Metal Detecting and Archaeology
Suzie Thomas and Peter G. Stone (editors)
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Metal Detecting and Archaeology, edited by Suzie Thomas and Peter G. Stone, is a compilation of chapters by 19 authors associated with the "Buried Treasure: Building Bridges" conference held at Newcastle upon Tyne in northeast England. The meeting was envisioned as a forum for exploring mutual interests, issues of contention, and the potential for productive collaboration among cultural resource professionals and metal-detecting hobbyists. In the foreword, Lord Redesdale notes that the divide between the two groups has been infused with elements of "class politics and social division," as professional archaeologists have long maintained proprietary authority over historic cultural resources and heritage. With her introduction to the volume, Suzie Thomas also immediately confronts the longstanding distrust between the two factions, while clearly attempting to maintain an evenhanded approach to the topic. This compendium includes the viewpoints of academic anthropologists and archaeologists, government officials, museum curators, civil servants, metal detectorists, and interested members of the public. Collectively, the authors represent disparate perspectives from England and Wales, as well as Poland, South Africa, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the United States.

Much of what is described has a universally familiar quality that will resonate with those who read this book. Integral to the overt examination of the specific relationship between archaeology and metal detecting are important implications that relate archaeology to cultural heritage, methodology, education and outreach, preservation, and cultural resource management laws, regulations, and standards—public archaeology of international scope. Those who are interested in history and involved in cultural resource preservation will find it is easy to draw parallels, based on personal experience, from the situations and issues presented.

The vehicle that communicates this encompassing subject matter is the documentation of struggles and compromises between cultural resource professionals and a public that lays claim to knowledge and objects associated with a shared heritage, property ownership, and perceived rights. Persistently operating beneath the surface of those legitimate concerns is the insidious element of looting solely for financial profit by "nighthawks."

As related by Thomas, the device used by the metal-detecting hobbyist today originated in a life-and-death urgency to locate landmines during World War II. In chapter 4, Cornelison and Smith chronicle pioneering uses of metal detecting in the U.S., noting that archaeologists experimented with the technology as early as the 1950s. The majority of professionals though, came to view metal detecting as ineffective for their individual applications. In response to increased use by hobbyists, archaeologists became concerned about the perception of association with treasure hunting, and have largely resisted the technology.

Following early successes by Dean Snow working at the Revolutionary War Saratoga battlefield, archaeologists Doug Scott and Richard Fox collaborated with metal detectorists in the 1980s and began to dispel negative perceptions through their innovative surveys at the Little Big Horn battlefield. Their research exemplified the value of large-scale, method-driven data collection, as well as professional/amateur cooperation.

Although metal detecting as a hobby began in the U.S. soon after World War II, Addyman in chapter 5 notes that concerns relating to its use for "treasure hunting" in Great Britain arose in the 1970s. Using "native wit," British hobbyists were locating numerous archaeological sites, and archaeologists were, early, disorganized in their response. Lacking an organized focus, complaints by the professional community were interpreted by the public as elitist protectionism and jealousy. Early campaigns, such as Stop Taking Our Past, attempting to influence public opinion against the metal-detecting hobby, ultimately proved divisive and counterproductive. Thomas relates that those

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trying to reach across the aisle were maligned by loyalists on both sides of the debate. Similar to their U.S. counterparts, British archaeologists began to shun the technology for fear of being perceived as condoning treasure hunting.

Archaeologists have long contended that non-scientific excavation does irreparable damage to historical provenience. Thomas correctly observes that much of the information to be gained from an artifact is associated with its physical context within a cultural landscape. Countering that argument, English metal-detector users point out that many of the objects they discover in rural settings have already lost their context due to deep plowing, and are in imminent danger of being destroyed. Further, hobbyists claim credit for fantastic finds that might otherwise have remained undiscovered. The schism between the two sides was widened by a nationally infamous incident at Wanborough, England, where a Romano-British temple site was massively looted in the 1980s. The subsequent trial and accompanying publicity was seen by many as manipulation and politicization by the archaeological community for the purpose of bringing about more restrictive British common law.

To illuminate modern relations between British archaeologists, amateurs, and hobbyists, the authors provide some background on laws pertaining to cultural resources in England. The Treasure Trove Law can be traced to the 12th century when it was enforced as a deterrent to the medieval-era tax-evasion practice of hiding valuables rather than declaring them. Under the law, anyone finding gold or silver was obligated to report the find to the appropriate authority. If the owner could not be located, the "treasure" passed to the Crown. If it could be shown that the objects had been accidentally lost or buried without intention of recovery (votive), ownership passed to the landowner. In 1996, the Treasure Act was passed as a refinement to the Treasure Trove Law, but was soon perceived as less than effective and difficult to enforce. It is the more recent Portable Antiquities Scheme that is credited with providing a wealth of information on both archaeological sites and artifacts.

In chapter 6, Bland explains that the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) was conceived as a means to (1) promote public responsibility for voluntarily recording archeological finds, and (2) dramatically decrease the irreplaceable loss of information due to rampant underreporting. Museums were unable to raise funds to purchase an estimated half of all finds that consequently went unrecorded under the old system. PAS provides a distinction between public acquisition of artifacts and the reporting/recording of data associated with finds. Bland reports that as of January 2008, the PAS database (<http://www.finds.org.uk>) contained 210,000 records and 160,000 images relating to 317,000 objects. The scheme recognizes metal detecting as a legal activity, and without promoting the practice seeks to engage users rather than ignore them. Metal-detector users report approximately 68% of finds recorded by finds liaison officers, and Bland estimates that more than half of the metal-detector users operating in England are reporting finds. As illustrated by Richards and Naylor in chapter 15, benefits of the data being captured by PAS include geographic information system applications in which the spatial attributes of finds are being used to compose specific site distributions for modeling settlement patterns across England through time.

By most accounts presented here, the success of PAS is due in large part to the nationwide network of finds liaison officers (FLOs) who have direct contact with metal detectorists and other members of the public through organized events and other forms of outreach. In chapter 10, detectorist Trevor Austin comments that the FLOs understand the hobby of metal detecting just as they understand archaeology and the environment, and they discuss the issues honestly. Commenting on the relationship, Austin describes metal detecting as "a hobby that has responsibilities," and expresses a commonly held desire for more opportunities to work alongside archaeologists.

The book includes a number of examples of collaborations between the archaeological and metal-detecting communities. In chapter 11, Spencer recounts what could be considered a paradigm shift in British numismatics. With the advent of the metal detector the traditional focus in the study of historic coins shifted from known collections to coins being discovered beneath farmlands. In contrast to the contents of known collections based on savings and currency, metal-detecting surveys in the hinterlands were producing rarely seen cut coins and small denominations associated with the transactions

of ordinary folk. Spencer and other experts realized that prior to this revelation the study of numismatics had been constructed through a selective process biased toward the wealthy who hoarded, collected, and bequeathed.

Readers of *Metal Detecting and Archaeology* will gain insights into cultural resource management approaches elsewhere in the world. Lodwick, in chapter 9, reports that Wales operates under a PAS system similar to that used in England. The system in those two areas is considered to be liberal by comparison with Scotland, described by Saville in chapter 7, where all archaeological finds of any age, type, or material must be reported, and belong to the finder only if the Crown does not claim them. Landowners there have no claim to antiquities discovered on their property. Hurl, of Northern Ireland, reports in chapter 8 that all archaeological excavation requires a license. In Poland, as outlined by Kobylinski and Szpanowski in chapter 2, the state claims ownership of all archaeological finds, and laws prohibit private collections and trade in artifacts. In chapter 3, Becker states that metal-detector use in South Africa requires a permit issued by a professional council that requires justification and affiliation with a professional agency.

In her introduction to this volume, Thomas acknowledges concerns associated with the destruction of the primary context of artifacts in the field. Here the message must be clearly communicated that there are aspects of primary context that can and must be interpreted only by a professional archaeologist. That said, a key element of context is relative location on the landscape. In chapter 16, Pollard begins to address concerns of location and relative context with an outline of a systematic methodology for data collection in metal detecting. The elements of the methodology will be completely familiar to those who have conducted Total Station site mapping and archaeogeophysical surveys using electrical resistance, magnetometry, electromagnetic conductivity, magnetic susceptibility, or ground-penetrating radar. Despite a long-held reputation as an unsystematic tool, metal detecting is identified by the authors contributing to this book as another form of remote sensing. As such, it must then contribute precise, reconstructable, and permanent data.

Generally focusing on the positive, Thomas and the assembled authors encourage cooperation. Education and public outreach are precepts that are underpinning the "bridges" being constructed to connect metal-detector users and other members of the interested and conscientious public to archaeology. Thomas suggests that metal-detector users be viewed in terms of their potential contribution, and as providing an opportunity in a time of "community archaeology." As demonstrated in this book, metal detecting is most successful in the hands of a skilled user, just as archaeology is done best by archaeologists. Based on those clear criteria, successful collaborations are producing extraordinary results.

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