

The 1911 census makes no better reading as far as overcrowding is concerned. Additionally there was still no electricity or piped water and none of the roads was metalled. The hardship was severe, but however poor a family might be, no Capel Green wife went out to work, as all the returns make clear. Her time was consumed in the cottage and vegetable plot, although she often aided her husband in the field along with their children and, if desperate, could earn ½d per pail picking stones from the fields for parish road maintenance.

Evidence from the ground

Of these people and all this labour-intensive activity does anything survive? Firstly, the largest retting pit can be identified at the north end of the Green (Illustration 2). Other clues have come from the soil. As a gamekeeper David Boast has had access to the land and used his metal-detector. When the Green was ploughed up - as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy - he was on hand to rescue numerous surface finds. Artefacts included fragments of prick spurs, a belt-attachment for a sword, numerous buckles and buttons, crotal (animal) bells and lead shot. Thimbles outnumber any other kind of object found. David loaned me his collection of more than eighty specimens (Illustration 4). Firstly, I arranged them in a rough order of size from which it is clear that about a quarter of them are too small to fit an adult finger. Could they say something about the lives of the people living round the Green?



4. Some of David Boast's collection of thimbles.
(Photo: author)

Needlework

Better-off girls learned to sew from a very early age as finely worked surviving samplers make clear, and a silver thimble was a popular christening gift until well into the 20th century. Poor children like their parents used thimbles of brass to stitch the garments they wore. When their mothers could afford it, unbleached calico and red flannel could be bought by the yard from a carrier or the