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HOARDING IN BRITAIN: AN OVERVIEW

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Introduction: what is a hoard?

In this paper I discuss some aspects of the study of hoards found in Britain. There is a very rich heritage of hoards of coins (and other metal artefacts), and their study underpins our understanding of how coins circulated in this country. Much has been written on what hoards can tell us about coinage, or, for example, Bronze Age metalwork and there have been many studies of hoards of different periods, but there have been few attempts at an overview of hoarding across time.¹ I shall raise some questions about hoarding in general to see whether one can make connections across periods.

In the summer of 2013 the British Museum and University of Leicester initiated a research project, with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, on ‘Crisis or continuity? The deposition of metalwork in the Roman world: what do coin hoards tell us about Roman Britain in the third century AD?’ Three research assistants will be employed and a complete database of all Roman hoards from Britain will be published online at www.finds.org.uk. The project will also include a survey of a large sample of hoards to try to understand better why they were buried. In this paper I introduce some of the themes we intend to explore further in this project.

First, we need to consider what is meant by the term ‘hoard’. I will look at hoarding and the deposition of artefacts in the ground in the broadest sense and by ‘hoard’ I mean any group of objects which have been deliberately brought together, but not necessarily deliberately placed in the ground – so the contents of a purse lost by accident would also count.

In 1975 Philip Grierson divided coin hoards into four categories: accidental losses, ‘emergency’ hoards, ‘savings’ hoards and abandoned hoards.² Under ‘accidental losses’ Grierson included purses or small bags of coins lost by accident; ‘emergency’ hoards comprise groups of coins taken from circulation on a single occasion and buried in an emergency, with the intention of subsequent recovery, while ‘savings’ hoards comprise coins taken from currency over a period of time, and also deliberately buried or concealed by their owners with the intention of recovery. Lastly, Grierson defined ‘abandoned’ hoards as those whose owners disposed of their coins with no intention of retrieving them and he gave as examples coins associated with burials, foundation deposits in buildings and groups of coins thrown into wells or fountains. This classification, itself a development of earlier accounts,³ has proved very influential in subsequent literature.⁴ The distinction between ‘savings’ and ‘emergency’ hoards is now generally regarded as not very useful.⁵ In practice hoards do not fall into neat categories and

Acknowledgements. This is shorter version of a paper to be published in Naylor forthcoming. I am very grateful to Martin Allen, Philip de Jersey and Ben Roberts for data on hoards; to Martin, Sam Moorhead and Kenneth Painter for very helpful comments on a draft of this paper and to Kenneth, Richard Bradley and Edward Besly for advance sight of their papers in that volume. For an earlier exposition of some of the ideas in this paper see Moorhead, Bland and Pett 2010. I am also very grateful to Sam Moorhead for many stimulating discussions on hoards and hoarding and to Martin Allen for his many improvements to this paper in the editorial process. I am also grateful to Ian Leins for permission to reproduce Fig. 6, Daniel Gricourt for Fig. 10 and Richard Hobbs for Figs 11–13.

¹ An exception is Hobbs 2006, which discusses late Roman precious-metal deposits from across the Empire and beyond from c. AD 200 to 700.

² Grierson 1975, 134–59.

³ For example, Laing 1969, 52–68.

⁴ For example, Casey 1986, 51–67; Reece 1987, 46–70; Burnett 1991, 51–7; Reece 2002, 67–88; Blackburn 2005, 10–17; Blackburn 2011, 585–8.

⁵ Reece 2002, 72.

any attempt to categorize them this way is likely to conceal the fact that the contents of hoards will have been put together in a wide range of different ways. Both ‘emergency’ and ‘savings’ hoards are likely to have been concealed for the same reasons: because their owners felt threatened and buried their wealth in the ground with the intention of subsequent recovery. Traditionally, therefore, students of coin hoards have generally seen them as having been buried for safekeeping, although Hobbs argues for a wider range of reasons for hoarding, including the possibility that hoards might have been buried for social reasons (a theme also taken up by Guest in his 1994 PhD).⁶ In his discussion of early medieval coin finds, Blackburn proposes another method of classifying hoards, by analysing how the elements in the hoards were put together, rather than the circumstances of their burial.⁷ He notes that many hoards had complicated histories and that a single hoard could contain several distinct elements, citing as an example a hoard of coins found in Cambridge which contained 1,805 pennies of the period 1279–1351; this was no doubt drawn from circulation over a period of time, with the addition of nine gold coins in the 1350s.⁸ This is an important insight, but in this paper I am chiefly concerned with the circumstances of deposition rather than with the contents of hoards.

By contrast, when prehistorians discuss hoarding and the deposition of valuable objects they generally assume that objects are deposited for votive reasons.⁹ Such an explanation is very rarely applied to medieval or post-medieval hoards – votive deposition is not normally thought to fit into the Christian tradition¹⁰ – and it is unusual for hoards from the Roman period (although see Hobbs 2006). This makes the Iron Age/Roman transition a key period for study in any discussion of why hoards were buried in Britain.¹¹

If we focus on the reasons why hoards were buried and not recovered, we can propose the following categories: (a) accidental losses; (b) hoards buried with the intention of recovery and (c) hoards deliberately abandoned for a variety of reasons, including votive. A further variation in this simple categorization is provided by the theory that at certain periods, for example after AD 296 when radiates were replaced with *nummi*, it is possible that hoards which had been deliberately buried in the ground were not recovered by their owners because the coins had been demonetized and therefore were effectively worthless.¹²

Rate of discovery

The growth of metal detecting from 1970 and the introduction of the Treasure Act and the Portable Antiquities Scheme in 1997 have led to a great increase in the discovery and recording of hoards. Fig. 1 shows the numbers of hoards of Roman coins discovered each year from the earliest records in the fifteenth century AD to 2010, with data derived from Robertson’s *Inventory* and more recent finds reported as Treasure: the steep increase in discoveries in the last twenty years is very apparent.¹³

The pattern of hoarding in Britain

To introduce the subject of the pattern of hoarding in Britain I have attempted a very approximate and high level overview of coin hoards from Britain. For the Iron Age Philip de Jersey has kindly supplied information from his forthcoming corpus of Iron Age coin hoards. The figure for Roman finds is based on Anne Robertson’s *Inventory* which contained data on 1990

⁶ Hobbs 2006, 120–34; Guest 1994.

⁷ Blackburn 2005, 13–14.

⁸ Allen 2005; Blackburn 2005, 14.

⁹ Bradley 1988; Bradley 1998; Needham 1988; Hill 1995.

¹⁰ For an exception see Bradley forthcoming.

¹¹ Aitchison 1988 suggests that some Roman coin hoards may have been buried for votive reasons. He also makes an important distinction between hoards buried within the province of Britain and those buried north of Hadrian’s Wall or the Antonine Wall in Scotland: once coins were exported beyond the frontier their whole function changed.

¹² Casey 1986, 65–6; Reece 2002, 77.

¹³ Robertson 2000. Blackburn has carried out a similar analysis for hoards of coins of the period 450–1180: see Blackburn 2005, 26, figs. 1 and 2. The pattern he obtained is very similar to the one for Roman hoards.

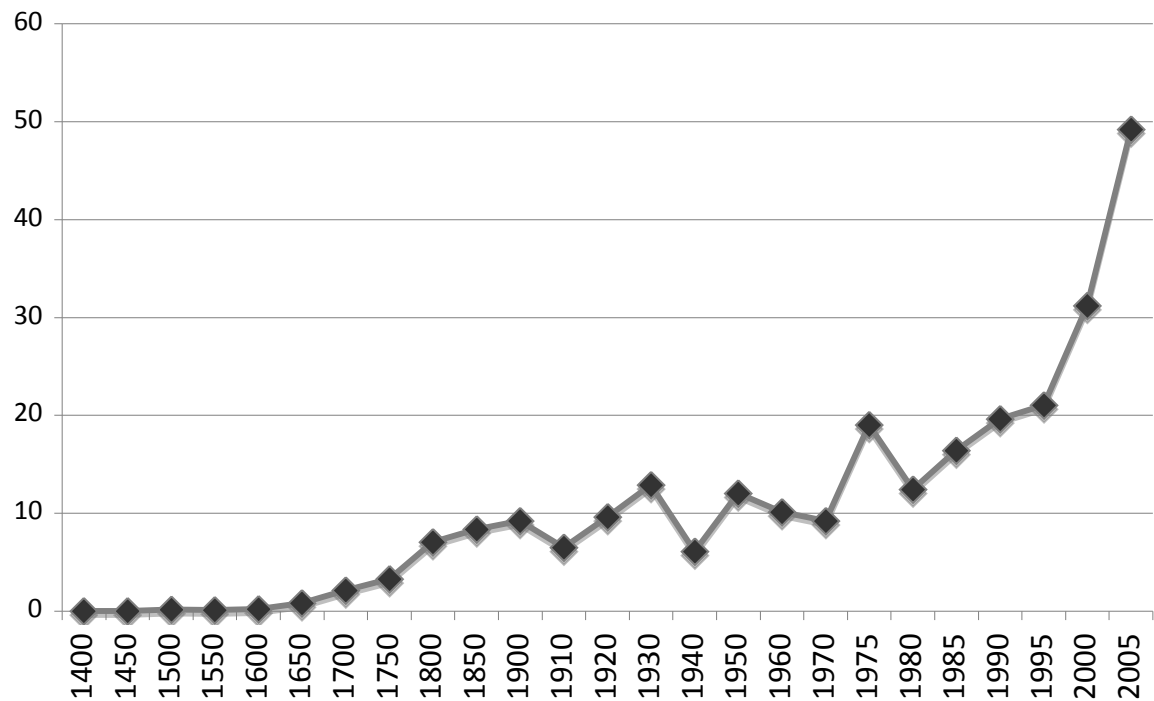


Fig. 1. Number of hoards of Roman coins discovered *per annum*, 1400–2010.

finds made up to about 1990; there are 739 later finds until the end of 2012 (of which 185 are addenda to existing hoards).¹⁴ The early medieval data is based on the Fitzwilliam Museum's online Checklist of Coin Hoards,¹⁵ and the medieval figure on Allen's recent list.¹⁶ The post-medieval figure is based on the hoard corpus published by Brown and Dolley in 1971, which goes up to 1967, with an estimate of the number of more recent finds, and for the Civil War period we have Edward Besly's updated summary in this volume.¹⁷ There is no doubt that the research currently being carried out by Stephen Briggs on references to hoards and other coin finds in online newspaper archives will greatly increase our corpus of hoards, especially of the post-medieval period.

TABLE 1. Approximate total number of coin hoards from Britain by period

<i>Period</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Iron Age (c.55 BC–AD 64)	340	
Roman (AD 43–410)	2,544	
Early medieval (410–1180)	415	
Medieval (1180–1544)	372	(excludes Scotland)
Post-medieval (1544–1967)	c.854	(estimate)
Total	4,525	

Fig. 2 summarizes the number of coin hoards from the Iron Age to 1937. It should be stressed that this chart only reflects the number of hoards that have been recovered from these periods and it in no way reflects their value. This can range enormously from a handful of

¹⁴ Robertson 2000.

¹⁵ <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/coins/projects/hoards/>. See Blackburn 2003 and 2005 for analysis of early medieval hoards.

¹⁶ Allen 2012, 446–514.

¹⁷ Brown and Dolley 1971; Besly and Briggs 2013.

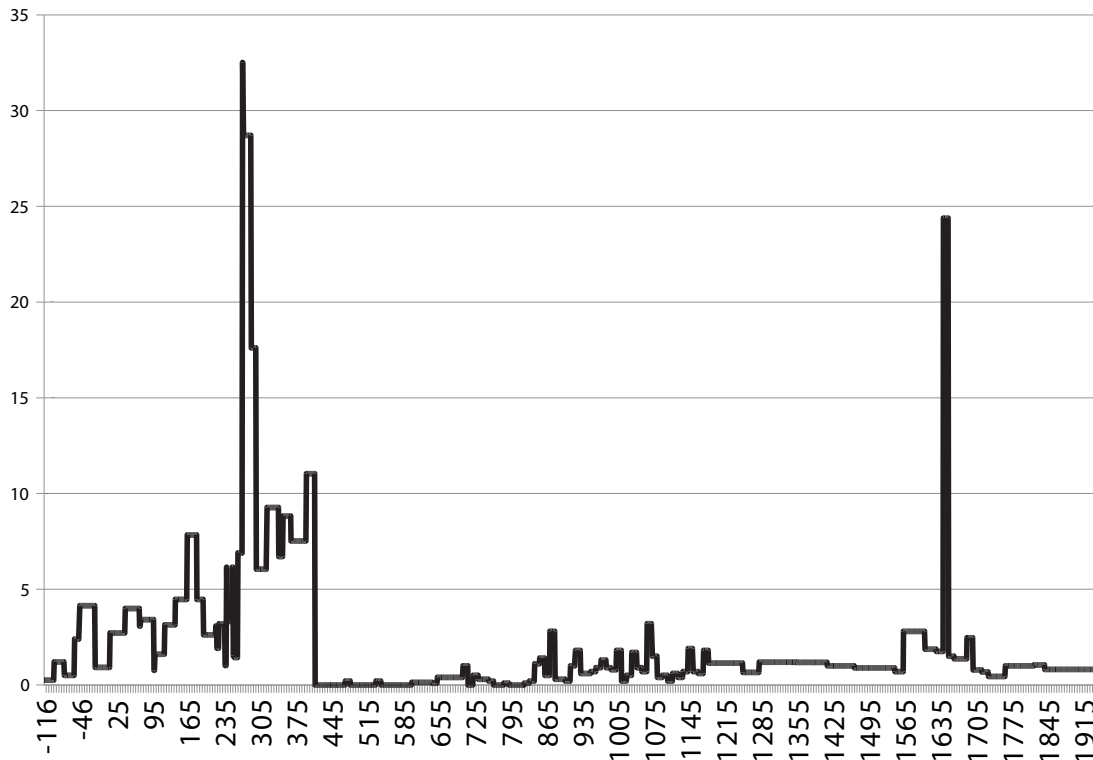


Fig. 2. Numbers of coin hoards deposited *per annum*, 120 BC–AD 1937.

base metal *nummi* of the fourth century to the 580 gold and 14,654 silver coins and some 200 items of gold and silver jewellery in the Hoxne hoard.

Fig. 3 provides a more detailed analysis of the Iron Age and Roman periods, from AD 69. There is a first peak in the 160s, when we have many hoards of silver *denarii*, and then a huge spike in the radiate period, between 268 and 296. In the fourth century the number of hoards is higher than in the early empire but it is much lower than at the end of the third century.

The early medieval pattern (Fig. 4) is interesting and has been commented on by Blackburn.¹⁸ Most of the hoards are quite closely dated and I have divided them into ten year periods and this clearly influences the pattern. During the fifth and sixth centuries there is very little coinage in Britain (although recent work shows that it was not entirely absent) and this is reflected in the very low number of hoards. These start to increase with the resumption of coinage in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms after 600 and there is an initial peak at the beginning of the eighth century. There is then a decline and hoards start to become more frequent in the mid ninth century – and in the period of Alfred the Great (871–99) in particular. This presumably reflects two things – the pattern of coin production and the incidence of Viking raids, so well attested in the historical sources. The dip in the early tenth century is interesting – could that reflect a respite from Viking attacks and the Anglo-Saxon offensive with its reconquest of much of the Danelaw – and then numbers rise again for the next 150 years, with a peak in the decade of 1060–70, i.e. the time of the Norman conquest. There is then a decline under William II and Henry I and another increase in the reign of Stephen – the anarchy.

In the next period, covering 750 years from Henry II's introduction of Short Cross coinage in 1180 to 1937 (Fig. 5), things seem to settle down. The main feature seems to be the great stability throughout this long period, with a modest increase under Elizabeth I and a dramatic spike at the time of the Civil War in the decade 1639–49. So once we move past the Roman

¹⁸ Blackburn 2003; Blackburn 2005.

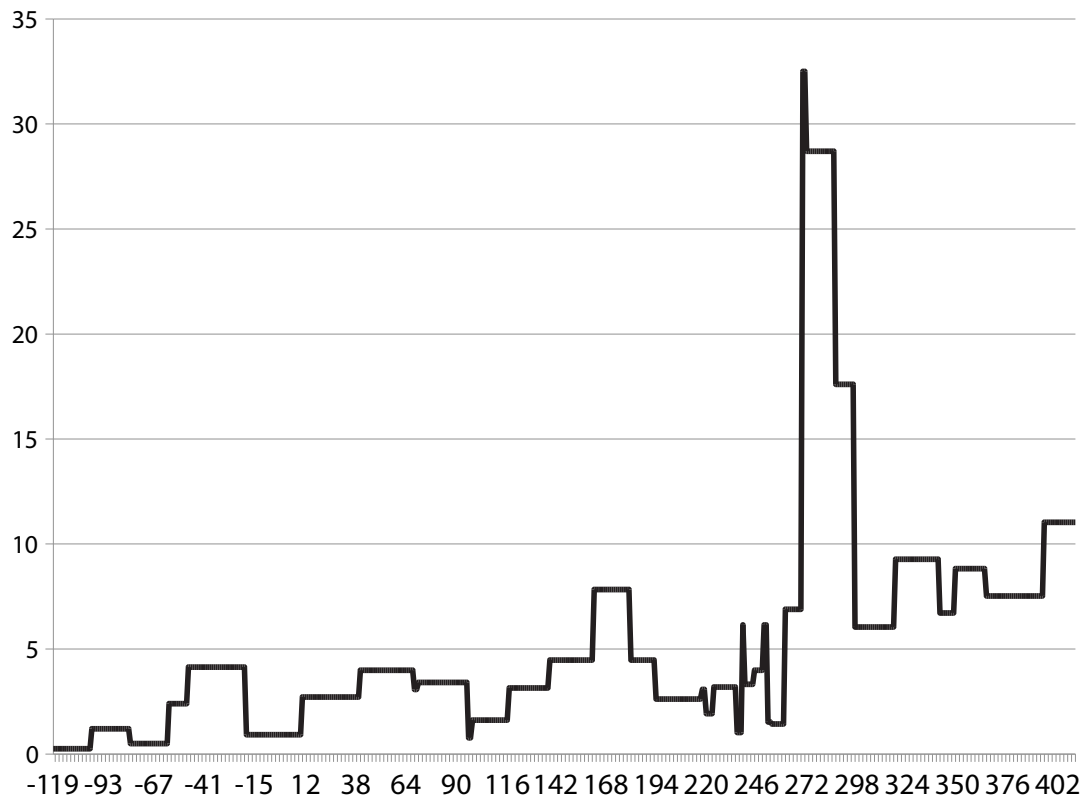


Fig. 3. Numbers of coin hoards deposited *per annum*, 120 BC–AD 410.

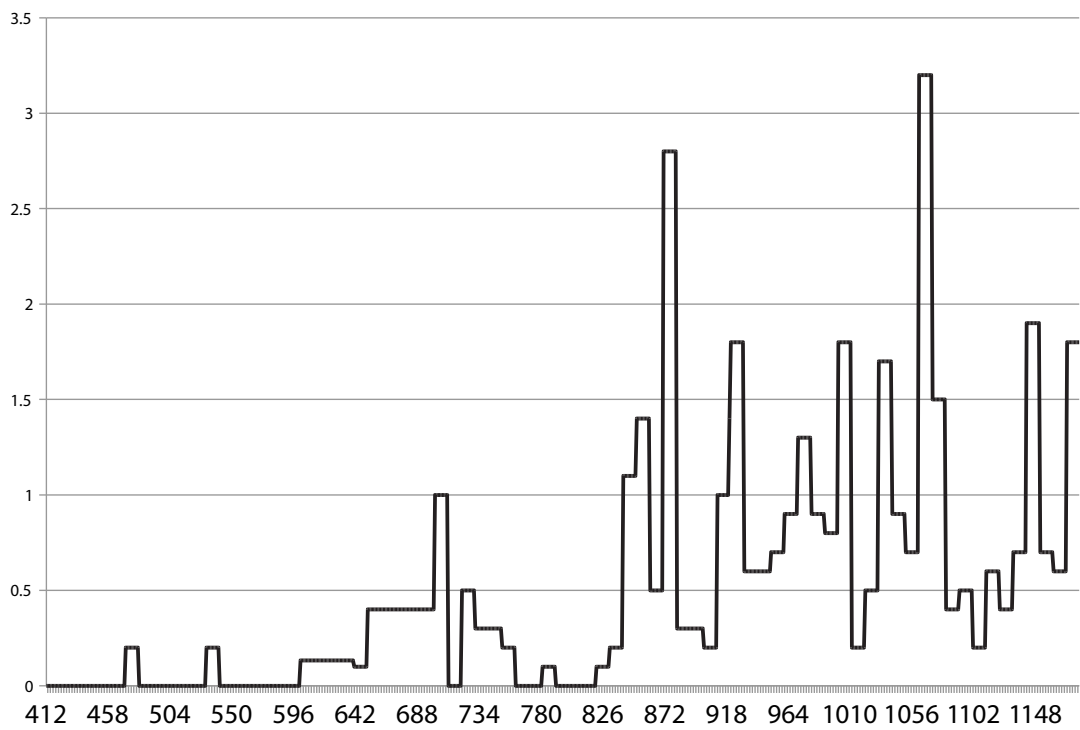


Fig. 4. Numbers of coin hoards deposited *per annum*, AD 410–1180.

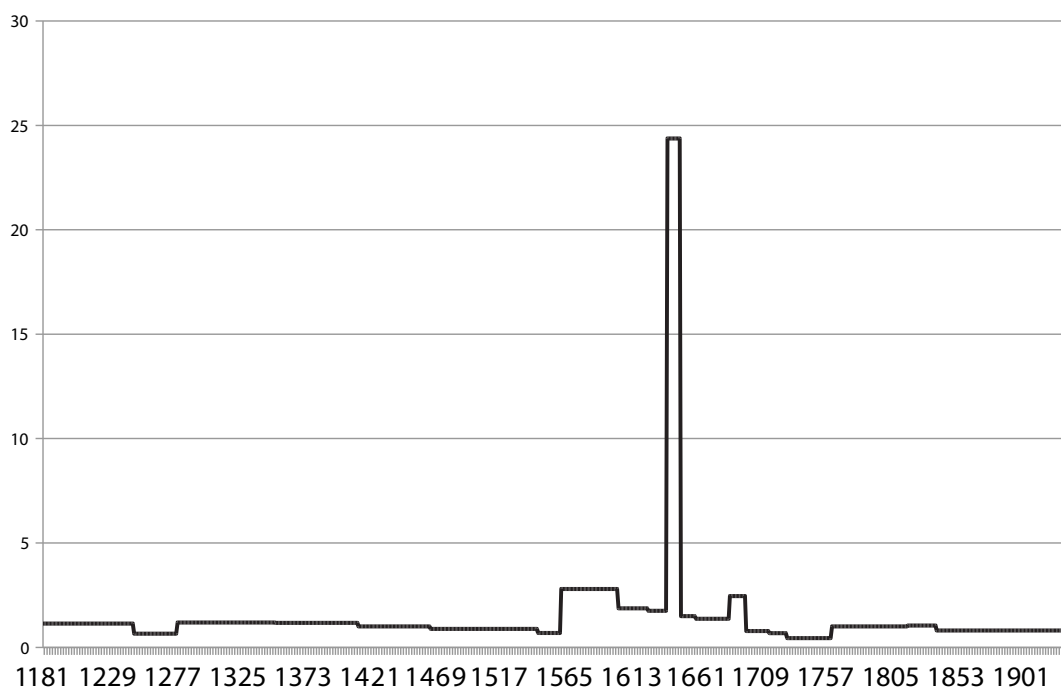


Fig. 5. Numbers of hoards deposited *per annum*, AD 1180–1937.

period it is very difficult to divorce the incidence of hoarding – and it must always be remembered that we only study the unrecovered hoards; we have no means of knowing how many more hoards were buried by their owners and subsequently recovered – and times of unrest, whether it be the Viking attacks in the ninth to eleventh centuries, the Norman Conquest or the Civil War. But the threat of invasion at the time of the Napoleonic Wars is not reflected here.

Hoarding in the prehistoric period

No one would question the votive nature of deposits of Bronze Age metalwork. Yates and Bradley demonstrated a correlation between these deposits and river valleys, especially near the source of rivers.¹⁹ They also made the fascinating observation that ‘for some time it has been obvious that metal detectorists have been extraordinarily fortunate in locating previously unrecorded hoards. The same people have found them on a number of different occasions. Discussions with the finders have made it clear that this did not happen by chance. Long before prehistorians had realized that the siting of hoards might follow topographic ‘rules’, metal detectorists had reached the same conclusion.’²⁰

Similarly it is hardly controversial to suggest that Iron Age hoards such as the deposits of torcs (and coins) from Snettisham in Norfolk might have been buried for ritual reasons.²¹ The hoards of coins from Hallaton, Leicestershire, also seem to have been buried in the ground for ritual purposes rather than with the intention of recovery.²² After an amateur archaeologist, Ken Wallace, discovered a number of Iron Age coins in 2000 the University of Leicester Archaeological Services carried out an excavation on the site between 2001 and 2003. They

¹⁹ Yates and Bradley 2010, fig. 6.

²⁰ Yates and Bradley 2010, 28–9.

²¹ Stead 1991.

²² Leins 2007; Score 2011.

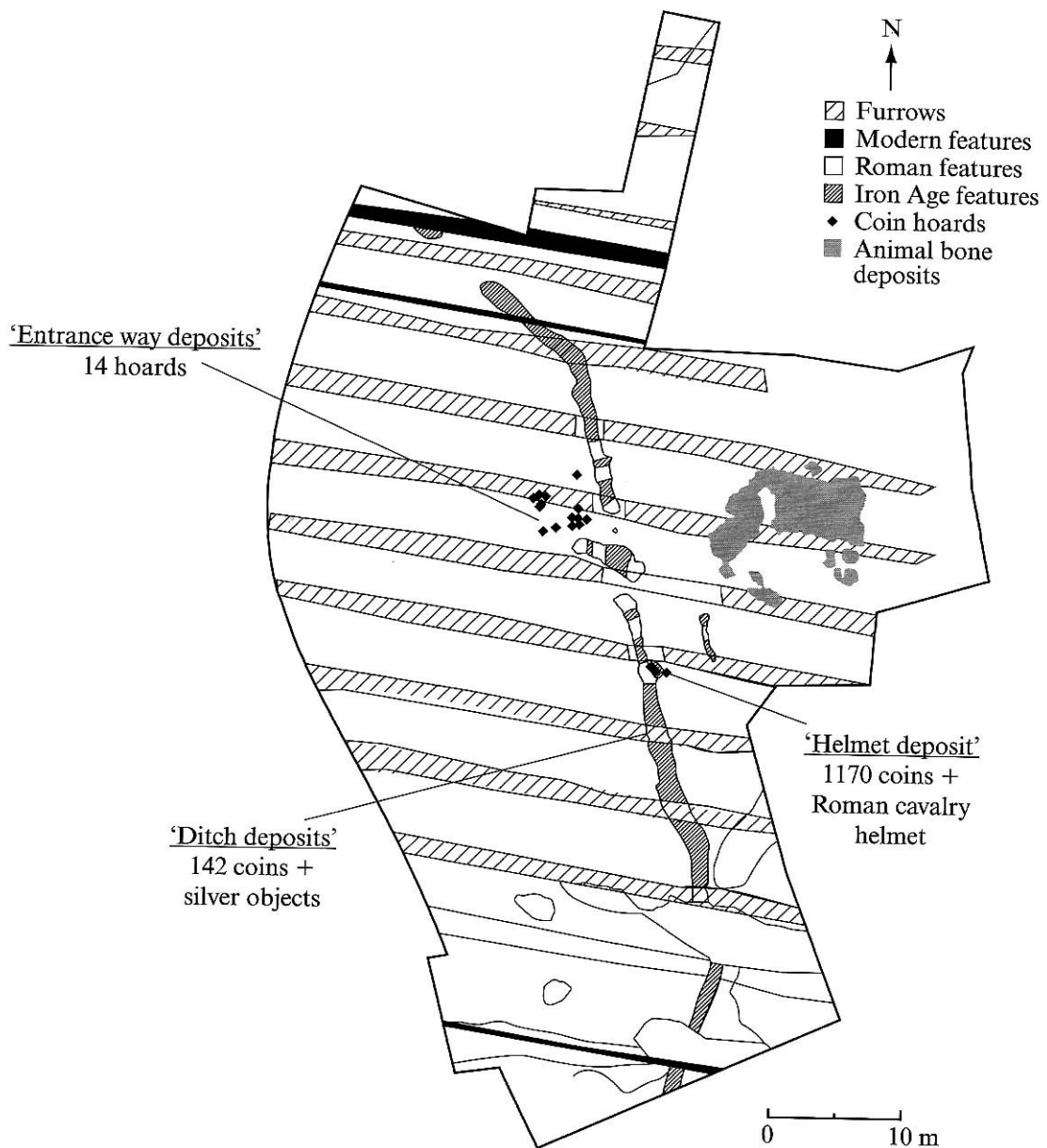


Fig. 6. Hallaton deposits (Leins 2007).

recovered a total of 5,292 coins in sixteen separate groups. The nature of the site remains difficult to interpret – it is on a hillside and there is an enclosure surrounded by a ditch – and it seems to have been a place where the local people gathered for ritual feasting as large numbers of animal bones were discovered. At one point, in an entrance way through the ditch, fourteen separate deposits of coins were found while further away the remains of Roman cavalry helmet contained 1,170 coins and a final deposit of 142 coins and silver objects a little further away still (Fig. 6). It is difficult to interpret these deposits as having been buried with the intention of recovery as they were so close to each other and all the signs are that they were buried for ritual purposes.²³ What is interesting is the association of 1,170 Iron Age coins with a Roman helmet – it is thought to be early first century AD – while radio-carbon dates of the pits

²³ However another suggestion is that the hoards could have been buried with the intention of recovery at the time of the Roman invasion.

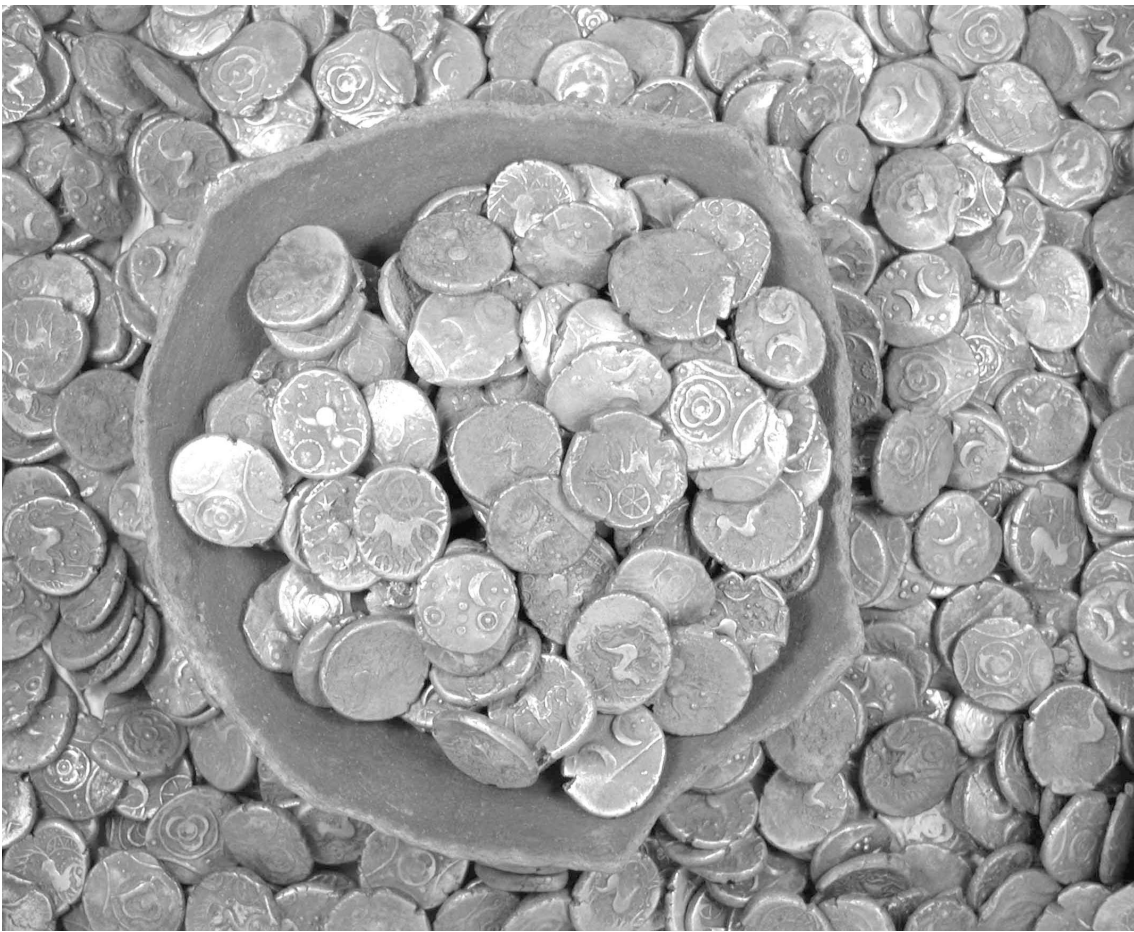


Fig. 7. The Dallinghoo hoard.

suggest the site was being used down to the 50s AD, so into the early years of the Roman occupation.

But why were 39 gold Iron Age staters dating to *c.* 50 BC found inside a cow bone placed in the ground? This hoard was found during the excavations at Sedgeford in Norfolk in 2003.²⁴ And yet presumably hoards were also buried with the intention of recovery in the Iron Age – for example, the hoard of 840 gold staters (deposited *c.* AD 15) found by two detector users at Dallinghoo in Suffolk in 2008: the largest hoard of Iron Age gold coins to have been recorded from Britain (Fig. 7).²⁵

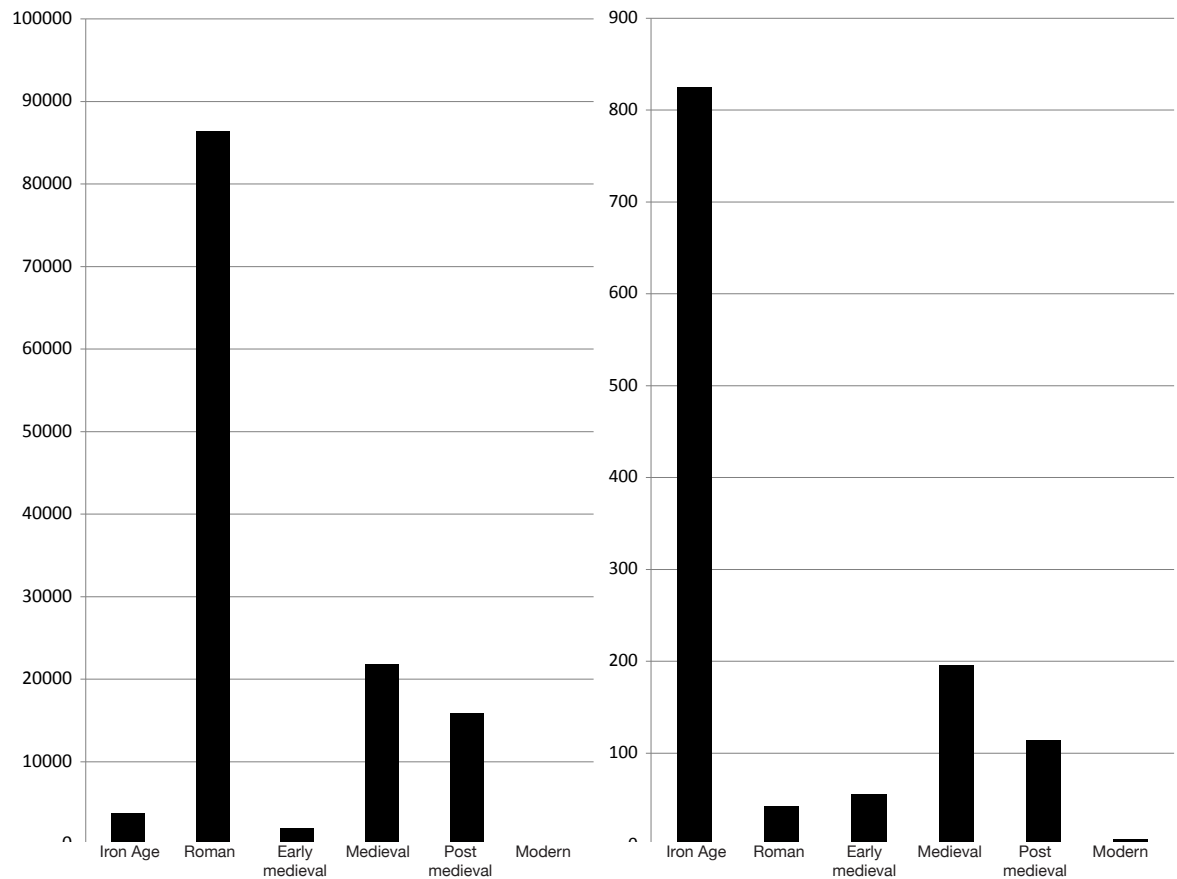
The coming of Rome: the disappearance of gold

There is undoubtedly a very marked difference between the Iron Age and Roman practices of the deposition of hoards and precious-metal objects in Britain. Votive practices do not stop in the Roman period but votive deposits do seem to be different in character – the large assemblage of coins from Bath, that span the whole Roman period, or the hoard of religious objects from Ashwell are quite different from most Roman coin hoards.²⁶ There is another change that takes place at this time. In the Iron Age gold – particularly gold coinage – was widespread, but this suddenly changed in the Roman period. This can be shown by Figs. 8a and 8b, which are

²⁴ Dennis and Faulkner 2005.

²⁵ British Museum 2010, cat. 471.

²⁶ Walker 1988; DCMS 2004, cat. 27.



Figs. 8a and 8b. (a) All coins recorded on PAS database; (b) gold coins on PAS database (Bland and Loriot 2010).

based on the coins recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Fig. 8a shows the total number of coins recorded on the database and that Roman coins far outnumber those of the Iron Age. However, Fig. 8b shows the number of gold coins recorded and it can be seen that these are much more common from the Iron Age than the Roman period, while Fig. 9 shows the proportion of gold coins recorded on the PAS database for each period. What causes the disappearance of gold from Britain with the coming of the Romans? We do not know, although this phenomenon has already been noted by Creighton, who demonstrated it when summarizing coin hoards of the Iron Age and the first two centuries AD.²⁷ He argued that in the Iron Age gold coins had been struck by the rulers to validate their kingship and that the coins had been used for transactions ‘involving horsemen and chariots’,²⁸ and that with the coming of Roman rule these functions were no longer needed. He noted that the main concentration of gold coins shifted from the south and east in the Iron Age to the west and north after the Roman conquest, reflecting the military zone of the new province.²⁹

²⁷ Creighton 2005. For the Iron Age-Roman monetary transition see Reece 1979 and Creighton 1994.

²⁸ Creighton 2005, 83.

²⁹ Sam Moorhead comments (*pers. comm.*): ‘I have no doubt that the Roman authorities zealously guarded the mining and use of gold (even coin) in the military provinces. This becomes much more noticeable in the later Empire. Put simply I do not think the average person really had access to gold and that its circulation was generally restricted.’ Against this I would note that the analysis of findspots of Roman gold coins in Britain contained in Bland and Loriot, 53–74, would seem to indicate that at most periods gold coins were broadly distributed across Britain, although there are distinct concentrations in military sites and towns.

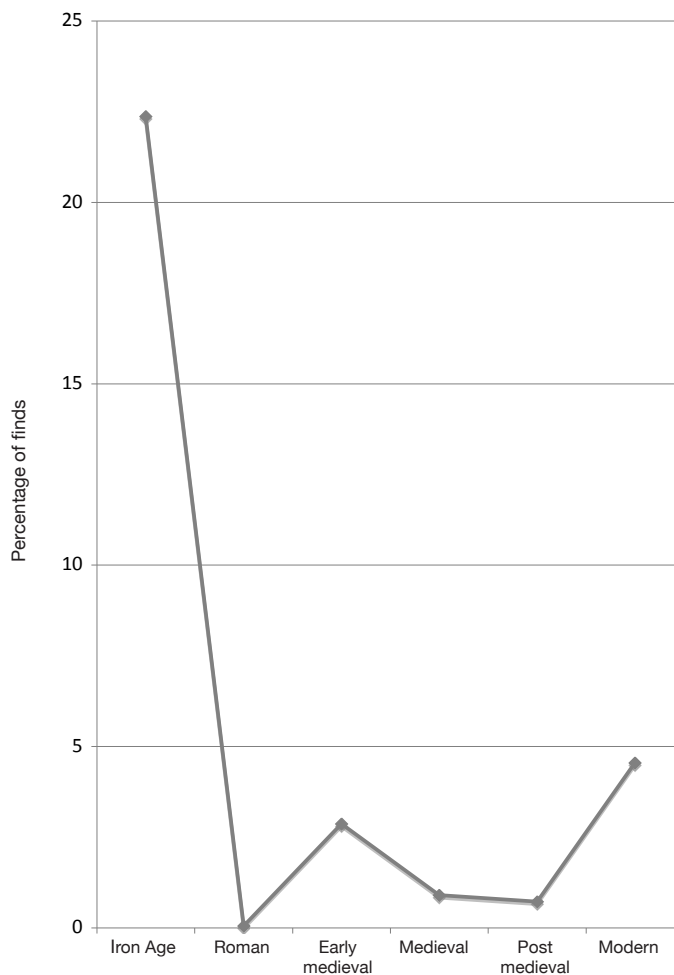


Fig. 9. Proportion of gold coins recorded on PAS database (Bland and Lorient 2010).

The third century AD

If we look more closely at the hoards of radiates which close with coins minted between 253 and 296, one distinguishing feature of them is that many very large and indeed the four largest hoards of Roman coins from Britain all date to this period:

Cunetio Hoard (1978):³⁰ 54,951 coins to AD 275

Frome Hoard (2010):³¹ 52,503 coins to c. AD 291

Normanby Hoard (1985):³² 47,912 coins to c. AD 290

Blackmoor hoard (1873):³³ 29,788 coins to c. AD 296.

The average size of 96 radiate hoards discovered since Robertson's *Inventory* is 1,124 coins, but of course that largely reflects their low intrinsic value. However, the fact that they are large might mean that it is more likely that they will be discovered – whether by metal detecting today, or by building or agricultural work in times past. So how do we interpret all these hoards? As I have said, the normal interpretation is that they were buried by their owners in response to an external threat of invasion or civil unrest, with the intention of returning later to recover them.

³⁰ Besly and Bland 1983.

³¹ Moorhead, Booth and Bland 2010.

³² Bland and Burnett 1988.

³³ Bland 1982.

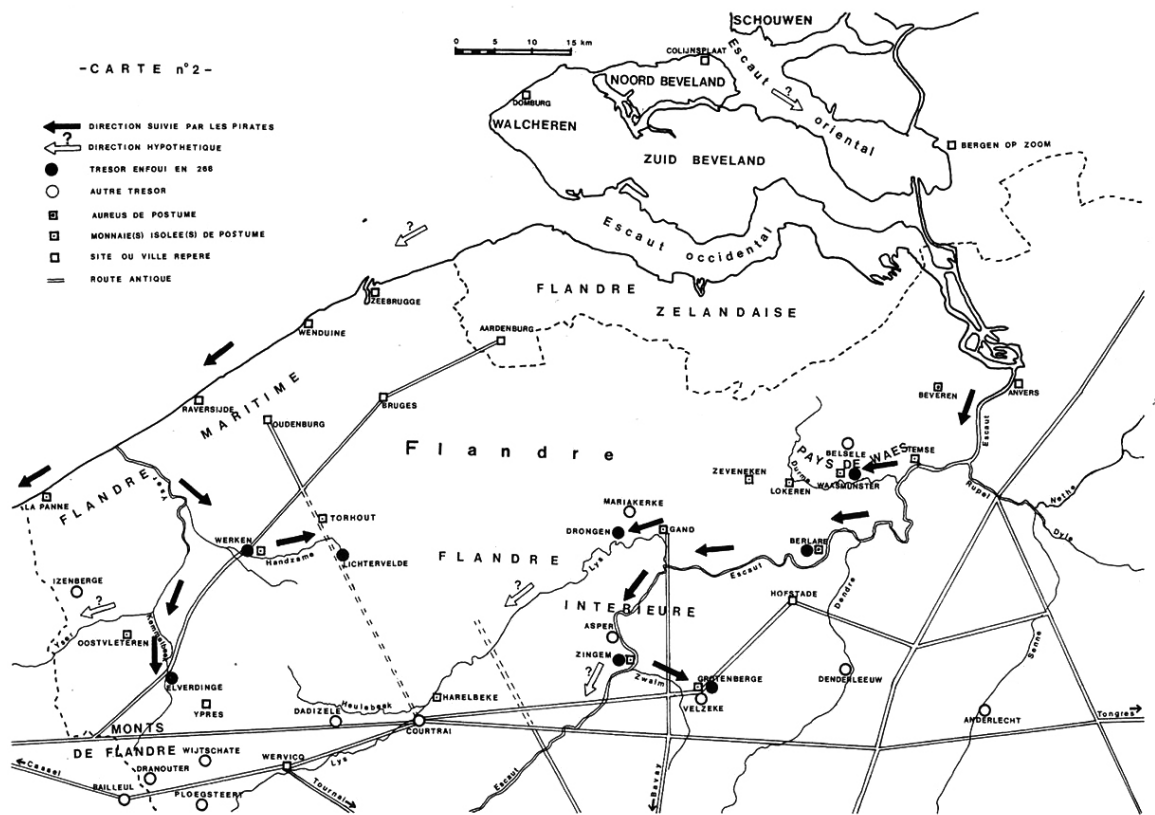


Fig. 10. Hoards of AD 268 from Flanders (northern France and Belgium) and possible routes of barbarian raids (Gricourt 1988).

In 1988, the French scholar Daniel Gricourt tried to take this type of interpretation of coin hoard patterns to its logical conclusion by using them to trace the route of individual barbarian raids in northern Gaul in AD 268, following the coast and the valley of the Ijzer, or the valley of the Schelde (Fig. 10). Of course it is tempting to make an association between a large concentration of unrecovered hoards and areas of unrest, especially when, as in this case, they all close with coins of the same period, but is this trying to push the evidence too far? Nevertheless, there is clearly extensive archaeological evidence for the destruction caused by the barbarian raids on Gaul, especially Gallia Belgica, in the second half of the third century. The historical sources attest raids in 250, 259–60 and 275–76 and it is the third of these that seems to have had the greatest impact.³⁴ Earlier accounts state that most of the many villas from northern Gaul were destroyed at this period and were not reoccupied.³⁵ More recent work has modified this picture: it is possible to find some villas that seem to have survived the period intact, while it has been suggested that the lack of coins of 275–96 might mean the temporary abandonment of a monetary economy rather than that the site was deserted at that time. However, towns also show much evidence of damage at this time and many of those never fully recovered, being rebuilt in the fourth century on a much smaller scale.³⁶ So, although the interpretation of the changes that occurred in both towns and countryside in Gaul is now more nuanced than it was thirty years ago – there are sites that escaped destruction at this time and there are suggestions that the changes seen at this period might not all be the direct consequence of barbarian raids – the overall picture of destruction and dislocation in Gaul remains.

³⁴ Painter forthcoming.

³⁵ Percival 1976, 67–82; Wightman 1985, 243–6.

³⁶ Johnson 1983; the essays in Schatzmann and Martin-Kilcher 2011 provide a recent survey of this phenomenon.

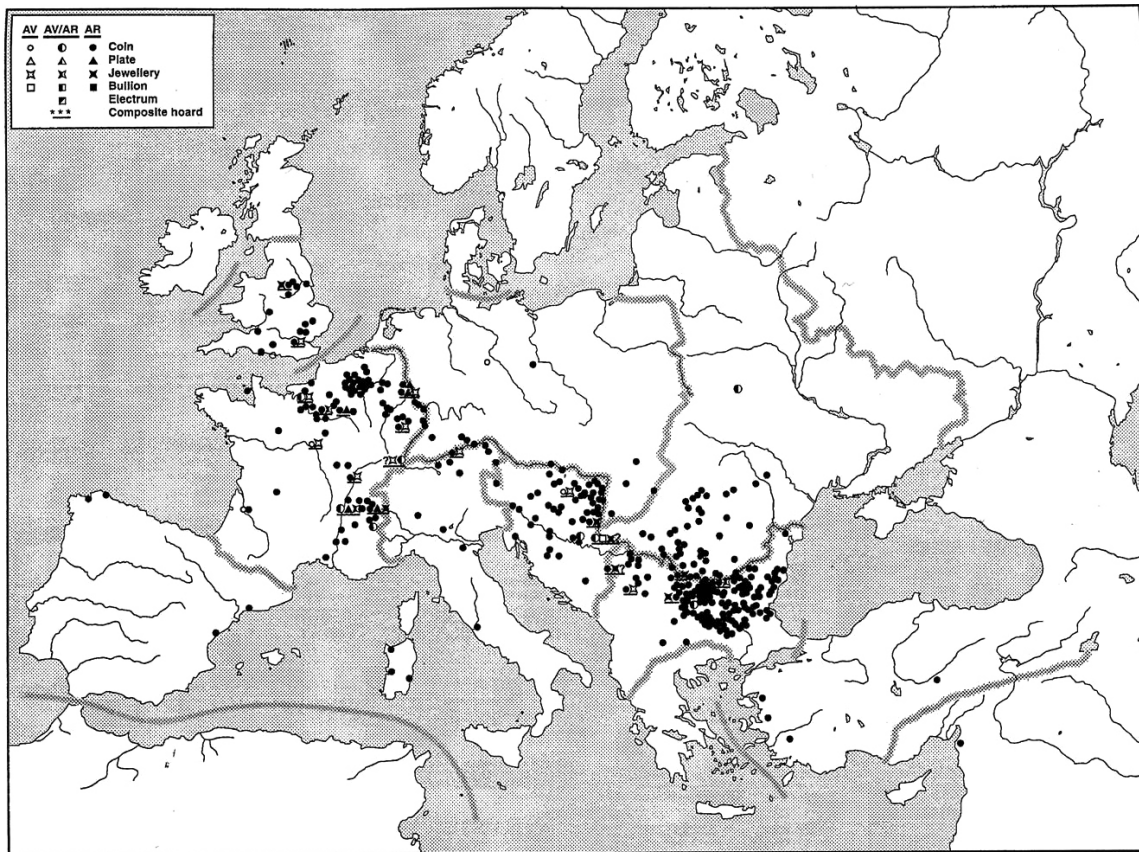


Fig. 11. Precious-metal deposits of 238–59 (Hobbs 2006).

So what of Britain? If Britain has a greater concentration of coin hoards of this period than Gaul does, can we assume that the barbarian raids caused even greater destruction on this side of the Channel than on the Continent? The interesting thing is that the archaeological evidence does not seem to support that. In 1981 Peter Salway wrote: ‘the evidence suggests that ... civil life ... continued in fair prosperity’ and ‘it seems to be established ... that Britain was relatively untouched by the convulsions elsewhere in the empire in the mid-third century.’³⁷ The final quarter of the century saw the establishment of many villas which reached their apogee in the first half of the fourth century, and by this period Britain appears to have been one of the wealthiest areas north of the Alps – along with Aquitania in south-west France and the area around the imperial capital of Trier.

It is interesting to compare the British pattern with hoards from the rest of the Roman world. Fig. 11 is a map of hoards closing between 238 and 260 from Hobbs.³⁸ This includes all hoards, including gold and silver objects. Note the great concentration in the Danube area, especially present-day Bulgaria, with relatively few from Britain and Gaul. It is difficult to separate this pattern from the historical evidence we have for continued fighting in the lower Danube including the defeat of Trajan Decius at the battle of Abritus in 251.

Fig. 12 is also from Hobbs’ book and shows hoards with a terminal date from 260 to 274. The focus now moves westwards to Gaul and Britain – again it seems reasonable to assume that this reflects the well-documented pressure on the German frontier at this period. To this are added the major barbarian raids on the Empire in the 260s – although of course there is a

³⁷ Salway 1981, 243.

³⁸ Hobbs 2006.

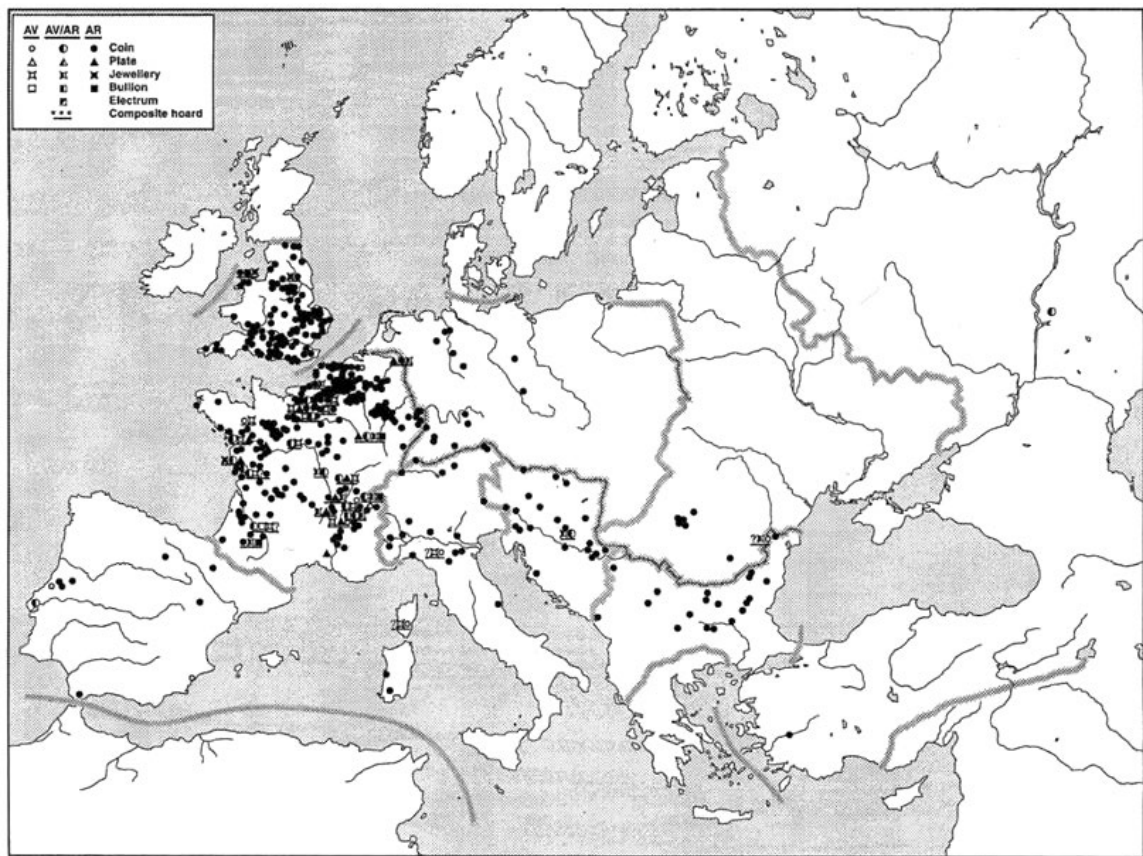


Fig. 12. Precious-metal deposits of 260–74 (Hobbs 2006) showing major barbarian invasions (after Jones and Mattingly 2002, map 5.6).

danger of a circular argument here, since the compilers of this map may well have used the pattern of coin hoards in drawing the main lines of attack. That proviso apart, there does seem to be a correlation (the lack of hoards from present-day Turkey could reflect a low recording rate). Fig. 13, also from Hobbs, shows hoards with a terminal date of 274–96. It is interesting that now there is a very strong concentration in Britain with much lower numbers elsewhere. Does this mean that Britain was facing unprecedented pressures at this time? We have just seen that the archaeological evidence does not seem to support that conclusion.³⁹

Contextual evidence for Roman hoards

So do any Roman hoards have contexts that might provide clues as to why they were buried? One of the most intriguing pieces of contextual information came from the discovery of the Frome hoard.⁴⁰ This was found by metal detector user Dave Crisp while detecting on farmland near Frome in Somerset in April 2010. The archaeological record contained no information about Roman activity on this field, although Mr Crisp had found a stray coin of Hadrian and some sherds of Roman pottery. His first discovery was a scattered group of 73 late fourth-century *siliquae* and subsequent research revealed that a hoard of 111 coins of the same type had been discovered on the same farm in 1867, so perhaps this was another portion of that hoard. He continued to search in the same field and received another response about 100 metres from the findspot of the *siliquae*. Digging down, he uncovered the top of a large pot

³⁹ Casey 1986, 65–6 had already observed this apparent anomaly.

⁴⁰ Moorhead, Booth and Bland 2010.

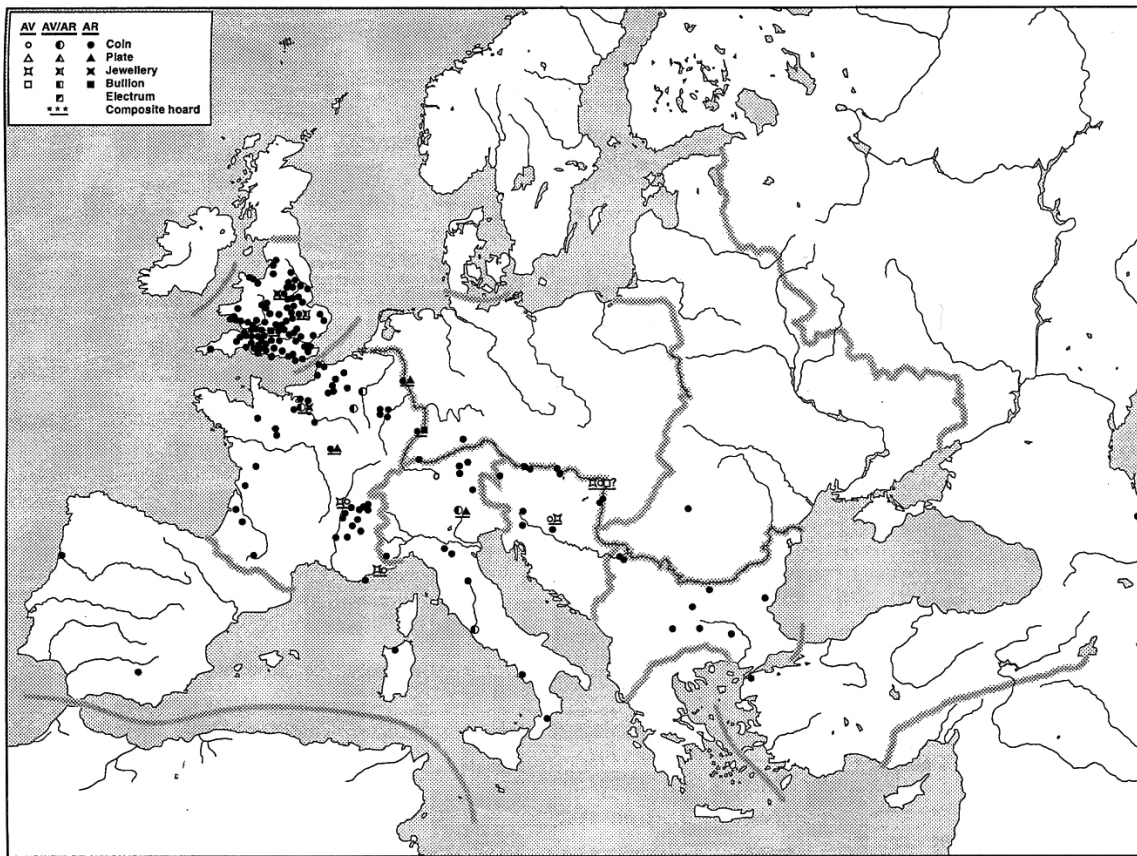


Fig. 13. Precious-metal deposits of 275–96 (Hobbs 2006).

that turned out to be full of coins. At that point he stopped and his local Finds Liaison Officers arranged for the hoard to be excavated by the archaeologist Alan Graham. Because of the size of the pot and the weight of the coins, it was dismantled in situ and the coins were removed carefully layer by layer in over 80 context bags. There were 52,503 coins, making it the second largest hoard ever to be discovered in Britain. Apart from five silver denarii of Carausius, the coins were all radiates of base silver, dating from 253 to *c.* 291 (the last two issues of Carausius were not represented). This is a summary of the hoard, based on a preliminary classification; it is a typical hoard of a well known class.

TABLE 2. Provisional summary of the Frome hoard

Central Empire (14,788)	<i>Date</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	Gallic Empire (28,377)	<i>Date</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Valerian and Gallienus	253–60	46	Postumus	260–69	257
Gallienus and Salonina	260–68	6,495	Laelian	269	4
Claudius II	268–70	5,421	Marius	269	35
Divus Claudius	270	1,227	Victorinus	269–71	7,504
Quintillus	270	333	Tetricus I	271–74	12,416
Aurelian and Severina	270–75	279	Tetricus II	272–74	5,203
Tacitus and Florian	275–76	262	Gallic uncertain	260–74	2,954
Probus	276–82	619	British Empire (766)		
Carus and family	282–85	46	Carausius	286–93	766
Diocletian and Maximian	284–96	60	Copies (314)		314
			Illegible (8,261)		8,261

The excavation has given us vital evidence about how the hoard was buried. The first point that became obvious is that the pot, which is quite thin, could never have borne the 160 kg of

coins – it would immediately have collapsed under the weight of them. So the pot must have been placed in the ground empty and then the coins added to it. Because the coins were carefully recovered in a series of ten layers or spits we know that most of the coins of Carausius (the latest coins in the hoard) were more than halfway down the pot, and Fig. 14b shows the numbers of his coins in each layer. In addition, the forty-three Carausian coins in the top two layers have a much earlier chronological spread than those found lower down the pot. So the coins must all have been placed in the pot on a single occasion. This calls into question the traditional interpretation of hoards of this period. If the original owners of this hoard had intended to come back and recover it later then surely they would have buried their coins in smaller containers which would have been easier to recover? The only way anyone could have recovered this hoard would have been by breaking the pot and scooping the coins out of it, which would have been awkward. In addition there is the fact that another hoard of silver *siliquae*, just 100 years later in date, was buried in the same field. Could this have been a sacred field?⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the hoard was buried on high ground, in land that would become waterlogged without drainage.

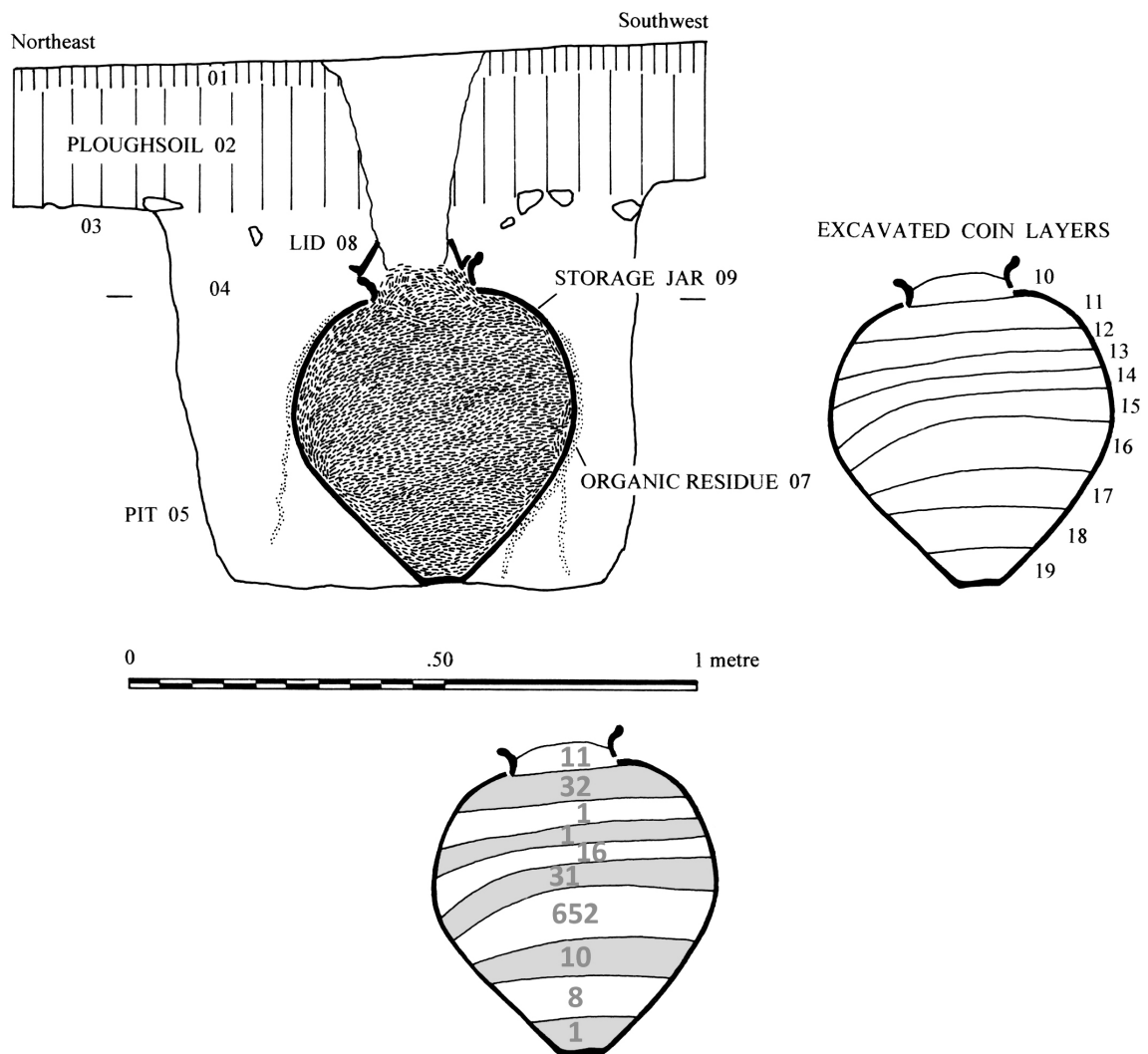


Fig. 14. Plan of the Frome hoard pot (Moorhead, Booth and Bland 2010, drawn by Alan Graham); on right, numbers of coins of Carausius in each layer (courtesy Mike Pitts).

⁴¹ This suggestion was first made by Richard Reece (*pers. comm.*).

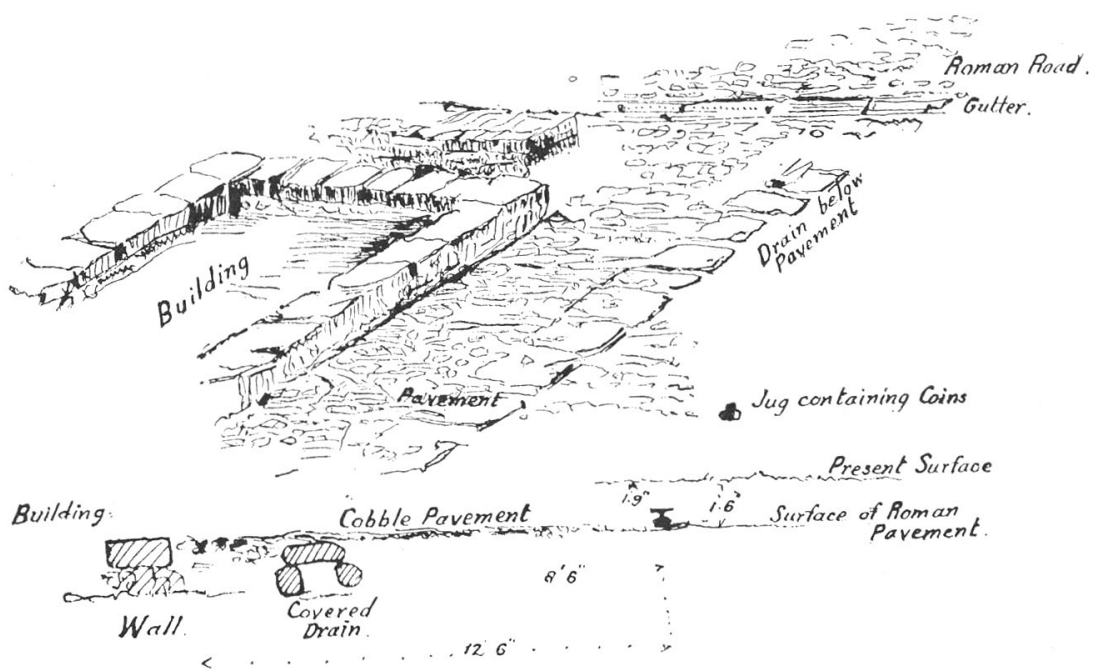


Fig. 15. Findspot of Corbridge hoard and jug containing the coins (from Macdonald 1912).

Some Roman coin hoards do have contextual information that suggests a different reason for burial. The Corbridge hoard of 162 gold aurei, closing in AD 160, was found during archaeological excavations in 1911.⁴² They were buried in a jug beneath the floor of a building in the Roman military supply base at Corbridge, just south of Hadrian's Wall (Fig. 15). We know that that period was a time of considerable difficulties in northern Britain and it is quite likely that these were buried by one of the garrison at Corbridge in response to a raid across the Wall.

⁴² Craster 1912; Macdonald 1912.



Fig. 16. The Cotswold hoard.

Hoards can also be associated with human burials, such as the hoard recently found in the Cotswolds north of Bath (Fig. 16). There are two pots: the smaller one has 1,435 Roman coins (radiates of the third century AD closing in AD 282), while the larger one has been x-rayed and contains a human cremation together with another nine coins.

Sometimes, it seems, hoards could be deliberately thrown away. A hoard of 622 small module radiate copies, the so-called 'barbarous radiates', dating to *c.* 274, was excavated by archaeologists in the Roman fort at Cardiff Castle in 2006 (Fig. 17). It seems surprising that metal objects would be thrown away, but it does seem to have happened in this case.

Hoards can also be buried in several pots, such as the example (Fig. 18) from Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire, which contained three pots of coins, all radiates of the third century AD, where the coins were carefully graded in each pot with the earlier, better quality, radiates in two pots and the later, more debased issues in a third container.⁴³

It is easy to assume that in a period when both hoards and the coins in them are very abundant, the deposition of the hoard is likely to take place quite soon after the date of the latest coin. This is certainly the case with the very numerous hoards of the second half of the third century AD. However, a hoard discovered at Bredon Hill, Worcestershire, in 2011 (Fig. 19) has challenged that assumption. This was buried in a pot and contained 3,847 third-century radiates closing with 36 specimens of Probus (276–82) and it is a typical example of a hoard of this period. However, the findspot was investigated by the local archaeological unit which concluded that the hoard was buried inside a building and that the pit cut for the vessel containing the coins disturbed the latest layer of that building which was dated to not before 350,

⁴³ Bland 1992; see also Callu 1979 on the subject of multiple hoards.



Fig. 17. Hoard of 'barbarous radiates' from Cardiff Castle (British Museum 2008, cat. 1248).



Fig. 18. Chalfont St Peter hoard (Bland 1992).

70 years later than the latest coins.⁴⁴ No other examples of the deposition of a radiate hoard so long after the date of the latest coin is known, although there is another possible example from a Romano-British site at Lilleshall, Shropshire. Here excavations in 1973 in advance of road building brought to light a hoard of 69 radiates, closing with coins of Tetricus (271–74), deposited in a ditch (Ditch VII) which also contained a coin of Honorius in its infill, therefore dating to after 395.⁴⁵ However, since the ditch surrounded an enclosure whose function is not certain, this is not as clear cut an example as the Bredon Hill hoard.⁴⁶

Of course hoards vary enormously in size, and clearly we should not assume the same motive behind the deposition of a very modest hoard such as ten fourth-century *nummi* found at Uckington in Gloucestershire (Treasure reference 2010 T244, PAS database record PAS-52F818) and a find like the Hoxne treasure of 580 gold and 14,654 silver coins and some 200

⁴⁴ *BNJ* 82 (2012), Coin Hoards from the British Isles 2012, no. 36.

⁴⁵ Browne and Boon 2004.

⁴⁶ Martin Allen (*pers. comm.*) has suggested that it may be possible to question the archaeological interpretation of the stratigraphy in both these cases: as he points out 'stratigraphy is not a precise science'.



Fig. 19. Bredon Hill hoard.

items of gold and silver jewellery, buried some time after AD 407.⁴⁷ That clearly belonged to a wealthy family. One is put in mind of the entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, under 418: 'In this year the Romans collected all the treasures which were in Britain and hid some in the earth so that no one afterwards could find them, and some they took with them into Gaul.'⁴⁸ Although this was written more than 450 years later than the year it refers to, it does seem to preserve the memory of an event that took place at the end of Roman rule in Britain.

Some Roman hoards clearly are votive in character. The Ashwell find of 27 gold and silver objects, including gold jewellery, a silver figurine and votive plaques of silver alloy and gold (Fig. 20) was originally made by a detector user in 2002 and the site was subsequently investigated by archaeologists.⁴⁹ The hoard dates to the later third or fourth century AD and it must have been connected to a temple or shrine of the hitherto unknown goddess Senuna, who is named on five of the gold plaques.

But what about the Water Newton hoard of Christian silver (Fig. 21)? As Painter has demonstrated, that is also clearly religious in character, but could it have been buried for votive reasons?⁵⁰ Since the hoard consists of items used for communion and therefore votive deposition would not be appropriate, this hoard is interpreted as having been buried for safe-keeping.

On the other hand it is reasonable to assume that the 12,595 Roman coins found in the excavations of the Sacred Spring of the Roman baths at Bath, which come from the whole

⁴⁷ Guest 2005; Johns 2010.

⁴⁸ Garmonsway 1972, 11.

⁴⁹ DCMS 2004, cat. 27; Jackson and Burleigh 2007.

⁵⁰ Painter 1977, 1999 and 2006.

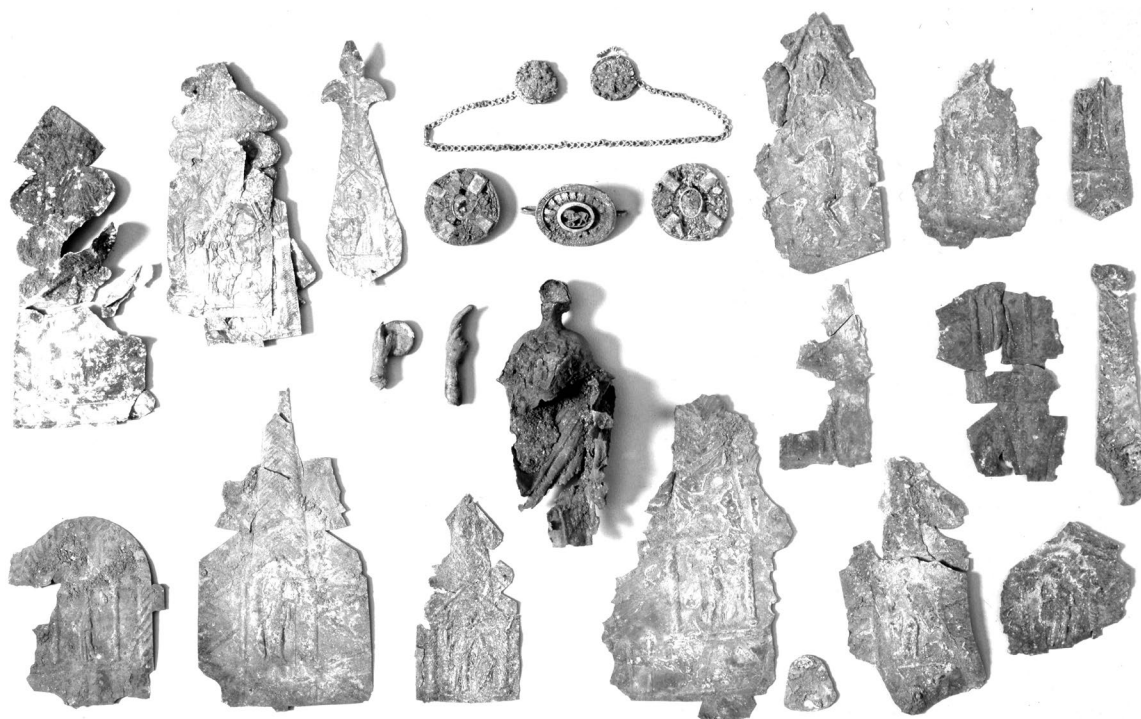


Fig. 20. Ashwell hoard (DCMS 2004).



Fig. 21. Water Newton hoard.

period of Roman occupation of Britain are not a hoard, but had been thrown into the sacred spring rather as we throw coins into fountains today.⁵¹ Other finds like this are known from Coventina's Well,⁵² the Thames at London Bridge and Piercebridge in County Durham.⁵³ Kenneth Painter provides a very thought-provoking account of the nature of Roman votive deposits.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Walker 1988.

⁵² Allason-Jones and McKay 1985.

⁵³ Walton 2008.

⁵⁴ Painter forthcoming.

Medieval hoards

Post-Roman hoards are generally assumed to have been buried with the intention of recovery. Hoards of silver of the Viking period are well-known from Britain and Ireland, the best known recent example being the Vale of York hoard, discovered by detector users in 2007 and the largest Viking Age hoard since Cuerdale was discovered in 1840. Gareth Williams and Barry Ager were able to connect its burial with the events surrounding Athelstan gaining control over the kingdom of Northumbria in 927.⁵⁵ Similarly the large hoard of 1,237 gold coins and jewellery of the fifteenth century found during building work at Fishpool in Nottinghamshire in 1966 can be associated with known events during the Wars of the Roses.⁵⁶ It was probably deposited some time between winter 1463 and summer 1464, during a Lancastrian rebellion against Edward IV.

Hoard of the English Civil War

In 1974 John Kent discussed coin hoards buried at the time of the English Civil War. He argued that there was no correlation between the storm centres of the war and the location of the hoards, apart from a cluster around Newark on Trent, besieged three times in 1644–46.⁵⁷ His distribution map is shown below (Fig. 22). However, this work has been revisited by Edward Besly, who has been able to add in many new hoards discovered since 1974 and, by analysing these much more closely according to the year of issue of the latest coin, he is able to show that there is a correlation between the hoards and the areas of fighting – which are very well documented.⁵⁸ We can, therefore, conclude that the general pattern of hoarding at this time does support the threat model – as does Pepys's slightly later account of how he buried a hoard of coins.

Two documented cases of hoarding

In his diary Pepys provides one of the few documented accounts that we have of the burial and recovery of a coin hoard.⁵⁹ In June 1667, deeply concerned by the raid of the Dutch up the Medway and Thames, Pepys took all the gold coins he could lay his hands on in London (£2,300 worth) and sent his wife and servant to bury them on the family estate in Brampton in Northamptonshire. In October, when the threat had passed, he went back to retrieve them but had great difficulty finding where his wife had hidden the coins and, even after a great deal of digging, ended up £20–£30 short of the amount that had been buried. This is a good example of deliberate burial of wealth under threat of invasion, with the intention of recovery.

Pepys's account is well-known. A more recent example is provided by the discovery in 2007 of a hoard US gold 'double eagles' (\$20 coins) in the garden of a house in Hackney.⁶⁰ While digging out a pond in the garden of the property, residents of the block of flats there came on a glass kilner jar containing 80 of these coins, which dated to between 1853 and 1913 (Fig. 23).⁶¹

This was an unprecedented discovery and a programme of research was started into the building where the find was made. The building that currently stands on the site was built in the early 1950s, replacing an earlier house destroyed in the Blitz in 1940. Extensive research was undertaken to see if it might be possible to trace past residents, to identify who might have buried the coins, but the flats had been used as nurses' accommodation and married quarters for the police and there were too many possibilities. So in October 2010 the coroner opened

⁵⁵ Williams and Ager 2010.

⁵⁶ Archibald and Cherry 1966.

⁵⁷ Kent 1974.

⁵⁸ Besly forthcoming; Besly and Briggs 2013.

⁵⁹ Painter and Künzl 1997.

⁶⁰ Richardson 2013.

⁶¹ A great deal of the research on the Hackney hoard (including finding Martin's Sulzbacher's son, Max) was done by my colleague, Ian Richardson, Treasure Registrar at the British Museum, to whom my thanks.

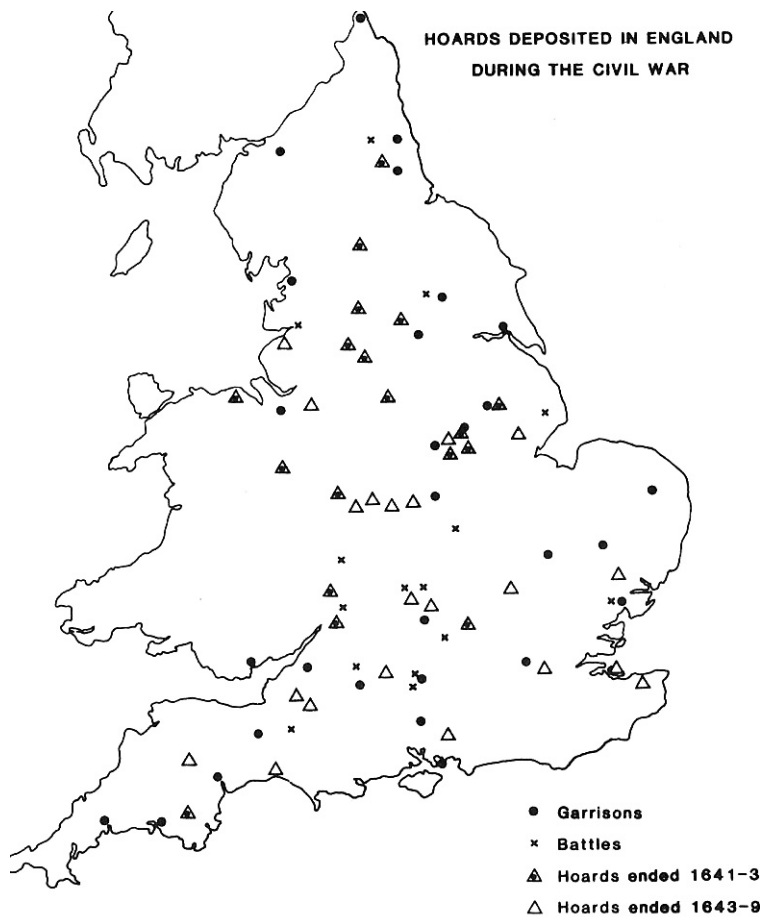


Fig. 22. Civil War hoards from England (Kent 1974).

his inquest on the hoard in order to publicize the discovery to see if any claimants might come forward. Although no claimants did reveal themselves, a local historian, Mr Alan Selby, contacted the British Museum with a vital piece of evidence. He discovered that the Hackney Gazette for 14 March 1952 had published an account of a coroner's inquest held on another hoard, also consisting of US gold coins, which had been found in the garden of the same house (Fig. 24). The news report said that the 1952 hoard had been claimed by its owner, Mr Martin Sulzbacher and we were then able to make contact with his son, Max Sulzbacher, now living in Jerusalem, and through him the whole extraordinary story came out.

The coins had been smuggled out of Germany by Martin Sulzbacher, a German Jewish banker, who came to England as a refugee in 1938 and was subsequently joined by his parents, brother and other members of his family. Martin Sulzbacher bought the house in Hackney and lived there with his family. He put his coins in a safe deposit box in a bank in the City. In 1940 he was interned as an enemy alien and was sent to Canada on the *Arandora Star* but the ship was torpedoed on the way. Rescued after many



Fig. 23. Hackney hoard.

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