

Recent Roman Coin Hoards in the Borders.

When metal detecting first was first introduced into the Borders, it was not welcomed by many of the Archaeological Establishment. Detectorists were robbers and destroyers of the nation's heritage while metal detectors and their use should be declared illegal.

I took a different view in that they were making archaeological discoveries which would otherwise have remained unknown. As a pro-detectorist, I have been involved in the three Roman coin hoards which have been found by detectorists in recent years.

When the Emperor Severus and his two sons came to Britannia in 208, it was to conquer Caledonia. After two and a half years without much success, he died in York on 4th February 211. The eldest son Caracalla decided that it was not worth the bother and thought it easier to bribe the revolting natives with Roman silver while he left for Rome to be Emperor.

The three recently found hoards are likely to be products of that decision. One interesting point is that all three hoards were found in close proximity to Iron Age forts/settlements and were within the territory of the Selgovae. So it is fairly obvious that the Romans were bribing individual local leaders rather than/or as well as the main tribal grouping.

By the terminus dates of the coins this policy seems to have lasted for many years which was longer than Caracalla did as he was murdered by his Praetorians on 11th March 217.

Peeblesshire. A hoard of 290 denarii ranging from Mark Antony (killed 30 BC) to Elagabalus (Emperor 218 -222 AD) was found on Edston Farm near the remains of a hill-fort in 1994. These were recorded in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain 10, 149 -68*. Declared Treasure Trove, they were acquired by the then Tweeddale District Museum Services.

Roxburghshire. A scattered hoard of 80 denarii was found on Kippilaw Farm south of Maxton in June 2010. They range in date from Vespasian (69 to 79 AD when he became a god') to Marcus Aurelius (161 -180). The find-spot was about 80m north of an unrecorded palisaded enclosure. They were claimed for Treasure Trove. See *P.S.A.S. Vol 144, (2014)*.

Selkirkshire. A hoard of 228 denarii was found on Synton Parkhead Farm near Ashkirk on 4th and 5th May 2011. They range in date from Vitellus (69) to Commodus (180 -192). The find-spot was at the side of a small palisaded enclosure with the Iron Age forts of Blackcastle Hill on the north and Campknowe on the south-west. See *P.S.A.S. Vol 144 (2014)*.



First Sight of the Synton Parkhead Roman Coin Hoard.

The green patina on the coins shows that copper has been added to the mix to make the silver go further. At the period of the hoards the denarius was barely 40% silver and by the middle of the 3rd century, the Roman 'silver' coins had been degraded to copper discs with a silver wash and thus were useless for bribery. So more exotic items of Roman culture, rings, brooches, tableware, glass and pottery became suitable 'gifts' to local tribal leaders. These (hopefully) ensured that the auxiliary militia units recruited from friendly tribes as 'limitanei' (border guards) and 'exploratores' (scouts) would give advance warning of the frequent invasions from the north

Philiphaugh.

Ian Girdwood was gamekeeper on Philiphaugh Estate near Selkirk, a keen metal detectorist he usually detected on the site of the 1645 battle. One day in 1990, he approached me with an object in his hand and a 'what is that' query. I had no hesitation in identifying the gold ring with an engraved seal-stone of Ceres, the goddess of crops, as Roman. When I asked where he got it, he said 'On the field behind the cricket pitch – with a metal detector'. Although I had wrongly dated it as 1st/2nd century, it was quickly claimed by the National Museum as Treasure Trove and given a 4th century dating.



After consideration, I recalled the late Bruce Mason who died in 1963 showing me two distinctly Roman brooches which he had found while field-walking there.

At this period, Dr Ian Smith was searching for comparisons to the Early Anglian settlement at Sprouston and had noted a similarity on APs of the fields at Philiphaugh. I had been fencing there and found a graveyard while looking for the location of previously-dug fence posts with my divining rods. So we got together to compare notes and walk the Philiphaugh fields.

(Ian was one of the rare breed of archaeologists who looked on the use of divining roads, not as proof but as a good indication of what was under the ground even although nothing could be seen on the surface.)

As he would later write of the site *'Close by are at least three rectangular buildings, defined by continuous wall-trenches and a substantial square, ditched enclosure; a counterpart, perhaps for the remodelled enclosure of Sprouston Phase III. Philiphaugh clearly lies outwith the area of early Anglian settlement and thus the cemetery, buildings and enclosure are probably best seen as the components of a British site.'*

At one place on the field nearest the cricket pavilion (and the ancient graveyard), four rows of post-holes indicated a building about 23m by 15m and this was where Ian Girdwood had found the ring.

Further investigation of the site was cut short by Ian Smith's tragic death in July 1994.

Using the premise that the site was 'British' ie non-Anglian, it would have lain within the territory and period of the Selgovae, so the ring may be best looked on as part of a gift/bribe to the local tribal leader. This also infers that the flat fields at Philiphaugh were a major population centre in the 4th century, a not impossible suggestion as all the building would have been of wood which would have decayed over the centuries.

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