

D. Penton, *The Coin Report and Catalogue for Overton Down XII, Wiltshire, 1987* (MA Dissertation, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Durham).*

A Summary and Commentary

by P.J.Fowler

**A copy of the Dissertation, donated by its author to this author, is with the paper archive at DM. We attempted to scan it to include here but the graphic presentation of so much of its data defied the TWA scanning machine. This FWP 95 is incorporated in full in FWP 64, the full excavation report on Overton Down Site XII*

The Catalogue lists 136 coins which have been identified to ruler and mint, with other comments as appropriate. For the purposes of his Dissertation, Penton gave each coin a 'Penton number'. The site finds number, with all but a few exceptions an SF number (meaning the coin was three-dimensionally recorded when found), is given, with the context of each coin separately in another list printed underneath. The coin identifications, and therefore date, in the Catalogue are accepted in this summary for present purposes, though doubtless numismatic revision in some respects is now desirable; but the Dissertation should not be used as in any way authoritative about Site OD XII itself, its interpretation or the archaeology of the area.

The Dissertation (33pp) contains 'coin plots' in colour for the four areas excavated (Area 1: 13; 2:52; [3: 29, coins missing but plot constructed from recorded data]; 4: 71). It contains no 'Conclusions', however, and its discussions are, understandably, numismatic in orientation rather than directed at our questions. The following is a summary of the main points from Penton's discussion, here used in the light of the analysis and interpretation of the site carried out subsequent to his coin identifications. Indeed, interpretation of the site itself is significantly advanced here.

The great majority of the coins were of fourth century date but a few Tetrican and Carausian examples occurred, hinting perhaps at an early phase of occupation from c300 associated with the indications of early timber structures detected on all four excavated Areas. The only associated cluster of early coins occurred in the sealed stratigraphy of the pit in Area 1 where five, together with other objects, appeared to present a structured deposit (fig. FWP64.10). Four coins were at the bottom of the filling: a very worn ass of c AD 141 (Faustina, wife of Antoninus Pius); two copies of Tetricus II; and an unworn Quinarius of

Allectus (AD 293-96). On top of the pit was another worn ass, this time of Marcus Aurelianus c 164-65. There can be little doubt that this was indeed a ceremonial deposit, but its significance is uncertain. Buried fairly close to AD 300, it may well be a foundation burial to mark the start of new habitation on formerly arable land. That need in no way conflict with the tempting idea that the coins' time span, mid-second century- very late third, was fairly exactly, as far as other evidence indicates, the c 150 years between the cessation of cultivation and the fields' re-use for habitation.

Overall, the coin evidence indicates that the main occupation with stone-based buildings began around AD 335. About the same date also seems to be indicated for the filling in of the ditch bounding the east side of the site; it was certainly covered over by the mid-fourth century, though its line, perhaps a property boundary, was still respected by all the buildings except Building 1 and was indeed marked in part by a line of sarsen stones.

Area 1: the six coins in neither the pit or the ditch were all from outside Building 1. The deepest, of late third century date, might relate to the hint of an early timber structure.

Area 2: two similarly-dated coins (Carausius, Licinus) made a similar hint here but the coins' distribution was completely different: 37 of 52 from the whole Area were inside Building 2, the majority in the western half; only 5 were in the eastern bay. The date range overall here was from the third to the eighth decade of the fourth century, the most common (17) of 330-48 being around the hearth in the western, presumably living, area. Probably significantly, none of the four Theodosian coins (all worn) from this Area came from within the building, suggesting that the site around a by then abandoned house was being used as a rubbish dump by the last decade of the fourth century and later.

Area 3: all 29 coins were of the fourth century as far as is known. The majority were again within the building's outline.

Area 4: with little reliable stratigraphy in the eastern half of the Area where three structures (Building 4, Phases 1, 2, 3) successively occupied the same site, secure contextual observations about the 71 coins are few.

The area inside the three structures contained 29 coins, 21 of them from where the three structures occupied common ground. All 11 coins 30 cms or more below the grass surface over the whole site were in the AD 348-78 bracket, 6 of the seven from the interior of the buildings being specifically 364-78; the

seventh, and deepest, was 'Constantius II'. Above them in the 20-30 cms depth below the turf each of the five 1 inch (2.5 cms) absolute depths distinguished by Penton from site records contained at least one coin of 388-402, so perhaps a residual stratigraphy remained amid the disturbance of re-buildings, stone-robbers and rabbits.

On the other hand, taking the 17 coins at '10 inches depth' (25 cms.) over the site, all but one (SF139, a Theodosian issue of 383-7), lay outside the buildings' interior. This is the largest number of coins from any particular depth, and '10 inches' is just below the post-depositional, worm-sorted 'layer' of detritus at the bottom of the topsoil, characteristic of this and other downland sites. Of the 16 coins, 6 belong to the first half of the fourth century or earlier; 10 belong to the second half of the century or a little later, figures which are probably indicating where the main emphasis of the settlement's history lies. Exactly half, 8, lay in an area regarded on other grounds as being where rubbish was probably dumped on the north east of the buildings. Their date range was the half century up to c. 380. Such relative precision is not, however, matched by the other eight '10 inch depth coins', which range from late third-early fifth with no particular spatial or chronological clustering. Altogether 13 coins occurred in this 'rubbish area'. Nine of them were of the period 364-78, perhaps hinting that the dump might well have been of one or both of Phases 1 and/or 2 of building in Area 4 in the third quarter of the fourth century. In all 10 Theodosian coins, the latest on the site, were found; 8 occurred within the area of the three buildings, probably indicating the date of the third, or more probably the second, of them.

A smaller cluster of 7 coins lay around the north western corner of the buildings; one of them is one of the only two Theodosian coins found outside the area of Buildings 4A (the other was in the area north of the subsequently recognised Building 4B/C). An even smaller group of 5 coins lay outside the south western corner of Buildings 4A. The 7 coins further west, including the Theodosian SF 200, seemed to be casual losses in an open working zone.

It is very tempting, and plausible in the light of all the dating evidence, to think of a dated succession of buildings in Area 4A, with Phase 1, a timber-framed hall or barn, in mid-century; Phase 2, a smaller, somewhat irregular timber-framed building in the later decades, and around the turn, of the century; and Phase 3, a stone-founded structure, coinless and with residual glass and pottery, standing in the early decades of the fifth.

In the light of this interpretation, given that in general Area 4 produced much of the later material, it is possible to suggest five stages in the settlement's history, each, as it happens, about thirty five years long:

Stage 1 : c. 300: timber structures on Areas 1,2 and perhaps 3

Stage 2 : c. 335-370: first main occupation with stone-footed Buildings 1,2 and 3, plus Phase 1 of Building 4A

Stage 3: c. 370-405: second phase of main occupation with Buildings 1 and 2 abandoned, 3 perhaps still in use and 4A, Phase 2, built

Stage 4 : c. 405-40: Building 4A, Phase 3, and perhaps Building 4B/C

Stage 5 : mid-5th century: following desertion, the whole site was extensively robbed of its stone and other materials, fittings and contents for a building or buildings nearby

Note: the above incorporates numismatic advice given after it had been drafted by Sam Moorhead (British Museum Education Service)

Finally edited by pjf 1.xi.99.

Appendix dated 13.xi.99.

TO BE INSERTED INTO FWP 64, P. 4, replacing the para which starts 6 lines from the bottom:

1. Features pre-dating the stone building

Features pre-dating the stone building included a pit and several post-holes (4 certain, 6 possible; Figure FWP64.9).

Pit 3 (Figure FWP64.10), 0.46-0.61 m deep, in the south east corner of the Area, contained the only associated cluster of early coins on the site. They occurred in its sealed stratigraphy where five, together with other objects, appeared to present a structured deposit (fig. FWP64.10). Four coins were in layer 3, in effect originally the upper filling of the pit: at the top of the layer, a worn ass of Marcus Aurelianus c 164-65 (SF 117); and at the bottom of layer 3, a very worn ass of c AD 141 (Faustina, wife of Antoninus Pius; SF 115), and two worn copies of Tetricus II, 270-73 (SF 125, 126). At the bottom of the pit (fig FWP64.10, layer 7, plan b) was an unworn Quinarius of Allectus (AD 293-96; SF 135), a coin which probably indicates the date of deposit fairly accurately. The other objects were, in layer 3, of iron (SF 116, 124, 133, 134, and nails), lead, pottery, glass and animal bone, with similar material in layer 7 but without lead and glass.

There can be little doubt that this was indeed a ceremonial deposit, but its significance is uncertain. Buried fairly close to AD 300, it may well be a foundation burial to mark the start of new habitation on pasture which had formerly been arable land. That need in no way conflict with the tempting idea that the coins' time span, mid-second century- very late third, was fairly exactly, as far as other evidence indicates, the c 150 years between the cessation of cultivation and the beginning of the fields' re-use for non-arable activity which may have included habitation from Stage 1 onwards (*see below*).

2. To be inserted in the gap between paras. 5 lines down from top of p. 19 of standing text of FWP 64:

The great majority of the coins were of fourth century date but a few Tetrican and Carausian examples occurred, hinting perhaps at an early phase of occupation from c300 associated with the indications of early timber structures detected on all four excavated Areas. The only associated cluster of early coins occurred in the sealed stratigraphy of Pit 3 in Area 1

Overall, the coin evidence indicates that the main occupation with stone-based buildings began around AD 335. It is possible to suggest five stages in the settlement's history, each, as it happens, about thirty five years long:

Stage 1 : c. 300: timber structures on Areas 1,2 and perhaps 3

Stage 2 : c. 335-370: first main occupation with stone-footed Buildings 1,2 and 3, plus Phase 1 of Building 4A

Stage 3: c. 370-405: second phase of main occupation with Buildings 1 and 2 abandoned, 3 perhaps still in use and 4A, Phase 2, built

Stage 4 : c. 405-40: Building 4A, Phase 3, and perhaps Building 4B/C

Stage 5 : mid-5th century: following desertion, the whole site was extensively robbed of its stone and other materials, fittings and contents for a building or buildings nearby