

XII MUSEUM NOTES, 2003

1. A ROMAN COIN HOARD FROM LONGHORSLEY

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2002, 70 Roman bronze coins – 61 *sestertii* and 9 *dupondii/asses* – were found at Longhorsley, Northumberland (NZ 14 95) with the aid of metal detectors on cultivated land at a depth of 30cm. The coins range from one extremely worn *as* of Vespasian to one lifetime issue of Faustina II, who died in AD 175.¹

Vespasian (AD 69–79)	1
Domitian (AD 81–96)	2
Trajan (AD 98–117)	7
Hadrian (AD 117–138)	17
Sabrina	1
Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61)	14
Faustina I	1
Reign of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–80)	
Faustina II	1
Illegible	26
Total	70

The coins form a typical pattern of worn *aes* from the first and second centuries in Roman Britain. Along with the coins, evidence of metalworking was recovered in the form of a bronze sprue, that is the excess metal which forms in the mouth of a casting vessel (fig. 1).² The metallurgy of the sprue implied a zinc-rich source, consistent with the coins in the hoard, suggesting that the coins were intended for recycling.³

COMPARISON WITH OTHER LATE SESTERTII HOARDS

Sestertii circulation in Britain and northern Gaul stagnated with issues of the Adoptive and

Antonine emperors.⁴ The coins continued to be used in Britain up until about AD 270 (the *terminus post quem* of the Gare Hoard, see below). Because of this longevity of circulation and reliance on old coin, an unworn *sestertius* is a rarity in a British coin hoard or assemblage.⁵ During the AD 44–64 dearth of *aes* production countermarking suggests that there was some concern about the condition of the older coin and Boon has suggested that the care over the *aes* exhibited in the first century may have been due to the careful ‘scrutiny of coin for the *stipendia*’.⁶ This is in contrast with *sestertii* in circulation during the later second and third centuries, which can be understood in terms of their relative unimportance to military pay-packets in the face of the plentiful amount of debased silver coinage available at the time, in turn reflected in the move during Antonine times to supply the military provinces with fewer *aes* and more silver – the converse of the civilian provinces.⁷

The best comparisons to Longhorsley are the Gare Hoard from Cornwall (1,076 base silver and *aes* coins to AD 270)⁸ and the Curridge hoard from Berkshire (425 *aes* to AD 209).⁹ However, the nearest significant find of *sestertii* is from Coventina’s Well on Hadrian’s Wall. The latter is not a hoard but a votive assemblage, accumulated throughout the Roman occupation, including *sestertii* deposited up to the AD 260s when this coin type ceased to be minted.¹⁰ It is nevertheless worth including for comparison since the circulation had effectively frozen by the end of the second century, giving the Coventina’s Well assemblage a profile of issues similar to late *sestertius* hoards:

Reign	Longhorsley %	Gare %	Curridge %	Coventina %
Early Julio-Claudian	—	—	—	0.13
Claudius (AD 41–54)	—	—	—	0.26
Nero (AD 54–68)	—	—	—	0.44
Civil War – Titus (AD 68–81)	1.43	0.48	3.06	6.94
Domitian (AD 81–96)	2.86	1.74	3.06	6.13
Nerva/Trajan (AD 96–117)	10.00	6.27	17.65	21.58
Hadrian (AD 117–38)	25.71	15.62	24.24	29.63
Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61)	21.43	25.07	23.29	28.06
Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–80)	1.43	33.08	15.76	5.19
Commodus (AD 180–92)	—	10.70	5.18	1.30
Early Severan (AD 193–217)	—	2.41	1.41	0.21
Later Severan (AD 217–35)	—	1.45	—	0.08
Post Severan (to AD 260)	—	0.96	—	0.06
Irregular	—	0.10	—	—
Illegible	37.14	1.74	6.59	(excl.)
Total no. of coins	(70)	(1037)	(425)	(6171)

The tail off at the end of the Antonine period is quite marked in all the comparative hoards. In the case of the Coventina's Well coins this might be exaggerated by cherry-picking at the time of its discovery, which would presumably have removed the newer, less worn examples.

Significantly, prior to the final tail off there is a relatively gradual decline from a Hadrianic/early Antonine peak in all except Longhorsley. The latter hoard draws up short, which suggests an Antonine deposition before the coins of Marcus Aurelius – which the comparanda show



Fig. 1 The Longhorsley Coin Hoard. The sprue is front right.

were still relatively well supplied – had reached their full importance in the circulation. Less likely (on grounds of the total absence of later Antonine coins) is a later deposition with only the most worn coins deliberately selected for the melting pot.

POSTSCRIPT

(L. Allason-Jones)

The findspot of this hoard is intriguing. The farm lies 28 miles north of Hadrian's Wall but adjacent to the route of the Devil's Causeway. However, no Roman military site is in close proximity and the nearest known civilian settlement site is at Smallburn (NZ 1435 9275), two miles to the south-east.

The discovery of a hoard of Roman coins in this area may suggest a hitherto unknown settlement, particularly as the worn nature of the majority of the coins suggests that they were intended to be melted down. It is possible that the hoard was hidden by an itinerant metalworker with the intention of being recovered later and worked elsewhere but the presence of the sprue, with a similar metal content to the coins, argues more strongly that metalworking had already been carried out close at hand and was expected to be in the future.

The Museum of Antiquities is grateful to the landowners and the finders – the Ashington and Bedlington Detector Club, for agreeing to waive their claims to the hoard and jointly present it to the Museum of Antiquities.

NOTES

¹ *Dupondius/as*, 9.76g.rev.HILARITAS SC (Hilaritas stg.1.); *RIC* (Marcus) 1643.

² The sprue is roughly conical (30.59grams; 2.5cm wide by 2.4cm deep) and terminates in the stumps of

three casting channels. A similar sprue was found at Duston, Northamptonshire, alongside coin moulds for Tetrarchic *nummi* and discarded spoil castings from the latter. See G. C. Boon, 'Counterfeit coins in Roman Britain', in *Coins and the Archaeologist* ed. J. Casey and R. Reece, London (1988), 102–88, fig. 11.

³ Metal analysis by Richard Baron, Chemical and Materials Analysis Unit, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

⁴ D. R. Walker, 'The Roman Coins' in *The Finds from the Sacred Spring, II: The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*, ed. B. Cunliffe, Oxford (1988), 300. See also R. Reece, *Coinage in Roman Britain*, London (1987), 68: 'One type of copper hoard that is particular to Britain and the north of Gaul is the group of worn *sestertii* buried in the middle of the third century'; Reece then proceeds to discuss dating implications.

⁵ In addition bronze coins, because of their everyday usefulness, experienced a much higher velocity of circulation than silver and gold and quickly became worn.

⁶ See Boon 1988, 106.

⁷ See A. S. Hobley, *An Examination of Roman Bronze Coin Distribution in the Western Roman Empire AD 81–192* [BAR International Series 688] Oxford (1998), 128.

⁸ R. A. G. Carson, 'Gare (Cornwall) find of Roman silver and bronze coins' in *Numismatic Chronicle*⁷, (1971), 181–8.

⁹ R. Abdy, C. Read, and V. Rigby, 'Curridge, Berkshire: 425 *sestertii* and lower denominations to AD 209' in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain*, 9, ed. R. Abdy, I. Leins, and J. Williams [Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication 36] London (2002), 147–58.

¹⁰ For full details of the Coventina's Well Hoard see L. Allason-Jones and B. McKay, *Coventina's Well, A Shrine on Hadrian's Wall*, Chollerford (1985). Only the surviving portion of the pre-A.D. 260 *aes* assemblage is included on the table since a significant portion of the worn coins were melted down at the time of the discovery.

2. ROMAN VAULTING TUBES (*TUBI FITTILI*) FROM CHESTERS: AN ADDENDUM

R. J. A. Wilson

In *Museum Notes* last year, I published a pair of Roman terracotta vaulting tubes from Chesters on display in the Museum of Antiquities, which had hitherto been interpreted as water pipes; I further speculated as to which building at Chesters they might have come from, and about their possible date (Wilson 2002). Dr Grace Simpson, a former Honorary Curator of the Chesters Museum, has since kindly alerted me to the existence of similar terracotta tubes in the Clayton Collection there. There are four examples in all, and by contrast with the examples in Newcastle they have been published, albeit cursorily: they are listed in Sir Wallis Budge's catalogue of the Chesters Museum as nos 2067–70, where they are described as 'drain pipes' (Budge 1907, 384). In the data-base of the Collection currently in use they carry the inventory numbers CH 1127–8 (= Budge nos. 2067–8) and CH 1131–2 (= Budge nos 2070 and 2069). All are incomplete (none has the nozzle end preserved), and only one (1128) has part of the shoulder from which the nozzle starts. Their maximum surviving lengths vary from 116mm to 175mm, and the maximum external diameter of these four pipes varies from 71mm to 78mm (those in Newcastle have diameters of 71mm and 74mm). All have the distinctive exterior and interior corrugation to allow the pipes to key well with the mortar in which they were intended to be encased when in position in the vault, and three of them (all except 1131) still have mortar adhering to them. The fabric is described as orange. All four are currently on display at the bottom of a case in the centre of the larger of the two display rooms in the Chesters Museum, although some of them can only be seen with difficulty.

As with the pair now in Newcastle, there is no information about the date of the discovery or the precise findspots at Chesters of these four

vaulting tubes: I have already speculated that they may have come from the extramural bath-house in its late second-century or third-century form (Wilson 2002, 184). An alternative possibility, as Dr Grace Simpson has pointed out to me, is that they were found in the bath-house inside the fort next to the *praetorium*. This bath-house was built over the *intervallum* road, obstructing normal circulation here in the process, at what was surely a late stage in the history of the fort (Bruce 1978, 115; Johnson 1990, 26): it seems probable that the visible structure, constructed partly with re-used materials, is not earlier than the fourth century. This small bath-house, however, seems to me to be an unlikely candidate for the sort of outside (probably legionary) help which would have included specialised knowledge of vaulting with *tubi fittili*. Nevertheless, without further discoveries, it must be admitted that the precise contexts of what are now the six vaulting tubes known from Chesters must remain uncertain.

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