



Battlefields Trust Middleton Cheney Battlefield Survey Report

1. Introduction

1.1 On 25 February 2023 a Battlefields Trust team surveyed a small area at Middleton Cheney that research had suggested might cover part of the May 1643 battlefield of Middleton Cheney.

1.2 The survey was carried out in accordance with standard archaeological methodology for the investigation of historic battlefields, as outlined by Foard and Morris (2012) and using the Battlefields Trust's [battlefield investigation policy and guidance](#).

The Site (*Figure 1*)

1.3 The site was located within an arable field (last ploughed in 2022) which was fallow at the time of the survey (Field 1) and another in long term permanent pasture with some remnant ridge and furrow (Field 2). Ground conditions in Field 1 consisted of short grass and in Field 2 slightly longer grass which had been grazed by sheep. Field 1 was bordered to the east by the Astrop Road with fields adjoining on all other sides. Field 2 was bordered by the A422 to the north, a stream to the west, a rough grazing field to the south and a field containing Christmas trees to the east. A public footpath also ran along the southern edge of this field.

1.5 Field 1 was underlain by Marlstone rock formation which explains the iron stone content within the topsoil. Field 2 consisted of Dyrham formation toward the east side of the site and Charmouth mudstone formation to the western side of the site, nearest the stream. No superficial deposits are recorded (BGS Online viewer, 2022).

1.6. Field 1 was largely flat at the 130m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Field 2 sloped down to the stream from 130m to 105m aOD.

Historical Background

1.7 On 6 May 1643 a parliamentary force of around 600 foot and 120-150 horse with a single six pounder piece of drake artillery from the garrison at Northampton attempted an attack on Banbury following a fire there. The parliamentary force was intercepted by two royalist cavalry regiments whilst trying to ford the river Cherwell south of Banbury and retreated to Middleton Cheney.

1.8 In the village's common field the parliamentarians turned to face their royalist pursuers, reportedly across a valley. The royalists deployed in three bodies of horse and drove off the parliamentary cavalry. The royalists then attacked the parliamentary infantry and despite coming under artillery fire, caused the foot

soldiers to break and run, ending the battle. Forty-six of the dead from the battle were recorded as being buried in the village churchyard.

1.9 Tradition has located the battle in the Moor's Drive area, now a housing estate. This was part of the village's common field in the mid 17th century, but these commons extended over a large area south of the town.



Figure 1: Battlefield Survey Areas (Lidar data base map © Environment Agency 2022 OGL 3.0)

Archaeological objective

1.10 The survey aimed to test whether fighting occurred south of the Moor's Drive area (see Figure 2 for conjectured deployments) and therefore whether at least some of the battlefield could be pinpointed. It aimed to recover unstratified metallic artefacts from across the site, principally lead shot associated with the events of the 1643 battle of Middleton Cheney, during the British Civil War.

1.11 In accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 2009), the metal detector survey has been designed to be minimally intrusive and minimally destructive to archaeological remains.

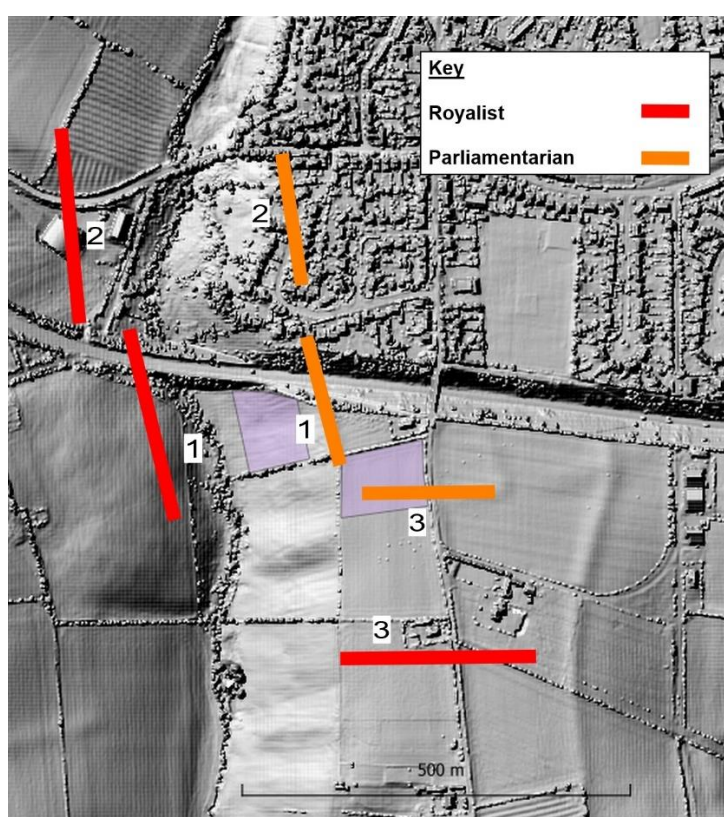


Figure 2: Conjectured deployments of forces at Middleton Cheney (Lidar data base map © Environment Agency 2022 OGL 3.0)

Metal Detecting Methodology

1.12 The metal detector survey was undertaken across both fields over a single day.

1.13 The survey area was split into a series of parallel transects set out across the fields. Both were covered using 5m spaced transects.



1.14 During the survey, each detectorist followed the line of a transect down the field, ensuring a wide and consistent sweep of the detector head as close to the ground as possible, resulting in a c.2m wide fully surveyed strip along each transect (1m either side of the transect line). Thus, 5m spaced transects offered c. 40% coverage of an area.

1.15 The locations of the detected areas were recorded using navigation grade GPS. Transects were marked on the ground using temporary markers in the form of colour-coded flags, to ensure the detectorist did not deviate from the determined transect. All such markers were removed from site at the completion of each survey area.

1.16 Ground conditions were good, with short grass meaning that the detector head could consistently be brought close to the ground surface to ensure maximum potential artefact recovery. The ploughing of Field 1 in 2022 provided better detecting conditions than Field 2, where the permanent pasture could have resulted in metal objects moving down the soil column due to worm action and out of range of metal detectors.

1.17 The equipment used to carry out the survey consisted of six high grade metal detectors and Garmin ETREX 32X navigation grade GPS equipment.

1.18 The survey targeted non-ferrous metals only, due to the potential for a large number of ferrous metal signals across most land, the recovery of which would have introduced a significant time delay. Lead shot represents the majority of finds that would be expected on a 17th century battlefield, the presence of which would confidently confirm if there was Civil War activity in the area. It was therefore deemed unnecessary to detect for ferrous artefacts given the limited time available for the survey.

1.19 Artefacts were removed from the ground using a small spade and trowel. Care was taken to fill in and level all holes after the removal of material. No artefacts were removed from a depth greater than the plough soil (c.300mm). All finds of possible archaeological significance were pin-flagged and subsequently plotted using navigation grade GPS.

1.20 Recovered artefacts were labelled with a unique ID number. They were stored in breathable plastic bags. Artefacts of undoubted modern date were collected and bagged together as 'junk' to gauge the 'background noise' within the field and determine if there were any factors which may be affecting artefact recovery rates. Only minimal 'background noise' was encountered.

1.21 The survey complied fully with the provisions of the Treasure Act 1996 and Treasure (Designation) Order 2002 and the Code of Practice referred to therein. There were no finds considered to be potential treasure cases.

2. Results

2.1 This section provides an overview of the notable metal detector survey results. A full list of all recorded finds is detailed within the Appendix.

Lead Bullet

2.2 A single lead bullet was discovered at the northern end of Field 1 (Figure 3). It weighed 12.7g and was 13.04mm in diameter and showed impact damage on one side. The impact damage was characterised by a flattening of the ball in a small area and it is likely that is as a result of hitting a solid object probably toward the end of its flight as the damage is limited.



Figure 3: Lead bullet recovered from Field 1 during the Middleton Cheney survey

Other Finds

2.3 The non-bullet finds from the survey are fully detailed in the Appendix.

2.4 The majority of finds were of relatively recent date, spanning the 19th and 20th centuries. Some finds, such as irregular scraps of lead were undatable.

3. Discussion

3.1 The metal detector survey recovered a total of 24 finds which included a single lead bullet. The size of the shot would imply use by a 35/36 bore weapon; within the range of the smallest pistols recorded as being in military use during the period leading up to the Civil War. Nevertheless, a single bullet in itself does not indicate battlefield use as it could have been deposited in the field as a result earlier or later hunting/sporting activity.

3.2 The remaining finds are somewhat typical of what might be expected across most agricultural land and in all likelihood made their way into the fields through manuring, waste disposal or accidental loss.



3.3 That no other bullets were found in Field 1, where detecting conditions should have allowed more bullets to have been found, if they were there, suggests that this was not part of the battlefield at Middleton Cheney and that fighting probably occurred nearer the village. The long term pasture land use in Field 2 raises the possibility that any seventeenth century deposited artefacts have passed beyond metal detecting range, particularly given that the earliest finds located dated from only the late 19th century. If this is correct, it is still possible that fighting occurred in Field 2, though it is equally the case that the traditional site of the battle in the Moor's Drive area may be correct.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Despite the recovery of a single bullet in Field 1, the metal detector survey produced no confirmed evidence of battle and the find is probably more indicative of hunting activity. Whilst no artefacts earlier than the late 19th century were found in Field 2 the permanent pasture there raises the possibility that any 17th century finds have sunk below the range of a metal detector. If this is the case, it remains possible that the battle extended into this area. The largely built-up nature of the traditional site of the battle prevents testing other possible areas for signs of fighting.

5. Project Team

4.5 The survey was led by Simon Marsh, Research and Threats Coordinator for the Battlefields Trust, supported by a team of detectorists that had worked on the Stow-on-the-Wold battlefield survey. The report was written by Simon Marsh.

4.6 Particular thanks go to the landowners for giving permission to undertake the survey, Gregg Archer for his assistance on the survey and the Middleton Cheney battlefield community project for its ongoing help and support. The costs of the survey were met by the Battlefields Trust.

6. Bibliography

Foard, G and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, (Oxford, Council for British Archaeology: 2012)



Appendix

Middleton Cheney Finds

Find No	Metal	Description
1	Copper plated	metal disk broken
2	Lead	piece of lead
3	Copper plated	clip part
4	Lead	bullet 12.7g 13.04mm diameter. Impact damage on one side
5	Copper plated	button
6	Pewter	metal disc
7	Tin?	half a button
8	Copper/Nickel	button
9	Copper	Victorian farthing 1875
10	Pewter	metal disc
11	Lead	scrap
12	Copper	George V penny 1921?
13	Copper`	George V half penny 1931
14		valve
15	Copper alloy	bent rounded metal bar
16		button/stud broken at one end
17	Copper?	button
18		circular weight
19		thimble
20		probable fragmented metal container with 5mm diameter raised circular marks and the letters ?&NS stamped inside
21	Steel?	Modern tear-drop shaped weight
22	Silver	Victorian shilling 1893
23	Copper	George VI Penny 1945
24		button

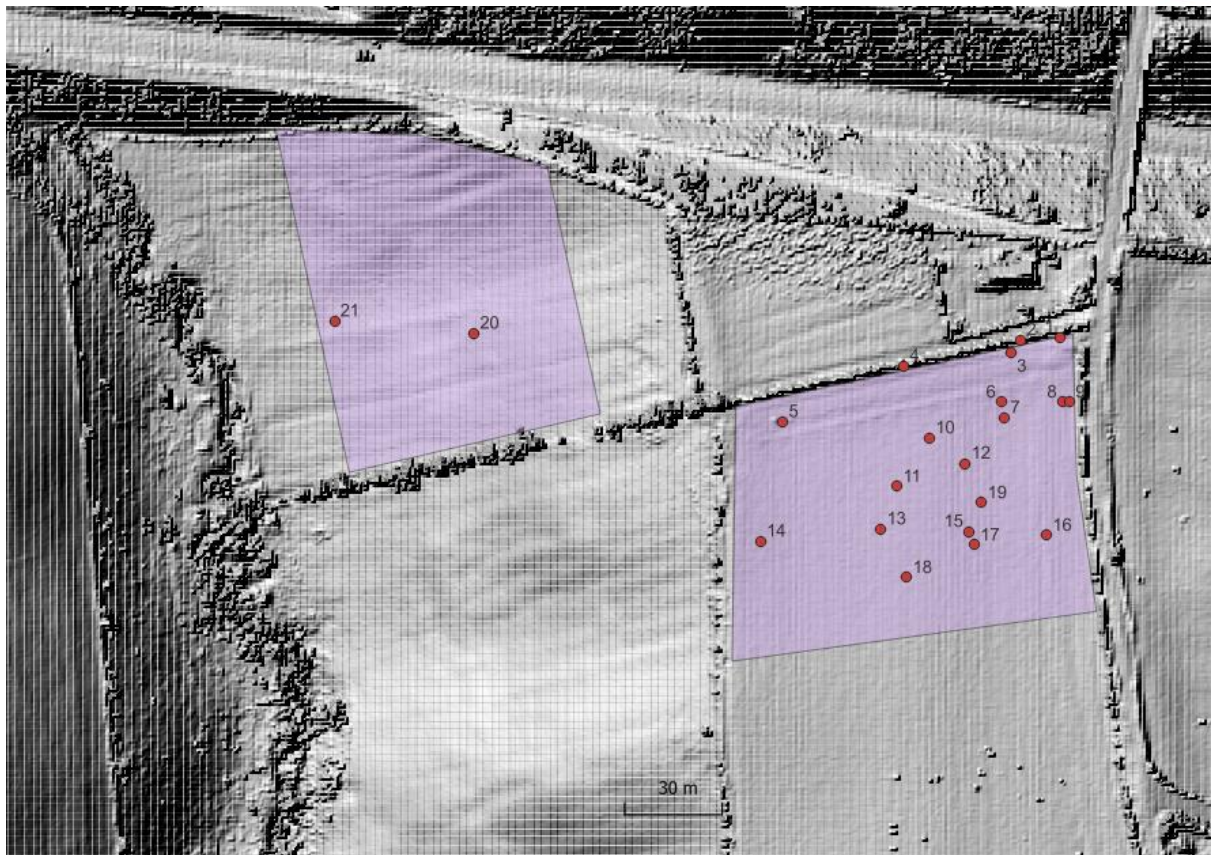


Figure 4: Location of finds (Lidar data basemap © Environment Agency 2022 OGL3.0)

NB. Navigation grade GPS may have located objects ~3-5m from their exact position. Finds 22-23 were recovered from Field 2 'junk bags'. Find 24 was recovered from the 'Field 1' junk bag and therefore are not located on the above map.