The Institute of Detectorists

and the Detailed and Partial Artefact Survey approach

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DAPAS 'detailed' survey 2m transects.
Credit: Nathan Portlock-Allan

Early in 2017, inspired though attending two courses – Dr Wendy Morrison's 'Archaeology in Practice' and 'Building Bridges Between Archaeologists and Detectorists' at President James Madisons Montpelier, Virginia – an initiative was launched to develop a research and educational Institute of Detectorists (IofD). Within 18 months from initially contacting Historic England with the proposal, we had created the first course for metal detecting, which was held at the University of Oxford's Rewley House. Through a healthy demand, all 40 places were filled with attendees benefiting from receiving a CIfA CPD Certificate. 'Metal Detecting for Archaeological Projects' went on to win the prestigious Archaeological Training Forum Award for 2019.

The first ever educational programme for detectorists? It could be said that 18 years into the third millennium was a little late for an interest which has been practised over many decades...

Metal detecting has now become a heavily monetised business sector where nationally representative groups have strategically aligned to making it a 'sport'. Reassuringly, a core of individuals within the hobby are supportive of values aligned with the heritage sector. Unfortunately, there is a large and more vocal majority who see education as a threat. 'Why do we need education to dig holes?' is a typically basic and vitriolic response, whereas those with influence prefer to portray a harmless hobby engaged in the 'random searching for casual losses'. Reading the promotional

words of the commercial rally organisers openly targeting historic landscapes demonstrates a very different agenda.

Although initially out of our scope, when evaluating reasons behind the historic lack of relevant education available to the hobby, there are two perspectives in play. Whilst detectorists claim a harmless pursuit targeting ploughsoil finds within a decontextualised horizon, the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) states in the 2017 Annual Report, for example, that 'Over 93% of finds were discovered on cultivated land, where they are vulnerable to agricultural damage and natural corrosion processes'.

Perhaps education is not the greatest of priorities if detectorists focus on the ploughzone... but does this reflect reality?

Even a brief internet search returns a plethora of evidence that detecting pastureland is a KEY practice for detectorists. Acceptable in the 2017 Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting, detecting pasture produces artefact finds which, having laid in their place through antiquity, are in much better condition than those which sustain damage and wear through agrochemicals and the plough. Then, in considering the need for 'all year round detecting', is the availability of arable land when not drilled and under crop – a point not missed by Dr Katherine Robbins in *Portable Antiquities Scheme: A Guide For Researchers*: 'Many metal detectorists only search ploughed land and, due to the demands of agriculture, these fields are only available for a few weeks each year.'

The 2017 PAS report records that just 2.5% of finds are recorded from pasture and other undisturbed land: grassland/heathland/woodland. Results from our research, however, show the widespread practice of detecting pasture and this equates to a significant percentage of time across a year for most detectorists. Perhaps, if the general practice of 'digging holes' in ancient pasture is acknowledged, the need for education becomes more of a priority?

The Detailed and Partial Artefact Survey (DAPAS) approach

A key objective of the IofD is to promote the embedding of metal detecting into professional practice and to create a new status of 'Practitioner Detectorist' to become part of the archaeological team. Regarding terminology here, a fundamental difference between practitioner detectorists and metal detectorists is our broadened scope to include all material artefacts as potential dating evidence, with spatial plotting of the archaeological record contributing evidence and building the contextual landscape.

Institute course at Rewley House, University of Oxford. Credit: Keith Westcott

The use of metal detectors is now more commonly specified within Project Briefs and Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs), although it is recognised that use is sporadic and would benefit from a general revaluation. The IofD and CIfA are collaborating on initiatives to promote the value of detecting within archaeology and the importance of archaeological standards in detecting. Both ALGAO and FAME have written in support for the initiative.

DAPAS has been developed to form the basis of a consistent approach to utilising metal detectors on archaeological sites. Whilst acknowledging that the methodology must have a degree of flexibility, key elements can be adopted across most sites, allowing an education programme to be created and providing an effective framework for both archaeologists and detectorists. Further work on testing elements of the methodology this year will lead to producing standards and guidance.

Being interviewed at Broughton Castle by Prof Suzannah Lipscomb. Credit: Keith Westcott

The Broughton Castle Hoard on display at the Ashmolean. Credit: Keith Westcot

Keith Westcott

Keith previously represented the UK as an EU Principal Expert and British Standards Institute Chair in the heating sector. With National Institute roles and a Fellow in the Institute of Leadership and Management, he has focused on forming the research and educational Institute of Detectorists since 2017. Initially diving on British shipwrecks, he continued his interest in history on land and discovered a hoard related to Queen Henrietta Maria which became the last case of Common Law of Treasure Trove. Now a member of *Time Team*, both the hoard and his discovery of the Broughton Castle Roman Villa is featured in three new *TT* episodes.

Detailed and Partial Artefact Survey – a systematic approach to include:

Overarching methodology, Standards and guidance, Education requirements & CPD certificates, IofD Code of conduct, Contractual assessment including reward waiver, Site requirements of risk assessment, Method statements, Health & safety, Welfare facilities, Safety equipment requirements access & insurance, Pre-site research, Reviewing the Project Brief and WSI, Utilising the geophysics report to determine transect intensity, Coordinated approach with the project manager & forming discard policy, Site assessment and setting out, Finds retrieval & digging policy, bagging/tagging & location recording, Minimum standard of detector, Equipment required, Site conditions and evaluation for detector settings, Submission of final report.

DAPAS basic principles – combining fieldwalking with metal detecting when required:

- Detailed – intensive sweep over known archaeology, gridded at 2m sweep, utilising set length nylon-eyed ropes over fibreglass stakes to ensure full coverage
- Partial – predetermined transect centres to achieve partial site coverage, utilising ranging poles and preferably ropes to ensure a uniform approach. HS2 project at 20m transects combined with geochemistry and magnetic susceptibility, for example
- Trench – linear marked-out topsoil sweep before digging and before each drawback of a mechanical excavator
- Spoil – volume to surface area makes locating finds in spoil heaps particularly inefficient. A systematic approach is being developed
- Finds retrieval – artefact extraction from topsoil when located, by detectorist. Deeper signals flagged and reported to archaeologist
- Recording – find bagged, with separate tag and attached to plastic stake, allowing small finds to be retrieved before spatial coordinates logged
- A no-metal zone – it may sound obvious, but using metal stakes to set out a 'detailed' surface detecting area is not conducive to an efficient survey. Likewise, utilising metal-eyed tarpaulins under spoil severely curtails the ability to search for metal artefacts

Field testing to determine optimum survey efficiencies and the development of standards will commence in autumn 2022; please contact Keith Westcott at keith@detectorists.org.uk if you would like to contribute.