

ART. IV. – *The Ninekirks (Brougham) hoard; a reconsideration.* By P. J. CASEY, F.S.A.

Read at Hull, September 10th, 1978.

IN the Transactions of this Society for 1955, the Rev. C. M. L. Bouch published a group of coins discovered at Ninekirks, Brougham.¹ The conclusions reached in the course of that study were that the coins dated to the sixth century and that they thus lent credence to the proposition that a dark-age site existed at Ninekirks, a site associated with the late-Roman missionary activities of Ninian and continuing in occupation into the eighth century. The coin hoard was seen as “welcome numismatic support for the theory of sub-Roman survival in the Brougham area”. Whether or not a post-Roman church site exists at Ninekirks the coins cannot be adduced as contributory evidence since it can be demonstrated that they are not of sixth century date but were deposited in the late third century and are yet another example of a common class of Roman hoard found in the western provinces of the Empire.

The twenty-three coins which comprise the hoard were discovered in about 1914 during the digging of a grave in the churchyard at Brougham. The coins remained in the possession of the finder and it is through the kindness of the finder’s son, John Sarginson of Eamont Bridge, that I have had the opportunity to re-examine the hoard.

Catalogue

The hoard, with a single exception, 20/13, consists of copies of the coinage of the Gallic Empire. In most cases it is possible to ascertain the prototype from which the copy derived and the coins have been arranged and listed by the prototypes.² The obverse and reverse legends of the originals are given and such lettering as appears on the copies. The diameter of the coin is quoted in millimetres and the catalogue numbers of individual coins in the original report are given after the running numbers of the present report.

1/1. Postumus	Obv. [IMP CM CASS LAT POSTVMVS PF AVG] Rev. [VICTORIA AVG – SC.]	RIC 169 17 mm Pl. 1, No. 1
2/16. Victorinus	Obv. [IMP C VICTORINVS PF AVG] Rev. [INVICTVS]	RIC 114 11 mm Pl. 1, No. 2
3/17.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [INVICTVS]	RIC 82 12 mm Pl. 1, No. 3
4/4-11.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF] AC Rev. [PAX AVG]	RIC 100 10 mm Pl. 1, No. 4

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5/4-II.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PAX AVG] I / . . . V	RIC 100 10 mm Pl. I, No. 5
6/4-II.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PAX AVG]	RIC 100 12 mm Pl. I, No. 6
7/4-II.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PAX AVG]	RIC 100 11 mm Pl. I, No. 7
8/18-23.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PAX AVG]	RIC 100 11 mm Pl. I, No. 8
9/18-23.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PAX AVG]	RIC 100 11 mm Pl. I, No. 9
10/14.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [PIETAS] AVG	RIC 110 11 mm Pl. I, No. 10
11/4-II.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [SALVS AVG]	RIC 121 9 mm Pl. I, No. 11
12/12.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [VIRTVS AV] G	RIC 148 13 mm Pl. I, No. 12
13/2.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. [VIRTVS AVG]	RIC 148 12 mm Pl. I, No. 13
14/18-23.	Obv. [IMP C TETRICVS PF AVG] Rev. Illegible	RIC – 11 mm Pl. I, No. 14
15/4-II. Tetricus II	Obv. [C PIV ESV TETRICVS CAES] Rev. [P]A X VAG	RIC 248 11 mm Pl. I, No. 15
16/4-II.	Obv. [C PIV ESV TETRICVS CAES] Rev. [VICTORIA AVG]	RIC 277 11 mm Pl. I, No. 16
17/4-II.	Obv. [C PIV ESV TETRICVS CAES] Rev. [VIRTVS AVG]	RIC 280 10 mm Pl. I, No. 17
18/15.	Obv. [C PIV ESV TETRICVS CAES] Rev. Intersecting lines	RIC – 12 mm Pl. I, No. 18
19/3. Claudius II – posthumous	Obv. [DIVO CLAV]DIO Rev. [CONSECRATIO]	RIC 261 10 mm Pl. I, No. 19

20/13. Aurelian/Probus(?)	Obv. Radiate, helmeted head left . . . AVG. Rev. Palm branch.(?)	RIC – 13 mm Pl. I, No. 20
21/18-23.	Obv. Radiate head right Rev. Illegible	RIC – 10 mm Pl. I, No. 21
22/18-23.	Obv. Radiate head right Rev. Illegible	RIC – 12 mm Pl. I, No. 22
23/18-23.	Obv. Radiate head right Rev. Illegible	RIC – 10 mm Pl. I, No. 23

The dating of the hoard to the post-Roman period depended on two premises. The first was that one of the coins, 13/2, dated to the sixth century and that it was of Continental origin. The second premise was that, whereas in the South of Britain copies were recognised to be virtually contemporary with their prototypes, the same coins had an extended circulation and production life in the North. The second premise naturally arose from the acceptance of the presence of a coin of post-Roman date in the hoard though the proposition that Radiate Copies appear late in the area is contradicted by the absence of these coins from late Roman sites founded *de novo* in the fourth century in the North. No examples of Radiate Copies are recorded from the Yorkshire Coast signal station sites. The cited presence of Radiate Copies in the Conventina's Well find is not evidence for the late production and circulation of these objects. The coins from the Well do not constitute a hoard in the proper sense but an accumulation of coins, votively deposited, over a long period; a period certainly stretching back to the third century as the masses of worn imperial *sestertii* in the find attest.

The coin which has caused the problem in the chronological interpretation of the Ninekirks Hoard calls for explanation. The reverse of the coin appears to exhibit a central motif bordered by a circle outside which appears a legend (Pl. I, No. 13). The central element of the design has been interpreted as being the letters N and O disposed either side of a central vertical thus:— N|O. The original report on the hoard compared this coin to a continental issue of the sixth century, though which issue was not specified. The parallel is clearly to be sought in the currency of the Merovingian Franks where there is, indeed, a coinage which imitates Roman imperial prototypes. In very rare instances even third century issues seem to have been used as models. But the overwhelming majority of Merovingian coins are based on the Byzantine imperial *solidus*, with the "cross on steps" reverse, or on its fraction the *tremissis* with its reverse depicting a cross on a globe.

In the Merovingian versions the cross is flanked by letters, denoting either the weight of the coin or its mint, and is often enclosed in a circle which divides the central device from the surrounding legend. This coinage, though based on a gold prototype, was produced in both gold and silver depending on the availability of the former metal by way of imperial subventions. The silver issues are generally late in the series and follow a period of debasement of the gold issues, a debasement which coincides with the withdrawal of Byzantine subsidies. No Merovingian coinage was produced in bronze. The silver issues bear the best general "resemblance" to the Ninekirks bronze coin, but these date not to the sixth century but to the late seventh century. However, the Ninekirks coin has an

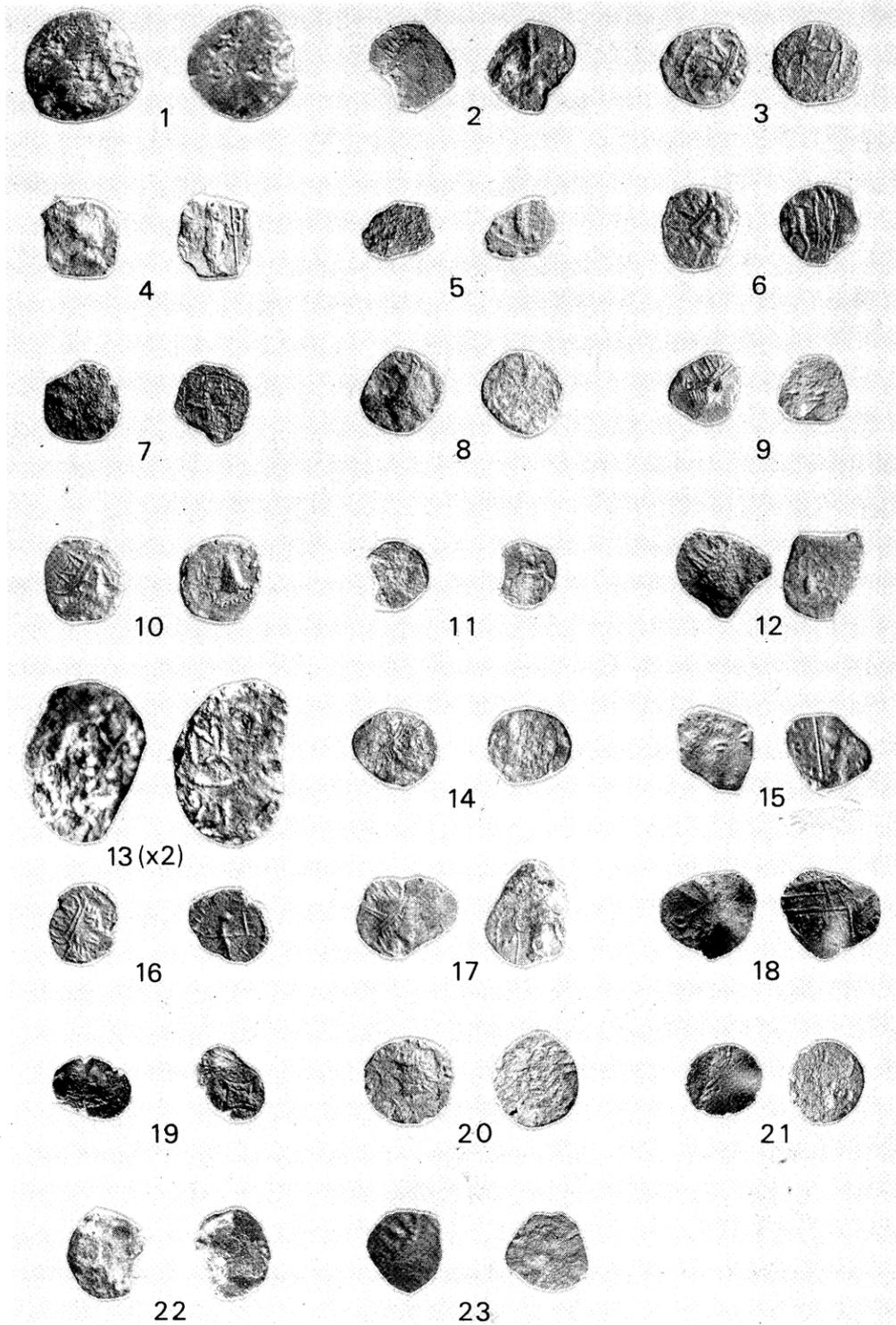


PLATE I. - The Ninekirks (Brougham) hoard.

altogether less exotic origin. Close examination of the piece indicates that it is a copy of an issue of Tetricus I with the reverse type VIRTUS AVG. The personification of Virtus on this type consists of a military figure, perhaps Mars or the emperor, holding a spear in the right hand and resting the left hand on a shield. The producers of Radiate Copies habitually singled out individual elements of the designs in the types which they were copying and this tendency is well developed among the coins of the Ninekirks Hoard. In the present instance the die-cutter has represented the figure only in the most sketchy manner but has accentuated the shield and the bent arm holding the spear, the result being to give the impression of lettering. As for the inscription around the central device, inspection reveals that the Virtus reverse has been struck on a re-used flan. It is a not infrequent occurrence for this series to be struck on fragments of earlier coins, or even on pieces chopped from heavier Radiate Copies.³ The Ninekirks coin is an instance of this practice where the new die has been struck off-centre to the old flan thus leaving part of the original legend visible. The obverse of the coin is almost entirely obscured by corrosion products but the characteristic elements of the radiate crown are, nonetheless, visible. A less eccentric treatment of the same figure but showing a similar emphasis on the shield and spear is demonstrated by the other example of the Virtus type in the hoard (Pl. 1, No. 12). The supposed sixth century coin, actually seventh century, thus falls into place with the rest of the contents of the hoard.

The production of Radiate Copies began in the second half of the third century and reached its greatest volume in the decade and a half between 270 and 286. The occasion for the production of this coinage lay in the financial crisis which coincided with the duration of the Gallic Empire (260-73), though the crisis was not confined to the separatist western provinces of the Empire. In the first instance copies may have been produced to supplement insufficient official coin supplies in a period of acute inflation, but their function probably changed in the decade following the monetary reforms instituted by Aurelian in the aftermath of the Gallic Empire. The Aurelianic coinage, whilst no significant advance on the issues of the Gallic Empire in terms of precious metal content, appears to have been tariffed at a high value. The base double *denarius* of the Gallic Empire, copies of which form the hoard, was superseded by a coin of similar weight and metallic standard probably valued at five *denarii*. The need for a coinage of less than five *denarius* value seems to have been acute and wide-spread copying of the coins of the Gallic emperors, and especially the Tetrici, took place.

Attempts have been to establish a chronology of these copies based on module, with the largest copies standing nearest to their prototypes and the smallest at the extremity of the series. Whilst this simple scheme may be objected to in detail the broad concept is undoubtedly valid, especially since the smallest copies on rare occasions imitate not the coins of the Gallic Empire but issues later than the Aurelianic reform, though no example is known to derive from any issue later than those of the emperor Probus (276-282). Copies of this latest period tend to fall into the size range 8-14 mm and it is into this module that the Ninekirks coins fall.⁴ A single coin in the hoard is almost certainly of post-Aurelianic type (Pl. 1, 20/13) since it displays characteristics not usually associated with Radiate Copies. The striking deviation from the norm lies in the fact that the imperial features face to the left; this is very rarely found in the series since almost all derive from Gallic prototypes in which left-facing busts are extremely scarce. Whilst the obverse type can be traced back at least to the reign of Gallienus (258-68) the left-facing portrait is not

common before the reigns of Aurelian and Probus when issues, with the emperor helmeted with a radiate crown, become relatively abundant. The present coin seems to exhibit the peak of the typical third century imperial helmet and a radiate crown and it seems reasonable to assign the coin to the latest period of the issue of Radiate Copies. The reverse type is unknown to the coinage of Aurelian or Probus and seems to be derived from the Hilaritas type of Tetricus I, emphasis being placed upon the long palm branch rather than upon the figure which held it on the prototype.

The ability of the producers of Radiate Copies to achieve something akin to the prototype tends to vary with time. Early issues derived directly from Gallic originals are good in style, within the appalling standards of the series, but serious degeneration sets in when the copiers are not working from official coins but from previous generations of copies. Nevertheless some elements are constant; the emphasis on the radiate crown of the emperor, and as has been noted, the emphasis of individual elements of the stock reverse types of the period. Literacy, however, is rarely displayed even when the coins bear significant portions of obverse or reverse legends. More often than not the Copies were produced from dies too large for the flans on which they were to be struck so that legends are often entirely absent. Nonetheless, the features of the individual emperors are often well represented so that even anepigraphic specimens can be attributed to prototype. The circulation of Radiate Copies is very wide and they occur on sites of all types and economic status. Their presence on military sites demonstrate that they were of wide utility and perhaps achieved grudging official tolerance. The presence of the Ninekirks Hoard in close proximity to the fort at Brougham is not, therefore, surprising and fits well with the evidence for the presence of Radiate Copies, in all modules, in profusion at other sites in the vicinity of the frontier, notably at Corbridge and South Shields. There is no reason to suppose that the Ninekirks Hoard was not concealed in the period between 276 and 286, the date at which the prolific coinage of Carausius once again provided a large volume official coinage in Britain. The attribution of the hoard to the post-Roman period is not consistent either with the contents of the hoard or with the date of similar hoards elsewhere in the western provinces.

References

- ¹ C. M. L. Bouch, "A Dark Age coin hoard from Ninekirks, Brougham". *CW* 2 lv, 108-111.
- ² H. Mattingly and Sydenham, *The Roman imperial coinage*, Vol. V, pt. 2 by P. V. Webb.
- ³ G. C. Boon, "The coins" in G. J. Wainwright, *Coygan Camp* (1967).
- ⁴ H. B. Mattingly, "The Lightwood Hoard and the coinage of 'Barbarous Radiates'," *N. Staffs Jnl. of Field Studies*, 3, 1963, 17-36.