



THE MARTOCK HOARD





THE FIND

21st July 2012. On a typical British summer morning two metal detectorists headed for a ploughed field near the village of Martock on the edge of the Somerset levels. They had targeted the field due to it being near the famous Fosse Way Roman road and on previous visits found evidence of Roman occupation so there was a sense of excitement as they headed down the green country lanes. Matthew & Paul are father and son and had been detecting for 25 years so knew a thing or two about reading fields and picking the best areas to search. This was certainly the case on this day.

After a few hours of searching Matthew came across a clear signal and with little excavation unearthed a lovely bronze coin of Constantine the Great (307-337AD).



After a few minutes of wondering who last touched the coin, what it was used to buy and why it was lost he stored it safely and moved on. Or at least he would have done had his metal detector not given several other loud readings in the immediate area. He pin pointed another signal, dug down and was rewarded with another similar coin. Being an experienced detectorist he knew that there were more and called his father over to help with the search.



The finders

Over the space of several hours 419 coins were recovered from the plough soil along with several pieces of Romano-British pottery. These were later identified to be from several vessels but there was the majority of a Black Burnished Ware jar which is thought to have been the hoard container.



Finders' excavation

The next step was to report the find to the portable antiquities scheme and arrange for a more detailed excavation in the hope that there were more coins and information about the deposit below the plough line still in situ. The excavation unearthed a further 7 coins and further pottery sherds. The whole find was then reported as Treasure to HM Coroner via the Portable Antiquities Scheme.



Archaeological excavation

The 425 coins were all nummi and date to a relatively short period of Roman occupation, 317-330A.D. which was a very prosperous time in Britain.

After cataloguing at the British Museum the coins were considered by a Coroner and with no museum showing interest in acquiring the find for a public collection it was disclaimed and returned to the finders.

The image overleaf shows what Matthew & Paul received back, having thought they would never get to handle the coins again they were pleased to be able to show their friends and family and share stories of that fateful day in July 2012.



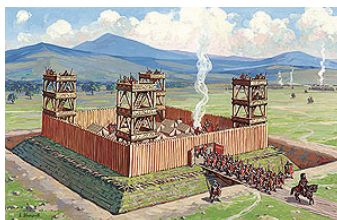
The Martock Hoard (prior to conservation)

After a few years they decided to sell the coins and contacted a few companies who expressed little interest due to the state of preservation. While talking to a fellow detectorist Matthew mentioned the coins and Silbury Coins was recommended. Matthew got in touch and spoke to John Philpotts, director of Silbury Coins who arranged to travel down and meet them in person the following week. This meeting went well and a large part of the hoard was sold.

HISTORY OF THE AREA

Somerset was occupied by the Durotriges tribe in the Iron Age and by the Roman's only 6 years after the invasion of Britain in 43AD.

The Second Augusta legion commanded by Vespasian (who later became emperor) marched along the coast from their landing point to Exeter and then back inland via the many Hill forts, ensuring that there was no opposition to the inevitable Roman rule. There is some evidence that a 'marching fort' was built just north-east of modern day Ilchester, this would have been the earliest occupation of the area. Following the Bouddica rebellion in 60-61AD a vexillation fort housing 1000 legionnaires was built to control the use of the Fosse Way and modern day Ilchester was born.



Roman Fort



The Fosse Way

The famous Fosse Way was built stretching from Exeter in the South West right through to Lincoln in the North East. This road passes close to the find site. Many major Roman settlements were established on the Fosse Way, The nearest to the Martock hoard find spot was 6 miles away. Ilchester or as the Romans knew it *Lindinis* translating to ‘little marsh’ was a small settlement in Roman terms but still had some 35 acres enclosed with walls and was supported by a number of wealthy villas in the immediate surrounding area. The town’s defences started as a simple clay bank, later a timber revetment was added and during the 4th century this was replaced with a stone wall and defensive towers. Finance most likely came from the local tin mining opportunities alongside general farming and pottery manufacture.

In the 2nd Century AD a detachment from *Lindinis* helped to build Hadrian’s wall, this is known as inscriptions have been found on the wall recording the people from *Lindinis* some 320 miles north. These days this is a 6 hour car journey, one wonders how long it took on Horseback, if they were so lucky, otherwise I bet a few pairs of sandals were worn out!

LOOKING AT THE COINS

The coins from the Martock hoard date to between 317AD and 330AD and were minted all over the Roman Empire but predominately in the west. The reverse of each coin has a combination of letters in the exergue which tell us where it was struck. The map below shows the mint distribution.



The Roman Empire

Mints represented Coins

Arles	1
London	200
Lyon	11
Rome	2
Siscia	5
Thessalonica	1
Ticinum	3
Trier	114
Uncertain	88



There are a wide variety of types and emperors represented, remarkable given the short window of production.



*The Martock Hoard
(after conservation)*

OBVERSE SAMPLES



1. Military bust with shield to front



2. Helmeted bust



3. Radiate bust



4. Military bust



5. Empress Helena



6. Empress Fausta



7. Laureate bust with eagle tipped sceptre



8. Laureate bust with spear & shield to front



9. Laureate bust with shield & spear



10. Laureate bust left



11. Laureate bust right



12. Consular bust holding victory on globe

REVERSE SAMPLES



1. Camp gate



2. Standard with captives



3. Victory advancing with trophy & captive



4. Military trophy with bound captives at base



5. Emperor holding thunderbolt riding eagle



6. Empress with children



7. Laurel wreath with vows



8. Two victories inscribing shield



9. Altar



10. Securitas standing



11. Sol advancing

All the designs above make a clear message to anyone handling these coins, some are designed as propaganda to show the power of the Roman Empire (1,2,3,4,5) others to show the human side of emperors who most Romans probably never caught sight of (6). Some to promote the incredible engineering capabilities of the Roman army (1). Some to celebrate the success of the rulers (2,3,4,5,7,8). Last of all some to pay respect to the gods (9,10,11).

The coins present can be grouped in to two periods, 317-324AD when Constantine the Great (306-337AD) the first Christian emperor ruled jointly with his pagan rival Licinius (308-324AD) and then 324-330AD when Constantine the Great ruled as senior emperor with his sons as junior emperors.

Below is a table showing numbers of the emperors & associated family present in the hoard:

Constantine the Great 306-337A.D.	160
Licinius I 308-324A.D.	6
Licinius II (as Caesar) 317-324A.D.	9
Constantine II (as Caesar, son of Constantine the Great)	109
Constantius II (as Caesar, son of Constantine the Great)	1
Crispus (as Caesar, son of Constantine the Great) 317-326A.D.	90
Fausta (Wife of Constantine the Great)	3
Helena (Mother of Constantine the Great)	2
Uncertain (the whole hoard was only available to be studied uncleaned so attribution was difficult in some cases)	45

CONCLUSION

Silbury Coins was delighted to be contacted by Matthew and Paul in May 2016. Often disclaimed hoards are sold without the study & publication given here which is a shame as it can bring joy to many involved with the find, living in the local area or wishing to own part of a real Roman treasure find.

Silbury Coins has had lots of experience dealing with disclaimed hoards and knew the right specialist conservator to be able to remove the encrustation and turn the coins in to something presentable and desirable to the collector.

We look forward to being contacted by the next lucky finder!

To buy a coin from the hoard visit: www.silburycoins.com



A trip to the bank, circa 330AD

Victor Ambrus

Background to Silbury Coins

Silbury coins is a well-known and respected name in the numismatic world. Director John Philpotts has been handling coins and antiquities for 26 years. Silbury Coins provides a professional service rivalling that of the biggest companies in the market, whilst still retaining the personal touch. Driven by a passion for hands on history ever since being given his first Roman coin at the age of 6, John remains just as passionate today, I think anyone who knows him will agree.



"Ethics – a word which appears to often be forgotten in modern day society but something that we hold very strong. BNTA membership is a start, but we like to take it further than that. As well as offering nothing but genuine, correctly described stock we ensure that our prices are fair both to the buyer and seller. Perhaps rather old fashioned in our approach, we believe that there is only one way to do business, the honest way. If you choose to deal with us then you will be treated as we would want to be treated ourselves." **John Philpotts**

Silbury Coins sell via their website, private meetings and trade shows around the UK.
For more information or to discuss buying/selling to Silbury coins, get in touch today.



T: 01242 898107 E: sales@silburycoins.com W: www.silburycoins.com

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