

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR METAL DETECTING

EARLY HISTORY 1978– 1982

The National Council for Metal Detecting (NCMD) that exists today is a professional organization which has attracted a large and loyal membership. They are split between eight regional bodies stretching from the Scottish region, down through the North West, North East, Yorkshire, and Midland regions into the Western, Anglian, and Southern regional areas. Also included are the Central register clubs and individual and associate members.

Every single one of these detectorists, whether regional, central, or individual have their own delegates representing them at the National Executive meetings that are held three times a year. The NCMD also provides representation at various committees, such as the Portable Antiquities Advisory Group (PAAG) and the Best Practice Working Group, also liaising with various government departments on matters likely to affect the hobby.

It was the early 1960s and into the 70s that metal detecting gained popularity with the public here in the United Kingdom. This interest gave birth to the early modern-day range of metal detectors with wonderful names like, C-Scope, Arado and Tesoro. These were used by a growing number of detectorists, a few of which would, through sheer hard work and determination set the wheels in motion that would lead to the organisation of individuals into clubs, clubs into Federations, and eventually the formation of the N.C.M.D.

During the late 1960's there were a few intrepid individuals who were seeking places to detect, but they were few and far between and very lonely

“.....I began detecting in the mid-sixties, I didn't clap eyes on another detectorist for three years, so I gave up and only started again, when I saw two other men in a field, the three of us were still detecting together thirty years later....”

Brian Down – North West MDC

THE FIRST FEDERATION

The 1970's saw a huge rise in the number of people taking up the hobby and during the mid-seventies, small groups of individuals began forming themselves into clubs.

In the hobby press of the day, Treasure Hunting magazine, people were learning about the emergence of clubs and placing messages for people from their area to join forces and form more new clubs. One such individual from the North West was Brian Cross. He placed a message in the May 1978 edition of the magazine, giving his address and asking interested people to contact him, and contact him they did.

The result was the formation of the South Lancs & Cheshire MDC. This club is still going strong and plays a full and active part in the activities of the North West Region.



Legh Arms – Knutsford, Cheshire
'Legh'
from Middle English; (clearing in a forest)

During the early months of 1979, Brian, who had at this time, been joined at the South Lancs club by John Fargher, was already considering the possibility of the coming together of some of these clubs to form a Federation to strengthen the hobby and therefore be in a better position to defend against the increasingly poor publicity being generated by various elements within the archaeological and heritage professions.

Brian began to visit and revisit the other known clubs in the area to convince their members that forming a Federation was the way forward. Eventually his persistence paid off and a meeting was arranged.

On the 26th July 1979 the following clubs represented by 18 delegates gathered at the Legh Arms, Knutsford, Cheshire

<u>Thameside MDC</u>	<u>South Lancs & Cheshire</u>	<u>H.S.S. Mold</u>	<u>Crewe & Nantwich</u>	<u>Bolton</u>
Founded 1977	Founded 1978	Founded 1976	Founded 1979	Founded 1977
Colin Sumner	Brian cross	Norman Butterworth Eldon Jones / A King	Steve Murphy	George Wood Jean Verrey Mr & Mrs Taylor

And so, the first Federation of metal detecting clubs was born. The October 1979 edition of Treasure Hunting magazine carried the report on the meeting.

“..... An inaugural meeting of the North Western Federation of Metal Detecting Clubs was held in Knutsford, on the 26th July 1979 when eighteen representatives of clubs from the area met to discuss arrangements for the proposed aims of the society. The aims of the Federation are ‘to protect the interests of metal detector users, to promote a favorable public image of the hobby and to encourage all metal detector users to abide by a code of conduct’.

Sub-committees were formed for, finance, legal affairs, dealing with proposed legislation, by-laws, etc. publicity, press and TV relations, relationships with Archaeologists and Museums, recruitment of clubs to the Federation and the extension of the Federation into a National non-profit organization. It was agreed that only a non-profit making organisation set up on a democratic and voluntary basis would be accepted by the majority of metal detector users.

It is hoped that Federations will be formed and established throughout the country and eventually combine to form a powerful and acceptable National Organisation for the benefit of all metal detector users. The Federation will audit and publish its accounts annually and provide itself with a democratic constitution.....”

North Western Federation first elected committee.

Chair	Alan Clarke
Secretary	Brian Cross
Treasurer	Harry Knight
Liaison offer	Marjorie Norton

You would be forgiven for thinking at this point, that all was well in the hobby. The fact is that it was the exact opposite. The Council for British Archaeology supported by several other archaeological groups were already planning an anti-metal detecting campaign that would, if successful, severely limit or totally ban metal detecting.

The hobby however had other ideas and the formation of a counter campaign was underway, led and supported by some formidable individuals.

STOP TAKING OUR PAST (STOP) CAMPAIGN

The introduction and accessibility of commercially available metal detectors in the early 1960's through the 70's, and into the 80's was viewed with equal amounts of excitement and trepidation, depending on whether you were a detectorist or an archaeologist

Those early years could and should have been a crucial period of development between the two groups but alas, due to failures on both sides of the divide, it became a fractious affair with both sides campaigning for the support of the public.

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) supported by several other heritage organisations began planning the STOP campaign in 1979. After several months of planning, their campaign was launched on the 12th March 1980. The campaign was accompanied by grotesque posters and cartoons painting every detectorist with the same, tarnished brush. It asked the public to 'please report their activities and encourage prosecution'. The STOP campaign also applied pressure to local councils to ban detectorists from council-controlled land.

In November 1979 and in direct response to the STOP Campaign, the Detector Information Group (DIG) was formed, organised and managed by Frank Mellish, Tony Hammond, and Geoff Fry. The DIG campaign was set up to counteract the harmful misinformation being broadcast by the STOP group. What followed was a sustained war of words and actions that would see the DIG campaign gather momentum and strengthen support for the whole of the metal detecting hobby.

Operating only on voluntary funding, DIG was clearly a well-organized group, whose aim it was, to raise the public profile of the metal detecting hobby and it would go on to challenge STOP at every level including government departments. Dig organised a rally of its supporters in Parliament Square. On the 16th of December 1979 over 1,000 detectorists from all over the country descended on Parliament Square followed by a march to Downing Street to hand in a petition at number 10. DIG was also successful in July 1980 with its petition to the House of Lords against Clause 100 of the County of Kent Bill which was an attempt to restrict the hobby in the county.

Later DIG was invited to a meeting in Paris of the Council of Europe and the Committee on Culture and Education, and in June 1981, representatives attended the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, to discuss and contribute to a report on metal detecting and archaeology.

The Detector Information Group held the line against the STOP campaign until the National Council for Metal Detecting was up and running, and then continued to work with the Council along with the newly formed Special Purposes Committee headed by John Howland whose job it was to root out and combat the very worst of the misinformation being spread by the CBA and its supporters.

Much has been written about the STOP campaign but drawing a conclusion from the dissemination of reports from both camps, the consensus must be, that the STOP campaign did the archaeological world a lot more harm than good and was certainly responsible for generating the initial fractious relationship between detectorists and archaeologists. The STOP campaign lasted barely a year, and its failure, amongst other things, accelerated the galvanisation of metal detecting groups around the country and ironically, was seen to be the beginning of a coming together of the two parties. Whilst there are still varying levels of distrust between detectorists and many within the archaeological world, the record levels of detector find's recorded each year speaks for itself.

THE SECOND FEDERATION

Meanwhile, back in the North West, the newly formed Federation was up and running with Alan Clarke and John Fargher at the helm, while Brian Cross went roaming the countryside in his trusty camper van recruiting the other North West clubs into the fold. This was to be a successful venture with the number of clubs reaching 17

News of the impending STOP campaign was being leaked and causing a great deal of concern. At a meeting of the North West Federation it was agreed that attempts should be made to meet with the representatives of the DIG campaign to agree the best path forward. Brian Cross contacted the campaign leaders who were based in the South of England and a meeting was arranged in November 1979 at a motorway services area situated halfway between the two parties.

Present at the meeting were Brian Cross, Dennis Buchanan and the three members of the DIG campaign Frank Mellish, Tony Hammond, and Geoff Fry. The conversation quickly revealed that both parties were seeking the same end, a National body that would give the hobby some credibility. Frank Mellish reported to the meeting that he thought the immediate way forward was to seek membership and recognition of the CCPR (Central Council for Physical Recreation, reborn in October 2010 as SARA, the Sport And Recreation Alliance). This was seen as an important body and supported the rights of individuals to enjoy their chosen recreations.

“.....It was a eureka moment. I was sat in my dentist waiting room reading the Telegraph when I spotted a tiny item about how the frisbee users association of Great Britain won a battle with councils who had banned their use in recreational spaces. The victory was due solely to being recognized and accepted into the CCPR.....”

Frank Mellish

It was agreed that Frank Mellish and Tony Hammond would seek a meeting with the CCPR and put forward the case for the hobby of metal detecting to be accepted as a recreational pastime.

In the Summer of 1980 the two parties met again, this time at the North West Federation meeting venue, the Legh Arms Knutsford. Geoff Fry and Tony Hammond addressed the delegates of the Federation which was by now 12 clubs strong, and 30 delegates represented the clubs at the meeting

On the agenda was the meeting between DIG and the CCPR. Frank Mellish reported that they had met with the chief executive of the CCPR who told them that our hobby ‘would’ be eligible for membership, but they could only accept organisations that were a recognised National Body, and so the race was on to bring together other groups within the detecting fraternity to form a National body.

What followed was several months of hard negotiations and meetings with the numerous clubs in and around the South of England in collaboration with the leaders of DIG

On Saturday 9th May 1981 several clubs within the Southern area answered the call and descended on the Greenwich Community Centre. The purpose of the meeting was to thrash out any issues regarding the formation of a Southern Federation. The following month, July 1981 Treasure Hunting magazine recorded the meeting.

“.....SOUTHERN FEDERATION FORMED. A meeting was held at Greenwich Community Centre on Saturday 9th May to discuss the Formation of the Southern Federation of Metal Detecting Clubs. 15 clubs attended covering a large area of the South East.

David Wood of the Wessex Metal Detecting Association opened the meeting by expounding the need for clubs to organise themselves into a Federation. DIG is unable to help with all local bans and clubs will be able to achieve more if they band together.

The other advantage of the formation of a Federation would be the increased power to promote the hobby and improve both communications between clubs and public relations.

Guest speaker Geoff Fry from the DIG campaign, spoke of the reasons why DIG was formed and gave a resumé of the work they have done so far. He explained DIG's continued need for funds and support and why he believed that a Southern Federation would be beneficial to DIG and to the hobby in general.

A proposal to inaugurate the Southern Federation of Metal Detecting Clubs was passed unanimously and a committee was nominated as follows.

Chair,	David Wood	Wessex MDA,
Vice Chair	John Williams	West Kent MDC
Secretary	Berni Glover	Serendipity MDC,
Vice Secretary	Mrs Andrews	Bedford HSS
Treasurer,	Derek Elliot	South East London MDC
P.R.O.	Mick Turrell	Wessex MDA.

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The encouragement of other areas to form Federations continued via the trade press as well as club meeting visits and by word of mouth but the priority now was to bring together the two Federations from the North West and Southern areas and thrash out all the requirements that come with the formation of a National organisation.

It would be four months before this happened, but it finally happened, on the 15th September 1981 when a delegation from the Southern Federation travelled to Cheshire to meet with the representatives of the North Western Federation. Fittingly the venue, the Legh Arms, was the same as the one used when the first Federation was inaugurated in July 1979. The North West was represented by Alan Clarke, Dennis Buchanan, and John Fargher, whilst the Southern delegates were, John Howland, David Wood, and Ernest Souchs.

With all parties working towards the same goals, the business was amicably concluded on the night. The first committee of the new metal detecting National body was voted in. The first executive committee for the Council was made up of an equal number of members from both the Northern and Southern Federation

Chair	Dennis Buchanan
Vice Chair	David Wood
Secretary	John Howland
Treasurer	John Shreeve
PRO	Mick Turrell

Following the completion of an agreed constitution and rulebook came the first public announcement that the new National body had been formed and named, The National Council for Metal Detecting, the chosen date and venue to make this announcement was the 21st November 1981 at the North West Conference and Exhibition held in Blackpool. Once again, the hobby press carried the announcement

“.....We are pleased to announce the formation of the National Council for Metal Detecting. The National Council is the representative body of metal detector users and is fully backed

by the Northern and Southern Federations.

This formation came after many months of careful negotiation and it was decided to announce it at the Blackpool Conference and Exhibition on the 21st November 1981 so that the officers of the council would be able to answer questions put to it by the press and the metal detecting fraternity.

The aim of the council will be to promote, encourage and protect the hobby at all levels of representation, including central government.

DIG will be continuing their good work as a pressure group, but will now have the financial backing of the council to help them fight for our hobby. The National Council have given DIG a mandate to work on their behalf.

Plans are now being made to start further Federations in those areas not covered by the Northern or Southern Federations. The National council would welcome any club or individual who is willing to set one up

The Council is currently engaged in negotiation to have the hobby recognized as an official pastime. and the signs that this will come about are encouraging.

We will also attempt to contact the archaeological lobby in order to thrash out our differences. We are therefore throwing out an open invitation to the CBA to meet our members and see for themselves that they have nothing to fear from the many thousands of responsible hobbyists.

In just 28 months a small but dedicated group of hobbyists from opposite ends of the country had pulled together several independent clubs into Federations, and the Federations into a National organisation, ready to stand and fight on behalf of the growing number of metal detectorists around the UK.

MORE FEDERATIONS

Almost immediately the call for more clubs to band together was answered and other Federations began to emerge around the country joining forces with and strengthening the National Council.

MIDLAND FEDERATION (founded - December - 1981)

A meeting for representatives of Midland based metal detector clubs convened on Wednesday 9th December 1981 at the Fir Tree Inn, New Arley, Nr Coventry. The object of the meeting was to form a federation of metal detecting clubs in order to promote and publicise the hobby more effectively and also to combine resources in order to fight attacks on the hobby by the anti-detector lobby here in the Midlands. Unfortunately, the night selected for the meeting turned out to be extremely unpleasant with both dangerous ice, and thick fog blanketing most of the Midlands. However, four clubs sent representative and another two apologised for not being able to attend due to the conditions.

Clubs represented were, Three Spires Metal Detecting club of Coventry, Hinckley Search Society, Castle Bromwich Detector Club of Birmingham, and Arley Relic Hunters club who were responsible for convening the meeting. Wolfruna Detecting Club, and Coventry Heritage Preservation Society also expressed their interest and desire to join such a Federation.

Ray Horton of the Arley club took the Chair and explained to the dozen or so people present, that it had been in the minds of his members for some time that it would be in the interest of all people connected with the hobby in the area, to form themselves into a Federation, for the reasons outlined above.

Since there were approximately 15 – 20 clubs within a 20-mile radius of Coventry, it was felt like the potential for the idea was excellent, Ray said that he personally felt that it was essential to the long-term future of the hobby that clubs join together to fight attacks by such bodies as the CBA and hostile local authorities, because with recent legislation the hobby was becoming increasingly threatened.

Willy Connor of the Hinckley club said that he agreed with this, and he thought that clubs in the area should get together more and meet socially, so that a more open-minded attitude would prevail with clubs mutually helping each other and having respect for each other's territory, it was only through linking up and working together that this would be possible.

John Wells of the Three Spires club asked what sort of constitution and rules the Federation would be having. It was decided to leave this to a subsequent meeting to see how many other clubs would be attracted to the federation.

It was decided however, that as from this meeting the Federation now existed, and a committee was instituted from those present, this would be composed initially of one ordinary member from each club.

Those elected to the committee were Barry Catley (Castle Bromwich) John Wells (Three Spires) Terry Palmer (Hinckley) and Ken Jones (Arley) with Ray Horton as acting chair and John Dawson as acting secretary.....

ANGLIAN FEDERATION (founded – 1982)

On Monday 28th June 1982 a meeting was held to formulate plans for the setting up of a Federation of metal detecting clubs in this area, in line with similar formations in other parts of the country. The clubs who attended were – St Neots & District Artefacts Club, Northampton Historical Detecting Society, and Huntingdon & District locators Club.

After considerable debate a list of basic aims were agreed in keeping with the policy of the National Council for Metal Detecting. These were

1. To promote, protect and encourage the hobby of metal detecting.
2. To unite under one banner all responsible detecting enthusiasts allied to the Federation.
2. To represent the interests of the Federation members within the Anglia region.
3. To maintain a balanced view of metal detecting in the press and media.

A committee was formed comprising. Chairman, R F Kings, (Northampton) Secretary. G K Simmonds (St Neots) Treasurer, P Sayers (ST Neots)

An application has been made to the National Council for full membership, and a further meeting organized for Monday 26th July to discuss constitutional and membership matters. If any other clubs in the area are interested in joining us they are invited to contact me (name and address supplied)

NORTH - EASTERN FEDERATION (founded – 1982)

In July 1982 the following three clubs have together formed the North Eastern Federation. Any club interested in joining the Federation should contact (name and address supplied)

Northern Local History &
Field Archaeology Society

Sunderland Relic & Artefacts
Recovery Club

South Tyne History &
Field Archaeology Society

YORKSHIRE FEDERATION (founded – 1983)

I am pleased to inform you that the inaugural meeting of the Yorkshire Federation of Metal Detecting Clubs took place on Sunday 24th April 1983. Representatives of clubs based in - Barnsley – Doncaster – Hull – Leconfield – York - attended the meeting which was arranged by the York Metal Detecting Club.

Lively discussion ensued and resulted in the election of Roger Wiggin of the York club as chairman, Ken Sommerton of Barnsley as treasurer and Steve Critchley as secretary. The Federation will hold its first full meeting on 14th May, At York. The days meeting was nicely rounded off with the search of a local site, organised by our York hosts.

SCOTTISH FEDERATION (Founded-1985)

In June 1985 the Scottish federation was formed and the first elected committee was.

Chair - E Bailey,	Vice Chair – J Fearek	Secretary – R Fortheringham
Scottish Detector Club Bill Baptie	S.A.R.G. Colin Irvine	N.M.D. Club Colin Irvine

WESTERN FEDERATION (FOUNDED 1987)

In early 1987 four clubs from the Western region gathered to form a new federation.

Ischem Relic Society	Weston Historical Research and Detecting Association	Severn Vale Historical Research and Detecting Society	Swindon Artefact Searchers
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The Federations (now regions) listed above along with the North West and Southern, form the eight regions currently (2018) members of the National Council for Metal Detecting.

FIRST NATIONAL COUNCIL CONFERENCE

Following two executive meetings between the two founding Federations, the first National Council Conference was held on the 23rd May 1982 in Coventry at The Arley Miners Club. The meeting content was recorded.

Chair	Dennis Buchannan
Vice Chair	David Wood
Secretary	John Howland
Treasurer	John Shreeve

The first Delegates' conference was held on 23rd May in Coventry and was well attended. The delegates from the member Federations had travelled from all over the UK.

The conference was opened by the Chairman, Dennis Buchanan and there then followed reports from the regions which gave everyone present an insight into the problems being experienced by detector clubs.

Geoff Fry, the DIG representative spoke at some length on the need for raising capital by which anti-detector legislation could be fought off, and unless this capital was forthcoming,

survival of the hobby was indeed imperilled. It was a sobering thought when Geoff Fry announced the cost in fighting the Kent Bill and the Cumbria Bill. From what Geoff said we all should be most grateful to the efforts of DIG and C-Scope Ltd and to the many clubs that raised money in support to protect the hobby. George McRae of Whites Electronics Ltd echoed these sentiments but went on to say that the National Council must be helped in the future to secure a future for the hobby. After the lunch break, the serious matter of proposals to guide the actions of The National Council were determined.

Funding

The funding of the National Council was discussed at some length. It was finally decided that each of the member Federations would make a levy of £1 per club member per member club. This per capita levy would put into the fighting fund some £8,000 which together with other fundraising schemes by clubs, rallies etc, a sum of £20,000 could be reached within a short space of time. With this sort of capital behind the National Council, the very best QCs and public relations agencies could be employed. We would be in a position to crush any restrictive legislation whether at Central or Local Government level.

The Individual

David Wood, Vice Chairman then proposed that the NCMD offer some type of membership to the Individual enthusiasts, these being as David pointed out, those hobbyists who for some reason or another find it impossible to join an established club. George McRae said that Whites Electronics Ltd could assist in this area by issuing a card with every new detector sold. A meeting with the trade members and NCMD Executives would be arranged to discuss the implementation. Mr Colin Hanson was elected to become the Membership Secretary for this proposal.

Metal Detectors / Archaeology

John Howland, General secretary then outlined the proposals of a meeting that he and David Wood had with Dr Henry Cleere and Richard Morris of the CBA. These proposals for co-operation between the NCMD and CBA were discussed at some length. The outcome of any co-operation would, the delegates intoned, include the following actions by the CBA as a sign of good intention.

The NCMD has asked the CBA to consider the following amendments before co-operation can ensue. The CBA should.

- 1 Recognise the hobby of metal detecting and that the hobby has no connection with orthodox archaeology. That this non-archaeological hobby does not have any detrimental effect on orthodox archaeology
- 2 That local councils influenced by information supplied by professional archaeologists with the intention of suppressing the hobby of metal detecting have such information withdrawn.
- 3 That all official reports on metal detecting are amended to show there is a 'hobby' of metal detecting which does not interfere with orthodox archaeology (i.e. the Council of Europe recommendations, information leaflets held by the House of Commons Research Division)
- 4 That the recovery of small items, coins, badges, buckles etc, lost on footpaths, beaches, river banks, or similar places does not cause harm to archaeology.
- 5 The acceptance of these proposals by the CBA be transmitted to the press.

Code of Conduct

The General Secretary then asked the delegates to consider a new code of conduct, or did a code of conduct need to be implemented? Geoff Fry addressed the meeting with the view that the existing code of conduct was recognised by the Department of the Environment and that any changes to it might have a detrimental effect. The delegates voted to adopt the existing code for the National Council.

The Conference also supported the concept of treasure hunting provided it was carried on

Legally. It also recognised the many followers of treasure hunting be they the many sub-aqua clubs or non-detector users choosing to follow this concept.

Detector licences

The chairman then asked the delegates whether they were in favour of the re-introduction of detector licences. This was rejected.

The closing address was made by the chairman who thanked Mr Ray Horton of the Midlands Federation who had done a superb job in organising the venue and refreshments.

All things considered the Conference was a huge success. The National Council now had a mandate from the members. With the help and enthusiasm shown at the conference the hobby of metal detecting was now slowly blossoming into one of the best outdoor family leisure pursuits.

NCMD / CCPR

On the 24th March 1983 the National Council for Metal Detecting was admitted to the membership of the Outdoor Pursuits Division of the Central Council for Physical Recreation. The NCMD was represented at committee meetings by John Howland and David Wood.

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My sincere thanks to the following for their contributions to this item.

- Brian Cross
- John Fargher
- Frank Mellish
- John Howland
- Mollie Thomas
- David Dickenson

Kev Gorman
North West Region
June 2018.

