

Discovery of the site, 1944-5

Email from Diana Briscoe 03/05/2020 about the history of discovery LKD 001.

As far as I know, the heath was first ploughed in 1944. That is what I recall my mother telling me and it seems more likely because her mother, Violet Home, was dying of (I think) cancer, and so it would have been more likely that she would have been in Suffolk in that year than in 1945 when she was working for the Red Cross in London. Violet died on 29 June 1944.

According to my mother's version, the ploughman started ploughing the heath and almost immediately started taking the tops off urns. They were intending to plant carrots, to make ersatz raspberry jam. I believe it's very sandy and so not much else would have grown successfully. He went home for lunch in Cavenham, went to the pub (which was the only place that had a phone) and rang Cavenham Hall as he knew my mother was interested in "old things". She came up on her bicycle, looked at what had been exposed, identified it as potentially Anglo-Saxon and reported it to the curator of Moyses Hall in Bury St Edmunds. He came out, probably a few days later, and confirmed this. I know that several people visited the site, including Katherine Kenyon (I think she came for a weekend), and did a bit of digging, but precisely who and when I know no more.

I believe that the reason for the rescue dig in 1947 was that the farmer was planning to plough it again. I am afraid I don't know a great deal about who was involved, except that there was a clergyman who was quite heavily involved (I think my mother did name him, but that is lost in time). She had a lovely story of him carrying one of the urns to a waiting car, tripping over something, and exclaiming "Oh, whoops, must not drop the dear departed!".

Grace Briscoe volunteered a team of diggers from Lakenheath and they came over and excavated part of the site in 1947. According to my mother, they fought "like cat and dog" with the local diggers and had to be segregated at opposite ends of the site. Grace came over to inspect proceedings, and was driven by my father, John, who had (I think) just been demobbed from the RAF. That was how Teresa & John met – they would probably never have come across each other otherwise.

I am not at all surprised to hear that Sam Marston had been nosing around the site. My mother considered him to be a "wicked old man" and with his fingers in many dubious pies. I don't know anything about Owen Williamson, unless he was the parson above. Cavenham Hall had been sold in June 1946, and my mother stayed at The Bull at Barton Mills, when she came to Suffolk.

Teresa deposited all of her archaeological papers to do with excavations in Suffolk with the Unit before she died, and I certainly saw them in a box there when I visited you probably in the late 1990s or early 2000s. I didn't know she had done that until somebody in the Unit produced them for me to check something. I don't recall much about Lackford, but I think I was looking for something different, or maybe just having a quick nose.

Transcription of notes by Teresa Briscoe (found by Diana Briscoe 2020 in papers related to the Archive of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps). Handwritten on an A5 sheet.

1945 Discovery of Lackford after first plough (10") for 200 years

-50 Difficulty of excavation. No labour, money, petrol, new maps, - paper – etc

Referred to local museum An old curator could not help.

Then to Rev. Tyrell Green, Kay Kenyon on their advise (sic) Tom Lethbridge.

Re-ploughed 1946 (autumn) Over 2-300 urns lost

1947-51 excavations at weekend – Jan started big freeze Jan – March.

Site included ?Roman tomb (2) probable site of finding of The "Cavenham Crowns" cf ? Fen, Nfk.

Original excavators = Cambridge University – Tom –

Mildenhall Museum – Icklingham men with Sam Marston.

Briscoes 3 + T.B.

All pots had to be taken back to Cambridge for consolidation No hut – and a mile walk to site carry equipment/pots.

[T.B. enquired whether there was any meaning in stamps, decoration. Tom said "probably why don't you investigate? it's the job of an amateur to do – only an amateur would have the time! So did]

195? Publication of Report.

Tom maintained his stamps were 1:1 and accurate.

T.B copied into a) a book

b) on card for card index

Additional comments (JP):

This document gives a concise account of the genesis of the Archive!

It is also worth noting that Teresa (née Home) met her husband to be on the Lackford excavation (one of the 'Briscoes 3')

Lethbridge 1951 also mentions the post-war petrol shortages 'amongst other difficulties' as a reason for the two year delay in starting. He only mentions 'at least thirty urns ploughed out and very many others undoubtedly destroyed by former ploughing' in contrast to TB's observation of several hundred.