

Land at Hamdown Farm Langport Somerset

Archaeological Metal Detector Survey

Site Code: LANG20



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Land at Hamdown Farm
Langport
Somerset

Archaeological Metal Detector Survey

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	4
The Site (Figure 1)	4
Historical Background - The Battle of Langport (10th July 1645)	5
Archaeological objectives	5
Metal Detecting Methodology	6
2. Results.....	7
Lead Bullets (Appendix 1)	7
Other Finds (Appendix 2)	9
3. Discussion	9
4. Conclusion.....	10
5. Project Team.....	10
6. References	11
7. Appendix 1 - Bullets	12
8. Appendix 2 – All Finds	13

List of Figures

Figure 1. Site location plan.....	15
Figure 2. All finds	16
Figure 3. All bullets.....	17

List of Photographs

Photograph 1. Transect flags laid out within the site, facing north west.....	18
Photograph 2. General view of the site towards the B3153, facing north east.....	18

List of Charts

Chart 1. Bullet count by possible weapon type.....	8
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SUMMARY

Project Name: Land at Hamdown Farm

Location: Langport, Somerset

Site Code: LANG21

NGR: 343858, 127467

Type: Metal Detector Survey

Date: 4-5 December 2021

Location of Archive: To be returned to landowner

An archaeological metal detector survey was undertaken by a team of archaeologists from The Battlefields Trust, Archaeology Warwickshire and The University of Southampton.

The primary objective of the survey was to assess the presence/absence, nature, survival and distribution of any unstratified archaeological artefacts associated with the Battle of Langport (10th July 1645) which took place within the first English Civil War/War of the Three Kingdoms (1642-1646).

A single field within the western extent of the Registered Battlefield was subject to survey, the majority being detected with 2.5m spaced transects and the remainder being surveyed with 5m spaced transects due to time constraints.

A total of eight lead bullets were recovered, the majority of which are potentially associated with the Battle of Langport and likely indicate a low level of battle-related activity within the site.

The majority of finds overall were 18/19th century in date, the only other artefacts of note being a very worn C3/4th Roman coin and a medieval buckle dated 1350-1450.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2021 a team from The Battlefields Trust, Archaeology Warwickshire and The University of Southampton carried out an archaeological metal detector survey on Land at Hamdown Farm, Langport, Somerset (centred on NGR: 343858,127467).
- 1.2 The survey was carried out in accordance with standard archaeological methodology for the investigation of historic battlefields, as outlined by Foard (2012, 2013).

The Site (Figure 1)

- 1.3 The site was located within a single arable field which was fallow at the time of the survey, ground conditions consisted of crop stubble and short regrowth. The site is bordered to the immediate north by the B3153 and additional arable fields to the east, south and west. Farmhouses and agricultural buildings are present a short distance to both the east and west. The site is more generally located north east of Langport and east of the settlement at Picts Hill.
- 1.4 The surveyed field lies within the Historic England Registered Battlefield of Langport (List Entry 1000016), the western boundary of the site corresponding with part of the western boundary to the registered area.
- 1.5 The site is underlain by mudstone and limestone of the Westbury Formation and Cotham Member (undifferentiated), sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 201 to 210 million years ago in the Triassic period, in a local environment previously dominated by shallow seas. No superficial deposits are recorded (BGS Online viewer, 2022).
- 1.6 The topography of the site slopes downwards from west to east, from approximately 26m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) to 14m aOD.

Historical Background - The Battle of Langport (10th July 1645)

- 1.7 The New Model Army approached the small town of Langport from the east. It was a key bridging point where the major road from Somerton passed between two large areas of wet moorland. This was a logical place for the royalists to make a stand, or at least to try to hold up the parliamentarians in order to enable retreat, via Sedgemoor, to the port of Bridgewater. Goring sent his baggage and artillery ahead towards the port, keeping only two pieces of ordnance with the army. He then turned and marched out to the east of Langport, to face the parliamentarian army. Though he held a strong position, on high ground controlling the roads that approached the town from the east, his forces were still outnumbered and outgunned and were soon defeated.
- 1.8 Although the royalist army was not destroyed at Langport, the defeat was to have a significant effect upon troop morale. As Goring admitted: 'the consequences of this blow is very much for there is so great terror and dejection amongst our men that I am confident at this present they could not be brought to fight against half their number'. Bridgewater fell soon after, isolating the remaining royalist garrisons in the West Country.
- 1.9 Three alternative locations have been suggested for the battle along the Wagg Rhyne. Although the site registered by Historic England seems the most likely. Most of the landscape is still agricultural but there has been some development, especially on the southern site, while there is continuing small scale erosion of the battlefield by small scale development right across this landscape (Battlefields Trust Resource Centre, 2022).

Archaeological objectives

- 1.10 The principal objective of the metal detector survey was to provide information about the archaeological resource within the site, including its presence/absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality. It aimed to recover unstratified metallic artefacts from across the site, principally those associated with the events of the 1645 Battle of Langport, during the English 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.

Metal Detecting Methodology

- 1.12 The metal detector survey was undertaken across the entire field over two days.
- 1.13 The survey area was split into a series of parallel transects set out across the field. The majority of the field was covered using 2.5m spaced transects, but due to time constraints, the southern part of the field was covered using 5m spaced transects (Figure 2).
- 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 2.5m spaced transects offered a c. 80% coverage of an area, while 5m spaced transects resulted in a c.40% overall coverage.
- 1.15 The locations of all transects were recorded using GPS. Transects were marked on the ground using temporary markers in the form of colour-coded flags, in order to ensure the detectorist did not deviate from the determined transect. All such markers were removed from site at the completion of each survey day.
- 1.16 Ground conditions were consistently good, with short stubble meaning that the detector head could consistently be brought close to the ground surface to ensure maximum potential artefact recovery. The field had also been ploughed within the previous year.
- 1.17 The equipment used to carry out the survey consisted of three high grade metal detectors and Leica GPS survey 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. The majority of finds that would be expected on a 17th century battlefield are lead shot, 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 ploughsoil (c.300mm). All finds of possible archaeological

significance were plotted using a GPS.

- 1.20 Recovered artefacts were labelled with a unique ID number. They were stored in breathable plastic bags or wrapped in acid-free tissue, as appropriate. Artefacts of undoubted modern date were collected and bagged together in order 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 (Figures 2 and 3). A full list of all recorded finds is detailed within Appendix 2.

Lead Bullets (Appendix 1)

- 2.2 A total of eight lead bullets were recovered during the survey (Chart 1). It is not always possible to precisely identify the weapon of origin for bullets during this period as they do not conform to standardised sizes. This results in a degree of overlap between calibres with the size of some bullets meaning they are located on the uncertain interface between weapon types. The weapon types given within this report are therefore an approximate guide and based on the calibre identifications made by Foard (2012 pp. 41-93). Finds were examined in detail and individually assessed for firing evidence and any other features of interest. The assessment of the bullets was based on characteristics identified in previous work by Foard (2012, pp. 94-120), Harding (2012 pp.44-83) and Sivilich (2016).
- 2.3 It is likely that impacted bullets will have lost a small percentage of their original weight due to deformation/fragmentation upon impact.
- 2.4 Three bullets (**11**, **16**, **32**) were the smallest and although would conform to calibres associated with 17th century pistols were also considered likely to be the result of later sporting activity. One (**11**) still had a large sprue intact and it was unclear from the surface evidence whether it had been fired or not. Bullets with an attached sprue are sometimes

recovered from 17th century sites (Harding 2012 pp. 45-6, 171-73) so an association with the battle cannot be entirely ruled out, although it may simply be a bullet which was lost shortly after casting and before the sprue had been trimmed.

- 2.5 One bullet (**28**) fell within the weight range of what might be expected for a carbine projectile. It was heavily impacted, with the original spherical shape of the bullet only partially surviving, suggesting that it had hit something at close range.
- 2.6 The remaining four bullet weights (**2**, **12**, **13**, **27**) were all very similar and placed them in the broad series of calibres spanning the grey area between the largest carbine calibres and smallest musket calibres (25-27g). One bullet (**2**) was massively impacted and had clearly hit something solid at extremely close range. Very similar examples of this level of impact can be seen in Foard (2012 pp. 114-15) and Harding (2012 p.70). Along with bullet **28**, these are considered too large to be associated with any post-battle sporting/hunting activity.

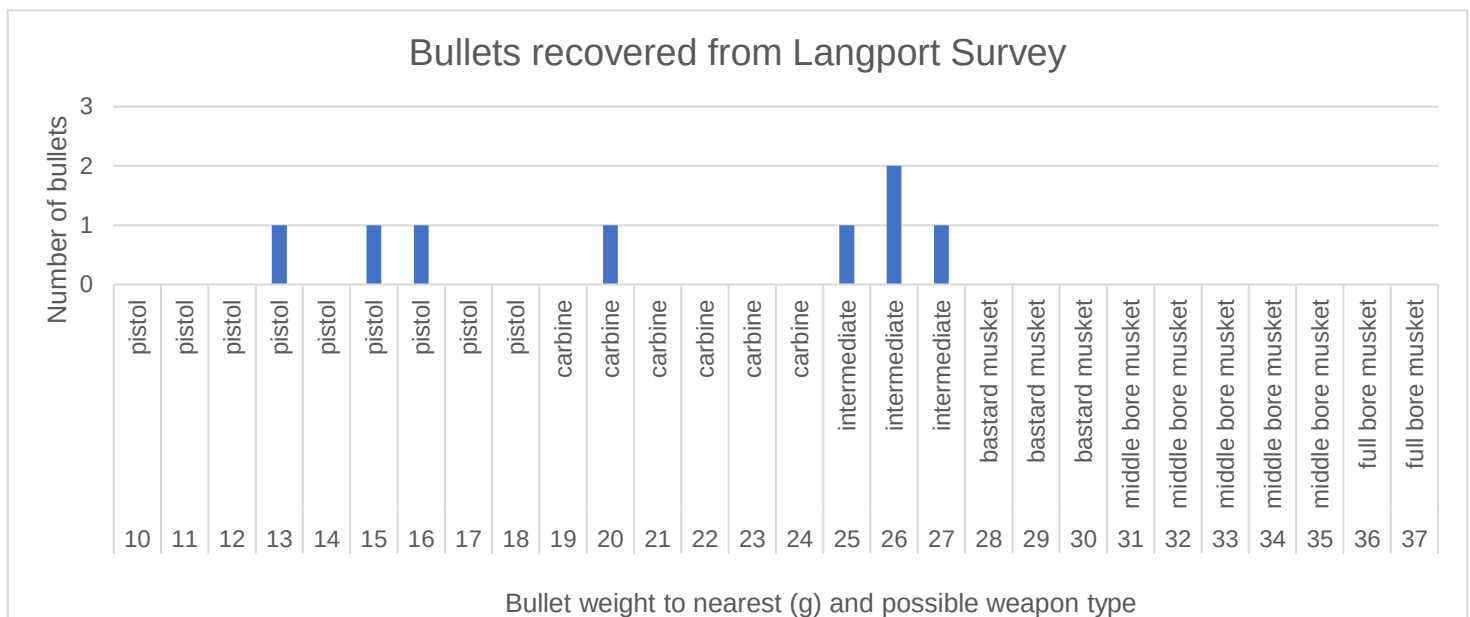


Chart 1. Bullet count by possible weapon type

Other Finds (Appendix 2)

- 2.7 The non-bullet finds from the survey are fully detailed in Appendix 2.
- 2.8 The majority of finds were of relatively recent date, spanning the 18th and 19th centuries. Some finds, such as irregular scraps of lead were undatable.
- 2.9 The only earlier finds of note were a very worn C3/4th century copper alloy Roman coin (**42**) and an asymmetrical medieval buckle (**36**) dated 1350-1450. A copper alloy vessel fragment (**29**) and possible lead net weight (**44**) of medieval or post-medieval date were also recovered.

3. Discussion

- 3.1 The metal detector survey recovered a total of 47 finds which included an assemblage of eight lead bullets, at least five of which appeared to be consistent with 17th century military activity.
- 3.2 Given the lack of any larger bullets within the assemblage which can be confidently ascribed to muskets, the calibres represented by this group of five bullets, visible as the upper peak within the calibre graph (Chart 1) are, in all likelihood, associated with larger calibre carbines. However, there is still some possibility that the smallest calibre bastard muskets may be represented instead but there is simply not enough evidence to firmly conclude if these represent very small musket bullets or very large carbine bullets.
- 3.3 Given the lack of obvious larger musket calibre bullets, it is suggested that the assemblage is more reflective of skirmishing, perhaps either preceding the main action or on a flank, rather than the main firefight between formed blocks of infantry.
- 3.4 The remaining finds are somewhat typical of what might be expected across most agricultural land and in all likelihood represent finds which have largely made their way into the fields through manuring and waste disposal.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The metal detector survey produced limited evidence which is considered, in all likelihood, to be associated with the 1645 Battle of Langport. The bullet scatter appears to be more consistent with skirmishing rather than the main engagement, which does perhaps throw some doubt on the interpretation presented by The Battlefields Trust which has the Royalist army deployed within the site, and supported by the Historic England Registered Battlefield. It is note worthy that the bullets appear to be generally within the northern part of the site, closest to the road.
- 4.2 As noted in 1.9 above, there are two alternative sites which are also considered to potentially be the true site of the battle and the activity within the site, particularly if associated with a flank action or similar, may in fact be related to an engagement in an alternate location further south from the registered area.
- 4.3 However, any conclusions drawn at this stage should be somewhat tentative, as only a single field has been subject to systematic survey and much more work must be done within adjacent areas to stand any chance of interpreting the evidence accurately.
- 4.4 Reports by a local metal detectorist during the survey that the owner of an adjacent farm had a cannon ball recovered from the battlefield, should be followed up and the object assessed if possible.

5. Project Team

- 4.5 Metal detecting was led by Sam Wilson, assisted by Bryn Gethin and Dom Barker. The report was written by Sam Wilson and illustrations produced by Dom Barker.
- 4.6 Particular thanks go to the landowner for giving permission to undertake the survey, which was funded by the Battlefields Trust.

6. References

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7. Appendix 1 - Bullets

Obj. ID	Date	Description	Bullet Weight (g)	Diam (mm) (max)	Diam (mm) (min)	Fired/unfired	Poss. Weapon type?	Firing evidence	Patination	Max band width (mm)	Battle related?	Notes
2	04/02/21	Bullet	25.7	-	-	Fired	Intermediate	V. heavy impact, v flat and distorted. Probable near perpendicular impact against hard object at v. close range	White	none visible	Y	See Foard pg.114-5, Harding pg. 70
11	04/12/21	Bullet	14.7	13.07	12.82	Uncertain	pistol/sporting	Slightly mis-shapen. Small, flat impact (post depositional?), small linear striation, surface generally slightly pitted	White	none visible	poss.	Large sprue intact. There are known examples of this from C17th sites – see Harding and Sivilich
12	04/12/21	Bullet	26.3	16.52	16.44	Fired	Intermediate	Slightly mis-shapen, numerous minor impressions, several barely perceptible poss. circular impressions (buck and ball?), several v. minor indentations	White	none visible	Y	
13	04/12/21	Bullet	26.6	16.9	16.73	Fired	Intermediate	Minor banding, several linear striations	White	5.69	Y	
16	04/12/21	Bullet	13	13.19	12.89	Unfired	pistol/sporting	None visible	White, some surface concretion	none visible	poss.	
27	04/12/21	Bullet	25.4	16.7	16.32	Fired	Intermediate	Several linear striations	White	none visible	Y	
28	04/12/21	Bullet	19.8	-	-	Fired	carbine	Heavy impact, partially surviving hemisphere	Greyish white	none visible	Y	
32	04/12/21	Bullet	15.8	-	-	Fired	pistol/sporting	Moderate impact, partially flattened face, several minor linear striations	White	none visible	poss.	

8. Appendix 2 – All Finds

Find no.	Date	Material	Description	Provisional date	Comments
1	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Coin weight	Late C17th?	Stamped on upper surface – further work needed to ID
2	04/02/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	V. heavy impact
3	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Horse harness mount	C18th+	Oval
4	04/12/21	Lead?	Printing plate fragment	C19th+	
5	04/12/21	Lead	Irregular scrap	Undateable	
6	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Edging strip w/ poss. handle attachment – furniture related?	C19th+	Pressed construction. Decorated with pattern on one side
7	04/12/21	Aluminium	Cap	Modern	
8	04/12/21	Iron	Buckle	C19th+	Rectangular.
9	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Buckle	C19th+	Square. Prong present.
10	04/12/21	Iron	Buckle	C19th+	Square. Prong present.
11	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	Sprue still intact
12	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	
13	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	
14	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Horse harness mount	C18th+	Oval
15	04/12/21	Iron	Buckle	C19th+	D-shaped, prong present
16	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	
17	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Horse harness mount	C18th+	Rectangular, folded corners. Pressed construction
18	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Silver?	Spiral mount/badge?	C19th+	Pressed construction
19	04/12/21	Pewter	Probable handle fragment – tankard?	C18th+	
20	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Hinged cap – machinery related?	C19th+	
21	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Poss. mount or similar, one edge curved in w/2 poss. rivet holes, 2 edges broken	Uncertain	Additional analysis required for firm ID

22	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Poss. mount or similar. Elongated shape with scalloped edges and small hook/point (?) attached one end	Prob C19th+	Thin, folded
23	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Mount/badge	C19th+	Star shaped, pressed construction
24	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Poss. Handle or similar?	Post-medieval	Decorative shape, large rivet at one end, other end broken
25	04/12/21	Iron	Buckle	C19th+	Rectangular
26	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Button	C18th+	Tiny remnant of gold plating on reverse
27	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	
28	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	Moderate impact
29	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Vessel fragment	Medieval/post-medieval	Rim present, poss. rivet hole
30	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Padlock part	C19th+	
31	04/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Buckle	C19th+	D-shaped.
32	04/12/21	Lead	Bullet	Post-medieval	
33	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Button	C19th+	Two part construction
34	05/12/21	Lead/Iron	Uncertain cog-like obj. Poss agricultural related	Modern	
35	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Horse harness mount	C18th+	Oval. Gothic letter 'D'
36	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Buckle	1350-1450	Whitehead No. 540
37	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Coin	C20th	Half farthing
38	05/12/21	Lead	Irregular scrap	Undateable	
39	05/12/21	Lead	Irregular scrap	Undateable	
40	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Poss. Strap end or similar	Post-medieval	V. thin, holes crudely punched from both sides
41	05/12/21	Silver (?)	Thimble	C19th+	Forget me not' inscription
42	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Coin	Roman, C3/4 th	Very worn, poss. nummus?
43	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Poss. Cap/mount	C19th+	
44	05/12/21	Lead	Weight (net?)	Medieval/post-medieval	
45	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy/Iron	Horse harness mount	C18th+	Oval
46	05/12/21	Lead	Model deer	C19th+	
47	05/12/21	Cu. Alloy	Perforated disk	Modern	Folded

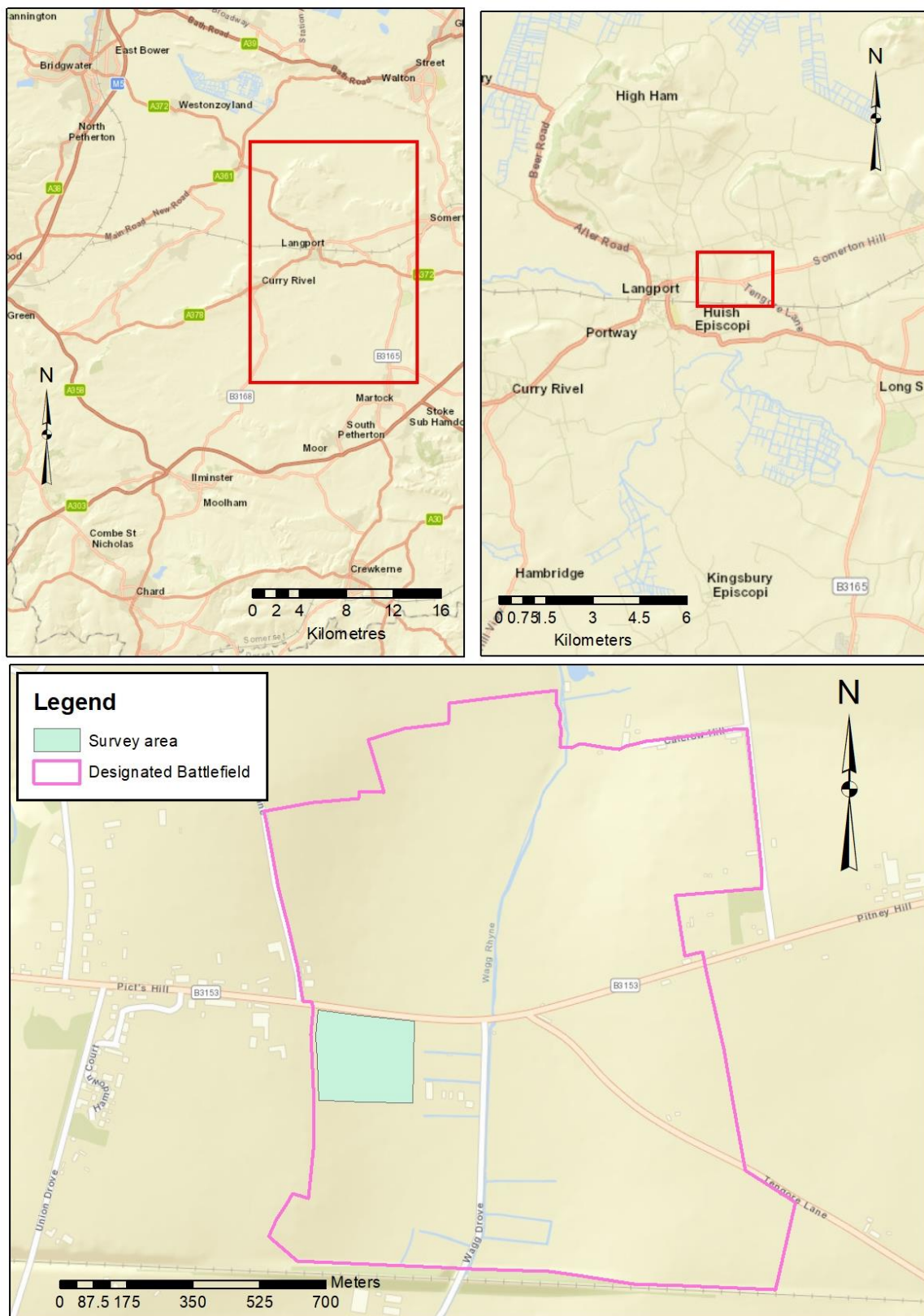


Figure 1. Site location plan

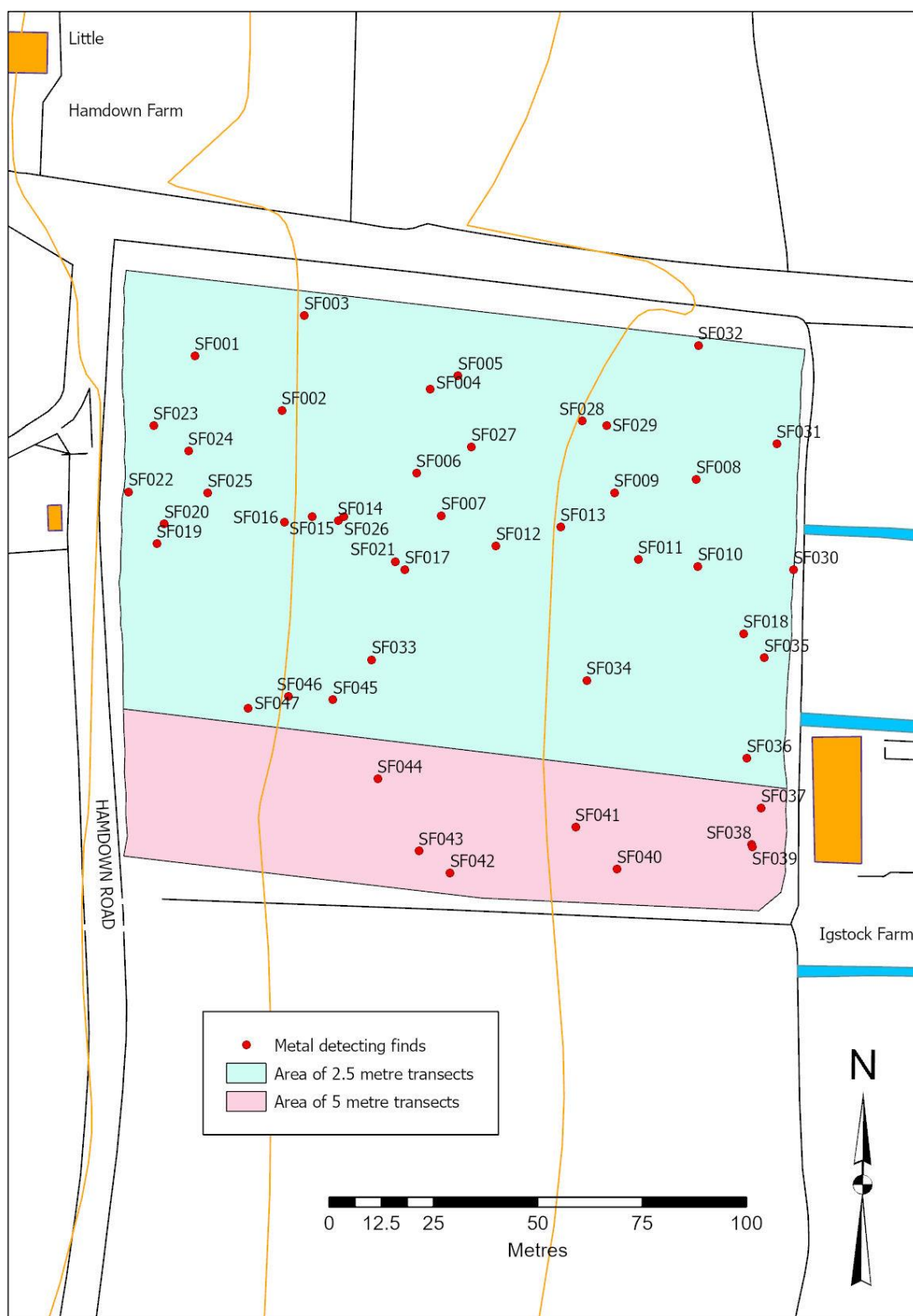


Figure 2. All finds

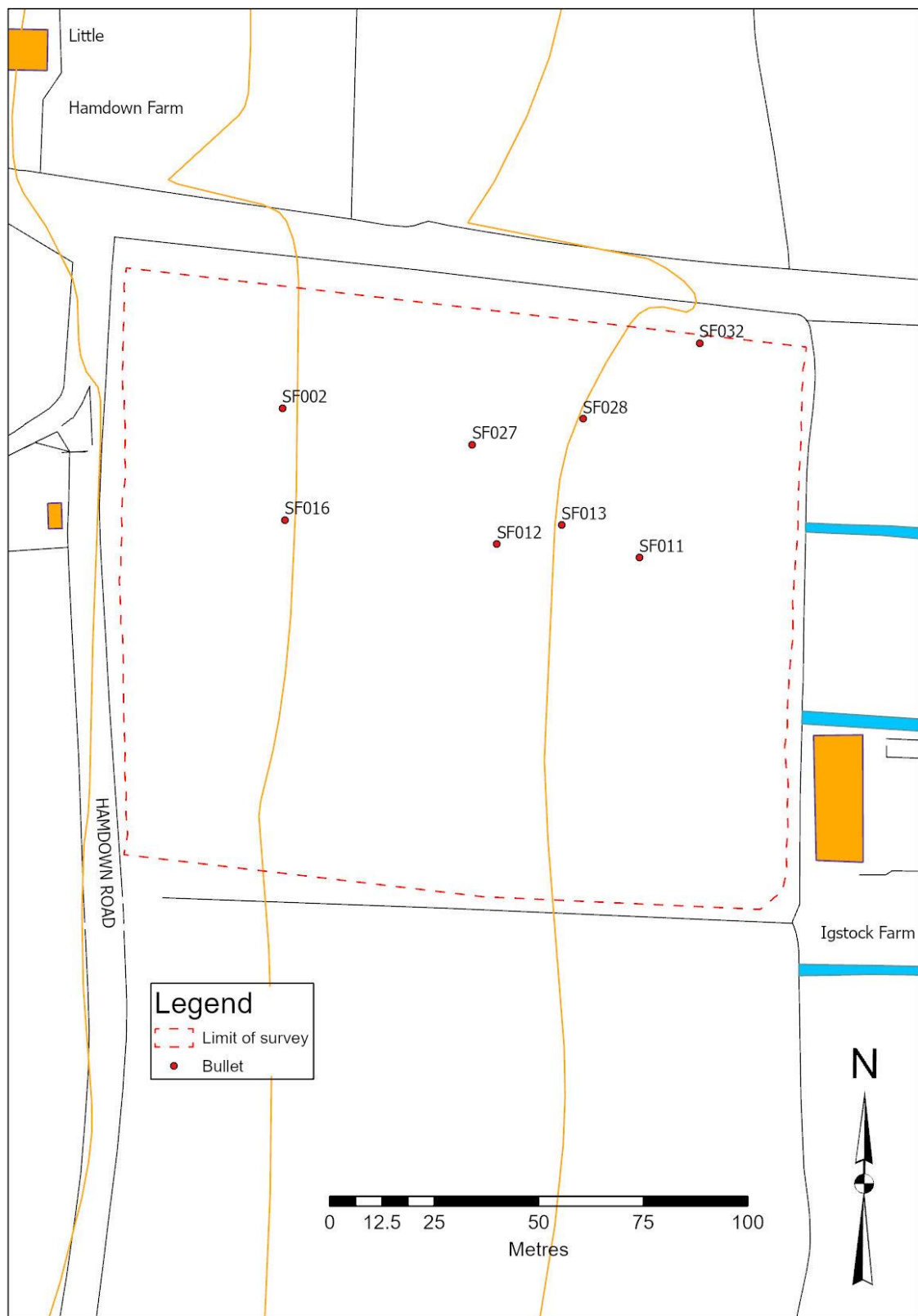


Figure 3. All bullets



Photograph 1. Transect flags laid out within the site, facing north west.



Photograph 2. General view of the site towards the B3153, facing north east.