

RECORDS OF 'AUREI' FROM CHESTER

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In 1886, W. Thompson Watkin published his pioneering volume *Roman Cheshire*, which summed up the archaeological and literary evidence for the occupation of the county. Among the records of coin finds are descriptions of some ten gold coins and notices of others now lost. Since then further examples have come to light. The updated catalogue below lists all these pieces in chronological sequence, identified according to *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vols. I-IX, 1923-81, abbreviated here as *RIC*.

The most striking aspect of the list is the number of early pieces and the duplication of two types, one of Nero, the other of Titus, during the reign of Vespasian. Although this does appear to be coincidental, it is possible that in the latter case, as in the bronze and silver series from Chester, they represent parts of consignments of pay sent to the legion in the area. The concentration of coins dating from the late 70s could be connected with the increase of activity in Chester when the fortress was put on a permanent basis. It is likely, however, that some pieces may have been kept as savings for a time before they were lost and this may account for the general good condition of those coins still in existence. It is to be regretted that most of the coins listed below are lost or inaccessible and that only one has been found during archaeological excavation (*cf.* catalogue no. 17).

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Finally, this note is dedicated to the memory of her grandfather, T.E. Morgan, for many years Honorary Secretary of the Yorkshire Numismatic Society.

CATALOGUE

- 1 Tiberius A.D. 14-37
 Obv. TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS
 r. head laureate
 Rev. PONTIF MAXIM
 Pax or Livia seated r. holding branch.
RIC, vol. I, 1st. edit. 1923, no. 3, p.103
 'Found at Bank Farm, Sealand, during the lifting of cauliflowers in September 1952 and now in the possession of Mr. S.G. Simmons [Hawarden]'.
 Thompson, 1961, no. 5(i), p.45

- 2 Nero A.D. 54-68
 Obv. NERO CAESAR AVGVSTVS
 r. head
 Rev. IVPITER CVSTOS
 Jupiter seated l. holding thunderbolt in r. hand, sceptre in l.
RIC, vol. I, 1st. edit., 1923, no. 45, p.148
 'In March or April 1886, whilst 'breaking a clod' in a field, close to 'Peck Mill' between Alvanley and Dunham-on-the-Hill . . . the coin is now in the possession of Mr. Humphreys, a resident in the neighbourhood . . . [the coin] is a very well preserved one, and weighs 113 grains'.
 Watkin, 1886, p.312

- 3 Nero
 Obv. not described
 Rev. IVPITER CVSTOS
 Jupiter seated with thunderbolt and sceptre
 as *RIC*, Vol. I, 1st. edit., 1923, nos. 45-7, p.148
 Foregate Street, Chester, 1779
 Watkin, 1886, p.238

- 4 Nero
 Obv. not described
 Rev. SALVS
 A seated figure
 as *RIC*, vol. I, 1st. edit., 1923, nos. 52-6, pp.148-9
 'Found in 1826 in a field near Smith's Walk, Nicholas St., or near Capt. Wrench's house . . . Formerly owned by . . . Mr. S. Gardner, of Eastgate Street'.
 Watkin, 1886, pp.238-9

- 5 Galba June A.D. 68-January A.D. 69
 'In 1870 a fine gold coin of Galba was found at Huxley Gorse in the neighbourhood. It was offered . . . for sale to Mr. Shrubsole, but at a too exorbitant price. What has now become of it is unknown'.
 Watkin, 1886, p.296
- 6 Vitellius 19 April-20 December A.D. 69
 Obv. A VITELLIVS IMP GERMANICVS
 l. head laureate
 Rev. CONSENSVS EXERCITVM
 Mars advancing l. holding spear and flag surmounted by eagle.
RIC, vol. I, 1st. edit., 1923, no. 4, p.229
 Grosvenor-Laing development site, at the rear of the Grosvenor Hotel.
 Grosvenor Museum acc. no. 30.C.1965
 Thompson, 1962, no. i, p.60
- 7 Vespasian A.D. 69-79
 Obv. not described
 Rev. PAX AVG
 Peace with olive branch, standing by an altar so described.
 Not identifiable from description
 'Found in making the foundations of the Castle . . . formerly owned by . . . Mr. S. Gardner of Eastgate Street'.
 Watkin, 1886, p.239
- 8 Titus as Caesar
 Obv. not described
 Rev. COS IIII
 A bull r.
RIC, vol. II, no. 181, p.36; A.D. 75 under Vespasian
 'Found in drain near the Snuff Mills in Handbridge in 1885 . . . In possession of Mr. W.S. Jones, of Chester'.
 An impression of this coin is listed amongst the collections of the Grosvenor Museum, acc. no. 178.1902
 Lawson, 1928, site XCIII, p.187; Watkin, 1886, p.239
- 9 Titus as Caesar
 Obv. not described
 Rev. ANNONA AVG
 Abundance seated l., l. arm resting on chair
RIC, vol. II, no. 218, p.39; A.D. 78, 79 under Vespasian
 'Found in 1882, in Foregate Street, . . . now in possession of Mr. Edwin Lloyd, of Chester'
 Watkin, 1886, p.239

10 Titus as Caesar

Obv. T CAESAR VESPASIANVS

r. head laureate

Rev. ANNONA AVG

Annona seated l. holding bundle of corn ears on her lap in both hands. *RIC*, vol. II, no. 218, p.39; A.D. 78, 79 under Vespasian 'April 15th. 1909. This gold coin was found when excavating was being done to find a water drain in Foregate St. at the top of Love Street'. (Written on original envelope containing coin).

Presented by Mr. W.E. Walton, Waltons the Jewellers (Chester) Ltd., 1 Bridge Street, Chester, 4 July 1961.

Grosvenor Museum, acc. no. 72.C.1961

Thompson, 1962, p.60

11 Domitian as Caesar

Obv. CAESAR AVG F DOMITIANVS

r. head laureate

Rev. COS IIII

Cornucopia

RIC, vol. II, no. 237, p.42; A.D. 76 under Vespasian

A MS. note by Professor Robert Newstead describes the circumstances under which this hitherto unpublished coin was acquired:

'I have this 9th. day of September 1913 purchased a gold coin from Mr. H. Stuart Page of 123 Bridge St., Warrington for the sum of £5-5-0. The coin in question was found at or near the canal side (Queen St.) Chester, about two months since. It was brought to my brother Mr. Alfred Newstead, Curator of the Grosvenor Museum, by the man who found it while excavating for a drain or sewer at the place indicated above almost immediately after it was found, and offered for the sum of twenty five shillings. Subsequent enquiries failed to trace either the man or the coin, but my brother saw the coin a few days ago when it was in the possession of Mr. Page from who I purchased it. On Sept. 1st. Mr. Page (see letter attached herewith) offered the coin for the sum of five guineas. I saw the letter today (Sept. 9th 1913) and immediately wired accepting the offer. I received a wire in reply (attached herewith) stating that I could have the coin today. Immediately proceeded to Warrington and secured it for the sum stated' [A sketch and description of the coin is given here] 'I can add nothing more regarding the coin but will endeavour to interview the man who found it.

Robt. Newstead Sept. 9th 1913'

'The coin was presented to the Chester Archaeological Society shortly after I had purchased it. It is now the property of the City and is exhibited in the Grosvenor Museum. Robt. Newstead Decr. 29th 1939'

The coin does not appear to have been accessioned and has been on display in the Newstead Gallery of the Museum since October 1953. Curiously enough, it is not listed by J.T. Davies, 1922, in the first full catalogue of the Roman coin collections.

- 12 Trajan A.D. 98-117
 Obv. not described
 Rev. PM TRP COS IIII PP
 Hercules with club and lionskin
 as *RIC*, vol. II, nos. 49-50, pp.247-88; A.D. 101-102
 'Found in Boughton . . . Formerly owned by . . . Mr. S. Gardner of Eastgate Street'. Watkin, 1886, p.239
- 13 Faustina I died A.D. 141
 Obv. not described
 Rev. AVGVSTA
 a female figure
 Not identifiable from the description
 'Found in Nun's Gardens . . . Formerly owned by . . . Mr. S. Gardner of Eastgate Street'.
 Watkin, 1886, p.239
- 14 Carausius A.D. 287-293
 Obv. IMP CARAVSIVS AVG
 r. bust laureate, draped and cuirassed
 Rev. CONCORDIA MILITV
 Concordia standing left with two ensigns
RIC, vol. V, part 2, no. 621, p.516
 Said to have been found at or near Chester.
 Neligan Sale (Sotheby's, 1881, lot 184); Trau Sale, Vienna, 1935, lot 3482.
 Shiel, 1977, p.148, no. 1
- 15 Carausius
 Obv. IMP C CARAVSIVS AV
 r. bust laureate, draped and cuirassed
 Rev. OPES IVI AVG
 Abundantia standing left, grapes in right hand, cornucopia in left hand
 Said to have been found at or near Chester.
 Neligan Sale (Sotheby's, 1881, lot 185); Trau Sale, Vienna, 1935, lot 3483; bought by Evans and now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
 Shiel, 1977, pp.149-50, no. 9
 It is curious that although nos. 14 and 15 were offered for sale in 1881, Thompson Watkin does not include them among the other finds of gold coins from Chester or elsewhere in the county. This may be a genuine oversight, despite his assiduity in recording finds large and small in public and private collections and in extracting information from published and manuscript sources (*cf. Roman Cheshire*, 1974 reprint, introduction, pp.v-vi). There is also a slight suspicion that he might not have given credence to the attributed provenance. The coins are included in this catalogue for the sake of completeness.

- 16 Magnentius A.D. 350-353
 Obv. not described
 Rev. VICTORIA AVG LIB.ROMANOR.
 Two figures standing facing each other and with hands joined. A standard or trophy between them.
 Mint mark S.M. AQ; Mint of Aquileia
 as *RIC*, vol. VIII, no. 125, p.326; A.D. January 350-Spring 351
 Crook St., Chester in the collection of Mr. F. Potts
 Watkin, 1886, p.236
 The find spot is recorded in a MS. notebook of H.J. Bellars (died June 1868), one time City Librarian, Chester.
- 17 Magnentius
 Obv. DN MAGNEN-TIVS AVG
 r. bust bareheaded, draped and cuirassed
 Rev. VICT AVG LIB ROM ORB
 Victory and Liberty facing each other holding a trophy between them.
 Mint mark NLVG; Mint of Lyons.
RIC, vol. VIII, no. 119, p.185; A.D. 353
 Hunter Street School excavations, Chester, July 1979, excavations number CHE/HSS 1979 II 67 74; now in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.
 Strickland, 1982, p.15. The coin is illustrated on the cover of the *Grosvenor Museum Excavations Newsletter*, February/March, 1981.
- 18 Valentinian (Valentinian I A.D. 364-375 or Valentinian II 375-392?)
 Obv. not described
 Rev. not known to Thompson Watkin
 'Found near the Cathedral about 1788 . . . In 1849 owned by Hugh Neill, Esq., of Liverpool'.
 Watkin, 1886, p.239
- 19 A small Roman gold coin was found by Col. Wilson in his garden (at Kelsall) c. 1932 and subsequently lost. Information *ex* Canon M.H. Ridgway and recorded in 'Records of Archaeological Finds in Cheshire', no. 161, a MS. account of local finds which is held in the Grosvenor Museum.

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