

# Who Are the Moravians?

## Richie Bennett

Who are the Moravians? I asked myself this very same question back in February, when Nigel, the Project Leader of the East Tytherton Heritage Project approached me for some assistance. Nigel had sought me out through the Chippenham & District Metal Detecting Club (CDMDC) website to ask whether the club would support an ongoing initiative to add some historic context to an already established local research project. Eager to learn more, I gleaned as much background information as possible to understand the scope of what he was asking and concluded that the club would most likely approach this request with much enthusiasm. Nigel had already committed vast amounts of time to the project and, consequently, a wealth of background information was available through his study.

In summary, our task was to detect around the Moravian Church in the village of East Tytherton, including the burial ground, school and adjacent playing fields, to see if we could recover any artefacts that would lend support to his already extensive research. So, where on earth is Moravia and why did the Moravian Church teachings take hold in a tiny Wiltshire village? Well Moravia, named after the River Morava, is a historical region within what is now the eastern part of the Czech Republic and was one of the historical Czech lands, together with Bohemia and Czech Silesia. It has had a very turbulent history under various empires and was eventually dissolved in 1949. The Moravian Church considers itself to be the oldest Protestant denomination, having been founded way back in 1457. For reference, compare this date with the mid-16th century English reformation under Henry VIII which occurred some 100 years later!

### Missionary Activity

The Moravian Church has long been associated with cross-cultural missionary activity and came to Britain during the height of the colonial period. Other missionary efforts expanded into Greenland, Labrador (to the Inuit people), Surinam, Guyana, South Africa, the native tribes of North America and the

Caribbean (largely to the African slave population there). John Wesley (Fig.1), commonly accepted as the founder of Methodism, was greatly influenced by the Moravian church. It has been established that The Moravian Church in East Tytherton owes its existence to a man named John Cennick (Fig.2), an eighteenth century evangelical preacher. Cennick worked for a while alongside Wesley in Bristol and was probably the first local preacher. Afterwards he concentrated on the Wiltshire area, preaching and forming societies in several local towns and villages. So, history lesson aside (noting that we have barely scratched the surface), I made the proposal to the CDMDC at the next meeting and was greeted with unanimous support. It was agreed that any finds made would be researched and returned to the project so that Nigel could investigate and introduce them into the historical record. The 30 March 2019 was the date set, with preparations made, permissions acquired, and the club detectorists fully briefed.

### The Search Begins

The day arrived and the weather could not have been better – bright, sunny and certainly warm enough for t-shirts. Nigel greeted us on arrival and, as only three of us had participated in an earlier reconnaissance of the area, he went on to provide a thorough tour of the detecting grounds (Fig.3). This included the Moravian cemetery, the church grounds, the old school gardens

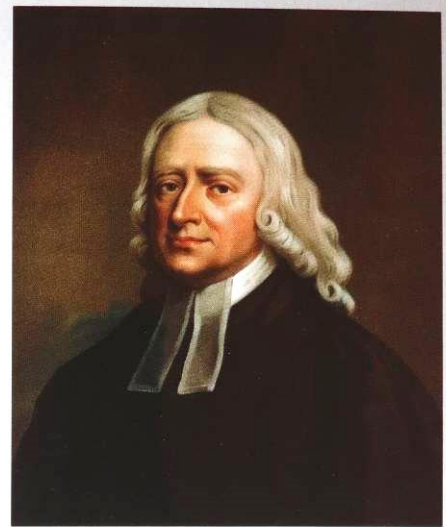


Fig.1. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

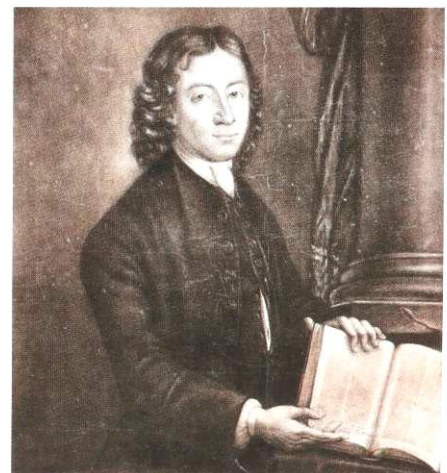


Fig.2. John Cennick, who worked alongside Wesley and founded the Moravian church in East Tytherton.

Fig.3. Nigel briefing the detectorists.



# Who Are the Moravians?



Fig.4. Obverse of a George I 'dump issue' halfpenny.



Fig.5. Obverse and reverse of a superb George V halfcrown.



Fig.6. Late Saxon stirrup-mount.



Fig.7. Obverse and reverse of a George IV and Caroline, Prince and Princess of Wales, marriage token.



Fig.8. Obverse and reverse of a William III sixpence love token.



Fig.9. Sestertius possibly of Marcus Aurelius or Antoninus Pius.

(now a residential property) and a neighbouring Girl Guides' playing field that was used in Georgian times for outside preaching. The group, numbering eleven in total would be divided across these various areas when detecting commenced. The cemetery area proved relatively difficult to detect on given the number of ancient trees and associated root systems. Furthermore, the 'laid flat' style gravestones largely restricted the detecting areas, so little was recovered from here. For a different reason, the Girl Guides' playing field yielded little of value in terms of adding context to the religious activities of the Georgian period. However, what it did yield was plenty of post-decimal coinage that was testament to its use over the past 50 years or so. There were a few exceptions: Terry, the Club Chairman, recovered some Victoria pennies and I was lucky enough to unearth a George I 'dump issue' halfpenny (Fig.4) and a lovely condition halfcrown of George V (Fig.5). Could the halfpenny

have been dropped by a member of Cennick's congregation? Well perhaps, we will never know, but the possibility is an amazing consideration. Just prior to abandoning the field and straying over a thousand years from what we were expecting, out popped a Saxon stirrup-mount (Fig.6), which will definitely be off to the FLO for confirmation and recording.

## More Fruitful Ground

By far the most fruitful ground turned out to be the lawns in front of the church. Finds there confirmed the Georgian context and the activities that took place there. Thimbles, lots of them, were repeatedly unearthed, suggesting the womenfolk would have been working outside, mending, darning and perhaps making clothes. My favourite find of the day came early: a King George IV and Caroline, Prince and Princess of Wales marriage token (Fig.7). This was issued to commemorate the king marrying his first cousin, Caroline of Brunswick, in the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, on 8th April 1795.

Shortly after bringing that to the surface, another very welcome surprise popped up in the form of a William III love token (Fig.8). Most established detectorists will know these well – often a worn sixpence bent into an S-shape. This particular example however, has been bent on four sides which is a first for me. Back in olden times, it was common practice to give your sweetheart a worn and bent coin, sometimes engraved with initials or symbols of love. If she kept it, the feelings were reciprocated but if she threw it away it was time to move on. Going by the number of love tokens found by detectorists I guess there were a lot of disappointed young men back in those times!

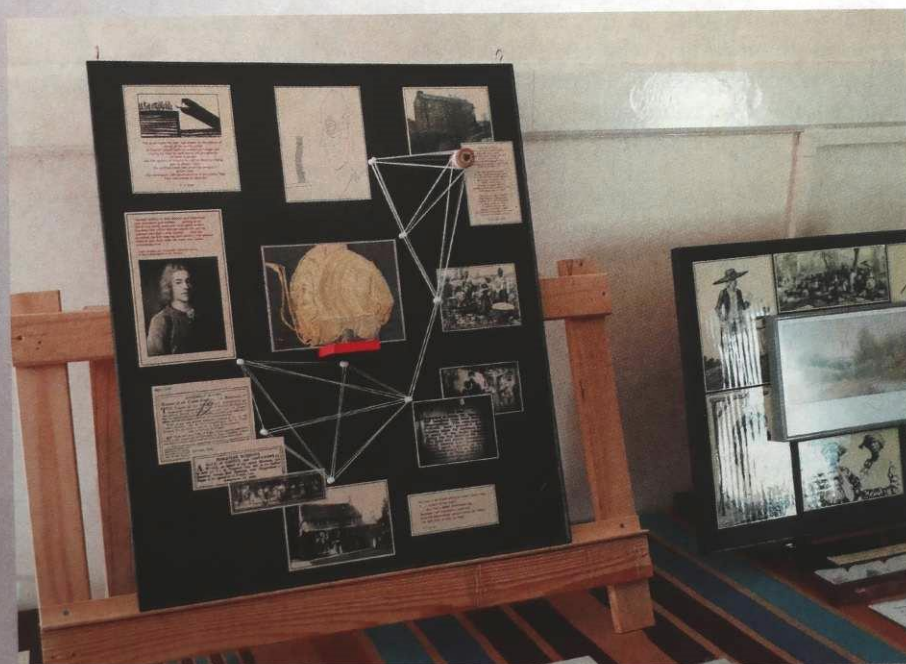


Fig.10. Nigel's presentation display.



Fig.11. Death of George III commemoration medal.



Fig.12. Dog or hawking whistle.



Fig.13. Obverse and reverse of a 1919 dated George V threepence.

### The Odd Surprise

By now word had spread across the various grounds that the land in front of the church was producing more relevant finds and before long the majority of us had congregated in this area. An abundance of 18th and 19th century coins were recovered, along with the odd surprise. It was not at all expected that we'd find, some eight inches under the lawn, a second century Roman *sestertius* (Fig.9) of perhaps Antonius Pius or Marcus Aurelius. Unsurprisingly, it was our club's 'Roman Magnet', also known as Mark, who found it. No-one can match him in finding artefacts from this period when he switches on his trusty old Teknetics T2 complemented by his 'dustbin-lid' coil. Whether this coin was genuinely lost in-situ some 1800 years ago, or brought here in some top-soil during post-medieval landscaping, we'll never know. During 'time out', Nigel and others involved in the project kindly laid on tea and biscuits in the church rooms together with a presentation explaining everything the project had learned over the years (Fig.10). Nigel and his colleagues had clearly invested significant time and effort in painstakingly researching the village's history in articulate detail with numerous charts, booklets and pamphlets. Part of the church's story is that it's the resting place of an Antiguan ex-slave girl named Leonora Casey Carr, this being the only known grave of an ex-slave in Wiltshire.

### More Finds

Back to the grindstone and finds continued to surface, including a George III death commemoration medallion (Fig.11) and what appears to be either a dog or hawking whistle (Fig.12). My silver trophies came along in the form of a couple of George V coins – one

mentioned earlier along with a lovely threepence of George V (Fig.13). Not all that old but nice all the same and more confirmation of the church's post-Georgian and Victorian use. I also had a quick search in one of the villager's gardens nearby and dug up a 16th century Nuremberg jetton and (probable) Edwardian religious pendant (Fig.14).

As the day drew to a close, digging tools were holstered and detectors packed away. The NCMD Western

Region representative and close friend of the club, Andy, then presented Nigel with a keepsake to remind him of the day (Fig.15) which had proved to be very successful in helping develop further the hard work that he and his team had already completed. All the finds made (Fig.16) will be cleaned, identified, recorded and prepared for display. We are all very much looking forward to working with the project again this coming September.



Fig.14. Edwardian religious pendant.



Fig.15. Nigel receives a keepsake from Andy (left to right).



Fig.16. Sorting all the finds.