

10. A HOARD OF ROMAN SILVER COINS FROM BRIGLANDS,
RUMBLING BRIDGE, KINROSS-SHIRE.

In the last of his four lists of Roman coins found in Scotland,⁴ Sir George Macdonald recorded the discovery, in 1938, of nine *denarii*, ranging from Otho to Commodus, on Lord Clyde's estate of Briglands, Rumbling Bridge. He suggested that they had probably formed part of a hoard.

This suggestion was confirmed by the discovery, during the years 1948-57, of further groups of *denarii* on exactly the same spot, two-thirds of the way up the steep left (east) bank of the River Devon, and from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile above Rumbling Bridge (6-inch *Kinross-shire*, xxv NW.; map ref. NT/017998). The circumstances of the discovery have been described as follows by the finder himself, the Rt. Hon. Lord Clyde, LL.D., Lord Justice-General of Scotland and Lord President of the Court of Session:

"At the mouth of a rabbit hole a round flat object lay exposed to view. I caught sight of it one evening as I was walking along the top of the bank of the River Devon about half a mile above Rumbling Bridge. On closer inspection the object turned out to be a Roman coin. A few had come to light in the immediate vicinity some years before, but no investigation was then made. The sudden appearance of this further specimen suggested that the rabbits in the course of burrowing had disturbed a hoard, so I was advised to test the matter by opening up the site. The bank is very steep, composed of loose soil which from time to time slides down to the water, and immediately above the rabbit hole was a large larch tree with extensive roots. But despite all this disturbance coins began to appear as the rabbit hole was opened up. One day over thirty-seven coins were found, many of them sticking together in little piles of five or six. Then discoveries became rarer, and ultimately only odd ones were disclosed scattered by themselves. There was no sign of a container of any kind. Where the concentration was thickest the soil was sandy but the sand gave way to undisturbed earth and stones. Pockets of sand are quite common in this area.

¹ Personal observations in September 1955.

² Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 308, with comparable European examples to which Dr Rieth adds an example from Aulendorf, 20 Km. SE. of Buchau (O. Schnieder in *Vorzeit am Bodensee* (1952), p. 13). Lunate openings also occur in single-piece wheels (e.g. Tindbaek, Jutland); the Biskupin wheel is another variant, this time two-piece.

³ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xv (1949), 191.
P.S.A.S., lxxiii (1939), 245.

VOL. XC.

Why this hoard was placed there must remain a mystery. No Roman camp or Roman road is known in the immediate vicinity. There could hardly have been a bridge at this part of the river and certainly no ford. Indeed there does not appear to be anything to explain why this spot was selected. The money may have been buried by a trader travelling southwards after safely crossing the river, and intending to recover the money when conditions were more settled; or it may just have been dropped by accident as someone journeyed along the top of the river bank."

In all, 179 coins have so far been found. They were each covered by a uniform deposit of dirt and oxide which left no doubt that they had all come from the same hoard. After cleaning in the Hunterian Museum, they were identified as follows:¹

Nero	2	R.I.C. 45, 46. Much worn—very much worn.
Otho	1	R.I.C. 12. Very much worn.
Vitellius	2	R.I.C. 2, 24. Much worn—very much worn.
Vespasian	6	R.I.C. 50, 75, 75 or 102, 90 (2), probably 90. Very much worn.
Titus, under Vespasian	2	R.I.C. Vespasian 176, 191. Very much worn.
Domitian, under Vespasian	2	R.I.C. Vespasian <i>cf.</i> 238 (but <i>obv.</i> CAES), 244. Much worn.
Titus	1	R.I.C. 20. Worn.
Julia Titi	1	R.I.C. Titus 56. Very much worn.
Domitian	7	R.I.C. <i>cf.</i> 108 <i>a</i> (but <i>obv.</i> GERM), 116, 137, 168, 169 (2), 177. Fairly well worn—much worn.
Nerva	3	R.I.C. 5 or 17, 15, 34. Fairly well worn—worn.
Trajan	25	R.I.C. 17, 21, 38, 52, 58 (2), 67, 99, <i>cf.</i> 118 (but <i>AR</i>), 147 <i>b</i> , 184, 218, 251 or 252, 272, 292 or 293, 308, 318, 334 (2), 343, 347, 353, 361, and two illegible through corrosion. Fairly well worn—very much worn.
Trajan?	1	<i>Obv.</i> and <i>rev.</i> legends obliterated through corrosion, but <i>obv.</i> bust is probably of Trajan.
Hadrian	21	R.I.C. 5 or 10 or 15 or 18, 75, 76, 77, 80, 94, 101, 120, 126, 176, 178 or 343, 220, <i>cf.</i> 227 (but <i>obv.</i> bust laureate, draped, r.), 247, 256, 265, 286, 327, 330, 336, and one illegible through corrosion. Fairly well worn—much worn.
Sabina	1	R.I.C. Hadrian 390. Fairly well worn.
Antoninus Pius	31	R.I.C. 9, 11, <i>cf.</i> 30 (but <i>obv.</i> head laureate r.), 48, 51, probably 54 or 136, probably 61, probably 111, 130, 143, 175 (2), 178, 181, 201, 209, 219 (3), 221, 229 <i>a</i> , 231 (2), 232 (2), 242 or 270 or 285 <i>a</i> or 299, 250, 262, 270 or 285 <i>a</i> or 299, 303, 305. Slightly worn—worn.
Antoninus Pius, deified	1	R.I.C. Marcus 431. Slightly worn.
Faustina I	2	R.I.C. Antoninus Pius 338, 339 <i>a</i> . Fairly well worn.
Faustina I, deified	10	R.I.C. Antoninus Pius 344, 347 (2), 350 <i>a</i> , 351, 360 (2), 362, 368, 384. Slightly worn—fairly well worn.

¹ References are to Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, I (1923), II (1926) and III (1930).

Marcus, under Antoninus Pius	5	R.I.C. Antoninus Pius 429 <i>a</i> , 438 <i>b</i> , 446, 448 <i>d</i> , 466 <i>a</i> . Slightly worn—fairly well worn.
Faustina II, under Antoninus Pius	4	R.I.C. Antoninus Pius 497, 502 <i>a</i> , 517 <i>c</i> , probably 517 <i>c</i> . Slightly worn—fairly well worn.
Marcus	20	R.I.C. 62, 70, 124, 164 (2), 185 or 205, 191, 203, 206, 207, 220, 222, 252, 261, 276, 286 or 299 or 310 or 322, 296, <i>cf.</i> 316 (but <i>obv.</i> M ANTONINVS AVG GERM TR P XXIX), 349, 377. Slightly worn—fairly well worn.
Marcus, deified	1	R.I.C. Commodus 272. Slightly worn.
Faustina II, under Marcus	9	R.I.C. Marcus 677, 683, 686 (2), 688, 697, 706, 730, 737. Slightly worn—fairly well worn.
Faustina II, deified	2	R.I.C. Marcus 745, 746. Slightly worn.
Lucius Verus	5	R.I.C. Marcus 482, 516, 555, 561, 590. Slightly worn —fairly well worn.
Lucius Verus, deified	1	R.I.C. Marcus 596 <i>a</i> . Slightly worn.
Lucilla	4	R.I.C. Marcus 759, 770, 781, 784. Slightly worn— fairly well worn.
Commodus, under Marcus	1	R.I.C. Marcus 654. Slightly worn.
Commodus	7	R.I.C. 2, 19, 25, 26, 56, 79, 150 <i>a</i> . Very slightly worn— slightly worn.
Crispina	1	R.I.C. Commodus 282. Very slightly worn.

 179

Although it is not certain that these 179 coins comprised the whole hoard, the careful search to which the area has been subjected makes it very unlikely that many stray survivors still await discovery. Since, too, the several groups of coins so far found all fall within the range Nero to Commodus, it is improbable that any further finds will materially alter this distribution. It may therefore be assumed that the 179 coins represent with fair accuracy the general composition of the whole hoard.¹

In its composition, this hoard was a typical, even conventional, Roman silver hoard of the late 2nd century A.D. It contained no rare coins; none of the Republican *denarii* of fine silver which were particular favourites in the less Romanised parts of Roman Britain, but which became very scarce after the reign of Hadrian;² not even a single heavy imperial *denarius* of an earlier date than A.D. 64, the year in which Nero reduced the weight of the *denarius*; and no debased legionary *denarii* of Mark Antony, although these did persist in circulation, by virtue of their very baseness, until the early 3rd century A.D.³

In the Briglands hoard, as in other Romano-British silver hoards ending with

¹ Sir George Macdonald suggested, when the first nine *denarii* were found, that the hoard dated to the campaigns of Severus, A.D. 209–11, but the absence of coins later than Commodus from the 170 coins found subsequently now makes this unlikely in the extreme (*P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1939), 245, and LXXXIV (1950), 149 f.).

² A. S. Robertson, in *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly* (1956), 272.

³ *Op. cit.*, 273.

Commodus,¹ *denarii* of the reigns of Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus predominated. There was also the usual admixture of some of the long-lived silver of the Flavian emperors, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, along with some silver of Nerva, and there were, too, a few excessively worn *denarii* of Nero, Otho and Vitellius. It is noticeable that the earlier coins—from Nero to Hadrian—had all undergone a considerable amount of wear before being incorporated in the hoard, while the coins from Antoninus Pius onwards include examples showing much slighter traces of wear. The eight latest coins, seven of Commodus as emperor and one of Crispina, his empress, appear to be almost unworn by circulation.

The composition of the Briglands hoard, corresponding closely with that of other Romano-British hoards ending with Commodus, and the condition of its coins combine therefore to indicate that the hoard was amassed from coins in circulation during the reign of Commodus (and perhaps just before it), and was closed soon after the date of the latest coins of Commodus and Crispina. Of the seven coins of Commodus as emperor, one is of A.D. 180, one of A.D. 181, two of A.D. 181-2, one of A.D. 183, one of A.D. 183-4, and one of A.D. 186-7. The coin of Crispina is not datable to a particular year in Commodus's reign, but its obverse legend suggests that it may be assigned to a date between A.D. 180 and 187.² Since these eight coins are little, if at all, worn, and since they form an uninterrupted chronological series ending abruptly with a coin of A.D. 186-7, the hoard was probably closed, that is money ceased to be added to it, in or shortly after A.D. 186-7.

The date at which money ceased to be added to a hoard may not of course have been followed immediately by the date at which the owner hid away, or lost, his treasure, although this is generally assumed to have been the case. The composition of a hoard may, however, provide a clue whether or not the two dates coincided. If the coins in a hoard formed an unbroken chronological series stopping short suddenly with the latest coins, then the date at which saving or hoarding ceased may well have been followed at once by the concealment or loss of the hoard. For an owner who had saved steadily and consistently was hardly likely to stop abruptly, unless the hoard was no longer within his reach—or unless some abnormal circumstance had cut off the source of his coin supply.

The abrupt ending of the chronological series of Briglands *denarii* in A.D. 186-7 may therefore be due either to the concealment or loss of the hoard shortly after that date, or else to a cessation of coin supplies. Taken by itself, the hoard does not provide evidence for or against either of these alternatives. It does, however, prove that the owner was adding steadily to his savings down to at least A.D. 186-7, and was apparently including newly minted coins of Commodus's reign as they came his way. There must then have been some source open to him from which he could obtain such coins down to A.D. 186-7. The source in all probability was the Antonine garrison force in Scotland, the force which maintained in operation the Antonine Wall and its forts, and the Antonine system of forts and fortlets strung along the roads which covered south Scotland and even penetrated as far north as Perthshire.

How long the Antonine system in Scotland lasted is still in doubt. The latest coin from the Antonine Wall which has been certainly identified is a fairly well worn *as* of Marcus Aurelius of A.D. 173-4, found in 1952 at Mumrills.³ From

¹ Fourteen such hoards are listed in detail in *op. cit.*, pp. 284 f.

² *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, IV (1940), cliv.

³ The coin was sent to the Hunterian Museum for identification by Miss Doreen Hunter, Dollar Park Museum, Falkirk.

Kirkintilloch came a coin (or coins) of Commodus which must have been minted in or after A.D. 175, when Commodus was given a share in the coinage by the emperor Marcus, and a much-worn brass coin from Bar Hill has been identified by Sir George Macdonald as "Commodus (possible)." ¹ The latest coin found on an Antonine site in Scotland which is not on the Antonine Wall, is a slightly worn *denarius* of Crispina, wife of Commodus, from Newstead, with an early type of obverse legend.² Crispina married Commodus in A.D. 178, and coins bearing her name may have been issued as early as that date, although Commodus and she did not become emperor and empress until the death of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180.³

There is, of course, no way of telling how long or how short was the interval between the minting of coins of Commodus and Crispina and their arrival in Scotland. They may have come straight from Rome in the pocket of a Roman soldier or traveller, or they may have passed from hand to hand over a period of years. However that may be, the Antonine system in Scotland is proved by its own coin evidence to have been in existence down to at least A.D. 178.

If it was from the Antonine garrison force that the owner of the Briglands hoard acquired his coins, then the hoard would carry the life of the Antonine system down still further, to at least A.D. 186-7. The fact that the latest coin from the hoard is later than the latest coin so far found in an Antonine fort in Scotland would then be explained by the circumstance that coins in a hoard were deliberately and regularly withdrawn from circulation by its owner, while coins from a site find were dropped or lost accidentally and involuntarily, probably with long intervals between each loss.

A date about A.D. 185 (or shortly afterwards) for the abandonment of the Antonine Wall and its accompanying system was in fact favoured by Sir George Macdonald.⁴ He based his view on the literary evidence of the *Historia Augusta*⁵ and Dio Cassius⁶ for a native rising against the Romans in North Britain early in Commodus's reign, on the numismatic evidence of coins of Commodus, dated by their inscriptions to A.D. 184, 185 and possibly 186, and commemorating Roman victories in Britain,⁷ and on the archaeological evidence from certain Antonine Wall forts which appeared to indicate that the final period of occupation was brief.⁸ The victories commemorated on coins, Sir George Macdonald suggested, were won in a punitive expedition carried out by the general Ulpus Marcellus against the North Britons who had risen against the Romans, and they were followed by a brief reoccupation of the Antonine Wall and its almost immediate abandonment.

A date some ten years later, A.D. 196-7, has, however, been preferred by other scholars, for example by Mr John Gillam, mainly on the ground of similarities between the late Antonine pottery from Antonine forts in Scotland and that from a deposit at Corbridge dating to the period on Hadrian's Wall which ended with its destruction by the northern barbarians in A.D. 196-7, when the usurper Albinus

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LII (1918), 223 f.

² J. Curle, *A Roman Frontier Post: The Fort of Newstead* (1911), 399. A recent examination of the coin, now in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, shows that, although corroded, it is not much worn.

³ *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, IV (1940), cxiii, cliv, 693 ff.

⁴ *The Roman Wall in Scotland* (1934), 12 f., 477 ff.

⁵ *Vit. Comm. Ant.*, c. 8, 4, and c. 13, 5.

⁶ *Dio Cassius*, LXXII, 8.

⁷ The latest of these coins are assigned to December, A.D. 185, by Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, III (1930), 419, No. 459e, and in *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, IV (1940), 802, rather than to A.D. 186.

⁸ *The Roman Wall in Scotland* (1934), 479 f.

took the army of Britain over to Gaul to fight against the emperor Severus.¹ It is undoubtedly the case that since Hadrian's Wall was destroyed in A.D. 196-7, the Antonine system, if still in existence, must have been wiped out at that time too. Antonine sites in Scotland have not yet, however, yielded closely datable inscriptions or coins which would confirm its continued existence down to so late a date as A.D. 196-7.

The uncertainty about the date at which the Antonine system was abandoned makes it impossible to decide whether the abrupt end of the Briglands hoard in A.D. 186-7 is directly to be associated with the Roman withdrawal from Scotland and a consequent cessation or interruption of coin supplies. The loss of the hoard, on the other hand, may well have been caused by unsettled conditions in North Britain during Commodus's reign. The coins of Commodus dating to A.D. 184 and 185, if not to A.D. 186,² and commemorating Roman victories in Britain, indicate that the rising of the North Britons took some considerable time to put down. Even if the Antonine system continued in operation until A.D. 186-7 or later, and Roman coins still passed from Roman into native hands, the life and property of even the most peace-loving North Briton north of the Antonine Wall may well have been insecure.

The owner of the Briglands hoard was not in fact the only North Briton to lose his savings in Commodus's reign. Four other hoards ending with Commodus or Crispina have been recorded from Scotland. One was found at Pitcullo, Leuchars, Fife, in 1781,³ one near Braco, Shotts, Lanarkshire, in 1842,⁴ one at Torfoot, Strathaven, Lanarkshire, in 1803,⁵ and one near Drummond, Muthill, Perthshire, in 1672.⁶ Unfortunately, none of these hoards has survived intact for more recent inspection so that the exact year of their latest coins is unknown.

Still, at least five hoards were evidently lost in Scotland during Commodus's reign, and the loss of several hoards at the same period and in a particular area is usually a concomitant of disturbed conditions. One of these hoards, the Briglands hoard, ended in or shortly after A.D. 186-7. Whether, however, the Antonine Wall was evacuated at about that time, or whether it was held by the Romans for another decade—on that question the Briglands hoard remains regrettably silent.

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