

ART. II.—*Coin evidence, and the evacuation of Hadrian's Wall.* By J. P. C. KENT, Ph.D., F.R.N.S.

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DURING the fifteen years that followed the war of 1914-1918, one of the principal topics of debate was the date of the abandonment of Britain by the Roman government. Much valuable evidence was adduced by both sides, and the result was a compromise solution which has remained almost unquestioned: the present "orthodox" view, propounded by R. G. Collingwood in the *Oxford History of England*,<sup>1</sup> is that whereas the area of Hadrian's Wall passed out of the hands of the Roman administration shortly after a withdrawal of garrisons from the Wall forts in 383, the south was regained after the rescript of Honorius in 409, and was held until about 430. In the present paper I wish to consider one only of Collingwood's propositions, namely the date of the abandonment of Hadrian's Wall.<sup>2</sup>

A survey of the controversy, which was remarkable for the high level of scholarship on which it was conducted, will clear the ground. In 1914, an article by Craster suggested, on the basis of coin finds, that the Wall forts had been evacuated under Magnus Maximus and that occupation at Corbridge ceased only a few years later.<sup>3</sup> This view did not commend itself to Haverfield: twice he

<sup>1</sup> Collingwood & Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 2nd ed., 1937, 288 and 296.

<sup>2</sup> The following abbreviations are employed: AA4 = *Archæologia Aeliana*, 4th series; AJ = *Archæological Journal*; CW2 = these *Transactions*, new series; JRS = *Journal of Roman Studies*; NC5, 6 = *Numismatic Chronicle*, 5th, 6th series; RIC = Mattingly & Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*; RW3 = Bruce, *The Roman Wall*, 3rd ed., 1867.

<sup>3</sup> AJ lxxi, 1914, 35f.

wrote that the evidence afforded no conclusive proof that the forts were not occupied as late as 395, or even 400.<sup>4</sup> Eight years later, Collingwood published his survey of coins from Romano-British sites,<sup>5</sup> which provided evidence that, while in southern England the coin series regularly go down to Arcadius and Honorius, and potentially include Constantine III, those on Hadrian's Wall close with the issues of Gratian. This pronouncement has never been challenged seriously, and has remained unquestioned since Mr. C. E. Stevens eliminated from the controversy the troublesome and elusive coin of Arcadius from near Heddon-on-the-Wall.<sup>6</sup>

When Collingwood wrote, however, the question of the coin-evidence had already been superseded as the main topic of interest by that of the date of the *Notitia Dignitatum*.<sup>7</sup> In 1920, J. B. Bury had published a detailed account of that document,<sup>8</sup> in which he claimed that the sections relating to the *comes Britanniarum* could not have been composed before 410; and since references to a unit styled *Placidi Valentinianici* could not have been inserted before the accession of Valentinian III, while it was absurd to suppose that an official list of appointments contained obsolete material, Britain as a whole must have been held even later than 425. In endorsing Haverfield's judgment, however, he somewhat grudgingly conceded that the Wall forts might have been abandoned after 410.

So far the conflict lay between whole-hearted believers in the *Notitia* and those who accepted Collingwood's interpretation of the coin-evidence. In an attempt to bridge the gap, the ill-starred theory of "coin-drift" was propounded.<sup>9</sup> Alike numismatically and historically unsound, it drew into the conflict F. S. Salisbury, fresh from

<sup>4</sup> Haverfield, *Roman Britain in 1914*, 40 and *The Roman Occupation of Britain* (ed. Macdonald), 1924, 159.

<sup>5</sup> JRS xii, 1922, 37f.: "Hadrian's Wall, a history of the problem".

<sup>6</sup> JRS xxvi, 1936, 71f.: "The coin of Arcadius from Heddon-on-the-Wall".

<sup>7</sup> This should be consulted in the edition of Otto Seock (Berlin, 1876).

<sup>8</sup> JRS x, 1920, 131f.: "The *Notitia Dignitatum*".

<sup>9</sup> Edward Foord, *The Last Age of Roman Britain*, 1925.

his triumphs at Richborough. From the refutation of Edward Foord's numismatic heresies,<sup>10</sup> Salisbury proceeded to attack the problem from a new angle, denying that the *Notitia* was a homogeneous document.<sup>11</sup> If some entries were demonstrably later than 425, there were whole sections, in particular the list of mints controlled by the western *comes sacrarum largitionum*, which could not be later than 383. Salisbury's views were subjected to criticism both by Ernst Stein<sup>12</sup> and by H. S. Schultz.<sup>13</sup> The former denied that the Gallic mints closed in 395, and showed by the examples of Noricum and the Rhine frontier that the cessation of the coin series may be due as much to the stagnation of trade as to separation from the Empire. The latter endorsed Stein's arguments, but unwisely suggested that some of the Richborough coins, ascribed to Valentinian II and Theodosius I, belonged in fact to Valentinian III and Theodosius II. Salisbury was provoked to an immediate denunciation of his critics<sup>14</sup>; so vigorous was this, however, that he failed to appreciate the validity of several of the points which they had raised, in particular that the Gallic mints had demonstrably survived at least until 413,<sup>15</sup> and that it was dangerous to assume that official occupation ceased shortly after the date of minting the latest coin found on a site.

The verdict of British scholars has rested with Salisbury and Collingwood. Mr Stevens has argued subsequently that, exclusive of the section *per lineam valli*, the disposition of units in the north of Britain represents the arrangements made by Stilicho after 395, which need not have survived the usurpation of Constantine III.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Antiq. Journ.* vii, 1927, 268f.: "The Richborough coins and the end of the Roman occupation".

<sup>11</sup> *JRS* xvii, 1927, 102f.: "On the date of the *Notitia Dignitatum*".

<sup>12</sup> *XVIII. Ber. d. Röm.-Germ. Komm.*, 1928, 92f.: "Die Organisation der weströmischen Grenzverteidigung usw."

<sup>13</sup> *JRS* xxiii, 1933, 36f.: "The Roman evacuation of Britain".

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 102f.: "The *Notitia Dignitatum* and the western mints".

<sup>15</sup> Post-395 types are summarised by J. W. E. Pearce in *NC* 5 xv, 1935, 21; for their relative rarity cf. *NC* 5 vi, 1926, 47.

<sup>16</sup> *AJ* xcvi, 1940, 125f.: "The British sections of the *Notitia Dignitatum*".

Other studies have sought to give the Wall sub-section an even earlier date—before 367,<sup>17</sup> or even before 296.<sup>18</sup> Despite the protests of Mr W. Percy Hedley, that the coin-series from most of the Wall sites were too small and too inaccurately recorded to form a basis for generalisation,<sup>19</sup> the big guns were now ranged on the other side: Collingwood's compromise offered peace with honour, and the controversy is now quite dead. It died prematurely, however, for the problems which it raised were debated, but not settled; in resurrecting it, therefore, I am challenging a principal dogma of current thought on Roman Britain. The hardening of the tradition can be traced in successive editions of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall*: that of 1947, edited by Professor I. A. Richmond, regards the evacuation by Maximus as axiomatic, and states that "the remains found on the Wall go down to the year 383, and there, uniformly and abruptly, they stop."<sup>20</sup>

This last statement can be criticised on a number of grounds. First, the word *remains* can only relate to the coin-series; while pottery of the latter part of the fourth century can be distinguished without difficulty, there is as yet no means of determining if any of it is specifically earlier or later than 383.<sup>21</sup> Next, the coin-series do not in fact stop uniformly and abruptly: there may be no fourth-century coins recorded at all, as at Rudchester, or the series may end with any reign from Constans (as at Carvoran) onwards to Gratian. At a majority of forts the series does not go beyond the reign of Valentinian I, and only at Castlesteads is there a hint that coins of Gratian went down to 383.<sup>22</sup>

I now propose to offer evidence that the premise that

<sup>17</sup> So Eric Birley, CW2 xxxix 19of.

<sup>18</sup> So J. P. Gillam, CW2 xlix 38f.

<sup>19</sup> AA4 xiv, 1937, 95f.: "The last days of Corstopitum and the Roman Wall: the coin evidence".

<sup>20</sup> *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, 10th ed., 8.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. CW2 xlix 51.

<sup>22</sup> CW2 xxii 223, xxiv 252.

no coin later than 383 has been found on a Wall site is not in fact correct. It has never been disputed that coins later than those of Gratian have been found in the Wall district, though the number of such coins recorded has seldom received due recognition. Bruce mentioned coins of Valentinian II in the Clayton collection at Chesters, and of Arcadius in a collection made in the Walltown area (between Greatchesters and Carvoran).<sup>23</sup> Collingwood noted such coins at South Shields, Corbridge, Carlisle<sup>24</sup> and in "the Haydon Bridge area", while from Maryport was recorded a puzzling coin of Honorius "dating to 417" (this is unlikely to have been the *solidus* issued for the consulship of 417, and was more probably a misinterpreted VOT X MVLT XX issue of c. 398-402).<sup>25</sup> To this number may once more be added the almost legendary Arcadius from near Heddon, which can be identified from Bruce's description as an example of the scarce AE 3 type, VRBS ROMA FELIX, dating between 393 and 396.<sup>26</sup>

In 1935 Mr Eric Birley found a fine specimen of Valentinian II (SALVS REIPVBLICAE, with mint-mark RP = Rome<sup>27</sup>) at Chesterholm, a site from which Collingwood had known of no coin later than Magnentius, and it became clear that *Vindolanda* at least, of the forts *per lineam valli*, was receiving Roman coins after 389. We may now add coins from two forts on the Wall itself. The coins found in the 1929 excavations at Birdoswald cannot at present be traced, but the description of the first coin in the list (no. 11, Victory dragging captive) leaves no doubt that it is another specimen of SALVS REIPVBLICAE, and therefore subsequent not only to

<sup>23</sup> RW3 43.

<sup>24</sup> I have seen the main collections of coins from these three sites.

<sup>25</sup> RW3 370: the coin is perhaps Cohen<sup>2</sup> 64. The *solidus* of 417 has the correct *vota*, XXX-XXXX (Cohen<sup>2</sup> 69).

<sup>26</sup> RW3 125; cf. RIC ix 135-136.

<sup>27</sup> AA4 xiii, 1936, 228; I have examined the coin myself — it is RIC ix 133, no. 64a.

375, as stated in the report,<sup>28</sup> but also to 389.<sup>29</sup> The other site is that of Coventina's temple, close to the fort of Carrawburgh. I have recently undertaken a rapid examination of the coins in the Chesters Museum, in particular of two large parcels, the contents of which were clearly from that site: their patina and general condition corresponded exactly with specimens now in the Black Gate Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne, and the provenance was confirmed by the presence of characteristic imitative coins of the early empire. Roman votaries had clearly tended to offer worn or fraudulent pieces, and a large number of the smaller coins proved completely illegible; the great bulk of the fourth-century coins consisted of the later issues of Constantine the Great and his sons, and their imitations; there was a definite, though smaller, proportion of the GLORIA and SECVRITAS issues of Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian; finally, and of the utmost importance for the date at which coins ceased to be deposited in the shrine, I noted five pieces, all of which must have been dropped later than 383: I am able to publish these thanks to the courtesy of the Trustees of the Chesters Museum:—

1. Obverse illegible.

Reverse, gateway of fort. The type is too small to be the Constantinian issue, and must be SPES ROMANORVM, as issued by Maximus and Victor, 387-388.<sup>30</sup>

2. Obverse illegible, but the small bust indicates either Arcadius or Honorius.

Reverse, Victory walking left. The type is too small for SECVRITAS, so it must be VICTORIA AVGGG (probably 389-396).

<sup>28</sup> CW2 xxx 173.

<sup>29</sup> An overwhelming proportion of the coins of this type found in Britain were issued from Aquileia and Rome, which did not begin to strike it until 388/9 (cf. *Richborough IV* 278 and RIC ix 90, 112).

<sup>30</sup> Cohen<sup>2</sup>, Maximus no. 7; Victor no. 3.

3. Obverse illegible.  
Reverse corroded, but showing a single figure.  
VIC[TORIA AVGGG]. Mint-mark probably  
P[C]O[N] = Arles. Date as no. 2.
4. Obverse [D N VALENTINI]ANVS P [F AVG].  
Reverse [VIRTVS ROMAN]ORVM. This is a  
fragment of a silver coin. The only issue of this  
type in the name of Valentinian II was from Trier,  
between 389 and 392<sup>31</sup>; the fragment is unmistakably  
in the style of that mint.
5. Obverse D N HONORIV[S P F AVG].  
Reverse illegible.

The continued depositing of coins in Coventina's temple, after 383, gives added importance to the barbarous hoard, apparently from the fort itself,<sup>32</sup> which J. G. Milne considered to date from the early years of the fifth century, on account of the worn condition of the regular issues of Valentinian and Valens which it contained.

Although they are commonly found in hoards, Theodosian coins are much less frequent as casual finds,<sup>33</sup> and the objection that five coins do not constitute proof of a regular occupation in the immediate vicinity is not valid. We have already noted the preponderance of worn and damaged pieces in the deposit, so that few of the latest Roman issues are to be expected; and it cannot even be said that the proportion of Theodosian coins is particularly low. Exclusive of the late gold hoard, I have noted thirteen coins of the period 383-395, i.e. Maximus to Honorius, at Corbridge, compared with over 520 of the years 364-383.<sup>34</sup> Theodosian coins were evidently much scarcer in the north of Britain than in the south, except perhaps at ports or important centres such as South Shields and Carlisle, but the reason for this may have

<sup>31</sup> RIC ix 31, no. 94a.

<sup>32</sup> NC5 xiii, 1933, 82.

<sup>33</sup> C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain*, 1937, 93-94.

<sup>34</sup> These figures correct the list given in AA4 xiv, 1937, 95f.

been economic rather than political. Even on southern sites where there is literary evidence for an active fifth-century occupation, no distinctively high proportion of Theodosian coins is noticeable; the following table is instructive:—

	253-306	306-364	364-383	383-395
(a) London <sup>35</sup>	127	129	19	1
Verulamium <sup>36</sup>	3004	1085	217	77
Pevensey <sup>37</sup>	21	108	25	1
(b) Kenchester <sup>38</sup>	83	139	21	1
Brough on Humber <sup>39</sup>	117	72	7	1
Leicester <sup>40</sup>	214	200	75	10

It will be seen that even in the south and the midlands it is unusual for Theodosian coins to bulk large in site-finds, and a prolongation of occupation into the fifth century does not make for a great preponderance of late issues.

Hoards become progressively more rare towards the north. It is these, and not total site-finds, that tell us about the state of the currency at the end of the Roman period, but their evidence must be used with care. Theodosian bronze was the first coinage of AE 4 module to enter Britain in bulk since about 345, and most hoarders of this period made a special effort to collect the new money; earlier worn issues were usually excluded, except perhaps to make up the deposit to a definite weight or value. It is therefore significant that a proportion of coins of the late third century onwards is almost invariably present. The following table summarises the contents of some typical hoards of the kind:—

<sup>35</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *sub anno* 457; the figures are derived from my own list of the coins in the Guildhall Museum, and from the London Museum Catalogue, *London in Roman Times*.

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* i 19; *Verulamium Report* 223f., NC5 xii, 1932, 239 and *Trans. East Herts Arch. Soc.* xi, 1942, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *sub anno* 491; JRS xxii, 1932, 66; NC5 xx, 1940, 65.

<sup>38</sup> G. H. Jack, *The Romano-British Town of Magna (Kenchester)*, 1916, 32f.

<sup>39</sup> *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, 3rd ser. i, 1937, 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Leicester Jewry Wall Report*, 279f.; NC5 xx, 1940, 24.

	253-306	306-364	364-383	383-395
Laxton <sup>41</sup>	3	13	11	289
Woodbridge <sup>42</sup>	5	32	14	496
Bermondsey <sup>43</sup>	3	24	11	259
Cirencester <sup>44</sup>	2	47	41	519
Icklingham <sup>45</sup>	23	92	78	881

Salisbury believed that hoards such as these showed that within a few years of issue, Theodosian coins replaced earlier ones in general circulation.<sup>46</sup> This view, however, makes no allowance for the natural predilection of hoarders for the freshest coins available, and entirely fails to account for those comparatively rare deposits in which pre-Theodosian issues predominate; two recently published examples illustrate this type:—

	253-306	306-364	364-383	383-395
Worle Camp <sup>47</sup>	3	127	50	6
Redenhall	31	68	18	10

Hoards like these, made up of a random collection of current coins, leave no doubt in my mind that coins of the Houses of Constantine and Valentinian supplied the vast bulk of currency at the end of the fourth century, and that those of Theodosius and his colleagues were relatively scarce and normally hoarded.

The diminishing frequency with which the later issues are found, away from their ports of entry in the south, indicates not slackening Roman control so much as the failure of the new coinage to escape the hoarder. The evidence quoted above suggests that—even in parts of the south—Constantinian coins at the end of the fourth century were more than six times as numerous as those

<sup>41</sup> NC5 xvi, 1936, 156.

<sup>42</sup> NC5 xv, 1935, 49.

<sup>43</sup> NC6 vi, 1946, 167.

<sup>44</sup> NC5 ix, 1929, 382.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>46</sup> NC5 xi, 1931, 22.

<sup>47</sup> NC6 vi, 1946, 153 and 157.

of the Theodosian dynasty.<sup>48</sup> On Hadrian's Wall the proportion must have been nearer twenty to one. To the earlier coins must be added those of the House of Valentinian, which (being of a higher denomination than the issues of Constantine's later years) circulated freely beside them. Mr Hedley's contention that the total number of coins from sites on or near the Wall is too small for us to expect a regular series of Theodosian coins, is therefore valid; for each Theodosian coin found, we must add something like thirty earlier pieces if we are to gain a true picture of the currency in the year 390 and later.<sup>49</sup> It is significant that the two sites in the Wall region that have produced coins in very large numbers, Corbridge and Coventina's temple, are precisely those on which more than a single specimen of post-383 issues have been found.

I have set out the coin-evidence and the principles governing its interpretation; I now propose to consider the basis of the theory of evacuation itself. The complicated issues raised by the *Notitia* cannot be argued in full in the present paper; but I have shown, in a thesis submitted to the University of London, that Salisbury's view—that portions of the financial sections cannot be later than 383—is based on a false understanding of the mint organisation of the later fourth century,<sup>50</sup> and I

<sup>48</sup> The series at Richborough is unique in containing very large numbers of late coins, but even there the contents of late pits suggest that *in circulation* Theodosian coins enjoyed only a narrow preponderance over earlier issues: cf. Pits 37 (*Report III*, 66), 41 (*Rep. III*, 67), 63 (*Rep. IV*, 82) and 98 (*Rep. IV*, 87); Pit 89 (*Rep. IV*, 85) had disturbed an earlier Constantinian deposit, and cannot be used as evidence. The contents of Pit 180 (*Rep. IV*, 99) suggest that this was a typical Theodosian hoard. I have found another piece of information, confirming my view of the proportions of coins current at the end of the fourth-century, in *Antiq. Journ.* xvii, 1937, 33: a late fourth-century sealed layer, at Verulamium, contained 34 coins up to 306, 72 of 306-364, 22 of 364-383 and 11 of 383-395; the layer *below* yielded an imitation *Fel. temp. reparatio* piece, which cannot be earlier than c. 350.

<sup>49</sup> The miscellaneous character of the currency is well illustrated by the finds in the post-367 level at Birdoswald, CW2 xxx 173.

<sup>50</sup> *The Office of Comes Sacrarum Largitionum*, 1951, (typescript, pp. 168 and 176).

hope to be able to demonstrate elsewhere that the document was composed, as a whole, at the final division of the Empire in 395, and that it was kept fully up to date until about 410: after the latter date correction was progressively less complete, and the document as we now have it was discarded about 430. No doubt a new *Notitia* was compiled for official use then, and our copy passed into private hands.

The *Notitia* claims to be a list of military as well as civil dignities, and since *duces* did not attain the rank of *spectabilis* until after 400, we have *a priori* grounds for assuming that the military sections are contemporary with the others. Mr J. P. Gillam has recently revived Mommsen's theory of a late third-century date for the list of forts and units along the Wall<sup>51</sup>; he has performed a service in demonstrating that this section conforms largely (though not, as he admits, completely) to the third-century disposition of units, but he has failed to dispose of the crucial argument which proves it to be later than 297: granting that the *ala prima Herculia* could originally have received its name from Carausius, it is unlikely that he or Allectus would have allowed the name to survive the reopening of hostilities—and it is in any case inconceivable that such a change would have been recognised in Maximian's official army-list until after 297, and incredible to suppose that pages from the files of Allectus were transferred bodily, and without correction, into those of his conqueror, remaining thus for over a century. It is therefore clear that the third-century units in Britain largely survived the complete destruction of their forts in 296. The reason for this is plain when we read the account given by Themistius of the state of the lower Danube frontier in 367<sup>52</sup>: there, the forts had no gates, the troops neither arms nor uniforms—they were merely peasants and traders, and naturally offered

<sup>51</sup> CW2 xlix 38f.; cf. Mommsen in *Ephemeris Epigraphica* V 163 = *Gesammelte Schriften* vi 117.

<sup>52</sup> Themistius, *Or.* 10, p. 136A.

no resistance to a barbarian onslaught. I see no reason to believe that their counterparts in Britain were any more effective. The scapegoats for the disaster of 367, dismissed by Count Theodosius, were the *arcani* or frontier scouts; the other troops, including many *libero comœatu dispersos*, were recalled to the colours and guaranteed against reprisals.<sup>53</sup> Theodosius, therefore, did not create new units but, like Valens on the Danube, he relied on restoring the discipline of surviving troops.

Arguments based on the improbability of survival, in my view, founder in face of these facts. We can see the third-century units past the disasters of the fourth century, without doing violence to our sources; it is also plain that they will have been completely useless as field troops: whatever troops Maximus took to Gaul in 383—and they need not have been many—we can be quite certain that he never thought of removing any from the Wall. It would not have been worth his while. I therefore see no reason why the list *per lineam valli* should not have been still valid in 395.

To summarise my conclusions: there is archæological evidence for the occupation of at least some sites on the Wall later than 390, though the state of the currency in Britain at that time—our sole guide—was such that this evidence is necessarily scanty. An evacuation of the Wall under Maximus is historically improbable, and I believe that the evidence of the *Notitia*, although admittedly controversial, supports my contention that the Wall was still held in 395. It is eminently desirable that more attention should be directed to the fourth-century occupation of the Wall, and particularly to the upper levels of sites such as Carrawburgh and Haltonchesters, which offer some hope of adding materially to the evidence for this period.

<sup>53</sup> Ammianus xxvii 8, 9; xxviii 3, 8.