

# THE WESTBURY SUB MENDIP HOARD



# EMPERORS & THEIR WIVES REPRESENTED IN THE HOARD



**Marc Antony**  
32-31 BC



**Nero**  
AD 54-68



**Galba**  
AD 68-69



**Otho**  
AD 69



**Vitellius**  
AD 69



**Vespasian**  
AD 69-79



**Titus**  
AD 79-81



**Domitian**  
AD 81-96



**Nerva**  
AD 96-98



**Trajan**  
AD 98-117



**Hadrian**  
AD 117-138



**Aelius**  
AD 136-138



**Antoninus Pius**  
AD 138-161



**Diva Faustina**  
AD 138-141



**Marcus Aurelius**  
AD 161-180



**Faustina II**  
AD 147-175



**Lucius Verus**  
AD 161-169



**Lucilla**  
AD 164-182



**Commodus**  
AD 177-192



**Crispina**  
AD 178-182



**Pertinax**  
AD 193



**Septimius Severus**  
AD 193-211

# THE BEGINNING

## AD 193

Sometime, during mid to late AD 193 in the South West corner of the Roman province of Britannia, a citizen was compelled to bury his hoard of 188 silver denari, equivalent in value to around £4,500 in modern day currency. This based on the fact that a denarius is thought to have been worth around £25. A Roman soldier would have been paid around 300 denari per year – this doesn't seem like a lot but remember there were far fewer things to spend your money on back in Roman times!

What compelled him to bury the hoard we can only imagine; was it for safe keeping while he headed to market in nearby Wells or had he been asked to head north and help with the trouble caused by the Caledonians near Hadrian's Wall? Perhaps they were stolen by a mischievous slave who was then caught, sold and could never return to recover his loot. Who knows but, for certain, these coins were not recovered, at least not in Roman times.

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# THE FIND

## MAY 2016

**Introducing Daniel Stevenson, Metal Detectorist in AD 2016 searching a small field in Somerset during May where some 1,822 years previously these coins had been buried.**

The search was arranged by a small club and everyone was excited, due to the history of Roman occupation in the area. The search areas were identified and they headed out into the fields, detectors ready. The first impressive find was a reminder of the significant mining activity which took place in South Western Britain during the Roman period: an impressive lead pig ingot was unearthed. This was a bullion ingot inscribed with the name of the emperors of the time, similar to a modern day gold bar which carries the assay marks. It measured 52cm in length and weighed a whopping 19.3 kilograms! Four similar ingots have previously been found in Somerset suggesting that this is where they were mined during the second century AD.



Roman Lead Pig Ingot

Later in the day Daniel got a faint signal and, upon removing a clod of earth, was greeted with the unmistakable sight of a silver coin. It quickly became apparent that there were more coins in the ground – imagine what must have been running through Daniel’s mind! We’ve all seen the great piles of coins in the British Museum which have been found around England previously, was this the tip of such an iceberg?



First glimpse of the hoard

Daniel resisted the temptation to carry on digging and contacted the event organiser who quickly arranged for an archaeologist to come to the site and carry out an excavation.

After several hours of careful digging there was no sign of a container of any kind, meaning the coins had most likely been placed in the ground in a purse or other form of organic material which, in 1800 years, was no longer present.

The coins were carefully lifted and bagged then, once everything had been removed from the ground, the hole was backfilled. The coins were taken to the British Museum in accordance with the Treasure Act.

Here they were studied and subsequently declared as 'Treasure' by a Coroner. This gives The British Museum, or any other museum in the country, the opportunity to acquire the hoard and should they wish to do this the finder and landowner would have been paid a fair market value. However, on this occasion, there was no interest shown so the hoard was disclaimed and returned to the finder. Dan decided that it would be best to sell the coins so that he could split the proceeds evenly between himself and the landowner; usual practice in such a case. He contacted a friend who recommended he speak to Silbury Coins who subsequently purchased the hoard from Dan.



**More coins revealed as archaeological investigation begins**



**Wider investigation to look at the context of the hoard**

# THE COINS

Once at the British Museum, the coins were counted and identified. There were 188 silver denari stretching from coins of Marc Antony (32-31 BC) to Septimius Severus (AD 193) some 225 years of Roman history. All bar the early Legionary issues were struck in Rome.

As usual with finds like this the older coins were in the poorest condition, as can be seen to the right, understandable given that they had been in circulation for up to 224 years and then the latest dated coins in the hoard were much as struck having seen very little wear through circulation.

225 years of history represented in one hoard is pretty remarkable – this would have been over six Roman lifetimes (the average life expectancy was 37 years). This is comparable to having coins in circulation from AD 1791 showing the bust of King George III! This gives an insight into the times and perhaps shows a lack of importance of what was actually on the coins but more significance in the material value.

The earliest coins are struck during the reign of Mark Antony and are Legionary issues. These were struck at travelling mints and each coin bears the number of its legion, although most examples here are too worn to be able to be identified. However, to the right, is a nice example of a coin struck by the mint travelling with the V (fifth) Legion from the hoard.



Marc Antony  
32-31 BC



Crispina, wife of Commodus  
AD 178-182



Mark Antony,  
Legion V

We then see a mix of coins from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD including famous names like Nero and Otho, the latter being known as one of the less successful Roman emperors reigning for just eight weeks in AD 69.



**Nero**  
AD 54-68



**Otho**  
AD 69

Nearly a third of the hoard consists of coins of Trajan and Hadrian, both of whom were successful emperors with long reigns and thus producing a large number of coins.



**Trajan**  
AD 98-117



**Hadrian**  
AD 117-138

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD sees a greater emphasis on dynasties. Coins are struck showing emperors wives; then in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries, daughters, sisters and mothers are also featured portraying the emperors as family men – something which must have been increasingly popular with the Roman citizens.

### EMPEROR'S WIVES



**Diva Faustina**  
AD 138-141



**Faustina II**  
AD 147-175



**Lucilla**  
AD 164-182



**Crispina**  
AD 178-182

To view coins for sale from the hoard,  
visit [www.silburycoins.com](http://www.silburycoins.com)

# REVERSE TYPES

There are a huge variety of reverse types for silver denari, most show gods and goddesses but some celebrate triumphs of engineering, architecture and military campaigns. Some show wild

animals which have been 'discovered' by the emperor's troops in faraway lands which most citizens will probably have never set eyes upon – what a great place for propaganda!



**Ceres,**  
goddess of crops  
and agriculture



**Concordia,**  
goddess who embodies  
agreement in marriage  
and society



**Felicitas,**  
goddess of good  
luck and positivity



**Hilaritas,**  
goddess of rejoicing,  
often depicted on coins  
to celebrate the birth of  
a child to the emperor



**Moneta,**  
Goddess of memory,  
prosperity, finances  
and money



**Commemorating  
the Via Traiana,**  
a 205 mile Roman  
road built in AD 109



**Elephants**  
were used by the  
Roman army



**Peacock** representing  
paradise, renewal,  
and spring



# TROUBLED TIME IN THE EMPIRE

This hoard was deposited within months of the death of Commodus. The Roman Empire was locked in Civil War and AD 193 saw no less than four Roman emperors – three of which were brutally assassinated to make way for Septimius Severus who eventually went on to reign for 18 years. At one point during AD 193 the position of emperor was even put up for auction by the Praetorian Guard, Didius Julianus being the successful, or unsuccessful bidder!

The rarest coin, in the hoard, is a denarius of Pertinax (AD 193). He was the son of a freed slave and quickly climbed the ranks in the military before becoming emperor after the assassination of Commodus on New Year's Eve, AD 192. However he inherited a broken empire and quickly became unpopular with the people and military leading to an assassination plot by his own Praetorian Guard on 28<sup>th</sup> March, less than three months after he'd taken the imperial position of emperor.



**Pertinax**  
AD 193

The latest coins in the hoard are early issues struck under Septimius Severus in AD 193, these are legionary issues and were the very first coins issued under this new emperor giving special thanks to the Legionaries who help him rise to imperial emperor.

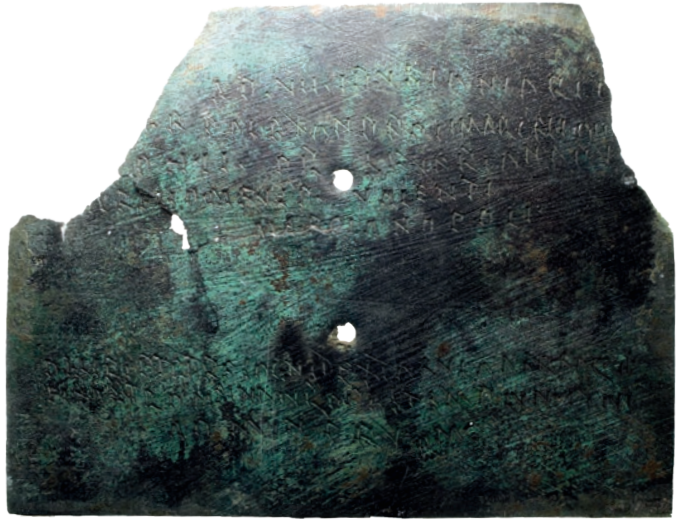


**Septimius Severus**  
Legionary Issue  
(obverse)



**Septimius Severus**  
Legionary Issue  
(reverse)

Much information is available from the Roman period, recorded in various ways, enabling us to piece together a wonderful picture of the past. Take, for example, this bronze military diploma or discharge paper. With careful translation, we can read that it was awarded to Aurelius Ulpius Valens from Marcianopolis who served with the Praetorian Guard.

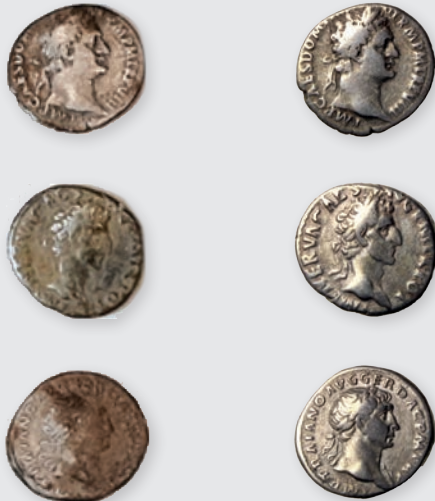


**Roman Military Diploma**  
Praetorian Guard, Cohort II, Severus Alexander Cos. II, dated 7 Jan AD 226. This diploma is described in *Roxan's Roman Military Diplomas*, Vol 3, #195 a and b

## CONSERVATION

**1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century denari are generally made of good silver and, as such, last well.**

That said, when these coins were removed from the ground, there was some encrustation and staining. Luckily, at *Silbury Coins*, we know specialist conservators who knew exactly what to do with them. Careful work to remove the encrustation, but not damage the coins themselves, took place over a number of months and the results are clear to see.



BEFORE

AFTER

*Note; we do not recommend that anyone without professional knowledge tries to clean coins, instead please contact us.*

# CONCLUSION

A BIG thank you to Daniel for his hours of searching to locate this buried treasure and for carefully assisting with its excavation. Thank you to the group who arranged for permission to search the land that day and to everyone else involved in getting this exciting find to this point.

It has been a pleasure to be involved with another amazing Treasure find, from the beginning to the end of the process it is always enjoyable and something we are very passionate about. Now it's our turn to pass this enjoyment on to you, the collector and give you an opportunity to own the coins from a real Roman Treasure find.

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If hearing about this exciting find has made you want to go searching for your own buried treasure then get in touch with *Leisure Promotions* who will be able to supply you with everything you need to get started.

[www.lpmetaldetecting.com](http://www.lpmetaldetecting.com)





## 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 28 years. With a great team around him, Silbury Coins provides a professional service, whilst still retaining the personal touch. Driven by a passion for hands-on history ever since being given his first Roman coin by his father at the age of 6 John remains just as passionate today, as does his father who regularly attends numismatic events with the company. When buying from Silbury Coins you will be dealing with expert numismatists and receive all the benefits of their years of knowledge and experience.

As members of the BNTA we adhere to their strict code of conduct as 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 & seller. Dealing with Silbury Coins you will find honesty and integrity is of foremost importance in their day to day business. If you choose to deal with us then you will be treated as we would want to be treated ourselves.

As well as offering a wonderful and vast selection of coins for sale we provide much information for collectors starting out and are happy to assist those who've spent a lifetime collecting coins.

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The best place to browse our stock is on our website, or if you'd prefer, you can get in touch to arrange a meeting.

We are always looking to replenish our stock, if you would like to sell single coins or a collection/hoard then get in touch.

To discuss buying or selling you can contact us using one of the following ways:

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