

ROMAN COINS: BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE YORKSHIRE MUSEUM – ALEC BOYD AND KERRIE HOFFMAN

July 24, 2015 Pat Hadley Finds, Museum
Archaeology, Roman Coins, digitisation, Numismatics, Romans, Wikipedia, Yorkshire

The Yorkshire Museum's [Numismatic \(money and medals\) collection](#) is composed of over 44,000 objects, approximately 35,000 of which are coins. As you can imagine with a collection of this size the documentation and curation of these objects is a massive undertaking. We took up the challenge of helping curator Andrew Woods with this task. One day per week for 6 months we volunteered to photograph primarily Roman Republican coins and then update the records for these objects to provide a more precise location in the museum store. This work makes the collection more accessible both physically and digitally.



A wooden storage cabinet with one tray removed. Coins are placed in each of the round depressions.

Meeting at 10:00am we proceeded to the museum's research room situated behind the scenes at the Yorkshire Museum. Our daily routine began by setting up state of the art photography equipment. Andy would then select a series of objects for the day. Our main task was to use this equipment to photograph these objects and produce high resolution digital images.



Kerrie photographing coins

These images could be used for both documentation and presentation material. We then had to update the museum's collection database to include these new images and revise the object's storage locations. Each day we took turns alternating between these two tasks to broaden our exposure to the curatorial process.



Numismatics volunteer Alec updating the YMT database with information about coins

For each coin we photographed both the obverse (heads) and the reverse (tails). A coin's obverse usually depicts the current ruler whilst the reverse often shows an image (such as a god, animal, or structure) or phrase which symbolises the ruler's sovereignty. During our time on this project we took over 6000 photographs of over 3000 objects, averaging approximately 200 per week. As we worked through the collection we saw the faces of 45 emperors and 13 kings.



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This is a coin we photographed in our first week and the [Wikipedia](#) page has been viewed 16000 times

The images taken for this project are not exclusive to the YMT online [public resource](#). They have already made their way to Wikipedia and we hope that they will soon be featured in an [online collection](#) with contributors across the world. The image above is featured on the Wikipedia article: '[Gold coin](#)'.

Over the six months we did not work exclusively with the Roman collection and had opportunities to document coins of other archaeological periods. Highlights included:

Photographing and preparing parts of the [Waterloo](#) collection for display at the Castle Museum.

Documentation of the Blake Street Hoard, the oldest hoard from York.

Preparing English Civil War coins in the Breckenbrough Hoard for display.

Photographing the returning [Vale of York Viking Hoard](#) now on display at the Yorkshire museum alongside our images.

We are now coming to the end of this project, with the hope that this and similar projects will allow more people to contribute to the documentation of the museum collections and further their accessibility. Many fantastic opportunities also currently exist, details of which can be found on the [YMT website](#).

We will be completing another post to show you interesting coins we have photographed, and some of our personal favourites, so check back soon!

This post originally appeared on the [York Museums Trust Blog](#): [Roman Coins: Behind the Scenes](#). It was posted by Pat Hadley on behalf of Kerrie and Alec.