



Figs. 1a & b. Anglo-Saxon gold tremissis found in Essex.



Fig. 2. Obverse of another gold tremissis originally classed as being of Merovingian origins.



Figs. 3a & b. A very similar coin obverse to Fig. 2, found in 1994 at Shalbourne, Wiltshire and classed as Anglo-Saxon.

It has been nearly 20 years since I was lucky enough to make the astonishing find of two Anglo-Saxon gold coins in an Essex field (Figs. 1a & b & Fig. 2). Originally the coin shown in Fig. 2 had been classed as being Merovingian in origin, however another coin found in Shalbourne, Wiltshire and shown in Figs. 3a & b is currently classed as being Anglo-Saxon after the late Lord Stewartby (once Honorary Keeper of Medieval coins at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) put forward a convincing argument in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* (1993). Therefore, with the similarity in reverse designs I believe my second coin is also Anglo-Saxon.

At that time, I had just completed my studies in Field Archaeology at Birkbeck College, University of London, and was keen to apply what I had learned in the classroom out in the real world of the field. The enthusiasm of my Anglo-Saxon course tutor, Dave Beard, to share his vast knowledge and understanding of that period was infectious. In one class, I took particular note when he said that many Anglo-Saxon coin finds are associated with locations by roads, rivers and trackways and that these may have been near to Anglo-Saxon markets or fairs, which made sense. However, at that time there wasn't a lot of information on where these sites might be, or at least that's what I thought. In fact, information on the potential locations of ancient roads, rivers, trackways and many other kinds of ancient sites is all around us in our everyday lives – encoded in the language of our place-names.

Place-Names as Signposts to the Past

Further reading led me to the work of Margaret Gelling and the publications of the English Place-Name Society (EPNS). It was in one of those publications that I came across the

interpretation of the place-name element Chipping as being derived from the Old English *céping*, 'a market or a market-place'. This word is also associated with *céapan* (to buy) and *céap* (to deal). It reminded me of the many times I had got a bargain at the market, something cheap. However, what about the 'ing' part of the Chipping place-name? If that place-name element is associated with an Anglo-Saxon personal name, it would probably mean something

like 'the people of Chipp'. However, being associated with a function (ie market) it is thought to mean either 'place' or small stream. The former seemed the most likely but I did wonder, once I found a promising town, whether I should zoom in on looking for fields close to a small stream too. So, my search centred on finding a place called 'Chipping', with an

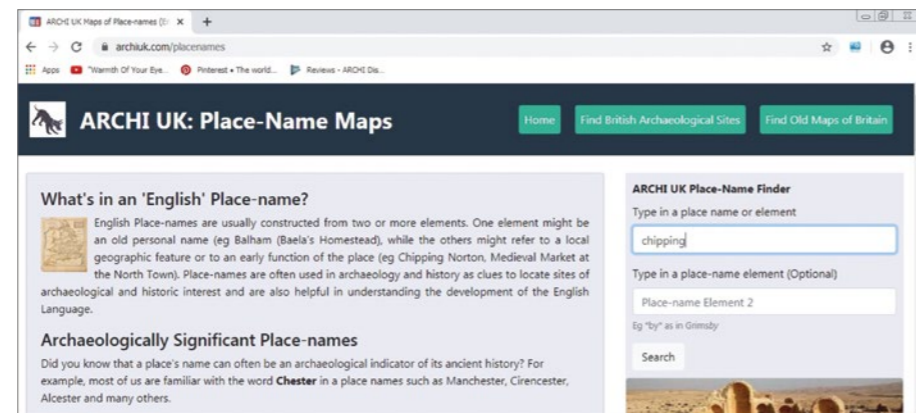


Fig. 4. Using the ARCHI Ancient Place-Name Finder to locate 'Chipping' type names. The ARCHI place-name index (ARCHI Ancient Place Finder) is available for anyone to search at www.archiuk.com/placenames. You can search this place-name index for archaeologically significant place-name elements. The results list shows a list of places containing that place-name element together with links to a modern aerial photograph plus older, 19th century maps. Together, you can use these maps to search for the kind of geographic and landscape features mentioned above which I still use to locate potentially undiscovered sites of archaeological, historic and cultural interest.

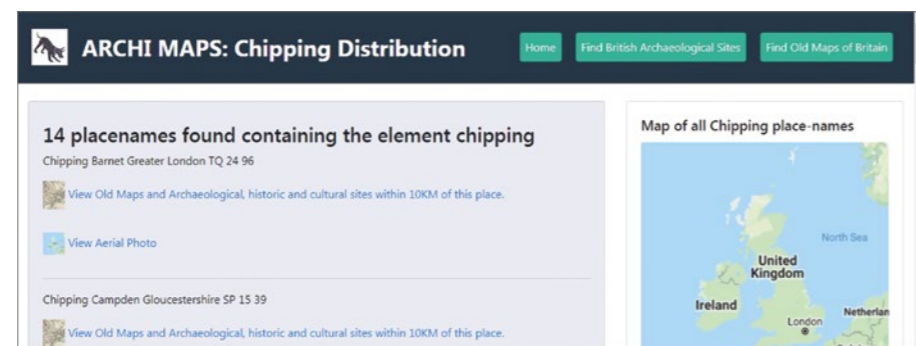


Fig. 5. Results List of a search for the English place-name element 'chipping'. You can use the aerial photography and links to ARCHI to decide which of these places warrant further investigation.

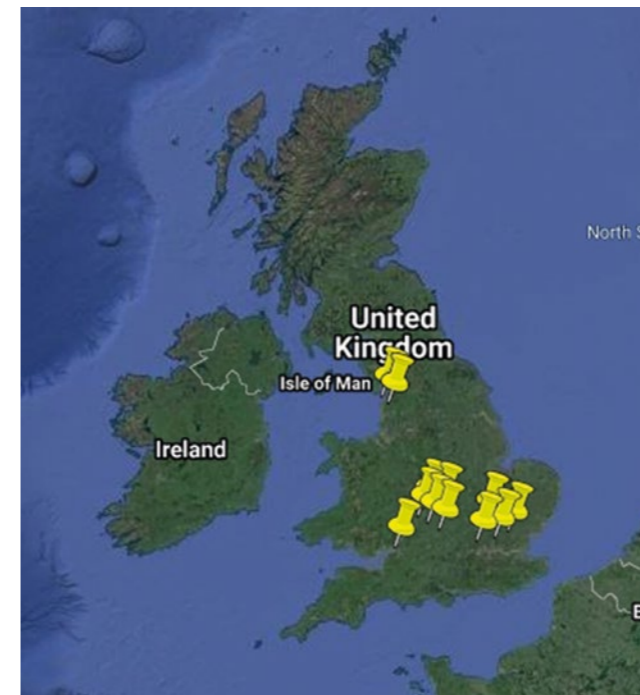


Fig. 6. Distribution Map of the 'chipping' place-name element. Is there a place with a historically-significant place-name element near you?

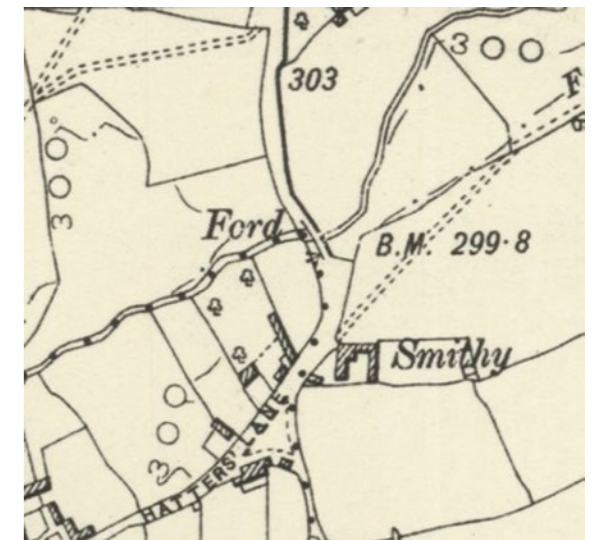


Fig. 7. Old Map showing the location of a ford close to a place containing the 'chipping' place-name element. I like to look at the oldest maps I can because later maps don't often show where the old fordable parts of rivers were.

ancient long-distance track leading to it, a watercourse at one or more of its boundaries and fingers crossed, fields close by that I could gain permission to search on. The hope was that an original Anglo-Saxon market site was in a field just outside of what was now the main town. Even if it wasn't, there would still be fields by the side of the roads and trackways leading to the town where traders may have stopped off or camped the days before a market was held.

It wasn't too difficult for me to find

places with the place-name element 'Chipping', because at that time I was building my ARCHI database and I had already compiled a large list of English place-names from the indexes of numerous road atlases (Figs. 4-8) as part of the search engine. There were a few Chipping place-names within a couple of hours drive of my home. For obvious reasons, Cheapside in the City of London would not be a contender. Chipping Hill, Witham, Essex seemed like a good possibility because I had read that there might have been

an Anglo-Saxon mint there. When I looked at the map of the area I could see the main road leading to Chipping Hill crossed the River Brain, which was a good sign, but the location of the fields of interest were urbanised with houses and shops. Even if I had been given the opportunity to detect on someone's back garden in that area, I would have probably politely declined because we all know what an absolute nightmare urban gardens are to detect.

Geography of Medieval Markets and Fairs

It was common in the medieval period for traders to stay in a field just outside of the main gates of a town or village prior to market day. If the town had a river at its boundary, that would be



Fig. 8. Zoomed-in view of the fields of a 'Chipping' place. Clearly seen to the left of this photograph are the remains of a medieval ridge and furrow field system. The field system appears to overlay an earlier enclosure, possibly suggesting the town's significance even before the Anglo-Saxon period.



Fig. 9. Preliminary paper-based research material for place-name analysis and location plus suggested background reading on Anglo-Saxon coinage.

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OCCUPIERS.	Station relating to the Plot.	NAME AND DESCRIPTION LANDS AND PREMISES	STATE OF CULTIVATION	QUANTITIES	PARABLE TO		PARABLE TO		REMARKS
				STATION RELATIVE TO THE PLANT.	PLANT	PLANT	PLANT		
		259 Greenhouse & garden	grass	1 0 33	1 1 7	1	1	AA3	
Himself.		262 River mead.	grass	9 - 7	1 11 6	1 0 6	1 0 6	AA3	
		292 Wood field	arable	1 0 14	1 0 14	1 0 14	1 0 14	AA3	
		359 garden	arable	2 1 07	11 6	1	11 11	AA3	
Joseph Mead.		66 Longish field	arable	12 - 7				AA3	
		966 Woods	arable	1 - 6				AA3	
		966 Woods	arable	1 - 28				AA3	
		967 W. meadow	arable	1 0 36				AA3	
		968 Middle field	arable	1 0 36				AA3	
		969 Grass field	arable	4 2 15				AA3	
		970 Grass field	arable	1 0 35				AA3	
		971 Long field	arable	12 0 12	1 11 3	1 0 0 0	1 0 0 0	AA3	

Fig.10. Tithe Apportionment from 1839 listing 'Ford' Field (plot 282).

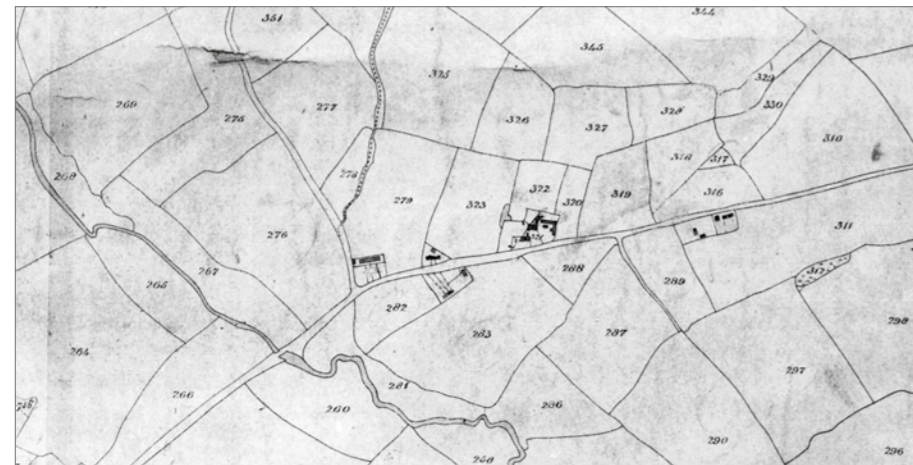


Fig.11. Tithe Map from 1839 showing the location of plot 282 (Ford Field) at the junction of a major route and river. Coins and artefacts dating from the Anglo-Saxon to the late Medieval Period were found in adjacent fields. Finds from Ford field appeared to indicate it was significantly associated with a medieval market site.

even better, because the fields right next to the river would be the most likely place traders would have settled and watered themselves, their horses and their livestock. In fact, using Tithe maps, I once found what I think was such a field (Figs 9-11).

The field, called Ford Field, was at the point where a supposed Roman road crossed a navigable river in Essex. Given that the actual original ford was aligned with a major Roman road, I anticipated finding items from the Roman period. However, I found absolutely nothing from the Roman period in that field or others adjoining it. Instead, I was really surprised to find many items from the 8th century onwards, including one of Offa's pennies (Figs.12a & b). A good number of Short Cross pennies also cropped up (Fig.13a & b) as well as several cut halves (Figs.14a & b) and cut quarters mixed in with several later Long Cross issues. Amongst the artefacts were a medieval lead seal matrix (Figs.15 &

Clues in the Landscape

Back to the search for an Anglo-Saxon market town: I eventually found a place which seemed to fit the bill. It had the Chipping place-name element and I drove over to take a look at the area in and around the town. Within an hour of surveying the town I knew I was onto something. It just felt right. It was more of an instinctive feeling than wisdom, as at that time I was a relative newcomer to the study of field archaeology. Knowing what I know now about the place, I think that my positive feeling was based in a kind of innate ability we all possess to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning. Quietly, in the back of my mind, lights were starting to come on. I probably didn't realise it, but I was standing immersed in the



Figs.12a & b. Offa King of Mercia penny,
(AD 757-796) from Ford Field.

kind of geographic landscape features this country's ancient ancestors would have looked for when choosing an early market town.

Looking back now, it is clear to see the geographic and environmental aspects of this place that make it special. There was a small river virtually encircling the place to provide water, food and a defensive barrier. This watercourse was joined nearby to the main, navigable river I had crossed over a mile or two down the road. The town was elevated and provided good views of the surrounding landscape from its higher points, which would help make the settlement easier to defend. Also, not being surrounded by swampy ground (as many places weren't well drained at that time) meant that access to the site and trade links could be established and more easily maintained. Actually, if I had access to archaeological reports of the area at the time I would have found very little archaeological evidence that this place was significant in Anglo-Saxon times, and I might have even moved on. However the place's name and my gut feeling pushed me on.

Facts and Fairy Tales

Just on the outskirts of the old settlement, I identified a couple of fields which I liked the look of (Fig.19). Going through the fields was a much wider than average straight rural trackway leading up to a watercourse, which was just shallow enough to be fordable. At the time, I didn't know it was actually a section of a major long-distant ancient trackway with another path crossing through it forming a 'crossroads' about 50 metres from the river. To top the lot, the fields were right at the parish boundary.

However, at the time I knew none of this because I didn't even have a map of the area. If I had, I'm sure I would have been over the moon,



Figs.13a & b. Short Cross penny from Ford Field.

because one thing I did know at that time was that ancient market sites were often sited on parish borders.

There are various theories for this but the one I have always liked is that spirits were very active at parish borders. Given that our ancestors were very superstitious, one can easily see how people are less likely to be dishonest under the watchful eyes of the spirits and ghosts. There is thought to be an association of Anglo-Saxon burial sites and settlement borders. I've read that Bronze Age barrows are also often situated at settlement and regional boundaries, which may explain the origins of this old tradition.

Gold!

Once I decided I wanted to detect on this land, I found it quite difficult to establish who actually owned it. Then one day while tramping along one of its peripheral tracks trying to get a better feel for the place, I heard the sound of a tractor. The farmer was kind enough to stop for a chat and I was lucky enough for him to agree upon a one year search and recovery contract. That first season, the field kept me occupied with Victoria pennies, silver sixpences, buttons, musket balls and shotgun cartridges, but nothing from the Anglo-Saxon period.

The second season changed everything. After a couple hours detecting one morning, I got a bright signal and I brushed about one inch off the newly-ploughed soil and clods with my foot. The signal was gone. I looked around wondering where the clods I had just

kicked aside had gone and swept my detector coil over them. The signal was back. I honed in on the suspected clod of soil, broke it in half and was absolutely astonished to see the glint of gold shining from its backdrop of earth. Moments later I was holding the little coin that I mentioned right at the start of this article, shown in Figs.1a & b.

I wasn't sure what the coin was, but the feeling of antiquity as I held it was so powerful that it just had to be old, really old. I was reminded of the



Figs.14a & b. Short Cross cut halfpenny from Ford Field.



Figs.15 & 16. Front and back of a medieval lead seal matrix from Ford Field.

coins from the Sutton Hoo ship burial minted by the Merovingian Franks. It has been postulated that the Sutton Hoo coins were deposited with King Rædweld of East Anglia around AD 625. It was clear to me that this coin was a piece of much needed archaeological evidence to support a historical record of this area being important in Anglo-Saxon times. However just what kind of site did it represent? Other than this single gold coin, I had no other finds to suggest that this field was where an Anglo-Saxon market site once stood. It was actually much more likely that the original market site was in the village, possibly under the location of where the current market is held every Wednesday to this day.

Thinking back to the Sutton Hoo ship burial, I wondered whether the coin may be just one of a scattered hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold coins, possibly from a high-status burial. I liked the idea of this theory the most. However, I did also have to consider a third interpretation, that the coin was just a casual loss. After all, the find spot was only a stone's throw away from the intersection of two long-distance and possibly ancient pathways. Whatever the reason for the coin being there, I was filled with a strong and barely controllable passion to see if there were more coins lying under the earth – some may call it greed and maybe there was a bit of that, I'll admit it.

An hour of frantic searching passed, then another, but nothing came up in the area of the first coin. I was approaching some really roughly



Figs.17 & 18. Medieval silver spoon handle from Ford Field and close up detail of its terminal.



Fig.19. Tithe Map from 1869 showing very promising fields at the intersection of a major ancient trackway and a possible ancient ford. This track / ford / river geographic arrangement had yielded Anglo-Saxon to mid-medieval finds at other locations I had previously searched.

ploughed soil at the edge of the field. I had been avoiding this area for reasons obvious to most detectorists, so slowed right down. It seemed like thankless work going in and out of the furrows and I was starting to believe that the first coin was in fact just a casual loss. Then suddenly, a lovely clear, round sound reverberated through my head.

I knelt down on the ground in a state of reverence as I broke open the clod of earth and was greeted with the golden symbol of an archaic Christian cross on a second ancient gold coin, as mentioned previously and shown in Fig.2. After a long while just sitting there, I pulled myself back into reality. Maybe these coins weren't just casual

losses? Maybe, just maybe, there were more lying beneath the ground under my feet, wishing also that I could free them from the darkness in which they had lain for the past 1,300 years. However, those coins would have to wait nearly 20 more years before they too would see the light. I will tell the story of their rebirth in my next article.

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