

ART. VI – *A hoard of Roman coins of the third and fourth centuries from Distington, Cumbria*

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THE sixty-seven coins which make up the Distington hoard were found in the garden of a house in the village (NGR NY 0023) in April 2001; some of the coins were brought into the Senhouse Roman Museum on 8 June, 2001. Since the hoard appeared to constitute Treasure (as defined by the Treasure Act of 1996), details (including the full NGR) were supplied to the British Museum and to the County Sites and Monuments Register; further, the Cumbria Western District Coroner was informed of the find. One of the authors (IDC) visited the site and dug a small test hole, whilst the second author (DCAS) later identified and listed the coins. In the present paper, the NGR has been given only to four figures, in order to safeguard the site and to maintain the privacy of the finders. In the event, the Coroner decided against holding an inquest, and the coins have been donated by the finders to the Senhouse Roman Museum.

Circumstances of Discovery

The hoard was found on a property on the main street through the village of Distington; until the modern A595 by-passed the village, this street was part of the trunk road from Cockermouth to Whitehaven. The property appears to be a converted farmhouse of nineteenth-century date, which is present on the first Ordnance Survey map (*c.*1860: CUMB. LXI.7 1:2,500).

Virtually nothing from the Roman period is known from the vicinity of the find (Crawford and George, 1983, 10). The Roman forts at Burrow Walls (NGR NY 003300) and Moresby (NGR NX 980210) lie four miles to the north-west and two miles to the south-west respectively. The parish church has pre-Norman origins, as is evidenced by the four tenth-century cross fragments (Bailey and Cramp, 1988, 96-7). Although the precise line has not been confirmed, it is probable that the Roman road from Papcastle to Moresby follows the line of the A595 (Bellhouse, 1956, 56-61). Many finds of Roman coin hoards and individual casual losses of coins, when not within or adjacent to forts, are found close to Roman roads (Shotter, 1990, 209).

The garden in which the coins were found is under grass with rows of trees (*Leylandii*) just inside the eastern and southern boundaries. The property itself is on a slope which falls away to the north-east, and the garden is formed in two flat terraces separated by a stone revetment approximately 500 mm in height.

The coins were recovered in three groups: Group 1 (the “wallet” group) was found in the course of the removal of one of the trees on the lower terrace on the eastern boundary. Fifteen coins were in a folded leather container which came up from the bottom of the root-system at a depth of 750-1000 mm. These coins were in a much fresher condition than those in Groups 2 and 3, but there has, since discovery, been some mixing of the contents of Groups 1 and 2.

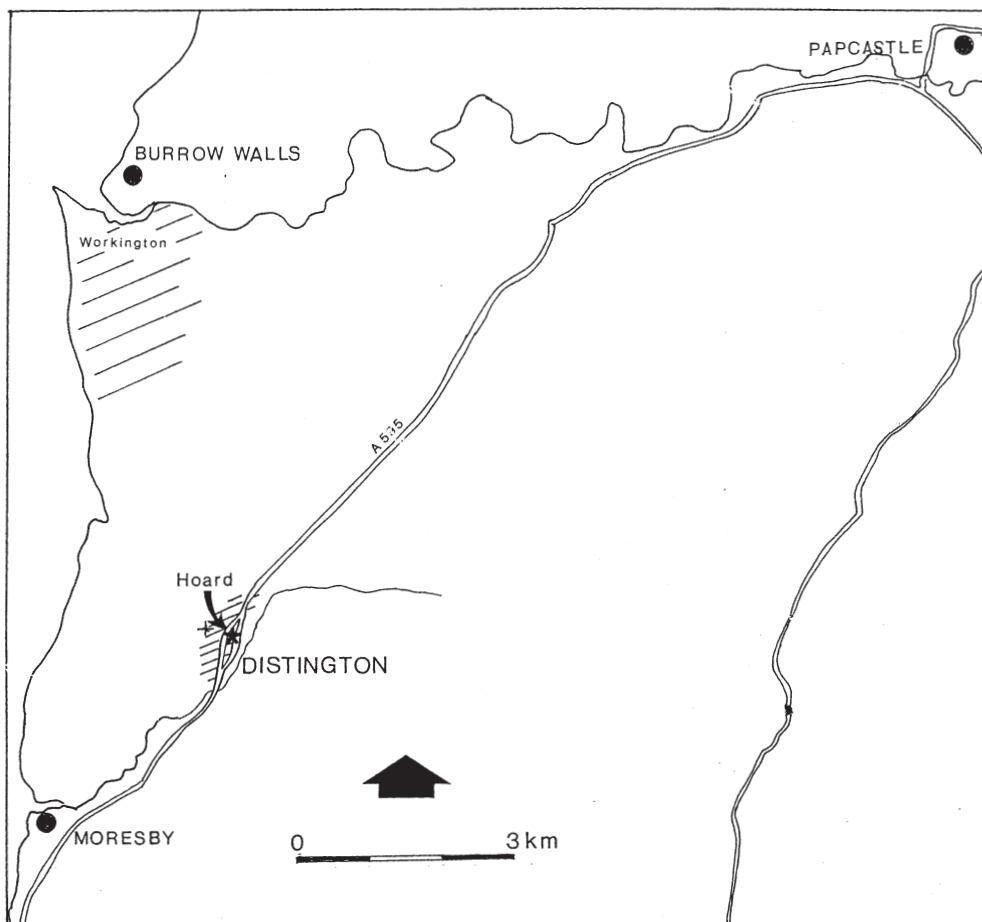


FIG. 1. Location map of the Distington hoard.

The owners subsequently used a metal-detector to scan the garden and Group 2 (49 coins) was recovered between trees on the southern boundary; on 9 June the first-named author (IDC) dug a small hole (300 mm square) at about 3.5 metres from the south-east corner of the garden on the spot where another signal was given by the metal-detector. Besides attempting to identify the source of the signal, the hole was designed to determine whether any archaeological context survived. Three coins (Group 3; nos. 21, 22 and 60) were recovered from the loose garden-soil. It is clear from the evidence of the finders and the "test-pit" that all of the coins were in root-disturbed soil, which also contained modern glass and pottery. The presence of living trees and dense root-systems makes further investigation impossible at present and no clear archaeological context has been established for the finds. Given the distribution and condition of the coins, particularly in Groups 2 and 3, it seems likely that the hoard was originally disturbed when the trees were first planted approximately 20-30 years ago.

The Coins

Group 1 was reported to have been found in a piece of leather folded in two and fastened with a leather thong; this container was similar to a “wallet” and was approximately 150 mm long. When found, the “wallet” was fragile, but sufficiently sound to be cleaned and supported. Unfortunately, the coins and the container were initially taken to Whitehaven, where their condition deteriorated to the point where the owners, on the return of the objects to them, saw no alternative but to discard the remains of the “wallet”. Thus, the “wallet” was not seen by an archaeologist, although the finders’ description of it suggests the possible use of a “document-case” as a container; the coins were laid out in two layers within the “wallet”.

When the coins reached the Senhouse Museum, they had already been out of the ground for two months and it is clear from the evidence of the finders that there had been some mixing of Groups 1 and 2. However, with the help of the finders it was possible to identify some of the coins from the “wallet” and, using as criteria freshness of condition with occasional patches of green corrosion, the original group was re-assembled by the first-named author (IDC).

As stated, Groups 2 and 3 were found loose in the garden-soil, and there was no evidence of a container or other depository-arrangements in respect of them. Some of these coins exhibited a degree of surface-corrosion, but appear to be mainly little worn and are generally legible. Indeed, most of the problems of identification arise from specimens which are poorly struck, missing their mint-marks and suffering corrosion-damage and chipping rather than wear. No conservation has been applied to the coins, beyond washing off the loose soil, but it is not regarded as likely that conservation would add substantial new data.

The question of whether the coins of Group 1 and of Groups 2 and 3 represent one or two hoards will be discussed below.

In the following lists, coins 1-15 constitute the reassembled wallet group; coins 16-67 represent “the remainder”:

A. CONSTANTINIAN (A.D.330-346)

1. Constantine I; VRBS ROMA/She-wolf and
twins SMTS€ LRBC I.838 330-5
2. Constantius II; VICTORIAE DD AVGGQ NN
AQS I.701 341-6

B. CONSTANTINIAN (A.D.346-361)

(Nos. 3-9 are issues of Constantius II; no.10 of Constantius Gallus)

3. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling horseman)
SMHA II.1902 351-4
4. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling horseman)
(Obverse head facing left) *| II.2292 346-50
5. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling Horseman) Γ|
SMN€ II.2300 351-4
6. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling Horseman) Γ|
ANΓ II.2623 351-4

7. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling Horseman)	<u>ε </u>	II.2629	351-4
8.-9. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling Horseman)	<u>ANT</u>	II.2632	351-4
10. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling Horseman)	<u>ANA</u>	II.2633	351-4
C. VALENTINIANIC (A.D.364-378)			
(Nos. 11-13 are issues of Valentinian I; nos. 14-15 of Valens)			
11.-13. GLORIA ROMANORVM			364-75
14. SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE	<u>SMAQP</u>	II.995	364-7
15. SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE	<u>SMK△</u>	II.2520	364-5

The fifty-two remaining coins are distributed as follows:

A. RADIATES AND COPIES (*c.* A.D.260-290)

16. Gallienus; IOVIST[ATORI]	<i>RIC</i> V.219	259-68
17. Gallienus]LL AVG; copy		<i>c.</i> 270-90
18. Claudius II; copy		268-70
19. Claudius II; copy		268-70
20. [DIVO]CLAVDIO/[CONSECRATIO] (Eagle)	V.265	270
21. Victorinus/Tetricus I (?); copy		<i>c.</i> 270-90
22. Unassignable Radiate copy		<i>c.</i> 270-90

B. CONSTANTINIAN (A.D.324-346)

23. Constantine I/DN CONSTANTINI MAX AVG Wreath VOT XX	as <i>LRBC</i> I.476	324-7
24. Constantine II/DOMINOR NOSTROR CAESS Wreath VOT X	as I.478	324-7
25. Constantinian/DOMINOR NOSTROR CAESS Wreath VOT X		324-7
26. CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG/GLORIA EXERCITVS (two standards)		330-5
27. Constantinian/GLORIA EXERCITVS (one standard)		335-41
28. [PIETAS ROMANA] (?)		337-41

29. Constantius II/VICTORIAE DD AVGGQ NN

 $\overline{\text{AQS}}$

I.701

341-6

(Note: It is possible that no. 29 has been pierced)

30. Constans or Constantius II/VICTORIAE DD

AVGGQ NN

 $\overline{\text{ASIS}}$

I.790

341-6

31.-32. Constantinian/VICTORIAE DD AVGGQ NN

341-6

C. CONSTANTINIAN (A.D.346-361)

33. Constantius II/FEL TEMP REPARATIO

(Falling Horseman)

 $\overline{\text{FSIS}}$

II.1208

351-4

34.-43. Constantinian/[FEL TEMP REPARATIO]

(Falling Horseman copy)

c.350-60

44.-45. Illegible, but probably Constantinian

D. VALENTINIANIC (A.D.364-378)

46. Valens/GLORIA ROMANORVM

 $\overline{\text{ASIRM}}$

II.1632

364-7

47.-52. (GLORIA ROMANORVM)

364-78

53.-60. [SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE]

364-78

61.-62. Illegible, but probably Valentinianic

E. THEODOSIAN (A.D.378-392)

63. Valentinian II/SALVS REIPVBLICAE

 $\overline{\text{XI}}$ $\overline{\text{CONS}\Delta}$

II.2183

383-92

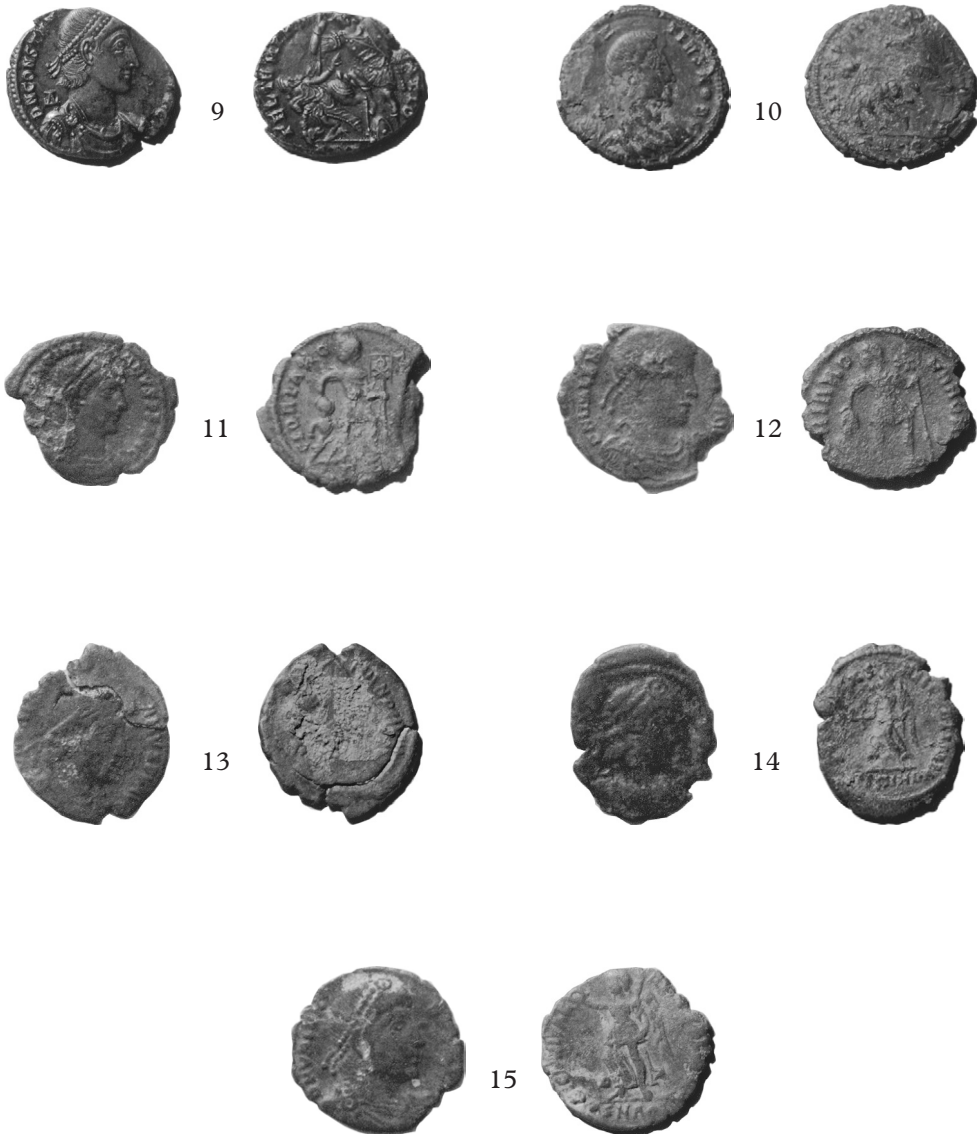
64.-67. Illegible coins of the fourth century

Discussion

The chronological makeup of the coins can be demonstrated by means of the following table:

Period		“Wallet-group”		“The remainder”		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
XIII	(239-75)			7	15.22	7	11.48
XIV	(275-94)						
XV	(294-324)						
XVI	(324-30)			3	6.52	3	4.92
XVII	(330-46)	2	13.33	7	15.22	9	14.75
XVIII	(346-64)	8	53.33	11	23.91	19	31.15
XIX	(364-78)	5	33.33	17	36.96	22	36.07
XX	(378-88)						
XXI	(388-)			1	2.27	1	1.63
Illegible				6		6	
TOTALS		15		52		67	





“Distington, Cumbria: The Coins of the reconstituted ‘wallet-group’ (nos. 1-15 in the catalogue). The images are presented in pairs (obverse and reverse of each coin), and the numbers correspond to those of the Catalogue”.

There are few well-documented hoards of the late-fourth century from north-west England (Shotter, 1990; 1995; 2000), although a number of individual late-fourth century coins have been recovered as casual losses from known sites and from other locations along the coast of Cumbria (Shotter, 1997). The present coins thus serve to provide more evidence of Roman military and Romano-British activity on the coast prolonged into the later-fourth or even early-fifth centuries. Indeed, although the latest minted coin in the present group(s) is an issue of Valentinian II, and although, despite considerable corrosion, many of the coins appear to exhibit relatively little wear, some are sufficiently worn to suggest that the savings-period represented by these coins may have extended into the fifth century.

The long chronological range of the coins is not in itself unusual; a considerable number of hoards are known – for example, from East Anglia (Shotter, 1978) – which contain radiates and copies, as well as issues stretching late into the fourth century. Indeed, the family of Constantine I clearly gave new impetus to the acceptability of some radiate copies by their spuriously-claimed kinship with Claudius II (*Panegyrici Latini* VI.2, 1f; Syme, 1968, 115-6).

However, a major question, which does arise, is whether the sixty-seven coins found at Distington constitute one hoard or two. The make up of the whole group does not in any way preclude the assumption of a single hoard. As we have seen, the long chronological range is entirely acceptable, as is the obvious implication that the money in circulation in Britain in the later-fourth century continued to be dominated by mid-to-late Constantinian and Valentinianic issues. The validity of this for north-west England is plainly evident in the record of coin-loss for Carlisle (Shotter, 1990; 1995; 2000).

It should be noted, however, that there are differences of constitution between the “wallet-group” and “the remainder”. If the “wallet-group” has been “reconstituted” correctly, then not only does it lack the earlier and later issues which feature amongst the rest of the coins, but also the distribution of coins in the two groups between the Constantinian and Valentinianic periods is markedly different. In the “wallet-group”, coins of the period, A.D. 346-364, outnumber Valentinianic by a ratio of approximately 2:1 – a relationship which is effectively reversed amongst the remainder of the coins. This might suggest that the two portions of the coins were put together under different circumstances, if not by different people. “The remainder” evidently continued in use over a long period, possibly into the fifth century, whilst the savings-period of the “wallet-group” appears to have been short, to judge from the condition and types of coins contained in it. In view of the predominance of eastern mint-marks amongst the coins of the “wallet-group” (Aquileia, Heraclea, Thessalonica, Cyzicus, Nicomedia and Antioch), and because none of the coins in that group need to have been issued later than the late-360s, it might be suggested that this group was put together with some care in the eastern part of the empire by a person (or family) who subsequently migrated to Britain – perhaps on official or commercial business – and then remained in the province. For saving and spending, the owner may have preferred, whilst in Britain, to add to and subtract from “the remainder”, leaving the larger and fresher coins of the “wallet-group” substantially intact; personal idiosyncrasies are not infrequently detectable in the make up and use of savings-hoards.

Although the condition of most of the coins does not allow for the establishment

of their mints of origin, in the cases where it has proved possible – most of the “wallet-group” and a few of the remainder – the mints are spread from Italy, along the Danube and into Greece and Asia Minor. The predominance of such mints has sometimes been invoked to call into question the genuineness of the origin of such coins in a Romano-British context – for example, the hoard of later-fourth century aes issues from Brindle in Lancashire (Brickstock, 1987, 317.-8). However, the evident importance of the west-coast defences in the later-fourth century (and perhaps beyond) would appear to render it unremarkable if soldiers or craftsmen and merchants of eastern origin – not to mention doctors – were present; nor should we forget that it was not unusual for the place of origin of such people to be lost behind a Latinised nomenclature. It should certainly not occasion surprise if such people brought with them savings accumulated elsewhere in the empire. Surviving inscriptions certainly provide us with evidence of such migrations into northern Britain – Flavius Antigonus Papias (from Carlisle: *RIB* 955), “the Galatian” (from Maryport: *RIB* 864). Aulus Egnatius Pastor (probably a Greek doctor, from Maryport: *RIB* 808), not to mention the sculptor, Barates of Palmyra, from South Shields (*RIB* 1065).

The Location of the Find

As already noted, the findspot of these coins was adjacent to what will have been the Roman road from Papcastle to Moresby. In view of the likely importance of coastal activities into the later years of the fourth century (Kent, 1951; Shotter, 1997) and the fact that Papcastle, like Maryport, *may* have exercised a central role in regional administration (Olivier, forthcoming), such a conclusion is entirely reasonable, if the chief road-routes in the area, as elsewhere in the north-west (Shotter, 1990), acted as focal lines for settlement. Although no archaeological context was discovered at the findspot of the present coins, it may be readily supposed that, as at Old Carlisle, this major road-line encouraged settlement by farmers, merchants and those engaged in a wide variety of manufacturing trades. Indeed, it may not be inappropriate to mention in conclusion that the extramural settlement at Manchester encouraged not only industrial activity, but also a considerable amount of coinage which had its origin in the eastern portion of the Roman empire (Jones, 1974; Shotter, 1990).

APPENDIX

Statistics of the Distington Coins

Cat No.	Diam (Max)	Diam (Min)	Mean	Wt (gms)	Wear	Die Axis	Comment
1	15	15	15	1.14	LW	0	
2	16	14	15	1.26	LW	220	chipped
3	19	18	18.5	2.12	LW	330	chipped
4	24	19	21.5	3.49	LW	0	
5	21	20	20.5	5.25	LW	20	
6	22	21	21.5	5.05	LW	30	
7	19	18	18.5	3.44	LW	0	
8	20	19	19.5	4.59	LW	330	
9	21	18	19.5	4.10	LW	290	*
10	22	21	21.5	3.68	LW	160	
11	18	18	18	1.53	LW	40	*
12	17	16	16.5	1.61	LW	150	
13	19	18	18.5	1.93	LW	180	
14	18	17	17.5	1.71	LW	180	*
15	21	17	19	2.65	LW	180	*
16	17.5	16	16.75	2.39	LW	0	
17	15	15	15	2.43	MW	n/a	*
18	19	18	18.5	1.44	LW	n/a	chipped
19	13	12.5	12.75	0.88	MW	n/a	
20	16	15	15.5	1.35	LW	270	*
21	21	18	19.5	3.59	LW	200	
22	16	15	15.5	2.27	MW	180	
23	16	16	16	1.67	LW	0	*
24	18	18	18	2.81	LW	200	
25	15.5	15	15.25	1.42	MW	n/a	chipped
26	17	16	16.5	1.30	LW	0	
27	14	13	13.5	0.90	MW	150	
28	15	14	14.5	1.30	MW	180	*
29	15	15	15	1.37	LW	150	pierced (?)
30	17	15	16	1.19	MW?	180	
31	15	14	14.5	1.19	VW?	n/a	
32	15	14	14.5	1.19	MW	0	
33	16	16	16	2.58	LW	0	
34	19	18.5	18.75	3.32	MW?	340	
35	17	16	16.5	2.30	MW/LW	200	
36	19	16	17.5	2.18	LW	30	
37	16	16	16	2.05	LW	0	
38	18.5	17.5	18	2.81	LW	340	chipped
39	15.5	15.5	15.5	2.43	MW	240	
40	18.5	17.5	18	2.26	LW	0	
41	15.5	14	14.75	2.31	VW	n/a	

Cat No.	Diam (Max)	Diam (Min)	Mean	Wt (gms)	Wear	Die Axis	Comment
42	16	15	15.5	1.62	VW	n/a	
43	14	14	14	1.67	VW	40	
44	14.5	14	14.25	1.63	VW	n/a	
45	15	14.5	14.75	0.98	MW	0	chipped
46	17	17	17	1.74	LW	200	
47	18	16	17	2.38	LW	180	
48	18	17	17.5	2.17	MW	0	
49	16	16	16	1.32	MW	150	
50	15	14	14.5	2.05	LW	150	chipped
51	14	14	14	1.64	VW	160	
52	15	14.5	14.75	1.87	MW	220	*
53	14	13.5	13.75	1.21	LW	20	*
54	17	16	16.5	2.19	LW	210	*
55	15	15	15	1.92	LW	210	chipped
56	17	16.5	16.75	2.39	LW	200	chipped
57	16.5	14	15.25	1.48	MW	310	chipped
58	17	15.5	16.25	1.89	MW	350	
59	16.5	15	15.75	1.71	MW	140	chipped
60	18	18	18	1.48	LW	20	
61	16	15	15.5	1.91	LW	150	*
62	16	15	15.5	2.31	MW	0	chipped
63	13	12.5	12.75	0.73	LW	0	*
64	16	15.5	15.75	0.79	VW	n/a	
65	17.5	16.5	17	2.31	VW	n/a	
66	15.5	14	14.75	1.08	MW	n/a	chipped
67	17	16	16.5	2.49	VW	n/a	chipped

(Note: * indicates slight damage to the edge of the flan).

Acknowledgements

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