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First published 2009
The Boydell Press, Woodbridge

ISBN 978-1-84383-415-1

ISSN 1756-4832

The Boydell Press is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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Introduction

SUZIE THOMAS

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, chapter 5). 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). 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 (Corbishley *pers comm* 2008). Some see the development of PAS as an apparent concession of the research agenda to what is essentially treasure hunting (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 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

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