

What if I find something that might be of archaeological interest?



Worcestershire is a county rich in archaeological finds from prehistoric stone axes to the remains of World War II defences. The value of a find is not necessarily whether it is of gold or silver - but the story that it can help tell of the way that the county has developed. A small piece of pottery, broken clay pipe or squashed lead object can be just as interesting as a gold coin.

But a find can only begin to tell this story if it is properly recorded. Any find that you think might be of archaeological interest should therefore be reported to the County Historic Environment Record (HER). Staff will help identify finds. They can then be added to the database, mapped and interpreted.

Where do I report finds?

You can report finds in a number of ways

- directly to the HER at the Archaeology Service on 01905 855494 or email the HER Manager at archaeology@worcestershire.gov.uk.
- via Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury on 01299 250416
- via the Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) of the Portable Antiquities Scheme 01905 721130.

The Service periodically organises 'Finds Identification Surgeries', usually as part of exhibitions in partnership with local groups, where you can bring along recent discoveries for experts to try to identify.

There is a legal responsibility to report some classes of finds through the Treasure Act (see below).

Where do I look?

Many finds are simply made in people's back gardens. When you are gardening, just look out for pieces of broken pottery, clay pipe etc.

If looking for finds elsewhere then please follow the follow guidelines:

- Always get the permission of the landowner and tenant before entering any land
- Do not collect finds from Scheduled Monuments (this is illegal)
- Seek professional help if you discover something large, unusual or below the ploughsoil.
- Only use a metal detector on ploughed soil (which has already been disturbed) and do not go below the plough soil. Further advice on metal detecting can be found [here](#).

- Check with the HER before going out on site to establish the status of the site and if anyone else is working on a project there.
- Record the find spot in as much detail as possible (the HER will be able to advise on this)
- Always report your finds
- Remember, often the most important finds are those that, at first sight, look the most boring!!!

Where do I go for help?

If you are concerned that a site, monument, or building in Worcestershire is being damaged or that someone is metal-detecting irresponsibly, then please contact the Head of Service at the County Archaeological Service on 01905 855455 in the first instance. He/she will be able to advise you on the correct course of action and forward the relevant details to other bodies such as English Heritage.

If you are looking to get involved with archaeological field work or take up responsible metal-detecting, then try your local archaeological societies. They frequently organise fieldwalking and other activities. This is a good way to start and means that you can take part in a researched archaeological project and learn skills from experts.

If you find pottery and want to know how old it is, then have a go at identifying it yourself, using the [Worcestershire Online Ceramic Database](#) or bring it to the HER for identification. Other finds can be taken to the HER, your local FLO or the local museum, as mentioned above.



Metal Detecting and Archaeology

What does the law say?

If you wish to metal-detect on land which is not your own, you must get permission from the landowner before you do so. If you metal-detect on land without consent, you may be charged with a criminal offence and you could be sued for damages.

Some archaeological sites are protected by law. These are called Scheduled Monuments, and it is an offence to use a metal-detector on these sites without the written agreement of the Secretary of

State. It is a separate offence to remove any archaeological object from a scheduled site by the use of a metal-detector. A number of local authorities in Worcestershire have specific policies restricting the use of metal-detectors on their land. You are therefore advised to contact the County Council and relevant District Councils.

Some types of find are classed as 'treasure' and there are legal requirements to report them.

What is treasure?

The Treasure Act 1996 replaced Treasure Trove legislation and extended the protection of law to a wider range of finds. Treasure is now defined as:-

- All hoards of gold or silver coins at least 300 years old (a hoard is defined as two or more coins found in close proximity)
- All hoards of other coins with a precious metal content of less than 10% and at least 300 years old (a hoard is defined as ten or more coins found in close proximity).
- Objects at least 300 years old with a minimum precious metal content of 10%.
- Objects found in archaeological association with treasure.
- Prehistoric base metal assemblages found after 1st January 2003

The County Archaeological Service or a local museum can help you establish whether the items you have found are treasure, as defined above. If they are, under the Act you are responsible for reporting them to the District Coroner within 14 days. This can be done by letter, telephone or fax.



You will then normally be asked to take your find to a local museum or to the HER. You will be given a receipt. The HER will be notified, although the find will be regarded as confidential until the issue of 'treasure' is resolved or in cases where site security or other issues are considered important.

If the object is not identified as 'treasure' the museum or HER will inform the coroner, who may then decide to give directions that the find should be returned without holding an inquest. If the find is believed to be 'treasure' they will inform the British Museum. This will decide whether they, or any other museum, may wish to acquire it. If so, an inquest will be held and the find valued to ensure that the finder receives a fair price. If no museum wishes to acquire the find it will be returned to the owner.

Failure to follow the terms of the Treasure Act 1996 may be punishable by fine, imprisonment or both.

A voluntary reporting scheme has also been established to ensure that other items of archaeological interest that are not treasure are recorded. These can be reported to the HER or your local museum.

Where can I find out about these restrictions?

A landowner should warn you of the existence and location of Scheduled Monuments on his/her land. To be on the safe side, contact English Heritage (which is responsible for advising the Secretary of State for National Heritage on scheduling). The HER also holds a copy of the list of Scheduled Monuments.

Please bear in mind that archaeologists have to react guardedly to enquiries about the location of sites, particularly in areas where there is a problem of looting. You may like to consider offering a reference.

In any case, it is advisable to keep well away from Scheduled Monuments, not only to stay within the law, but to avoid archaeological remains which may extend beyond the legally protected area.

Do I need an agreement with the landowner?

Yes. All other finds except for 'Treasure' are the property of the landowner, not the finder. You are therefore advised to enter into a written agreement with a landowner before detecting on his/her land.

These restrictions apart, is it safe for me to metal-detect anywhere else?

Yes, provided you have permission from landowner and any tenant - and are responsible.

What do you mean by 'responsible'?

To be responsible is to:

- keep off Scheduled Monuments
- always ask permission

- only detect in already-disturbed ground (e.g. ploughsoil)
- seek professional help if you discover something large, unusual or below the ploughsoil.
- record the find spot in as much detail as possible (the Historic Environment and Archaeology Service will be able to advise on this)
- report your finds immediately to the landowner and to the HER via your local museum or directly to the HER
- report gold and silver finds to the Coroner

Digging for objects which you have located can destroy archaeological evidence. It can be vital to establish exactly where a find was made in relation to the surrounding soil (its context). The actual find tells only part of the story of its history. Do not assume that all archaeological deposits are deeply buried and therefore 'safe'. In many parts of the county, topsoils are thin, and archaeological remains may be close to the surface. This can also be the case on unploughed pasture

OK, but if I limit my searching to ploughsoil and do not penetrate below that, am I being responsible?

Provided that you record the position of your finds, and report them promptly to the HER, directly, or via your local museum or FLO.

Why are recording and reporting important?

Even objects apparently adrift in ploughsoil have an historic setting. Some items will be genuine losses and could appear anywhere, but many will come from archaeological sites (e.g. settlements, cemeteries, buildings), remains of which may survive under the ploughsoil or nearby. The plotting of finds can produce patterns which are of historical significance. The reporting of even a single find can add to existing knowledge. If you suspect that an object is undisturbed in its primary context (e.g. in a container, or below the ploughsoil) leave it where it is and call for archaeological assistance.

Should I clean my finds?

It is best not to attempt to clean any find you discover, but rather take it to a museum, FLO or the HER for professional advice. The original surface can yield important information about the objects manufacture or use – a socket may contain traces of wood or leather.

What should I do if the landowner insists that finds should not be reported?

The landowner is within his rights - unless the finds are of gold or silver, in which case you have no choice. However, our advice would be not to detect at all in any circumstances where information about finds is likely to be withheld. Similarly, we advise landowners not to grant permission for metal detecting unless the finders agree to report all finds to the HER.

Can archaeologists seize finds?

No! Museums and archaeological bodies do not have the power to confiscate finds. Our principal concern is to record their occurrence and thereby widen an understanding of our common heritage for the benefit of future generations. All information received is treated in confidence.

What is the view of the HER on metal-detecting?

Metal-detectorists who act responsibly and observe the disciplines of archaeology are welcome as companions and partners in the study of our past - and its promotion for the benefits of the community. If you think that fits you, why not join your local archaeological society? Details of local societies are obtainable from the HER or our website.