

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Summary of Roman coins and small metal finds in and around Wirksworth

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One of the most intractable issues in identifying coin and small metal object finds in a town such as Wirksworth is that records of small finds appear to be spread chaotically all over the place. In this respect Wirksworth is badly served, whereas in a location with a long history of archaeological or antiquarian work, such as Chester or York, the probability of being able to identify finds would perhaps be so much greater and easier. This paper is a summary of the position at the time of writing.

The Wirksworth Roman Coin Hoard

The Wirksworth Roman coin hoard is often overlooked because of its Georgian find date but it is significant because it is the highest value Roman coin hoard ever found in Derbyshire - it contained 83 Roman silver coins. Many of the other better known and sometimes larger (by number of items) coin hoards, including the Cromford hoard of 1795, the Scarcliffe hoard of 1876 or that found near Heage in 2011 are either of copper or brass coins or barbarous radiates - forgery coinage - of low denominations (Palfreyman and Ebbins, 2012). Perhaps the closest comparator to the Wirksworth hoard is the Parwich Hill hoard, found in 1769, with 79 denarii and whose date of deposition is strikingly similar.

The Wirksworth Roman coin hoard is a late second century hoard which was found in May 1735, by a man working in a lead mine near Wirksworth (original sources say Wirksworth, not Middleton or Carsington). The coins were hidden in a pot and consisted of 83 Roman silver denarii ranging in date from the Emperor Augustus (27BC to 14AD) to Lucius Verus (161AD to 169AD).

A denarius would be the equivalent of a days pay for a soldier or a skilled person, say about £80 now, so this hoard would amount to having about £6,600 in the bank, a huge amount for the time. The range of coins in the hoard would reflect the type of coins in circulation at the time the hoard was hidden. The last coins of Lucius Verus, give an approximate date for the deposition of the hoard of (at the earliest) AD161 when Lucius became emperor and not much later than 169, as the hoard would have had to contain coins in circulation of Marcus Aurelius or Commodus to be later.

This date of deposition and loss co-incides with a smallpox plague in the empire around 165-172AD and afterwards, which killed many people.

[A note on sources for the Wirksworth Hoard](#)

Derby Mercury 8th May 1735:

“Wirksworth, May 6. A few days ago a poor man, as he was working in a lead mine near this town, found above an hundred pieces of Roman Silver Coin, being the Roman Denarii: The newest of these pieces must be above 1600 Years old. The busts of the five first Emperors of Rome appear exceeding full and clear upon several of them, and the Inscription very legible. There was the Remains of a Pot in which they were hid, but very much decayd.” The account from the Derby Mercury was (oddly) repeated in Gent T, 1735, Annales Regionduni Hullini, Hull Records; but Mr Gent just repeated the Derby Mercury report and padded it a bit (see appendix for copy)

Minutes of the Society of Antiquaries 12th June 1735:

“Mr Vice President Gale produced from Sir John Sloan two letters from a gentleman in Derbyshire which were read giving an account of some Roman silver Denarii of the Emperors found in that County near Wirksworth, the coins were in number 83 from Augustus to (Lucius) Aurelius Verus.” In so far as this appears to be a learned source, the number found is taken from this, not the “above an hundred” of the Derby Mercury newspaper report.

[Other coin and metal finds in Wirksworth and locally](#)

Historically, therefore, we know of Roman coin hoards from Wirksworth, Cromford and Parwich (Lombards Green and Saints Hill). Concentrations of Roman coins have also been found at Rainster Rocks (Brassington), Thorpe by Ashbourne, Carsington and in 2011 very large numbers of poor quality forgeries from the suspected Roman villa site at Heage. More recently coins have been found locally at Hopton. A summary of all Derbyshire coin hoards is given by Palfreyman and Ebbins (2012).

Wirksworth

An Antoninianus of Aurelian (about 270-275AD) was found at West End, the reverse has two standing figures facing each other, with the right hand figure apparently with a hand on the hip and perhaps holding a globe in the other hand, another (unidentified) Roman coin and a little, possibly first century, Roman plate brooch also from West End and a further Roman gold coin from Yokecliffe (not yet identified), all found by Neil Gilbert in 2018 to early 2019.



Antoninianus of Aurelian found at West End, Wirksworth 2018



Roman plate brooch found at West End, Wirksworth 2019



Roman Gold Coin found at Yokecliffe, Wirksworth 2018. Approx 3cm diameter, possibly an Aureus of Marcus Aurelius (161-180AD)

Ian Bunting, a sites archaeologist for Severn Trent Water had found a Roman Ear Scoop on a small plot of land he owns at West End, reported on 30th August 2020.

North of Sough Lane, Bolehill, Wirksworth in a plough-field a coin of Constantius II (337-361AD) DENO-586E95 was found in 2018 with a coin of Commodus DENO-58E12F at the same time, but are listed in the Portable Antiquities Scheme Database as Cromford Parish. Also in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database is a Roman lead loom weight from Wirksworth:



Roman cast lead loom weight from Wirksworth 2017
Used for cloth weaving on a loom. Record number DENO-D3AAFD

Hopton

From 2018-2022 a small spread of Roman coins was found at Hopton, by Neil Gilbert, a local detectorist. Also a Roman fibula brooch at Hopton was found and a fine silver Denarius from Pikehall, which he brought to the Wirksworth Heritage Centre in February 2019. There are also the Roman coins which Dean Smart found near the Chariot Way at Hopton, these include a Sestertius of Hadrian (about 118), an As of Claudius (about 41-54) and a Denarius of Antoninus Pius; Neil Gilbert also reported finding a Denarius at Hopton (image below) and a Roman steelyard weight also from Hopton.



Denarius found at Hopton (Antoninus Pius with goddess Minerva on reverse) 138-161AD

Carsington

Carsington Villa find site is often quoted and implied as one place but is actually composed of two sites where many items were found: Firstly, Site A: Shiningford Farm (Brouchs Nether Field) Roman lead processing site and secondly, Site B: Scow Brook Field - the villa site itself. During the digs at these sites, only one coin was found at each. In the case of in the case of Shiningford, this was an As of Antoninus Pius (about 139+) and Carsington Scow Brook Villa, this was a Denarius of Balbous (about 238AD+). However, the Housleys of Middleton then metal detected the whole of Brouchs Nether Field and found 20 Roman coins and other metal objects including 40 spindle whorls. It is thought that some of the metal finds were deposited in Sheffield Museum. Carsington archaeological excavations were pre-internet and the recording of them and the finds, while we know that records exist, is spread around in disconnected bits all over Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, making collecting information difficult.

Rainster Rocks, Brassington

There is the Wheeldon family's Antoninianus of Valerian (about 258-260) found by them at Rainster Rocks, now in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database as DENO A57ESF:



Antoninianus of Valerian found at Rainster Rocks

Cromford

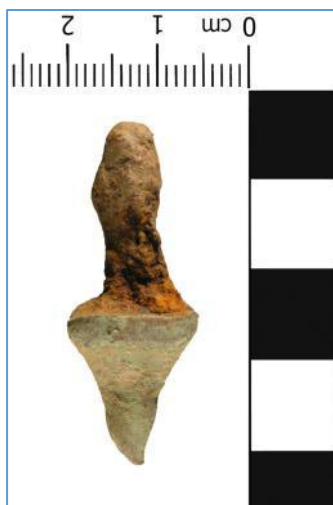
Hoard noted above and also in Cromford itself an earlier find of a coin of Constantius II from a garden on Cromford Hill (Wirksworth Road) in the 1950s (Stroud, 2001).

Alderwasley

North of Nether Park Farm at Alderwasley (Hob Uid 314023) a Roman trumpet brooch and nearby another (Hob Uid 608619) near the known Roman quern making sites near Shining Cliff Wood (Palfreyman and Ebbins, 2018).

Kirk Ireton

Find WMID-2D3B07 is listed on the PAS database, this item is a Roman "Furniture Fitting" and is the first Roman item ever to be found at Kirk Ireton, in 2017. This is really unusual, coins, for example, don't tell us much about their environment, but a furniture fitting (its a foot from a chair or cupboard leg) is likely domestic furniture. This implies a Roman dwelling or house should probably be sought at or near the find site at Kirk Ireton, which would then make sense of this domestic find.



Kirk Ireton Roman Furniture Foot

See also Roman lead ingot finds (Database on Wirksworth Archaeological Society website).

Unknown dates, possibly Roman or Medieval

DENO-642203 is a lead spindle whorl apparently reported in 2009 but not updated until 2020 as being from Wirksworth. A round Spindle Whorl was also found in Pittywood Road Wirksworth with Roman pottery (Stroud, 2001) and another on the Cromford Meadows Cricket Pitch.



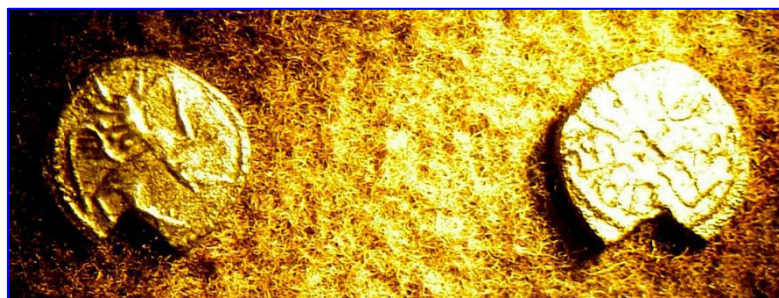
DENO-642203 May be medieval.

Unconfirmed finds

There were allegedly two Roman coins found in the Wirksworth Hannages some time before 2006 (Barry Joyce pers comm) but these do not occur in any database, so are unproven. During the week of the 13th of April 2018, the Town Mayor, Andy Pollock, was taking the air at Gorsey Bank when he encountered a couple of metal detectorists who had apparently found a Roman coin in a field on the west side of Pratthall Lane.

[Northumbrian Sceat](#)

The most well-known coin discovery in Wirksworth is the Northumbrian Sceat (of King Eadberht 737-758) found by Cath Housley in the Agricola House car park on Church Street, its replica is in the Wirksworth Heritage Centre, the original went to Sheffield Museum.



Sceat found in Church Street, Wirksworth 1986 (image of the replica)

[References](#)

Palfreyman, A, and Ebbins, S, 2012, Excavation At The Amber Valley Roman Hoard Site, Near Ripley, Derbyshire 2010-11, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 132, pp140-144

Palfreyman, A, and Ebbins, S, 2018, Iron Age and Roman quern manufacture in the middle Derwent valley, Derbyshire Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 138, pp. 14-38.

Reynolds, J, 1886, Roman coins in Derbyshire, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 8, pp. 216-230

Society of Antiquaries, 1735, Minutes relating to the Wirksworth Roman Coin Hoard, held in 942.51 at Matlock Local Studies Library

Stroud, G, 2001, Derbyshire Extensive Urban Survey, Wirksworth and also Cromford, Derbyshire County Council, p4

Thomson-Watkin, W, 1886, The Roman Minor Settlements, camps, discoveries of coins etc and roads in Derbyshire, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 8, p214

[Portable Antiquities Scheme Website](#)

<https://finds.org.uk/>

Copy of record by Gent, 1735

Re: Wyvyr Street - antonhobbs + Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin: February 1954

Internet Archive

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worksworth

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"Antiquity a curious Plate, found, 197, 198. And, as I am compiling this Index, I hear, that, about the Beginning of May, 1735, above 100 Pieces of the Romani Denarii, or Pence, the newest of them are reckon'd to be more than 1600 years old (among which are very apparent the Busts of Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius Emperors of Rome, with legible Inscriptions) were found by a poor Man, working in a Lead Mine, near [Worksworth](#), in Derbyshire: Where (as a dignify'd Antiquary writes) 'not only Lead, but Stibium also, a Mineral of Metallick Nature is found here in distinct Vein; us'd formerly in Greece by the Women to colour their Eye-Brows, upon which account the Poet Ion calls it ο'μμα' ὀδραφανος.'"

Mention of the Hull mint of Edward I is conspicuous by its absence in Gent's history of Hull, and one is led to the conclusion that its existence must have been unknown to him. It was left to a later local historian, Charles Frost, F.S.A. (the first President of the Hull Law Society) to treat of this subject very fully in his "Notices Relative to the Early History of the Town and Port of Hull," printed in 1827. No apology is required for quoting in *extenso* the following passage from a chapter entitled: "Of the first Charter granted to Kingston upon Hull, and of the improvements consequent upon the Town being made a Free Borough," viz. :—

"Hull, being now constituted a free borough, was regarded as one of the principal towns in the kingdom, and, when an extensive coinage was appointed, it was fixed upon as one of the places where mints were to be established. On the 30th March in the 28th Edw. I. it was ordained by the King in Council at Westminster, that there should be mints and moneys (overours de monnoie) at the following places, viz. in the Tower of London thirty furnaces, at Canterbury eight, as there had theretofore been (sicome avaut ces heures unt este), at *Kynge-*

Results

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Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin: February 1954

by B.A. Seaby Ltd.

Publication date 2/1/54

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