

The British  
Museum

AMGUEDDFA  
CYMRU



Advice for finders  
of archaeological  
objects and treasure



# Contents

## **6 The Portable Antiquities Scheme: advice for finders of archaeological objects**

- 9 The objectives of the Portable Antiquities Scheme
- 10 Am I legally obliged to report all my finds?
- 10 Are you only interested in seeing finds made by metal-detector users?
- 10 What types of archaeological finds would you like to record?
- 10 How long will this take?
- 11 Will my finds be taken away from me?
- 11 What will I gain from reporting my finds?
- 11 Who will have access to the information about my finds?
- 12 Do I need permission before I start searching with my metal detector?
- 12 Can the reporting of finds lead to the area becoming a scheduled monument, meaning that I can no longer detect there?
- 12 I have been detecting for many years and have a large collection of finds. Am I expected to have this material recorded?
- 12 Should I clean my finds?

## **14 The Treasure Act 1996: information for finders of treasure**

- 16 Who owns treasure?
- 16 What objects qualify as treasure?
- 17 What objects do not qualify as treasure?
- 18 What should I do if I find something that may be treasure?
- 18 How do I know if a find is of outstanding national or regional significance?
- 18 Where will I have to take my find?
- 19 What information do I need to provide?
- 19 What if I do not report a find of potential treasure?
- 19 What happens after the find is reported to the Coroner?
- 20 What if a museum wants my find?
- 20 How is a fair market value for a treasure find arrived at?
- 21 What if the Coroner, the national museum or the host organisation responsible for taking in finds loses or damages my find?

- 21 Who is eligible to receive a share of the reward?
- 21 Who is not eligible to receive a share of the reward?

- 21 How long will it take before I receive my reward?

- 22 For further advice about treasure

- 22 Summary of the law (across the UK) and links for further information

## **26 Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales (2017)**

- 28 Before you go metal-detecting
- 29 While you are metal-detecting
- 30 After you have been metal-detecting
- 30 Finding out more about archaeology and metal detecting

Cover:  
Medieval bone bead from  
London (LON-78B66F).

Previous page:  
Excavation of the Late Bronze  
Age Wardour Hoard, Wiltshire  
(WILT-E8DA70).



## The Portable Antiquities Scheme advice for finders of archaeological objects



Late Iron Age horse-brooch, part of the South Pembrokeshire Chariot Burial group (NMGW-113E81).

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) records archaeological finds made by the public to advance knowledge, tell the stories of past communities and further public interest in the past. It is a partnership project, managed by the British Museum (in England) and Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales (in Wales), working with at least 100 partners across both countries.

Finders in Scotland, Northern Ireland and UK Crown Dependencies should make themselves aware of local laws and any linked guidance available.

This booklet provides information about the PAS and the accompanying law of Treasure which was last updated in 2023 (see page 14 onwards).



### The objectives of the Portable Antiquities Scheme

- Transform archaeological knowledge through the recording and research of public finds, to enable the stories of past peoples and their landscapes to be told
- Share new knowledge about archaeological finds made within communities, so that people might learn more about their past, their archaeology and their history
- Promote best archaeological practice among finder communities, so that the past is preserved and protected for the future
- Support museum acquisition of finds made by the public, so that these can be saved for future generations and enjoyed by local people
- Provide long-term sustainability for the recording of new finds, so that these discoveries can contribute to the rewriting of our histories

Left:  
Amal Khreisheh and  
Lucy Shipley excavate the  
findspot of the Cheddar Brooch,  
Somerset (DEV-1A7D5C).

Right:  
Roman copper-alloy lock  
component in the form of  
a duck from Hampshire  
(HAMP-47B5C4).





### **Am I legally obliged to report all my finds?**

No. The Scheme is entirely voluntary, but by recording finds with the PAS you are contributing to our knowledge of Britain's past. However, you must report material which constitutes Treasure, or which you believe may be Treasure (see page 15 onwards).

### **Are you only interested in seeing finds made by metal-detector users?**

Not at all. We would like to see archaeological objects found by anyone. The focus of the Scheme is to record finds made by the general public.

### **What types of archaeological finds would you like to record?**

We would like to see everything that you have found – not just metal objects. We try to record all items made before about 1540, but selectively record more modern finds. Your local Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) will decide what to record on the PAS database.

### **What type of information about my finds do you want?**

We would like to record details of the objects that you have found including a detailed description, its weight and measurements. We will also photograph your find. Most importantly, we need to record where it was discovered (its findspot) as without this it lacks key archaeological information. As there is always pressure on FLO staff time, we will only undertake to identify and record important artefacts for which findspot information is provided. Findspots should be recorded as precisely as possible (the nearest 1–10m or 8–10 figure National Grid Reference), obtained using a handheld GPS device or similar.

### **How long will this take?**

Your FLO will borrow your finds for a period of time, determined by the type of find and the resources available, while they research and record them. You will be issued with a receipt while they are in our care. This should also indicate when your finds will be returned.

### **Will my finds be taken away from me?**

No. We only want to record information about your finds. Museums may sometimes be glad to have the opportunity to acquire non-Treasure finds, but this will only happen if you and the landowner agree.

### **What will I gain from reporting my finds?**

Your local FLO will be able to offer you:

- Finds identification (either personally, or after consulting a specialist) and recording
- Advice on conservation and storage of your finds
- Advice on the Treasure Act 1996

### **Who will have access to the information about my finds?**

Our aim is to make as much of the information available as possible while protecting your personal details and archaeological sites from damage. We will publish details of the finds you show us on the PAS database, but the findspots of objects will not be identified more precisely than 1km and with the relevant parish or community name; the most sensitive findspots will not be identified as accurately as this. This data is made available to third parties, such as Historic Environment Records and researchers, who must agree to follow the Scheme's terms and conditions for publishing data online.



Early Bronze Age flint  
arrowhead from Suffolk  
(SF-22FEE1).



### **Do I need permission before I start searching with my metal detector?**

Yes. As outlined in the Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales (2017) – see pages 27–31 – you must have the landowner's permission to search and it is useful to have a written agreement with the landowner (not only the tenant) regarding the ownership of any finds. All land in England and Wales, including the foreshore, is owned by someone (whether a person, organisation or government body), so do not assume you may detect without securing that permission. It is prohibited to search or disturb protected sites, such as scheduled monuments, and it is important to avoid damaging preserved archaeology.

### **Can the reporting of finds lead to the area becoming a scheduled monument, meaning that I can no longer detect there?**

Only sites of national importance are scheduled (which means it is illegal to use a metal detector on them without permission from Historic England or Cadw). It is rare for detector finds on their own to lead to a site being scheduled or otherwise protected.

### **I have been detecting for many years and have a large collection of finds. Am I expected to have this material recorded?**

We would be very glad to know about all your finds, no matter how long ago you found them, as long as you know where the items were found. It is best to discuss the logistics of recording a large collection with your local FLO.

### **Should I clean my finds?**

Most of your finds will need no treatment other than dry storage. For further information about caring for non-Treasure finds refer to Conservation Advice for Finders (available on the PAS website – [finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)). Finds that may be potential Treasure cases should not be cleaned before being reported.

Above:  
Medieval silver penny of  
Henry III from Lincolnshire  
(LIN-E7DBA5).

Right:  
Early Medieval gilt copper-  
alloy brooch from Lincolnshire  
(LIN-DBB8FA).



# The Treasure Act 1996

## information for finders of treasure

Under the Treasure Act 1996 there is a legal obligation to report all finds of Treasure: this leaflet provides a summary of the main points of the Act. We strongly recommend that all other archaeological finds are reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS, see above) but this is voluntary.



Medieval gold nobles of  
Edward III and Richard II  
from Powys (NMGW-  
117167) © y Gaer  
Museum, Art Gallery &  
Library / Amgueddfa  
Cymru – Museum Wales.



## Who owns treasure?

Treasure belongs to the Crown, until it is disclaimed or acquired by a museum (landowners will normally have best title to all other finds). Finders and landowners are not able to sell Treasure finds, rather they may claim a reward (see further below), paid at the discretion of the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The aim of the Treasure Act is to ensure the most important archaeological finds are acquired by museums for public benefit.

## What objects qualify as treasure?

The following finds are Treasure under the Act if found on or after 24 September 1997 (in all cases except those otherwise highlighted):

1. Any object that is not a coin, that is more than 300 years old when found, and has metallic content of which at least 10% by weight is precious metal (gold or silver).
2. A single prehistoric object (up to and including the Iron Age), any part of which is precious metal (if found on or after 1 January 2003).
3. Groups of at least two base metal prehistoric objects from the same find (if found on or after 1 January 2003).
4. Groups of at least two coins that are more than 300 years old, that contain more than 10% by weight precious metal (gold or silver), and groups of at least 10 coins of any metal that are more than 300 years old, and (in both cases) are from the same find. The following will normally be regarded as coming from the same find: hoards, groups of similar coins in the same place, and votive or ritual deposits. Finders should be aware that finds may have become scattered since they were originally deposited in the ground.
5. Any object, whatever it is made of, that is found in the same place as, or had previously been together with, another object that is Treasure. This might include the vessels for coin hoards, items in a burial, or other items in a hoard that are not gold or silver.

6. Any object that would previously have been Treasure Trove (under the common law in place prior to the Treasure Act) but does not fall within the specific categories given above. These are objects that are made substantially (more than 50%) of gold or silver, deliberately hidden with the intention of recovery and whose owners or heirs are unknown.

7. An item or groups of objects made of metal and more than 200 years old that provides/provide an exceptional insight into an aspect of national or regional archaeology, culture or history because a) it is a rare example of its type, b) because of the location in which it was found or c) because of its connection with a particular person or event (but only if found on or after 30 July 2023).

## What objects do not qualify as treasure?

Treasure does not include unworked natural objects, including human and animal remains (even if they are found in association with Treasure), and objects from the foreshore and the sea which are Wreck (the latter, usually from beaches, should be reported to the Receiver of Wreck). If you are in any doubt, it is always safest to report your find: find contact details at [gov.uk/government/groups/receiver-of-wreck](https://gov.uk/government/groups/receiver-of-wreck)



Early Medieval gold mount from Cornwall (CORN-8F1D47).



## What should I do if I find something that may be treasure?

You should show your find to your local FLO, or the relevant Treasure Registry (in England, the British Museum, and in Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales), who will confirm whether it is likely to be Treasure or not. You must report all finds of Treasure to the Coroner for the district in which the finds were made, either within 14 days of discovering it or within 14 days of the day on which you realised that the find might be Treasure (for example, as a result of having it identified). The obligation to report finds applies to everyone. If you fully notify the FLO or relevant Treasure Registry within this period with all required information about a find, either in person, by letter, telephone or email, you will have been considered to have met this obligation. Your FLO (in Wales, the Treasure Registry) will then report the find to the Coroner on your behalf. Coroners will not usually want you to report finds to them directly as they generally do not have a place to store finds.

## How do I know if a find is of outstanding national or regional significance?

You may have an idea yourself, or others (such as fellow detectorists, FLOs, curators, researchers, and antiquities dealers) may suggest that the find is exceptionally significant. If you suspect that you have made an important find it is best that you contact your local FLO or the relevant Treasure Registry for advice. They will be happy to give you a first response from images, advising you on how best to proceed. Advice will also be taken from relevant colleagues and finds experts in coming to a decision about whether to progress your find under the significance-based criteria. Please note that these deliberations might take some time as further research will be necessary. If the expert opinion believes a find is of outstanding national or local significance a report will be prepared for the Coroner who will ultimately decide if the find is Treasure.

## Where will I have to take my find?

Your local FLO or relevant Treasure Registry is normally the main point of contact for Treasure finds. You will be given a receipt when you deposit the find. Your find may be sent to another institution (usually the British Museum or Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales) as part of the Treasure process.

## What information do I need to provide?

You will need to provide information about exactly where you made the find (the findspot), a legal minimum of within 10m, but ideally within 1m, and information about the circumstances of discovery. In public communications about the find, only a parish (England) or community (Wales) name will be given, while a more general location description may be used for particularly sensitive finds. It is strongly recommended that you and the landowner should keep the find-site location confidential and avoid sharing information on social media.

## What if I do not report a find of potential treasure?

The penalty for not reporting a find that you believe (or there is good evidence for believing) to be Treasure, without a reasonable excuse, is imprisonment and/or a fine. Failure to report a find because you did not at first recognise that it may be Treasure will not get you into trouble, but you should report it once you realise this.

## What happens after the find is reported to the Coroner?

If the institution or individual receiving the find on behalf of the Coroner believes that the find may be Treasure, they will inform the British Museum or Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales. Once all the relevant details about the find (contact information for finder and landowner, findspot, date of find) are provided, a 'report' will be prepared for the Coroner by a suitable expert or experts, describing the find and recommending whether (and on what basis) it meets the criteria for Treasure. For those finds which are subsequently deemed to fall outside the criteria for Treasure, the Coroner will be informed and the item returned to the finder/landowner. If the find appears to meet the criteria for Treasure, appropriate museums will be asked if they would like to acquire the find for public benefit. If not, the Secretary of State will disclaim it. When this happens, the Coroner will notify the landowner that the object is to be returned to you after 28 days unless the landowner objects. If the landowner objects, the find will be retained by the relevant Treasure Registry on behalf of the Crown until you and the landowner have resolved any dispute. It is important to note that Treasure finds remain Crown property until they are disclaimed or acquired.

### What if a museum wants my find?

The Coroner will hold an inquest to decide whether the find is Treasure based on the written report and other evidence gathered as necessary. If the find is declared to be Treasure then it may be valued remotely, unless the Treasure Valuation Committee (TVC) wishes to see it or an objection is raised by any interested party (finder, landowner, acquiring museum). This amount is the reward and is equal to what a museum will need to raise to acquire the find. However, the UK government wishes to encourage finders and landowners to consider donating their finds (therefore waiving their right to this financial reward) and gives certificates to all those who do. There is no obligation to do this.

### How is a fair market value for a treasure find arrived at?

The TVC, which consists of independent experts, values all finds that museums wish to acquire. The TVC will commission a valuation from one or more experts drawn from the antiquities or coin trades. You, the landowner and the acquiring museum will have the option to comment on this valuation, and/or to send in a separate valuation for the TVC to consider. The TVC will inspect the find and arrive at a valuation. If you are then dissatisfied with the recommendation there is an opportunity to provide evidence to support your claim and to ask the TVC to reconsider the case. If you are still dissatisfied, you can then appeal to the Secretary of State.



Middle Bronze Age gold bracelet from Wiltshire (WILT-DE7029).

### What if the Coroner, the national museum or the host organisation responsible for taking in finds loses or damages my find?

They are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that this does not happen but, if it does, you should be compensated as if the find was being acquired.

### Who is eligible to receive a share of the reward?

This is set out in detail in the Treasure Act Code of Practice. To summarise:

- The finder who has obtained permission to be on the land from its owner, and acted in good faith
- The landowner
- Sometimes, the person who occupies the particular site as a tenant of the owner may also receive reward, subject to the landowner's agreement (unless this is precluded by the terms of the tenancy agreement)
- Where pre-existing written agreements exist between finder or rally organiser and the landowner, then these terms will take precedence and be followed.

### Who is not eligible to receive a share of the reward?

- Any person involved in an archaeological project who makes a Treasure find
- A finder or a landowner who has acted in bad faith, and not in accordance with the Treasure Act Code of Practice, may expect a reduced share of the valuation, or none at all

### How long will it take before I receive my reward?

The target time for payment of an ex gratia reward is 18 months after the find is received by the FLO or relevant Treasure Registry and all the necessary details are supplied (provided no challenges to the valuation are made), although it may be necessary to exceed this period in cases such as large hoards of coins, where finds need cleaning for identification or scientific analysis, or in cases of finds that are particularly rare or complex.



### For further advice about treasure

Finders are strongly advised to review the Treasure Act Code of Practice (3rd Revision), which provides further information about the Act and the Treasure process. This can be found at [finds.org.uk/documents/treasure\\_act.pdf](https://finds.org.uk/documents/treasure_act.pdf)

### Summary of the law (across the UK) and links for further information

- ENGLAND: Finders must have the landowner's permission to search and avoid protected sites. Only Treasure must be reported by law. See [finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)



- NORTHERN IRELAND: Searching for archaeology is licenced and anyone finding archaeological finds must report them by law. See [communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/guide-metal-detecting-archaeology-and-law](https://communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/guide-metal-detecting-archaeology-and-law)

- SCOTLAND: Finders must have the landowner's permission to search and avoid protected sites. They must report all finds by law. See [treasuretrovescotland.co.uk](https://treasuretrovescotland.co.uk)

- WALES: Finders must have the landowner's permission to search and avoid protected sites. Only Treasure must be reported by law. See <https://museum.wales/treasure/>









## Code of practice for responsible metal detecting in England and Wales (2017)



If undertaken responsibly metal-detecting can make an important contribution to archaeological knowledge. This document aims to provide guidance for metaldetectorists who wish to contribute to our understanding of the history of England and Wales. It combines both the requirements of finders under the law, as well as more general voluntary guidance on accepted best practice.

Previous page:  
Photo © J D Richards,  
University of York.

Left:  
Post-medieval copper-alloy  
toy from West Yorkshire  
(SWYOR-B7A2F4).



## Being responsible means:

### Before you go metal-detecting

- Not trespassing; before you start detecting obtain permission to search from the landowner, regardless of the status, or perceived status, of the land. Remember that all land (including parks, public open-spaces, beaches and foreshores) has an owner and an occupier (such as a tenant farmer) can only grant permission with both the landowner's and tenant's agreement.

Any finds discovered will normally be the property of the landowner, so to avoid disputes it is advisable to get permission and agreement in writing first regarding the ownership of any finds subsequently discovered.

- Obeying the law concerning protected sites (such as those defined as Scheduled Monuments, Sites of Special Scientific Interest or military crash sites, and those involving human remains), and also those other sites on which metal-detecting might also be restricted (such as land under Countryside Stewardship or other agri-environment schemes).

You can obtain details of these sites from several sources, including the landowner/occupier, your local Finds Liaison Officer or Historic Environment Record or at [www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk) / [historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list](http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list) / <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru/search-cadw-records> – which will help research and better understand the site.

Take extra care when detecting near protected sites since it is not always clear where the boundaries of these lie on the ground.

- Familiarising yourself with the Portable Antiquities Scheme, including contact details for your local Finds Liaison Officer (England), telephone 0207 323 8611; or Treasure Administrator (Wales), 029 20573374 ([treasure@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:treasure@museumwales.ac.uk); [trysor@amgueddfacymru.ac.uk](mailto:trysor@amgueddfacymru.ac.uk)), and its guidance on the recording of archaeological finds discovered by the public; make it clear to the landowner that you wish to record finds with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Ensure that you follow current conservation advice on the handling, care and storage of archaeological objects.
- Obtaining public liability insurance (to protect yourself and others from accidental damage), such as that offered by the National Council for Metal-Detecting or the Federation of Independent Detectorists.

### While you are metal-detecting

- Working on ground that has already been disturbed (such as ploughed land or that which has formerly been ploughed), and only within the depth of ploughing. If detecting takes place on pasture, be careful to ensure that no damage is done to the archaeological value of the land, including earthworks.

Avoid damaging stratified archaeological deposits (that is to say, finds that seem to be in the place where they were deposited in antiquity) and minimise any

ground disturbance through the use of suitable tools and by reinstating any ground and turf as neatly as possible.

- Stopping any digging and making the landowner aware that you are seeking expert help if you discover something below the ploughsoil, or a concentration of finds or unusual material, or wreck remains. Your local Finds Liaison Officer may be able to help or will be able to advise on an appropriate person. Reporting the find does not change your rights of discovery, but will result in far more archaeological evidence being recovered.
- Recording findspots as accurately as possible for all archaeological finds (i.e. to at least a one ten metre square – an 8-Figure National Grid Reference), using a hand-held Global Positioning Systems (GPS) device whilst in the field or a 1:25000 scale map if this is not possible.

Bag finds individually, recording the National Grid Reference on the bag with a waterproof/indelible marker.

Archaeologists are interested in learning about all archaeological finds you discover, not just metallic items, because such finds contribute to knowledge.

- Respecting the Country Code (leave gates and property as you find them and do not damage crops, frighten animals, or disturb ground nesting birds, and dispose properly of litter).

## After you have been metal-detecting

- Reporting all archaeological finds to the relevant landowner/occupier; and making it clear to the landowner that you wish to record archaeological finds to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, so the information can pass into the local Historic Environment Record. Both the Country Land and Business Association and the National Farmers Union support the reporting of finds with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Details of your local Finds Liaison Officer (England) can be found at <https://finds.org.uk/contacts>, e-mail [info@finds.org.uk](mailto:info@finds.org.uk) or phone 020 7323 8611; The Treasure Administrator (Wales) can be contacted on 029 20573374 ([treasure@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:treasure@museumwales.ac.uk); [trysor@amgueddfacymru.ac.uk](mailto:trysor@amgueddfacymru.ac.uk))
- Abiding by the statutory provisions of the Treasure Act 1996, the Treasure Act Code of Practice and wreck law. If you wish to take artefacts and archaeological material older than 50 years old out of the UK, you will require an export licence. If you need advice your local Finds Liaison Officer will be able to help you.
- Calling the Police (101), and notifying the landowner/occupier, if you find any traces of human remains or a likely burial; human remains can only be disturbed further with a licence from the Ministry of Justice.
- Calling the Police or HM Coastguard, and notifying the landowner/occupier, if you find anything that may be

a live explosive, device or other ordnance. Do not attempt to move or interfere with any such explosives.

- Calling the Police if you notice any illegal activity whilst out metal-detecting, such as theft of farm equipment or illegal metal-detecting (nighthawking). Further details can be found by contacting Historic England/Cadw or the 'heritage crime' contact within your local police force.

## Finding out more about archaeology and metal detecting

- You can find out more about the archaeology of your own area from the Historic Environment Records maintained by local authority archaeology services (in England) and Heneb (The Trust for Welsh Archaeology). Also the Heritage Gateway (in England) and Archwilio (in Wales).
- For further information about the recording and reporting of finds discovered by the public and the Treasure Act 1996 contact the Portable Antiquities Scheme (email [info@finds.org.uk](mailto:info@finds.org.uk) / telephone 0207 323 8611).
- For further information about how you can become involved in archaeology contact the Council for British Archaeology (telephone 01904 671417). They can also supply details of local archaeology societies.
- You can find out about metal detecting via the National Council for Metal Detecting or the Federation of Independent Detectorists or the Association for Metal Detecting Sport.

This Code was last revised in 2017.

It has been endorsed by: Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales / PAS Cymru, Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, Association for Metal Detecting Sport, British Museum / Portable Antiquities Scheme, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, Council for British Archaeology, Country Land & Business Association, Institute for Archaeology (University College London), Historic England, National Council for Metal Detecting, National Farmers Union, Royal Commission on the Historical & Ancient Monuments of Wales, Society for Museum Archaeology.



FSC® certified paper.  
Please recycle. We send zero waste to landfill.



Portable  
Antiquities  
Scheme

[www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport



Cadw



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

