

# A survey of Romano-British coin hoards in Leicestershire

by *M. J. Winter*

## INTRODUCTION

In this study I intend to divide the material into two sections, (i) a brief description and discussion of the contents of the hoards; (ii) a fuller discussion of the hoards and their archæological contexts, incorporating, where applicable, the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Leicestershire Museums Survey Team and members of the amateur field group.

### I

The main purpose of this section is to supply details of the Romano-British coin hoards found in the county. Details of several of these hoards have been adequately published, others have been merely noted or only scantily recorded, while the Sproxton (1961) hoard is currently being studied by D. T-D Clarke. Some 24 hoards have been discovered in the county, while another eight can be regarded, on the evidence available as being possible hoards. I have not written out the coin list in full, where this is known for those hoards which have been published.

#### *Ashby de la Zouch*

This hoard<sup>1</sup> of third brass antoniniani was discovered in 1818, enclosed in two urns, about one mile north-east of Ashby. The emperors represented were Gallienus, Victorinus, Tetricus and Claudius II. Unfortunately, this is the only information on this third century hoard that we possess.

#### *Burton on the Wolds*

Nichols,<sup>2</sup> records a hoard of 204 copper coins, well preserved and found in 1802 in the vicinity of Burton Boundalls, ranging from Septimius Severus (4) through Constantinus (64) Maximinus (6) Diocletian (35) Maximianus (73) to Constantius (32).

#### *Edmondthorpe*

This hoard was found in a square hole in the rock about three feet below the surface during the construction of the Oakham Canal in 1797. The coins are described as 'common', ranging from Trajan to Gratian, with many in 'excellent preservation'.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Great Casterton*

A hoard of 327 minims was discovered during excavation at the villa site in 1950.<sup>4</sup> The hoard is definitely dated to the second half of the fourth Century A.D.

*Goadby Marwood*

This hoard from the extensive settlement in the north-east of the county was found in 1953, and has been fully described<sup>5</sup> in these *Transactions*. The hoard consisted of 1,917 antoniniani ranging from Valerian I to Probus, and a date of c. A.D. 280 was suggested as being the time of concealment.

*Higham on the Hill*

Burton records a small hoard<sup>6</sup> of two or three denarii of Trajan discovered in 1607 under a great square stone which formed part of the Watling Street.

*Hinckley*

This hoard<sup>7</sup> of denarii was found in 1871 during excavations near Hinckley, and ranges from Otho to Lucius Verus. Two Republican coins may have formed part of this hoard, but Sir John Evans who examined part of the hoard believed that they came from some other source.

*Leicester i*

Nichols<sup>8</sup> records a hoard found in 1718 during construction work in a cellar for a new house near the North Gate. The coins are described as being of 'a sort of copper', and ranged from Titus to Honorius. They were found in an 'earthen jug'.

*Leicester ii*

An urn, containing some 500 copper coins ranging from Severus to Constantius II was found near to Leicester in 1730.<sup>9</sup>

*Leicester iii*

This hoard,<sup>10</sup> found in 1805, was discovered at the corner of St. Peter's Lane with High Cross Street. The hoard enclosed in 'an earthen vessel' with 'some in good preservation' is described as comprising 'many . . . of Diocletian'.

*Leicester iv*

This hoard of 61 silver coins, was found in Causeway Lane in 1906.<sup>11</sup> The hoard ranged from Constans to Theodosius, and was found in an urn.<sup>12</sup>

*Leicester v*

Six Roman copper coins found in an urn in the Castle Yard was donated to Leicester Museum in 1860.<sup>13</sup>

*Leicester vi*

A hoard of 38 antoniniani were discovered during the excavation of the Jewry Wall site, (1936-38), full details of which were published in the *Numismatic Chronicle*.<sup>14</sup> The hoard ranged from Gallienus to Probus, and was probably deposited about A.D. 280. Generally, the coins were in a poor condition.

*Mount St Bernard*

In 1840, an urn filled with Roman small brass and base silver coins was brought to light by the plough.<sup>15</sup> It is stated that the number of coins found may be calculated to be about 1,400 to 2,000. Eighty-four of the coins in private possession were identified as being antoniniani ranging from Philip I to Probus. A further 966 antoniniani and the urn in which they were found, are

in the possession of Leicestershire Museums,<sup>16</sup> and also range to Probus. A coin of Licinius has been attributed to the hoard, but this seems unlikely. The hoard is described as being found at the very highest point of the Forest. Nearby, fragments of vases and pieces of curbed edge house tiles were also found.

*Lutterworth i*

Stukeley<sup>17</sup> and Nichols<sup>18</sup> record a hoard of about 46 denarii and sesterti found in a hole near Bensford Bridge, Lutterworth in 1725. The hoard ranged from Vespasian to Antoninus Pius. A large number of the coins are described as being 'excellently cut'. A complete description of all but 12 of the coins is given by both antiquarians.

*Lutterworth ii*

This hoard was found at the town of Lutterworth in 1869, and contained 254 antoniniani ranging from Volusian to Tetricus II.<sup>19</sup> Many of the coins were described as being in good condition.<sup>20</sup>

*Sproxton i*

An urn containing exactly 100 siliquae was found about a quarter of a mile north of Sproxton Church by the side of the road to Saltby in 1810. The hoard, presumably still kept at Belvoir Castle, ranges from Constantius II to Honorius, full details are to be found in the Numismatic Chronicle.<sup>21</sup> One coin has been lost and its identification unknown.

*Sproxton ii*

In June 1961, a hoard of 174, fourth century bronze coins was uncovered,<sup>22</sup> during ironstone quarrying to the north-east of the village. The hoard ranges from Constantine I to Constantine II.

*Stockerston*

Nichols<sup>23</sup> mentions a hoard of 230 siliquae found in Holyoke Wood in 1779. The hoard which ranged from Julian to Arcadius was enclosed in a glass urn. Many of the coins are described as being in a state of 'high preservation' but no detailed description is given.

*Rothley*

A label in the Museum files<sup>24</sup> reads 'part of an urn found at Rothley containing coins in 1895'. Unfortunately the urn and its contents did not arrive at the Museum with the rest of the Collection of Mr. Burns-Hartopp. However, *TLAS*, Vol. IX (1904-5). p. 174 does record material exhibited on behalf of Mr. Burns-Hartopp namely. 'A Roman coin of Julius Caesar (First Brass) bearing the inscription IVLIVS DIVOS CAESAR found with others at Rothley some years ago'. This may be a reference to the hoard, enquiries have failed to elicit any further details.

*Thistleton*

Excavations in 1957 at the extensive Romano-British site in advance of ironstone quarrying revealed two small third-century coin hoards. found at the top of a large pit.<sup>25</sup> The excavations are currently being prepared for publication, where the hoards will doubtless be described in detail.

*Thrussington*

Only a scanty record is available of this hoard from correspondence in the Museum files.<sup>26</sup> The coins were found in an urn in Thrussington and are described as 'including VRBS ROMA and other fourth-century issues'.

*Uppingham*

In 1814 in a wood near Uppingham a hoard of 600 Roman silver coins was discovered.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately no further details of this hoard were recorded.

*Note*

There are at least another eight possible examples of Roman coin-hoards discovered in the county,<sup>28</sup> though it is now impossible to say definitely if they were genuine hoards or not; while the provenance of the Stanford hoard is uncertain; it could well have been found in Nottinghamshire.

## II

## NUMISMATIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COIN-HOARDS

Of our 24 hoards, five were composed entirely of third-century antoniniani whether regular or barbarous issues, six hoards contained silver coins only, and one hoard contained silver and bronze coin. All the rest are described as being composed of copper, though two of these were composed of fourth-century issues. Of three hoards, we do not know what the coin was.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

There is no record from 11 of the hoards of there being any container found at the time of the discovery. Twelve of the hoards were found in coarse ware vessels, with ten of these vessels described as urns, one as a jug and one as a vessel. The Ashby hoard it may be noted was contained in two urns, one at least was brass. Only one hoard was found in a glass vessel, which throughout the Province was a very rare container, only about six are recorded.<sup>29</sup> Apparently no hoard was found in a samian vessel.

Of more interest to the archaeologist working on the problems of Romano-British occupation in Leicestershire, are the objects or settlements with which the hoards are associated, and possible settlements yet to be found as indicated by the hoards themselves. We have several examples of the former, with possibly the most interesting being the objects found in association with the Mount St. Bernard Hoard. In the account of the discovery of the hoard, it is recorded that 'fragments of other vases have recently been found near the spot . . . also pieces of the curved-edge house tiles.'<sup>30</sup> The ground was examined to a depth of 9-10 inches only. Although not strictly found in association with the hoard, there is little doubt that we have here a selection of finds from an occupation site. The 'curved-edge house tiles' certainly sound like *imbrices*

The recently found, (1961) hoard from Sproxton, although not having any objects associated with it, is a useful addition to the number of Romano-British finds in the same locality. Skeletons of uncertain date, (possibly Prehistoric), were found in the same quarry as the hoard, while if we take the

evidence of the 1810 hoard plus Romano-British pottery and a section of wall found in the same area as the 1961 hoard,<sup>31</sup> then we probably have an occupation site or sites here.

The Sproxton, (1810) hoard is also interesting, as it appears to have been buried in the side of an existing burial mound, presumably a Bronze-Age barrow. Human skeletal remains and pieces of a larger urn than that which contained the hoard were also discovered, though unfortunately not recorded.<sup>32</sup> The exact location of the find can be easily found from the reference given, though no barrow can be seen today. Thus, while hoards with associated objects are few, the find-spot of a hoard in relation to other Romano-British finds in the same locality can be of interest. The Ashby hoard for example was probably buried near the line of the Roman road running north-west out of Leicester, while fieldwork has recently located a Roman settlement at Edmondthorpe cut through by the late eighteenth-century canal, in the same area as the find-spot of the fourth-century hoard, and adjacent in all probability to a road running from Thistleton to Syston on the Fosse.<sup>33</sup>

The two hoards and other coin finds from the Lutterworth region, are just some of the more important finds from that locality,<sup>34</sup> which include coins, pottery, (with some samian), from the town itself, where the 1869 hoard was discovered. Although only three miles from the settlement at Caves Inn (Tripontium) on Watling Street, such finds should not be ignored as extensive Romano-British type cropmarks showing field systems and occupation enclosures exist in this area.<sup>35</sup> Fieldwork here would be rewarding.

#### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOARDS

The number of hoards lost in Roman Leicestershire during the reigns of different emperors is of interest. It is evident that at certain periods more hoards were lost than others, as for example during the currency of coin of the Tetrici to Probus, the Constantinian period and in the later fourth-century.

The reason for the loss of these hoards can usually be assigned to specific reasons or causes, when they are considered in conjunction with known literary and other archaeological evidence. Thus, in Leicestershire, in the years 270-282 we have a total of at least five recorded hoards, almost certainly an indication that these were troubled years. At least 170 hoards have been recorded for these years throughout Britain as a whole.<sup>36</sup> The crises which caused the trouble were threefold: the advent of Saxon raiders, currency reform and internal rebellions. Though the Province escaped the barbarian invasions which beset the rest of the Western Empire. Alongside these troubles, Aurelian (270-275) and his successors attempted to reform the coinage by replacing the debased issues of the Gallic empire with a heavier and better struck coin. This attempt at reform was unpopular in Britain, and the old issues were hoarded rather than exchanged for the new at an unfavourable rate.<sup>37</sup>

Turning to the end of the fourth-century A.D., we have a total of five hoards dating from the last quarter of the century. Professor Anne Robertson, has already shown that these hoards are concentrated in the lowland areas of

England, south-east of a line from the Severn to the Humber, with outliers in the coastal districts of west Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire.<sup>38</sup> The hoards reflect the areas where the wealth of late Roman Britain was to be found, and thus those areas that had the most to lose from barbarian raiders. With the closure of the Gallic mints (c. 395), coins of Honorius were the latest to enter Britain in any great number, and mainly on this basis, the Sproxton (1810) hoard was considered by O'Neil<sup>39</sup> to have been deposited in the early fifth-century A.D. possibly in the reign of Constantine III, (407-411).

Individually, a number of the hoards call for comment. The Edmondthorpe hoard and the Leicester (1718) hoard both cover a very long time span, so long in fact that one begins to doubt the authenticity of the original sources. The Leicester (1730) hoard also covers an unusually lengthy period. It would appear that either there are a number of mistakes in our sources, or, we are seeing a local characteristic in the composition of these hoards. Unfortunately, we cannot, in the absence of the coin check this.

#### Notes

1. *T.L.A.S.*, I (1866), 81
2. J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, (1795-1815), III, 1136
3. *Gentleman's Magazine* (1797), I, 75
4. P. Corder (Ed.) *The Roman Town and Villa at Great Casterton, Rutland* (1951), pp. 18 and 23
5. *T.L.A.H.S.*, XXXII (1956), 25-35
6. W. Burton, *Description of Leicestershire* (1777 revised edition), p. 120; and *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities* 2, VI, 73 (Henceforth P.S.A.)
7. *Ibid.*, 2, V, (1870-3), 282-4; and J. Evans in *Numismatic Chronicle* (1881), 306
8. Nichols, *op. cit.*, I, 4
9. *Manuscript Minutes of the Society of Antiquaries*, II (1732-7), 200
10. *Annual Register*, (1805), 417
11. *T.L.A.H.S.*, X (1905-6), Pts. I-II, 59
12. Leicestershire Museums Accession No. 116'1962
13. *Ibid.*, Accession No. 85'1860. (Coins and pot not found)
14. *Numismatic Chronicle* (1940), 24
15. *Ibid.*, III, (1841), 67; and *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Ser. I, VIII (1852), 2
16. Museum Accession No. 88'1938. Published in Abbot's Paper in *T.L.A.H.S.*, XXXII (1956), 25ff.
17. *Itinerarium Curiosum* (2nd Ed., 1776), I, 112
18. Nichols, *op. cit.*, II, Pt. 1, 128
19. *Numis. Chron.* (1871), 169
20. *Archaeol. J.*, XXVII (1870), 347
21. *Numis. Chron.* (1834), 61
22. Museum Accession No. 538'1961
23. Nichols *op. cit.*, III, 535
24. Burns-Hartopp Collection
25. *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 48 (1958) 137
26. Leicestershire Museum Records
27. *Rutland Magazine*, I (1903-4), 160

28. These were at Lutterworth, Narborough, Queniborough, Syston, Quorndon, Stanford, Barrow and Kilworth. Details are in Leicestershire Museum Records.
29. A. S. Robertson, 'Romano-British Coin Hoards', in J. Casey and R. Reece (Eds.), *Coins and the Archaeologist, Brit. Archæol. Rep.*, 4 (1974), 24
30. *J. Brit. Archæol. Ass.*, Ser. I, VII (1852)
31. Leicestershire Museums Records
32. *Numis. Chron.* (1934), 62
33. *T.L.A.H.S.*, LII (1976-77), 101
34. Leicestershire Museums Records
35. Information in Leicestershire Museums Records
36. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 27
37. S. Frere, *Britannia* (1967), 190
38. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 34
39. *Numis. Chron.* (1934), 73

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