

romano british coin hoards shire archaeology

Romano British Coin Hoards: Shire Archaeology

The study of Romano British coin hoards has greatly enriched our understanding of the socio-economic landscape of Britain during the Roman occupation, which spanned from AD 43 to AD 410. These coin hoards are not merely collections of currency but also invaluable archaeological artifacts that provide insights into trade, culture, and the daily lives of the people during this era. In this article, we will explore the significance of these hoards, the archaeological practices involved in their discovery, and the broader implications for the study of Romano British history.

Understanding Romano British Coin Hoards

Romano British coin hoards consist of caches of coins that were buried or hidden for various reasons. These hoards can range from small collections to large deposits containing thousands of coins. They typically include a mix of local and imported currency, reflecting the complex trade networks established during the Roman conquest of Britain.

Types of Coins Found

The coins found in these hoards can be categorized into several types:

1. Roman Imperial Coins: Coins minted under the authority of Roman emperors, typically featuring their likeness and various symbols of power.
2. Provincial Coins: These were minted in Britain and often bore local designs, reflecting regional identities.
3. Barbarous Imitations: Coins that were copies of Roman coins produced by local tribes, often with variations in design and quality.
4. Bronze and Silver Coins: Different metals denote different values and uses, with silver coins often being used for trade while bronze coins circulated in everyday transactions.

The Purpose of Coin Hoarding

The reasons for hoarding coins during the Romano British period can be multifaceted:

- Economic Instability: Times of economic turmoil or uncertainty may have prompted individuals to hide their wealth.
- Taxation: High taxes imposed by the Roman administration could lead people to bury their coins to evade collection.
- Invasion or Conflict: Fears of invasion or local conflict might have led to the concealment of valuables.
- Cultural Practices: Some hoards were likely buried as part of ritualistic practices, possibly intended as offerings to deities or ancestors.

Archaeological Discoveries

The discovery of Romano British coin hoards has been facilitated by various archaeological methods, including systematic excavation, metal detecting, and surveys of known sites.

Methods of Discovery

1. Metal Detecting: Modern metal detectors have become invaluable tools for amateur and professional archaeologists alike. Many significant hoards have been discovered by hobbyists, who are often encouraged to report their finds.
2. Excavation: Professional archaeological excavations often target areas where hoards are believed to be buried, informed by historical texts, local lore, or previous discoveries.
3. Surveys: Landscape surveys help identify potential sites for hoards by examining the geography and settlement patterns of the Romano British period.

Notable Coin Hoards

Several significant hoards have been uncovered in Britain, each contributing unique insights into the period:

- The Hoxne Hoard: Discovered in 1992, this hoard is the largest collection of late Roman coins and valuables found in Britain, containing over 15,000 coins and various artifacts, including jewelry and silverware.
- The Mildenhall Treasure: Found in 1942, this treasure includes a variety of Roman silver tableware and is indicative of Roman luxury and domestic life in Britain.
- The Frome Hoard: Uncovered in 2010, this hoard comprises over 52,000 coins, representing one of the largest finds in British history and providing extensive insight into coin circulation during the 3rd century.

Significance of the Hoards in Shire Archaeology

Romano British coin hoards play a crucial role in shire archaeology, the study of regional archaeological findings. These hoards can reveal patterns of trade, social structure, and interactions between different cultures.

Economic Insights

The composition and condition of coin hoards can illustrate:

- Trade Networks: The presence of coins from various regions indicates the extent of trade networks that connected Britain with the broader Roman Empire.
- Currency Use: The types and quantities of coins can inform researchers about the economy, including inflation, currency debasement, and the everyday

use of money.

- **Social Stratification:** The distribution of hoards across different regions can suggest social hierarchies and economic disparities within Romano British society.

Cultural Significance

Coin hoards also provide evidence of cultural practices and shifts during the Roman occupation:

- **Cultural Exchange:** The mixture of Roman and local coinage reflects the blending of cultures and the adoption of Roman customs by local populations.
- **Ritual Practices:** Some hoards may have been buried as part of religious or cultural rituals, contributing to our understanding of spiritual beliefs in Romano British society.

Preservation and Challenges

The preservation of coin hoards presents several challenges to archaeologists and historians alike. Proper care and handling are essential to ensure that these artifacts remain valuable for future study.

Conservation Techniques

- **Cleaning:** Coins must be cleaned carefully to prevent damage. Professionals often use specific techniques to remove corrosion without harming the coins.
- **Storage:** Proper storage in controlled environments helps prevent further deterioration from factors like humidity and temperature fluctuations.
- **Documentation:** Thorough documentation of the find context is crucial for future research and understanding of the hoard's significance.

Challenges Ahead

The future of Romano British coin hoards faces several challenges:

- **Illegal Metal Detecting:** Unregulated metal detecting can lead to the loss of archaeological context and valuable information about hoards.
- **Funding and Resources:** Archaeological projects often rely on funding, which can be limited, affecting the ability to conduct thorough investigations.

Conclusion

Romano British coin hoards provide a fascinating glimpse into the complexities of life during the Roman occupation of Britain. They offer invaluable insights into economic practices, cultural exchanges, and social structures that characterized this transformative period. As archaeological methods continue to evolve and more discoveries are made, our understanding of these hoards will undoubtedly deepen, revealing even more about the rich

tapestry of Romano British history. The ongoing challenges of preservation and study highlight the need for continued investment in archaeological research and education, ensuring that these treasures remain accessible for future generations to explore and learn from.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Romano-British coin hoards?

Romano-British coin hoards are collections of coins that were buried or hidden during the Roman occupation of Britain, typically from AD 43 to AD 410. These hoards often provide insights into the economy and trade practices of that period.

Why are coin hoards significant in shire archaeology?

Coin hoards are significant in shire archaeology because they can reveal information about local economies, trade routes, and social practices. They also help archaeologists understand the historical context of specific regions during the Roman period.

What types of coins are typically found in Romano-British hoards?

Typical coins found in Romano-British hoards include denarii, sesterii, and other Roman coinage, often minted under various emperors. Some hoards might also contain local or imitation coins.

How do archaeologists locate Romano-British coin hoards?

Archaeologists locate Romano-British coin hoards through careful surveying of historical sites, metal detecting, and examining areas known for past agricultural activity or settlement patterns.

What are some famous Romano-British coin hoards discovered in the UK?

Some famous Romano-British coin hoards include the Frome hoard, found in Somerset in 2010, and the Hoxne hoard, discovered in Suffolk in 1992, which is the largest hoard of late Roman coins ever found in Britain.

What can the study of coin hoards tell us about Roman Britain?

The study of coin hoards can provide insights into economic trends, such as inflation, trade relationships, and the impact of invasions. They also reflect the social and political dynamics of the time.

How do hoards reflect the relationship between Romans and local Britons?

Hoard findings often show a blend of Roman and native coinage, indicating interactions between Romans and local Britons. They can also suggest how local communities adopted or resisted Roman economic practices.

What role do hoards play in understanding Roman military presence in Britain?

Hoard findings can indicate the presence of Roman military forces, as coins were often buried during times of conflict. The location and contents of hoards can help identify military camps and their economic activities.

What modern technologies are used in the excavation of coin hoards?

Modern technologies such as ground-penetrating radar (GPR), 3D scanning, and GIS mapping are used to assist in the excavation and analysis of coin hoards, making the process more efficient and revealing hidden structures.

How does the discovery of hoards impact local communities today?

The discovery of hoards can enhance local heritage tourism, engage communities in archaeology, and promote educational initiatives. It often leads to increased interest in local history and preservation efforts.

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