Searching for answers: a survey of metal-detector users in the UK

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Abstract: The relationships between archaeologists and metal-detector users are often more complex than is realised, partly because little has been published to date on the dynamics that exist, though there is more about the artefactual information that has been gleaned through these relationships (see e.g. www.finds.org.uk/database). It is crucial to understand the drivers behind metal-detector users' activities, if archaeologists are to be able to communicate and interact meaningfully with this significant community concerning the treatment of archaeological heritage. Attendance at a selection of some of the most controversial of metal-detecting events in England, metal-detecting rallies, proved an important opportunity to access a large number of metal-detector users, and a chance to carry out a survey that focused on the metal-detector users themselves, rather than the archaeology or their impact on it. The ways in which rallies in England and Wales are conducted are the subject of continued debate between different organisations, with the Council for British Archaeology, for example, planning a guidance note for the promotion of archaeologically good practice. However, this paper focuses more on individual metal-detector users who go to such rallies, and what they can tell us about the opinions and drivers of metal-detector users in the UK in contemporary times.

Keywords: metal detecting; metal-detector users; United Kingdom; portable antiquities; treasure

Introduction

Archaeologists and metal-detector users do not always see eye to eye (e.g. Thackray 2001). In the UK, as in other countries where metal detecting occurs, such as Poland (Kobyliński and Szpanowski 2009) and South Africa (Becker 2009), this issue is particularly significant to the heritage sector due to the potential, both for archaeological damage but also for collaboration, that the metal-detecting community presents. In England and Wales, uniquely, this latter potential is explicitly explored through the actions of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS – see British Museum n.d.), which conscientiously seeks not to discourage metal detecting per se, but to encourage the responsible recording of metal-detected finds by hobbyists with its network of archaeologists known as Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs).

However, to what extent does this initiative, along with other factors such as more negative experiences of archaeologist–metal-detector-user interaction, directly affect the behaviour and views of metal-detector users in the UK? Understanding the views and experiences of metal-detector users, rather than just the impact of the discoveries that they make, is crucial to sustaining and improving the relationship of metal-detector users with archaeologists and other heritage professionals.

This paper presents results from questionnaire surveys and observations of individual metal-detector users at selected metal-detecting rallies (e.g. Figure 1), carried out as part of doctoral research investigating the relationships between archaeologists and metal-detector users in England and Wales (Thomas 2009a). The surveys, which included as subjects metal-detector users from other parts of the British Isles as well, such as Scotland and the Isle of Man, were carried out by the author and student volunteers from the International Centre for Cultural Heritage Studies and the Department of Archaeology, Newcastle University.

Four rallies were attended: Snape and Thornborough in North Yorkshire in 2006, and Durobrivae (Water Newton) and Nene Valley in Cambridgeshire, in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Whether the commercial nature of the rallies visited affected the range of responses gained from the interviewees cannot be known in this analysis. Additionally, since the survey was of a sample of participants at these specific rallies, metal-detector users not at those rallies, including those who never attend rallies by definition, could not be included in the research. The latter may be important as their views and backgrounds could be different from those of metal-detector users who attend rallies. For example, there could be ideological or simply practical reasons why they choose not to attend.

Figure 1. A student volunteer interviewing a metal-detector user at the Nene Valley metal detecting rally, August 2008. Photograph: Gregory Jackson.

General statistics

Not all the questionnaire questions are presented in this paper; however, main findings are first summarised, observations are made and conclusions given. Some 262 metal-detector users were interviewed in total, of whom 92.4% (242) were male, seemingly corroborating the impression given by metal-detecting publications such as The Searcher and Treasure Hunting that the hobby is primarily, but not exclusively, male in its demographic.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the age range of the respondents. The majority were in the medium-to-high age ranges, indicating that the majority of the respondents were what might be classed as 'middle aged'. These findings, with a further 33 (12.6%) respondents over 65, indicate that the metal-detecting population seemed mostly to be of middle-to-old age.

In addition, almost half of the respondents (126, 48.1%) had been metal detecting for over 10 years (Figure 3). When the age ranges were cross-tabulated with the number of years spent metal detecting, further observations were made. Although there is some variation, the general trend is for older metal-detector users to have been metal detecting for longer. The correlation between the age and number of years metal detecting is illustrated in the dot graph in Figure 4. This shows the mode (most frequent) number of years spent metal detecting by each age group; in other words, the most common response of how many years respondents in each of the age range groups had been metal detecting. It indicates that respondents in the older age ranges (35 and over) had been metal detecting for ten years or more.

However, metal-detector users in the age range 25–34 were more likely to have been active in the hobby for less than a year. This suggests it is more likely for a metal-detector user to take up the hobby at a younger age, rather than later on in life. Significantly, this may suggest that the hobby is in decline, since older hobbyists are less likely to have come to the hobby later in life, but are much more numerous than the younger hobbyists. However, this may be misleading. The numbers of years varied in each answer category, and with hindsight, the questionnaires should have allowed for more specific response options going beyond the ten-year mark. There seemed to be few new or younger metal-detector users emerging, regardless of whether they then decided to continue with the hobby. John Fargher (2007, p. 24), a regular contributor to The Searcher metal-detecting magazine, has made a similar observation, asking his metal-detecting readership: 'where is the next generation of detector users going to come from?'

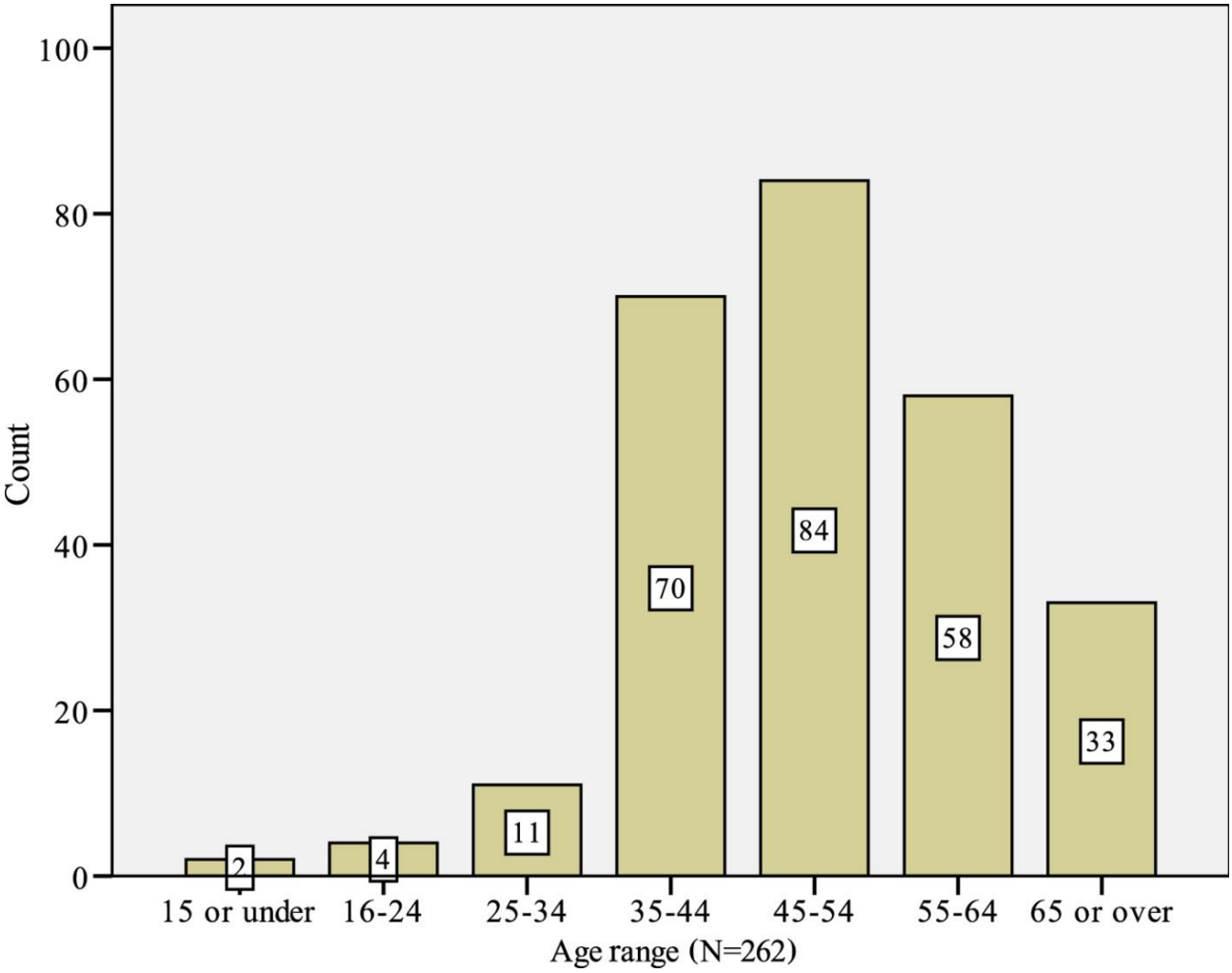

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents per age range category.

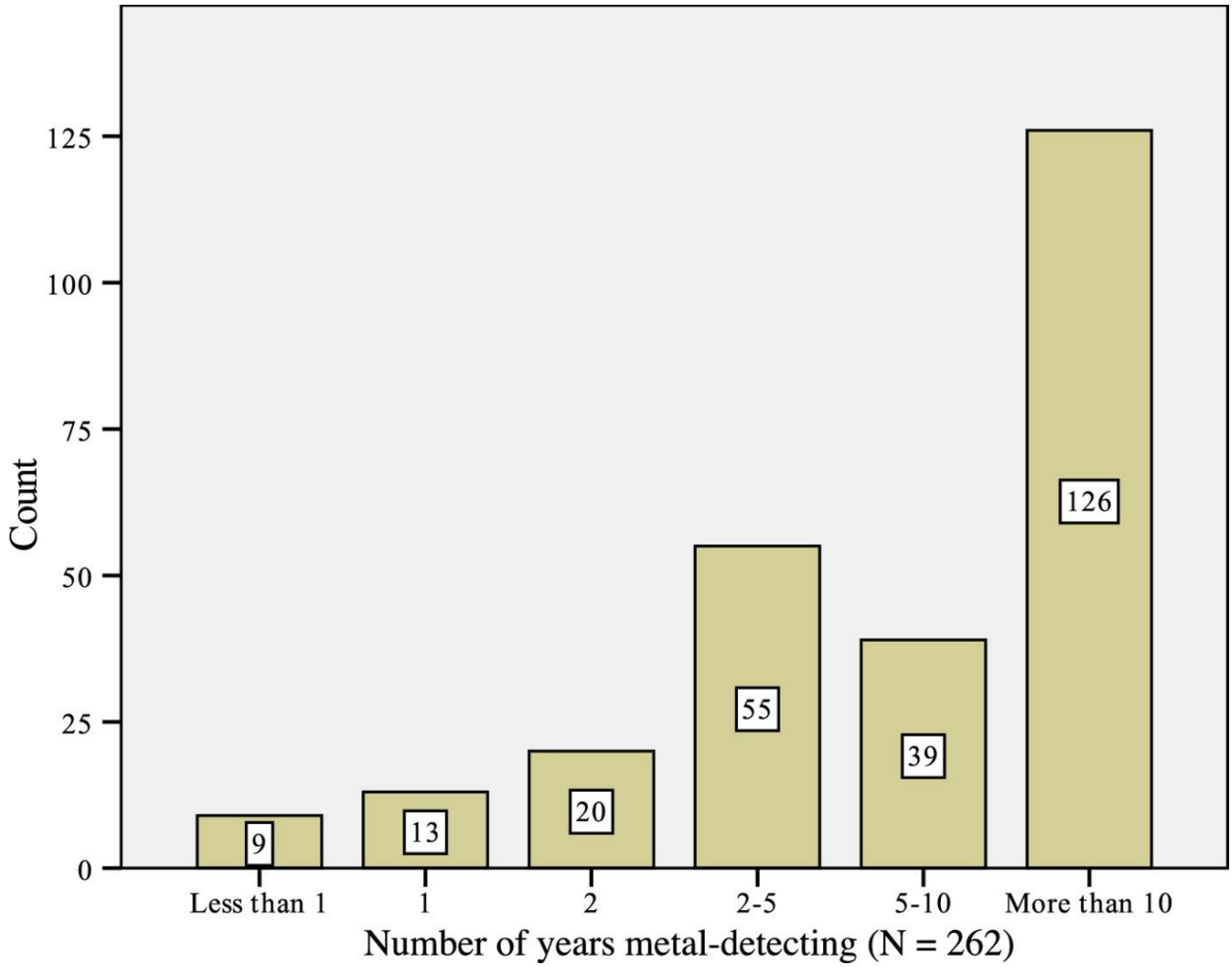

Figure 3. Number of years respondents had been metal detecting.

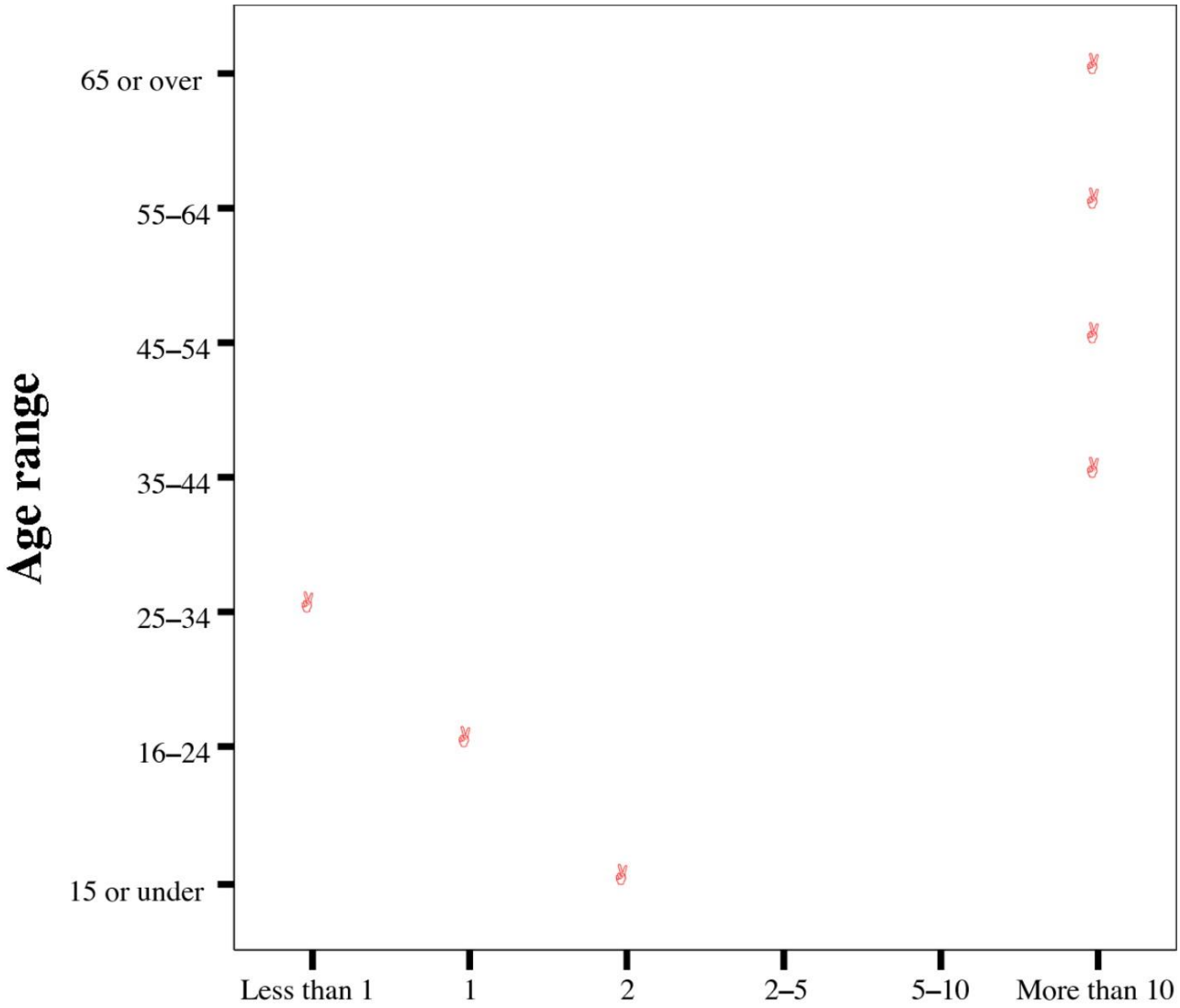

Figure 4. Mode number of years spent metal-detecting per age group.

Motivation to metal detect

The responses regarding what first interested respondents in metal detecting are shown in Figure 5, where the popularity of each response option is illustrated. Response option 8a, 'interest in the past', was the most popular, with 54.4% (142) of respondents claiming that this initially motivated them. The least-popular response option was 8b, 'interest in finding items of value' (20, 7.7%). A little less than a third (73, 28%) of respondents were motivated by the pleasure of finding things, regardless of their age or value, indicating that this 'discovery' aspect, which may also form part of the motivation in positive responses for 8a and 8b, is significant.

The extra details given for the response category 8f, 'other', varied. Therefore, the 74 (28.5%) 8f responses are not quantified here by type, but examples are cited to give an impression of the broadness of information that the 'other' category represents. For example, four respondents had moved onto metal detecting after being involved in bottle hunting. Another was interested in the electronic technology.

Media sources were also cited as motivations to metal detect; one had started metal detecting after watching the television programme Time Team, and two others said they had read newspaper articles about metal detecting, while another had picked up a metal detecting magazine in a shop.

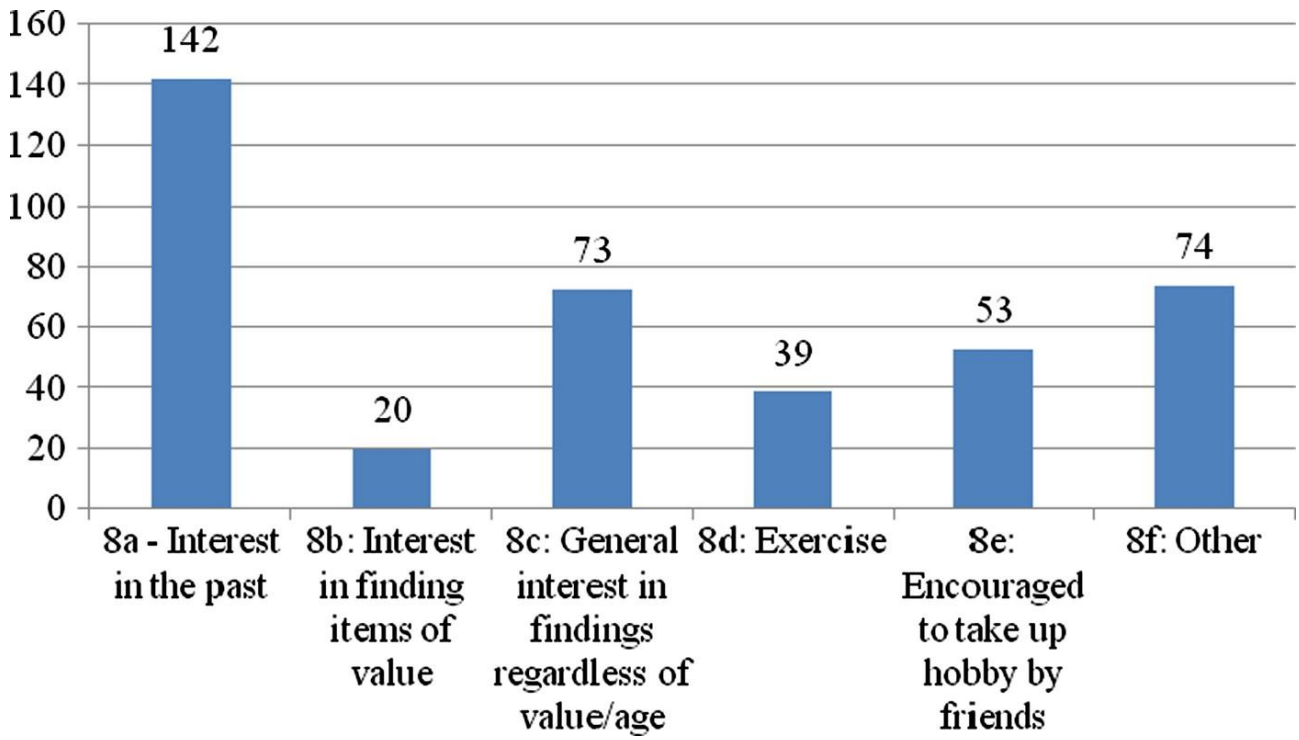

Figure 5. Count for each response option.

Find-recording practices

When asked whether they recorded their finds (see Figure 6), 170 (65.6%), a majority of the respondents, said that they recorded their finds with the Portable Antiquities Scheme, an initiative across England and Wales encouraging metal-detector users and others to record their finds. Only a tiny proportion, two respondents (0.8%), said that they recorded directly with the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) or Historic Environment Record (HER). The results showed that 5.4% (14) of the sample had used the United Kingdom Detector Finds Database (UKDFD), a metal-detector user-run independent online database.

A reasonable proportion of the 'other' responses dealt with find-reporting arrangements in different parts of the British Isles – in the case of the rallies visited, individuals detecting in Scotland and the Isle of Man (11, 4.2% total). The next-highest proportions indicated that some form of recording takes place at either the club or the individual level, without necessarily consulting or including archaeologists.

A further 15.6% of respondents (40) said that they never recorded finds, indicating that a significant number do not share finds information. This suggests, dependent upon how representative the sample is, that there may still be a significant proportion of metal-detector users not engaging with PAS. It is unclear, however, whether this is a conscious decision to resist initiatives (for example indicating a distrust of PAS), lack of knowledge about recording options, lack of knowledge about the arguments in favour of recording finds (with some perhaps feeling that their own finds were not of archaeological interest), or even inertia – with recording finds perhaps seeming to be too much effort for no tangible benefit.

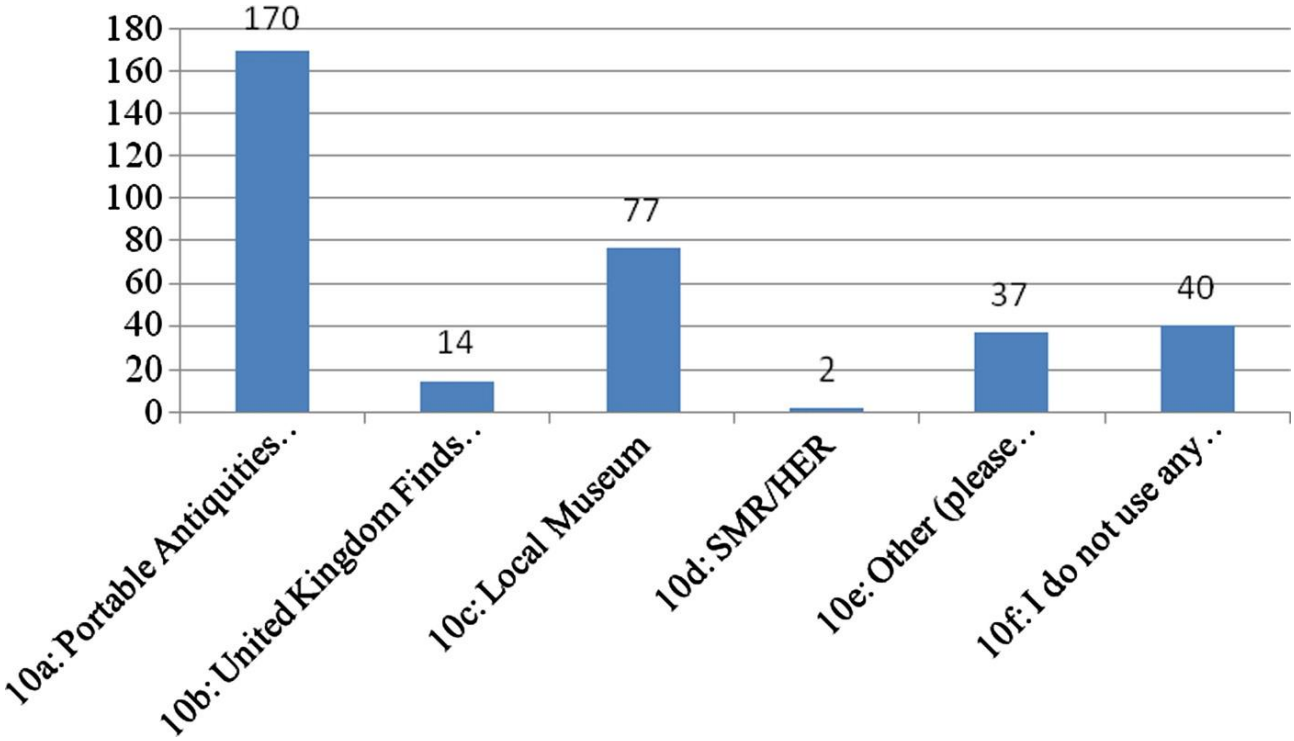

Figure 6. Details of how/whether respondents recorded their finds.

Working with archaeologists

Just over one-third (95, 36.5%) of respondents said that they had worked with archaeologists before but the majority (165, 63.5%) said that they had not. In this question, 'work' referred to collaborating on field projects, rather than recording finds with such as Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) – the regional archaeologists of PAS. Those that had worked with archaeologists before were then asked to give details of their experiences. To summarise, 33 respondents (12.7% of the total, or 34.7% of those that had worked with archaeologists), specifically described their experiences as positive or mostly positive. In comparison, 13 specifically described a bad experience (5% of the whole total or 13.7% of those that had worked with archaeologists). Eleven of the respondents that had not worked with archaeologists before (4.2% of the total sample) specifically said that they would like to do so. Respondents also described the type of work with which they were involved, ranging from simply marking find spots at metal-detecting rallies through to metal-detecting surveys as part of an archaeological field project, detecting spoil heaps on excavations, and even digging. Most of the descriptions given did not specify a positive or negative experience.

The respondents that described positive experiences did not usually elaborate beyond general comments about enjoyment or interest. One respondent described a positive experience working with the crew of the television series Time Team, while three other respondents described negative experiences with the same organisation, indicating that personal experiences of the same sort of activity can, and do, vary!

The negative experiences tended to elicit more details from the respondents describing them, and tended to describe negative attitudes of archaeologists. For example, one respondent commented, 'we are the enemy unfortunately'. Another issue that came up, with several negative experiences described, but also from one respondent who described their experience as mostly positive, was contact after the event or project. Several respondents felt that they were excluded from information about projects that they had worked on, and on some occasions had been promised site reports that never materialised. The results indicated that, while the majority of experiences of working with archaeologists were positive, those who

had had negative experiences were more inclined to elaborate on why. That Chitty and Edwards (2004, p. 44) found similar results, with negative comments more likely to be represented in the responses, even if these were 'not numerically representative of the majority view', indicates that this was a phenomenon that could perhaps be expected.

Destination of finds

Forty-four respondents (17.1%) said that they sold their finds, with 214 (82.9%) claiming not to do so. This number might be lower than the actual percentage that sold their finds, as one respondent denied selling their finds, only for a family member later to tell interviewers that the respondent had actually sold artefacts at that very rally to an antiquities dealer! This perhaps relates to the tendency of many respondents to surveys, especially if interviewed face to face, to give answers that they imagine that the interviewers wish to hear, although attempts were also made to avoid including leading questions (see Kvale 1996, p.157). When asked for details of how they sold their finds, some respondents gave more than one example.

Seven respondents said that they sometimes sold some of their finds privately to friends or to members of their metal-detecting clubs, and one respondent said that they had operated in the past as an antiques dealer and had sold finds in that capacity. Five respondents said that they had used online auctions such as eBay, but the most popular way of selling finds was to coin and antiquity dealers, with 15 respondents. A further three respondents said that they had sold items with a dealer acting as an agent for them (selling through rather than to a dealer), showing 18 respondents (40.9% of those that sold finds) involved dealers in the process.

Interestingly, three respondents said that they had sold through Treasure or Scottish Treasure Trove cases, and so perhaps did not belong in this statistic, since these 'sales' were through legal obligation and were actually rewards. They have not been removed from the statistics for this question since they are based on the responses that they chose to give. It is perhaps telling of respondents' views towards Scottish Treasure Trove laws and the Treasure Act of 1996 that they apparently interpreted their declaring these items, and being compensated, as a decision to sell, rather than as a legal obligation. Alternatively, they indicate a lack of understanding of the different legal systems.

A majority of 167, or 65%, had not donated finds to a museum, although of these, six remarked that they would consider doing so in the future. One of the respondents remarked that they were planning to donate to a museum because of a positive experience with an FLO. The 90 respondents (35%) who had donated finds to museums were asked to give further details. Most involved donating different (mostly metal) artefacts to their local museums. Nine of the positive responses were in fact Treasure or Scottish Treasure Trove cases, which would, as noted above, be cases of legal obligation to hand over the find to a museum if requested, most likely with a reward, rather than a voluntary decision to donate an object free of charge.

Perhaps this was a misunderstanding of the question. Alternatively, it might indicate that they took ownership of the situation by implying that it was a decision to donate rather than that they were required to do so by law, or it was a misunderstanding of the Treasure and Treasure Trove processes. One respondent said that they had actually donated an item of Treasure to a museum, waiving their right to the reward. The respondent expressed dissatisfaction that the museum had not given them a certificate to recognise this fact, even though one had been promised.

Interviewers invited respondents to make extra comments about any issues already discussed in the questionnaire, or to bring up any other concerns or comments. Seventy-four (27.1%) of the respondents

chose to add extra comments. The issues varied, from general comments about the rally that they were attending, for example that they were enjoying it, or that it did not seem well organised, through to personal views on selling artefacts – three making the point that they would never sell. Several respondents made general comments about the relationships between archaeologists (or 'archies') and metal-detector users. Of these comments, some of the responses demonstrated that while respondents hoped for even further cooperation, relationships were perceived to have improved in recent years. Others highlighted that trust was still an issue on both sides.

Observations

The findings of the survey regarding gender bias towards males reflect other literature that has implied male bias in the metal-detecting hobby. For example, all of the metal-detector users featured in Faulkner's (2003) metal-detecting publication were male. Conversations experienced during the research phase, and observations from the student volunteers at the Durobrivae (Water Newton) rally (Figure 7), also acknowledged the male bias. This may indicate an appeal of the hobby more specifically to males, which in turn, given the age of many of the participants, as well as the length of time that many of them had been detecting, may be indicative of the nature of gender and hobbies. It may even be related to an engendered interest in the sciences (bearing in mind the technological dimension of metal detectors), with research suggesting a male gender bias in achievement at schools in the sciences (Murphy 2002, p. 190). The fact that many metal-detecting clubs convene their meetings in traditionally male-dominated environments such as working men's clubs may also account for the male domination of the hobby, with the 'social capital' for entering such an environment, that is the resource of networks of common values (Field 2003, p. 1), stacked in favour of males.

Gender may also have been an issue affecting the results collected by the researcher and the student volunteers. Comments from student volunteers and reflections by the researcher after attending the Durobrivae (Water Newton) metal-detecting rally indicated that all felt that the level of friendliness, and possibly the inclination to share information, might have been increased by the fact that the researcher and student volunteers were all female and reasonably young. This was also experienced on informal club visits in the North East by the author, where gender or age may also have had an effect on the level of interest taken in the research project and on the willingness to offer information. This again has implications in terms of social capital, suggesting that it may be easier for a younger, female researcher to enter an environment dominated by older men, since certain social etiquettes concerning politeness, and even chivalry, may come into play. Thus, greater social capital may, it can be speculated, have been bestowed upon the researcher than had they been an older male.

Figure 7. The Durobrivae (Water Newton) rally, August 2007. Photograph: Suzie Thomas.

More detailed research could help to verify or challenge hypotheses about the periods in time in which metal detecting was most popular, for example, cross-referencing with sales records from metal-detector manufacturers and outlets. In future research, for example, if the exact years in which individuals took up metal detecting could be plotted from enough respondents, indications of the years in which the hobby was most popular could be more clearly mapped. Such a study would ideally also include individuals that no longer metal detect but who did in the past. It is hypothesised that there would be a peak in people taking up metal detecting in the late 1970s, which would correspond with archival evidence (Thomas 2009a). Fluctuations could also be detected, for example any surges in interest in the hobby following high-profile discoveries such as the recently publicised Staffordshire Hoard, or the Middleham Jewel discovered by metal-detector users in North Yorkshire in 1985 (Wyman and Havers 2005, p. 95). Further exploration into the socio-economic backgrounds of metal-detector users, both historically and in the present day, would also shed more light on the possible impact of political and economic factors, such as the dramatic rise in unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. BBC News 2008a). It is highly likely that there is a correlation between political change (and the impact this had on unemployment levels) and the rise in seemingly 'get rich quick' hobbies such as metal detecting, but further research, including detailed interviews of metal-detector users active both then and now, would give more detail to this hypothesis. It would also indicate whether the demographic of metal-detector users had changed at all in the past few decades.

If there are, at most, 202 metal-detecting clubs in England and Wales, an estimate can be made of the overall total of metal-detector users. This is based on the mean number of members per club being 50

(Thomas 2009a, p. 226). This would give a maximum of 10,100 active metal-detector users in clubs or societies in England and Wales alone (but more likely fewer, as some are members of more than one club). PAS' (2006a, p. 140) lower estimate of 186 existing clubs in 2006 would make the maximum total number of individual club members approximately 9,300. Scottish, Northern Irish, Manx, and Channel Island clubs, which are known through the Federation of Independent Detectorists (FID) and National Council for Metal Detecting (NCMD) websites, gave a further nine clubs for the whole of the UK. If they also have an average membership of around 50, this would take the highest total estimates of club members in the whole of the UK up to between 9,750 and 10,550 (the higher estimate based on the higher estimated total of metal-detecting clubs, the lower based on PAS club numbers).

However, these estimates exclude non-members, and as 39.8% of respondents to the individual survey said that they did not belong to a metal-detecting club or society, this might represent a significant figure. It is possible that the non-member percentage recorded in this survey is higher than for the entire population. If one speculates that non-club metal-detector users may be attracted to metal-detecting rallies as opportunities to search, since most clubs organise their own weekend searches with permission from landowners, it might make sense for more non-members to attend rallies than are present in the entire population. Further research, perhaps through more extensive survey work, would be necessary to verify this theory, and it may turn out not to be true; the percentage in this research may be accurate or may even be lower than proportion of the whole population.

If the survey's results regarding membership of clubs or societies are actually indicative of the total population of metal-detector users, then the estimated club membership population of 9,750 or 10,550 is 60.2% of the total number of metal-detector users for the whole UK. Thus an absolute total number of all UK metal-detector users might then be estimated to be somewhere between 16,196 and 17,525. For England and Wales, the total figure might be at the very most between 15,449 and 16,777, indicating that the majority of UK-based metal-detector users are active in England and Wales. However, several of the individual metal-detector users interviewed were members of more than one club, something also acknowledged by PAS in annual report statistics (PAS 2006b, p. 121). A very rough estimate based on the percentages of club members and non-members suggested by the survey might thus put the population, certainly in 2006, of regular metal-detector users in the whole of the UK at around 12,000 to 14,000. This estimate includes an allowance for duplicate club numbers (where individuals are members of more than one club). It is less than half of Dobinson and Denison's (1995) estimate of around 30,000 metal-detector users, in England alone, 11 years earlier. Thus, even the most optimistic of estimates for the current metal-detector user population suggests that the number has fallen from what it may have been in previous decades. If this were combined with research into the points at which metal detecting was at its most popular, more could be said about the growth, decline or fluctuation of the metal-detecting population over time.

The suggestion in the survey of a decline in metal-detector user numbers also contradicts a recent news report (BBC News 2008b) that the popularity of metal detecting is in fact growing. Indeed, responses to the survey of metal-detecting clubs and societies (see Thomas 2009a, pp. 225–236) also implied that membership numbers had increased to some extent in 29 out of 53 cases. This possibly contradicts the information from the individuals' survey. However, even the most generous estimates of metal-detector users in the UK are significantly lower than Dobinson and Denison's results in 1995, and this may raise questions about the accuracy of Dobinson and Denison's estimate, or else indicate a fairly dramatic decline in numbers.

There has certainly been an increase of finds reported in recent years, as reported in the above BBC News report and others, and an increase in the number of metal-detector users engaging with organisations such as PAS, demonstrated by the results shown in PAS annual reports. This does not necessarily indicate,

however, that the individuals that are new to working with PAS and other organisations are also new to the metal-detecting hobby. It most likely indicates instead that PAS is becoming more successful in engaging with the existing metal-detecting community. The results from the questions concerning recording finds also support the suggestion that PAS engages with a high proportion of metal-detector users. The questionnaire, as well as the survey of metal-detecting clubs (Thomas 2009a), suggested that the UKDFD is used much less frequently than PAS.

The total number of individual metal-detector users using PAS for 2005–2006 is 3,439 recording as individuals, with some 5,702 individuals belonging to clubs visited by FLOs (PAS 2006b, pp. 120–121), but not necessarily opting to record during those visits. Although the total population of metal-detector users is unknown, even the lower-end estimates of around 12,000 metal-detector users in the UK implies that the actual proportion using PAS may be lower than half of the total population, given that the numbers in clubs contacted as listed in the PAS report (2006b) are very approximate. This implies a positive skew in the survey results, where 65.6% of individual metal-detector users interviewed said that they recorded with PAS.

This result opens the door for further research, as other factors might be at play, such as a reduced activity of some club members (who perhaps, for example, still attend club meetings but are less active in actual metal detecting for whatever reasons), or other factors yet to be investigated. However, the above result is also supported by a further 86.5% of surveyed club representatives (another questionnaire survey carried out as part of the wider doctoral research – see Thomas 2009a), who said that they recorded with PAS. If one allows for the number of UK metal-detector users who are not resident in England or Wales (for example an estimated 340 in Scotland, based on average membership numbers calculated from the metal-detecting clubs survey), the proportion grows. Interestingly, 13 of the Scottish respondents in the individuals' survey said that they used PAS, even though it does not operate in Scotland. They presumably record with PAS when they attend metal-detecting rallies in England or Wales, although it is also possible that they interact with the FLOs whose English regions border Scotland or due to other, non-rally searches carried out by Scottish metal-detector users in England or Wales on other occasions.

The financial motivation of finding something valuable, including the sales of finds, was another theme explored by the questionnaires. As this is a sensitive question, in terms of its potential connection to the arguments made against treasure hunting and its links with sales of antiquities and damage of the archaeological heritage (e.g. Hobbs 2003, p. 18, Skeates 2000, pp. 39–56), reluctance to respond openly to archaeologists asking them about their hobby might be understandable. It ties in with observations regarding how individuals might respond to certain questions, such as the 'barrier of self-incrimination' (Oppenheim 2003, pp. 211–212). In relation to the question of what motivated metal-detector users, only 20 (7.7%) responded that they were interested in finding items of value, which is less than half of the number of metal-detector users that admitted to selling artefacts. This might indicate reluctance to admit to financial gain's being a motivation, but may also indicate that a metal-detector user might well go on to sell finds without this being a primary motivation for taking up the hobby. Since most artefacts found in the UK are, relatively, not very valuable financially, the occasional sales of cheaper artefacts do not necessarily reflect 'finding items of value' as a motivation to metal-detect.

The frequency of respondents who sold finds through processes involving coin and antiquity dealers mirrors Montalbano's (2007, p. 78) findings regarding the sale of unreported Treasure, that many more metal-detector users may be increasingly using this 'real world' selling method rather than online salerooms. However, even if one allows that some lots displayed through auction sites are not from metal-detecting sources, the online market is still considerable.

The most popular response concerning motivations to metal-detect was 'interest in the past', which, rather than indicating a financial motive, demonstrates that a large proportion of metal-detector users instead have a desire to access heritage in a hands-on manner. This fascination with accessing the past through the artefacts that they discover suggests a particular attachment developed by metal-detector users to their finds, which was something observed at the metal-detecting rallies and at visits to clubs where metal-detector users frequently were keen to show off their finds.

Blaydon Search and Recovery Society, like many clubs, arrange a 'Find of the Month' competition (Figure 8), which the author was asked to judge on one occasion, with the instruction not simply to choose the most financially valuable object as the winner.

Metal-detector users may therefore be applying both etic and emic categorization to their finds, in terms of the identification and classification of objects and, in some cases, the financial value, as well as attaching very personal and current meanings to certain artefacts through the act of having found the artefacts in the ground themselves. An interest in connecting with the past, held by many metal-detector users, also demonstrates the potential to increase inclusion within archaeology, and community archaeology in particular, commented on elsewhere (e.g. Thomas 2009b, p.9). In fact, those that had collaborated with archaeologists appeared more likely to describe the experience as positive rather than negative, although the majority of those interviewed at the rallies had not worked with archaeologists before.

In addition, the rate of donations of finds to museums, while not something that a majority of those interviewed had done, indicated a reasonable number of metal-detector users had nonetheless been involved in this way – yet another type of interaction with heritage professionals. The issue with a small number of individual respondents of classifying Treasure cases as an example either of a sale or of a donation was discussed above. Possibly, it indicates a deliberate misinterpretation to give them ownership of the situation, or a misunderstanding of the compulsory nature of reporting Treasure. The anticipated bequests of metal-detector user collections to museums in years to come may cause storage-capacity issues. This issue has been discussed at conferences such as the All that Glitters conference in Cardiff in 2004, as well as in some informal conversations between the author and museum professionals. That metal-detector users may eventually leave their collections to museums rather than to family members may display a notion that ultimately the artefacts 'should' be in museums. On the other hand, it could also indicate apathy towards metal detecting in younger generations, which would support the indications in this paper that metal-detecting numbers may be in decline. As Fargher (2007, p. 24) paraphrased his wife commenting on what will happen to his collection of metal-detected finds if he decides to leave them to his children:

> What shall I tell the kids to do with all your metal detecting junk when you pop your clogs? … They don't have any idea what's in all those boxes and cases of yours, and they certainly won't want any of it.

Figure 8. A selection of 'Find of the Month' entrants at Blaydon Search and Recovery Society, Tyne and Wear, 2007. Photograph: Suzie Thomas

However, in 2009, and since the questionnaire survey was carried out, high-profile discoveries by metal-detector users, such as the Staffordshire Hoard and the Stirling Hoard, may cause a rise in metal-detector user numbers, particularly due to the media attention given to the hobby during the second half of 2009 and in early 2010. Furthermore, the act of collecting itself, in this case of metal-detected objects, may be reflective of a contemporary 'consumer culture', which has been observed in research of the act of collecting in the USA (Belk et al. 1991, p. 178).

The general comments collected by the survey were more mixed, with comments showing a range of opinions concerning archaeologists, and in particular trust issues. Research into contemporary metal detecting necessarily draws on sociological techniques such as qualitative and quantitative survey, and demonstrates several issues that are relevant from a theoretical point of view. The notion of 'social capital' was briefly mentioned above in relation to gender, but also has wider implications for the inclusion of metal-detector users in archaeological projects, as well as for metal-detector user behaviour at metal-detecting rallies. It would follow, according to Field's (2003) exploration of social capital and the importance of personal networks in making 'things happen' (Field 2003, p. 2), that extending the interactions between archaeologists and metal-detector users would increase the opportunities for interested metal-detector users to work in archaeological contexts, as well as to understand better the research objectives attached to archaeological projects. This is a two-way process, as increased exposure to the metal-detecting community and its behaviour increased the author's ability to enter into reliable discourse with metal-detector users in club and rally contexts. This included knowing the language and

terminology (for example, archaeologists are 'archies', and finds 'come off' a field), as well as accessing 'gatekeepers'. In ethnographic field research, a particular individual from the subject-community may emerge as such a 'gatekeeper', 'like a fairy godmother to help the forlorn ethnographer' (Rock 2001, p. 34, quoted in O'Reilly 2005, p. 90).Furthermore, the concerns of many metal-detector users, that archaeologists can sometimes be rather dismissive of them, may also be remedied by encouraging more archaeologists to engage more meaningfully with the metal-detecting community. The arguments about professional archaeology creating barriers to 'active participation in history' (Shanks and Tilley 1992, p. 25) may ultimately be challenged by wider interaction with non-professionals in archaeology, especially in light of current trends for research interests in 'community archaeology' (e.g. Marshall 2002, Tully 2007). To increase opportunities for metal-detector user involvement with archaeological projects, as well as ensuring that archaeologists can be present at metal-detecting events such as search days and rallies, may expose areas where the two groups' ideologies differ, but will in the process also engender greater understanding of each other.

Notes on contributor

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