

The art of detecting

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While there are now a lot of detector finds on display in museums all over the country we have just achieved a first with a display in a contemporary art gallery.

A few years ago, when the British Museum's Treasure exhibition was in Norwich, it was visited by an artist, Paul Matosic. Paul had admired all of the spectacular finds but then he saw something that really fired his imagination – there, in its plastic bucketed glory, was the Carlile collection, eleven thousand bits of scrap metal found by a detectorist in North Lincolnshire. This, he thought, had the makings of an interesting work of art.

When he first contacted me I was, I admit, a bit sceptical; museums get more than their fair share of odd requests. However, when Paul came up to see me I found that he was a good bloke and had his feet firmly on the ground, which is where he wanted to put the Carlile collection, laid out as an art-work. I liked the idea and said that I would look into it, and then promptly let him down by retiring from the Museum. Fortunately, even I am not indispensable, and the project was taken up by Rose Nicholson who took over from me at the Museum. Paul Matosic's installation is currently on show at the 20-21 Gallery in Scunthorpe.

Now, for the first time in my career I am supposed to review something arty – as you will all know my area of expertise is Anglo-Saxon and Viking, not contemporary art, but least I don't have to worry about deciding

which bit belongs to which beast, which is the main problem with early Medieval animal art.

Well darlings (doing my best to be an art critic) what Paul has done is to lay out Walter's finds on the floor of the 20-21 Gallery, a former church with a very high roof which gives a sense of space above it. This is important as what he has done is place the finds in the form of a 1906 map of Scunthorpe: the height giving a feeling of space as you look down on the streets. The objects have been set out in groups and, amazingly, as you look down on them it really does look like an aerial view of a city.

When you get closer you can see what the objects are, the usual stuff

that you are all finding: bits of lead, thimbles, buttons, stair-rod clips, bullets; the list goes on and on. It looks stunning and for people like us (interested in finds) it really is a voyage of discovery – you never know what you will see next.

The reaction of the public is wonderful; I was talking to one of the gallery attendants who was telling me that people love it, they find it fascinating. Now, you have all got your bit-boxes and we are expecting great things of you!

Paul Matosic's work will be on display at the 20-21 Gallery in Scunthorpe until mid December, entrance is free, all you have to do is get to Scunthorpe.

