

## METAL-DETECTOR USERS AFFILIATED TO MUSEUMS: Building a model of community archaeology in Pest County

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*The current legal framework governing the use of metal detectors is characterised by its strictness. Even the employees of heritage protection institutions may only perform instrumental surveys of archaeological sites under comprehensive official control. Such rigour is understandable given that the use of metal detectors results in a very significant proportion of the archaeological material hidden underground, which forms a part of the nation's assets, being either destroyed or transferred to private collections, often abroad, meaning that their value is lost as items of material and cultural history. The most important condition that private individuals contemplating the use of a metal detector must meet is the conclusion of a cooperation agreement with the museum responsible for the area in question. With that provision, the law has delegated the responsibility for overseeing activities with metal detectors to museums. The recent legislation has presented a new challenge to the decision-makers of the institutions concerned, and the experiences of the last few years indicate that no national consensus has been reached on the issues. Museums with local collection areas apply various rules and practices in their respective catchment areas, and that introduces additional confusion into an already opaque situation. Within the framework laid out in the legislation, our institution is attempting to develop a model that is capable of turning activities conducted at the fringe of the archaeological profession, partly illegally, into an asset that serves heritage protection. We are quite aware that only a programme built on solid scientific foundations and long-term cooperation can really furnish an alternative to the pillaging of archaeological sites. We can increase social awareness of the value of heritage protection by setting an example, and not through rigid rejection.*

### A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT THE NEW REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE USE OF METAL DETECTOR INSTRUMENTS

In 2016, completely new legislation was introduced to govern the use of metal detector instruments (Government Decree no. 496/2016 [XII. 28.]), outlining a novel way of dealing with the problem. In Hungary, the level of trust in heritage protection institutions is low; museums and national heritage as a whole lack appropriate prestige and, to ameliorate against that, these strict regulations were introduced. For Hungarian nationals who find archaeological objects, delivering the objects to a museum or reporting the archaeological site that they have discovered it is not a natural reaction. On the other hand, compliance with the law remains uncontrolled as long as on-site protection of archaeological sites is not practicable. Those who have previously used their metal detectors specifically for profit will not be stopped by the regulation, and the network of internet metal-detector forums, online stores and illicit trading will also offer opportunities to sell the treasures found. The law-abiding segment of the metal-detector community, those who have always considered the activity a hobby and are quite willing to cooperate with museums, have put down their instruments in disillusionment. The legislators failed to take their interests into account—indeed, they were unable to do so since metal-detector hobbyists have not formed an association in the legal sense, and they have found it difficult to form groups together. In essence, they have only formed informal groups of friends, so there was no one to negotiate with. The experience has left a rather bitter taste in the mouths of the staff of the heritage protection institutions involved whose opinions were not taken into account either, or were only taken into account rather tangentially, during the drafting of the legislation.

Very many of the citizens who own a metal detector are actually not aware of the details of the applicable legislation; indeed, there is some variation in the interpretation of the statute even among heritage protection

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professionals. When controls were tightened, metal-detector users wishing to cooperate practically besieged the museums, because their only legal option now lay in the possibility of cooperating with museums. The museums, however, have no procedures, no resources and, more importantly, no trained personnel to deal with this problem. Generally, the projects in which instrument-assisted discovery of archaeological sites has been facilitated in the catchment areas of individual institutions have been the result of the personal initiative, commitment or as it may be, the ambition of individual archaeologists or heritage protection professionals.

Very commendably, the law prohibits the use of metal detectors for private gain, while—although without actually supplying a detailed protocol—it offers an opportunity for citizens to get involved in the work of museums. The real problem, however, which had actually given rise to the more restrictive new rules, remains unchanged: day after day we encounter archaeological sites that have been robbed. The single effective solution that we have envisaged would involve setting up a ‘national heritage protection force’—an idea that has often been raised before.<sup>2</sup>

### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOPOGRAPHY PROGRAMME OF THE FERENCZY MUSEUM CENTRE

Archaeological topography research has a number of overlaps with the activities of metal-detector hobbyists. Detectorists interested in historical periods, who spend their leisure time walking around the countryside, actually conduct an archaeological activity: they are identifying archaeological sites, seeking out traces of



Fig. 1. Participants on an instrument-assisted site exploration in November 2015, in the Ócsa Landscape Protection Zone (photo: Tibor Ákos Rácz)

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed survey of the topic, see: Bálint, Marianna: Védetlen örökségünk [Our unprotected heritage]. In: *Saulusból Paulus. Fémkeresővel a régészek oldalán* [Saulus to Paulus. Working as a detectorist alongside the archaeologists], Bálint, Marianna and Szentpéteri, József, eds. (Budapest–Hajdúböszörmény, 2017), pp. 129–140.



human habitation and activities in the landscape, and collecting the remains of material cultures from ages past. However, they have no appropriate qualifications or authorisation to do so. Naturally, the majority of finds collected from the surface or a shallow depth are scattered artefacts, which have already been moved from their original resting places by agricultural cultivation. It is important, however, that those items should also find their way into the storage facilities and databases of museums, as they may furnish irreplaceable information about archaeological sites. A significant part of the activities of hobbyist detectorists is simply invisible to the archaeological profession, and we wish to affect change in that respect by starting an open programme primarily aimed at them.

Within its catchment area, as a part of its archaeological topology programme, the Ferenczy Museum Centre cooperates with metal-detector hobbyists, provided they conduct their activities in compliance with the rules of heritage protection. It is a fundamental precondition of cooperation that detectorists only conduct field research in coordination with the authorities; that they refrain fully from delivering the artefacts found to private collections or to illicit trade; and that they submit any finds to the museum and share information about the conditions in which the items were found with the appropriate professionals.<sup>3</sup>

In Pest County, intense cooperation with metal-detector hobbyists has been ongoing for almost ten years now, with a number of spectacular results. We have organised archaeological rescue operations and planned archaeological excavations with the participation of local municipalities, universities with faculties of archaeology and detectorists at sites that were of particular professional interest, or particularly exposed to risks. The most important examples were perhaps the research conducted in the Great Plains part of Pest County. In 2010 in Dabas-Felsőbesnyő; in 2011 in Bugyi-Felsővány; and in 2012 in Ócsa-Mádencia graves from the 10th century were excavated.<sup>4</sup> We rescued artefacts from the sites of a number of mediaeval hoarded assemblies.<sup>5</sup> We have put on exhibitions of the artefacts found: our exhibition entitled Not Vanished without a Trace—Artefacts from the Magyar Settlement period found in Pest County has been shown at a number of venues around Pest County. A permanent exhibition has been established in Monor using the objects submitted by detectorists. We opened an exhibition in Gödöllő in September 2015 entitled Treasure

<sup>3</sup> The most efficient form of cooperation with detectorists has been implemented by Danish archaeologists: the building of partnerships characterises the country's entire network of museums. The Danish Museums Act permits free use of metal detectors everywhere other than at registered archaeological sites and protected historical monuments. Precious metal objects and those with historical or cultural value constitute property of the state if they are over 100 years old, and the state pays compensation to finders. But the fees are not high enough to make the detector's work profitable on its own. In general, finders tend to submit the objects they find on account of their commitment to the national cultural heritage. The most spectacular assemblies of artefacts found in recent decades were all unearthened in the course of wide-ranging cooperation, while treasure-hunting and illicit trading in antiques have remained at negligible levels. The liberal model, which has been applied consistently since the end of the 1970's, is based on integration and not on the criminalisation of metal detectors, and this is something that Danish archaeologists also consider to be an unqualified success story. Henriksen, Mogens Bo: *The Metal Detector – Friend or Foe? Aspects of Metal Detector Archaeology in Denmark*, in *Across the Western Baltic. Proceeding from an archaeological conference in Vordingborg*, ed. Hansen, Keld Møller – Pedersen, Kristoffer Buck. (Vordingborg, 2006), pp. 217-226; Dobat, Andres S.: *Between Rescue and Research: An Evaluation after 30 Years of Liberal Metal Detecting in Archaeological Research and Heritage Practice in Denmark*. *European Journal of Archaeology* 16 (2013)/4, pp. 704-725. An example of topographical research conducted in cooperation with detectorists: Henriksen, Mogens Bo – Horsnæs, Helle W.: *Detecting Vester Kærby. Problems Associated with the Interpretation of Metal-detector Finds from the Plough Soil*. In: *Small Things – Wide Horizons. Studies in Honor of Birgitta Hårdh*, ed. Larsson, Lars – Ekengren, Fredrik – Helgesson, Bertil – Söderberg, Bengt. (Oxford, 2015), pp. 237-244. The experience of the other liberal model, which has seen much public interest and press coverage, namely the metal-detector activities conducted in the United Kingdom, has been far from that positive for the professionals. In a volume of papers offering a monograph summarizing the state of research of the UK's mediaeval rural settlements, Carenza Rachel Lewis calls detector surveys a dangerous method that may cause irreversible damage by disturbing original stratification: Lewis, Carenza Rachel: *A Practical Guide to Investigating Medieval Rural Settlements*. In: *Medieval Rural Settlements. Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600*, ed. Christie, Neil – Stamper, Paul. (Oxford, 2012), pp. 288-307.

<sup>4</sup> Füredi, Ágnes: *Honfoglalás kori tarsolylemmez Pest megyében. A Bugyi-Felsőványi 2. sír. Eine landnahmezeitliche Taschenplatte im Kom. Pest. Das Grab 2 von Bugyi-Felsővány. (A Hungarian Conquest age *sabretache* plate in Pest County. Grave no. 2 at Bugyi-Felsővány)* *Archaeologiai Értesítő* [Archaeological Notices] 137 (2012), 207-234.

<sup>5</sup> Nagy, Balázs – Rácz, Tibor Ákos: *Tatárjárás kori teaurált leletgyűttes töredéke Dabasról (Pest megye). [Fragment of a hoarded cache from the Mongolian Invasion period found at Dabas (Pest County)]* *Érem (Coin)* LXXII (2016)/1, 1-6.



Chamber which consists of precious metal objects that were submitted by detectorists or found during planned excavations in recent years. In the near future, our institution is also planning to put on a larger, ‘summary and evaluation’ type exhibition.

In view of the abovementioned events, strict rejection of detector use was not an option for our institution



Fig. 2. Early Mediaeval gold pendant from Galgahévíz (finder: Zoltán Csörgi, photo: Tibor Ákos Rác)



Fig. 3. Early Árpád-Age cross pendant with embossed image of Christ from the Ócsa Landscape Protection Zone (finder: Norbert Belán, photo: Balázs Deim)



Fig. 4. Late mediaeval lead plate with the image of a bishop from Dány (finder: Zoltán Kupor, photo: Tibor Ákos Rác)



Fig. 5. Byzantine reliquary from Sós-kút (finder: Péter Tauser, photo: Tibor Ákos Rác)



despite the increasingly strict laws. On the other hand, full liberalisation, i.e. giving detectorists free reign without any conditions, in a spirit of total trust, would have been an irresponsible action that we could not support, either. We have developed a strict system of conditions for awarding metal detector survey contracts: two years of consistent work in our archaeological topography programme, on excavations and on cultural events conducted by our institution is required of anyone wishing to conclude such a contract.

In the spring of 2015, we launched the programme in order to authenticate the previously unknown archaeological sites that had been discovered by metal-detector hobbyists. The exploration of sites proceeds in accordance with professional protocols, but it is a special feature of our work that we have been preparing and conducting the site authentication of archaeological sites and their entry into the public registry of sites with the involvement of civilians (*Figure 1*). Our targeted site surveys represent some 20-25 days of field work per year. Since the programme started, we have identified more than 150 new sites. From the 50 sites we surveyed in 2016, after sorting, 897 metal artefacts of archaeological age were entered into our records (*Figures 2-5*). In addition, 802 coins were entered into our records with identification numbers. Also as a part of the programme, we managed to relocate the precise original location of a cache of coins found more than 100 years ago; and two new caches have also been found, one from the period of the Mongol invasion and one from Roman times. The numbers increased significantly by 2017, because as of spring this year the number of metal-detector survey contracts we have awarded has increased from 4-5 to 16.

New recruits are not allowed to bring their detectors in the first year. They can begin to use the instruments in the second year, but only during group site surveys. After two years, if a relationship of trust has been established and the applicant has learnt the basic rules of surveying archaeological sites, i.e. once they can delineate sites independently and produce the documentation prescribed in the professional protocol for the museum and the authority, they are offered an opportunity to sign a contract. Once the contract is signed, the person who was previously a metal-detector hobbyist may now perform instrument-assisted site surveys outside known archaeological sites without on-site supervision from an archaeologist. If the suspicion is raised that a contractor has conducted field activities that they have not reported to the authority, or that they deal in antiques, we cut our ties immediately. Individual contractors are only permitted to survey within the administrative boundaries of a few adjacent towns, usually in the region from which the candidate comes. As a result of the contract, the person in a sense becomes a caretaker of that region, and they also receive the right to call to account anyone conducting illegal activities there. We hope to repress illegal detection by establishing the dominance of legal detectorists. The entire programme is coordinated continuously with the authority.

## COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY

We handle our communication and cooperation with metal-detector hobbyists not as a set of occasional, isolated actions, but as a multi-phase educational process operating within the framework of the archaeological topography programme. The first phase is the establishment of contact with those who are open to cooperation, that is to say: networking. Around sixty laypeople are currently participating in the programme. It is important to note that only some of them come from metal-detecting backgrounds, others are motivated by the opportunity to participate in archaeological research itself, and they have never held a metal detector in their hands before. The general public do have an interest in learning about our cultural heritage and in direct, active participation in the research work involved in that. The commitment of the group who are genuinely interested and ready to cooperate is characterised quite well by the fact that they accept the professional guidelines that are applied on our organised site surveys, even if that means not using metal detectors in a particular instance at all.

It is logical to question how we are able to provide an appropriate professional background for their activities. What is the basis for the trust that we place in our detectorists? And how do we detect those with shady intentions? Two years together is quite a long time. During the test period, we expect applicants to attend theory training sessions as well (*Figure 6*). The organisation and conducting of site surveys; the



*Fig. 6. Lecture organised for laypeople participating in the topography programme at the Gödöllő Archaeological Base (photo: Tibor Ákos Rácz)*

ability to identify and handle archaeological artefacts and to record information properly; and the production of the requisite documentation all require special skills. Those skills are taught and existing knowledge is further deepened with the help of external specialists in a series of lectures about archaeological materials, archaeological topography and community archaeology (*Figure 7*), usually in the spring before the field-work season begins. The lectures present the scientific aspects of archaeological research to our lay assistants. It is also an important component of our programme that in addition to learning about the professional issues, participants should also acquire practical skills. Accordingly, applicants are also required to attend archaeological excavations.<sup>6</sup> Our most important achievement is that the laypeople who have been attending our events for years have formed a community, and that community now shapes itself, helping new arrivals and divesting itself of the characters that don't really belong in it.

Our topography programme meets the criteria for community archaeology: it is voluntary work, a local concern, with research perspectives originating from outside the museum's sphere, and the lay community participates in planning and scheduling.<sup>7</sup> Among all Hungarian heritage protection institutions and archaeological research institutes, the museums with their own archaeological catchment areas are the ones best suited to becoming bases for community archaeology. Due to the territorial principle of organisation, that is where there is an opportunity to express the varied cultural interests of local communities while also disseminating the aspects of scientific research. Minimal investment of energy can yield spectacular

<sup>6</sup> In August 2017, we were excavating an Avar Age burial ground at Albertirsa. At the dig, which only lasted a total of four weeks, volunteers were present on 17 working days. Most of the 27 persons who volunteered only spent 2 or 3 days with us, but there were some who wanted to be a part of our work from the beginning to the end. At the request of cultural societies from the nearby towns, we held two guided tours of the excavation during our time there.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the topic of community archaeology, currently very popular in Western Europe, see Marshall, Yvonne: What is Community Archaeology? *World Archaeology* 34 (2002)/2, pp. 211-219; Moshenska, Gabriel – Dhanjal, Sarah (eds.): *Community Archaeology. Themes, Methods and Practises* (Oxford, 2011).



scientific results because we are largely using the material resources, the infrastructure and the free time of our volunteers. At the same time, it is also a partnership in which we serve each other's needs. It is not one-way communication initiated by the profession, such as a popular science lecture, an exhibition or a publication, but a two way channel that involves active community participation in heritage protection and the furnishing of direct answers to direct queries. In community archaeology, the emphasis is not the achievement of academic objectives, but on creating value and building communities.

### VOLUNTEERING IN CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

The discovery and the protection of our cultural heritage is the shared responsibility of specialised scientific institutions and the general public. Due to their limited scopes of action and meagre financial resources, museums are strongly dependent—as they have always been, since their inception—on the assistance of laypeople committed to the protection of cultural values. Inclusion of local cultural societies, communities and municipalities in a partnership for heritage protection has innumerable



*Fig. 7. Archaeological material class for museum-friendly detectorists at the Cegléd Archaeological Base (photo: Tibor Ákos Rácz)*



*Fig. 8. Archaeological site surveying as a recreational activity (photo: Tibor Ákos Rácz)*

mutual advantages. Not only do citizens and NGOs with local ties often have better knowledge of the locality than the employees of a museum with a large catchment area, they can also provide resources (money, voluntary work) that heritage protection can benefit from.

State institutions, museums do not have sufficient resources for dealing with the variety of heritage protection tasks they face. More precisely: in this field as well, there are priorities, and there are other things that do not receive sufficient energy and attention. In our county, there has been not a single year recently in which an archaeological site was not at least partially destroyed in relation to some construction project, either out of negligence, or ignorance, or even deliberately. Society's resources, the voluntary workforce must be invited to assist with the supervision and identification of sites, the exploration of archaeological sites itself, the financing of excavations and the upkeep of the assets discovered. That implies the partial outsourcing of the museum's tasks.

In the long term, voluntary work, that is to say direct involvement in heritage protection work, can change people's attitudes towards history and archaeology, and thereby contribute to the preservation of our cultural heritage. Volunteering is a tool of life-long learning and social responsibility, while it is also a recreational activity (*Figure 8*). According to surveys, one third of the Hungarian population participate in voluntary work programmes each year. Most of the voluntary work that gets done is associated with traditional values, solidarity or possibly religious backgrounds. Volunteers primarily focus on social and healthcare problems and less on cultural issues. However, in correspondance with worldwide trends, new forms of volunteering are getting more and more popular also in Hungary, focusing on personal contentment and orienting towards gaining experience, networking, the development of self-knowledge and the rewarding spending of free time. We would like to use our programmes to promote it.