

LAW & RESPONSIBLE DETECTING · FREE RESOURCE

UK Metal Detecting Law Quick Reference

A nation-by-nation starting guide to permission, protected land, beaches, reporting finds and responsible detecting.

What's inside

- ✓ Clear, practical steps you can use straight away
- 📄 Written for real UK detecting, not theory
- 📄 Plain-English guidance, checked against official sources
- ★ Free to print, keep and share



Written by
detectorists



Checked against
UK guidance



Free to print and
keep

Quick reference only, not legal advice

The law differs across the four nations. Always get permission from someone authorised to give it, never detect on scheduled monuments or protected sites without consent, and check the current official guidance for the place where you detect.

Reporting finds: the four nations differ

England & Wales

Report within 14 days

- Report potential Treasure to your **Finds Liaison Officer** (or the relevant Treasure Registry route). The 14 days run from finding it, or from realising it may be Treasure.
- The 2023 significance class applies where a qualifying object gives **exceptional insight** through rarity, find location, or connection with a person or event. It does not make all old metal Treasure.
- Any reward is **discretionary**; it can be reduced or withheld, and is not guaranteed to be shared.

Scotland

Report within about four weeks

- A different system: **Treasure Trove** under Scots law, not the Treasure Act. Report to the **Treasure Trove Unit**, usually within four weeks of first recovery.
- Hoards, fragile finds and suspected sites need immediate contact and no further digging.
- Some categories need not be reported (see the March 2026 Code). Finds may be claimed by the Crown; any finder reward is ex gratia and shared privately only after it is awarded.

Northern Ireland

Report within 14 days; licence needed

- Direct potential Treasure to **National Museums NI**, within 14 days of realising it may be Treasure.
- A **licence** is required for ground-disturbing archaeological searches; archaeological objects carry separate reporting duties. Check the current NI rules before you detect.

Words explained

FLO Finds Liaison Officer, a Portable Antiquities Scheme officer who records finds and advises finders.

Scheduled monument a nationally important archaeological site protected by law; consent is needed for most activity.

SSSI a Site of Special Scientific Interest, protected for nature; some activities need the conservation body's consent.

Where you can (and cannot) detect

📍 Private land

Always get permission from the owner, occupier or manager with authority to give it.

📍 Beaches & foreshore

The Crown Estate permissive right applies only to foreshore it owns in England, Wales and NI, under its terms. Scotland uses Crown Estate Scotland. Councils, private owners, leases and byelaws may still apply.

🏞 Parks & council land

Usually need the local council's permission.

📄 Scheduled monuments

Off limits without consent, in every nation.

📄 SSSIs & protected land

Check the designation, the land-manager's permission, and whether the conservation body must consent.

✓ Wreck material

Recovered from the seashore or tidal water: report to the Receiver of Wreck within 28 days.

📄 Stop for danger

Suspected ordnance, shells or munitions: **do not touch, move away and call the police**. Human remains: **stop and contact the police**. Treat leaking or hazardous items as dangerous, not as finds.

☆ Rewards are not automatic

Any reward is discretionary and processes differ by nation. Do not assume finder and landowner will share; in Scotland a finder reward is ex gratia and shared privately only after it is awarded.

Quick reference only, not legal advice. Edition: UK explainer, v1.1. Guidance checked: 24 July 2026. Next review due: by July 2027. Always confirm the current official guidance for where you detect.

Official sources: [GOV.UK Report treasure](#) [Treasure Trove Scotland](#) [National Museums NI](#)

This resource is provided for general information and personal record-keeping. Rules, official guidance and access arrangements can change. Check the current requirements for the place where you intend to detect. Separate England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland field cards are recommended for field use.

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