Gerrard J, Cooke M.

*Contaminated Green Waste.*

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Seminar Report: Contaminated Green Waste

Date: 24 June 2016
Host: Doctor James Gerrard, School of History Classics and Archaeology.
Location: Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Contaminated Green Waste (CGW). These words instil anger, frustration and total revulsion in detectors who have had the misfortune to find it in their endeavours to pursue their unique hobby in our green and pleasant land. Not so green and not so pleasant I hear you say...

As detectors, you will not have received much praise for raising awareness to CGW and we are possibly the first members of the public to do so.

Our country is being insidiously turned into a colossal rubbish tip by our elected leaders because of European legislation in which very few of us have had any say - out of sight and out of mind of the ordinary man and woman.

Millions of tons of it is being ploughed into the soil as supervised by our Environment Agency via local governments and their authorised waste processing contractors, arguably qualifying them to be labelled as common or garden fly-tippers or super-tippers!

This can only serve to devalue the legacy of life in our once pristine countryside for our children and for future generations.

The Seminar on Green Waste held in Newcastle highlighted issues regarding the discovery of contamination in a far greater volume than currently condensed by the Environment Agency and the costs of dealing with it.

Doctor James Gerrard and colleague Martin Cooke, Archaeological and Geophysical professionals invited a representative group of Archaeologist/Geophysical stakeholders together with a representative of the NCMD to take an active part in the meeting to discuss what could be done to combat the introduction of ferrous waste into the soil.

This one category of waste is seriously affecting the use of electronic geophysical measuring equipment as used by private, academic and government contractors to evaluate and map out sites proposed for development as well as for the archaeological prospecting of historic sites and pre-groundwork searches of building and civil engineering projects throughout the UK.

The seminar comprehensive programme included presentations by professional Commercial Geophysicist/Archaeologist Orlando Castige from the South West of England who in his presentation illustrated how the spreading of ferrous CGW had completely masked an ancient site and had eradicated the use of conventional geophysical measuring equipment.

Another example of how it had seriously affected equipment and complicated his work was given by professional Geophysicist Duncan Hale, currently working in a commercial field unit. Having worked with Countryfile in their television programme on GW, Duncan illustrated how ferrous waste had obliterated an already previously scanned historic site and prevented any further detection of hidden archaeological features buried beneath the surface.

The cost to project budgets of ruined surveys are immense, and other methods of geophysical evaluation and new methods of technological prospecting no longer based on magnetism will have to be used. The reversion to evaluation trenches, for example to locate hidden archaeology, is not always regarded as an economically acceptable option. Geophysics is generally the primary method used to evaluate buried archaeological features and a precursor to defining the next stages of the evaluation process of a development site.

Dr Gerrard and his colleagues are currently introducing an App that can be downloaded onto a smart phone, iPad or laptop whereby members of the public, particularly the detecting fraternity, can upload information of previously found CGW without giving accurate location detail but listing where roughly the site is, what is found, quantity, whether on ploughed, pasture of heathland, and photographs may be included and uploaded too.

This App should be available soon and can be used for data capture in the future finding of this waste. All of this information will be used to build a data map of contaminated areas and where alternative methods of prospection must be used by Archaelogical/Geophysical Surveyors.

Byron Tosh

Contaminated Green Waste

James Gerrard (Archaeology) and Martin Cooke (Civil Engineering and Geosciences), Newcastle University

The metal detecting community has for some time been working hard to raise awareness of the impact of contaminated green waste on the environment. Back in Issue 9 of Digging Deep John Wells wrote an important article on this very subject.

Over recent years archaeologists (and in particular archaeological geophysicists) have become increasingly aware of the negative impact that contaminated green waste is having on their work too. Some of you may have caught the episode of Countryfile broadcast last year that highlighted the impact of this issue on James’s archaeological work as well as the detecting community.

The recycling industry would like us to believe that contaminated green waste is a small-scale issue caused by rogue operators. The evidence from detectorists and archaeologists is suggesting that the scale of the problem is much bigger than this. However, our evidence is largely anecdotal: a field here, a field there.

At a recent event held to discuss the impact of contaminated green waste on the Historic Environment (at which the NCMD was represented by Byron Tosh) we demonstrated a simple App developed by our team at Newcastle University. This App, called ‘NCL Green Waste’, will soon be available to download for Android and iOS. It will enable detectorists and others to anonymously and easily record land that has been treated with contaminated green waste.

We hope that many of the readers of Digging Deep will use the App to record fields that have been treated with contaminated green waste. This will allow us to build up a body of evidence that will demonstrate the scale of the problem to the powers that be.

We hope to write a longer piece about the NCL Green Waste Project and the App for the NCMD newsletter Digging Deep in the near future.