

# Introduction

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This book explores the frequently contentious relationship between two very different groups of people: archaeologists and metal detector users. Both groups share a deep and sincere interest in the past but both go about their work with, traditionally, very different methodologies and, some argue, very different aims and objectives. Part of the contentious nature of the relationship can be put down to the unequal academic and social positions of 'professional' archaeologists and those who metal detect as a hobby. The latter are vilified by many professional archaeologists as being a terrible threat to the scientific exploration of the past, whose antics destroy the primary context of artefacts and thus dramatically reduce the value of artefacts recovered in this way to the proper study of the archaeological past. Metal detector users are at best a major nuisance, at worst a group that fosters and propagates the illicit trade in antiquities for its own financial gain to the significant detriment of the archaeological record. On the other side, many metal detector users find the position taken by archaeologists elitist and exclusive, denying those without higher academic qualifications the opportunity to engage in a practical way with their hobby and frequently their life-long burning interest: the discovery of objects from the past.

There is ample historical and contemporary evidence of tensions between the two groups. Some of this stems from earlier campaigns, such as the 1980s STOP campaign ('Stop Taking Our Past'), launched by archaeological organisations against treasure hunting (see Addyman, Chapter 5, and Thomas, Chapter 14); equally vitriolic accusations have been made against archaeologists by metal detector users at different times (eg Fletcher 1996, 35). No doubt, STOP's 'initial knee-jerk reaction' to metal detecting (Addyman and Brodie 2002, 179) did have an ultimately deleterious effect on the burgeoning relationships between archaeologists and metal detector users. Trevor Austin (Chapter 10) echoes the point that in the early years of the metal detecting hobby, attempts by many metal detector users to share information about their finds with local museums and archaeologists were often met with hostility. There is also the very real issue of 'nighthawks' – those metal detector users who operate illegally, displaying the same commercially driven lack of concern for the integrity of the archaeology that they are

inadvertently destroying as do *tombaroli*, the tomb-robbers of Italy, or *huaqeros*, the South American 'archaeological bandits' (Brodie 2002, 1).

Given such entrenched and contradictory standpoints it is not surprising that those who have tried to work across the groups have often been castigated for letting one or both of the sides down. However, there have been examples of successful cooperation between metal detector users and archaeologists, such as the work in East Anglia in the 1970s under the guidance of Tony Gregory and Barbara Green (Green and Gregory 1978), a local initiative which has been credited with inspiring the later model used by the extremely successful Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) (Bland 2005, 442; and see Chapter 6). A code of practice for responsible metal detecting in England and Wales was produced in 2006, with the support of both archaeological and metal detecting organisations (CBA *et al* 2006).

This book concentrates on the positive. Aside from inevitable mentions of problems associated with unscrupulous metal detecting in the following chapters as appropriate, it does not focus on nighthawks, illicit trade in antiquities or looting. Instead it follows in the footsteps of these early pioneers of collaboration and sets out to demonstrate the efforts made in the past and being made today to try to encourage cooperation between archaeologists and metal detector users: to show efforts to build bridges between the two warring parties. To this end contributors include not only archaeologists who have directly or indirectly worked with metal detector users, but also representatives from a non-archaeological background: Trevor Austin (Chapter 10) is himself a metal detector user; while Peter Spencer (Chapter 11) is a numismatist who works regularly with metal detector users and writes for metal detecting magazines. This is done in the understanding that archaeological attempts to discredit, and on occasion illegalise, metal detecting have failed and that there is little likelihood of the hobby disappearing in the future. At the same time there is increasing evidence (see for example Spencer, Chapter 11; Simpson, Chapter 12; Richards and Naylor, Chapter 15) that metal detecting can *and does* contribute to our understanding of the past in a way that traditional archaeology cannot. It seems logical, therefore, to move away from confrontation and towards conciliation in a way acceptable to all involved.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY AND METAL DETECTING – PRESENT AND PAST

Metal detecting in the UK today is a popular and apparently growing hobby, with many people who take it up apparently continuing to metal detect for years (Thomas, in prep). While many metal detector users are registered through their membership to either or both of the two national representative bodies, the National Council for Metal Detecting (NCMD) and the Federation of Independent Detectorists (FID), there is also a proportion of metal detector users who are not members of either organisation and who are therefore essentially invisible. Both the NCMD and the FID generally do not disclose exact membership numbers, largely because these tend to fluctuate from month to month as memberships lapse and are renewed. Therefore, estimations of the current total number of metal detector users in the UK vary. For example Grove (2005, 5) suggests there are

around 30,000 active metal detector users, but Bland (2005, 441) suggests there are more likely to be only some 10,000. Ten years earlier Dobinson and Denison (1995) estimated the number of people metal detecting to be around 30,000 in England alone, with the acknowledgement that an absolute certainty on the figure was impossible. It can be a challenge, too, to establish what is meant by a 'metal detector user' in terms of frequency of metal detecting: some people may metal detect only occasionally, or purchase a metal detector but tire of the hobby after only a few outings, whereas others are avid enthusiasts who may go detecting twice a week or more.

Metal detecting emerged as a result of mine detecting technology developed during and after World War II (Addyman, this volume). This technology was, perhaps inevitably, developed into a machine manufactured for public consumption and marketed as a new hobby, at first in the USA; it was then imported to, and later manufactured in, the UK (Atkinson *circa* 1968, np; Beach 1970). In Chapter 5 Peter Addyman – as a 'veteran' of many of the interactions between archaeologists and metal detector users, and as an instrumental figure both in the Portable Antiquities Working Group and the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) – provides us with a history of archaeology and metal detecting in the decades before the PAS was implemented. Roger Bland (Chapter 6) then describes the development and future of both the PAS and the 1996 *Treasure Act*, both of which were put into practice in 1997, and which are currently the two principal ways in which metal detecting is brought into contact with archaeological and legislative practices in England and Wales.

### THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME

The PAS, initially set up in just six regions of England, remains a nationally important scheme across England and Wales, creating links in all regions with not only metal detector users but also other members of the public who might discover chance finds. At the time of writing, the PAS operates in the whole of England and Wales. There are currently 34 Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) covering England, with Wales administered through a network of four Trust Liaison personnel, and a Finds Coordinator based in Cardiff. The contributions by Mark Lodwick (Chapter 9) and by Philippa Walton and Dot Boughton (Chapter 13) provide case studies of the PAS in action in different regions. As Finds Coordinator for Wales, Lodwick is able to present in detail the ways in which delivery of the PAS in Wales contrasts with the English experience. Walton and Boughton, as FLOs for the North East and Cumbria and Lancashire respectively, discuss the issues and challenges faced in their regions, both of which were added to the PAS network at a relatively late stage and neither of which, when compared to other regions – East Anglia, for example (see above) – had an existing tradition of cooperation between archaeologists and metal detector users. As well as its region-specific interactions, the PAS has a central unit which is responsible for specialist advice on finds, for coordinating its activities and, since March 2007, for administering the 1996 *Treasure Act*. While Bland (Chapter 6) provides a comprehensive overview of these core activities, Ceinwen Paynton (Chapter 17) describes specifically the educational

activities of the PAS, including the resources it has provided for use in schools, although the role of Learning Coordinator within the PAS was unfortunately lost in recent cuts to the Scheme (see below).

Annual conferences at the British Museum have demonstrated not only the success that the PAS has had in engaging large numbers of metal detector users through the network of FLOs, but also the research potential of the data collected through the implementation of the Scheme. The 2007 PAS Conference, 'A Decade of Discovery', demonstrated some of the current academic research projects taking advantage of the information collected on the PAS Finds Database (available at [www.findsdatabase.org.uk](http://www.findsdatabase.org.uk)). A number of examples of the PAS facilitating the discovery of important sites or the collation of additional data to enhance knowledge about a particular period or geographical area are included in this volume. Faye Simpson's account (Chapter 12) of a metal detector user who made a chance discovery at Cumwhitton in Cumbria and promptly reported his find to Simpson, who was at the time the FLO for Cumbria and Lancashire, is a case in point. She describes how a telephone call from a member of Kendal Metal Detector Club with an artefact that 'could be something interesting' led to the discovery and excavation of an extremely significant Norse burial site; important information was thus gathered about a previously undocumented area of Scandinavian occupation in the North West of England. Julian Richards and John Naylor (Chapter 15), working with metal detected finds to shed light on the Viking and Anglo-Saxon periods through the 'Viking and Anglo-Saxon Landscape and Economy Project' (VASLE), derived information for their research from a number of methods, which not only included working directly with a group of metal detector users in survey work, but also utilised the data stored on the PAS Finds Database. This is another important example of the way in which metal detector users, by collaborating with archaeologists and allowing their finds to be recorded, can make a real and meaningful contribution to the archaeological record. Conversely, however, Tony Pollard (Chapter 16) demonstrates that in battlefield archaeology, while metal detecting is a valuable tool, the data from PAS has not necessarily proven useful, in part because of the location of some of his case study battlefield sites (eg in Scotland, where the PAS does not operate), but also because in many cases metal detector users do not seem to be recording certain types of metal artefact through the PAS, such as musket balls. Similarly, at a metal detecting rally in Cambridgeshire in 2007, a number of metal detector users interviewed as part of a wider research project told surveyors that they had found musket balls, but had not thought that they were worth recording with the PAS staff (see Thomas 2007).

As Bland (Chapter 6) demonstrates, many Treasure cases (under the 1996 *Treasure Act*) are also brought to light by PAS staff working with finders. Recent increases in the amount of Treasure being declared may be directly connected to the success of PAS (Lammy 2006, 2). The PAS has recently experienced cuts in funding, with Finds Assistants in some regions and its Learning Coordinator already lost, and is under threat from further possible cuts in order to support the London 2012 Olympics, with proposed plans to drop the central unit of the PAS, 'effectively initiating the Scheme's end' (*British Archaeology* 2008, 7). This seems to beggar belief. Given the demonstrable success of the

PAS, especially in the development of trust and the building of relationships between archaeologists and metal detector users, to lose this valuable tool would surely be close to catastrophic.

That is not to say that the PAS is without its critics. There are concerns, for example, that the PAS, by interacting with metal detector users, adds a spurious legitimacy to metal detecting, making it seem comparable to professional archaeological practices, when this is not truly the case (M Corbishley *pers comm* 2008). Some see the development of PAS as an apparent concession of the research agenda to what is essentially treasure hunting (Peter Fowler *pers comm* 2006). From the other end of the spectrum, Peter Spencer (Chapter 11) argues that the PAS, perhaps in some areas at least, could be doing even more to create links with metal detecting clubs than it is currently does.

In 2003/4 the PAS, in partnership with the British Museum and a number of regional museum services, developed the touring exhibition 'Buried Treasure'. The exhibition toured throughout England and Wales in 2004 and 2005, visiting London, Cardiff, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich, and displayed some of the most significant finds to have been discovered in England and Wales by non-archaeologists, including the Mildenhall Treasure, made famous in a short story by Roald Dahl (Hobbs 2003, 72), and the beautiful torques of the Snettisham Hoard. To coincide with the visit of the touring exhibition to the Hancock Museum in Newcastle, a one-day conference entitled *Buried Treasure: Building Bridges*, co-organised by the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University, Tyne and Wear Museums, and the PAS, was held. The conference was intended to look specifically at relationships between archaeologists and metal detector users, and in part, formed the basis for this book (although the scope here is far wider than that of the conference).

The conference ran smoothly and was very instructive, with a surprisingly large number of metal detector users present. However, its announcement on the CBA's online discussion forum, *Britarch* (archives available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/britarch.html>), elicited some rather negative feedback from some of the regular online discussants. Comments included, from one professional archaeologist:

It might be easier to 'build bridges' if the emphasis of conferences like this was not so unremittingly on the 'treasure' aspect of the whole portable antiquities thing. The question I ask myself, as an archaeologist, is why should I waste a day, the conference fee and a train fare to hear people talk about material culture as 'treasure', a category that archaeology discarded many years ago and which is of no conceivable interest in archaeological terms. (*Britarch* Discussion List 2005)

Another archaeologist, who objected particularly to the conference's title (among other things), remarked that:

... something like 'Finding the Past Together: Building Bridges' would ... be far more descriptive of what those gathered on one side of that 'bridge' would prefer to be the message being discussed. Indeed it is the recognition that it is good 'information about' the past and not 'treasures from' the past which is what is needed before that bridge can even be built. Of course it is always far easier to go for the superficial ... From what has been said here, it looks like the conference is yet another of

those fluff propaganda exercises so characteristic of this discussion over the past few years ... (*Britarch* Discussion List 2005)

It should be pointed out that not all discussion on this list was negative towards the conference. It was regrettable, nonetheless, that not only did none of the antagonists attend the conference (surely an ideal forum in which to debate their viewpoints?), but when three of the more strongly opinionated online discussants were approached to produce contributions for this book, all three declined to participate. Reasons ranged from not feeling that they were sufficiently informed (!) on the subject to provide a reasonable chapter through to disagreeing with the entire premise of the book. These individuals are, of course, entitled both to their opinion and to their choice not to contribute to the discussion, but it is nonetheless frustrating that people with such obviously strong opinions on the issue of archaeology and metal detecting were not prepared to lend that opinion to the debate being constructed here, leaving it up to this Introduction to alert the reader to their – very strongly held – views.

A number of the actual contributors to the *Buried Treasure: Building Bridges* conference (Bland, Austin, Simpson, Richards, Walton and Boughton) did agree to contribute to this volume. In addition, further authors were invited to participate in order to present a more comprehensive picture of this fascinating relationship in the early 21st century.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY AND METAL DETECTING – THE BIGGER PICTURE

While, owing in part to the ample scope for analysis and case studies provided by the PAS, the majority of the following chapters focus on the situation in England and Wales, wider pictures are also provided by authors commenting on the situation in other countries, in the UK and beyond. It is certainly remarkable, given its relatively small size as a whole, that different systems are in place in the different countries that comprise the United Kingdom. Alan Saville writes about the Treasure Trove system in Scotland (Chapter 7), where the Crown exercises its right to lay claim to *all* archaeological discoveries rather than merely, as is the case in the 1996 *Treasure Act*, a relatively narrow selection of categories (see Bland, Chapter 6). That such a wide range of finds is expected to be processed and potentially claimed by Scottish museums, without the aid of a regional network such as the PAS, is surely problematic in itself. Declan Hurl (Chapter 8) presents yet another situation in Northern Ireland, where, although the 1996 *Treasure Act* is in operation, there is also the *Historic Monuments Act (Northern Ireland)* 1971, under which digging for archaeological objects without a licence is illegal, effectively outlawing most metal detecting. However, as Hurl reveals, this has not stopped nighthawking (discussed below), and channels of communication between archaeologists and metal detector users seem to have started to develop only within the past decade.

Certainly, within the UK, the combination of rich deposits of metal artefacts and the relatively liberal regulations on the activity of metal detecting (in France, for example, unlicensed metal detecting is completely prohibited), has led to the hobby becoming popular with both UK residents and tourists visiting from elsewhere for treasure-hunting tours and metal detecting rallies (eg Addyman and Brodie 2002, 180). In order to provide

an international context to the situation in the United Kingdom, contributions have been included from different countries and continents. These illustrate both legislative positions and case studies of collaboration. Zbigniew Kobyliński and Piotr Szpanowski (Chapter 2) describe the present situation in Poland, introducing the legislation in place, as well as the challenges faced by archaeologists attempting to protect sites as varied in type as medieval cemeteries and battlefield sites related to both World Wars. Treasure hunting, as a threat to the security of archaeological sites in Poland, seems in recent times to have grown dramatically. That the more negative side of metal detecting – nighthawking – seems to be on the increase in Poland is regrettable, and it can only be hoped that clear solutions are found soon. Elize Becker (Chapter 3) provides us with an outline of the use of metal detectors in South Africa, where the metal detector has in fact been utilised by archaeologists as a tool for specific areas of research, such as battlefield archaeology and marine archaeology. Non-vocational use of metal detectors in South Africa, as in Poland, seems largely restricted to illicit activity, unfortunately. It is interesting to contrast these two experiences with the situation in England and Wales, where the PAS, although not without its critics, does enable communication between archaeologists and metal detector users, and as a result records information, even if not to the level that many archaeologists would deem acceptable, that would otherwise be lost.

In the USA metal detecting developed as a hobby as early as the 1940s, and, rather like in the UK, there are organised groups of metal detector users, often referred to as ‘relic hunters’. The situation varies from state to state: for example, in some areas there is little or no metal in the archaeological record and so metal detecting is not even an issue, although other activities, such as pot-hunting, do occur. In other areas, such as Georgia, Mississippi and Virginia, metal detecting – for example, relating to Civil War artefacts – is more prevalent (Toner 2002). Battlefield archaeology is a field of archaeological research where metal detectors are particularly useful if operated responsibly. John Cornelison and George Smith (Chapter 4) explain how cooperation with metal detecting clubs in the south-east of the USA has helped to build relationships, focus research and enhance understanding.

While battlefield archaeology has been researched in the USA for many years, this sub-discipline, remarkably given the sheer amount of evidence for sites of conflict in such a small country, is still relatively new in the UK. That only some of Britain’s battlefields and sites relating to times of war are registered with English Heritage or Historic Scotland, and even then only inventoried without statutory protection, also indicates that decision makers have yet to fully comprehend the importance of these finite resources. Tony Pollard (Chapter 16) describes the development of battlefield archaeology in the UK vis-a-vis the potential for and, in some cases, the actual use of metal detector users and their skills in surveying historic battle sites. He explains, too, that while metal detectors used appropriately can shed considerable light on the events of a specific battle, the machines, when used in a way considered irresponsible to the archaeological record, can cause irreversible damage. Metal detecting rallies, already a cause of concern for many archaeological observers, have already taken place at the battlefield sites of Marston Moor and Bannockburn.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

Metal detecting rallies are a controversial activity, although in the UK they take place legally. Certain measures have been taken at some of these events, which can attract hundreds or even thousands of metal detector users, to try to optimise the quality of recording (eg Thomas 2007), but their presence in the annual calendar of metal detecting events remains contentious. Even more problematic than metal detecting rallies, many of which now have at least some archaeological presence, and regarding which there is now, at least, dialogue between rally organisers and archaeologists, is the issue of nighthawking. It is not unfair to state that, while most metal detector users have a deep interest in history and archaeology, and are more than willing to participate in archaeological projects if invited, there are some who neither take an interest in archaeology nor particularly care about the impact that their actions may have on the archaeological record. Nighthawks operate illegally: for example, they search scheduled (protected) sites, go on private land without permission (trespassing) or fail to declare Treasure finds under the 1996 *Treasure Act*. Dobinson and Denison (1995) drew attention to a number of known instances of nighthawking, notably at the Roman site at Corbridge in Northumberland, where the raids were closely documented by staff in the 1990s; eventually a private security firm was employed to watch the site. Stead (1998) has written in detail about his role in discovering the looting, sale and subsequent retrieval (of at least some of) the Salisbury Hoard. In this volume another notorious incident of nighthawking at Wanborough in the 1980s is also reassessed (Thomas, Chapter 14). The looting of Wanborough, while itself deplorable, was not particularly unusual, certainly if early research carried out by the CBA in the 1970s was anything to go by (Thomas in prep). Yet the site's significance is in the way in which it was then utilised, even exploited, to draw attention to the threat of uncontrolled metal detecting, and the paucity in legislation available to deal with it. Thus a single event had a profound impact, over time and with a lot of determination, on the eventual change in the law and the abolition in England and Wales of the old Treasure Trove common law.

### CONCLUSIONS, AND SOME WAYS FORWARD

The development of this book stemmed from an aspiration to bring together the different opinions about metal detecting and archaeology, at a time when this relationship seems to be at a crucial point in its evolution. The relationship is complex, and possibly in England and Wales also exceptional. On a recent visit to Albuquerque, discussions with American colleagues confirmed both the unique nature of the Portable Antiquities Scheme and the envy of at least some archaeologists in countries where such a system does not exist. This uniqueness is reflected particularly in the international chapters of this volume. Certainly, there are critics of working with metal detector users, and perhaps if history had played out differently there would be a much lesser metal detecting presence in Britain today, without the political influence this large and organised group inevitably now has. However, metal detecting is here, it is not going anywhere and to ignore it or to refuse to engage even in basic communication would, perhaps, be unwise. Austin (Chapter 10) and Spencer



(Chapter 11) both warn that archaeologists ignore metal detecting at their peril, as the alternative to working together seems to be the loss of even more information.

In 1983, the late Tony Gregory suggested that the rise of metal detecting represented the failure of archaeology to appeal to audiences outside the middle classes. His views were echoed by Hodder's (1984, 29) conjecture that campaigns such as STOP, which targeted treasure hunting as a major threat to archaeology, added to social divisions between archaeologists and a public whose views were, possibly wrongly, assumed to be the same as those of archaeologists. It would make sense, therefore, to regard the majority of metal detector users not as selfish treasure hunters (while conceding that nighthawking does, regrettably, occur) but as a section of the public with an active interest in the physical past. Many metal detector users have been pursuing their hobby for several decades, and there is a strong tradition and culture associated with the metal detecting hobby, now into its fifth decade in the British context.

During the course of my research into the relationship between archaeologists and metal detector users in England and Wales, I have frequently been asked by friends and colleagues what my conclusions are. Usually I reply that I try to abstain from forming an opinion until absolutely necessary. What is clear, however, is that communication and cooperation are vital, whether it is through the PAS, museums, or more informal channels. Metal detectors, everyone would accept, can in the wrong hands cause great damage to the archaeological heritage. However, the enthusiasm of many metal detector users for their hobby, and their determination to pursue it, should be seen by archaeologists less as a problem and more as an opportunity; at a time of 'the rise and rise of Community Archaeology' (Archibald 2006), here is a community already interacting with archaeology on a regular basis. The metal detector machine itself, as Richards and Naylor (Chapter 15) point out, 'is just another type of remote sensing equipment', a perfectly valid tool in archaeology.

For those reading this book who have a metal detecting background, I hope that it will help reinforce the value of sharing information about finds with archaeologists. For archaeologists, hopefully some light has been shed on the complexity of our relationship with metal detecting, and why it is an important one to cultivate.

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