

Notes and News

THE PATCHING HOARD (Pls. I, II, Figs. 1, 2)

The Patching hoard may be described as the latest hoard of Roman gold and silver ever found in this country. A detailed article about the hoard is to be published in *Britannia*. The purpose of this note is to bring the hoard's discovery to the attention of all those interested the very early Anglo-Saxon period, and 5th-century Sussex in particular.

The Discovery of the Hoard

In April 1997 two metal-detectorists, working with the permission of the landowner, discovered five late Roman gold coins in a field at Patching, West Sussex (Fig. 1). They reported their find to the Coroner's Officer, who took the coins to Worthing Museum for identification. There they were confirmed as *solidi* from the reigns of Arcadius (A.D. 383-408), Honorius (A.D. 393-423) and Valentinian III (A.D. 425-55). John Ornstein at the British Museum identified two of the Valentinian III *solidi* as Visigothic copies.

When they went back to the field with their metal-detectors and a mini digger the two detectorists uncovered another seventeen *solidi*, two gold rings, 20 silver coins and a quantity of scrap silver. Once these finds had been reported the finders were persuaded to refrain from further digging while a small emergency excavation was organised by Worthing Museum and the Sussex Archaeological Society.

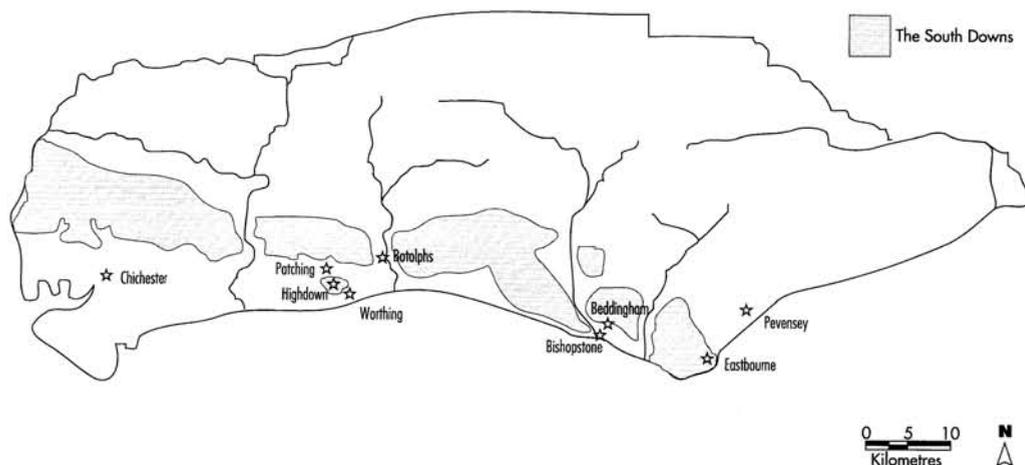


FIG. 1

Map of Sussex showing the location of sites referred to in the text

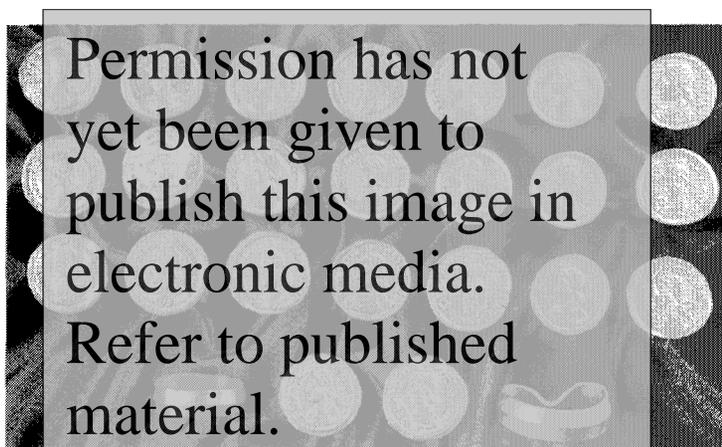


PLATE I

Patching, Sussex. The gold solidi and gold rings. Reproduced actual size.

The finders were on site throughout the excavation checking the spoil with their detectors. The excavation failed to reveal any context for the hoard. Mirroring the line along which the hoard had been found, however, were two land-drains which are thought to have been laid in the late 19th century and around the time of the Second World War respectively. Two silver coins were recovered from immediately above the later land-drain. It is assumed that the hoard was disturbed by workmen laying the drains, who may or may not have recovered any coins. Four silver coins and a few pieces of scrap silver were recovered during the excavation. Some weeks later the finders found another solidus and two more pieces of scrap silver a few yards away from the original findspot. A resistivity survey of the field where the hoard was found is to be carried out in an attempt to identify any buildings in the area.

The hoard was declared Treasure Trove at an inquest in July 1997 and was in fact one of the last cases to be dealt with under the old legislation. Anticipating this verdict, the British Museum had already announced that it would waive any claim it might have on the hoard in favour of Worthing Museum. In September, two days after the new Treasure Act came into effect, the hoard was valued. With the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the MGC/V&A Purchase Fund, and the Friends of Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, Worthing Museum raised the money to pay for the hoard within the three months allowed. The Heritage Lottery Fund also paid for the construction and installation of a new showcase which met the security requirements set down by the National Security Advisor for Museums. The Patching Hoard display in Worthing Museum was unveiled on 7 April 1998, twelve months to the day after the first five coins were brought to the Museum. It has Worthing Museum accession numbers 1998/1-59.

The Contents of the Hoard

The solidi (Pl. I)

The 23 solidi span a period of about 80 years from *c.* A.D. 380 to 461. There are thirteen Roman and ten Visigothic solidi.

The Imperial solidi are from the reigns of the following emperors and have been dated as follows:

Gratian *c.* 380 (1)

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PLATE II

Patching, Sussex. The silver coins. Reproduced at actual size.

Valentinian II *c.* 385 (1)
Theodosius I *c.* 385–90 (2)
Arcadius *c.* 390 (1)
Honorius *c.* 412 (1)
Theodosius II *c.* 420–40 (3)
Valentinian III *c.* 440–50 (3)

The Visigothic solidi have the following dates:

Valentinian III *c.* 440–50 (8)
Marjorian *c.* 460–61 (1)
Libius Severus *c.* 461 (1)

The silver coins (Pl. II)

There are 27 whole or fragmentary silver coins, most of which are exceedingly fragile. They too can be divided into Imperial and Visigothic issues. They include one very worn Republican *denarius* from 49 B.C.. The other Roman silver coins consist of *miliarenses* of:

Valens *c.* 367–75 (1)
Valentinian I or Valens *c.* 364–67 (1)
Uncertain (1)

and *siliquae* of:

Constantius II *c.* 337–40 (1)
Constans 337–50 (1)
Julian *c.* 361–63 (1)
Gratian *c.* 367–75 (2)
Valens *c.* 367–78 (4)
Valentinian II *c.* 388–92 (1)
Theodosius I *c.* 388–95 (1)
Magnus Maximus 383–88 (2)
Honorius *c.* 395–406 (1)

Honorius or Arcadius *c.* 395–406 (1)

Constantine III *c.* 408–11 (1)

Theodosius II *c.* 425 (1)

The Visigothic issues are:

Honorius? (2)

Valentinian III *c.* 449–55 (1)

There are also fragments of three silver coins which cannot be identified.

The siliqua of Constantius II is a rare type and that of Constans is new. The siliquae of Constantine III and Theodosius II are known from Continental finds but have never before been found in Britain.

Discussion of the Coins

This remarkable assemblage is the only British hoard containing mid 5th-century coins. It combines types which are well known and which circulated in Britain with coins which are either entirely new types, as in the case the siliqua of Constans minted in Siscia, or which have never before been found in this country, such as the solidi of Honorius and Theodosius II. The early coins show signs of wear and circulation. The latest, Visigothic, issues are in near mint condition.

The solidus of Libius Severus is the latest coin in the hoard, providing a terminus post quem of 461. The two earliest siliquae show no signs of having been used and must have been kept together for over a hundred years before being buried at Patching. The coins would not all have been in circulation at the same time and were presumably gathered together in at least two groups, those which could have circulated in this country forming one group and the remainder the other. When and where the whole hoard was assembled must remain a mystery.

The coins span the period A.D. 337–461. This exceptionally wide date-range clearly implies that they cannot have been amassed in one lifetime but over several generations, each of whom added to the collection. While the earlier elements in the hoard may well have been assembled in this country, the remainder was probably put together on the Continent and brought to Britain.

The Gold Rings

The two gold rings are very similar in form although they differ in size (Pl. I; Fig. 2). The larger ring has been bent out of shape. Both rings consist of a band which has been hammered to produce a central ridge or keel running around the circumference of the ring. The larger ring has a band width of 9 mm and would originally have had an internal diameter of at least 25 mm. Hammer-marks are clearly visible all over its surface. A scarf joint, identified by Duncan Hook at the British Museum Research Laboratory, shows that the ring was originally made as a strip and then bent into shape, the ends being hammered together. The smaller ring has a band width of 7 mm and its internal diameter is 22 mm. Initial examination of the rings suggests that the larger one is probably unfinished and unworn whereas the smaller one shows some signs of wear.

When the rings were examined under the Scanning Electron Microscope by Duncan Hook the metal was shown to include numerous platinum-group inclusions. This is generally taken to show that the gold came from a placer deposit — in other words an alluvial deposit — and that it had not been refined or remelted much.

The rings are very hard to date. They are of such simple form that they could have been made in any period. No close parallel for them has yet been identified. It seems most likely that they were simply one-off products, made by a goldsmith for a particular client shortly before deposition. Modern British jewellers measure ring sizes on an A-Z scale, with Z being the largest normal size. Jewellers consulted by the author identified the rings

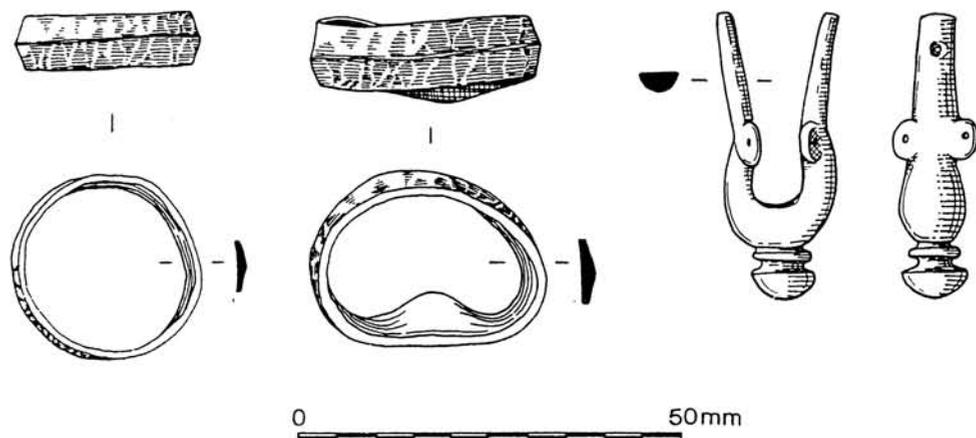


FIG. 2

Patching, Sussex. The two gold rings and the scabbard-chape fitting.

from Patching as $Z + 0.5$ (22.2 mm) and $Z + 6$ (just under 25 mm) and suggested that the rings were most likely thumb-rings, although the smaller one could certainly have been worn on a rather thick finger.

The Scrap Silver

There are 54 small pieces of scrap silver, weighing a total of 317.58 grams. Many of them are pieces of sheet or bar silver. A few have traces of decoration. There is only one complete item among the silver: a peg-shaped chape-fitting from a sword scabbard (Fig. 2). It is of a very simple design but related to more elaborate types which have been found in continental Germanic graves which have been dated to the second half of the 5th century.¹ The simple design of this fitting suggests that it is an early example, and therefore made and brought to Britain not long before the hoard was buried. There are also fragments of late 4th-century Roman spoons, a broken round-headed pin and buckle tongues.

The Local Context

What happened in Sussex during the transition from being part of a province of the Roman Empire to becoming an Anglo-Saxon kingdom is poorly understood. Archaeological evidence for the 5th century is thin on the ground and archaeologists have to depend largely on cemeteries for information. Evidence for 5th-century settlement sites in Sussex is so far limited to Botolphs,² Beddingham³ and Bishopstone.⁴

One of the tantalising aspects of the Patching Hoard is that it was found only 2 km NW. of Highdown cemetery, which is thought to have been in use by the time the hoard was buried. The hoard's burial spot is clearly visible from the ramparts of the prehistoric

¹ W. Menghin, *Das Schwert im Frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1983).

² M. Gardiner, 'An Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Settlement at Botolphs, Bramber, West Sussex', *Archaeol. J.*, 147 (1990), 216-75.

³ D. Rudling, 'The Roman villas of Sussex, with particular reference to the villas at Beddingham and Bignor', *Proximus*, 2 (1998), 97-111.

⁴ M. Bell, 'Saxon Settlements and Buildings in Sussex', 36-53 in P. Brandon (ed.), *The South Saxons*, (Chichester, 1978).

enclosure which surrounds the Saxon cemetery. Martin Welch has suggested that up to ten of the graves at Highdown might be Romano-British, representing a well-established community that controlled a group of Saxon mercenaries.⁵ The settlement of the 5th-century community that used Highdown as its burial ground has never been identified, and it is tempting to suggest some link between Highdown and the Patching Hoard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SALLY WHITE

⁵ M. G. Welch, *Early Anglo-Saxon Sussex*, (Brit. Archaeol. Rep. Brit. Ser. 112) (Oxford, 1983).