

## THE MATTISHALL HOARD OF ROMAN SILVER COINS

*By*

BARBARA GREEN, B.Sc., A.M.A. and T. H. MCK. CLOUGH, M.A.

ON Thursday, 18 January 1968, a hoard of about 1100 Roman silver denarii and antoniniani, concealed in a pottery jar, was discovered on a building site at Mattishall, near East Dereham, Norfolk (N.G.R. TG 04881115). The coins, having been cleaned and identified at the Castle Museum, Norwich, were declared Treasure Trove at a coroner's inquest held on 12 February 1968. This short account is designed to place the hoard within its archaeological context; it is hoped that a fuller numismatic publication will follow.

The hoard was discovered by Mr. W. Tyrrell and Mr. C. Lovick while they were preparing the side of a driveway leading to garages for bungalows on the Walnut Tree development site near the centre of Mattishall village. Mr. Lovick directed a blow of his shovel at what he thought was a flint; this broke and disgorged about two hundred coins, which were coloured green by the products of corrosion. Together the two men lifted the lower part of the pot, which contained the remainder of the coins fused together in a solid mass. Realizing that the discovery might be of importance, but unaware of the true composition of the coins, they brought the pot and its contents to the Castle Museum.

On the following day, the writers of this report were able to visit the site and investigate the immediate area of the find. It was clear that the pot had been buried in a shallow pit which cut slightly into the natural boulder clay. Fragments of other Roman vessels and a small quantity of burnt daub were found in the pit fill, which was somewhat darker and different in feel to the surrounding earth; no objects of later date were found other than a fragment of coarse brick. Both the size of the pit and the nature of the fill, despite the presence of other sherds, indicated that this fill was not an accumulation of domestic refuse. The evidence pointed to the pit being dug specifically as a place of concealment for the hoard. It is possible that the other sherds were placed in the pit around and above the vessel to protect and cover it; they may, on the other hand, represent a meagre scatter of surface debris which was shovelled into the pit when it was filled immediately after the deposition of the hoard. With the exception of this pit and its contents, no signs of Roman domestic occupation were noted. The state of the site, which had been much disturbed by the activity of mechanical diggers during the construction of bungalows, paths and driveways, made further investigation outside the immediate area of the pit impracticable. The buildings of the present village are likely to obscure any further evidence for Roman occupation in the vicinity; however, it is possible that Roman material may be found in an adjacent garden.<sup>1</sup>





Plate 1. Denarii from the Mattishall hoard (3)





Plate II. Antoniniani from the Mattishall hoard (1)





Balbinus (238): 1 D, 2 A	Pl. II.4 (IV.2, no. 10)
Pupienus (238): 1 D	Pl. I.23 (IV.2, no. 4)
Gordian III (238-44): 5 D, 146 A	Pl. I.24 (IV.3, no. 129A)
	Pl. II.5 (IV.3, no. 207, mint of Antioch)
Philip I (244-9): 75 A	Pl. II.6 (IV.3, no. 19)
Otacilia Severa, his wife: 13 A	Pl. II.7 (IV.3, no. 129)
Philip II (247-9): 19 A	Pl. II.8 (IV.3, no. 218d, Philip as Caesar)
Trajan Decius (259-61): 11 A	Pl. II.9 (IV.3, no. 92b, commemorating Marcus Aurelius)
Herennia Etruscilla, his wife: 7 A	Pl. II.10 (IV.3, no. 59b)
Herennius Etruscus, his son: 4 A	Pl. II.11 (IV.3, no. 138)
Trebonianus Gallus (251-3): 11 A	Pl. II.12 (IV.3, no. 46a)
Volusian (251-3): 5 A	—
Aemilian (252-3): 1 A	—
Valerian I (253-60): 7 A	—
Gallienus (253-68): 15 A	Pl. II.13 (V.1)
Salonina, his wife: 2 A	Pl. II.14 (V.1, no. 68, mint of Asia)
Valerian II (Caesar 253-5): 1 A	—
Saloninus (259): 1 A	—
Postumus (259-68): 3 A	Pl. II.15 (V.2, no. 73)

Only the lower part of the jar which contained the hoard survives, the neck and rim being missing (Fig. 1). This is 4.5 inches high; when complete the

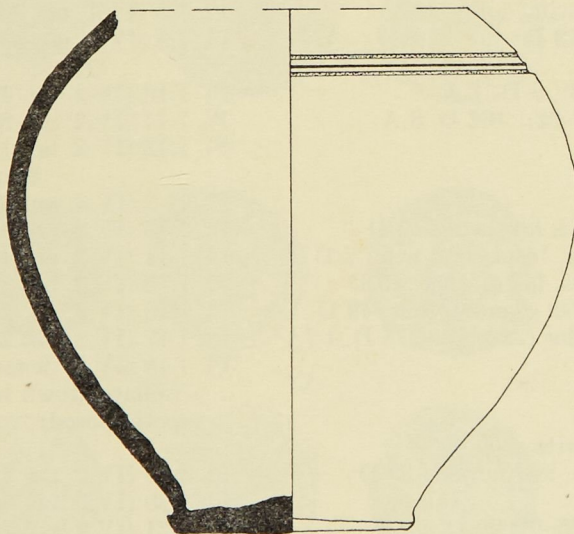


Fig. 1. The pot which contained the Mattishall hoard ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )



jar was probably 6.5 inches high. The grey fabric is hard and slightly sandy; it is well-fired. The body of the vessel was originally burnished black. The jar is decorated with two shallow, horizontal grooves above the maximum diameter. The form and fabric are similar to other third century A.D. vessels from Norfolk, but the absence of the neck and rim makes accurate dating and comparisons impossible.

The latest coin in the Mattishall hoard is dated to 260, and concealment probably took place soon after that date. Mattishall thus becomes the thirteenth hoard concealed in the third quarter of the third century to be recorded in Norfolk.<sup>3</sup> Most of these hoards were buried either about 270 or after about 274 following Aurelian's reform of the coinage, but two were probably concealed at about the same time as Mattishall: first, a small hoard of sixteen coins found in 1957 "near Norwich" (probably in Cringleford), and secondly a very much larger hoard found in 1946 at Caister-by-Yarmouth (Caister-by-Yarmouth II) which contained over 900 coins. The latest coins in these two hoards were struck under Postumus. Mattishall forms an addition to a group of twenty-four British hoards concealed between 253-268.<sup>4</sup>

Mattishall resembles Caister-by-Yarmouth II in the absence of silver-washed base metal coins. The date range of Mattishall, from Antoninus Pius to Postumus, also recalls that of Caister-by-Yarmouth II, although the earliest coins there were legionary denarii of Mark Antony (died 30 B.C.). Only two other Norfolk hoards of the period have a similarly wide date range. The Emneth II hoard (whose find spot was in fact in the parish of West Walton) found in 1941 had over 740 coins ranging from Septimius Severus (193-211) to the Tetrici (270-3); the enormous hoard of 17,000 coins found at Baconsthorpe in 1878, of which only about one-quarter appear to have been recorded, ranged from Nerva (96-8) to Aurelian (270-5).

A number of historical events may have led to the concealment of the Mattishall hoard in about 260. Saxon pirates were beginning to harass the east coast, and the construction of forts to guard anchorages for detachments of the British fleet was under way. It was a period of dynastic uncertainty, with a rapid succession of short-lived emperors. In the forty years between 244 when Gordian III was murdered and the accession of Diocletian in 284, the names of some fifty-five emperors or Caesars are recorded. It was a time of great economic strain and the imperial treasury was approaching bankruptcy. The silver coinage was increasingly debased, and the later antoniniani of Gallienus, although nominally silver, were in fact produced in base metal and coated with a silver wash. The good silver coins of earlier issues were therefore sought after and hoarded as an investment.

The Mattishall hoard probably represented the savings of a local Romano-British farmer. Although no evidence of occupation in the vicinity was found apart from the pottery accompanying the hoard, it is unlikely that the coins would have been concealed at any great distance from a habitation.<sup>5</sup> This hoard is of considerable interest in providing evidence for occupation in an area which has hitherto been blank on the distribution maps.<sup>6</sup> In the past it



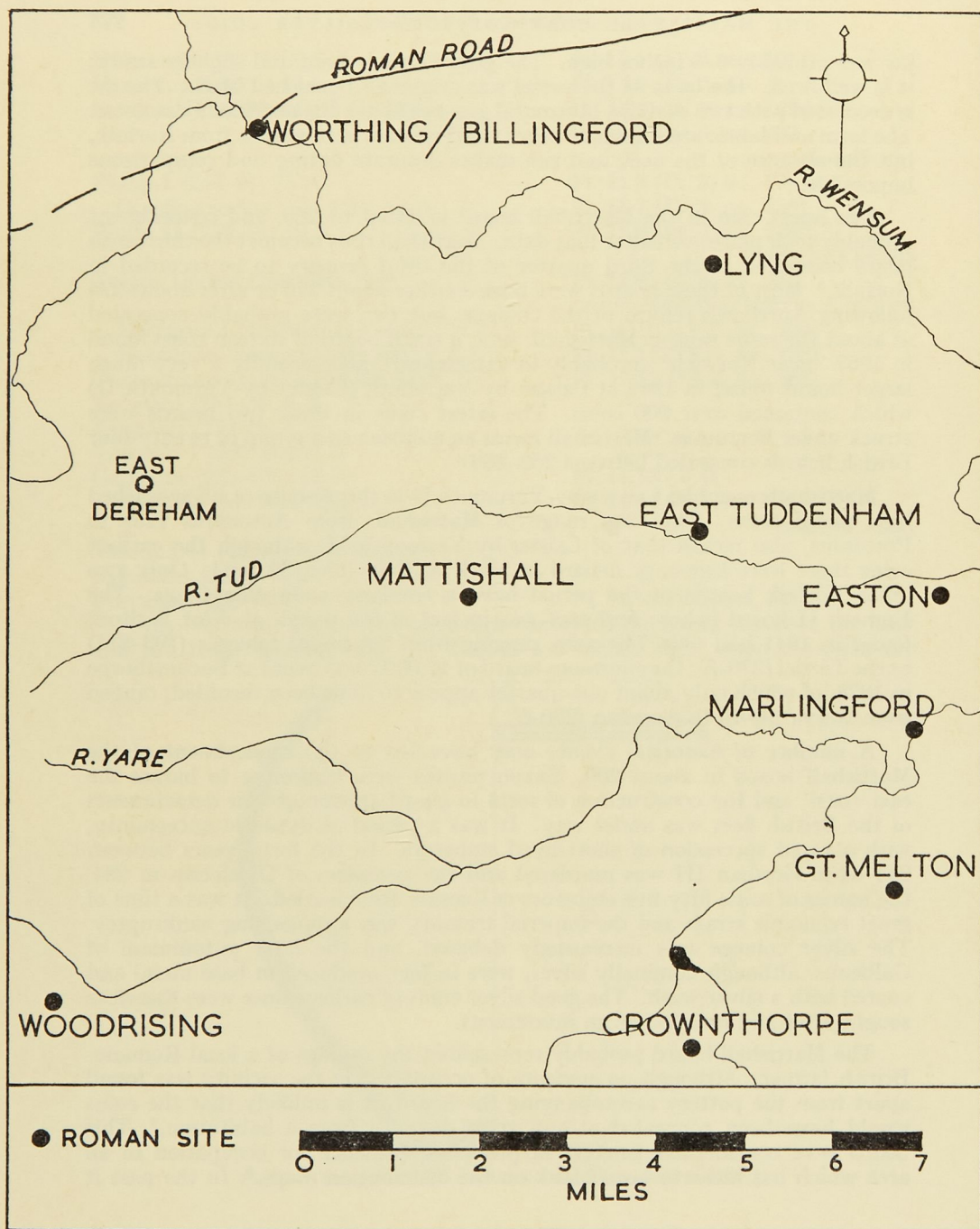


Fig. 2. Distribution of Roman finds in the Mattishall area



has been suggested that there was comparatively little clearance of the forests on the heavy boulder clays of central Norfolk and Suffolk. Fieldwork in recent years has shown that this is not strictly true, although the main areas of occupation were still on the lighter soils as they had been in prehistoric times. Considerably more fieldwork is needed in the East Dereham area. The nearest recorded sites (see map) are several miles away. A scatter of sherds, coins and building materials near the river Wensum in Billingford and Worthing parishes probably indicates a minor settlement which grew up at the crossing of the river by the east-west road from Caister-by-Yarmouth to the fens at Denver.<sup>7</sup> A ceremonial cavalry helmet and vizor mask were found at this crossing in 1948 and 1951 respectively.<sup>8</sup> A single pottery kiln, dating from A.D. 100-130 was excavated in 1959 in the gravel pit at Lyng. A possible minor settlement is recorded beside the river at Marlingford. Trial excavations there in 1949 by G. P. Larwood indicated that these finds may well not be *in situ* but have washed downstream from another site.<sup>9</sup> A denarius of Vespasian, some sherds and a lump of iron slag indicate occupation of some sort at East Tuddenham, but as yet there are no indications of a building. Two other coin hoards have been found in the area, at Easton in 1851<sup>10</sup> and at Great Melton in 1887.<sup>11</sup> The Easton hoard of some 4000 bronze coins was concealed about A.D. 340, while the Great Melton hoard of coins was deposited about A.D. 180. The Roman bricks in Great Melton Church provide further evidence for Romano-British occupation nearby. A Romano-Celtic temple at Crownthorpe<sup>12</sup> and a large rural building (perhaps a villa) discovered at Woodrising<sup>13</sup> complete the short list of sites nearest to Mattishall. Within this area there are one or two records of finds of single Roman sherds and coins. Several of the coins come from gardens and their provenance is suspect in the absence of further evidence. A number of Roman roads may cross the area. Mr. W. F. Edwards has suggested that a road from the west gate of Venta Icenorum (Caistor-by-Norwich) may run through Great Melton to cross the southern part of Mattishall parish,<sup>14</sup> but considerably more field-work is needed to establish this with any certainty.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>7</sup>Since this paper went to press it has been possible to carry out a limited investigation of the building site. P. Wade-Martins has found further pottery and signs of domestic occupation. It is hoped to carry out a small excavation in summer 1968.

<sup>8</sup>Mattingly, H. and Sydenham, E. A. *et al.* *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. III, 1930; Vol. IV, Pt. 1, 1936, Pt. 2, 1938, Pt. 3, 1949; Vol. V, Pt. 1, 1927, Pt. 2, 1933.

<sup>9</sup>*Baconshorpe*, 1878: about 17,000 coins, Nerva-Aurelian; *Arch. Journ.*, xxxviii, 1881, 433-4. *Caister-by-Yarmouth II*, 1946: about 900 coins, Mark Antony-Postumus; Jenkins, G. K., "The Caister-by-Yarmouth Hoard", *Num. Chron.*, vii, 6th Ser., 1948, 175-179. *Caistor-by-Norwich B*, 1929: 86 coins, Postumus-Tetricus II; Atkinson, D., "Caistor



Excavations, 1929", *Norf. Arch.*, xxiv, 1932, 135-6. *Choseley I*, 1942: about 300/350 coins, Gordian III-Claudius II; Carson, R. A. G., "The Roman Coin Finds at Choseley", *Norf. Arch.*, xxx, 1953, 353-7. *Choseley II*, 1945: about 600 coins, Gordian III-Victorinus; *ibid.* *Emmeth I* (find spot actually in Walsoken parish), 1938: about 1600/2000 coins, Gordian III-Aurelian; Robertson, A. S., "A Roman Coin Hoard from Emmeth, Norfolk", *Num. Chron.*, 6th Ser., v, 1946, 147-53. *Emmeth II* (find spot actually in West Walton parish), 1941: over 740 coins (including those reported since publication), Septimius Severus-Tetricus I; Mattingly, H., "The Emmeth Hoard", *Norf. Arch.*, xxviii, 1945, 107-10. *Holme Hale*, 1943: about 40 coins, Gallienus-Claudius II, "Roman Britain in 1943", *Journ. Roman Studies*, xxxiv, 1944, 79. *Near Norwich* (? Cringleford), 1957: 16 coins reported, Elagabalus-Postumus; unpublished. *Stiffkey*, before 1931: 18 coins, Volusian-Victorinus; C.E.B., "Roman Coins from Norfolk", *Num. Chron.*, 5th Ser., xi, 1931, 316-7. *Thurton*, 1707: number of coins unknown, Gallienus, Victorinus, Tetricus, Quintillus, etc.; *V.C.H. Norfolk*, I, 1901, 322. *Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalen*, 1860's: 27 [28] coins, Valerian I-Victorinus (a coin of Tetricus may be a stray); Sutherland, C. H. V., "A Hoard of Roman Coins from Magdalen, Norfolk", *Num. Chron.*, 5th Ser., xvii, 309-11.

<sup>1</sup>Frere, S., *Britannia* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 188.

<sup>2</sup>See footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup>Clarke, R. R., *East Anglia* (Thames and Hudson, 1960), 116, fig. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Margary, I. D., *Roman Roads in Britain* (Phoenix House, 1955), 240 f.

<sup>5</sup>Toynbee, J. M. C. and Clarke, R. R., "A Roman decorated helmet and other objects from Norfolk", *Journ. Roman Studies*, xxxviii, 1948, 20-7, pls. ii-iv; *Journ. Roman Studies*, xli, 1951, 131-2, fig. 20 and pl. xi.

<sup>6</sup>*Arch. News Letter*, 3, No. 2, 1950, 38.

<sup>7</sup>*V.C.H. Norfolk*, I, 1901, 316.

<sup>8</sup>*Arch. Journ.*, xlvii, 1889, 362.

<sup>9</sup>*Journ. Roman Studies*, I, 1960, 228.

<sup>10</sup>Clarke, R. R., "Roman Norfolk since Haverfield", *Norf. Arch.*, xxx, 1952, 149.

<sup>11</sup>In lecture to Norfolk Research Committee, 1964, unpublished.

<sup>12</sup>In September 1968 Norwich Castle Museum purchased the major part of the hoard; the British Museum retained 15 coins.