

Launch of the new UKDFD

We know that it's been a long time coming, but we are pleased to let you know that we are finally ready to launch *the new UKDFD*.

Before providing more details about the new software, it is worth reflecting on the success of the scheme since its launch on 1 September 2005. Here are some key points:

- Well over 50,000 items have been uploaded to the database.
- Around 47,000 of them have been validated and retained as permanent records.
- The number of individual record-views exceeds 35 million.
- At any one time, day or night, there are typically between 100 and 200 people online from around the world, making use of the database.
- We have designated over one hundred recorded items as *finds of special significance*, due to their uniqueness or extreme rarity.
- There are many references to UKDFD records in academic papers, published books, and specialist websites.

It is also appropriate to acknowledge the difficulties we experienced in 2017. Our database became increasingly unstable, and we were unable to update the software, as the supplier was no longer in business. We very reluctantly took the decision to switch off recording, as we would otherwise have been at risk of losing recorded data. This was particularly frustrating for our recorders, as some had paid an annual subscription only shortly beforehand. Fortunately, we were able to leave the database online as a view-only facility, so the thousands of people who use the database for study, research and identification purposes were not adversely affected.

The combination of the obsolete and unstable state of the software, and the shortfall in income (only £900 received towards our 2017 target of £3000) presented a significant dilemma: To have the existing software rewritten would cost a small fortune, and it would still be very dated, but to have new bespoke software written would be even more prohibitively expensive. We ultimately decided to buy existing software that could be reconfigured to meet our particular needs. This was by no means a cheap option, but at least we now have up-to-date and dedicated software. Its complete reconfiguration has taken considerable time and effort, but unfortunately, there was no quick option.

In working on our new software, we have taken account of requests, suggestions and criticisms received from our users. In particular, we have:

- made improvements to the range and effectiveness of searches;
- made improvements in respect of viewing images;
- provided for creating personal, offline (pdf) record files;
- provided for printing individual records;
- restored and improved the 'My Records' facility;

- provided research tools for creating temporary record sets and comparing records;
- created *Membership Plans* and *Recording Packages* to suit different needs;
- Integrated mapping of findspots with individual finds and searches.

We have spoken above about the costs we incur in providing the UKDFD, so hopefully it will not come as too much of a surprise that we have had to look at how we can fund these costs. We have sought to spread the cost equitably across the various types of user, and minimise the impact on those who already pay to record. We summarise below the changes we have made:

- All who wish to view the records and use the database will need to register and purchase a *Membership Plan*. These start at £15 per year.
- Those who also wish to record will need to buy a *Recording Package*. These start at £5.
- All services (membership, record packages, etc.) can be purchased with pay-as-you-go *Credits*. These are 'UKDFD money tokens' valued at £1 each, which can be purchased at a discount once registration is complete. They are a particularly cost-effective option for those who intend to upload a lot of records, and they remain valid while membership remains active.
- As promised, all members who paid a subscription after April 2016 have been proportionately compensated, and have been awarded *Credits* with which they can purchase *Membership Plans* or *Recording Packages*. The number of *Credits* awarded is based on both time 'lost' and the cumulative amount they paid during the period. (e.g. a recorder who made two £20 payments will have received more *Credits* than a recorder who made a single £15 payment.)
- All registered users will be able to log on to the new software using their present username and password, but will have very restricted access ('My Records Only') until they purchase a *Membership Plan*. On purchasing a plan, they will have access to all features included in the particular plan they choose. Those members wishing to record finds will also need to purchase a *Recording Package*. Registered users can gain an advantage by using *Credits* to make their purchases.

Further details of the subscription arrangements can be found on the new website.

A great deal more will be learned about the new UKDFD by exploring the website and trying out the various features. The site is much more complex than any of our previous versions, so it will take a little time to get used to it. For the same reason, we quite expect to experience a few 'teething' problems, as the complexity makes it more likely that we have missed things during our own testing. For a short period after launch, recording will remain switched off. This will enable us to address any problems progressively. A separate area has been set up on the present forum to post any questions, concerns, problems, etc. that arise, so please use this, rather than any other area.

Among other things on the new website, there is provision for a periodic *Newsletter*. We hope that this will be published quarterly, but initially it may need to be more frequent. We are also going to introduce a more professional '*Help Desk*' facility with a '*Ticket*' system and '*Live Chat*' facility. We will require additional help to run both these services, so we would be very pleased to hear from anyone who is prepared to volunteer and become involved with either of them.

In addition to this email, there will shortly be a video giving further information about using the new UKDFD website – *a picture is worth a thousand words!*

We hope very much that everyone will enjoy the new UKDFD and find it pleasant and easy to use. Please remember to post any queries, problems, concerns or comments on the dedicated 'UKDFD 2018' section of the Forum.

The UKDFD Team