

A late 2nd century coin hoard from Leigh

In August 2004 a hoard of denarii was recovered with a metal detector by Mr Martin Adams, while detecting with the Weald and Downland Metal Detector Club, from a field at Swains Farm, Leigh (TQ 22 46). The field (fig 1) lies at *c* 50m OD on Weald Clay, some 0.5km east-south-east of Leigh church. To the north-west is a stream which enters the Mole near Flanchford; to the south-east, behind the farm, is an area of higher ground which rises to a height of 73m.

The hoard initially comprised 24 coins and these were mainly recovered in a diffuse arc that extended some 15–20m and which lay beneath a power line that crosses the field. These coins were reported to the author as Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Subsequent fieldwork (on 25 and 30 August 2004) recovered a further 38 coins, including two fragments. Work began by plotting, in so far as was possible, the positions of the coins recovered initially, after which a trench (fig 1, the area containing coins 26, 28–30 and 32) measuring 6 x 3m was laid out in the centre of the spread. This trench was subsequently extended in all directions; in all 112m² were excavated in at least ten mostly contiguous areas, each area being backfilled before the next was opened. Metal detectors were used at all stages and coins were recovered both in the soil removal, from the spoil heap, and from the subsoil. The plan (fig 1) takes into account 59 of the coins. Many of the coins were recovered from a few centimetres below the surface of the subsoil after the latter was cleaned. The subsoil comprised a yellow/brown clay which merged into a more orange deposit containing flecks of iron pan.

A concentration of coins was found in the subsoil in the trench laid out immediately to the west of the original area opened and this can be taken as the likely original deposition site of the hoard. Within this concentration were found two joining sherds of a rim of a vessel of Roman date; unfortunately the pot is much earlier than the deposition date for the hoard and may not have formed its original container. There was no sign of a burial pit or other sign of a container and it may be assumed that the hoard was buried in a bag or leather pouch. A decorated copper-alloy object, possibly a box fitting, was recovered some 10m south-west of the concentration; although of probable Roman date its connection with the hoard remains uncertain.

The plot suggests that the coins had been dispersed in two directions, fanning out to the north-east and to the south-east. In the surface of the subsoil, particularly in the area of the coin concentration, were plough furrows on both these alignments and it seems certain that this was how the coins were dispersed. Few coins were found to the south-west or north-west and this suggests a measure of annual habit in the direction of ploughing. The present ploughing alignment is more or less north–south, on the same alignment as the trenches. The hoard was subsequently declared as Treasure and was acquired in 2005 by Guildford Museum; the share of the reward by the landowner (Surrey County Council) being generously waived.

Composition of the hoard, by Richard Abdy

The group consists of 62 Roman silver coins (denarii) and begins with four extremely worn coins of the triumvir Mark Antony issued for his legions just prior to the battle of Actium in 31 BC. It ends with a consecration issue of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, most likely to have been made immediately after news of his death (at Vienna, 17 March AD 180) reached Rome. Most of the coins were in poor condition being badly corroded, or perhaps burnt.

⊙ Decorated strip

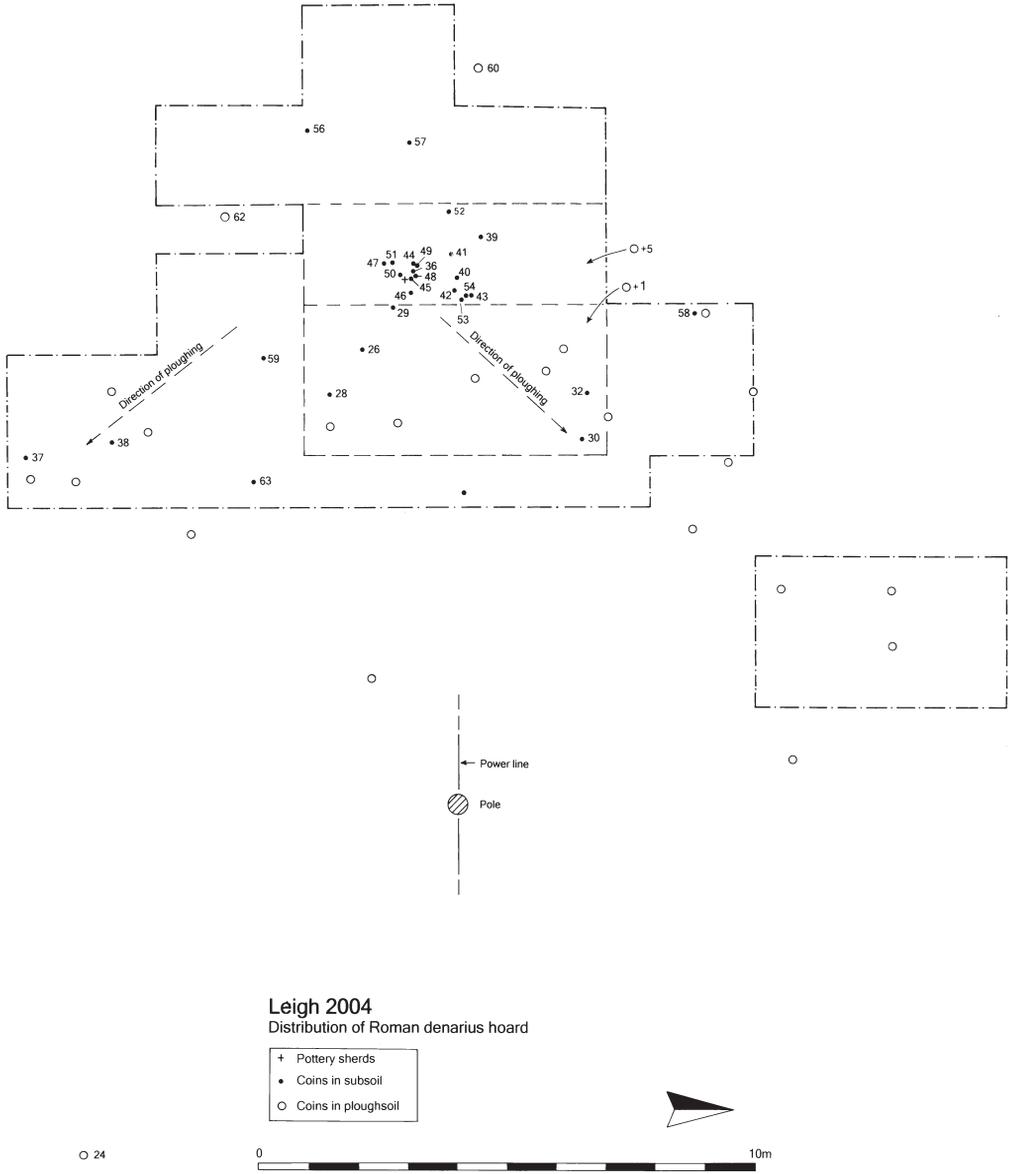


Fig 1 Leigh: plan of the trench showing distribution of the coins and other objects, with the relevant small finds numbers.

SUMMARY

Mark Antony	4
Vespasian (AD 69–79)	4
Titus (AD 79–81)	1
Domitian (AD 81–96)	2
Nerva (AD 96–8)	2
Trajan (AD 98–117)	10
Hadrian (AD 117–38)	8
Sabina	1
Aelius Caesar	1
Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61)	5
Diva Faustina I	6
Marcus Caesar	1
Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–80)	2
Lucius Verus	1
Faustina II	2
Divus Pius	2
Diva Faustina II	1
Reign of Commodus (AD 180–92)	–
Divus Marcus	1
Uncertain Antonine period empress	2
Uncertain emperor	4
Uncertain minor fragments	2
Total	62

The composition appears typical of Roman denarius hoards found in Britain terminating with coins of the Antonine dynasty. Although coins older than 200 years were present in the circulation at the time of deposition there is a notable gap of those of the emperors of the first half of the 1st century AD. These latter were of high-quality silver and were removed from circulation during the subsequent period of coinage debasement. In addition, the earlier issues of coins present display far more circulation wear than the later issues. Again this would be expected for a group of coins deposited together as a hoard, reflecting the mix of older and newer coins in the population at that time.

Pottery found with the hoard, by J D Hill (fig 2a)

Two sherds of pottery were recovered with the hoard (weight 15.5g). These are joining sherds from the rim of a tall jar or beaker in a hard white/grey fabric with eroded exterior surfaces that have a distinct orange/red tint. These small sherds come from a vessel that was probably made in the 1st century AD. Their date and their heavily eroded and worn character suggest they do not come from a complete vessel associated directly with the deposition of the hoard.

Copper-alloy object found with the hoard, by J D Hill (fig 2b)

A single metal object was found in the same area as the hoard. This is a broken and distorted object consisting of a copper-alloy decorated strip with a circular terminal at one end perforated with a large hole so the strip can be attached by a nail or rivet to another object. It is likely the original unbroken object had a similar terminal at the other end. The object is possibly Roman in date and is probably a fitting from a box or piece of furniture etc. It is too light and thin to have been a handle for a heavy object.

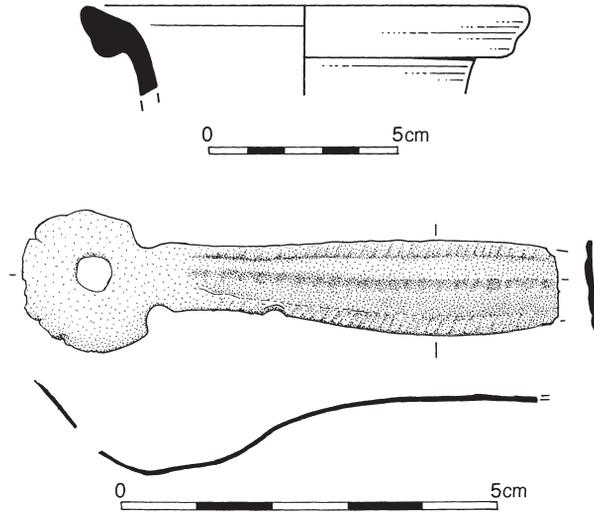


Fig 2 Leigh: top (a) pottery; bottom (b) copper-alloy object.

Discussion

The most unusual aspect of this hoard is its position. No Roman finds have been recorded in the vicinity although a Roman coin is understood to have been recovered from the field to the north of the site. Occasional brooch fragments or coins have been recorded nearer Reigate. The nearest known Roman site is a newly discovered site at South Park, some 2.5km distant, while recent discoveries prior to redevelopment in the Mole plain in the Horley area suggest that ancient activity in this area was greater than hitherto realised.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank those members of the Weald and Downland Metal Detector Club who took part in the work and for their support throughout. Members of the Surrey Archaeological Society also took part in the excavation and thanks are due to them also.

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