

THE BITTERLEY HOARD – PART FOUR – WHAT’S IT WORTH

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Contemporary Value of the Hoard

Jonathon Worton, a research student at the University of Chester has suggested what the hoard could have been worth in the 17th Century. This is really interesting as it puts some perspective into how far money went in the period. From my point of view as an archaeologist it just proves the old adage “The only things certain in life are *death and taxes*“.

Jonathon writes:

“with reference to monetary values, I always think it is more informative to consider the contemporary purchasing power, rather than attempting modern equivalence.



Some interesting examples:

1. In 1640/41 the day rate paid by the Corporation of Shrewsbury for 'public works' for an artificer – a wheelwright, carpenter, joiner – was 14d (less if 'diet' – food – included), 8d for a day labourer. These were probably good average rates for a days' toil. (Ref. Reed, *Shropshire Transactions*, Vol LV).

2. In 1636/7, at Tong, a local carpenter was paid over £8 for his work in refurbishing the church (Ref. Tong Churchwardens' Accounts); at the above rates, this may have represented some 140 days' wages (fewer if he were master craftsman, or if his mates were paid out of this).

3. In the 1630s the fee to become a burgess in Shrewsbury was £5.

So by these values, the hoard does not represent unexceptional wealth – perhaps the ready monies/savings of a reasonably competent tradesman, or a yeoman farmer.

Other comparables are suggested by the annual Ship Money levies of the latter 1630s – perhaps the first attempt at a near universal national tax.

From Ludlow the gent. William Bowdler assessed, as one of the town's highest payers, for £2 in 1635, and 36s – £1 16s – in 1640; also from 1640 we have 'Mr' William Colbatch, assessed for 10s, and the gent. Adam Acton at 12s.

These sums were assessed to pay the total annual shire levy of £4,500. To put this in wartime context, in 1643 the Royalists were attempting to raise £4,500 per month from the county by the 'Contribution tax'; Although they doubtless never accomplished this, regular monthly or bi-monthly payments of individuals of £1 16s, or 12s would have been a cumulative burden. This would have been in addition to other regular and irregular impositions – payments for the militia, fortifications etc.

The Contribution tax certainly depended on the assessment of the cumulative wealth of a local community, but individuals were assessed according to land holding – the obvious measure – but also in goods and monies. So, it may have been wise to conceal one's petty cash, as the military were perennially short of it! Although of course it deposited by a civilian, why the family did not collect it in happier times is a mystery (unless he/she wanted to keep the family silver in absolute secrecy).

If the hoard was deposited by soldier – an officer – even with the vagaries of civil war military salaries, it would not have been difficult to accumulate such a fund



A good comparable to the hoard's relative value might be that of horses – a valued possession at all levels of early Stuart society. Rates for good cavalry mounts, purchased in London and the southeast in 1644 for the Parliamentary army of Sir Thomas Myddleton, which served in and around Shropshire, varied between £5 and £7 per animal. For a couple of geldings for his own use (although these must have been real thoroughbreds) Sir Thomas paid £35 5s. (source: The National Archives, Commonwealth Exchequer papers, SP28).

Peter Reavill

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