

Coins from Hoards

The third and fourth centuries in Roman Britain were, by-and-large, times of danger. Wealthy individuals, anxious to safeguard their wealth from raiding Picts, Scots and Saxons had no access to banks so instead buried their savings in pots until the danger had receded. Similarly soldiers who were posted away from their settled barracks to counter an internal threat, might also bury their savings for safety until they could return. Coin hoards represent the savings of those who, for one reason or another, never returned to claim the treasure they had hidden so carefully.

The Dorchester Hoard (Dorset), May 1936 On May 11th 1936 a workman engaged in building work in South Street, Dorchester, uncovered two bronze vessels and the remains of a wooden keg containing 22,121 silver coins from the third century. The coins were subsequently declared treasure trove and taken to the British Museum where they were cleaned and recorded. The British Museum retained 3000 coins and a further 1500 went to the Dorchester Museum. The remainder were then sold by the finder. The Dorchester Hoard was deposited c.260 AD and comprises almost entirely silver *antoniniani* with the earliest of Julia Domna and the latest of Valerian II. In total the hoard contained 8890 coins of Gordian III and nearly 5,000 of Philip I but with over 600 of Volusian and about 120 of Elagabalus, plus fewer examples of other emperors.

The Bourton-on-the Water Hoard (Gloucestershire), c1970 Over 3,000 mainly *folles* sized coins of the London mint, mostly Constantine I, with some of Licinius I and a few others. Over 500 of the coins were of the *Soli Invicto Comiti* type with many in superb condition. The types of coins present - Licinius (no coins minted in the west after 316), Crispus Caesar, Constantine Jun Caesar (both made Caesar in 317) and the Sol reverse (not minted after 316) and those types not present, including several reverse designs introduced in 319, when taken together, indicate that the hoard was assembled early in the reign of Constantine, almost certainly between 317 and 319 AD. The main hoard contained 2707 coins and the scattered hoard 590 coins.

The Beachy Head Hoards (Sussex). Three roman coin hoards have been found near Beachy Head (Eastbourne) in the last hundred years. In **November 1961**, a farmer and his son were deep ploughing a field near Beachy Head when they noticed that the plough had brought up a scattering of copper coins. They took some to the British Museum and later they and representatives from their local museum in Lewes recovered about 5,300 debased (copper) *antoniniani*, all dating between 254 and 275 AD (Gallienus to Aurelian), together with fragments of the pot which had originally contained them. The whole hoard was taken to the British Museum for evaluation. One feature of the coins in this hoard is that all were 'official' coins, the numerous contemporary copies had been identified and excluded by the owner of the treasure. In **April 1964**, the same farmer uncovered a second hoard only a dozen or so yards from the site of the 1961 hoard. This one consisted of 3,175 silver coins, mostly *antoniniani* and all of good-quality silver. The date range of these coins spread from 196 AD to 266 AD, from the reign of Caracalla to that of Gallienus. Because the two hoards were discovered so close together, it is reasonable to suppose they were assembled and buried by the same person. We know of course the order in which they were discovered but have no way of knowing in what order they were buried or how long a time elapsed between the burial of the two hoards. In **1973** a third hoard was found and contained around 3,000 silver *antoniniani* from the middle of the third century

The Normanby Hoard (Lincolnshire), 1985 This hoard of 47,898 third century radiates (base silver or bronze *antoniniani*) is one of the largest ever found in Britain. It was discovered by a farmworker in December 1985 in the parish of Normanby, about twelve miles north of Lincoln. The coins were largely struck between AD 253 and 287. After cleaning and study by the British Museum, they were returned to the finder and landowner. Both the British Museum and Oxford's Ashmolean Museum purchased groups for their collections. The rest were offered for sale or dispersed through the trade. The pot that originally contained the hoard was acquired by the Lincoln Museum.

The Nether Compton Hoard, 1989. On 19th February 1989, a metal detectorist found a large pottery vessel containing a hoard of 22,670 roman coins in a field near the site of a 'known' roman building in the small village of Nether Compton in Dorset. Shortly after its discovery, the hoard was taken to the Dorchester Museum but no detailed record was made of the coins. In 1994, the coins were returned to the finder and sold through the trade, many going abroad. The pottery vessel and 33 coins which were stuck to it were donated to the museum. The vast majority of the coins date from the 330s AD and are overwhelmingly of the *Gloria Exercitus* type of Constantine the Great and his sons. It is estimated that there were between 20 and 21 thousand coins of this type, some featuring one standard, some with two. There were also between one and two thousand commemoratives of Rome and Constantinople and a few hundred earlier coins. As there were no coins of the 'two victories' type, the latest date for the hoard seems to be 339 AD

The Killingholme Treasure (Humberside), 1993 This hoard of 3,700 coins of Constantine I (Constantine the Great) and his sons feature a variety of different reverse designs. The hoard was discovered at Killingholme (North Humberside) by a metal detectorist in 1993. The coins, which date from the 320s and 330s, had been carefully and tightly packed into a single pot, probably in the mid 330s. After recording by the British Museum, most of the coins were sold in auction by Spinks. The coins in this hoard were minted at several places in the Western Empire, including many from the London mint.

The Grassmoor Hoard (East Midlands), January 2001. The Grassmoor Hoard, found in January 2001, consisted of 1375 small (avr. diam. 17 mm) bronze coins of Constantine I and his family, mostly struck between 317 and 340 A.D.. Many were minted at Arles, Trier and Lyons but a few at other mints, including London. The British Museum retained about 300 coins and the rest came onto the open market in March 2011. The majority of the coins are of four main types - Commemorative of Roma, Commemorative of Constantinople, Camp Gate, Two Soldiers with Standards.