

## Original Study

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Suzie Thomas\*

# The Future of Studying Hobbyist Metal Detecting in Europe: A Call for a Transnational Approach

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**Abstract:** Much research on hobbyist metal detecting has either focused on the archaeological impact only, conflated hobbyism with criminal activity (namely looting and illicit trade), or generalized the motivations and drivers for metal detectorists. Studies to date have targeted specific countries and regions, with only limited reference to metal detecting activities elsewhere. This has meant that the transnational aspects of metal detecting – such as the international trade of metal-detected objects, and transnational movement of metal detectorists themselves (for example through touristic activities) – has mostly been overlooked or merely speculated upon. Much debate has revolved around assumptions, stymied by perceived ethical barriers and accepted attitudes which limit deeper engagement with the metal detecting community. Approaching the study of hobbyist metal detecting at a trans-European level would encourage greater understanding of the scale of hobbyist metal detecting and the world views, activities and contact and trade networks of metal detectorists. This may challenge traditionally-held perspectives concerning what should be valued as cultural heritage and who is entitled to make use of it. In this paper I set out our current state of knowledge, and propose directions for future research.

**Keywords:** Metal detecting, transnational research, archaeology, Europe, worldviews.

## 1 Introduction

Archaeological cultural heritage is contested in many ways, from questions concerning who manages the material past, through to who decides what happens to it (for example what is saved and what is sacrificed in the name of development). Crucially, questions also arise concerning who ‘owns’ the past and the material associated with it. In debates around these issues, a group that frequently becomes marginalized, and even demonized, is the metal detecting community. It is clear that from the 1960s onwards in Europe the emergence of the metal detector as a publicly-available device was met with both alarm (primarily from those involved in cultural heritage management), but also with excitement and enthusiasm, for example in popular media (see Thomas 2012a). The often-controversial communities involved in metal detecting hold significant potential for in-depth research, so far only partially realized. The ethical implications of researching an often-criticized community and their activities (including artefact hunting but also object exchange) challenge the ‘comfort zone’ of archaeologists and other cultural heritage researchers, concerning the extent to which we are prepared to be ‘exposed’ to practices that may contravene accepted scientific

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\*Corresponding author: **Suzie Thomas**, Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki, Helsinki FI00014, Uusimaa, Finland, E-mail: [suzie.e.thomas@helsinki.fi](mailto:suzie.e.thomas@helsinki.fi)

archaeological methods, and the ethics thereof. Such research also has the potential to question academic authority and perspectives concerning what is important, and how best to understand and interpret alternative points of view, and would follow the research trajectory of other social science disciplines, such as criminology and sociology, which have been quicker to study and interrogate more challenging aspects of human behaviour. The issues explored here also tie in with discussions of power within heritage: which interpretations and treatments of cultural heritage are privileged and prioritized over others, and why this might be the case (see for example Moreau and Aldeman 2011 concerning the framing of graffiti as an ‘outsider’ and ‘criminal’ activity, or otherwise as an ‘alternative cultural expression’).

Metal detectorists are currently both known and unknown: they are seen and often vocal through online forums and representation in the media, and physically visible in the landscape (as individual actors and through the evidence that their activities leave in the ground). At the same time as this ‘known-ness’ (most archaeologists, for example, have opinions about metal detecting even if they do not know any metal detectorists), fundamental information about them remains unknown. We do not know how many people actively metal detect, or how often, and we do not know exactly what they find. This is problematic for our ability to understand the full implications of metal detecting, but also loses an opportunity to contribute to our broader understanding of how and why society values certain aspects of cultural heritage, and why this can become contested.

The state of current knowledge about metal detecting is surprising given that artefact hunting for archaeological material has been a hobbyist pastime in Europe and other parts of the world for many centuries. As others have noted (e.g. Taylor 1995), the scientific discipline of archaeology emerged from antiquarian artefact hunting traditions. Within Europe, research on metal detectorists themselves (as opposed to the impact of metal detecting – for example on the archaeological record) has emerged in recent years (e.g. Thomas 2012b and Winkley 2016 for the UK, Dobat 2013 for Denmark, and Rasmussen 2014a for Norway). Such research has usually been limited to studies within specific localities or national boundaries. Others have observed how legislation aimed at regulating metal detecting and other forms of artefact hunting has instead resulted in impossible-to-manage situations (e.g. Karl 2011 concerning Austria).

Although metal detecting is known in other parts of the world, such as the USA (e.g. Reeves 2015), and South Africa (e.g. Becker 2009), for this paper I frame my discussion primarily within European parameters rather than global. I suggest, within Europe, that a *transnational* perspective is required in order to gain greater insight into hobbyist metal detecting. I first challenge the conflation of metal detecting with looting which often occurs, and then reflect upon the trade and exchange of metal-detected objects. I include thoughts about how this might operate in practice, including possible transnational angles. Finally I discuss the position of metal detecting in both preservation and destruction of archaeological cultural heritage, before concluding with a summary of how future research in this field of interest might take shape. This includes the need for more reliable information on the scale of the activity, the nuances of metal detectorists’ perceptions of cultural heritage, and the nature of their interaction with portable archaeological material. Significantly, trading networks appear to have developed through both personal contacts and digital engagements. What I am suggesting may troublesome scholars due to the suggestion of close engagement with hobbyist metal detectorists. However, without a substantive level of engagement, and on a scale that goes beyond national boundaries, it will not be possible to progress our level of knowledge about this community, with such failure having serious implications for policy, practice, and even, potentially, archaeology professionals’ abilities to craft successful public relations.

## 2 Separating Detecting from Looting

It is currently impossible to assess the full extent to which metal detecting – compared with other identified threats such as climate change, urban expansion, military action or civil unrest – impacts upon damage to, or preservation of, archaeological heritage. On the one hand there are concerns about irreparable (and usually avoidable) destruction of archaeological contexts (especially if not metal detecting in the plough zone), wrought by untrained hands disturbing the ground in order to find the source of a metal-detected signal.

Yet, on the other hand we see arguments that metal detecting can have positive effects on archaeological knowledge, such as shedding light on previously unknown artefact types (e.g. Deckers 2012a, Worrell et al 2010) and enabling better understanding of the historic landscape (e.g. Robbins 2014). In jurisdictions where metal detecting is not prohibited on most land, such as England and Wales, arguments have been put forward for supporting a pragmatic stance which, while acknowledging the inherent problems that metal detecting poses for cultural heritage, seeks solutions which mitigate the loss to archaeological knowledge, given the political circumstances (e.g. Bland 2005). This approach can be seen within national and regional systems which work with finders of archaeological objects to ensure that finds data is recorded and that particularly significant material is acquired for local and national museum collections (e.g. in Scotland – see Campbell 2013). In the case of England and Wales, a Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting supports and advises metal detectorists, encouraging them to record their finds and abide by practices such as using an Ordnance Survey map or Global Positioning System to improve accuracy of their records of find spots (Portable Antiquities Scheme, n.d.).

A particularly significant barrier to further research is the ethical constraints of archaeologists engaging with metal detecting communities. Even the metal detector as a tool has become, for some, “the symbol of the search for coins and other metallic objects, disassociated with archaeological methodology and outside of the law” (Temiño and Valdés 2015, 113). This appears, to a large extent, to reflect a conflation occurring between looting and hobbyist metal detecting. Here, I should make a distinction between the two: ‘looters’ in this context are law-breakers who deliberately plunder archaeological sites and other cultural resources, usually so as to find saleable objects. (Although, it is also the case that in certain jurisdictions metal detecting to search for archaeological material is itself illegal, and therefore looting). As others have noted (e.g. Polk 2014), looters often rely on their looting activities as a source of income, and they may be part of a larger network of agents involved in the global trafficking of cultural objects. Looters may use metal detectors, but may have other tools and techniques for finding saleable artefacts, depending on their location and the material from which their ‘prizes’ are made. For the purposes of this paper, I characterize ‘hobbyist metal detectorists’ as non-professional enthusiasts who pursue legal metal detecting as a leisure activity. Even for metal detectorists who do indulge in buying and selling metal-detected artefacts, it is likely that they do not approach their pastime as a serious source of income or ‘profession’ in the way that some looters would do. Based on research thus far (e.g. Thomas 2012b, Koskinen-Koivisto and Thomas, 2016 in press; Herva et al 2016), hobbyist metal detectorist motivations appear to be more diverse than simply the pursuit of profit – with interest in history, personal significance of place, enjoyment of the outdoors, opportunities to socialize at events such as club meet-ups and metal detecting rallies, as well as other impulses coming into play. Furthermore, detectorists have played an active role in certain archaeological research projects, for example within battlefield archaeology (e.g. Ferguson 2013; Cornelison and Smith 2009). Nonetheless, the still common conflation of hobbyist metal detecting with looting has impacted the willingness of many academics to enter into dialogue with these individuals, even though artefact collecting (or artefact finding) enthusiasts often have significant knowledge of the cultural landscapes and material culture that they collect (Hart and Chilton 2015). Reeves (2015, 264) observed that: “For decades, archaeologists have stigmatized and oversimplified the views of metal detectorists”. Reflecting on issues of power within cultural heritage, Winkley (2016, 15) suggested that: “For too long, approaches to metal detecting have been blinkered by agendas about who owns heritage objects, and who is best placed to preserve them for the benefit of the public.” In addition to curtailing many collaborative opportunities between metal detectorists or other artefact-collecting groups and archaeologists, specific interpretations of professional standards and ethics have also limited the objective study of artefact-collecting communities (Pitblado 2014).

It goes without saying that destructive looting of archaeological sites is hugely problematic and, in fact, in most cases constitutes criminal activity. For obvious reasons, the connections of on-site looting to larger organized crime networks (uncovered for example in Cambodia by Mackenzie and Davis, 2014, and reported in Syria – see Brodie 2015, 327-328) are a cause for serious concern. They point not only to the need for greater understanding of the actual workings of such networks (for example the extent to which they are entangled with other organized criminal activities), but also to the confirmation that looting in these circumstances prioritizes financial gain over any kind of interest in the past. (Although arguably end-

collectors of the looted material have some interest, albeit an aesthetic one that disregards, or at least turns a blind eye to, the loss of archaeological information that extraction and trafficking causes). Therefore, it is important to make a clear distinction that looting and hobbyist artefact hunting (including hobbyist metal detecting) are separate activities. Nonetheless, a ‘grey area’ exists between the two. That is to say, while some hobbyist metal detecting enthusiasts may engage in activities such as illegally selling artefacts that they have found or extracting material from sites without permission to do so, they are not on the same part of the ‘searching spectrum’ (see Table 1) as ‘professional’ looters. Within the scope of ‘professional’ looters are also ‘subsistence diggers’, who are usually characterized as operating in conditions of poverty or need rarely seen within Europe (cf. Hardy 2014), and who arguably have little choice other than to loot local sites in the interests of survival (e.g. Matsuda 2005). The ‘searching spectrum’ as I propose here is necessarily simplified and merely illustrative, but creates a basis for beginning to contextualize and understand the differing nuances within artefact hunting and its drivers. It may, for example, serve as a reference point and a means of furthering discussion across different jurisdictions. While subsistence diggers are perhaps less relevant to the understood framework for activity within the European context, they are included so as to indicate the position of this activity in relation to other artefact hunting activities on the spectrum. At a trans-European level, a further complication occurs because differing legislation mean that the same activity may be perfectly legal, permitted under license, or a criminal activity depending on the jurisdiction.

**Table 1:** A proposed ‘searching spectrum’ with Looting (criminal intent) at one end and Hobbyism/Leisure at the other. © Suzie Thomas

Looting (criminal intent) -----		----- Hobbyism/Leisure		
Professional looting		Semi-professional looting		Hobbyist artefact hunting
Looter	Subsistence Digger	Opportunist Artefact Hunter	Hobbyist Artefact Hunter	
<i>May include:</i> Individuals who are part of a larger criminal trafficking network Theft from cultural places, e.g. museums Looting of protected sites Primary motivation is financial gain Possible ‘looting to order’ (Hardy 2015)	<i>May include:</i> Individuals who loot archaeological sites or steal from cultural places due to poverty Individuals who regard ‘their’ cultural heritage as an economic resource to exploit (e.g. Hollowell 2006)	<i>May include:</i> Individuals for whom sale of cultural material is not a primary motivation but they still may trade from time to time Individuals who do not always break the law but do on occasion commit crime e.g. trespass, unauthorized digging, failure to report significant finds	<i>May include:</i> Individuals who are motivated by hobbyist interests, who do not condone looting or the illicit trade in cultural objects Individuals for whom sale of cultural material is not a primary motivation but they still may trade from time to time Individuals who try never to break the law, and may trade primarily for hobbyist purposes (e.g. to enhance their collection or to offload ‘duplicates’)	

As several of the papers in this special issue demonstrate (e.g. Lewis 2016, Dobat and Jensen 2016), from a pragmatic point of view, relationships between trained archaeologists and hobbyist metal detectorists are, and have been for some time, improving in light of schemes that aim to make scientific use of the data that detectorists generate – the most notable of which is the Portable Antiquities Scheme in England and Wales. And yet, continued conflation of hobbyist activities with looting has affected the willingness of some archaeologists to consider dialogue with metal detectorists (Moshenska 2010). The way in which hobbyist metal detectorists understand archaeological heritage may be quite different to that of cultural heritage professionals, and their insights and opinions shed light on non-professional worldviews. Understanding this would be useful for studying alternative ways in which historical and archaeological material can be perceived, valued and utilized, and forms a timely reminder that heritage professionals’ priorities may not necessarily reflect the perspectives of other sections of society (see e.g. Smith and Waterton 2012 for

discussion of the ‘authorized heritage discourse’ and how dominant views have arguably limited discussion of other meanings and values).

It is possible too, that the emergence of recent television programming that appears to celebrate and privilege what might be considered particular kinds of ‘metal detecting approaches’, over scientific archaeological approaches, is causing the schisms once more to widen between archaeologists and metal detectorists. The former President of the Society for American Archaeology, Jeffrey Altschul, observed that the National Geographic Channel’s US-based metal detecting series ‘Diggers’ met with a largely negative reception from the archaeological community: “many archaeologists hated Diggers. To some, it was no more than glorified looting; to others, the main characters made everyone associated with archaeology look silly; still others simply had a visceral reaction of horror” (Altschul 2015, 3). More recently in Europe, the screening in Poland and the UK in 2015 and 2016 of ‘Battlefield Recovery’ (originally named ‘Nazi War Diggers’, and in fact already dropped from broadcast in 2014 by the National Geographic Channel in light of negative feedback – see Thomas 2015a), has generated largely disparaging comments on blogs and other social media. Much of the commentary from archaeologists has focused on the ‘amateur’ status of the programme’s presenters and the lack of ‘expert’ involvement. These comments are completely valid – especially given the ethical concerns around the treatment of human remains on the programme, and even serious health and safety concerns according to some reports (e.g. Brockman 2014). However, the implied juxtaposition of archaeologists (‘expert’, ‘good’, ‘correct’, ‘intelligent’) with metal detectorists (‘amateur’, ‘bad’, ‘wrong’, ‘stupid’), may not bode well for future attempts at engagement and outreach with this particular interest group. It could also be an indicator that further polarization between the two ‘opposing’ communities of interest and practice may be still to come. There are wider societal issues implied here too, concerning perceived elitism versus anti-intellectualism.

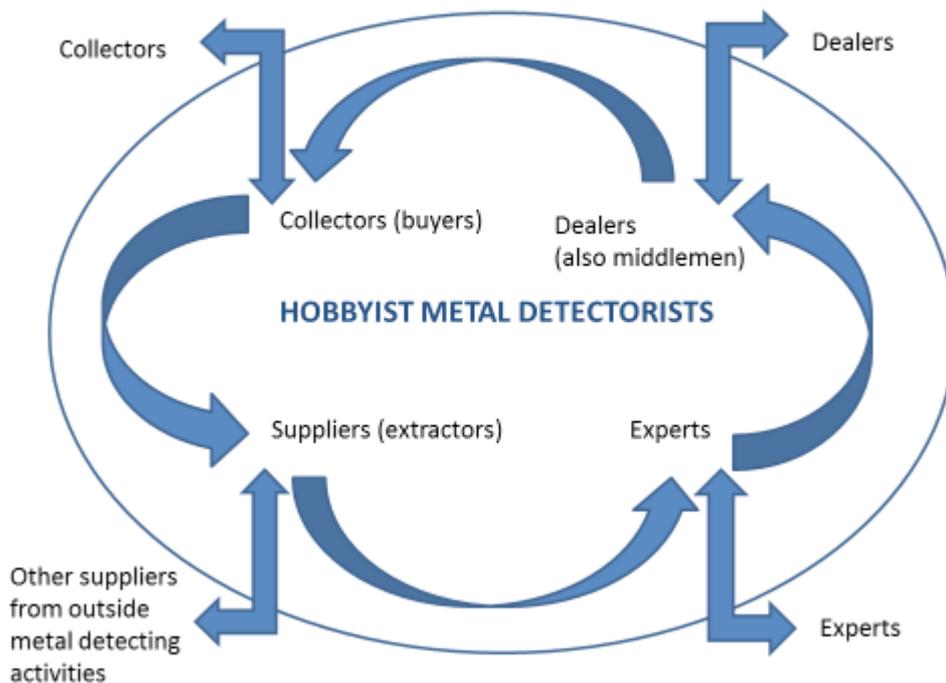
### 3 Trade, Exchange and Collection of Metal-detected Objects

The collecting and trading activities associated with metal detecting is an area of study that would benefit greatly from a transnational perspective. We know from existing studies of transnational networks for the trafficking of cultural objects that there is more or less a matrix of trade ‘levels’. These are characterized by Polk (2014, 212) as falling into four stages involving first ‘extractors’ (e.g. looters or subsistence diggers), then ‘middlemen’ (low-end dealers buying from the extractors), ‘dealers’ (higher end traders that have by this stage usually ‘laundered’ the objects to seem legitimate), and finally ‘buyers’ (typically wealthy collectors, foundations and museums). This has been shown by various studies to vary in its complexity and number of stages. Tsirogiannis (2015) suggests for his analysis of material connected to prosecuted antiquities dealers that objects passed hands many times, often between the same people, in order to obscure the original source before making it to public auction. In another example, although discovering a linear process from site to eventual dealer, Mackenzie and Davis (2014, 722) found in investigating historical trafficking of Cambodian statues that the links between ‘legitimate’ sale and the criminal stages along the trafficking process were “surprisingly few”.

What almost all studies to date have focused on is the so-called ‘high-end’ material; that which is likely to attract the attention of wealthy collectors, large museums and major auction houses. The smaller amounts of money typically demanded for metal detector-sourced material in areas such as northern Europe (notwithstanding rare finds such as the Everbeek Silver Hoard in Belgium – see Deckers 2012b, or the Crosby Garrett Helmet in England – see Worrell 2010) has to date largely escaped scrutiny. That ‘low-end’ objects are also subject to trade and exchange, sometimes drifting into illegal or at least grey areas of activity, is evidenced by countless entries on online auction sites. This is, of course, compounded by varying legislation in Europe affecting what counts as ‘illegal’ in different jurisdictions. Trade is also alluded to in internet discussion forums for metal detectorists, and strongly suggested by the presence of antiques dealers at certain detectorist-oriented events such as metal detecting rallies. Nonetheless, virtually none of the literature on the trade in cultural objects, save speculative suggestions (Thomas 2015b), has fully addressed this ‘low-end’ material. It is likely that the flows, processes, and even actors involved are somewhat different

to those characterized in other cultural object trade matrices (cf. Polk 2014). Because ‘low end’ material is found in far greater quantity than the ‘headline-grabbing’ objects of high financial value, the impact of its trade and movement between borders and owners, and the effect that this trade has for attitudes towards cultural heritage, are likely to be significant. Given the arguments that archaeologists make concerning the ‘informational value’ as opposed to ‘financial value’ to be gleaned from archaeological objects (e.g. Renfrew 2000, 19), the continued obfuscation of what happens to ‘low-end’, but far more common, objects found through metal detecting is regrettable.

Previous research has suggested that metal detecting enthusiasts have a diverse range of motivations for searching for cultural material – undoubtedly the opportunity to trade is one of the motivations for at least some, but it is not the sole motivation (cf. Thomas 2012b). Furthermore, due to their interest in the material that they find and collect, it is likely that many take on more than one role in Polk’s (2014) characterization of the trade in cultural objects. As well as becoming, perhaps simultaneously, extractors, middlemen, dealers and buyers to varying extents, they may take on another role – that of ‘expert’. It is clear from online discussion forums and other observations that the more experienced metal detectorists take on the role of finds ‘expert’, identifying their finds (and others’), advising about legal obligations of the finder and researching different places. Experienced metal detectorists seemingly also gain other types knowledge, less likely to be known by, or of interest to archaeologists, including the ‘going rate’ for particular objects in the collectors’ market, or the efficacy of metal detector brands and models for finding specific objects in certain conditions. Added to the circular schematic which I propose to depict the multiple roles of hobbyist artefact hunters within the trade of metal-detected materials, there are likely also external ‘actors’ for each of the different roles (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Metal detectorists as multiple-role actors in the trade of cultural objects © Suzie Thomas

These multiple external (non-metal detecting) roles may include: collectors of metal-detected and other artefact-hunted material who are not metal detectorists themselves; dealers who buy and sell metal-detected material; experts on finds identification and other particulars from outside of the hobby (e.g. archaeologists, museum curators, or dealers), and other suppliers of connected material which has not

been found through metal detecting. An example of this last case might be someone looking to sell objects originally obtained via a relative. Not only do the various roles adopted by the actors in this proposed schematic need verifying or challenging through robust empirical evidence, but we also need to identify clearly the channels through which their engagements and transactions are enabled. For example, to what extent is trading through online auctions a key method, as opposed to face-to-face sales, physical auctions, or ‘invisible’ transactions (through platforms such as private messaging)? And exactly how transnational is the trade: do the different countries involved fluctuate at different times (e.g. during metal detecting ‘rally season’)? How many countries within Europe can be involved in the movement of an object from supplier to collector? Do collectors living in countries where metal detecting is more prohibited contact suppliers in countries where metal detecting is easier to do? Does the trade of European metal-detected artefacts stay within Europe, or does it move more globally, and if so, where does it go?

## 4 The Role of Metal Detecting in Damaging or Preserving Cultural Heritage

Metal detecting ventures that interact with archaeological contexts, as opposed to, for example, beachcombing (searching for modern coinage on beaches) is archaeologically destructive. As with any invasive investigation of an archaeological site (such as excavation, the removal of objects discovered with metal detectors is ultimately a form of either partial or full destruction of an archaeological context. Even material contained within the plough zone arguably has the scope to indicate the nature of objects further below the ground if analysed properly (Dunnell and Simek 1995). However, unlike in controlled, scientific archaeological investigations, it is far less likely that a full record of that context, including soil samples and other particulars, will have been made alongside the invasive work of metal detecting and artefact retrieval. As a result, much of the criticism of metal detecting activities has focused on the inevitable removal of objects, with apparent disregard for the resulting loss of archaeological information and the use of sub-standard methods, from the point of view of archaeologists (see for example Fowler 2007). The deleterious aspects of the actions of hobbyist artefact hunters, particularly using metal detectors, has been discussed in the literature for many years (e.g. Kobyliński and Szpanowski 2009, Palmer 1981).

Despite these very real concerns, the extent to which metal detecting has an impact on either preservation efforts or actual damage to archaeological cultural heritage remains vague. There are no clear statistics showing how the scale of damage caused by metal detecting compares to other threats to cultural heritage. In the 1990s, English Heritage estimated that the percentage of total damage caused to ancient monuments in England by metal detecting (compared to other damaging activities such as agriculture or mining) could be as low as 1%, although they acknowledged that this was likely an underestimate and based on very little data (Darvill and Fulton 1998, 139). The few estimations on the numbers of hobbyist metal detectorists that exist are most often constrained by national borders, which does not necessarily reflect the transnational activities of metal detectorists (for example through ‘metal detecting tourism’, or through the trading networks speculated above). These estimations can vary widely: for England and Wales for example, estimates have ranged from at least 5,800 (Redmayne and Woodward 2013), 8,500 (Bland 2009, 71), through to 10,100 (Thomas 2012b, 58), while for other countries such as Norway (Rasmussen 2014b, 212-213), researchers acknowledge that figures are still unknown. Alongside this paucity in reliable evidence regarding numbers of active hobbyists, there is a need for clearer data on the amount of time individuals and groups spend metal detecting.

As well as deepening our understanding of metal detectorist motivations and perceptions of cultural heritage, coordinated transnational research would also enhance or challenge assertions made as to the efficacy of different approaches in controlling metal detecting. Understanding the actual effect of certain policy decisions, such as engagement and outreach strategies, soft and hard laws, and media campaigns, could better inform future approaches – again crucially based on evidence, rather than espoused but rarely thoroughly tested theories. Do tighter laws really result in reduced numbers of metal detectorists? Or is it the case that by legalizing metal detecting it is then easier to regulate and – vitally – to know what artefacts

are being uncovered and from where? Does the current push for greater openness of scientific data and dissemination actually stimulate the market for certain types of artefact?

## 5 Ways Forward

Without doubt, there has already been a significant increase in the extent to which archaeologists are prepared to engage with metal detecting enthusiasts (e.g. Lewis 2013, Reeves 2015, Stine and Shumate 2015), especially as a means of diversifying archaeological methodologies and fieldwork participation. Yet many discussions are still dominated either by a focus on the archaeological output of such engagements (rather than on the behaviour and attitudes of the metal detectorists themselves), or on ethical and ideological considerations concerning engagement with such groups and individuals. The limitations of the lenses through which researchers have previously viewed and engaged with metal detecting creates an opportunity to carry out research that challenges current conventions for understanding the world through alternative perspectives, and challenges previous studies of ‘outsider’ (sometimes ‘pseudo-’ or ‘alternative’) archaeology, which so far to a large extent have been dismissive and condescending (cf. Wilson 2012).

I do not necessarily actively advocate metal detecting through what I propose here, nor do I aim to underplay or gloss over the damage that such activity can cause. Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear to me that, without placing these concerns to one side and approaching the study of metal detectorists free from preconceptions or ontological frameworks, it is much more difficult to study metal detecting communities in an objective manner and to engage deeply with metal detectorist frameworks, values and perceptions.

There is clear awareness of the existence of hobbyist metal detecting and other forms of artefact hunting, as this present topical issue demonstrates. Yet the academic discourse around the phenomenon remains fragmented to date – in part due to the often-clandestine nature of metal detecting, and exacerbated by the lack of engagement with large sections of metal detecting communities. There is an urgent need for robust research that verifies or challenges current estimations concerning scale and impact. Knowing these figures – along with a clearer indication of the amounts of time that hobbyists spend metal detecting – would be a major contribution to the field of cultural heritage management and for legislation.

Deeper, trans-European research and the development of a more coherent network of researchers looking at metal detecting-related issues in their respective countries, would allow for us to collect robust, evidence-based data and to transform the state of the art in this field of study. It would replace what are largely *assumptions* about metal detecting and its enthusiasts with *knowledge*. The ethical implications of researching an often-criticized community would challenge and question academic authority and perspectives concerning what is important in the context of cultural and especially archaeological heritage, and how to understand and reconcile personal and alternative points of view. This provides an opportunity to debate perceptions of cultural heritage within the context of a specific community of interest that presents ideological and ethical challenges to archaeologists.

From an ethnographic perspective, the study of especially ‘serious leisure’ hobbyists (cf. Stebbins 1996) engaged in metal detecting contributes to our understanding of the worldviews that metal detectorists employ in realizing their hobby, as well as the ways in which their opinions of the material culture and historic environments with which they engage affect their daily activities and perspectives. Understanding different perceptions concerning the material remains of the past uncovers issues that relate to class, privilege, power, education, socio-economic status, gender, and possibly also ethnicity.

On a broader scale, it would be possible to describe and characterize the networks of actors and flow of portable cultural objects involved in the trade of metal-detected material. Coordinating and networking research and researchers in Europe potentially also leads to later opportunities to link in research from even further afield. Documenting and theorizing the trade and movement of metal detector-sourced ‘low-end’ cultural property would be a major contribution to our understanding of this particular market for cultural objects, which has long been overlooked in favour of the ‘high-end’ and arguably more visible antiquities and cultural objects usually studied.

Finally, understanding the values placed on metal detecting by its enthusiasts, including their views

concerning the consumption of cultural heritage as tradable objects, the law, and personal responsibility towards cultural heritage preservation, would present an invaluable opportunity for the development of more effective legislation and more pragmatic policies towards cultural heritage management. All of these recommendations are achievable, and should be research priorities over the coming years.

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