SYMPOSIUM 2026 - DETECTING THE PAST

INTEGRATING METAL-DETECTING AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Anthony Lee (Treasure Trove Unit)

Title: Treasure Trove in Scotland: metal detecting, data and digital dissemination

Abstract: The Scottish Treasure Trove Unit processes thousands of archaeological finds made by the general public every year, the majority now made through metal detecting. This talk will explore how the Unit's data can reveal patterns in metal detecting activity across Scotland and how it is changing over time. The growing treasure trove dataset also presents challenges in making finds information available to the Scottish heritage sector, international archaeological research and the general public while protecting it from misuse. The talk will also discuss the Unit's development of a new online database to make this important strand of Scottish heritage data more accessible than ever before.

Keith Westcott (Detectorists Institute and Foundation)

Title: SPIAS: Systematic, Partial and Intensive Artefact Survey; The Practitioner Detectorist and metal detecting as a non-intrusive archaeological evaluation technique

Abstract: Fieldwalking has long provided archaeology with a systematic means of identifying, recovering and spatially recording artefacts from the ground surface. Metal detecting extends this principle into the three-dimensional investigation of the topsoil, excavated spits and exposed surfaces, identifying metal coins and artefacts not visible at the surface.

SPIAS, Systematic, Partial and Intensive Artefact Survey, develops this approach through a consistent methodology, applying controlled levels of investigation according to project requirements.

This paper considers the role of the Practitioner Detectorist and systematic metal detecting as a non-intrusive archaeological evaluation technique. Applied alongside fieldwalking and geophysical survey, it can provide dating evidence to support interpretation, identify artefact distributions and, critically, recover vulnerable material culture before mechanical excavation. The archaeological value of this approach was demonstrated at Sutton Hoo, where systematic detecting located the missing base of the Bromeswell Bucket, ensuring its protection from subsequent mechanical excavation.

David Connolly (BAJR)

Title: Stepping into the field – Archaeology and Metal detecting.

Abstract: Since 2007, David Connolly has been an advocate for the acceptance of how much metal detecting can offer to the field of archaeology. The argument of saving heritage is true, however, only when we look at the how, when and where of artefact recovery. Pulling on nearly

two decades of work with detectorists from rallies to individuals, we can look at how to narrow the data gap, without taking the fun out of the hobby.

Stuart Campbell (Trimontium Trust and University of Manchester)

Title: Learning from the Trimontium Museum metal detecting surveys

Abstract: During several years of systematic metal detecting by volunteers working with the Trimontium Museum (both detectorists and recorders), we've tried to develop approaches that work within a community archaeological setting but also develop an understanding of past landscapes. While this has given insights into ways archaeology and metal detecting can be integrated, it has also been a massive learning exercise for myself into how the information generated can be interpreted and extended. This presentation will use examples of metal detecting within the research of the Trimontium Trust to explore some of these wider questions.

John Reid (Trimontium Trust)

Title: Wide area metal detection: a game changer in conflict archaeology

Abstract: Over the last few decades, the efforts of metal detectorists have contributed positively to many aspects of archaeology, numismatics, and indeed heritage in its widest sense, but arguably it is in the field of conflict archaeology where the impact of wide-area metal prospection has been most deeply felt. Beginning with the first large-scale explorations in the USA by Doug Scott and Richard Fox (1989) at the Little Bighorn site in south-eastern Montana, the technique has been applied to conflicts across continents and time periods.

This presentation highlights three episodes of conflict from Roman-period Britain, where metal detecting has completely transformed our understanding.

Suzie Thomas (University of Antwerp)

Title: Grounded Memories - the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Metal Detecting in the Netherlands

Abstract: Since June 2024, the Knowledge Centre for Intangible Heritage in the Netherlands (KIEN) has included the hobby of metal-detecting as an intangible cultural heritage on its national Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, allowing it the same status and understanding as other embodied practices such as the traditional distillation of jenever and the West Frisian language. What this means on the ground for the detectorists practicing this intangible heritage is still to be explored, including questions over the type of data that should be recorded by finds-reporting systems such as PAN (Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands), and the extent to which emotions, memories and other seemingly ephemeral phenomena connected to the hobby should be given more attention. In this paper I present on an ongoing collaborative project between the University of Antwerp, KU Leuven, the Meertens Institute and the Dutch Detecting Association, funded by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, in which we work in the Dutch Province of Zeeland to observe, record and co-create around the personal meanings that detectorists attach to their finds. Involving students, heritage professionals and

even a trained animator, we expect diverse results, revealing previously ignored or disregarded aspects of metal detecting.

Fraser Hunter (National Museums Scotland)

Andreas Minos Dobat (Aarhus University)

Chris Griffiths (Manchester Museum)

Bridget McGill (SAFAP)