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**A GROUP OF GOLD-PLATED ROMAN COINS¹
FROM WOODCOCK HALL**

by Robin A. Brown

On 20th September, 1973, a group of four gold-plated bronze coins was found at the Woodcock Hall Roman settlement site, Saham Toney. The four coins, stuck together one on top of another, were at first mistaken for a rather battered screw-top from a soft drinks bottle. Closer examination showed that the 'bottle top' comprised the following:

1. Diocletian, AE post-reform radiate ('antoninianus')
 2. Maximianus, AE post-reform radiate
 3. Galerius, AE post-reform radiate
 4. Constantine I, AE 3
- (see Fig. 1 and Pls. I-IV)

The coins adhered together on account of having been individually wrapped in cloth, the fragmentary remains of which were preserved and later subjected to specialist examination. Two, and probably all four, coins are counterfeit, probably cast.

The group of coins is of interest for the following reasons:

- a. Gold-plated coins are rare, and the purpose behind this treatment is open to speculation.
- b. The selection of these coins in relation to the particular emperors together with the reverse designs and the mints represented, is unusual.
- c. Post-reform radiates are rare in this country, and three together is particularly unusual.
- d. The survival of the cloth fragments and their interpretation.

Gold-plated coins

Gold-plated coins have been found in this country and other parts of the Roman Empire, but rarely. This, in itself, would suggest that the Woodcock Hall group is of especial interest.

The first question to ask is whether such coins were meant to deceive other individuals. Was gilding an attempt on the part of a forger to pass off bronze coins as *aurei* or *solidi*? Gold coins of this particular period would not have resembled any of the coins in this group, and even the weights would have been different (a *solidus* of Constantine I would have had a theoretical weight of 4.55 grams). If these coins were designed to be passed off as genuine the recipient would have had to be quite ignorant of the appearance and weight of the authentic item — not an impossible supposition, but somehow hardly a credible possibility.

No.	Emperor	Type of Coin	Obverse legend & type	Reverse legend & type	Mint	Coin Weight		Rev axis	RIC no.	Dates of issue
						as found	as new			
1.	DIOCLETIAN	AE post-reform radiate (counterfeit)	IMP C C VAL DIOCLETIANVS P F AVG radiate head to right, draped, cuirassed	CONCORDIA MILITVM HB Diocletian receiving small statue from Jupiter	Heraclaea	1.83 grams	3.0 grams	↑	VI 13	circa A.D. 295-296
2.	MAXIMIANUS	AE post-reform radiate (possibly counterfeit)	IMP C M A MAXIMIANVS P F AVG radiate head to right, cuirassed	CONCORDIA MILITVM KA • Maximianus receiving small statue from Jupiter	Cyzicus	2.78 grams	3.0 grams	↑	VI 13	circa A.D. 295-296
3.	GALERIUS	AE post-reform radiate (possibly counterfeit)	GAL VAL MAXIMIANVS NOB C radiate head to right	in wreath: VOT X F K	Carthage	2.59 grams	3.0 grams	↑	VI 35 (b)	circa A.D. 296-305
4.	CONSTANTINE I	AE 3 (counterfeit)	IMP CONSTANTINVS P F AVG laurelled helmeted head to right, cuirassed	VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINC PERP * • STR Two winged victories with cippus: VOT PR on altar	Trier	3.89 grams	3.0 grams	↑	VII 221	circa A.D. 319

Fig. 1 Coin details

Plate I

(a)



Coin No. 1 obverse
Diocletian gilded AE post-reform radiate.

(b)



Coin No. 1 reverse

Plate II

(a)



Coin No. 2 obverse
Maximianus gilded AE post-reform radiate

(b)



Coin No. 2 reverse

Plate III

(a)



Coin No. 3 obverse
Galerius gilded AE post-reform radiate.

(b)



Coin No. 3 reverse

Plate IV

(a)



Coin No. 4 obverse
Constantine I, AE 3

(b)



Coin No. 4 reverse

Roman law on counterfeiting was very strict, particularly in the matter of gold. Generally speaking all counterfeiting was regarded as fraud, but silver and gold forgeries were regarded with particular displeasure, since there was a legal distinction from bronze. Bronze coins were nominally the responsibility of the Senate, and many coins carried the legend S.C. (= *Senatus Consulto* = by decree of the Senate), whereas gold and silver coins were considered the prerogative of the emperor. The forgery of gold coins was therefore primarily *lèse-majesté*. An additional factor, since all coins bore the likeness of the emperor, was that a counterfeit was an offence against 'the image and superscription' of the divinity of the ruler. The malefactor could therefore be charged not only with forgery, but with treason, blasphemy and sacrilege. The penalty under Theodosius the Great was burning alive.²

Ulpian prescribed the most severe measures against those caught tampering with gold coins — *honestiores* would be exiled, *humiliores* sent to the mines and slaves crucified.

Setting aside any deliberate attempt to deceive fellow human beings, what other purpose might be served by gilding coins? It is possible that the practice is not unlike the present-day fashion in cheap jewellery, where coins of low denomination, or de-monetarised coins such as farthings, threepenny bits or sixpences, are gilded as mementoes and kept in the form of finger rings or attachments to necklaces.

We venture on to dangerous ground to attribute present-day attitudes and beliefs to people so far distant in the past, but there does appear to be evidence that coins were pierced,³ presumably to be strung on a piece of cord, or sewn to clothing to act as charms or simple adornments. Whether gilding was ever done to enhance the appearance of such coins is not known, but the fact remains that none of these four coins was pierced for suspension.

Rasmussen⁴ has pointed out that medals of merit and genuine gold coins were sometimes incorporated into pendants, as in an example in the Metropolitan Museum in New York that is composed of fourteen *solidi* of the emperors Theodosius I, II and Justinian. It is conceivable that gold-plated coins could have been used in the same way. Rasmussen notes that the find-spots of known examples suggests that such treatment was mainly a provincial custom.

A more likely possibility is that these coins were gilded as a temple offering. Examples from this country have been found at the Hayling Island Iron Age shrine and from excavations at the reservoir in the Roman baths at Bath.⁵ It was a well-known custom to offer miniature votive offerings at shrines, or in some way to fulfill a vow in what, in our eyes' might appear to be a slightly improper or underhand fashion. The accepted attitude in the Roman period appears to have been that if four gold coins had been promised to the god in return for some favour, then the god would not be upset or feel cheated, or perhaps even be aware, that the offerings were only gold-plated bronze coins (and counterfeit at that).

However, the find-spot of the coins has so far revealed no corroborating evidence that the location was a temple site, and since the coins were carefully wrapped in linen, each one individually, it seems possible that the coins had not yet actually been offered, but were still in the owner's possession.

There remains the possibility that the coins were plated in modern times in order to deceive or astonish archaeologists and numismatists. If so, then the coin selection has been made with great care, since three of the four coins are rare in this country, and the hoaxer has gone to considerable trouble to select a wrapping material that is also uncommon in the western Roman empire. Furthermore, the hoaxer chose a field, which until the advent of the metal detector, was not considered part of the Roman settlement site and so would elude chance discovery for many years. On balance the idea of a deliberate hoax seems extremely unlikely, but must still remain a possibility.

The selection of the coins

A discussion of the reasons behind the selection of these four particular coins is based on the assumption that the choice was not totally arbitrary, but deliberate. There can, however, be no way of knowing for certain whether this assumption is a valid one.

There are two factors that suggest the coins were specifically selected, perhaps over a period of time, and these are: the particular emperors chosen, and the particular reverses chosen. These choices, it is arguable, reflect in some way the original owner's attitudes, beliefs or aspirations, perhaps (as might befit a votive group) in a talismanic sense.

Of the 2500 coins in the Woodcock Hall coin collection only 27% still carry a legible mint mark, and these belong principally to the 3rd and 4th centuries. Of these the following mints are the most common:

1. Trier 254 coins
2. Arles 159 coins
3. Lyons 123 coins
4. Siscia 42 coins
5. Aquileia 38 coins
6. London 30 coins

With the exception of London that only operated for a relatively short time, the indication is that the bulk of the Woodcock Hall coins of the time was supplied by Gaulish mints.

The mints represented on the four gilded coins are, in three out of four cases, distant — Heraclea, Cyzicus and Carthage (see Fig. 2). Trier, on the other hand, is not only one of the closest, but also the most commonly represented at Woodcock Hall. In the Woodcock Hall collection few come from the borders of the Mediterranean⁶ and there is no other example from Carthage. In this respect alone the group is unusual and may suggest that they were the property of someone who had travelled the Roman Empire and retained selected coins that held some significance for him. It is possible they represent stages in a journey, a journey that terminated (at least as far as the coins were concerned) in this small settlement in Britain.

The reverses of two of the 'Mediterranean' coins, those of Diocletian and Maximianus are identical in all but detail, and the reverse legend *CONCORDIA MILITVM* undoubtedly had a military association. The *VOTIS* reverse on the coin of Galerius relates to the decennial vows made by the ruler, which would have been associated with the annual donatives to the army in a particular year. The Constantinian reverse, *VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINCIPIS PERPET-VI* ('joyful victory to the eternal leader') has been supposed to have Christian implications, but it seems clear that it would refer to Constantine's victories on the Rhine, a theory supported by the obverse depiction of him wearing a helmet, which, in this instance, also sports a laurel wreath.⁷

With these points in mind, the choice of rulers is also interesting. Why were these four men selected for the gilding treatment?

The Tetrarchy

On his accession in A.D.284 Diocletian recognised that fundamental changes were required if the self-consuming cycle of 3rd century warring military emperors was to be broken. His solution was imaginative — nothing less than a sweeping reorganisation of the way the rulers of the Roman empire were to be chosen. He rationally and skilfully blended aspects of imperial tradition with a recognition of the serious political and military problems that had to be faced.

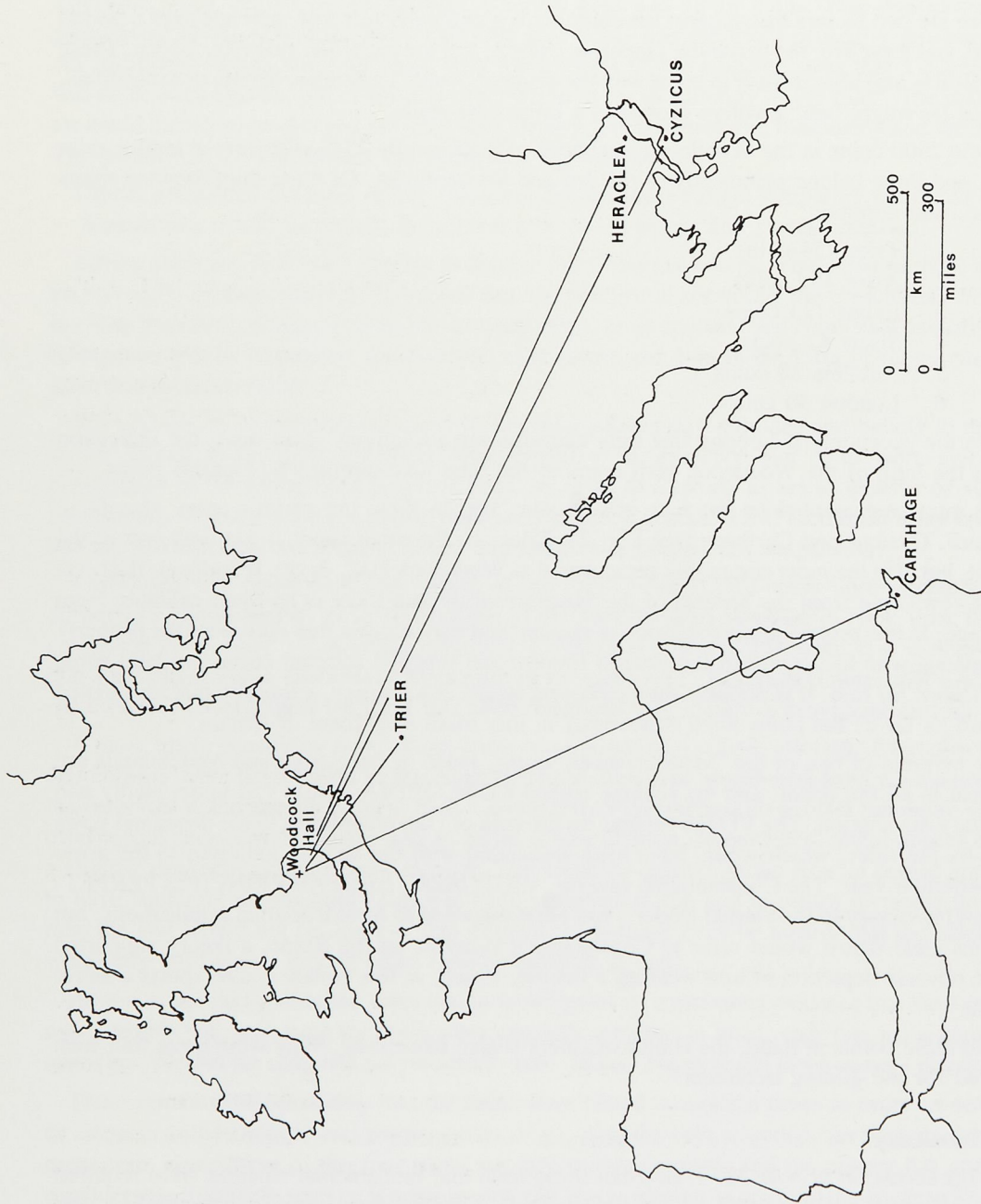


Fig. 2
Mints represented

To this end he chose a co-ruler, Maximianus, elevated to the rank of Caesar but subsequently, in the need to outwit Carausius, further promoted to co-Augustus.

By A.D.292 Diocletian had further decided it was necessary for each of the Augusti to appoint 'junior' emperors, Caesars, so that all four corners of the empire could be guarded, each man bound by ties of adoption and marriage. The plan envisaged that, after an interval, the two senior men, the Augusti, would quietly retire and the Caesars promoted to take their place and two more junior heirs adopted to carry on the self-perpetuating tetrarchic system.

Initially the situation was as follows:

	<i>Eastern Empire</i> (Jovian)	<i>Western Empire</i> (Herculean)
Augusti:	Diocletian	Maximianus
Caesars:	Galerius	Constantius

Galerius was married to Diocletian's daughter Valeria, and Constantius to Maximianus's step-daughter Theodora.

The legitimacy of this arrangement was claimed to derive from the gods of Olympus, namely Jupiter and Hercules, with whom Diocletian and Maximianus were identified. Thus, at a stroke, the two other powerful kingmakers, the army and the senate, were denied the power to appoint their nominees as rulers. Diocletian's new theology, which was to be the fabric that held this complicated arrangement in being, was a bold step. It created a divine, yet selective, dynasty upon which the safety of the empire was to rest.

In A.D.305, in conformity to the plan, Diocletian and Maximianus retired, and the two Caesars were promoted to Augusti. In their place two new Caesars, Severus and Maximinus, were appointed — to the not inconsiderable disappointment of the sons of the Augusti, Constantine and Maxentius.

It was here that the fatal flaw in Diocletian's careful plan was revealed — legitimate first-born sons were deprived of their chance to step onto the ladder leading to the throne, thwarted by an artificial electoral process.

In A.D.306 Constantine began to demolish Diocletian's edifice by having himself proclaimed Augustus on the death of his father in York. From that moment the tetrarchic system began to totter and by the following year the Caesars and the Augusti were at war with each other.

Galerius died in 311, and Diocletian in 312. Constantine defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge on 28th October 312 and became sole emperor in 323.⁸

The symbolism behind the coin choice

It would appear possible, therefore, that the four coins in the group reflect one man's view of recent history. Missing from the group are some important absentees, Constantius, Maximinus and Severus being the most obvious. Perhaps they formed part of the group at some stage and became separated, or perhaps they were never considered for inclusion.

The choice of Diocletian and Maximianus, the two strong pillars of the tetrarchy, each coin carrying the pious hope of harmony with the military, could be significant. Galerius, the senior Caesar, completes the eastern pair of rulers, but Constantine I, the effectual destroyer of the grand plan, is an unexpected addition to the group.

The original owner of the group may have been in the army, and, since Galerius was cruel in his suppression of Christianity, still strong in his pagan belief.

The condition of the coins

The coins themselves were not gilded when they were new. All the coins are worn beneath the gilding and the lettering is sometimes indistinct. Coin weights in three cases are low compared to standard. The collection could not have been completed until at least A.D.319, the date of the issue of Constantine I, probably later if the coins are counterfeits. Gilding must have taken place at some later date, but it is plain that, once gilded, they were treated with care and wrapped individually in linen.

The textile

Fragments of the material that were found stuck between the coins were sent for examination by Penelope Walton and Elizabeth Crowfoot. The report was as follows:

'Fragments of textile, found between gilded coins, the largest piece *circa* 1.3 cm by 0.4cm, folded double, pulled into curve. Flax, undyed, stained green from contact with bronze coins, spinning S in both systems, warp and weft, slightly uneven, with the occasional thicker thread; tabby (plain) weave, no selvedge preserved, count 10/10 threads on 5 mm, *circa* 20/20 threads per cm; originally quite good quality linen. The natural twist of the flax fibres is S (left), but practically all flax of Roman date found in the northern provinces is Z spun⁹ perhaps because in those regions the majority of textiles were of wool, whose fibres had no natural twist. The S-spinning of this fragment suggests the linen was brought, perhaps by someone who had seen service in the Roman army in the Eastern Provinces, Egypt, Syria or Palestine, where flax was the most important fibre used, and S-spinning the rule.'

CONCLUSION

With the wide variety of coin reverses that were in circulation at any one time, the coins in this group can probably be seen as a deliberate selection, serving, in the owner's eyes at least, to convey a significance that may have been political, military or merely sentimental.

The textile used to wrap the coins appears to have originated in the eastern Mediterranean and this, allied to the unusual mat marks on three of the coins, strongly suggests the owner had travelled widely before coming to Britain.

It seems likely that the gilding of the coins was meant to enhance the particular personal association the owner felt for them, whether as keepsakes or, more likely, as votive offerings, each coin carefully and individually wrapped in cloth to preserve the gilding.

In view of the circumstances of the finding of these coins, the possibility of their being modern forgeries appears unlikely.

March 1986

1. Thanks are due to A. M. Burnett, of the Department of Coins & Medals, British Museum, who examined the coins, and to Penelope Walton and Elizabeth Crowfoot who examined the textile fragments. All conclusions drawn remain those of the author.
2. P. Grierson, Roman Law on Counterfeiting, in *Essays on Roman Coinage presented to Harold Mattingley*, Oxford (1956), ed. R. A. G. Carson & E. H. P. Sutherland, 240ff.
3. At Woodcock Hall eight pierced coins have been found, two of Claudius, one of Nero, one unidentified 3rd century radiate and four of the period of Constantine I and his family.
4. N. L. Rasmussen, Were Medals of Merit used and worn in Antiquity? in *Acta Archaeologica*, Vol. xvi (1945), 211-222.
5. M. L. Green, correspondence, 26th June 1985.
6. Of the more distant mints, three coins come from Thessalonika, two from Heraclea, two from Cyzicus, one from Carthage and four from Constantinople.

7. P. M. Bruun, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. vii, (1966), 36.
8. This outline of events leading to Constantine I's sole rule is, of course, only very sketchy. A complete recital of even the principal events between A.D.289 and 323 would take up too much space.
9. J. P. Wild, *Textile Manufacture in the Northern Roman Provinces*, (1970), 38. One fragment from Cambridgeshire, from a coin of Vespasian, has one S and one Z system; an S-spun fragment was found in the coffin of St. Paulinus of Trier.

'ST. CATHERINE'S THORPE'—THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF A MYTH

by Edwin J. Rose and Alan J. Davison

In 1951 Mr. D. W. Aldous, digging his allotment near Hilly Plantation, Thorpe St. Andrew, was surprised to discover a church (site 9646; TG 2671 0902). The site was subsequently excavated by the late R. R. Clarke, and various helpers. Building materials, human skeletons, and Late Saxon and medieval pottery were recovered and presented to Norwich Castle Museum. Apart from a brief note in *Norfolk Archaeology* XXXI, 411-2, the excavation has never been published. The aim of the present article is however not to consider the excavation, but to examine the identification of the church.

Blomefield (1805, IV, 425) has a paragraph describing a church on Mousehold Heath which it is worth quoting at length:

'At the extremity of Pokethorp hamlet . . . is the site of St. Catherine's Chapel, which stood northeast of the said hamlet, about a mile distant from it, upon Mushold Heath; it was an ancient parochial chapel, founded about the time of the Conquest, and was afterwards reconsecrated to the honour of St. William of Norwich, . . . and is commonly called St. William in the Wood; it had a cell of monks . . . residing by it . . . In 1230, Nigel de Hapesburg gave a message and lands in Wiclewood, and the moiety of the advowson of All-Saints church there, to the church of Norwich, on condition that the prior and convent should find a chaplain to serve daily in the chapel of St. Catherine by Thorp Wood, for his own and his ancestors' souls . . . and about 1410, it was united to St. James's parish, and the parochial service transferred thither, the almoner only serving it as a chantry, from that time to the Dissolution, when it was totally demolished; the site of it being now commonly known by the name of Pokethorp churchyard; and in 1550 was leased by the dean and chapter, to William Blevherhaysset, Gent., by the name of the Chapel-yard called St. Williams in the Wood. It was much frequented by pilgrims, who visited it to its dissolution, for in 1506 the almoner accounted for the offerings at St. William's chapel'.

R. R. Clarke, in the note in *Norfolk Archaeology* mentioned above, describes the building excavated in 1951 as 'the site of a medieval church to be identified as the church of St. Catherine which Blomefield and all later writers have confused with the chapel of St. William upon Mousehold Heath, Norwich'. In his handwritten notes in Norwich Castle Museum he writes 'Probably the remains of the church of St. Catherine de Monte' and 'Blomefield asserts that this church was founded about the Norman Conquest and rededicated to St. William in 1168 but this is an error due to confusion between St. Catherine's church and the chapel of St. William'. No detailed reasoning is given for the assumption that Blomefield was in error, except 'Parish of Pockthorpe extended to Gas Hill temp Henry VI'.

Clarke's identification has been followed by all subsequent writers who have mentioned the site, notably Campbell (1975) who suggests that the excavated building was 'the parish church