Roman Coin Hoards from Lincolnshire

R. W. Higginbottom

In Britain, more than 1400 Roman coin hoards have been discovered so far. Over fifty of these hoards have been found in Lincolnshire, no less than three of the latter between February 1975 and November 1976. Such discoveries invariably occur by accident, often during agricultural or building operations. Where an earthenware hoard container survives, it is usually fragmented by plough damage. Unfortunately, where such finds were made in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries or earlier, the hoard coins themselves rarely survive at all, and details concerning discovery are poorly recorded. In Lincolnshire, no Roman hoards have yet been unearthed as a result of planned scientific excavation of an ancient site.

But why were these hoards accumulated? The simple general answer is that hoarding was the common way of amassing one’s savings before the introduction of sophisticated modern banking systems. Both money chests and household vessels, usually earthenware jars, were used for storing savings of coin and such savings would be placed in a safe, secure place in the owner’s house or more often nearby, perhaps in an outbuilding or garden. In normal circumstances, hoards so collected would be returned to circulation by the owner himself after a while; for example, the owner might give part of his savings to a relative, use his money to buy land, supply his daughter with a dowry, or finally, bequeath it by will. Hoards might also be dispersed as pay chests by employers or officials. Equally, they could be lost in fires, epidemics or natural disasters before dispersal was possible — or not recovered for some other reason. Hoards might be concealed more secretly — by misers or by individuals fearful of theft (while they travelled away from home), of warfare, economic instability, official persecution or riot. In such cases, hoards needed to be buried in the ground away from home, but near a landmark, so that retrieval after the journey or crisis was over was made easy. There was then the chance that the hoard would not be retrieved due to the owner’s death, the destruction of the hiding place, occasionally even the owner’s forgetfulness. It was also possible that, as a result of currency collapse or a change in government economic policy, the hoard itself might be rendered valueless, not worth retrieving. The repressive measures taken by the Roman government against illegal currency might equally deter an owner from regaining a hoard containing illegal coins or forgeries. The fact is that the hoards discovered in modern times must represent but a fraction of the original number concealed or collected. Most hoards were retrieved and it is reasonable to think that death or official policy were the principal factors causing the remaining hoards to be ‘lost’ in the Roman period.

The archaeological, historical and numismatic importance of Roman coin hoard finds cannot be overstated. In archaeological terms, such factors as typology of container, associated objects, finds spot and dating of the coins, are fundamentally significant in a hoard discovery. Dating of the coins, with its implications regarding the hoard container in particular, is the important link between the archaeological, historical and numismatic aspects of hoard study. The latest coin in a hoard provides a terminus post quem for the hoard, although the date suggested for deposition is usually an approximation, depending on the state of wear of the coins. But dating of the coins also supplies valuable information for establishing a chronology for types and issuing periods and for comparing composition with that of other hoards. Needless to say, the historian is given primary information by a hoard date, again comparable with other hoards and with historical events. Interesting points which arise from this compounded analysis are that most Roman hoards were contained in earthenware jars, very few of which survive completely intact, if at all, while many hoards include coins ranging in date over a period up to 250 years, indicating how prolonged the circulation life of a Roman coin could be. Finally, the recording of many hoards of similar date in a small area may reflect temporarily unsettled conditions in that locality.

Of the fifty Roman coin hoards found in Lincolnshire, thirty-two are recorded as being found in earthenware containers, usually jars. At least two purse hoards are known: the Lincoln (Castle Square) and Waddington (b) hoards, which are comparatively recent finds where no more than a dozen coins were involved. The purse hoards of course were probably not concealed, but simply lost by accident during their owner’s lifetime. The earliest discovery recorded, that of the Londonthorpe (a) hoard, was unusual in that the coins were apparently hidden under a stone in another stone hollowed out for the purpose. There are conflicting reports on this find, which took place before Leland’s time, and on its location, although Londonthorpe seems the most likely spot. Very few of the coin hoard containers, let alone the coins, have survived. In the City and County Museum in Lincoln three more or less complete earthenware jars are preserved from the hoards at Riby, Coleby and Waddington (a). In Scunthorpe Museum is the pot which contained the Kirmington (b) hoard of antoniniani, while Gainsborough Old Hall houses the hoard pot from Owston Ferry. But generally, the containers which originally held most Lincolnshire Roman hoards were destroyed on discovery or at some time afterwards. The recent find of the hoard of denarii at Londonthorpe (b), where the container survived as a few sherds, illustrates what damage the plough can do to hoard pots before the actual hoard is noticed. Even the jars preserved in Lincoln Museum were missing their rim sections because of plough damage. Finally, despite this poor record, hoard pots which have been analysed carefully reveal that coarse ware ceramic forms of unusual type were often used to hold hoards. The Coleby, Waddington and Riby pots are of nondescript greyware and were local products, but little more can be said about them.

Information about the composition of the Lincolnshire hoards is generally inconsistent, according to the date and accidental nature of discovery. Even the exact number of coins in the recent Coleby hoard is unknown, due to the circumstances of discovery; and often the contents of a hoard found in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries were given the vague descriptive tags ‘many’ or ‘a parcel of’ or even ‘a mass weighing 28 pounds’. The largest hoard recorded so far in this county appears to be that from Coleby, where at least 15,000 antoniniani were reported. But the average figures are rarely precise enough about this. Only in the case of Riby has a very large hoard been published fully and, even then, there were many coin
fragments which did not necessarily each represent a single coin. 21 At the other end of the scale, excepting the purse hoard at South Ferriby in 1910; this hoard consisted of six Theodosian silique, together with a silver ring, in a small jar. 22 Silver rings, two this time, were also found associated with the Edlington hoard of 828 antoniniani, although the Edlington container survived only as ephemeral sherds. 23 Few of the other hoards had objects associated directly with them — at Harlaxton, burnt bones are recorded in the urn as well as antoniniani, while near Horncastle rings were found in the hoard urn. 24 More loosely associated material, such as ash, timber, pottery and stone, is more commonly recorded with early discoveries of hoards, while at Market Deeping, the hoard found in 1807 was dug up near to ‘a perfect human skeleton’, suggesting that the coins, less valuable since they were antoniniani, may have served as grave goods. 25

The table on denominations below shows that a fair proportion of hoards include more than one denomination. The Bourne (b) hoard is reputed to have included an aureus, denarius, sestertius and follis, and the better recorded Lincoln (Broadway) hoard of only 78 coins was composed of follis and later bronze issues, as well as antoniniani and second century coins, having a date range 140–370 A.D. 26 The Broadway hoard has a relatively long date span for Lincolnshire, but one which is paralleled in other Romano-British hoards. Perhaps of greater numismatic interest is the inclusion of irregular coins or contemporary forgeries in some of the well recorded Lincolnshire hoards. The Thealby hoard seems to have consisted almost entirely of copies of Valentinianic and Theodosian coins, while barbarous radiates are known at least from the hoards at Kirtlington (a), Coleby, Riby and Well; the Riby hoard included 260 of these copies. 27 At Byard’s Leap, Lincoln (Broadway) and Mablethorpe (a), there were barbarous FEL TEMP REPARATIO coins present. 28 And the bulk of the coins in the Lincoln (Castle Square) hoard were contemporary copies of Claudian ‘Minerva’ asses. 29

Of the Lincolnshire hoards which can be dated, a very high proportion are of late third century or fourth century date. Only seven hoards are earlier than 200 A.D. and five of these were deposited in the Hadrianic or Antonine period; the earliest hoard is that found in Castle Square, Lincoln. While one hoard dates from the reign of Gordian III, eleven are of late third century date and mostly consist of antoniniani. Nine hoards are Constantinian and eight Valentinianic or later. The latest hoards are the Theodosian period examples from Caythorpe, South Ferriby and Thakeby. For Caythorpe, the records are too vague to make it sure if the coins ascribed to ‘Honorianus or Arcadius’ are issues later than 395 A.D. and at South Ferriby (a), the latest coin was a well preserved issue of Gratian dated 378–383 A.D. 30 Indeed, with so many ill recorded hoards now lost to study, it is difficult to make out any dating pattern for Lincolnshire’s quota of Roman hoards. An example of this is the ambiguous documentation for the Hainton and Greatford hoards. At Hainton, the pot was described as a ‘large posset pot’, which does not sound Roman, while the contents were said to be ‘various Roman silver coins, worth £80’. 31 In the case of Greatford, large numbers of Roman coins were found over a period of years by a farmer in a gravel pit near a Roman settlement site; the coins, in the circumstances, are likely to have been dispersed from a hoard disturbed by the gravel working. 32

At least two hoards (Alkborough and Appleby) were found in rabbit holes, but where records are available the circumstances of discovery are not always so easy to determine. 33 One description of the Hopton find mentions ‘two urns full of coins’, but other reports are more ambiguous; it is not impossible that the hoard was in two containers, since instances of this, as at Dorchester (Dorset), are known elsewhere, yet the riddle remains unsolved. 34 The Market Stainton hoard appears to have been found in two separate sections at two different dates — the top part of the pot and hoard about 1916, the rest in 1938. 35 As recently as 1946, there seems to have been confusion over the discovery of two small hoards at Mablethorpe, where the two hoards must have been found close together and then muddled in their association with a Flavian bowl which contained the earlier of the two. 36 The records for the Well hoard, found as early as 1725, are much clearer in stating that the hoard was found ‘in two fair urns’ near to each other. 37 But in the case of Kirtlington (a), details are far from simple. The City and County Museum acquired a small hoard of twenty-one fourth century coins in 1960 and the hoard was known to have been found at Kirtlington some years before. Further investigation revealed that the owner of the coins in 1960 was a boy whose uncle had acquired them about 1948, but no more information about them was available. However, it so happened that in 1956, the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle acquired a hoard of eleven coins said to have been found at Kirtlington in 1780. In comparing the dates of these two groups of coins and the circumstances, it appears that both form parts of a late fourth century hoard, found complete in 1780 or in parts over a period of years. 38 Another hoard acquired by the Museum in Lincoln is that from Stamford, found in 1850: these eleven Constantinian coins were re-discovered in a private collection in the 1940’s and were found wrapped in a newspaper of 1850 on which was written ‘Constantinian Hoard, Old Roman Road, Stamford’. 39

In only three cases of Roman hoard discovery in Lincolnshire has modern excavation played a part, each time indirectly. During excavations of a Roman hut site at Thakeby, a number of coins from what later proved to be a hoard, were found one day in a late Roman drain. But the same night the anticipation of further ‘treasure’ provoked some local quarrymen to visit the site and start an illicit ‘dig’. On digging into the same trench in which the first coins had been found, the quarrymen came across a hoard behind a stone. Later, only twenty-eight coins, a fraction of the whole hoard, were recovered from the quarrymen. Unfortunately, it is not clear in the excavation report for Thakeby how many coins found by the excavators themselves were associated with this hoard, which seems to have consisted mostly of barbarous copies of Valentinianic and Theodosian date. 40 At Lincoln (Broadway) and Edlington, both hoards found in the 1950’s, excavations were subsequent to the original discoveries, about which the Museum was notified; however, prompt action by the archaeologists at Edlington did lead to the recovery of another 332 coins from the hoard.

Generally speaking, Roman hoards in Lincolnshire have invariably been found near to Roman occupation sites, whether the latter be villas or farms, as at Edlington and Bourne, or towns and major settlements, as at South Ferriby, Ancaster, Lincoln and Owmby. 41 Examples from within or close to small settlement sites include Appleby, Kirmington (a) and (b), Waddington (a), (b) and (c), Coleby and Whaplode. 42 From the map, it can be seen that a large number of hoard finds are distributed along the north-south limestone ridge, the most important settlement zone and communications route in Roman Lincolnshire. Another cluster of finds is in the extreme south of the county near Bourne and Stamford. Apart from two others in the Fens and one at Timberland, the
remaining hoard locations are mostly confined to high
ground in the north and north-east of the county.29

**HOARDS BY DENOMINATIONS**

**Denarii:**
(6) Bracebridge Heath, Londonthorpe (b), Owymb, South Ferriby (b), Swaby, Waddington (c).

**Antoniniani:**
(10) Ancaster, Coleby, Deeping St. James, Edlington, Fleet, Harlaxton, Kirmington (b), Market Deeping, Riby, Well.

**Follis:**
(4) Market Stainton, Stamford, Waddington (a), Lincoln (d).

**AE 2/3/4:**
(1) Byard's Leap.

**Siliquea:**
(2) South Ferriby (a), South Ferriby (c).

**Composite:**
(12) Alkborough, Bourne (b), Caythorpe, Kirmington (a), Lincoln (Broadway), Lincoln (Castle Square), Mablethorpe (a), Mablethorpe (b), Owston Ferry, Thalby, North Thoresby, Waddington (b).

**Unattributed:**
(15) Appleby, Bourne (a), Carby, Gedney, Greetford, Hainton, Horncastle, Langtoft, Lincoln (Castle), Londonthorpe (a), Manton, Sleaford, Timberland, Whaplode.

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**Gazetteer of Lincolnshire Roman Coin Hoards**

The Society is indebted to the Council for British Archaeology for a grant towards the publication of this paper.

**FOOTNOTES**

1 My sincere thanks go to Dr. Anne S. Robertson, Andrew White, Christopher Knowles and R. A. G. Carson for their invaluable help with the research for this paper. Since this research was completed early in 1977, more information about new and old hoards has become available, e.g. records for Roman hoards at Rauceby (c. 1793) and Rosby (1726) have been traced by Andrew White. Further information about Lincolnshire coin hoards is housed at the City and County Museum, Lincoln.
R. W. HIGGINBOTTOM


7 Tyler, op. cit.

8 H. Dudley, Early Days in North West Lincolnshire, Scunthorpe, 1949, p. 162.


10 Camden, op. cit., p. 359; W. White, History, Gazetteer and Directory of Lincolnshire, Sheffield, 1856, p. 387.

11 Fenland Notes and Queries Vol. 6, 1904-1906.11; C. W. Phillips, 'The Fenland In Roman Times', London, 1970, p. 253. For bronze and ironwork, pottery and bone from the site of the Lincoln (Broadway) hoard, see L.A.A.S.R.P., Vol. 7, Part I, 1956-1957, pp. 10-13. Containers of wood, metal and cloth were sometimes used in hoarding, although they rarely survive. The Bourne (a) hoard was large in urn with an inscribed stone over, see J. Mazurek, History of Lincolnshire, Volume III, London, 1961, p. 181. At Caythorpe the hoard pot was found inside a stone pillar base, see Archaeological Journal, XIV, 1857, pp. 141-143. And at Fleet the pot was inscribed and was covered with an oak board, see W. Stukeley, Itinerarium Curiosum, I, London, 1776, p. 13.


16 Dudley, op. cit., p. 162.

17 Archaeological Journal, XCI, 1934, p. 168; Camden, op. cit., p. 386.

18 Archaeological Journal, XCI, 1934, p. 168 and City and County records.


20 Archaeological Journal, XCI, 1934, p. 169; Camden, op. cit., p. 359; White, op. cit., p. 385; Trollope, op. cit., p. 46. Information from A. J. L. suggests this hoard was discovered before 1685.


23 Camden, op. cit., p. 382.

24 Whitwell, op. cit., p. 77; Camden, op. cit., p. 388; White, op. cit., p. 660.

25 Unpublished Records in City and County Museum, Lincoln.

26 Dudley, op. cit., p. 212.

27 Ancaster: Archaeological Journal, XXVIII, 1870, p. 6. Owney: information concerning this probable hoard was kindly supplied by Sir Francis Hill, Lincoln; unpublished records concerning the hoard are housed in the City and County Museum, Lincoln.

28 Waddington: unpublished hoard found in 1977; information kindly supplied by A. J. White, City and County Museum, Lincoln; Whaplode: Phillips, op. cit., p. 300.


In 1971 Mark Girouard published the first edition of this book and placed all devotees of English country houses firmly in his debt. In 1973 the book was reprinted with corrections and now it has been reissued in a revised and enlarged edition, taking account of new material which has been published since 1971. The book makes an excellent companion to the same author’s Life in the English Country House and has been published in the same format, making it somewhat easier to handle and to shelve than the first edition. The book is a worthy follower of the English Country Houses series published over the years by Country Life and was originally intended to follow Christopher Hussey’s Late Georgian volume.

The book is scholarly one, but it is far from being for the expert and specialist only. It can, and certainly will be, read for pleasure, and no one who is interested in the English country house should be without a copy.

Lincolnshire readers have particular reason to welcome the new edition, for the accounts of individual houses now commence not only, as the first edition did, with an account of Bayons Manor, but also with an account of Harlaxton Manor, so that the country’s two most unusual houses provide a foretaste of what is to follow. It is to be regretted that there seems to be no well written and accurate account of Bayons as it was when it was furnished — though photographs do exist. The account given here is the only one, and is illustrated with pictures of the house when it was ruinous. It is instructive to compare the picture of Eustace Tennyson D’Eyncourt proposing a toast in his father’s hall at Bayons with the photograph of that same hall in ruins.

The illustrations throughout the book are excellent; the photographs of Harlaxton, two of them in colour, are particularly well chosen. It is only in an aerial view that the scale of this vast house can fully be appreciated, and it was an excellent idea to place the plan of the house on the same page as the aerial view. Too few books on country houses give plans. Bayons Manor is one of the few houses in this book for which no plans are given. One illustration of great local interest is Frank Dicksee’s painting The House Builders, showing Sir W. E. and Lady Welby-Gregory with the plans and model for Denton Manor, designed by A. W. Blomfield in 1884.

In his introduction Girouard examines builders, architects, materials, plumbing, heating, ventilation, gas, electricity and other technology. He also considers the male and female regions of country houses, the conservatory, the great hall (a revival found at Bayons and Harlaxton) and other features of houses built when styles and materials were more varied than in any other period. It is in its considerations of such matters that much of the book’s great value lies, for too many books on country houses have concentrated on the ‘public’ rooms, and the ‘show front’ and have made no attempt to show how such houses worked, or why they were planned in a particular way. The success of Girouard’s book is that he does not do this, and that he writes about the houses not merely as buildings or repositories for works of art, but as homes, expressions of personality, and places in which many people spent their entire working lives. A number of the illustrations show rooms and offices as they were in Victorian times, and these are of great value in any attempt to understand the Victorian country house as it really was.

Reviews today frequently bemoan the high cost of books. This one may seem expensive — but considered at about four pence a page, with hundreds of illustrations, it seems fantastically so; it is, in fact, a sound investment, for it is a book to which its readers will return again and again.

TERENCE R. LEACH

DUNHOLME