Laura Jones: Hello and welcome to the latest episode in the Culture in Crisis audio series Preservation by Design. We’re thrilled to be joined today by Michael Lewis, the Head of Portable Antiquities and Treasure, at the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Michael welcome. Today we’re going to be discussing the topic of treasure hunting in the UK which I’m personally rather excited about. We’ll be discussing the UK’s rich archaeological history and the ways and means we go about exploring and protecting it. Michael perhaps you can start by telling us what exactly is the Portable Antiquities Scheme and how does it work?

Michael Lewis: Okay, the Portable Antiquities Scheme is a project to record archaeological finds found by members of the public. So in this country, England and Wales predominantly, we have a legal obligation to report certain types of archaeological finds which are known as treasure. Outside that legal definition, which is only a small part of what there is to be found, there’s obviously many, many thousands of archaeological objects.

In the past there was no mechanism to record these finds so the Portable Antiquities Scheme was set up to basically record those objects on a voluntary basis.

LJ: Sounds very exciting, so this fine line between treasure and archaeological history, is there a specific way of categorising those things? To me anything that you can dig up in your garden or perhaps more externally sounds quite exciting.

ML: Yes, I mean I suppose the definition of treasure is a bit of an odd word really cos it conjures up lots of things in people’s imagination. But there is a legal definition for treasure and that is basically gold and silver objects that are over 300 years old. Hoards of coins, so if they’re precious metal there’s got to be two or more of them, if they’re base metal there’s got to be ten or more of them. And then also there’s other sorts of objects that can be classified as treasure.

So for example prehistoric base metal hoards are treasure as well. So on average we have probably 1200 treasure cases reported a year. And that could vary from a single Medieval ring to a hoard of say 30 or 40 Bronze Age axes. So the numbers are difficult to kind of align if you like with the cases. And obviously when it comes to things like coin, particularly Roman coin hoards, you could have many thousands of coins.
But to put that into context, we have about 80,000 odd other archaeological objects that are recorded in addition to the treasure finds every year. So there's a significant number of those. And actually because they're recorded on a voluntary basis we are fairly ... I'd say stringent in the way that we record those objects in terms of taking them in. So for example if someone was to come to us with an object that was of some age, say it was a Medieval object, but they didn't know where it was found precisely, it probably wouldn't be something we would record.

So the find spot is absolutely crucial to those objects. Likewise we tend to be less systematic in what we record after the end of the Medieval period, so from about 1540 onwards we're quite selective in what we record. So we really make a judgement on whether this object is industrially produced and therefore of less interest. Or whether it's something that's handmade and quite unique in its own special way. So there's a lot of obviously archaeological objects that have been found by members of the public and we only record a percentage of that.

LJ: So such a variety of objects and over such a broad period of time as well. I'm assuming you don't handle this all yourself, do you bring in external support? I've already heard that volunteers are quite important today, but how do you bring these people together and who are they?

ML: Yeah, the structure of the scheme is quite a complicated in many ways, but it's worked quite well for a long period of time. So in 2003 we had a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant that enabled us to employ local Finds Liaison Officers. So these are archaeologists on the ground in local counties whose job it is to go out, meet members of the public, particularly the metal detecting community, but not specifically, and record their finds.

So we have at the moment 40 Finds Liaison Officers across the country. Most of those are full time but some are part time and they're basically county based. Some cover more than one county and obviously with unitary authorities it can get a bit complicated. But basically there is a county based structure.

The way it works is that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport pays a grant as it were towards the British Museum of which a percentage, nearly £1 million a year goes to our local partners. And we have about 33 key local partners that are responsible for employing those Finds Liaison Officers. So we have a team at the British Museum who are the Central Unit and we also have colleagues who work specifically on the treasure process as well.

So that's broadly the structure. Payments of grants to local partners but we're very much working in partnership with our local partners to deliver the scheme's aim. And
in fact it would be impossible without the local partner contribution to deliver the scheme as it exists at the moment.

LJ: That’s fantastic. And I’m assuming that over the scope of the last 30, 40 years of activity you've really had to diversify the way that you engage different audiences. Would you say that the risks have changed? The engagement methods have changed? Or are you looking now at quite a different issue to you faced in the past?

ML: Well the scheme was set up as pilot schemes in 1997 so basically it’s 20 years that the scheme’s been running for. At the beginning it was very much how do we engage with a particular community? Which was the metal detecting community predominantly. On the background of the fact that there was very, very poor relations between the archaeological community and the metal detecting community in particular.

So in the 1980s there was a campaign called the STOP campaign, Stop Taking our Past, whereby most archaeologists in this country believed that metal detectorists were akin to the devil really, going out there looting archaeological sites, keeping those objects, not disclosing any information about those finds, making money from those objects. In essence they just saw the metal detecting fraternity as a load of looters really, going out ransacking the heritage.

And in fact if you look at the literature from that time it very much depicts detectorists as those people with a swag bag on their bag with a load of loot that they've taken from archaeological sites. So that was the background to us kind of starting to liaise with this community. In the 1970s and into the 80s at the same time as the STOP campaign there was some local archaeologists in particularly rural locations such as Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Norfolk who felt that a more productive way to work with the metal detecting community was to engage with them.

And so they started talking to these people. They also recognised that what was happening is that they were finding objects that were very different to those found by archaeologists. So for example archaeology is very much about digging trenches and looking at specific sites, metal detecting obviously is very sporadic. But most metal detectorists search on ploughed fields.

So they’re going out there kind of willy nilly looking over these fields for whatever they might find, but the fact is the plough is disturbing the archaeology from its in situ context. So it is the agriculture that is destroying these objects, or destroying the archaeology as we would say. And therefore it was recognised that actually it was a
useful way to understand what is being damaged by recording these finds that had come to light through metal detecting.

So these individuals they kind of started up local schemes if you like, before the Portable Antiquities Scheme to engage with that metal detecting community and understand more about it. And I suppose that was the platform, the basis of what the Portable Antiquities Scheme was about initially. Now like you say things have changed significantly over the last 20 years. I think most archaeologists now in this country recognise the contribution that metal detecting can play to archaeology.

I’m not saying that all archaeologists love metal detecting as a tool, there are reservations about the method that people employ. They’re going out there still kind of willy nilly, it’s not controlled mostly in any sort of way. And therefore there are potential ... there are times when potential damage can be done to archaeology if people don’t do things in a correct way. But there’s a general recognition that the plough soil is a layer of the archaeology that is very different to that that’s in situ and therefore these objects, if recorded, can play a really important part in our past.

I mean another thing I suppose that's probably quite interesting to say about the plough soil, well I think it’s interesting anyway, is that in the past it was the layer that most archaeologists sort of stripped off thinking that this has got no value at all because finds are without context. But now we’re realising that plough soil is really, really important in terms of our understanding of the wider heritage. So I think thanks to metal detecting and thanks to I think the Portable Antiquities Scheme we are looking at the plough zone as a very different layer of archaeological information than we ever did before.

LJ: So really what we've developed here is a story from 20 odd years ago where there was a real kind of rivalry between these two groups and having conducted certain outreach advocacy and trying re-contextualise their roles within this kind of similar shared field, metaphorically. As we’ve now just discussed, they are dealing with slightly different geographic spaces. So if metal detectorists are kind of maybe more opportunistic dealing with the response to plough fields and top soils.

Whereas archaeologists perhaps are taking a more methodical approach or are more concerned with the context of a find, bringing them together to be a more complementary joined up approach is maybe where we’d like to see this going in the future or is that hopefully an ambition that the PAS is invested in?
Yeah definitely. I mean one of the things we've developed over the last ten years really is a code of practice for responsible metal detecting and for the first time that kind of outlines what we as archaeologists working with the metal detecting community think that detectorists should do when they're looking for archaeological finds. Now the first iteration of this code was endorsed by the metal detecting bodies, the National Council for Metal Detecting and the Federation for Independent Detectorists.

But we've got a revised version no which has got sign up from the landowner organisations, so the CLA and the NFU and also many of the archaeological organisations or most of the archaeological organisations, but not yet by the representative metal detecting bodies, although there's lots of individual detectorists who like the idea of the code and have signed up to it as individuals or their clubs have.

And I think it's quite interesting because I think we're coming to a point now where we've done liaison for 20 years on a voluntary, getting to know you sort of basis and we're now moving into I think a period where you're either with us or you're not. The law says that you have to do certain things, the code of practice says that you should do other things on top of that so that you aren't legally bound, but very much in the interest of adding to archaeological knowledge.

So they're not draconian things, they're things like, when you dig a hole you should record, you know, where you found the object that you've taken from that hole. You should bag objects up separately. You should record these objects. For me as an archaeologist these don't seem overburdening things, but they're absolutely fundamental things that people should do if they want that object to add to the archaeological resource.

Now the metal detecting fraternity is a wide group of people, like any section of society, there are those individuals within it who are very, very keen to actively take part, they're interested in archaeology, they understand that their finds are adding to knowledge and there's those at the other end who basically have got criminal tendencies, if not criminals. Therefore they're interested only in looting sites and they have no interest in the archaeological value of these finds.

And I guess there's a load of people in the middle which, you know, don't fit into either camp. Or maybe a lot of people that kind of follow what we general say, so they obey the law, but they might not follow any codes of practice. So I think we're at this point now where we're kind of saying, look are you wanting to do this hobby to make sure that metal detecting has the biggest contribution it can make to archaeology or are you
just doing this completely for fun and you don’t care if this impacts on the archaeology of the past that we all share?

So we’re at that point. I mean it sounds a bit hard when I say it, but it’s not really like that, it’s about ... we’re on a path I hope in a direction where most people are thinking, yes metal detecting has a real massive benefit to make to archaeology, is that going to be realised or is that not?

LJ: So building this all up from the base we’re looking at people who are getting involved in these practices for very different reasons, with very different motivations and part of your job is to make sure that these finds are recorded properly so that there’s not a loss to our shared heritage or to the kind of common history that we all share. Now what I’m thinking of is, surely that those motivations for ... we’re calling it treasure hunting, will vary person to person. So how do you make sure that there is an incentive for people to record this?

How do you capture the most kind of ... the goodwill of those who are willing to show it, but also maybe giving people a reason who, for the purpose of the conversation, maybe don’t find the goodwill, search for a common history as engaging as perhaps we do?

ML: Yes. I mean it is a challenge of course because, you know, like I said we’re talking to very different people here and they have, you know, very different backgrounds and very different interests. There are some people who within the metal detecting fraternity who are really very, very keen on contributing to knowledge and once they’ve found the object they don’t really care what happens to it. If it ends up in a museum collection they get a thrill out of that. And of course there are other people that want some sort of compensation for that.

So the treasure process, and we’re talking about the legal side of things to start with, obviously there’s a ... as part of the treasure process it’s mandatory to record the archaeological objects that you find, there’s no choice in that. And the law says that you have to report it to a coroner in the district in which it was found within 14 days, although in practice people report it through their local Finds Liaison Officer, so there’s no sort of getting away from that. And there are of course people who have refused to report treasure and they’ve obviously been brought to book because of that.

Normally they’re pursued under the Theft Act for that sort of activity. And of course there are people as well who are quite enthusiastic to record their finds knowing that they’re going to get a final financial compensation if you like for those objects. So again you’re talking about what’s in it for them as it were? If people are to get
compensated financially for something that they find then that’s something. Although the process allows for people to dispute their valuations and some people do.

But we’re finding as well that there are other people who ... they are told what the value of the object is and then them or the landowner, because rewards are split 50/50 normally between the landowner and the finder, decide that they don’t want any of the money, they’re happy for the find to go into a museum. So yeah the motivations are completely all over the place as far as many people are concerned and that’s just regarding the treasure finds.

Now in terms of the Portable Antiquities Scheme we are very much interested in only recording the information about the object. So in terms of those objects outside the definition of treasure the requirement really is just to hand over the object for some time with us so we make a digital record of it that then goes on our online database, www.finds.org.uk and there people can search for those objects.

And for some of those people showcasing if you like those objects online is the thing. They’ve shown that they’ve found something that’s on an archaeological register if you like and that other people can search it up and they can see that they were the finder of that object and they might get a thrill from that as well. So there’s that sort of aspect to it. Other people of course within the scheme are actually employed, not employed, but they are volunteers within the scheme recording their own finds.

So for example we have a project, again a Heritage Lottery Funded one which is called Past Explorers whereby people can volunteer with the Portable Antiquities Scheme and that’s been very successful in providing training particularly for metal detector users and other people interested in archaeology to be able to record their own finds or other people’s finds.

LJ: So a lot of this is to do with responsible practices and instilling a kind of understanding of what risks are posed by responsible activities and what we might lose from that.

ML: Yes.

LJ: I guess one of the main kind of losses that we talk about is a loss of context. So an object being removed from its position in the ground in itself is an act of removal. And trying to balance the responsible practices of metal detectorists versus the kind of different activities of people who are more concerned with keeping things in context must be quite difficult.
I’m wondering what the kind of impact of the loss of this context has, what do we really lose by saying, okay well you’ve removed it from its spot, what is the perceived damage there?

ML: Yes, well obviously most of the finds that we record are actually from the plough soil anyway, so most archaeologists would say that they’re out of their immediate archaeological context. So there’s not necessarily a problem with people picking those up as long as they record them of course. But now and again, you know, people receive a signal when they’re metal detectors users that is below the plough soil and the code of practice is very clear. That if you find something significant or beneath the plough soil then you should get archaeological help in order to excavate those finds.

Now last year, so 2017, I did an assessment of the finds that had been reported through the Finds Liaison Officers and to what degree that they were found in situ or not and what happened in those cases. And I mean the numbers aren’t significant, but I can’t remember off the top of my head, but probably about 30 to 40 cases a year where a detectorist has found something in situ, normally a coin hoard, sometimes a grave, so they’re probably from the Anglo Saxon period if they’re graves, often they are, but not always.

And the hoards tend to be Roman, but sometimes a few Medieval ones and those Bronze Age hoards as well. And in those cases we obviously ask the finders to stop and get archaeological help and often the problem with that is how immediately or how immediate can the archaeological response be? So if I’m a finder in the field, found something in situ, I’m kind of ringing up the Finds Liaison Officer there and then expecting them to come over and do something about it.

And of course that’s not always possible because the Finds Liaison Officer might not be an experienced excavator, it might be necessary to get other people together to do the excavation. So there is a willing ... so it really depends a little bit on the willingness of the finder to whether they’re prepared to wait sometimes and for example there was a hoard of coins, a very important Anglo Saxon hoard found in Watlington in Oxfordshire where the finder had to wait for about three or four days before the Finds Liaison Officer was able to organise an excavation.

And it was tremendous that they did wait, because obviously the temptation of that thing in the ground and worrying that someone else is going to find it and all of that sort of stuff was obviously on their mind and I know the finder spent many sleepless nights thinking about whether someone was going to come back and get their hoard. But the important thing is that he did and therefore it could be excavated.
archaeologically and by doing that we learned a lot about how those coins were deposited and that of course completes the picture from an archaeological perspective.

No like I say, in 2017 we reckon about half the cases that we know of the finder’s stopped and sought archaeological help and in the other half they didn’t which of course is detriment to the archaeological record. So there’s still work to be done in dealing with that issue.

LJ: It’s certainly a promising start, I can imagine it’s terribly, terribly hard to resist once you’ve had that sort of bleep on your piece of equipment that says, actually hold fire we need to call in some sort of external support. So it does highlight this kind of role of kind of pushing forward the archaeological survey, the role of the metal detectorist is a kind of help or a catalyst for the study of archaeology. But at the same time we’re seeing this tension between this lack of resources that are available to archaeologists to be able to respond so quickly to such a kind of request.

And balancing the help and the hindrance of these kind of discoveries kind of has to be assessed on a case by case basis I assume. And the way that you break down your ... I know we were talking earlier about the geographic areas that you work with, do you find that there’s a different response in different areas of the country? Is there an ability to pull specialists from different parts of the UK or is it very much on the ground, who’s available, how can we help sort of preserve this heritage now?

ML: Yeah it’s a good question, because obviously it’s one of the strengths of the Portable Antiquities Scheme that we do have this regional structure or local structure because it does allow us to draw in resources that, you know, the British Museum alone couldn’t do, we very much depend on our partners to deliver the scheme. That said it’s also a weakness of the scheme that it will vary from area to area. And of course in some areas where the Finds Liaison Officers are based they will have much more resources at their disposal in terms of archaeological support than others.

And there is a sort of nature of the scheme itself that some Finds Liaison Officers are based within museum structures within local authorities, others might be in independent Trusts and others might be alongside historic environment records in County Councils. So again depending on where you’re based there are lots of opportunities of course, depending on what you can do. So for example if you’re a Finds Liaison Officer based in a museum there’s lots of opportunities for museum based work, but in terms of archaeological support that might be better if you’re based next to a historic environment alongside the County Archaeologist.
That said, all of the Finds Liaison Officers will develop a local network and this is one of the things that kind of I think amazing about the Portable Antiquities Scheme is that we have this kind of spider network across the country. When I’m talking about the country I’m talking predominantly about England, but it’s similar in Wales because the law in the other parts of the United Kingdom is slightly different. So whereas the British Museum will have our local partners, our main partners as our primary contact, the Finds Liaison Officer will have their own web of contact at the local level that will be an indirect one through the British Museum.

So for example in Kent for example where I was Finds Liaison Officer for a while there was obviously lots of local museums that I had very good links with. I was based with the Historical Environment Records within Kent County Council, so they can support any archaeological work, any outreach activities I wanted to do through museums, I’d be working with museum partners. I’d also of course be working with the metal detecting community so if we wanted to do archaeological surveys and then use metal detecting as a technique on those surveys then I’d be liaising with those different groups of individuals.

I’d also have contact with local historical and archaeological societies who might be able to support the scheme in another way. And of course now with our volunteer base we can bring in people with different sorts of expertise. So for example some of the Finds Liaison Officers they might bring somebody in to work with them who’s really interested in photography, who’s never done finds photography before so they can develop a new skill, but in essence they’re a photographer. They come in and they learn how to photograph finds and then obviously that makes a massive contribution to the work that the Finds Liaison Officer has to do if somebody else is doing that sort of work.

Likewise as we’ve talked before, if you have someone who’s a metal detectorist, who you make a self-recorder, who’s able to record their own finds. Not only are they helping towards the workload that the Finds Liaison Officer is doing, but they’re also actually improving their own skills in terms of becoming a pseudo archaeologist you could say.

LJ: Brilliant, so we’re really seeing drawing on different resources, different kind of expertises and skill sets, which I assume means you work in quite a multi-disciplinary field. Are you finding that you work not only with kind of the traditional detectorists, archaeologists and museums, but are you broadening out into local communities? Are there other people that are really invested in this kind of preservation? I know we talked briefly about landowners, how do they come into this?
ML: Yeah well landowners I mean they’re a really interesting body of people because obviously in this country anyone can detect or anyone can search on land as long as they have the landowner’s permission to do so. So it’s a fundamental relationship the detectorists have and they’re very precious about that relationship. And indeed all the sensitivities over find spots probably have more to do with landowners than anything else.

So a detectorist, you know, they may come across land in lots of different ways, but it probably is very straightforward that they might just knock on someone’s door who’s a landowner and say, can I come and search on your land? It’s a very different technique to that employed by archaeologists of course. Most archaeology in this country nowadays is development led or there’s a specific reason to go to a particular site and do some archaeological work. So the driver is completely different.

Of course that’s one of the benefits of detecting from an archaeological perspective is that they’re just going over the landscape with no real knowledge of what might be there although some obviously do research into that, but they’re just hoping to find stuff. But like you were saying, I mean that relationship with the landowner is absolutely crucial so once they’ve got those sites and they talk about their sites they’re quite keen to preserve those rights that they’ve got to them. So they can sometimes initially be a little bit wary about recording the finds because they’re worried who’s going to get this information.

They also can be a little bit worried that the landowner might not be happy for whatever reason. I mean obviously there’s stories that go around about what archaeologists might do if something is found on your land, you know, there’s these visions that we all turn up with loads of tents and trenches and obviously, you know, most archaeology is fairly low key these days. So there’s those perceptions that they may have to deal with and it’s an additional conversation on top of saying can I have permission? But also I want to record my finds and I want maybe some of them to go into a museum collection.

You can see it, it kind of creates a different sort of story than something about … than just kind of ‘I want to go on your land and have a look for stuff’.

LJ: And is this where your guidance policy documents come in? Or is this more of a legal agreement that they have to go through? I’m imagining people don’t necessarily turn up to a landowner’s front door with a signed document to sort of agree things. So do you find it’s more nuanced than that?
ML: Yes, I mean one of the things we’re doing at the moment is we’re producing guidance, where we’ve produced guidance for landowners we’ve just updated it. And we’re also doing a leaflet really to kind of highlight to landowners what the benefits of responsible metal detecting is. And again it’s not the benefits of detecting per se but the benefits of detecting if it’s done in a responsible way. And of course some people, like everyone, are more receptive to the idea that recording finds is going to add to the local knowledge, local history.

So some landowners are obviously very interested about the history and the archaeology of their land, other less so, you know, like all walks of society I suppose. So it’s a push for us certainly to try and have better communication with landowners in terms of demonstrating to them why it’s important that metal detectorists should follow the code of practice for responsible metal detecting. And indeed, you know, looking to the future I like the idea that a landowner will only let people on their land if they feel that they would be responsible.

And at the moment it’s very difficult for landowners to make that judgement. I mean somebody will turn up on their doorstep and they’ll make a face value judgement on that person. Like you inferred, I mean there are contracts sometimes signed between detectorists. We advise that there is an agreement about what happens to those archaeological objects and the permissions that that landowner’s given. Sometimes detectorists will do that straightaway and others obviously they’ll wait until they’ve developed that relationship a little bit more with the landowner before they do.

But of course if things are found then everybody wants to be clear about what will happen to those objects.

LJ: So once you’ve got this treasure or these finds, what are the various options for where that goes? Where does that end up and how do you balance now we’ve got the person that finds it, but also now the landowner who has a vested interest in the future of that object?

ML: So in terms of treasure it’s fairly clear cut because the treasurer process allows museums to acquire those objects if they want to. And normally it’s the local museum is the acquiring museum, so most treasure finds that are acquired by museums go into local museums although of course the National Museum in terms of British Museum in England and the National Museum of Wales they do acquire occasional finds, normally as a kind of a backstop really for local interest.
Not all treasure finds are acquired, so it's probably about a third at the moment I'd say that's acquired by museums and that can be for various reasons. Normally it's because the objects that are found are not particularly amazing from a museum perspective. They maybe poor examples of ones that they've already got, that sort of thing. Sometimes it can be to do with financial reasons, you know, obviously these objects are valued and a museum might decide well that's just too much to pay for that sort of find.

And again it depends a little bit maybe sometimes on the interest of the acquiring museum. So for example if they've got an Archaeological Curator at that museum they might be more interested in pursuing treasure finds than someone who's a social historian for example, as you might expect. So in terms of treasure it's fairly clear cut what happens to those object and a reward is paid and those objects enter a museum collection or they're sometimes donated which is the best obviously for all worlds, from an archaeological and museum perspective.

With the other objects that are found, so the 80,000 odd every year, it maybe that some of those, when the Finds Liaison Officers see them they think, well this is something that should be in a museum. You know, it's that Indiana Jones sort of moment really, you think, gosh this is an amazing object, you know, very unlike something that we've not seen before but it's not ... it doesn't fit the legal definition of treasure. So in those cases there's sometimes a bit of a negotiation. So it maybe the Finds Liaison Officer that floats it in the first place or it may be, depending on the relationships that there are between the local museum and the detecting community, there may be a Curator for the museum that might approach them.

And in fact there are some museums in the country who have Archaeological Curators who have very, very good links themselves with the detecting community, you know, through the Portable Antiquities Scheme and all of those other links and they may start approaching people and saying, oh this is something that would really add to our collection, you know, would you mind donating it? Or would you even sell it to us? So that sometimes happens. But I have to be upfront and that is, you know, quite a rare occurrence, you know, most of these objects we are making a digital record of those.

So we have information about that find and then the object then goes back to the finder. Now like you say, the object isn’t owned by the finder, the law says it’s owned by the landowner so that's a kind of local issue between the finder and the landowner about what happens. So most landowners in my experience are not too worried about most finds, they see it as a load of junk that the finder’s found and what they want to do with it is up to them.
But some landowners are obviously a bit more savvy to the archaeological value of some of these objects and they may say that they either want them themselves because they think that they are important in terms of the local history of the land that they may have farmed for centuries and centuries. Or they may just want some sort of financial compensation for the fact that this object might be worth something.

LJ: And how is that negotiated? Does that end up being quite contentious? Or is it quite ... in your experience have you found that there’s normally an amicable solution to be sought?

ML: Well with treasure finds there’s a process by which any party can question the valuation. So there’s an independent committee that reports to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport who says what they think the value of these treasure finds are. And then people can appeal against those and inevitably museums, if they do appeal, always say that the price is a bit too high and finders and sometimes landowners say that it’s a bit too low. I’ve never had it the other way round ironically.

So those parties, you know, they can put in their own valuations or they can give reasons why the valuation is wrong and the committee can reconsider those and come up with a different amount. So there’s a sort of, you could say a negotiation, but it’s not really a negotiation it’s them forming new evidence that can change the committee’s view. So once it’s kind of set, it’s set and the Secretary of State will generally agree with what the committee’s recommendation is.

And it’s really up to the finder and the landowner whether they take the money or they don’t I suppose. So that’s what happens in those cases. In terms of the other finds, it’s really the case of a negotiation between the finder and the landowner and the museum. So the museum will say, well this would add to our collection we’ll give you a certain amount of money for it or hopefully they’ll donate it and they just kind of work it out between themselves. So that’s obviously pretty low key sort of stuff really.

LJ: So I have to ask now in all your experience with the PAS you must have seen some incredible objects and some incredible finds, but ...

ML: Yeah, of course.

LJ: ... do you have a favourite? Do you have a good story that’s come out of a recent find? And I’d just love to hear a little bit more about some of these things that we’re finding buried beneath - probably - some of our back gardens.
Well there are of course some absolutely amazing archaeological discoveries that have been found, most of them are treasure finds. I suppose two of my favourite, the first one has got to be the Staffordshire Hoard, I mean that for people who don’t know it, it’s a hoard of Anglo Saxon war gear from the early part of the Anglo Saxon period, probably kind of spoils of war. So it’s mainly weaponry and things like that, well it’s just all the gold fittings really and garnets.

And obviously when that came up and there was a lot of media interest in it, but my kind of most memorable experience from that time is that we had a local Finds Liaison Officer meeting in Birmingham Museum and Duncan Slark who was then the local Finds Liaison Officer he just got these boxes out of all of these fittings and fixtures and bits and bobs. And I think, you know, obviously we don’t spend a lot of time doing this in the Portable Antiquities Scheme, but that time we did spend I would say, you know, half an hour or so passing around lots of bits of Anglo Saxon gold with garnets and being absolutely gobsmacked by the array of material.

And it was obviously such a significant find because never had such a large hoard of Anglo Saxon material been found, but also the variety of objects was astounding as well and the way that they were made at that period is absolutely phenomenal. So I mean that obviously for me was one of the kind of standout moments. But another one, from a very personal perspective, is that when I was Finds Liaison Officer for Kent I got a call from a detectorist in the east of the county who showed me or brought out this ice cream container and inside it was the Ringlemere Cup, which is now in the British Museum collection.

So this is a Bronze Age ceremonial (we presume) cup made of gold which again is exquisitely made, it’s an amazing object. And yeah I remember having to bring that to the British Museum and I think I stopped my car about three or four times just to make sure I still had it in my boot because I was so worried about this object, you know, not getting to the museum. And obviously it’s a phenomenally important archaeological object and, you know, it takes kind of pride of place in the British Museum’s Bronze Age collections. So I’m glad that I obviously ended up in a museum collection.

It’s fantastic to hear about the kind of community engagement and kind of the role of the individual in some of these finds, it’s really quite inspiring. But before I kind of go on record as telling people to go out and dig up their back gardens we should probably cover if there’s some sort of advice for those people who wanted to take a responsible approach to doing something like this. To perhaps become involved and become an
advocate for the PAS. What would you recommend for someone who was keen to become involved?

**ML:** Yeah it depends on what they want to do, if they want to find something or they want to support us recording things. I suppose if you want to go out and look for archaeological objects ... I mean I ... obviously there's different ways of doing this. One thing I think is important probably ... to join a metal detecting club and talk to other individuals within those clubs. Obviously there's the code of practice for responsible metal detecting. That makes it very clear what you should and shouldn't do.

And obviously make contact with your local Finds Liaison Officer, probably the first thing you should do actually, to make sure that they can offer you guidance in terms of what you should do and obviously report any archaeological discoveries. In terms of working alongside a Finds Liaison Officer, I mean there's obviously lots of volunteering opportunities within the Portable Antiquities Scheme and we're very keen to hear from anybody who has an interest in the past.

There's many, many more archaeological finds out there to record them, we have the capacity to record. It's one of the problems associated with the scheme which you could say is a bit of a victim of its own success in terms of encouraging people to come forward with these finds. So yeah, we need more help really in recording those archaeological finds. So if anybody's keen to do that getting in contact again with your local Finds Liaison Officer and they'll see what they can do to help that.

**LJ:** And all fully locatable through the website I'm assuming?

**ML:** Yes, so all of the finds recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme, so 1.3 million to date are on our online database, [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk). Anyone can look at that database and look at where these objects were found. We do restrict finds spot information online, but people who are researchers can have full access to the finds spot data and obviously we'd make that available to people who are doing bona fide research for archaeological purposes and for academic purposes.

And, you know, there's been lots of instances now where people have used Portable Antiquities Scheme data alongside other archaeological data to learn about the past.

**LJ:** It's wonderful and I'm thinking about now everyone feeling inspired at home I'm sure to go out and start being a part of this. What is the future for the Portable Antiquities Scheme? What are your next steps? And does the future hold some new bright developments for the scheme?
ML: Yeah one thing I’m keen to develop is that partnership nature that we have because many of the people that are involved with the Portable Antiquities Scheme think of the relationship that they have with the British Museum and their other partners in terms of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. But obviously the scheme provides a stepping stone to do other sorts of heritage projects on the back of that. And I think people are realising that there is an opportunity here, through these posts, who have a very, you know, there’s a big component of them that’s outreach as well as recording archaeological finds, and what other projects do they open up?

And I know some partners have already, you know, approached different funding bodies and different organisations to partnership up. To use the Finds Liaison Officer as a plank in those sorts of opportunities. I mean we know nowadays and it’s changed I think significantly over the last ten years that public funded bodies have to demonstrate their wider impact beyond their, you know, beyond their central reach as it were. And so the Portable Antiquities Scheme is an amazing way in which those partners can ensure as many people as possible can benefit, but also participate in understanding local archaeology.

And there must be lots of other ways that you can springboard on the success of that scheme to do different sorts of projects which I hope is what we’ll do in the future.

LJ: That’s great, so to see the scheme spreading out into more and more people and finding more and more engaging things to talk about and to play an active role really in protecting our shared heritage here in the UK and specifically as we’ve been talking about stay in England and Wales.

Michael I have to say a huge thank you for coming in today, it’s been absolutely fantastic hearing more about sort of debunking some of the myths around treasure hunting in the UK and hopefully inspiring some more people at home to become involved. A huge thank you from the V and A and the Culture in Crisis programme.