

# A Medieval Lead Canister from Colchester High Street: Hoard Container, or Floor Safe?

By HOWARD BROOKS, NINA CRUMMY, and MARION M. ARCHIBALD

*IN the year 2000, a lead canister and a penny of Henry III were recovered during a watching brief on a site in Colchester which is within 13 m of the find spots of two 13th-century coin hoards buried in similar canisters. While the container found in 2000 may have held a third such hoard (later recovered), it may also have been used as a floor safe. The site has connections with the Colchester Jewry, who were probably the principal agents in the handling of money and deposition of hoards on this site. The single penny may be simply a coin lost on a site where money changed hands in large quantities, or (speculatively) the only survival from a recovered hoard.*

## INTRODUCTION

By HOWARD BROOKS

The site, at 22–24 High Street (formerly John Menzies, now Superdrug), is on the south side of the principal E.–W. thoroughfare of the medieval and modern town (NGR: TL 9945 2517). A watching brief in January 2000 confirmed the expected survival of Roman and medieval urban strata, heavily cut by modern concrete beams.<sup>1</sup> Following this, an engineering design was devised to re-use existing foundations, which meant that full archaeological excavation was only required in the two areas where below-ground intrusion was unavoidable, the lift-shaft pit, and the tower-crane pit. These two areas were excavated by Colchester Archaeological Trust during April 2000. The excavated deposits were principally Roman in date; the finds and archive will be deposited at Colchester Museum (accession 2000.5). A watching brief was maintained on the other areas of the site, during which a lead canister and a penny of Henry III were recovered; both finds are discussed below.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Brooks, Archaeological Observations at 22–24 High Street, Colchester, Essex (unpubl. client report; Colchester Archaeol. Trust Rep., 57, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> H. Brooks, An Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief at 22–24 High Street, Colchester, Essex (unpubl. client report; Colchester Archaeol. Trust Rep., 101, 2001).

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MEDIEVAL COIN HOARDS FROM COLCHESTER (Fig. 1)

Two medieval coin hoards in lead containers have been found in close proximity to this site.<sup>3</sup> The first hoard (Colchester 1) was discovered in 1902 in the back garden of 25 High Street, now the National Westminster Bank. It consisted of about 11,000–12,000 silver pennies which had been buried in a lead vessel; the closing date was c. 1237. The find spot is 13 m south-east of the lead container found in 2000. The second hoard (Colchester 2) was found in 1969 in a position 6 m east of the 2000 canister, and within the same house plot. It consisted of 14,065 silver coins and 11 laminated forgeries buried in a lidded lead canister with an initial closing date of 1256, but with additional coins added between 12 and 22 years later.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CANISTER

A contractor's mechanical digger dislodged the canister from its original position when it was removing a concrete pile cap. Since the surrounding strata were all of Roman date, it was clear that the container must have been in a post-Roman pit cut down into the underlying Roman levels. The pile cap hole was therefore cleaned up in the hope of clarifying the canister's context. Unfortunately, this operation led to the identification of two adjacent post-Roman features (F61 and F62). Both features, and the surrounding area, were scanned with a metal detector, which led to the discovery in F62 of the medieval penny. The location of the canister can be summarised thus: it came from within a 1 m radius of the point indicated on Figure 1, but whether it came from F61 or the adjacent F62 is unknown. The presence of a medieval coin in F62 probably tips the balance in favour of that feature.

THE MEDIEVAL COIN

By MARION M. ARCHIBALD

The coin (SF 19, (94) F62) is a silver penny of Henry III of the Long Cross type, class Ib, mint of London, as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Obverse: hENRICVSREX·AN

Reverse: LIE TER CI' LON

Weight: 1.405 g

Die axis: approximately 350°

Class I as a whole was issued in 1247–8. The reverse has the earlier form LON rather than the later LVN which was standard from class II onwards. As this coin is not among the latest of class Ib and some class II provincial mints opened in February 1248, this coin was probably produced in 1247.

<sup>3</sup> Both hoards are only summarised here. Details of the 1902 hoard can be found in H. A. Grueber, 'A find of silver coins at Colchester', *Numismatic Chron.*, 4th ser., 3 (1903), 111–76, and of the 1969 hoard in M. M. Archibald and B. J. Cook, *English Medieval Coin Hoards: 1, Cross and Crosslets, Short Cross and Long Cross Hoards* (London, 2001), 67–142.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage: 1, Early Anglo-Saxon to Henry III, c. 600–1272*, 3rd ed. (London, 1994), No. 984; Archibald and Cook, op. cit. in note 3, Colchester hoard No. 611: in British Museum.

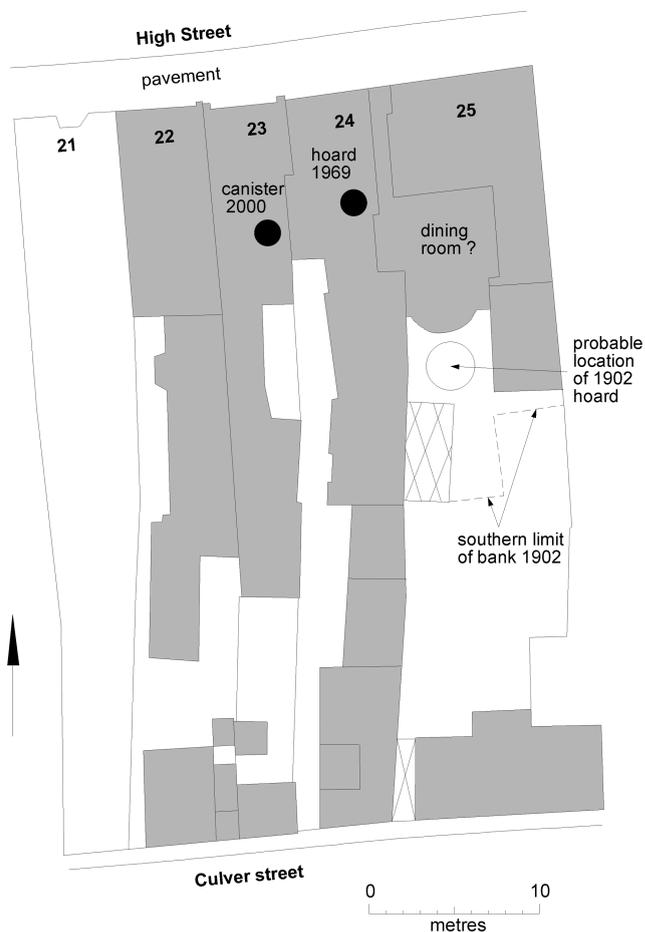


FIG. 1  
Location of canister in relation to previous medieval coin hoards. Outline of buildings derived from the Ordnance Survey 1869 sheet.

Coins of this class could have remained in circulation until the Long Cross was replaced by the Sterling issue after 1279 and was thereafter quickly re-coined into the new type. Coins of class I could thus, theoretically, have been in circulation at any time until c. 1280, but they became a progressively smaller proportion of the circulating medium as natural wastage took its toll and the huge issues in classes III and V were added to the coin-stock, thus reducing the statistical likelihood of a coin lost from circulation being of the earliest class.

The question arises whether this coin is a stray from the 1969 hoard, was originally part of a hoard possibly contained in the 2000 canister, or was simply an isolated casual loss. It was struck early in the Long Cross type and coins of its class were present in the first part of the Colchester 2 (1969) hoard which closed in class Vc. While its weight of 1.405 g is within the range of the hoard coins of class I it is significantly below their average of 1.44 g and is certainly much more worn. While the condition of a single coin can be unrepresentative, this piece would certainly

be out of place among the select coins of Colchester 2, and is unlikely to have been part of that hoard.

Although the stratigraphical relationship between the coin and the 2000 canister is not fully established, the circumstances of their recovery suggest they came from the same or closely adjacent contexts (see above). The 2000 canister is so similar to the one found on the same site in 1969 that it is likely to have been used for the same purpose, that is, containing coins (see below). Although the possibility cannot be completely ruled out, the chance of the canister and penny found in 2000 ending up so close together purely by chance seems very low. It is therefore likely that the present coin could have been one of a group originally placed in the 2000 canister.

#### THE LEAD CANISTER (Figs. 2–3)

*By* NINA CRUMMY

The canister (F62, (84), SF 16) is 197 mm high and 218 mm in diameter and is made from unalloyed sheet lead 2–3 mm thick. The internal volume is about 7,350 cc. It was fitted with a lid with a simple turned-down rim and sunken centre. This is now misshapen and part of its edge is missing, damage that occurred in antiquity. On the top are two scars, surrounded by corrosion products, where a missing strap handle, 19 mm wide, had been fitted. The main body of the canister has also been damaged. The wall is distorted for most of its circumference, and part of the base has been forced upwards. Some of this damage is recent. One area of the wall has been scraped, crumpled and pierced by tools used by the building contractors who found the canister, but, like the lid, it was also damaged and crumpled in antiquity (Fig. 2).

While the lid was cut from plain sheet metal, the wall and base plates were both cut from a decorated sheet (or sheets). The body of the canister was made using a cylindrical wooden former. The sheet for the wall would have been wrapped around the former to enclose the base plate which had been laid on top of one end. The sides of the wall meet at a butt joint, fixed together by soldering a roughly cut strip of lead on to the outside. The base and wall were joined by a similar technique, with a wide strip attached to the base, effectively forming a foot ring, its outer edge being hammered upwards over the wall. The metal rising up onto the wall is thus very irregular and much thinner than that on the base. When the canister was slipped off the former, a thin layer of lead was applied to the internal junctions of the plates to complete the seals.

The decoration on the wall and base consists of a simple pattern of upright low convex mouldings set between about 80 and 91 mm apart, with crosses also formed of low convex mouldings set between them. On the wall the crosses only fill the lower two-thirds (approximately) of each panel formed by the uprights, and a similar arrangement is seen on the base. The thickened rim of the wall is also part of the original casting. The quality of the workmanship of both the rim and the decoration compared to the crude method of fixing the base to the wall and the two ends of the wall together show it to have been made in the medieval period from a Roman sheet-lead object.

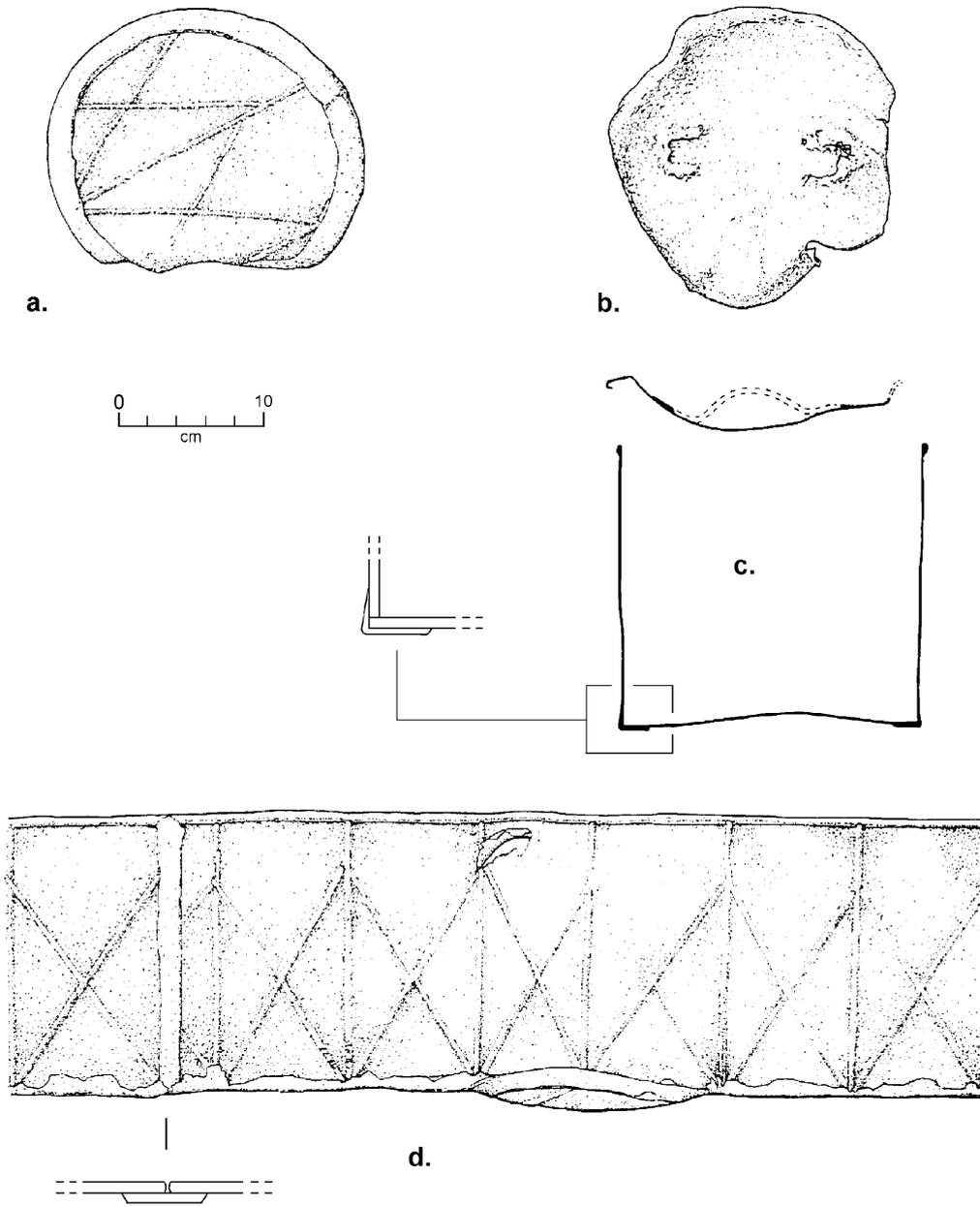


FIG. 2

Detail of lead canister: (a) underside; (b) lid; (c) section with joint detail; (d) outer face, with joint detail. *Drawn by Jason Walker.*



FIG. 3  
The lead canister (height 197 mm). Photograph by Gillian Adams.

During the Roman Period, unalloyed lead was used for many large items, in particular those associated with building construction and water supply, such as pipes or tanks. It was also used to make canisters for cremations and coffins for inhumations. All these items were made from sheet metal produced, exactly as in the Middle Ages, in simple sand-lined beds, the final product showing a characteristic pitted surface on one side. Many lead coffins were decorated with a variety of linear designs and symbols, as were a number of large tanks and caskets identified as Christian ritual objects.<sup>5</sup> The rim on the canister from the Menzies site suggests that the sheet came from a tank, as does the size of the decorative motif and its form.<sup>6</sup>

With the collapse of imperial control over Roman Britain, exploitation of the lead mines of the Mendips, Cornwall, and Wales effectively ceased, though there may be some evidence for extremely small-scale production in the immediate area of the mines.<sup>7</sup> In eastern Britain very few lead objects are found on sites of the Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon Periods, and where they are found, there is often reasonable evidence that they were made from metal taken from Romano-British buildings in the vicinity. For example, the lead used at Mucking, Essex, to make a group of rings is believed to have derived from a nearby villa, which may also have been the source for lead rings found during excavations at Linford, in Mucking parish.<sup>8</sup> There is also direct evidence for the stripping of sheet lead from Roman

<sup>5</sup> H. Toller, *Roman Lead Coffins and Ossuaria in Britain* (BAR Brit. Ser., 38, Oxford 1977), 19–28; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain Under the Romans* (Oxford, 1964), 345–57.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. Guy, 'The Oxborough lead tank', *Britannia*, 20 (1989), 234–7.

<sup>7</sup> C. Thomas, 'An early Christian cemetery and chapel at Ardwall Isle, Kirkcudbright', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 11 (1967), 127–88, at p. 145; L. Alcock, *Dinas Powys: An Iron Age, Dark Age, and Early Medieval Settlement in Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1963), 122.

<sup>8</sup> H. Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking, 2: The Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (London, 1993), 70–1; C. J. Going, 'The Roman period', 20–1 in A. Clarke, *Excavations at Mucking, 1: The Site Atlas* (London, 1993); K. J. Barton, 'Settlements of the Iron Age and Pagan Saxon periods at Linford, Essex', *Trans. Essex Archaeol. Soc.*, 3rd ser., 1.2 (1961), 57–104, at p. 100.

buildings and its subsequent hoarding. In Colchester a pit dug after the collapse of the Butt Road Roman church contained two large fragments of sheet lead that had been cut up with shears. They were probably originally part of the structure of the building or of a tank or similar container used for the supply or storage of water.<sup>9</sup> A cache of similar date and type has also been found at East Malling, Kent, and the folded remains of a dismantled tank, with signs of chopping in places, was found in a late or post-Roman pit at Perry Oaks, Heathrow, Middlesex.<sup>10</sup> Nearly all the late Roman lead tanks known from Britain have been found in a similarly damaged or fragmentary condition,<sup>11</sup> and, while this is often taken as evidence for the destruction of Christian artefacts by pagans, it seems equally likely that the lack of mining and the subsequently rare use of lead in the metal-working repertoire of the smiths of the Migration Period, despite its low melt-point and malleability, led to its perception as a valuable commodity, hence its conversion into a more portable form for hoarding.

The mining of lead ore resumed or increased in the Middle Anglo-Saxon Period and it was once more used structurally, but even in the High-medieval Period it remained a precious commodity, no doubt because of its silver content.<sup>12</sup> The right to mine the metal was only given by royal grant, and there is ample evidence for recycling.<sup>13</sup> For example, in 1390 orders were given for the lead to be stripped from the tower roof of Lydford Castle, Devon, and used for repairs necessary to the royal castles of Cornwall. At the time of the Dissolution all lead from monastic buildings was considered to be the property of the king, and there is both archaeological and documentary evidence for its subsequent removal. At Battle Abbey, East Sussex, folded sheet lead from the gutters of the demolished dormitory was found beneath a pile of stones also set aside for re-use, and empty slots for lead pipes were noted at Bordesley Abbey, Worcestershire. Four lead ingots, stamped with the royal Tudor arms, were found abandoned beneath collapsed stonework at Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, in 1920, and it seems fitting that three were subsequently passed to York Minster and used in the leading of the Five Sisters window. With reference to the Rievaulx find, G. C. Dunning cites figures for the weight of the lead recovered from some of the Yorkshire monastic houses: Jervaulx, 365 foddors (plus 34 and a half already there); Rievaulx, 140 foddors; Byland, 100 foddors; Kirkham Priory, 30 foddors; Northallerton Friars, 15

<sup>9</sup> N. Crummy, P. Crummy and C. Crossan, *Excavations of Roman and Later Cemeteries, Churches and Monastic Sites in Colchester 1971–88* (Colchester, 1993), 184–5.

<sup>10</sup> A. Ward, N. Crummy and I. Riddler, Bradbourne House, East Malling: Post-excavation Assessment (unpubl. rep., Canterbury Archaeological Trust, nd.); D. Petts, The Roman Lead Tank from Perry Oaks (unpubl. rep., Wessex Archaeol.: London Site Code WPR98, Wessex Archaeol. Site Code 45578).

<sup>11</sup> C. Guy, 'Roman circular lead tanks in Britain', *Britannia*, 12 (1981), 271–6; M. W. C. Hassall and R. S. O. Tomlin, 'Inscriptions', *Britannia*, 20 (1989), 327–45, No. 13 at pp. 333–4; L. Elliot and S. Malone, 'Archaeology in Nottinghamshire, 1998: Flawborough', *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 103 (1999), 88–9.

<sup>12</sup> M. Biddle and M. Petersen, 'Lead, tin and pewter working: archaeological evidence', 87–93 in M. Biddle, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> R. F. Homer, 'Tin, lead and pewter', 57–80 in J. Blair and N. Ramsay (eds.), *English Medieval Industries* (London, 1991).

fodders; Richmond Friars, 12 fodders. A fodder being the equivalent of about an imperial ton, the exercise was clearly highly profitable for the crown.<sup>14</sup>

*Other lead coin-hoard containers*

The vessel that contained the 1902 hoard from Colchester (Colchester 1) is in fragments, having been ripped apart by the workmen who found it when they realised that it contained coins. Its precise dimensions are uncertain, but it appears to have been similar in form to the canister found in 1969.<sup>15</sup>

The 1969 canister (Colchester 2) is made from plain sheet lead 1–2 mm thick and stands 227 mm tall.<sup>16</sup> The lid is dished in the centre and slightly turned down at the edge, which is crinkled and in some places markedly creased. The dishing of the centre is believed to represent the lead sinking over time under its weight and/or from soil pressure into the empty space above the topmost coins. The main body of this canister was made in the same way as that found recently, with the difference that the rim is flanged. Slight differences in colouration on the underside of the lid raise the possibility that it was sealed to the rim at deposition.

At least six other medieval hoards from England were buried in lead containers, though only one is close in form to those from Colchester. This is a large canister from Beauworth, near Winchester, Hampshire, found in 1833, and containing a hoard of coins buried c. 1087. The precise number of coins is not known, but is believed to be between 8,000 and 12,000.<sup>17</sup> At about 300 mm high, and with a capacity of 12,469 cc, it is close in size to the 1969 Colchester canister. None of the visible surfaces show sand-pitting. Though almost complete when found, a large section of the wall is now missing, and what remains is in very poor condition, preventing close examination of the underside. The main body appears to have been made in similar fashion to the Colchester 2 and 2000 vessels, with a thick external strip applied over a butt joint. Internally no junction is visible between base and wall; and there does not seem to be a ‘foot ring’ as on the Colchester containers. However, a very irregular strip of metal has been hammered up on to the bottom of the wall just as it has on the Colchester vessels; this may be from a very worn, low foot ring, or may be part of the base itself which could have been made from a disc of slightly greater diameter than the main section, with the excess material then bent upwards. The rim is slightly thickened and everted, with a flat top. There is a narrow worn constriction in the wall below the rim, probably made by pressure from string or wire. A thick shield-shaped casting with traces of an iron ‘pin’ on the top has been applied to one side of the rim, pushing it inwards slightly; the opposite part of the rim is missing. No design is visible on the external face of the casting, which may have served to attach a lid or handle. There is no record of a lid having been found, but, given the date and conditions of recovery

<sup>14</sup> A. D. Saunders, ‘Lydford Castle, Devon’, *Medieval Archaeol.*, 24 (1980), 123–86, at p. 134; J. N. Hare, *Battle Abbey: The Eastern Range and the Excavations of 1978–80* (London, 1985), 42; P. Rahtz and S. Hirst, *Bordesley Abbey* (BAR Brit. Ser., 23, Oxford, 1976), 205; G. C. Dunning, ‘A lead ingot at Rievaulx Abbey’, *Antiq. J.*, 32 (1952), 199–202, at p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> Colchester Museum accession number COLEM 1902.211; J. D. A. Thompson, *Inventory of British Coin Hoards AD 600–1500* (Oxford, 1956), 33–5; Archibald and Cook, op. cit. in note 3, pl. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Colchester Museum accession number COLEM 1971.126. A.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, op. cit. in note 15, 11–13; Archibald and Cook, op. cit. in note 3, 92, pl. 6.

and recording, the lack of any note of a lid does not preclude its original presence. However, there is no space between the casting and the wall of the vessel in which to slot a lid, while the iron 'pin' is too thin to form a handle and the attachment seems scarcely strong enough to take the combined weight of container and coins. The answer may be the use of a lid which rested on the rim, but did not turn down over it, and was secured by wire. The constriction just below the rim, which passes behind the seal-like casting, seems to confirm this.

The possibility of the Colchester 2 and Beauworth hoard canisters being re-used, Early Roman cinerary urns was considered, but the method of sealing the wall joint is so consistent between the Colchester and Winchester vessels that it can be presumed to be a common medieval technique. A superficially similar method was one of several used in the Roman Period, but the external strip appears then to have been made by pouring lead between wooden battens fixed externally to either side of the butt-joint, thus forming a neat edge on each side. The applied strip or 'foot ring' method used to attach the base to the wall on the Colchester containers was not used in the Roman Period.<sup>18</sup> The difference in date of the Beauworth and Colchester hoards precludes the vessels all being made by the same hand, despite the similarity of the jointing, and therefore it cannot be assumed that the three Colchester vessels were necessarily by the same maker. If the Colchester 1 and 2 and Beauworth vessels had been made from recycled Roman sheet lead, it is unlikely to have derived from coffins as the metal is very thin, only about 1–2 mm. Occasionally plain lead liners were used inside Roman wooden coffins, and these tend to be of thinner sheet, offering an alternative source. The vessels are most likely to be wholly of medieval manufacture, but, given the use of Roman lead for the Colchester canister found in 2000, the possibility must remain that the lead for the other three was also recycled Roman.

Of the remaining five lead hoard canisters, one is a money-box containing a hoard of pennies and groats deposited in 1295 in Dover. It was formed by folding lead sheet around two 'wedge-shaped' end-pieces (the shape is effectively a right-angled segment of an ellipse), and was probably originally set against a wall, with the longest flat side downwards and the upright back touching the wall. The coin slot was set in the centre of the top, near the point where the two ends of the sheet met. The slot was too small to take groats, and one end had been forced open so that some could be added when the hoard was deposited.<sup>19</sup>

In discussing the Dover hoard money-box, Lasko notes three other lead hoard containers. A hoard of Anglo-Saxon coinage from Campsey Ash, Suffolk, had been buried in two thin lead cases, which, from the description, appear to be fragments of salvaged sheet lead simply folded around the coins. A hoard from Cuerdale, Lancashire, deposited c. 905, was buried in a lead 'chest', which collapsed on removal. Severe decomposition and fragmentation is a characteristic of excavated Roman pewter, rather than unalloyed lead, suggesting that this container was a recycled object, probably a vessel. It may, however, have been made from folded

<sup>18</sup> A. Cochet, *Le plomb en Gaule romaine* (Montagnac, 2000), figs. 94, esp. c, and 95.

<sup>19</sup> P. E. Lasko, 'The container', 166–8 in R. H. M. Dolley, 'The Dover hoard: the first English hoard with groats of Edward I', *British Numismatic J.*, 28 (1958), 147–68.

sheet lead affected by adverse burial conditions.<sup>20</sup> Finally, a hoard from Sheldon, Derbyshire, deposited c. 1142, was found in a plate about 150–200 mm in diameter with its sides turned inwards to form a cup.<sup>21</sup> This may have been a paten of contemporary date, as by this time lead was being used to make communion vessels.

The sixth hoard contained in lead is a 19th-century find from Scotforth, Lancashire, deposited c. 1194 wrapped in a piece of sheet lead in much the same way as the Campsey Ash hoard and possibly that from Cuerdale.<sup>22</sup> The use of sheet lead in this way invites the notion of its being considered a potentially, if not equally, valuable part of the hoard, given the restrictions on mining lead ore and the recycling described above.

## DISCUSSION

*By* HOWARD BROOKS *and* NINA CRUMMY

### HOARD DEPTHS, AND THE FUNCTION OF THE CANISTER

There is no doubt that the lead canister from the Menzies site and that from the adjacent National Westminster site found in 1902 were made in exactly the same way as the 1969 container, and for the express purpose of storing large numbers of coins. That they were made at the same time by the same hand and for the same customer is much more doubtful, given that the 1902 and 1969 hoards were found in different, if adjacent, properties, the difference in closure dates, and the use of similar manufacturing techniques on the much earlier Beauworth container. The Menzies canister therefore almost certainly originally held coins, but whether it was buried as hoard deposit is less certain, though the lid has sunk in the same way as that of the 1969 canister, and damage to it in antiquity suggests that it had once been tightly fitted over the body but had been forced open. The antique damage to the main body may have been done at the same time. Marion Archibald notes that the single coin could have come from a hoard, but may also have been a casual loss. The essential question, therefore, is whether the canister was originally a coin-hoard container, later emptied, or had a different function.

Due to the level of detail recorded for the 1902 and 1969 hoards, it is possible to detect a major difference between those hoards and the canister found in 2000 in respect of the depth at which they were buried. The top of the 2000 canister was found approximately 0.7 m below modern shop-floor level, with the canister top at 29.9 m AOD. No relationship can be established between this depth and contemporary floor levels, as none survived on the site. However, the nearest floor levels are later in date (15th-/16th-century) and down-slope in the tower-crane pit, at 29.8 m. Based on that level, and taking into account the slope of the site, medieval floor levels over the canister position can be estimated at approximately 29.95 m. Broadly speaking, therefore, the canister top was at contemporary floor level, or slightly below it.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 15, 39–42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 123–4.

<sup>22</sup> Archibald and Cook, *op. cit.* in note 3, 22, pl. 2.

The two Colchester coin hoards found previously were buried more deeply than the 2000 canister. The press article on the 1902 hoard gives a depth of 'about 5 feet 6 inches from the garden surface', and states that the workmen went down a ladder to look at the discovery.<sup>23</sup> The 1969 hoard is recorded at 7 feet (2.1 m) below the modern shop floor.<sup>24</sup> Since shop-floor level has not changed radically since 1969, this puts the hoard depth at approximately 28.5 m, about 1 m deeper than the 2000 canister.

One explanation for the difference in the relative depths is that the 2000 canister was buried inside the rear wing of a property, whereas the hoards of 1902 and 1969 were buried outside. The evidence of the medieval boundaries shows that 23 and 24 High Street may have been, as now, on the same plot and therefore the 2000 canister and 1969 hoard were buried on the same property, and the 1902 hoard in an adjacent one, now 25 High Street.<sup>25</sup>

The crucial point is that the 2000 canister was buried more or less immediately below contemporary floor level. Therefore, although the coin hoard interpretation cannot be entirely ruled out, its use as a floor safe is an attractive interpretation. How this idea fits into the available evidence for the wider context of the site is explored below.

#### STONE HOUSES, HOARDS, AND THE COLCHESTER JEWRY

Archibald and Cook, and Stephenson, conclude that, while absolute proof is lacking, the Colchester hoards are likely to have been the property of a Jewish family or of Jewish financiers.<sup>26</sup> Medieval stone houses are known in many instances to have been occupied by Jews, who may have favoured them because of the security they provided. A reference of 1275 indicates that there were four medieval stone houses in St Runwald's parish, in which the current site would have been located in the medieval period.<sup>27</sup> All had originally been bought by Aaron the Jew, but were sold by his sons to raise money to pay their tallages. The sites of only two of the four stone houses are known, one at the junction of Pelham's Lane and High Street 60 m east of 23–24 High Street, and one at the rear of the former site of the Cups Hotel, 30 m to the north-east across the High Street (now occupied by Greytown House). The question then arises whether the position of the coin hoards might indicate the location of the other two stone houses. Several walls were plotted during the watching brief, but they were too far south to have been part of a stone structure on the High Street frontage, and differed in construction from, for example, the substantial medieval stone house walls at Pelhams Lane.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, later disturbance on the site (especially the very heavy 1969 concrete footings) may have removed all traces of an earlier structure. Therefore, though it is quite possible that one or both of the missing stone houses occupied by Jewish

<sup>23</sup> *Essex County Standard*, 12 July 1902.

<sup>24</sup> The depth was incorrectly given as 1.2 m in Archibald and Cook, *op. cit.* in note 3, 95.

<sup>25</sup> P. Crummy, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester* (CBA Res. Rep., 39, London, 1981), 49, fig. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Archibald and Cook, *op. cit.* in note 3, 94–6; D. Stephenson, 'Colchester: a smaller medieval English Jewry', *Essex Archaeol. Hist.*, 16 (1984), 48–52.

<sup>27</sup> J. M. Rigg (ed.), *Calendar of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews*, 1 (London, 1905), 235–6; Crummy, *op. cit.* in note 25, 50–3.

<sup>28</sup> Crummy, *op. cit.* in note 25, 56–60.

financiers were on the site of the two hoards and the canister, positive archaeological evidence in support of the proposition is currently lacking.

Finally, was the 2000 find a floor safe or the abandoned container from a coin hoard recovered deliberately or accidentally sometime in the medieval or post-medieval periods? While either of these is entirely plausible, the idea of a floor safe in premises where large amounts of currency were being handled is an attractive interpretation (given the proximity of the canister to contemporary floor levels and its presumed accessibility). However, the contrary can be argued on the basis of the condition of the lid, which has the appearance of sagging under the weight of soil above it, a condition which would only apply to a hoard buried under a reasonable depth of soil. In the absence of positive proof, it seems reasonable to suggest that the canister was either an emptied hoard container, or a floor safe, or both, in sequence.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological work was commissioned by Chartwell Land, through Paul Chadwick of CgMs. Site work was carried out by Colin Austin, Nigel Rayner, Alec Wade and Will Clarke, post-excavation work by Sue Anderson, Stephen Benfield, H. E. M. Cool, Nina Crummy, and Alec Wade. The project was monitored by Martin Winter for Colchester Borough Council. Nina Crummy is grateful to G. Denford of Winchester City Museums for arranging for her to examine the Beauworth canister.