

Fieldwalking at Longropes Field, Wimpole – thimble find

During October 2003, while walking this field with kind permission of the National Trust, a relatively small thimble was found. Shown in the photograph, it is 1.9cm tall and 1.04cm wide at the top. The crushed bottom makes it difficult to determine the base diameter but it appears to be ~1.4cm. The main body is made of thin brass sheet but there are no soldered joints used to form it. In 1769 Richard Ford of Birmingham patented the “deep drawing” process that formed the thimble shape from sheet-metal. A metal disc is forced between progressively developed sets of dies and annealed by heating until the desired shape is achieved. Thimbles of brass produced in this way are thinner than their cast counterparts, and early ones often have steel tops added to prevent needle penetration. The presence of some rust marks on the top of our thimble suggests it may have had a steel cap but the top is not magnetic (however see the comments below).



The top 0.78cm band of the thimble body consists of machined dimples in horizontal bands. The top has concentric rings of dimples. There are four bands of short vertical lines, at 0.25cm, 0.38cm, 0.78cm and 0.86cm from the base of the thimble. There are no signs of decoration between the bands (although significant corrosion here makes this difficult to be certain).

The photograph here (taken from the UK Detectorists website) shows a thimble produced by this method. The steel top has been destroyed by corrosion, which it states is usual with excavated examples. It dates to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Children’s thimbles were also produced by this method, and are exact replicas of the adult type.



The similarity between this example and the Wimpole one above is quite marked, suggesting that they are contemporary with each other. The small size of our thimble suggests it could be either a child’s one or one more suited to a small adult finger.