

Treasure Trove Review 2024

Stuart Allan, Chair, Treasure Trove Review

In December 2023, representatives of ClfA met with a team from the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer Department, who were carrying out a formal review of the Treasure Trove system in Scotland. Discussions covered the legal principles, the processes dealing with chance finds and assemblages, and the potential for relationships between professional archaeology, museums and metal detecting to be strengthened through interactions within the system and wider engagement with it. The meeting was part of a programme of meetings with stakeholder organisations and selected individuals with experience of the system from different perspectives, including conversations with colleagues in other UK and selected international jurisdictions.

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In February 2024 the Review launched a public consultation asking for views on questions grouped under the themes *Scope and Principles*, *Working with Museums and Finders*, *Governance and Resourcing* and *Looking Ahead*. ClfA was one of 39 organisations that submitted a return alongside 96 responses from individuals, many of them metal detectorists.

While respondents offered ideas and suggestions for change in Treasure Trove processes and raised points about capacity, efficiency and resourcing, there was a broad acceptance overall of the value of the distinctive features of the Scottish system. Scottish law is different, and Treasure Trove in Scotland has evolved differently from other parts of the UK. A key feature is the breadth of the Crown's claim, which is based on cultural value rather than on material content and age. The scope includes finds from all periods of human activity, from the prehistoric to the modern. There is a duty therefore to report all archaeological finds made in Scotland, including excavation assemblages, so that they can be recorded and considered for claim.

The system uses comprehensive criteria for assessing the significance of finds to decide which objects and assemblages should be claimed and offered to museums. This combination of reporting requirement and claim criteria has had a direct impact over time on how the archaeology of Scotland is recorded and how fully it is represented in Scotland's museums.

The challenge inherent in the Scottish system, therefore, is that large numbers of finds need to be processed each year, a task which requires resources and time. The system also assumes that museums in Scotland have the capacity and resources to collect finds and assemblages. The funding picture for many museums is such that this should not simply be taken for granted.

The Review's conclusions are based on our ultimate endorsement of the principles underpinning the system. We therefore propose practical measures to support its better leading, planning and

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resourcing. These include recommendations about changes to governance and approaches to resourcing, intended to make the system viable for the future in a manner that is financially sustainable and cost-efficient.

Equally important are changes in the culture of Treasure Trove, a theme which came through strongly in our discussion with ClfA. Although finders often express frustrations about slowness and lack of transparency in procedures, there is no shortage of goodwill for the objectives of the system. And yet we have found that individuals and organisations experience and understand Treasure Trove in terms that are essentially procedural and transactional, and they respond accordingly. We advocate greater emphasis on communicating the purpose behind rules and processes, with a focus on public benefit, partnership and participation. This includes means of better extending the system's reach through the whole of Scotland, working with museums and archaeologists regionally and locally.

Alongside these key areas are detailed recommendations intended to help the processes of reporting, claiming and allocating chance finds (a term that includes metal-detected finds) to work better and faster. For the professional sector, meanwhile, our Review coincides with ongoing work as part of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy to develop standards for assemblages passing into museums. Treasure Trove is pivotal here, and its work with assemblages needs to be recognised and supported.

While the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer is considering these and our other detailed recommendations, the next step is groundwork for a revision of the Treasure Trove *Code of Practice*, a task which our broader Review was intended to inform. To that end, we may be calling once more on input from ClfA representatives and members alongside the host of other organisations and individuals whose positive engagement has aided our deliberations in conducting the Review.



Late medieval heraldic harness pendant, c 1200–1400CE (Highland). Credit: Crown Copyright



Late Bronze Age socketed axehead, c 1000–800 BCE (Perth and Kinross). Credit: Crown Copyright



Dr Stuart Allan

Stuart is Chair of the Treasure Trove Review in Scotland, commissioned by the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (KLTR). He is a museum curator and historian, and for over 20 years until 2022 held various roles at National Museums Scotland, latterly as Keeper of Scottish History & Archaeology. In that capacity he had oversight of the Treasure Trove Unit, which operates the Treasure Trove system on behalf of the KLTR, and was a member of the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel.

