

From John Dentith, Secretary DAC, Worcester Diocese

Dear All

Please see below the text of an e-mail received from Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division. Any feedback on experiences welcomed.

Dear Colleagues,

It has been brought to my attention that metal detectorists (MDs) may be targeting parish churches as a good place to find coins, etc. Specifically, there was an article in the latest edition of Treasure Hunting entitled "Rural churches give clues to good finds" by one Robert Westgate, which suggests that vicars might be asked if MDs could search along the outside of a churchyard wall. Of course, this is likely to be without the church curtilage and the FJ anyway so this is rather odd advice, but the attention of less scrupulous MD's might be drawn by this, and parishes and dioceses should be on their guard.

MDs sometimes write letters to landowners offering a 50-50 split of any proceeds from finds (often involving searching loose soil). Clergy and PCCs are not legally able to come to such an arrangement, except under the authority of a faculty, and a proposal to remove or sell finds would also be subject to faculty.

While the use of MDs on archaeological sites is not necessarily a bad thing, if done within controlled conditions (with appropriate curatorial oversight), churchyards, as consecrated ground, are obviously a separate, sensitive case, and any digging, however shallow, would raise issues regarding burials, etc. If an application is made to allow the use of a metal detector, even if it is claimed that no digging will be done, a faculty will be required. If the site is also a scheduled monument or an area of archaeological interest, then the relevant consent is needed for the use of a metal detector, and for the removal of any finds.

I would be grateful for feedback if anybody has had experience of this issue recently.

Joseph

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