

Dealing with archaeological finds on farmland

What are archaeological finds?

While some think of archaeology as only dealing with treasure, most archaeological finds are more ordinary objects. Fragmentary pieces of pottery, bone, shell, metal and worked stone can all be of interest.

Where may I find archaeological finds?

Stray finds can turn up anywhere on your farm, in ploughsoil, eroding from banks or ditches, exposed by rabbit scrapes or built into existing buildings and walls.

How do I know if a find is significant?

It is not always easy to tell if a find is significant. This only comes through experience or by asking an expert. In the absence of an expert you will have to make your own judgement.

In many cases it is not the find itself that is significant but the context in which it is found. Pottery and coins will help date when a site was used and materials like iron slag or cremation deposits will tell what a site was used for. It is therefore important to leave a find in its original context unless it is clearly disturbed, such as lying in ploughsoil.



Remains from earlier buildings may be architecturally significant and should be preserved wherever possible.



Early pottery was fired at a relatively low heat and is liable to disintegrate rapidly once exposed by ploughing or other works. This example is over 5,000 years old from the time of the first farmers in Scotland.

What does the law say if I find something?

In theory all archaeological finds should be reported to archaeologists working for the government. Anything lost in the soil or above ground without an obvious owner, can be claimed by the Crown and should be reported. For more detailed information on the legal position - see

www.treasuretrovescotland.co.uk

It is also your responsibility to report all finds as part of good farming and forestry practice.

How should I treat finds found on my land?

Different materials need different treatments; for example wooden materials should be kept damp and metal objects protected from accidental damage. For general advice see the Treasure Trove website listed above.

Where do I report my finds?

In the first instance contact the Treasure Trove secretariat who will advise you who is the appropriate contact in your area. Alternatively you may contact your local museum or local council archaeology service direct.

GOOD PRACTICE

- Report all significant archaeological finds to the [Treasure Trove Secretariat](#) in the first instance (*tel. 0131 247 4355*). If they are unavailable, contact your local museum, or council archaeologist. The Treasure Trove website has a downloadable form that you can use to describe your find.
- If organic deposits like shaped wood or leather are exposed, keep them damp and report them as soon as possible.
- If a significant find is buried in an obvious archaeological layer, leave it in place so that it can be recorded in its original position. You should not move standing or carved stones and may need to leave a buffer zone to protect them.
- Where possible record the position of a significant find by means of a measured sketch (or GPS if you have access to it). A photograph of its location can also be useful.
- Familiarise yourself with the law covering Treasure Trove.
- Be selective in what you show to your local archaeological adviser.
Museum archaeologists have limited capacity to examine finds so restrict submitted finds to what you think may be important - though clearly you can only do this by learning what is significant. If in doubt ask!
- Spreads of pottery or flints may mark the remains of a previously unrecognised archaeological site, which may require management - see the other Archaeology Scotland leaflets for further advice.

Further information - [Treasure Trove Secretariat](#)
to identify your [local museums service](#)
to identify your [Local Authority Archaeology Service](#)
for more information on [distinguishing significant finds](#) (but note the law is different in England)



Metal objects like this 2,000 year old ring may decay rapidly when exposed to the air. Avoid the temptation to clean off corrosion as it may be preserving details about the find that can be restored by conservation.



A typical group of finds found in plough soil. Though all are potentially of interest there is nothing here that would need reporting as Treasure Trove. Use your local museum to distinguish between ordinary and significant finds.

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