Iron-Age and Roman Coins

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Introduction

The twin subjects of this essay, the study of Iron-Age and Roman coinage within Britain over the past century, present a somewhat paradoxical picture when viewed from the particular perspective of the British Numismatic Journal. Over the century of its existence the Journal has published approximately three times as many pieces on Iron-Age coins as on Roman coins and, for the sake of a comparison with a series from a different period, twice as many on the coins of Charles I. The coinages of the peoples of Britain before the Roman conquest are fairly represented, as are the various coinages of medieval and later Britain, whereas the Romans seem to have been given the cold shoulder. On the face of it, the under-representation of studies on Roman coinage which, after all, was more voluminous in quantity than any other in circulation within Britain before or since for a thousand years or more, is somewhat startling.

Yet perhaps this should not come as too much of a surprise. This is, after all, a journal of society whose object is "the . . . promotion of . . . the study of the coins, medals and tokens of the peoples of the British Isles . . .". According to one view of the British past, this counts our Celtic ancestors in and the Roman invaders out. The problem is that this view is about as old as the Society itself. The prevailing idea of "British" history around 1900 did tend to exclude the Romans from its story. They came, saw and conquered, provisionally in 55 BC under Julius Caesar, then again rather more permanently in AD 43, and sailed away in AD 410 just in time for the fall of Rome. The Romans were regarded as a foreign power ruling over the British, rather than as permanent settlers who contributed to the peopling of Britain. (Not surprisingly perhaps, late Victorian Britons tended to imagine that the Romans lived separately from their British subjects in much the same ways as they themselves tended to keep apart from their African and Indian subjects.)

The Romans were thus held to be different from Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans, in that they had left no genetic inheritance and, therefore, had exerted no lasting influence on the development of the British character, of which the historical origins and development were the focus of much attention in the period of Britain's imperial zenith. A key text in this regard is Matthew Arnold's Study of Celtic Literature, published in 1867, in which Arnold analyses the national character of the Britons as though it were an alloy of different historic elements — Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norman — and attributes different aspects of it to each of these constituent parts. The Romans are notably, and characteristically, absent from this compound (except indirectly via the Normans). Very few in late nineteenth-century Britain regarded the Romans as even part-ancestors of the British.

This view of the Romans would receive its first major critique at around the same time as the foundation of the British Numismatic Society. In 1906 Francis Haverfield first published his ground-breaking work entitled The Romanization of Roman Britain, in which he set out a very different view of Roman Britain, according to which the Britons became thoroughly, though not...
uniformly, imbued with Roman culture, and essentially became Roman in the course of centuries of interaction and participation in the life of the Roman Empire. This set Romano-British studies off in a completely new direction, such that to R.G. Collingwood, writing in 1924, the old view already seemed crude and dated. However, it has left its mark and is arguably still with us to this day. Insofar as the general public still has commonly held misconceptions about the British past, the idea of the Romans leaving Britain en masse to go back to Italy in 410 is, I would suggest, prominent among them. It is the persistence of this dated view of the Romans in Britain that best explains their absence from the pages of Britain's numismatic journal over the twentieth century. The fault does not lie solely with the successive editors of the Journal. Classicists have, after all, tended to gravitate towards the Numismatic Chronicle, the Journal of Roman Studies or, more recently, to Britannia. Harold Mattingly, perhaps the greatest British Roman numismatist of the twentieth century, did not publish a single article in BNJ, although he submitted many reports to the Chronicle on Roman coin hoards from Britain.

This is all by way of introduction. Nevertheless, it is telling how deep and lasting a mark was left on the character of the Journal by views of British history that were prevalent in the years around the birth of the Society. Quite apart from the spat over Andrew's article in the Chronicle for 1901 which caused the initial secession, there was clearly something nationalist about the intentions of the Society's founding fathers, which was expressed as concern over the neglect among British numismatists of their great numismatic heritage. There was also clearly something imperialist, as evidenced by the inclusion within the Society's range of interests of the numismatics of the Commonwealth, the United States of America, and their various subject territories. So wrote the first President of the Society, Carlyon-Britton, in his introduction to the first volume of the Journal:

The explanation [of the general want of appreciation of British Numismatics] must be that the true interest, worth and significance of British Numismatics have hitherto not been made known to the general public. The science has been tied up in the hands of those who have devoted their energies to the elucidation of the money of any paltry state, rather than face the historical importance of the great coinage of Britain, which in the making of its sovereign, as the standard currency of the world, has made its Empire and its trade of to-day.

But for the efforts of a few private individuals, the pages relating to British Numismatics would be chiefly conspicuous by their absence. This it is confidently trusted will, in course of time, be remedied by the volumes of this Journal; for no other country has hitherto shown such indifference to the knowledge of its own money.

The tone is unmistakably that of the frustrated, insular antiquarian chaffing at what appeared as the excessively cosmopolitan interests of his contemporaries, and is made all the more obvious by the tendentiousness of his remarks. But it was not untypical of the times. In the years before the outbreak of the First World War the increasingly tense international situation and the obvious decline of Britain's supremacy in world affairs, despite the apparent pre-eminence of the Empire, led to an ever more shrill note of nationalist patriotism in public discourse and, in the world of antiquarianism and the arts, a growing concern for the preservation and protection of Britain's national heritage from foreign acquisition, and for the raising of its profile in the public mind. The National Trust was founded in 1895, followed soon after by the British Academy in 1902 'for the Promotion of Historical, Philosophical and Philological Studies', and the National Art Collections Fund in 1903 by a group of enthusiasts who were determined to save works of art for British public collections. The foundation of the British Numismatic Society in the same year can be seen as another example of these trends at the turn of the century. These in turn seem also to have led to the imbalance in the amount of space devoted within the pages of its journal to the subjects of this chapter, British Iron-Age and Roman coins, to which I shall now turn.

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4 First published in Proceedings of the British Academy 2 (1906), 185-217, and later reissued in an expanded version as a book. For a recent study of Haverfield's influence on Roman studies, see R. Hingley, as in n. 3.
5 R.G. Collingwood Roman Britain (Oxford, 1924), pp. 11-12
8 I am grateful to Neil MacGregor for this information.
The Iron Age

In 1903 the only authoritative works on Iron-Age coins, or Ancient British coins as they were then generally known, were those of Sir John Evans: his *Coins of the Ancient Britons* (1864) and its *Supplement* (1890). 9 Evans (1823–1908) was a remarkable polymath among whose many interests numismatics was not the most prominent. A Fellow of the Royal Society, he researched into questions of water supply and aquiferous strata and was President of the Royal Geological Society from 1874 to 1876 and of the Society of Antiquaries, in addition to his long presidency of the (Royal) Numismatic Society, which lasted from 1874 to 1908. It was his scientific interest that led him to bemoan the numismatist’s lack of ‘those aids which the geologist derives from the order of superposition, and the mineral characters of the rocks in which his fossils are preserved’. 10

The study of these difficult coinages was fortunate to have an individual of such wide interests and learning as its modern progenitor. Though interest in Iron-Age coins went back to the sixteenth century and the great antiquarian William Camden, Evans’s work was the first to take a systematic and sceptical approach, thereby superseding much of the speculation and mythopoeia that had bedevilled the subject before him and, to some extent, still does. 11 Its main achievement was to provide a detailed and descriptive corpus of all the types then known, with accurate engravings, organised by region (Western District, South-Eastern District etc.) rather than by tribal attribution. Evans’s admirable example in this regard was ignored by most of his successors for the next century or more. He made mistakes, though some of them are still suggestive. He regarded the broad-flanked ‘Gallo-Belgic A’ series of gold coins as the first British coinage. Later writers, working with better evidence for their distribution, would declare them to be continental, which is still the generally held view, though the possibility that some at least were made in Britain is nowadays perhaps too readily discounted. 12 He also thought that the Verica of the coins was not identifiable with the *Berikos* mentioned by the Greek historian Dio as having fled to Claudius and provoked the Roman invasion of AD 43, on the grounds that his coins were among the earliest of the British inscribed coinages, predating those of Cunobelin who, also according to Dio, had died before the invasion. 13 Evans was probably wrong about the dating of Verica’s coins, which now seem to be contemporary with those of Cunobelin. Still, his unwillingness to hang the interpretation of the coins entirely on the few and unreliable pegs offered by the texts was exemplary. Ever since, writers on Iron-Age coins have been attempting to transform the evidence of prehistoric archaeology into a connected historical narrative. This has only been achieved by the application of two unwarranted procedures: assumption of certainty where none exists, and the often unconscious conversion of contestable hypothesis into established fact.

Both of these errors were committed by the next major contributor to the debate on Iron-Age coins in Britain, George Brooke (Pl. 4c), in two essays published in the *Numismatic Chronicle* and *Antiquity* in the early 1930s, shortly before his premature death in 1934. 14 He grounded his approach to the coins in what by that time had become the standard interpretation of the new burial rites and other aspects of material culture in the late Iron Age of southern Britain. It rested on the attribution of the new ‘Aylesford-Swarling’ burial rite to the Belgic invaders of Britain mentioned by Julius Caesar in the *De Bello Gallico*. This connection was first proposed in 1890 by Evans’s son, Arthur (more famous for his excavations at Knossos), and would continue to be central to work on the Iron Age in southern Britain for most of the twentieth century. 15 Brooke believed, wrongly, that the late fourth-century BC gold coins of King Philip II of Macedon, which

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10 Evans, *Coins of the Ancient Britons*, as in n. 9, p. 35
11 Evans, as in n. 10, chapter 1, gives a useful account of previous developments in the subject.
12 Evans, as in n. 10, p. 25
13 Evans, as in n. 10, pp. 170–1
14 G.C. Brooke ‘The philippus in the West and the Belgic invasions of Britain’, *NC* 13 (1933), 88–138, and ‘The distribution of Gaulish and British coins in Britain’, *Antiquity* 7 (1933), 268–89.
form the ultimate prototype of early Gaulish and British gold coins, only came west in the second century BC when they formed the gold currency of the Roman Republic. The gold coins of Gaul, he argued, had a very late beginning, arising from the wars between the Romans and the tribes of central Gaul in the 120s BC, and gold coinage was first brought to Britain from the continent by two waves of Belgic invasions, which he dated to about 75 and 50 BC by archaeological evidence. Whilst much of this has not stood the test of time, Brooke was more successful than Evans in sorting out which early gold issues were made in Britain and which on the continent, taking advantage of the improved quality and quantity of information about the geographical distribution of different issues. However, his attribution of early continental gold coinages to various Belgic tribes, such as the Bellovaci, Atrebates and Morini, was perhaps a retrograde step.

Brooke sought to create links between the testimony of the ancient sources and the coins, in order to create a quasi-historical narrative. This was entirely in keeping with current archaeological thinking. He attributed a gold coinage (the so-called ‘Whaddon-Chase’ type) to Cassivellaunus, Caesar’s opponent within Britain, and attributed the second Belgic invasion of about 50 BC to Caesar’s ally-turned-adversary, Commius, from whom, the coin legends revealed, the later kings of South-Central Britain were descended. In this manner he sought to use the coins to fill in the unfortunate gaps left by the ancient sources.

Brooke’s work, though now largely forgotten, is important as in many ways it anticipated that of the most important figure in the study of Iron-Age coins in the twentieth century, Derek Allen (1910–1975) (Pl. 5a). It is difficult to condense the wide-ranging work of this remarkable scholar into a few paragraphs. In brief, Allen took up where Brooke had left off in writing the history of late Iron-Age southern Britain from the coins. He refined the classification of what he came to call the ‘Gallo-Belgic’ coinages which first entered Britain from Belgic Gaul. Whilst Allen wisely eschewed attributing these various issues to tribes as Brooke had done, preferring six different anonymous letter designations for his classes Gallo-Belgic A to F, he did not hesitate to see in the presence within Britain of each successive Gallo-Belgic type a new wave of Belgic invaders, thus multiplying Brooke’s two waves by three. Allen applied his preference for letters to early uninscribed British coinage as well, reaching ‘R’ in this series. This was a sound method in many ways, as it offered an alternative to the classification of all Iron-Age coinages by tribe:

The static tribal structure of Britain, as we know it from Roman sources, fits well enough with the pattern of Celtic kingdoms revealed by the later inscribed coins, but in the earlier states of the coinage one should not think of coherent tribal areas, so much as of the directions of tribal movement and settlement, of arrows rather than blocks on the map.

The problem with Allen’s position was his commitment to the Belgic invasion hypothesis, which was even more thoroughgoing than Brooke’s. Brooke had argued that the ‘core’ coinages of the South-East were the products of Belgic invaders, whereas the peripheral coinages of tribes such as the Dobunni and Iceni were of pre-Belgic peoples, a view which Allen also held initially. Allen came to the opinion that the rise of coinage in Britain was in general ‘an indication of some degree of Belgic influence or culture’. The dividing line he drew was not between Belgic and non-Belgic coinages, but between early, uninscribed coinages of the migratory or pre-dynastic period, and the later, classicizing, inscribed coinages made when ‘the basis of the tribal or cantonal pattern of Roman times had been established’. This division has proved fundamental to most

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17 For a review of the state of play in the early 1940s, see H.B. Mattingly’s presidential address in the ‘Proceedings of the Royal Numismatic Society’, pp. 14–19, in NC 2 (1942).
20 Allen, as in n. 19, p. 98 and p. 125.
later attempts to understand the coinages of Iron-Age Britain, even those which have rejected the invasion hypothesis which, from Allen's point of view, was the reason behind it.

The inscribed, dynastic stability which Allen saw in the later period also encouraged him to write even more systematically than had Brooke the political and military history of the kingdoms of Iron-Age Britain. His narrative became orthodoxy for generations of scholars from the 1940s onwards. It found its way in one form or another into the early chapters of most of the standard books on Roman Britain, from Frere's Britannia to Salway's Roman Britain, as it provided the vital bridge between the invasions of Caesar and Claudius.23

Perhaps Allen's most lasting legacy to Iron-Age coin studies was the publication of his gazetteer of find-spots and conspectus of hoards in his essay on the origins of British coinage, published in 1960.24 Ironically this provided Iron-Age coin studies with the impetus it required to undermine Allen's own positions, as it encouraged a focus on the collection of information about archaeological and numismatic context rather than on the construction of historical narrative based on typological sequence. It also led to the foundation of the Celtic Coin Index in 1961 by Allen and Sheppard Frere, which moved from London to Oxford with Frere in 1966. This began as a card index containing records of all finds of Celtic coins from Britain. It went on-line in 2002 and now, under the direction of Philip de Jersey, contains records of 32,000 coin finds.25

Allen's Belgic invasion hypothesis was accepted entirely, though in a somewhat simplified form, by Commander R.P. Mack, author of the first type corpus for collectors (PI. 10d).26 Mack took the conflation of coin types and migratory invasions a step further, conjuring up the peculiar image of a 'second wave of immigrants to Britain, Gallo-Belgic B'.27 Mack's book remained the standard catalogue of Iron-Age coin types in Britain until the late 1980s. Together with the standard text books on Roman Britain mentioned above, it served to perpetuate Allen's views long after the theoretical basis for them had been challenged and dethroned in the wider world of Iron-Age archaeology.

The Belgic invasion hypothesis had in fact already begun to go out of fashion in the 1960s. A new generation of archaeologists, led by John Collis, more interested in asking questions about the social and economic function of coinage than in evolving new and more detailed typologies or historical narratives, started to write about Iron-Age coins from a different perspective during the 1970s and 1980s.28 During these decades, the nature of our story changes radically. The period from Evans to Allen represented the growth of a consensus about the significance of Iron-Age coinages, constructed by a sequence of great individuals whose opinions dominated the scene for decades. Allen's death in 1975 marked the turning point in many ways. Thereafter there was more genuine debate and difference of opinion among a larger group of participants about what the study of Iron-Age coinage should really be all about and, more importantly, what sort of evidence can and should be brought to bear upon it.

It was in this period that John Kent developed new ideas about the origins of coinage within Britain which, for the first time, offered an alternative to migratory Belgae in the continental

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movements of British mercenary bands, paid with gold coins which they then took back home with them. He also revived the coinage of Cassivellaunus after some years’ intermission. The mercenary hypothesis would come to play an excessively important part in Daphne Nash’s approach to Celtic coinage and society, as exemplified in her Coinage in the Celtic World. Its influence lingers in the presumption, still shared by many, that Iron-Age gold coinages were always produced for military purposes. Kent also took over Allen’s last, unfinished, project of publishing the British Museum collection of continental Celtic coins, bringing two volumes to posthumous publication.

The new archaeological tendency was, and in many ways still is, led by the work of Colin Haselgrove, who in 1977 wrote prophetically:

It seems that the study of British Iron Age coinage has itself reached a turning point and that in the future research will be increasingly devoted towards the integration of the coin evidence with the rest of the archaeological data, of which it is after all only one component.

The publication of his doctoral thesis in 1987 was the fullest statement thus far of the archaeological approach which he has pursued with such great effect. He organised all the coinages by phase, avoiding over-precision in the dating and tribal attributions, going back instead to something like Evans’s organisation by geographical district.

That this new approach failed to bring about a new consensus is vividly revealed by the publication only two years later of Van Arsdell’s Celtic Coinage of Britain, which took an entirely different tack. This book was intended as the successor to Mack’s corpus and, insofar as it included a large range of new types never before published, it served a very useful purpose. However, it had serious drawbacks. With breath-taking boldness, all types, apart from Allen’s Gallo-Belgic series, were attributed to one tribe or another and given an extraordinarily exact date range. The inscribed types of different rulers were organised into numbered issues, like those of medieval English kings, and in a curious throwback to Brooke’s invention of the coinage of Cassivellaunus, Boudicca was inexcusably given an issue of the East Anglian silver coinage attributed to the Iceni. Van Arsdell’s book was neither fish nor fowl. Numerically it was simply not very good. It was riddled with inaccuracies of description, whilst it displayed only a passing acquaintance with the relevant archaeology. That it was taken up by Cunliffe as the standard reference in the coin-related sections of the latest edition of his Iron Age Communities of Britain was perhaps one of the more puzzling turns in the recent history of British archaeology. One explanation is that Cunliffe’s view of the late Iron Age in many respects evolved out of the historicizing and art-historical tradition of Christopher Hawkes and Derek Allen. Van Arsdell’s work perhaps made more sense from this perspective than that of Haselgrove. Despite its many shortcomings, it was certainly more immediately accessible and comprehensible, which probably explained its enduring appeal.

It is perhaps surprising to realise that the tendency to describe Iron-Age coin series in tribal terms reached its peak only in the 1980s with Van Arsdell, who extended the tribes back in time to

32 Haselgrove, Supplementary Gazetteer... 1977, as in n. 24, p. 1.
36 See B.W. Cunliffe, Iron Age Communities of Britain (London, 3rd edition, 1991). Cunliffe also wrote the preface to Van Arsdell’s work where he optimistically described it as ‘an essential tool of incomparable value for everyone working in the field of Iron Age studies’.
include Allen’s early uninscribed coin series. (The Celtic Coin Index’s website has recently followed him in this.) Richard Hobbs, by contrast, returned to Allen’s distinction between uninscribed and inscribed series (though rejecting the Belgic invasion hypothesis that had underpinned it) and, following Haselgrove’s lead, returned to the example of Evans and avoided tribes altogether in his 1996 catalogue of the British Museum collection.37 This prompted an enigmatically titled retort from Van Arsdell in the pages of the Numismatic Circular.38 Hobbs’s catalogue provided a fully illustrated publication of the 4,581 coins then in the British Museum’s collection. Despite not being a full type corpus, the quality of the collection meant that in most areas it was able to serve as one. Its cautiousness on dating and tribal divisions as explained in the introduction provided a much needed antidote to the illusory exactness offered by Van Arsdell. However, the names which Hobbs gave to some of his series, especially his ‘northern’ and ‘north-eastern’ regions, rather than ‘Cauvillian/Trinovantian’ and ‘Corituvian’, were somewhat unhelpful, and perhaps said more about the south-of-Thames origins of the author than anything else.39 The other major new departure in this catalogue was the inclusion of an index to the bewildering multitude of symbols that appear on the coins. This imaginative attempt to make sense of the visual repertoire of motifs does not as yet seem to have made much impact, and it did not make good the lack of a more basic index of designs.

The 1990s saw a significant increase in activity, mostly centred on the work of the Celtic Coin Index in Oxford,40 Jeffrey May at the University of Nottingham,41 and the University of Durham, where Colin Haselgrove was professor of archaeology.42 The existence of these different centres represented the diversity of approaches which has been characteristic of the field since the 1970s. Haselgrove’s radical emphasis on evolving chronologies and questions from archaeology rather than typology, and on the integration of the study of the coin evidence with other categories of finds, differed widely from the variety of more thorough-going numismatic methods that were otherwise prevalent.43 Elsewhere, the technique of the die study was applied to a much wider range of coin series. This helped refine typologies considerably and made significant progress.44 In most other respects, however, the new numismatists perpetuated the venerable tradition of extracting history from (or injecting it into) the coin evidence. Indeed there often seemed to be few points of contact between them and the archaeologists, as the questions they were asking, the premises they were starting from, and the conclusions they thought they could draw from their evidence were so very different. The various members of the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum who had responsibility for the Iron-Age collections during the 1980s and 1990s, Andrew Burnett, Richard Hobbs and the present author, on the whole adopted a position of catholic neutrality and took refuge in publishing the collection and new hoards, or in the perhaps less exciting but certainly less polarized world of Roman coins.45

37 R. Hobbs, British Iron Age Coins in the British Museum (London, 1996). This project was initially conceived by Allen as part of his intention to publish the BM Celtic collection in five volumes.
39 Or, as Hobbs himself (pers. comm.) has acutely conjectured, maybe it’s because he’s a Londoner.
40 See the accessible introduction by P. de Jersey, Celtic Coinage in Britain (Princes Risborough, 1996), which drew extensively on his work at the Index. Also see his ‘Exotic Celtic coinage in Britain’, Oxford Journal of Archaeology 18 (1999), 189–216; and ‘Corobelin’s silver’, Britannia 32 (2001), 1–44.
There were attempts by John Creighton to reinvigorate the debate. His innovative book, *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain*, built on earlier work to develop a range of original theses about the meaning of the coin types of Iron-Age Britain. The abstract motives characteristic of early uninscribed British coinage were, he argued, inspired by narcotically induced visions brought on in the course of shamanistic ritual. On the reasons for the apparently abrupt change to classical imagery in the later period, he proposed as the vehicle for this shift a nursery of young British princes, sent to Rome as hostages, who grew up in the imperial court and returned to Britain imbued with the new Augustan style which they imitated on their coins, though almost nowhere else. This work was of uneven quality and it received mixed reviews, but it was undoubtedly the most interesting and inventive thing to come out of Iron-Age coin studies for a long time.

Ever since Evans the evidence of changing weight standards had provided a rough means of estimating chronologies for undated coin series. The development of techniques to measure specific gravity gave some insight into changing gold contents and added a further dimension to the story. The 1990s saw the metallurgical analysis of Iron-Age coins come into its own, with important work published by Northover and Cowell. The most interesting story to come out of this work was, perhaps, the deliberate maintenance within the Gallo-Belgic and uninscribed British gold series of a gold colour over a long period of steady recycling and debasement, followed by a shift towards a general preference for cuprous red gold more or less at the same time as the arrival of inscriptions and classical imagery.

Another important development in the late twentieth century was the more effective integration of continental material and its leading scholars into all sides of the insular British debate. Colin Haselgrove undertook extensive fieldwork in northern France and collected valuable information on stratified coin finds, with sometimes important implications for the dating of various early coin series. On the more strictly numismatic side, the publication in 1977 of Simone Scheers’s immensely learned work on the coinages of Belgic Gaul provided a detailed type corpus, metrical and die studies, and much information on the distributions of some of the most important coinages for the understanding of the British series. This was complemented in 1994 by Philip de Jersey’s work on the coins of Armorica.

Scheers’s style, with its intense attention to numismatic detail and strong historicizing tendencies, remains highly influential within Britain, and she remains the current leading representative of the francophone tradition of Iron-Age coin studies which for decades was dominated by the work of Colbert de Beaulieu. His view of coin chronology was strictly historically based, derived from a forced reading of the ancient literary evidence. He adopted from Camille Jullian, the great historian of Gaul in antiquity, the notion of an Arverian Empire which had lasted from the third century BC down to the Roman conquest of the south in 121 BC. Only with the fall of the Arverni and their monetary monopoly, he argued, did regional gold, silver and bronze coinages begin to flourish. This position proved to be untenable in the face of an increasing amount of good archaeological evidence which pushed the regional series back into the second century BC, though it still

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48 See Evans, *Coins of the Ancient Britons*, as in n. 9, pp. 26–7, estimating the date for the beginning of coinage in Britain through declining weight standards.


seems to have some advocates. Colbert de Beaulieu was also keen on attributing coin series to different local tribes. This, with some modification, is a tradition that persists. There is, however, an important countervailing archaeological tendency which is less committed to an historical framework for dating and more sceptical as to tribal nomenclature. If the study of these coins in Britain and on the continent is to move forward in the future, there will have to be a furthering of dialogue between archaeologists and numismatists on both sides of the Channel.

**Roman Coins**

At the turn of the last millennium Britain was in many ways the most intensely studied province of the Roman Empire, both in terms of the numbers and range of sites excavated and the kinds of questions asked about it. Britain generally lacks the monumental remains that characterize the continental provinces of the Empire, so British archaeologists developed new techniques of excavation, including stratigraphy, and studied the small things at their disposal—the strap-ends, the potsherds, the brooches, the tile fragments—at which they once excelled. Romano-British archaeology was thus rather less art-historical than its continental counterparts, which was a good thing. But it still shared some of their blindspots. For example, British archaeologists tended to excavate the ‘historically significant’ villas, towns and military camps of Roman Britain, and largely ignored the countryside. In an economy that must always have been predominantly agricultural and where most of the population will have lived in small rural settlements, this was perhaps an oversight.

The style of writing about Roman Britain changed over the century. From Haverfield through to the 1980s, most general books concentrated on the military and political story. Archaeology was used to illustrate the ancient textual evidence, or rather the narrative that had been constructed from that evidence. The post-1965 generation realised that archaeology could answer different kinds of important questions on which the texts had nothing to say. They began instead to devise a wide array of theoretical positions to enliven their debates on such subjects as Romanization, society and economy. They stopped reading Latin and Greek texts but, to some extent, also lost their interest in objects, and stopped being able to identify coins and pots as well.

The study of Roman coins in Britain fitted into this changing paradigm rather well. There was no distinctively Romano-British numismatic series, apart from the late third-century ‘British emperors’, Carausius and Allectus, and the brief life of the mint of London in the next generation. So there was no great local numismatic patrimony to distract scholars from more important matters. For the first half of the century British numismatists wisely concentrated instead on the imperial series as a whole, rather than on their small inheritance of it. Out of this empire-wide view grew Roman Imperial Coinage and the catalogue of the British Museum collection which between them still constitute the standard references for Roman imperial coins of most periods. The original presiding genius of these projects was Harold Mattingly who, together with Edward
Sydenham, worked tirelessly on both from the 1920s to 1950 as assistant keeper in the British Museum (though, to the slight frustration of his unworthy successors, he puzzlingly omitted to write a concordance between them). Webb and Pearce contributed volumes on the third and late fourth centuries AD respectively, while Sutherland, Carson, and Kent continued the work on both series until the publication of the final, tenth, volume of RIC in 1994. Not the least of the contributions made by those remarkable Romanists was the indispensable Late Roman Bronze Coinage, which reduced the apparent complexities of this series to a manageable, if initially daunting, tabular format. The British Museum collection of Republican coins had been published in 1910 by Grueber, whose work was based on that of Count de Salis in the previous generation. Sydenham’s type corpus of the series appeared in 1952, but the mysteries of the Republican series were not finally solved until Crawford’s Roman Republican Coinage in 1974, which immediately rendered all previous classifications obsolete.

The sorting out of the entire Roman coin series is perhaps the most important contribution made by British scholars in any field of numismatics. That tradition lives on in the Roman Provincial Coinage project with the added ingredient of entente cordiale, since it is a joint enterprise of the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This essay could justifiably end here, but there is another, equally important, story to tell about Roman coin studies in Britain, concerning the rise of a distinctively British style of archaeological numismatics in the 1970s, inspired by Richard Reece in London and John Casey in Durham.

There had been books of merit and interest on Roman coins in Britain before 1970. Akerman published the earliest example of the genre in 1836, but the first of the modern era appeared in 1937. Sutherland’s Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain undertook a period-by-period survey of the subject, looking at both the general currency and the phenomenon of copying in each one. It made extensive use of hoard evidence and contained a systematic list of all Roman coin hoards from Britain then known. On a somewhat more popular level for collectors was Gilbert Askew’s Coinage of Roman Britain, which was essentially an updated version of Akerman.

Roman coin hoards were doggedly published, with increasing attention to detail over the years as new reference books became available, by British Museum curators who dealt with them in the course of their Treasure Trove work. These appeared first in the Numismatic Chronicle and later in the Coin Hoards from Roman Britain series, started by Robert Carson and Andrew Burnett in 1979. But there was little sense that coin finds, whether in hoards or individually, were merely one aspect of the whole archaeological record with which they should be integrated. They were treated as a source for new numismatic types and varieties and as a means of understanding what coins were in circulation within Britain at different periods.

Explanations of different patterns of hoarding or circulation were mostly derived from historical evidence. Explanations were simple, in the sense that outbreaks of hoarding were thought to be explicable in most cases as a response to a local emergency of some kind or another. All that remained was to find out from the texts what the emergency might have been, be it the Boudiccan rebellion, the End of Roman Britain, or whatever. If nothing appropriate was found, the hoards were then interpreted as predictive of an otherwise unrecorded emergency — Saxon pirate raids, local insurgencies or the like. Either way, hoards were made to serve the purposes of reconstructing the military and political history of Roman Britain, which was entirely understandable as this was in fact the agenda of Roman archaeology as a whole. So, for instance, Anne S. Robertson, the

63 C.H.V. Sutherland, Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain (London, 1937).
doyenne of Romano-British coin studies, whose monumental corpus of hoards was published posthumously in 2000, attempted to explain the efflorescence of hoards closing in the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 160–181) with reference to a textually-attested rebellion within Britain which, she argued, had caused an outbreak of emergency hoarding. The problem with this explanation was that there was also a peak in hoarding at this time detectable in other areas of the empire where no disturbances were recorded. This began to be changed by the work of John Casey and Richard Reece in the 1960s and 1970s, both Roman archaeologists with a particular personal interest in coins and in site finds in particular.

Reece studied the rather unpromising 56,000 coins found in the excavations at Richborough in Kent, and found that in the late third century AD there was a huge upsurge in the numbers of coins found on the site, and a corresponding dip in the period from 296 to 317. This he initially interpreted as an indication of the refortification of Richborough by the 'British emperors', Carausius and Allectus, in the years up to 296. He then went on to compare the profile of coin finds, period by period, from this site with those from eighty-eight other sites in Britain which he had also studied and, most importantly, with the normal profile of coin loss for all sites, which was a mean generated from their coin lists. Reece found that the late third-century upsurge in Richborough's coin list was actually perfectly normal for Britain as a whole, but that Richborough had an abnormally high proportion of coins from the latest period of Roman Britain, 388–402. These observations led Reece to develop new statistical methods of analysing data on coin loss and a range of predictive 'normal' profiles for different kinds of site across Britain. Not everyone found them entirely accessible, however, and in the latest presentation of his ideas there are, mercifully, 'no numbers'.

This method has been revolutionary for our understanding of coin circulation in Roman Britain and beyond, and is still fundamental. What it taught us is that no site, indeed no province, can be studied in isolation. What it perhaps did not manage to achieve was to integrate fully the study of the coins with other categories of finds. Though Reece's work was by no means restricted to coins, that part of it that concentrated on the numismatic evidence was still something of a closed discourse to those not especially interested in the subject of Roman coinage in Britain. But there are signs in the work of the next generation that this is changing. The excavators of the Roman small town at Heybridge in Essex, for example, are attempting not merely to construct a unified coin list for the whole site, but to investigate variations in coin loss between different contexts within it, and to relate these to the other sorts of finds in the different settlement zones of the town, in order to produce a more integrated description of both the material and the place.

The major advances in interpretation have come from the recording and study of site finds by archaeologists. It must be acknowledged, however, that an important contribution has also been made by amateur archaeologists and metal-detectorists. Although the precision of the provenance date they tend to provide may leave something to be desired, the sheer quantity of material recovered is impressive. Through their efforts several new types of Iron-Age coin came to light in the 1980s and 1990s, and the numbers of specimens known increased rapidly. Relations between detectorists and archaeologists were often rather tense except in areas like Norfolk, where archaeologists like Tony Gregory made an effort to reach across the divide and gain access to the

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66. For a more extended account, see R. Reece, Coinage in Roman Britain (London). For further selected highlights, see also Reece, Roman Coins from 140 Sites in Britain, Cotswold Studies 4 (Cirencester, 1991); 'Site-finds in Britain', Britannia 26 (1995), 179–206; 'The interpretation of site finds - a review', in Coin finds and coin use in the Roman world, edited by C.E. King and D.G. Wigg, Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike 10 (Berlin, 1986), 341–54.

67. Work currently being undertaken for publication by Peter Guest and Mark Atkinson.

68. For further discussion, see P. de Jersey, 'Cast away riches: estimating the volume of Celtic coinage found in Britain', The Yorkshire Numismatist 3 (1997), 1–13.
important material and other information that detectorists were uncovering and which was going unrecorded.71 One imaginative response to the situation was the introduction of British Numismatic Journal’s Coin Register in 1987, as a quick and easy means of publicizing new single finds of significance. A potential solution to the problem arose out of a report of the Council for British Archaeology published in 1995, which estimated that around 30,000 detectorists were discovering something of the order of 400,000 finds dating from before 1600 every year, of which perhaps only five per cent were being recorded in any form.72 Something had to be done to encourage the voluntary reporting of these finds, and to improve relations across the country. This general feeling led to the launching of the Portable Antiquities Scheme in 1997, which received most of its initial impetus from numismatists, especially Roger Bland. The scheme, which is based at the British Museum and within local archaeological or museum services, was designed to enable the voluntary recording of finds of antiquities of all sorts, mostly made by metal-detectorists. Of the many thousands of objects of all kinds found and recorded every year, Roman coins alone constituted almost a fifth. The Scheme was piloted in six different regions across England and Wales, and has recently received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover the whole of England and Wales.73 (Scotland and Northern Ireland are not included.) The national scheme will include a post specifically dedicated to the interpretation of Roman and Iron-Age coins recorded by regional finds liaison officers.

Despite the increase in the contribution of site finds and chance individual finds since the 1970s, hoards have continued to make a considerable impact, not least on the lives of British Museum curators. The early third-century AD Shapwick Villa hoard of over 9,000 silver denarius, found in 1998, was the largest fully recorded (and now published) denarius hoard from anywhere in the Roman Empire.74 In the 1980s the curators who worked on the massive Normanby (Lincls.) and Cunetio (Wilt.) hoards of 47,909 and 54,951 radiates respectively rewrote the catalogue of the late third-century coinage.75 The Hoxne (Suffolk) hoard of over 15,000 gold and silver coins and over 200 items of gold and silver jewellery and tableware, buried in the early fifth century AD and rediscovered in 1992, will build on Pearce’s and Kent’s earlier taxonomic work on the late Roman silver siliqua coinage.76 The Hoxne hoard also provides important new information and analytical data on the related phenomena of the copying and clipping of silver coins in this period, of which the latter especially has long been a favourite subject in Romano-British numismatics.77

Finally, the mid-fifth-century AD Patching (W. Sussex) hoard, discovered in 1997, either narrowed or highlighted the gap between the disappearance of coinage with the end of Roman Britain and its reappearance in Anglo-Saxon England.78 This chasm had once been filled with the so-called

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71 See, e.g., his essay ‘Snippetsham and Bury: some new light on the earliest Icenian coinage’, in Mays (editor), Celtic Coinage, as in n. 28, pp. 47–68, together with Andrew Rogerson’s obituary of Gregory at pp. 70–71.
73 See the Scheme’s website at www.finds.org.uk and its regular Newsletter and Annual Report.
‘minim’ coinage of the fifth and sixth centuries. A steadily improving understanding of the phenomenon of copying over the twentieth century, especially of low denominations, rightly identified these coins as ‘barbarous’ imitations of earlier types, relocated them to the third and fourth centuries where they belonged, and left the fifth and sixth centuries barren. There are renewed attempts to fill them again with lingering Roman base-metal coins found in early Anglo-Saxon burial contexts. The implications of these and many other hoard finds, old and new, have recently been succinctly and admirably surveyed by Richard Anthony Abdy in his Romano-British Coin Hoards. The advent of the Treasure Act in 1997, which superseded the old common law of Treasure Trove, had an immediate impact on the number and the kinds of hoards that were reported and catalogued. Brought into law through the joint efforts of the Surrey Archaeological Society, Lord Perth and Roger Bland, it quickly effected a doubling in the number of reported cases of coin hoards. This increase came about largely because, under the new law, hoards no longer had to have been intended with the intention of later recovery to qualify as treasure. Moreover, base-metal coin hoards now fell squarely within the category of finds that had to be reported. Previously coins had had to consist ‘substantially’ of precious metal. This left many debased-silver coinages in an uncertain position. Furthermore, base-metal non-coin objects found in association with coin hoards were now deemed to be treasure ‘by association’. This led to a noticeable increase in the numbers of sestertius hoards, mixed silver and bronze hoards, and hoards including items of copper-alloy jewellery that became available for recording. It will be interesting to see whether this trend continues in future years and whether the new-found visibility of these wider associations will bring hoard studies closer to other archaeological debates.

Conclusion

The fields of Iron-Age and Roman numismatics in Britain have taken similar courses over the century of the British Numismatic Society’s existence. Both have developed vastly more detailed typologies, and benefited from improved provenance data and proper recording of hoards. One paradoxical consequence of this was that archaeologists and historians in adjacent fields gradually came to pay less and less attention to what the numismatists were writing and thinking, and their methods and preconceptions seemed to drift further and further apart from one another. Numismatics tended to persist in its deep-rooted antiquarian traditions of taxonomy, whilst archaeologists increasingly adopted a variety of ideas-based approaches which all too often shunned the object. The numismatists tended to work within the conceptual framework of a previous generation of archaeologists and historians, while they in turn referred to outdated or unreliable books on coins, or took as facts statements or arrangements that were merely hypothetical.

There were figures in both fields who saw the need for (re-)integration, especially in the latter part of the century, but they were only partially successful. Despite their efforts, most people in the wider academic world continued to work with the presumption that coins and coin studies...
were somewhat marginal. Absorbed as they were with the minutiae of their subject and dealing with the ever-increasing volume of material, the numismatists on the whole failed to communicate their passion and the significance of their material and results to others, and they were always in danger of becoming something of a closed community. Neither of Britain's national numismatic societies did much to counteract this tendency. Indeed it could be said that they fostered and institutionalized it.

Despite the problems, the study of Iron-Age and Roman coins within Britain was still in rude health in late 2002 at the time of writing. Traditional numismatic approaches and more integrated studies were both flourishing, in Iron-Age coins as never before. Whether they will fare so well in the future depends at least in part on whether numismatists succeed in communicating more effectively with their wider academic audiences, which are still potential rather than actual. The challenge before the Society and its friends in its second century is surely to create for the discipline an even more confident and outward-looking character than it had in its first. *Sic C, aliter CC*.