

Roman Britain in the third century AD

Despite Claudius's invasion of Britain in AD 43, the population was still largely British with the local administrative capital at Venta Belgarum - now Winchester.

By the 3rd century there was political unrest across the Roman Empire, with a rapid succession of rulers and usurpers. Some were in power for only a few months before being killed by rivals or during wars, or dying from disease.

The situation became even more unstable in AD 260 when Postumus, who was Governor of Lower Germany, rebelled against the central rule of Rome and set up the breakaway Gallic Empire. For the next 14 years the Central and Gallic Empires were ruled separately and issued their own coinage.

Despite the turmoil in the Empire as a whole, Britain appears to have experienced a period of peace and prosperity. More villas were built, for example, and there is little evidence of the barbarian raids that ravaged other parts of the Empire.



Map showing the Gallic and Central Empires, courtesy of Merritt Cartographic



The Boldre Hoard

The Boldre Hoard contains 1,608 coins, dating from AD 249 to 276 and issued by 12 different emperors. The coins are all radiates, so-called because of the radiate crown worn by the emperors they depict. Although silver, the coins contain so little of that metal (sometimes only 1%) that they appear bronze.

Many of the coins in the Boldre Hoard are extremely common, but some unusual examples are also present. There are three coins of Marius, for example, which are scarce in Britain as he ruled the Gallic Empire for just 12 weeks in AD 269. A coin of Divus Victorinus is even rarer, as it is the only one of its type ever recorded. Its reverse, depicting an altar, has never been seen before in coins issued during Victorinus' lifetime or in the Divus Victorinus series.



Over 600 coin hoards of the late third century have been discovered in Britain

Hoard were buried for various reasons:

- to keep savings secure
- to retain high value coins in a period of currency decline
- to hide the spoils of war or the proceeds of a theft
- as a response to changes in the economy
- to consecrate a building
- to make an offering to the gods

Map showing some of the 3rd century Roman coin hoards that have been discovered in Great Britain. Courtesy of Merritt Cartographic

The largest coin hoard found in Britain so far is the Cunetio hoard from Wiltshire, which consisted of 54,951 coins in two containers

The Romans and the New Forest

Recent discoveries have shown that there was more Roman activity in the New Forest than initially thought. Our coin hoard, for example, supports increasing evidence for occupation in the Lymington area.

Evidence from New Milton and Pennington suggests that people were living in small communities. Agriculture was the principal activity inland during this time, with evidence for cultivation in Pilley and possibly Boldre too. There was a significant salt industry along the coast, and an important pottery industry flourished from the mid 3rd to late 4th centuries, using local clay and wood.

A number of Roman coin hoards have been found locally:

- The **Rockbourne** hoard of 7,717 coins dating to around AD 305 was found at the villa in 1967. 500 of these coins are on display at Rockbourne; the rest were retained by the finder or sold.
- Another hoard of 4,020 Roman bronze coins had been discovered at **Brockheath** in Rockbourne in 1898. The hoard was kept in West Park House and a large number were stolen during the Second World War. 120 coins were salvaged, mostly of Tetricus.
- The **Cadnam** hoard was discovered in the 1980s, and contained 600 coins of the third and fourth centuries. It has since been lost.
- The **Holdenhurst** hoard contains Roman and Durotrigic (Iron Age) coins that are held at the Red House museum.
- In 1968 a hoard of Roman coins was found at **Hamble-le-Rice**. The coins date from AD 268-350, and are held by the British Museum, Hamble Parish Council and Hampshire County Council (HCC).
- 111 Roman coins were found on the **Leckford** Estate near Winchester, and are thought to have been buried around AD 275. The coins are held by HCC.
- The **Blackmoor** hoard consists of 29,773 coins dating to around AD 296, and was discovered in 1873. The coins are held by HCC.
- 195 coins of late Roman date were found at **Neatham** in the 1970s. They are held at HCC.

There were other hoards found locally, but information about them is scarce:

- A small pottery vessel full of silver Roman coins was dug up at Amberwood
- A large urn filled with Roman coins was dug up at Norley Wood
- A hoard of Roman coins was found at Bury Farm in the eighteenth century
- Four Durotrigic coins were found at Armsley in 1959
- A hoard of at least 610 coins from the mid-fourth century was found at Copythorne
- A hoard of 15 Roman bronze coins was discovered at Fawley in 1988

Some coins from the Boldre Hoard



The earliest coin from our hoard, this was issued by the emperor Trebonianus Gallus who ruled from AD 251-253. Gallus' reign was a troubled one, beset by Goths, the Persians and the plague. He was murdered by soldiers who supported Aemilius Aemilianus' claim to be emperor.

The front of the coin reads IMP C C VIB TREB GALLVS AVG – Emperor Caesar Gaius Vibius Trebonianus Gallus Augustus – and shows the emperor facing right and wearing the radiate crown.



The reverse of the coin reads PVDICITIA AVG and shows Pudicitia (representing modesty or chastity) seated and holding a sceptre.

Valerian was proclaimed emperor in AD 253, and immediately made his son Gallienus joint emperor. During this period many coins were issued by these two rulers, as well as for Gallienus' wife Salonina.

The front of this coin shows Salonina facing right and wearing a diadem. The inscription reads CORN SALONINA AVG – Cornelia Salonina Augusta.

The reverse of the coin reads CONCORDIA AVGG, meaning agreement between the emperors. It shows Gallienus and Salonina facing each other and clasping hands.





Gallienus ruled the empire jointly with his father Valerian from AD 253, and solely from 260. He defeated the Goths in 268, who had invaded across the Danube in huge numbers, but was murdered by his officers shortly afterwards.

The front of this coin shows Gallienus facing right and wearing the radiate crown, with the inscription [GALLI]ENVVS AVG – Gallienus Augustus.



The reverse of the coin is unusual, as it has been double struck with the same motif. It shows part of an antelope, representing the goddess Diana. The inscription reads [DIANA]E CONS AVG – Diana, Preserver of the Emperor.

After the death of his father in AD 260, Gallienus became sole ruler of the Roman Empire. In the same year, some of the western provinces broke away from the central rule of Rome to form the 'Gallic Empire'. From 260 until its overthrow in 274, coins were issued by emperors from both the Gallic and Central Empires.



The front of this coin shows Gallienus facing right and wearing the radiate crown. The inscription reads GALLIENVVS AVG – Gallienus Augustus.

The reverse of the coin shows a deer (again representing the goddess Diana) with the inscription DIANA E CONS AVG – Diana, preserver of the Emperor. The coin was minted in Rome.





In AD 260 Postumus, who was governor of Lower Germany, rebelled. He took control of Germany, Gaul, Spain and Britain, which became known as the Gallic Empire. He died at the hands of his own soldiers in 268 when he refused them permission to sack Mainz.

The front of this coin shows Postumus facing right and wearing the radiate crown. The inscription reads IMP C POSTVMVS PF AVG – Emperor Caesar Postumus Patriotic Augustus.



The reverse of the coin reads PAX AV[G] and shows Pax (representing peace) holding an olive branch and a sceptre. The coin was minted in either Lyon or Cologne.



Marius ruled the Gallic Empire for just 12 weeks in AD 269, which means his coins are very scarce in Britain. A soldier of humble birth in Postumus' army, he was appointed hastily by the army and murdered almost as quickly.

The front of this coin reads IMP C M AVR MARIVS AVG – Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Marius Augustus, and shows Marius facing right and wearing the radiate crown.

The reverse of the coin reads CONCORDIA MILIT[VM] – harmony between soldiers, and shows clasped hands.





Claudius (AD 268-70) was a very popular emperor, who defeated tribes of Alamanni and Goths before dying of the plague. He was deified after his death and many coins were struck in his honour, probably by the emperor Aurelian. These coins are quite uncommon in Britain.

The front of the coin shows Claudius facing right and wearing the radiate crown, and reads DIVO [CLAVDI]O – the Divine Claudius.



The reverse of the coin has the inscription CONSECRATIO (meaning consecration or dedication) around an altar.

Quintillus became emperor in AD 270, after the death of his brother Claudius. He ruled for only a few months, committing suicide when he realised he did not have the support of the Danube legions.

The front of the coin reads IMP C M AVR C L QVINTILLVS AVG – Emperor Claudius Marcus Aurelius Caesar Lucius Quintillus Augustus and shows the emperor facing right and wearing the radiate crown.

The reverse of the coin reads LAETITIA AVG and shows Laetitia (goddess of joy and gladness) holding a wreath and anchor on a globe.





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Victorinus ruled the Gallic Empire between AD 269 and 271, defeating the German barbarians and suppressing a major revolt in south-eastern Gaul, but losing south-western Gaul to Claudius II, ruler of the Central Empire. Unfortunately he had a weakness for his soldiers' wives, and was assassinated after propositioning the wife of a senior officer. He too, was deified after his death.

The front of this coin shows Victorinus facing right and wearing the radiate crown, and reads [DIVO VI]CTORINO PIO – the divine Victorinus.

The reverse has the inscription CONS[E]CRATIO around an altar. This is the only coin of its type ever found – no other coins in the Divo Victorinus series have the same reverse.





After the death of Victorinus in AD 271 his mother Victoria briefly took power, before bribing the troops to support her nominee Tetradius I. His rule over the Gallic Empire appears to have been both peaceful and prosperous until Aurelian, ruler of the Central Empire, decided to reunite the Roman Empire. Tetradius agreed to submit to Aurelian, who spared his life.

The front of this coin reads IMP C TETRICVS P F AVG – Emperor Caesar Tetradius Pious Happy Augustus and shows Tetradius facing right and wearing the radiate crown.



The reverse of the coin reads HILARITAS AVGG and shows Hilaritas (meaning mirth and rejoicing) holding a palm and cornucopia.

Aurelian was a popular commander who became emperor in AD 270. He defeated Tetradius in 274, bringing an end to the breakaway Gallic Empire, but was assassinated by members of his own guard in 275.

The front of this coin shows Aurelian facing right and wearing the radiate crown, with the inscription [IMP C AVREL]IANVS AVG – Emperor Caesar Aurelian Augustus.

The reverse of the coin reads RESTITVTO[R ORBIS], meaning Restorer of the World. It shows a woman on the right presenting a wreath to the emperor who is holding a sceptre.





The latest coin found in our hoard, this was issued by the emperor Tacitus who ruled between AD 275 and 276. Tacitus was a general chosen by the army to be emperor. He was murdered after a reign of only six months.

The front of the coin reads IMP CL TACITVS AVG – Emperor Claudius Tacitus Augustus – and shows the emperor facing right and wearing the radiate crown.

The reverse of the coin reads TEMPORVM FELICITAS and shows Felicitas (representing happiness and prosperity) standing left holding a caduceus (staff) and cornucopia (the horn of plenty). The coin was minted in Lyon.