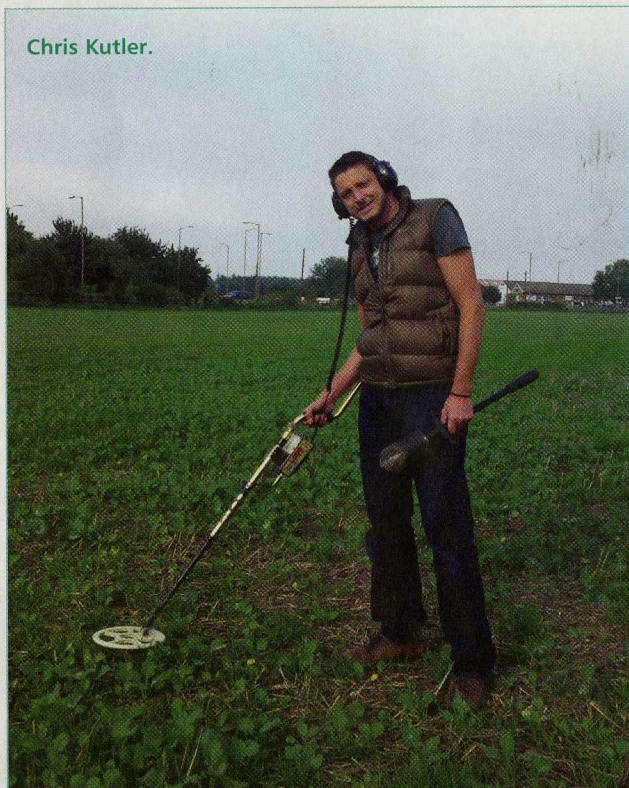


How I "Joined the Club"

Chris Kutler.



What is about metal detecting that inspires us to embark on a virtually ceaseless quest for that illusive thing called "treasure" and what does that term actually mean to us?

There were many (and perhaps still are some) in the archaeological "establishment" who would have had everyone believe that we are a thoughtless bunch of pillagers sneaking about at night seeking to rob the country of its heritage.

However, nothing could be further from the truth for the majority of us. Yes, there are those whose only aim is to profit from their finds but we all know these people are in the minority.

My personal quest was inspired back in the 1970s when reports began to appear in the papers about spectacular finds made with metal detectors. While these stories stimulated my imagination of piles of gold coins lying underground just waiting to be discovered, they were also the first time that I had been informed that our own country had a rich and fascinating history. This was possibly not equal in terms of technical abilities

as that of the Egyptians or Greeks, but perhaps equal in terms of religion and culture.

However, there was a problem and that was the lack of easily available information. This contributed to a missed opportunity in my early youth to "discover" British archaeology.

It was known amongst my clan of what would now be described as "Hoodies" that somewhere on Saddleworth moor was a Roman Fort. This notion obviously inspired all sorts of imaginings and was a distraction from the sometimes grim reality of life on a council estate in a northern

English town. However, despite attempts to find its location from teachers, the local library etc., neither my inspired friends nor I could find out where it was.

Fast forward nearly 20 years to 1995, and to a walk on the North Downs. As my eyes surveyed that path ahead I noticed that the path seemed to be bounded by large walls of earth, which appeared to curve around 20 metres ahead. I didn't really think much of it at the time and put it down to landslides, and then the soil piling up over the centuries.

Further on, during my walk, I noticed something else that didn't look quite natural. It was a large pile of earth built into an oval mound. My first thought was that it was some kind of small dumping ground which had become overgrown, but I began to wonder whether it was on those ancient burial mounds I had seen on one of those TV archaeology programs.

By way of coincidence, an article appeared very soon after my experience in one of the Sunday magazine supplements. It was all about how archaeology was gaining in popularity. There was an address too, of *Current Archaeology* mag-

azine. I noted the address and found the phone number of the magazine's editor. I called him as soon as possible and took up a subscription. Over the following months my enthusiasm increased in intensity to a fever pitch, and I had come to the point where I wanted – or more like, needed – to get involved in a dig!

Then I hit another problem. It seemed like this archaeology business had already too many enthusiastic amateurs and there wasn't space for another in the club. Not one to be put off easily I got hold of a copy of *Lighthouse*, London's adult education course magazine and found to my delight that Birkbeck College ran a three year evening course in Field Archaeology. Surely, I would get into the club once I had some formal training in archaeology?

The tutors couldn't be better. Roman Studies run by Harvey, Medieval Studies (The Saxons!) taught by Dave Beard, and pre-Roman Studies with Hedley Swain. These guys already had day jobs and while I felt privileged to be taught by them they were doing it because they wanted to succeed in passing on their passion for learning.

However, with two Merits and a Distinction under my belt I still couldn't get into the archaeology club. What was wrong? Why wouldn't anyone let me go on one of their digs?

Never the quitter, I thought back to those days back in the 1970s and realised the answer was to buy a metal detector and become "Site Director" on my own digs.

The next Saturday morning I left Treasure World near Euston, London with a Laser B3 in my hands a smile on my face and a handshake from the proprietor, which could only mean one thing – "Welcome to the Club".

Metal Detecting & ARCHI Sites

The next stage in my quest was to find out where sites worth searching were. In my next article I will look at how this research was done, how long it took, and how it has helped me and many others.