

ART. VI – *A collection of Roman coins from Whitehaven, Cumbria*

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A SMALL collection of mainly Roman coins was donated to the Senhouse Roman Museum at Maryport in 2004. The evidence for their Whitehaven provenance is slight but apparently authentic, and adds weight to hitherto-sparse indications of activity of the Roman period below the modern town.¹

The coins were part of a miscellaneous collection of numismatic material acquired from Mr John Adair Douglas whose family had run the Whitehaven stationery business, known as J. M. Adair since the mid-nineteenth century. Although the precise circumstances of the find have been lost, to John Douglas' knowledge, the coins had been with his family since at least the 1930s.²

The coins were stored in a small, cream-coloured envelope; although unsealed, this envelope was folded in such a way as to prevent the coins from falling out. On the front of the envelope the following note was written upside down (relative to the top of the envelope) in three lines: "Old Roman Coins found when digging foundations for Whitehaven Castle". The writing was almost certainly done before the envelope was folded, since the bottom of "Castle" runs across the crease. The envelope was folded a second time doubtless to create a compact packet for the coins. The handwriting on the envelope appears to date from the early to middle part of the twentieth century, as does the envelope itself.

To consider the provenance of the coins, it will be necessary to examine three strands of evidence: the coins themselves; the information on the envelope, and the history of the family who owned the coins.

The Coins

Although the coins are described in detail below, a few general observations are worth making: the majority of the coins are very common Roman bronzes of the third and fourth centuries. All show degrees of wear, corrosion, and some irregularities to the flans but, on the whole, are fairly legible. However, they could never be described as choice collectors' specimens – even for these types. Moreover, the collection lacks any silver *denarii* or the more attractive larger bronzes of earlier centuries. The group includes a very battered halfpenny of George II, which had clearly come out of the ground, and other corroded discs, some of which were probably buttons and had also probably been buried in the ground. On the whole, therefore, the group is fairly homogeneous and gives no reason to suggest that a collector had assembled it from diverse sources. Additionally, the non-Roman elements are all compatible with having been found in the circumstances described on the envelope.

Whitehaven Castle

The site of Whitehaven Castle was the seat of the west Cumberland Lowthers. In its early days, it was known as Flatt Hall, when it was the residence of Sir John Lowther

(1642-1706) and Sir James Lowther (1673-1755). The Whitehaven branch of the family died out with Sir James and their estates passed, via Sir William Lowther (1727-1756) in 1756 to Sir James Lowther of Lowther (1736-1802). This Sir James was created Earl Lonsdale in 1784.

Flatt Hall, which had been in existence since at least the beginning of the sixteenth century, was bought in 1675 by Sir John Lowther from Sir George Fletcher for £1000³ and was then subject to alterations and developments overseen by William Thackeray of Torpenhow.⁴ Whitehaven Castle was created by the first Earl of Lonsdale after extensive remodelling by Robert Adam (1769-76).⁵ The lodge and gates were erected in 1883.⁶ After the First World War, moves were afoot to expand medical provision in Whitehaven and, in 1921, Whitehaven Castle was sold for £20,000 with the intention that it would become the site of a new hospital. The anonymous purchaser of the Castle was, in fact, William Walker of Oaklea, one of the Infirmary's Trustees. Work on the conversion began in 1923 by the contractors, Walker and Slater of Derby (architects: Saxon, Snell and Phillips), and the hospital was officially opened by Princess Mary on 22 January 1926.⁷

This brief resumé of the history of Whitehaven Castle indicates several occasions when building-work was undertaken: the work by Thackeray in the seventeenth century should be discounted since it predates the use of the name, "Whitehaven Castle" (and we would have to assume that post-medieval coins were later intrusions into the collection). At first sight, the text on the envelope would appear to indicate that the coins were found during the construction-work on Whitehaven Castle in the 1770s. However, a more plausible date might be the time when the hospital was created in 1923-25. Such a date would be consistent with the envelope and its handwriting, although it remains a possibility that the present envelope was a replacement for an earlier container. It would also account for the continued presence in the collection of the halfpenny of 1747; in 1775, this halfpenny was still a current coin, of no antiquarian value but of some utility when current copper coinage was often in short supply. It might, therefore, be expected that it would have been extracted from a site-collection made at this time.

The Family

The recent owner of the coins, Mr John Douglas, identified them as having been in the hands of his family of Whitehaven stationers for some generations. The history of the firm, known latterly as J. M. Adair and Co., is described briefly, but inaccurately, by Daniel Hay, historian of Whitehaven. Another, apparently more accurate, version of the firm's story was published in *The Whitehaven News* at the time when the business closed down.⁸ The firm of booksellers, printers and stationers was founded by Thomas Wilson⁹ at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it was located at 45 King Street.¹⁰ By 1847, it was at 22 King Street.¹¹ In 1857, the firm was taken over by John McLeveen¹² Adair and, by 1869, had moved to 20 King Street. They remained here until 1900, when they relocated to 8 King Street to a shop known as "THE BOOK".¹³ The last owner, John Hindson Douglas, grandson of John McLeveen Adair and father of John Adair Douglas, died in 1969, having sold the premises to John Colliers. The premises were later part of Blundells.¹⁴ Neither Hay nor *The Whitehaven News* give full sources for the history of

the firm, but the details can be augmented from local directories. In 1858, the premises of John McLeveen Adair were at 63 King Street,¹⁵ but had moved to 20 King Street by 1869.¹⁶ Adair died in 1880, aged 46, but the business continued in the hands of his widow, Mrs Jane Ruston (née Hine).¹⁷ After her death in 1894, the business was taken on by their unmarried daughter, Sarah Adair, who ran it until 1920, when it was taken over by her nephews, Jonathan Hindson Douglas and John McLeveen Adair Douglas (d. 1922). The Douglas connection to the family came about when Minnie Adair, John McLeveen Adair's eldest daughter, married John Hindson Douglas, a Whitehaven draper. The style, & Co., was adopted about 1920 when the Douglas brothers became involved, and the firm was subsequently listed as J. M. Adair & Co, by which time they appear to have been primarily stationers.¹⁸

Jonathan Hindson Douglas lived at 4 Inkerman Terrace from 1929 until his death.¹⁹ His father, John Hindson Douglas, lived at 3 Inkerman Terrace, until his death in 1903. These houses were part of a group of six erected by Jonathan's grandfather (*The Whitehaven News*). Robert Douglas, who was at No. 22, was unrelated to the family.²⁰

These strands of evidence give us no reason to doubt the provenance of the coins as a local site-find and they throw useful light on the Whitehaven connection; however, they give no further insight into the question of how the family might have acquired the coins. Whilst there is no absolute certainty in this matter, we shall proceed on the basis of their likely discovery during the building-works of the 1920s.

The Roman Coins

The twenty-eight Roman coins in the collection are all *aes*-issues and are distributed chronologically as follows:

a) Gallienus (3 coins)

- | | | |
|---|----------------|--------|
| 1. Obv. GALLIENVS AVG Rev. IOVI CONSERVAT copy | <i>RIC</i> 210 | 259-68 |
| 2. Obv. GALLIENVS AVG Rev. FELICIT PVBL T | <i>RIC</i> 192 | 259-68 |
| 3. Obv. GALLIENVS AVG Rev. IOVI CONS AVG copy | <i>RIC</i> 207 | 259-68 |

b) Claudius II (1 coin)

- | | | |
|-------------------|--|--------|
| 4. Illegible copy | | 268-70 |
|-------------------|--|--------|

c) Divus Claudius (3 coins)

- | | | |
|---|----------------|-----|
| 5. Obv. DIVO CLAVDIO Rev. CONSECRATIO (Altar) copy | <i>RIC</i> 259 | 270 |
|---|----------------|-----|

| | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|--------|
| 6. | Obv. DIVO CLAVDIO Rev. CONSECRATIO (Altar) copy | <i>RIC</i> 259 | 270 |
| 7. | Obv. [DIVO CLAVDIO] Rev. [CONSECRATIO] (Altar) copy (poorly struck) | <i>RIC</i> 259 | 270 |
| d) Victorinus (1 coin) | | | |
| 8. | Obv. IMP C VICTORINVS P F AVG Rev. SALVS AVG | <i>RIC</i> 71 | 269-71 |
| e) Tetricus I (4 coins) | | | |
| 9. | Obv. Illegible Rev. [FIDES MILITVM] copy | <i>RIC</i> 68ff | 271-3 |
| 10. | Obv.]CVSA Rev. SALVS AVG copy | <i>RIC</i> 121ff | 271-3 |
| 11. | Obv.]CVS P F AVG Rev. [IOVI STATORI] copy | <i>RIC</i> 85 | 271-3 |
| 12. | Obv.]ITIVS[Rev. Illegible | | 271-3 |
| f) Tetricus II (1 coin) | | | |
| 13. | Obv. C PIV ESV TETRICVS CAES Rev. [IOVI STATORI] copy | <i>RIC</i> 235 | 271-3 |
| g) Unassignable Radiate Copies (3 coins) | | | |
| 14-16. | Largely illegible | | c. 280 |
| h) Constantinian (AD 330-346: 7 coins) | | | |
| 17. | Obv. CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG _____ Rev. GLORIA EXERCITVS (2 std) TRP | <i>LRBC</i> I. 48 | 330-5 |
| 18. | Obv. VRBS ROMA Rev. She-wolf and twins mm? | | 330-5 |
| 19. | Obv. [VRBS ROMA] Rev. She-wolf and twins mm? | | 330-5 |
| 20. | Obv. CONSTANTINVS AVG _____ Rev. GLORIA EXERCITVS (1 std) TRP | <i>LRBC</i> I. 99 | 337-41 |

21. Obv. (Constantinian)
Rev. GLORIA EXERCITVS (1 std)
335-41
22. Obv. [FL MAX THEODORAE AVG]
Rev. [PIETAS] ROMANA mm?
337-41
23. Obv. [FL IVL HELENAE AVG]
Rev. PAX PV[BLICA] TRP
LRBC I. 104
337-41
- i) Constantinian (AD 346-364: 2 coins)**
24. Obv. D N CONSTANTIVS P F AVG
Rev. FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Galley) copy mm?
c.350
25. Obv. Constantius II
Rev. [FEL TEMP REPARATIO] (Hut) copy mm?
c.350
- j) Valentinianic (2 coins)**
26. Obv. Valentinianic
Rev. [SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE] mm?
364-75
27. Obv. Valentinianic
Rev. [SECVRITAS REIPV] BLICAE copy TRP
LRBC II. 96
364-7
- k) Theodosian (1 coin)**
28. Obv. D N TH[EODOSIVS P F AVG]
Rev. Illegible copy
c.380

The Modern Coins and Buttons

29. Worn disc with traces of lettering on the face and a possible loop (flattened) on the reverse. Probably a button.
30. Irish Halfpenny of George II, dated 1747; moderately worn but very much damaged with pieces missing from both edges.
31. *Doit* of Hollandia. The reverse is clear, but the obverse is entirely worn away; the date is not visible. However, a date between 1702 and 1780 is indicated for this coin type.²¹
32. Farthing-sized bronze coin. The coin is extremely worn and the images are almost entirely worn away. A left-facing bust can perhaps be made out on the obverse, but it does not appear to be a standard bust of George II. The edge has a diagonal graining, perhaps suggesting that this could be a farthing token (c.1787-c.1815) or an Irish farthing.
33. Disc almost completely worn away or never bearing any images. The flan still retains some depth of corrosion products over much of its surface, but the centre

of one side has some fresh metal projecting into the corrosion, suggestive of a button-loop.

Discussion

The interpretation of the significance of this group of coins is not straightforward: in the first place, the Roman coins are accompanied by the addition of at least one more recent issue – the halfpenny of George II which, like a number of the Roman coins, has suffered damage at some stage (no. 30). It is certain that five of the pieces (29-33) are post-Roman, although 32 and 33 are far too worn and damaged to permit even a basic identification. This discussion will initially proceed on the premise that the twenty-eight certain Roman coins were indeed found during the development of the site of Whitehaven Castle in the 1920s alongside some post-medieval coins. The central question is whether the coins represent one (or more) hoards or site-finds.

The Roman coins fall naturally into two groups: first, Radiates and copies dating to the second half of the third century and, secondly, fourth-century coins, dating from the later years of the reign of Constantine I to the late-fourth century. It is possible that all of these coins might cohere into a single group as a votive deposit or even as a savings-hoard; hoards consisting of a mixture of coins of third and fourth century date are recorded,²² including one recently from nearby Distington.²³ However, whilst in this case the meagre record of discovery does not incline one way or the other on this matter, the condition of the coins themselves does not favour the “single-group” interpretation.

The condition of the coins is very variable, even within the group of Radiates and copies: the issues of Gallienus, Claudius II and of Victorinus are generally of reasonable quality, whilst the remainder are poor, including one “Divus Claudius” copy, which is struck partly off-flan (7), and issues of Tetricus I with blundered and illiterate legends (9, 10 and 12), together with the unassignable copies (14-16). The date of loss of coins of Claudius II are difficult to assess, especially because the claim of Constantius I and his family to have been descended from Claudius II may well have led to an extended circulation-life for the latter’s coins and, possibly, to a re-issuing of some coins of the CONSECRATIO series.

Apart from this, the condition of the coins of Gallienus (1-3) and some of those of “Divus Claudius” (5-7) would appear to be too fresh for them to have remained in circulation until the later years of the fourth century – that is, a circulation-life in the order of 120 years. We might expect such variations in the condition of the coins if they represented a long-term votive deposit, although the absence of coins earlier than A.D. 250 would appear to militate against this interpretation.

In view of this, it would appear safest to assume that we are dealing here with what were originally two separate groups of coins (1-16 and 17-28). Both could well have come from the Whitehaven area: hoards of third-century Radiates are common in north-west England,²⁴ reflecting, as elsewhere in Britain, the deteriorating economic and financial circumstances of the period. Similarly, hoards terminating in the later years of the fourth century require little explanation in the changing circumstances – political, military, economic and social – of those times, of which we have in recent years become more aware.²⁵ In addition, the decline in the coin-

supply which characterised the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries may have persuaded many to return, at least in part, to a system of barter in conducting their transactions. However, the volume of fourth-century coinage recovered in recent excavations from the areas of the fort-*principia* at both Newcastle-upon-Tyne²⁶ and Carlisle shows that coinage remained in resilient use until the 380s at least. It is nonetheless of interest that another group of coins from a location on the Cumbrian coast, like that from Distington,²⁷ should be recorded as containing an issue as late as the reign of Theodosius.

A further possibility should be considered: the generally poor condition of the coins would suggest that they had not been collected over a wide area; indeed, the apparent homogeneity of the groups would point in the same direction. It is, however, possible that the Roman coins in the collection represent individual site-finds – that is, casual losses from a site in north-west Cumbria. It is worth noting that Maryport²⁸ has produced a long coin-series, in which coins of the third and fourth centuries are well represented; further, coins of late-imperial date have been found at the known sites of Papcastle, Burrow Walls and Moresby, and at a variety of locations in the hinterland of the coast.²⁹

Indeed, the present find might even point to a site of later-Roman date in the Whitehaven area; in this connection, it is worth noting in conclusion that Lancaster City Museum and Art Gallery probably holds in its collection two Constantinian issues (SOLI INVICTO COMITI – type) which, according to the notebook of a local nineteenth-century collector, Thomas Dalzell, were found at Whitehaven; unfortunately, the coins cannot be individually relocated in the Museum's collection, because Dalzell's notes provide insufficient distinguishing details of them.³⁰

APPENDIX STATISTICS

| Cat. No. | Max. Dia. | Min. Dia. | Mean | WT (g) | Die Axis | Copy | Date |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|------|--------|
| 1 | 19.30 | 17.00 | 18.15 | 2.14 | 330 | * | 259-68 |
| 2 | 22.00 | 20.00 | 21.00 | 2.92 | 180 | | 259-68 |
| 3 | 18.00 | 17.00 | 17.50 | 1.92 | 330 | * | 259-68 |
| 4 | 17.50 | 16.50 | 17.00 | 1.47 | n/a | * | 268-70 |
| 5 | 18.00 | 17.00 | 17.50 | 1.75 | 0 | * | 270 |
| 6 | 17.00 | 15.30 | 16.15 | 1.45 | 20 | * | 270 |
| 7 | 15.00 | 14.00 | 14.50 | 0.88 | 50 | * | 270 |
| 8 | 21.00 | 17.50 | 19.25 | 1.14 | 0 | | 269-71 |
| 9 | 17.00 | 17.00 | 17.00 | 1.67 | 50 | * | 271-73 |
| 10 | 19.00 | 15.00 | 17.00 | 1.73 | 320 | * | 271-73 |
| 11 | 18.50 | 18.00 | 18.25 | 4.12 | 0 | * | 271.73 |
| 12 | 14.50 | 12.50 | 13.50 | 0.67 | n/a | ? | 271-73 |
| 13 | 16.50 | 16.50 | 16.50 | 1.36 | 180 | | 271-73 |
| 14 | 16.50 | 15.50 | 16.00 | 1.74 | 270 | * | 280 |
| 15 | 15.00 | 13.50 | 14.25 | 1.08 | n/a | * | 280 |
| 16 | 22.50 | 21.00 | 21.75 | 2.39 | n/a | * | 280 |
| 17 | 16.00 | 14.50 | 15.25 | 1.41 | 180 | | 330-35 |
| 18 | 17.00 | 17.00 | 17.00 | 2.19 | 330 | | 330-35 |
| 19 | 17.00 | 15.50 | 16.25 | 1.72 | 80 | | 330-35 |

APPENDIX STATISTICS (*Continued*)

| Cat. No. | Max. Dia. | Min. Dia. | Mean | WT (g) | Die Axis | Copy | Date |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 20 | 15.00 | 15.00 | 15.00 | 1.00 | 0 | | 337-41 |
| 21 | 12.00 | 12.00 | 12.00 | 0.81 | 0 | | 335-41 |
| 22 | 14.00 | 13.30 | 13.65 | 1.13 | 180 | | 337-41 |
| 23 | 15.00 | 15.00 | 15.00 | 1.43 | 0 | | 337-41 |
| 24 | 19.00 | 18.00 | 18.50 | 2.10 | 210 | * | 350 |
| 25 | 18.00 | 17.00 | 17.50 | 2.17 | 0 | * | 350 |
| 26 | 17.00 | 15.50 | 16.25 | 1.30 | 0 | | 374-75 |
| 27 | 13.00 | 12.00 | 12.50 | 0.67 | 180 | * | 364-67 |
| 28 | 11.00 | 10.00 | 10.50 | 0.92 | n/a | * | 380 |
| 29 | 17.50 | 17.50 | 17.50 | 1.98 | | button | |
| 30 | 28.00 | 28.00 | 28.00 | 5.12 | | Irish | 1747 |
| 31 | 21.00 | 21.00 | 21.00 | 1.80 | | Hollandia | 1702-80 |
| 32 | 22.00 | 22.00 | 22.00 | 4.28 | | farthing? | 1700-1820 |
| 33 | 21.00 | 21.00 | 21.00 | 2.87 | | button ? | |

Notes and References

1. We are grateful to Michael Finlay for donating the coins to the Senhouse Roman Museum and for putting us in touch with John Douglas, and to John Douglas himself for considerable help with details of his family and the business, particularly in the light of the errors contained in the printed sources. The information in this paper supercedes the preliminary notice of the coin-find given in R. J. A. Wilson and I. D. Caruana (eds.), *Romans on the Solway: Essays in Honour of Richard Bellhouse* (Kendal, 2004) (CWAAS Extra Series 31), 204.
2. John Douglas suggests two possible sources: his great-aunt, Sarah Adair, who died in 1940, or, more likely, through a gift to his father from the widow of Clayton Bentley who died in the late 1930s. Clayton Bentley was a Whitehaven architect with connections to Whitehaven Castle in the 1920s and 1930s, and a friend of John Hindson Douglas.
3. S. Collier, *Whitehaven, 1600-1800* (HMSO London, 1991), 10.
4. B. Tyson, "The Work of William Thakeray and James Swingler at Flatt Hall (Whitehaven Castle) and other Cumbrian Buildings", *Transactions of the Ancient Monument Society* ns 28 (1984), 61-92.
5. Whitehaven Hospital Research Group, *Whitehaven Castle – the Hospital Years* (Whitehaven, 2002), 2.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 9.
8. 25 February 1965. We are grateful to John Douglas for supplying a transcript of this article.
9. Not William Wilson as given in D. Hay, *Whitehaven: An Illustrated History* (Beckermest, 1979).
10. *Jollies Cumberland Guide and Directory* (Carlisle, 1811); W. Parson and W. White, *History, directory and gazeteer of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Leeds, 1829).
11. *Mannix and Whellan, History, gazeteer and directory of Cumberland* (Beverley, 1847).
12. This spelling of the name is used by John Douglas: the Directories give other variations.
13. The information in the 1910 Directory, which continues to give the address as 20 King Street, appears to be wrong: *Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1910), 284.
14. D. Hay, *op. cit.*, 187.
15. *Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1858), 219.
16. *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Manchester, 1869), 96.
17. *Porter's Postal Directory for 1882 of Whitehaven, Workington, Maryport and neighbourhood* (1882); *Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1894), 267.
18. *Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1934), 274.
19. *Ibid.*, 273; *Whitehaven and District Directory* (n.d.), 97.
20. *Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1925), 287.

21. W. D. Craig, *Coins of the World, 1750-1850* (1st edition 1966), 460.
22. D. C. A. Shotter, "Unpublished Roman Hoards in the Wisbech and Fenland Museum", *Coin Hoards* 4 (1978), 47-50.
23. Ian Caruana and David Shotter, "A hoard of Roman coins of the third and fourth centuries from Distington, Cumbria", *CW3*, ii, 67-78.
24. D. C. A. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England* (Lancaster, 1990); D. C. A. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England: First Supplement* (Lancaster, 1995); D. C. A. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England: Second Supplement* (Lancaster, 2000).
25. T. Wilmott and P. Wilson (eds.), *The Late Roman Transition in the North* (BAR 299) (Oxford, 2000); T. Wilmott, *Birdoswald Roman Fort* (Stroud, 2001).
26. M. Snape and P. T. Bidwell, "The Roman Fort at Newcastle-upon-Tyne", *AA5* 31 (Extra Volume), 175ff.
27. Ian Caruana and David Shotter, *op. cit.*
28. D. C. A. Shotter, "Roman Coins from Maryport", pp. 132-140 in R. J. A. Wilson (ed.), *Roman Maryport and its Setting* (Kendal, 1997) (CWAAS Extra Series 28).
29. D. C. A. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England* (Lancaster, 1990), 55, 91ff., 238ff; D. C. A. Shotter, "The Cumberland Coast and the Evidence of Roman Coin-loss", pp. 195-204 in R. J. A. Wilson and I. D. Caruana (eds.), *Romans on the Solway: essays in Honour of Richard Bellhouse* (Kendal, 2004).
30. S. H. Penney, "The Dalzell Collection", *Contrebis* 5 (1977), 23-26; D. C. A. Shotter, "Roman Coins from Carlisle", *CW2*, lxxviii, 204.

