

# THE DEREHAM HOARD







## THE FIND

**The Dereham hoard of some 1049 Roman silver coins was found in 2004 by metal detectorists Pat & Sally Buckley. The hoard was buried in a greyware pot during or shortly after AD 240 during the reign of the Roman emperor Gordian III. Here it remained until disturbed by ploughing in the early 2000s.**

Some scattered coins were recovered by the metal detectorists who then contacted Norfolk's Identification and Recording Service so that they could visit the site and undertake a proper excavation.

Pat and Sally took the field archaeologists to the spot where their machines 'went in to overdrive' and

a controlled excavation began. With the help of the metal detectors the epicentre was quickly located and a damaged pottery vessel containing some 800 coins was carefully uncovered. Further scattered coins were found nearby until a total of 1049 coins were eventually recovered.



## HISTORY OF THE AREA

Norfolk lies on the eastern edge of the country and forms part of East Anglia. The area was occupied by the Iceni tribe during the Iron Age and prior to Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43.

**Eburacum**  
(York)

**Lindum**  
(Lincoln)

**Venta Icenorum**  
(Norwich)

**Gariannonum**  
(Great Yarmouth)

**Londinium**  
(London)

FIND SPOT



Initially the Iceni kings having sworn allegiance to Rome remained in place, however following the Bouddica rebellion in AD 60-61 the Romans imposed direct rule which lasted until they withdrew around AD 410.

Dereham, which derives from an area where deer grazed, lies close to the centre of Norfolk roughly 17 miles west of Norwich. The town lies to the north east of Thetford Forest and is within the Norfolk Brecklands.

The area is now predominantly farmland although much of the Brecklands lie on relatively poor sandy and flinty soils. The old Fen Causeway passed nearby and this road roughly followed the route of what is now the A47 Trunk Road which connects Norwich and Peterborough.

The old Iceni capital Venta Icenorum lies just to the south of Norwich. Nearby rivers were used as a means of communication to the coast and Great Yarmouth which was the main port serving the area.

To help protect the coastal area the Romans built fortresses nearby at Burgh Castle and Caister. Caister became one of the largest Roman settlements in East Anglia.

For most of the Roman occupation this part of Norfolk was peaceful. Trade flourished and the area became wealthy. Finance most likely came from cloth, general farming, fishing, as well as pottery manufacture.



Part of the ruined outer walls of the Roman Fort at Burgh Castle, Norfolk



The impressive earthwork remains of an Iron Age hill fort in Warham, Norfolk. Occupied firstly by Bouddica's Celtic tribe, taken on by the Romans.



# CONTENTS OF THE HOARD

Here we show emperors represented in the hoard and number of coins present.



Mark Antony x 12  
31-30 BC



Vitellius x 1  
AD 69



Vespasian x 7  
AD 69-79



Domitian x 1  
AD 81-96



Trajan x 1  
AD 98-117



Hadrian x 5  
AD 117-138



Faustina I x 6  
AD 138-141



Antoninus Pius x 12  
AD 138-161



Faustina II x 4  
AD 147-175



Marcus Aurelius x 10  
AD 161-180



Lucius Verus x 1  
AD 161-169



Commodus x 14  
AD 177-192



Crispina x 1  
AD 178-182



Sept. Severus x 154  
AD 193-211



Julia Domna x 49  
AD 193-217



Didius Julianus x 1  
AD 198



Caracalla x 107  
AD 198-217



Plautilla x 6  
AD 202-205



Geta x 25  
AD 209-212



Macrinus x 4  
AD 217-218



Elagabalus x 164  
AD 218-222



Julia Soaemias x 12  
AD 218-222



Julia Maesa x 50  
AD 218-222



Julia Paula x 13  
AD 219-220



Aquila Severa x 2  
AD 220-222



Sev. Alexander x 309  
AD 222-235



Julia Mamaea x 43  
AD 222-235



Orbiana x 2  
AD 225-227



Maximinus I x 24  
AD 235-238



Gordian III x 9  
AD 238-244

Images shown are  
representative examples  
of the hoard coins.

## THE COINS IN DETAIL

The hoard is unusual not only for its size, but also for its terminal date which is around AD 240. Most of the hoards found in Norfolk were much earlier, the latest dating from the end of the 2nd century. Radiates and later coins from the late 3rd and 4th centuries have also been found but these mostly contained coins that were of much poorer quality with little or no silver content.

Whilst the Dereham hoard does contain some early radiates, mainly antoniniani of Caracalla and Elagabalus, most of the coins are denari. The antoninianus was introduced during the reign of Caracalla and were nominally valued at 2 denarius. These coins can be identified by the radiate crown which is on the emperor's bust.



Whilst there was a long debasement in the silver coinage from the 2nd Century onwards until the early part of the 3rd Century the silver used in coinage was mostly of decent purity. There was however a rapid debasement after AD 240 and by AD 260 most coins contained little, if any, silver. The weight of many coins was also reduced. The coins in this hoard were minted just prior to this rapid debasement and therefore contain silver that is mostly of reasonable quality.

The coins in the Dereham hoard span almost 3 centuries, a reminder of how long coins could circulate in an era where denominations remain unchanged for a long period of time. First introduced in the 3rd Century BC, the denarius was issued continuously until being phased out by inflation during the 3rd century AD.

Although most of the coins in the hoard date from the late 2nd and early 3rd Centuries there are also a few coins, which are much earlier. These date back to Mark Antony (31 BC). The Legionary issues were produced by Mark Antony to pay his soldiers whilst on campaign against Octavian, who later became Rome's first emperor Augustus 27BC- AD14.



Mark Antony 32-31BC Silver  
Legionary Denarius Legion II

These coins are mostly well worn which shows how long they had been in circulation. When the Legionary denari were first struck they were not popular as the coins were deemed to have had been minted from sub standard silver but after decades of use and slow debasement of the official denarius coinage these early coins once again became recognised as being as good as (or better) than the present-day coinage, thus worth saving in 3rd Century Britain.



Most coins minted during the 1st and much of the 2nd Century AD contained silver of good quality and of regular weight. The reason why there are so few coins from this period in the hoard is that it is likely that these coins would have already been removed from circulation and replaced with debased up to date denari.

Starting with the reign of Septimius Severus AD 193-211, the number of coins present in the hoard rises sharply.



There are over 300 coins from Severus Alexander, AD 222-235 and a further 164 from his cousin Elagabalus, AD 218-222. Both of these emperors were murdered indicating the increasing instability of the Roman empire at this time.



Severus Alexander AD 222-235



Elagabalus AD 218-222

It comes as no surprise that a hoard of this size contains some rarities; a single denarius from Didius Julianus who reigned for only a few weeks in AD 193, reputedly winning the role of emperor at an auction held by the Praetorian Guard and four denari struck under Macrinus, a usurper, who seized power and reigned for a few months after the assassination of Caracalla in AD 217.



Didius Julianus Silver Denarius AD 193



Macrinus AD 217-218

Dynasties became more popular in the late 2nd Century AD, this hoard contains a number of coins which depict imperial women, some of which can be seen below. Julia Domna (Fig. 1), wife to Septimius Severus, Plautilla (Fig. 2), wife of Caracalla, Julia Paula (Fig. 3) and Aquilia Severa (Fig. 4) who were both married to Elagabalus, Julia Maesa (Fig. 5), grandmother to Severus Alexander and his first wife Orbiana (Fig. 6).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

The last emperor represented is Gordian III who reigned from AD 238-244. The last coin of his, showing the emperor on horseback, was minted in Rome around AD 240.

Many of the later coins show little wear indicating that they had not long been in circulation when they were buried, this and the absence of later issues gives us the deposition date.



## REVERSE TYPES

There are a huge variety of reverse types for silver denari, most depict gods and goddesses with some celebrating events and triumphs. In an age before newspapers coinage was a valuable tool for propaganda, distributed throughout the empire.



Hilaritas  
between children,  
Goddess of rejoicing  
often depicted on  
coins to celebrate the  
birth of a child to the  
emperor



Ceres seated left  
holding corn ears and  
long torch, Goddess of  
crops and agriculture



Isis standing right  
nursing infant Horus,  
foot on prow, Egyptian  
goddess and mother of  
Horus who was god  
of the sky



Mars carrying spear  
and trophy,  
Mars is the god of  
war and guardian of  
agriculture. Son of  
Jupiter



Libertas standing left  
holding cornucopiae  
and pileus. Star in  
field Goddess of  
freedom



Jupiter advancing  
left, head to right  
and brandishing  
thunderbolt held in  
right hand, King of  
the gods



Victory standing left  
holding wreath and  
palm, Roman god  
of victory



Abundantia standing  
right emptying coins  
from cornucopiae  
held in both hands  
Goddess of abundance  
and prosperity



## CONNECTIONS TO BRITAIN

A number of the earlier emperors have a connection with Britain. In particular Hadrian, perhaps the most well-known, campaigned here and was responsible for construction of Hadrian's Wall around AD 122.



Hadrian's wall at Housesteads



Emperor Hadrian,  
AD 117-138

His successor, Antoninus Pius AD 138-161 never visited Britain, but was responsible for constructing the Antonine Wall which ran roughly between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Other emperors who campaigned here include Domitian, AD 81-96 and Commodus, AD 177-192 who are represented in this hoard.

Lastly, Septimius Severus, AD 193-211 spent several years in Britain and died in York in AD 211.

## CONCLUSION

This hoard holds a considerable sum for its unfortunate owner who, for some unknown reason, did not manage to retrieve it from its underground hiding spot. If only the coins could tell us their story...

Today, we have secure banks, even digital currencies and it is perhaps hard for us to understand the thinking behind burying such a large sum of money in the ground. But imagine living in more humble times, carrying a heavy 4-kilogram savings pot through the local town swarming with sneaky thieves on market day.

Thanks go to the lucky finders and everyone else who brought these coins to light. They are bound to put a smile on their new owners' faces, just as they did for us.





