring the replicas of the treasure currently in the Museum' (Colin Pendleton, pers comm).
151. Gadd never published anything on Mildenhall, although he did produce a monograph (Gadd 1976). After this he continued to explore the 'mystery' with surviving family members and also dug 2 trenches, re-excavating the 'stranger's trench' and investigating a spot indicated on Gage Farm by Toby Butcher, which he dug with Stanley West and Suffolk County Council Archaeology Unit. Neither excavation found anything directly relevant to the treasure itself, although the larger trench uncovered a Roman wall (John Gadd, pers comm).
152. Toby is also referred to by 3 other names: Arthur, Albert and Roy. The latter is apparently his Christian name (Mrs Bowers, pers comm).
153. MA, doc. 077, 2 Jan 1977. The document is entitled 'Interview with Albert Butcher', but means Toby (see note 152).
154. It should also be noted, however, that Basil

- Jarman, another of Ford's young employees, similarly claimed that he was present when the hoard was discovered (MA, doc. 091, notes taken by Chris Mycock, at Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds, after interviewing Mr Basil Jarman of Scotch Green Farm, Hundon, Suff, 15 Apr 1997).
155. MA, doc. 079, letter from John Gadd, High Corrie, Letton Close, Blandford Forum, Dorset, to Albert Butcher, 24 Woodcutters Way, Lakenheath, Brandon, Suff, 2 Feb 1977.
  156. MA, doc. 080, letter from Toby Butcher to Gadd, 8 Feb 1977.
  157. MA, doc. 081, notes on an interview with Peter Butcher, Gordon Butcher's son, 22 June 1977.
  158. It is unclear how Frank Rolfe was related to Fred Rolfe, on whose land the Mildenhall treasure was discovered. Margaret Langley described Fred as a 'tragic character' whose 'son or sons were killed in World War I, leaving no heir to land that had been his family's pride for many generations' (MA, doc. 092, letter from Mrs H M F Langley, Walpole House, 16 Yarmouth Road, Norwich, to Richard Hobbs, British Museum, 16 Apr 1997). Chris Mycock comments: 'I've done some work on WWI casualties on Mildenhall memorials. There is a list of West Row WWI casualties drawn up by a woman in the village, now in Mildenhall Museum. There are four men named Rolfe on it: Frank, Victor, Louis, and John. Not one of them features on any of the four local War Memorials. A manuscript panel in Mildenhall Church lists Frank Rolfe, Evans Rolfe and John Rolfe but not with a K for killed. The only Rolfe fatality is Private Philip Rolfe, R.W. Kents on Beck Row War Memorial. The same man, I think, also appears on the Mildenhall memorial as P. Rolph. There is no P. Rolph on CWGC web-site. CWGC's only Philip Rolfe in R. W. Kents is <[http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=809885](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=809885)> [(3 June 2008)] killed in 1916. His parents are not named on the CWGC certificate. <[FreeBMD.org.uk](http://FreeBMD.org.uk)> [(3 June 2008)] records a Phillip Rolfe (with double L) born September quarter 1897, at Mildenhall (I searched for "Phil Rolfe 1885 - 1900"). Of the six records, this was the only one in Suffolk, so he's probably our man. He was 19' (Chris Mycock, pers comm).
  159. MA, doc. 083, notes on an interview with Mr and Mrs Toby Butcher, 29 Sept 1977.
  160. According to Miss Owles, the local curator to whom Gadd spoke, no such bequest was made, although about 6 years before the interview, ie in about 1970, the year of Ford's death, the museum had been burgled, so it is not impossible that the coins were stolen. However, it seems that Gadd was in any case mistaken to suggest that the cabinet was left to Mildenhall Museum. According to Chris Mycock, the present curator: 'There seems to be some confusion here between Mildenhall Museum and Moyse's Hall Museum [Bury St Edmunds]. Elizabeth Owles was curator of Moyse's 1975-1985. Syd Ford left a lot of his archaeology collection to Mildenhall Museum, but I don't know of any coins from him. Most of what he bequeathed is on display. Colin Pendleton, now at Suffolk CC Archaeological Section, was curator at Mildenhall in the early 1980s and knows the Ford collection quite well (especially the bronzes). Colin is quite certain that there were no coins from Ford in Mildenhall Museum. Syd's cabinet was broken into and some of the better Bronze-Age pieces were stolen. Mildenhall Museum also had a display of coins and medals stolen, but I don't know when, or if they went in the same - or separate - raids. There are flints from Adolphus Bacon's collection at Moyse's Hall, but I am not aware of any coins. The theft of coins from Moyse's Hall took place on the night of 11th /12th Jan 1965 and so preceded Syd's death. The entire collection was taken, including 39 4th century of the House of Constantine and later. There is nothing on the list to suggest a hoard, though there were 5 gold coins, one for each of the last 5 emperors. The list of stolen items suggests that the collection was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to represent each emperor with one or two pieces each, though some have 4. The maximum is 11, for Constantine I. I feel it unlikely that Moyse's Hall would have had much from Syd Ford before he died, and - as far as I know - there is nothing in the present coin collection from him' (Chris Mycock, pers comm, Feb 2008).
  161. MA, doc. 084, notes on an interview with Frank Rolfe, 30 Sept 1977.
  162. MA, doc. 085, notes on an interview with Fawcett, 30 Sept 1977.
  163. Pearce 1942.

164. MA, doc. o85c, memorandum from Stephen Corri, British Museum Central Archives, to Richard Hobbs, 14 Feb 1996.
165. The testimony of Toby Butcher that he saw coins cannot be verified by the family. However, Mrs Bowers did confirm that Toby Butcher had always insisted that he was riding on the tractor on the day that the hoard was discovered, and did not think that this was something he had invented.
166. MA, docs o87, o90, o92, letters from Mrs M Langley to Ashbee, 9 Jan 1997, and to Richard Hobbs, 2 Apr 1997, 16 Apr 1997.
167. MA, doc. o92, letter from Mrs M Langley to Richard Hobbs, 16 Apr 1997.
168. Over which I was in curatorial charge between November 2003 and January 2006.
169. MA, doc. o98, letter from John Hicks, White Hart Cottage, Machen, to Richard Brewer, National Museum and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff, 1 July 2004.
170. Mrs Bowers told me that the young girl in the picture is Helen Moore, daughter of George Moore and Molly Ford and granddaughter of Sydney. She was born on 28 July 1941. Given that Helen looks about 3 years old in the photograph, it must surely have been taken in about 1944, at a similar time to the photograph of Jack Ford. It is also clear that the positions of the items from the treasure are exactly the same. Jude Plouviez at Suffolk County Council spoke to Helen in 1997, but Helen was unsure how old she was when the photograph was taken (Jude Plouviez, pers comm).
171. I would like to thank Chris Mycock for his help in this matter.
172. Mrs Bowers left me a voicemail message on 29 Jan 2008, and I spoke to her to confirm the details of this 2 days later on 31 Jan. She said: 'We are unable to confirm what Uncle John said ... I asked around the family and everyone seems to think it was [found in] 1942, not 1941. Grandfather [Sydney Ford] always had lots of stuff about, there were always bits about. I had a friend who said that she had seen it at Grove Villa, when in actual fact it was handed over before she was even born. I'm not saying he's wrong, but can't really confirm the date.'
173. Although I was informed that there was no pewter in the collection of material donated to Mildenhall Museum after Ford's death (Colin Pendleton, pers comm).
174. Mrs Bowers, pers comm.
175. Guggisberg and Kaufmann-Heinimann 2003.
176. Dr V Zsolt, 'The archaeology of the Sevso treasure', lecture given on 14 Feb 2008 at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries for the All Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group (APPAG).
177. MA, doc. o95, notes prepared for BBC interview with Sydney Ford, grandson of Sydney Ford, 30 Oct 2002.

## ABBREVIATION AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Abbreviation

MA Mildenhall archive, British Museum (see note 12)

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