

BNS Bursary 2026 - Frome Hoard

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The placement in May assisted Matthew Ball and Tasha Fullbrook with the final checking and packaging of the hoard in preparation for its return to Somerset where South West Heritage Trust will develop a permanent display.

This placement was very exciting for me since my academic interests are mainly centered on third-century Roman Britain and its coins. During my degree I studied the Frome Hoard in two different modules: history of the third century, and archaeology. Consequently, I was interested in the reasons why the Frome hoard may have been deposited and how this might feed into a historical narrative of instability in the late-third century (or not!). I was also interested in how the hoard was excavated in arbitrary layers (spits) and how this may give us a deeper understanding of its nature.

Throughout my placement, I mainly worked on the coins of the Gallic Emperor Victorinus. The bags of coins were generally separated by their reverse type – and these bags were grouped together by the archaeological layer where they came from (e.g. layer 16 was the biggest layer).

The aim was to prepare the hoard for transport back to Somerset by repackaging the coins, whilst also preparing the hoard for publication by checking counts/identifications and selecting coins for photography. Here is the general process of my work:

1. Empty the coins from their degrading paper envelopes and recount the contents (**Fig. 2-3.**).
2. Spot-check an array of coins to see whether they have been identified correctly and isolate coins worthy of photography (e.g. well-preserved types, brockages, blanks etc.).
3. Place the coins into inert archival plastic bags and transcribe the relevant information across. If necessary, correct or add any relevant details (**Fig. 4.**).
4. Lastly, Matthew Ball would check my work and update the Excel spreadsheet with the required information.

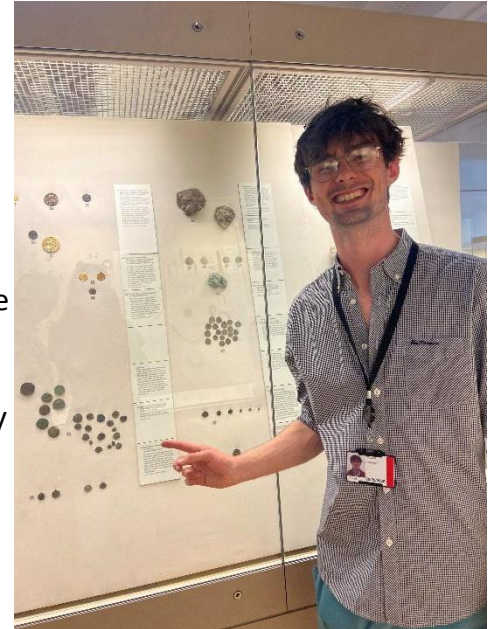


Fig. 1. Will enjoying some of the BMs coin displays (author's own photograph).



Figure 4. The relevant information is written on an inert plastic bag (author's own photograph)

What I enjoyed most was finding an assorted bag of coins and having to sort and identify them from scratch. It was very fun learning how to use a new catalogue for identification (**Fig. 5.**). I really liked how the catalogue succinctly categorised the different obv. bust types and rev. types into groups like “D1” or “Pax 1” – instead of describing them in a lot of detail (e.g. Victorinus, radiate, right... or Pax, standing left....).

				337					338

Figure 5. Two pages from the Catalogue which contains the Victorinus coins of Normanby Hoard – taken from: Bland, R., Besley, E., Burnett, A., and Moorhead, S. (2018) *The Cunetio and Normanby Hoards* (London: Spink Books), 337-338. Over the two weeks, I became very familiar with these two pages.

Here is an example of the general process of identifying a coin of Victorinus using the Normanby Catalogue.

1. Look at the obv. bust type. For example, the most important distinction for Victorinus was whether he is just cuirassed (type B), or both cuirassed and draped (type D). This is because type D is generally from Mint I and type B is from Mint II.
2. Look at the obv. legend. There are many different variations for Victorinus, but the main difference was whether it was long-form or not (e.g. 'IMP C M PIAVVONIVS VICTORINVS PF AVG' versus 'IMP C VICTORINVS PF AVG').
3. Look at the rev. legend and rev. type with their different attributes (e.g. PAX AVG with Pax 1, who is standing left with a branch in her right hand and a transverse sceptre in her left).
4. Lastly, look at the mint marks on the rev. (e.g. V/*//).

Using the coin from **Fig. 6.** as an example – the obverse shows a D1 bust and the legend reads 'IMP C VICTORINVS PF AVG'. Whereas the reverse shows Pax 1 with a mint mark (V/*//). Using this information, an excerpt of the catalogue (**Fig. 7.**) shows that this coin is NORM. 1406. This sort of coin frequently appeared in many of the different layers of the coin hoard.



Obv.: IMP C VICTORINVS PF AVG;
Victorinus, right, radiate, draped and cuirassed.

Rev.: PAX AVG, V/*//; Pax standing left, holding a branch right and transverse sceptre left.

American Numismatic Society,
1984.67.2523.

<http://numismatics.org/collection/1984.67.2523> (accessed 05 July 2026). Public domain.

Figure 6. Antoninianus/radiate of Victorinus (NOT FROM THE FROME HOARD), AD 269-271, RIC V Victorinus 118.

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Second phase: IMP C VICTORINVS PF AVG (sometimes punctuated)							
1405.*	PAX AVG	Pax 1	V*//	A3	-	2529	9 2.88
1406.	PAX AVG	Pax 1	V*//	D1	682	2530/8	645 2.84
1407.*	PAX AVG	Pax 1	V-//	D1	-	2531	9 3.03
1408.*	COMES AVG	Victory 1	*-//	D1	-	-	1 3.13
1409.	INVICTVS	Sol 3b	*-//	D1	683	2534/9	658 2.85
1410.*	INVICTVS	Sol 3b	--//	D1	-	2535	2 2.92

Figure 7. An excerpt from Fig. 5. – the red rectangles show the identification of the coin from Fig. 6. as NORM. 1406.

I found this sort of work the most engaging and rewarding part of my placement. I particularly enjoyed the orderly process, and the satisfaction of it. Consequently, I would one day like to work as a FLO in the PAS or even work on coin hoards at the BM. Either way, I would like to pursue a career in archaeological numismatics!

Matt and Tasha taught me a range of useful tips and tricks to assist identifying poorly preserved coins. Here are the most memorable examples:

- Since the coins are not well-preserved and the diagnostic parts of the obv. legend is often illegible or missing – it is good to look at the legible parts to estimate whether the long-form legend could fit in the given space.
- They encouraged me to understand a range of visual short hands to quickly identify rev. types or different emperors (especially if the legend is illegible). For example, the Gallic Emperor Tetricus I has a pointy nose with ‘squiggly’ beard and hair, whereas Tetricus II has a ‘baby face’ with big cheeks.

Experiencing the British Museum

Matt and Tasha also ensured I experienced a lot of different things outside of the ‘everyday tasks’ which I discussed above. They took me around the galleries, the departmental collection, and to different departments. I really enjoyed the whole ‘British Museum experience’.

In particular, I was shocked at the scale of the BM (**Fig. 8**): it is not just a museum but an institution. This felt the most profound when attempting to navigate all the confusing staircases and corridors or witnessing the hustle and bustle in the staff canteen. I was fortunate to be introduced to the Treasure team to learn more about the Treasure process and the PAS. I also met the Conservation team on Treasure Tuesday – we were shown how hoards are ‘micro-excavated’ under laboratory conditions, and how the coins are cleaned properly. It was certainly a privilege to meet Pippa Pearce and to hear how she comedically described working with coins (especially the Frome hoard).

Moreover, all of the curators in the Money and Medals Department, whom I was fortunate to meet or worked alongside, were all so kind. They each dedicated a lot of time sharing their knowledge and passion, and I truly

appreciate that. I was shown around the modern collections by Sabrina Ben Aouicha, Robert Bracey taught me all about die studies, Wendy Scott showed me around the medieval coins in the department, Miriam Dafydd

spoke to me all about documentation and museum studies, Richard Adby showed me around the Roman coins in the department, I chatted to Eleanor Ghey about hoards, and Elina Screen discussed potential dissertation topics with me. Each conversation was enlightening in its own way – and it was such a privilege to talk to each of these individuals. To be truthful, I rushed home each evening to write down everything that was said to me, and I often look back to these notes.

However, of course I must thank Tasha and Matt the most. Firstly, they were both very caring and knowledgeable, and they were good inspirations and teachers! I was particularly inspired by how Tasha became a FLO and a Project Curator, whilst currently doing a very interesting PhD. Matt spent a lot of time discussing with me a range of influential scholarship which shaped our understanding of Roman coins in Britain most notably the impact of Richard Reece, David Walker and P.S.W. Guest. Fortunately, in my Archaeology exam at university, I had a question on archaeological numismatics, and I included a lot of the ideas and concepts which Matt and I discussed.

Since he is a National Finds Advisor for the PAS and helps to manage the database – Matt

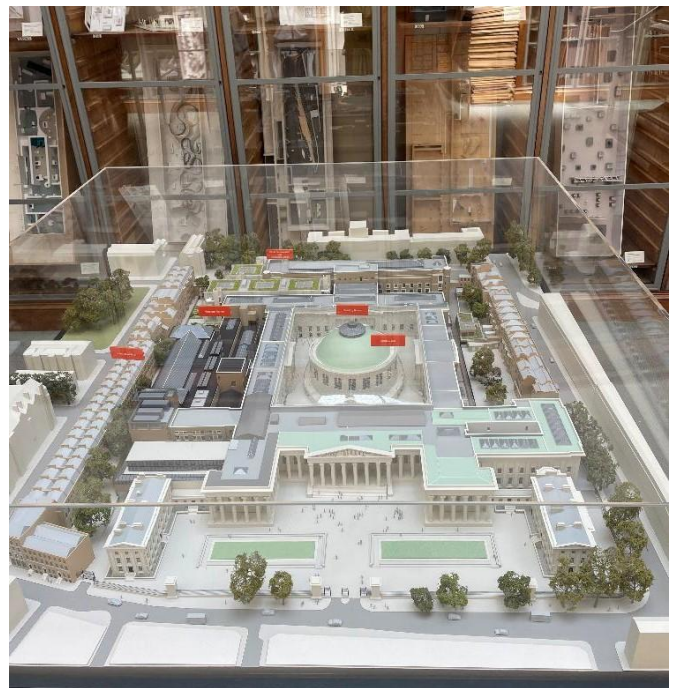


Figure 8. The fantastic model of the British Museum. Personally, this really cemented my view of the BM as an institution and, at times, a labyrinth.

explained how to navigate it properly, the importance of an accessible but comprehensive database, and the importance of the PAS to scholarship (e.g. Phillipa Walton's PhD). Before this conservation I certainly had a more 'conservative' attitude to metal detecting, but now I recognise how valuable the data gathered by metal detectorists is. Consequently, I hope to use the PAS in my future work at university (especially since my academic interest is third century Roman coins). Moreover, I hope to perhaps work in the PAS one-day. Consequently, Matt has encouraged me to think about volunteering for a local FLO to gain more experience with archaeological numismatics and to further understand how the PAS operates.

The things I did outside of the placement were also very important. On the 19th of May, I went to a RNS talk and heard Frédérique Duyrat talk about the gold coinage of Alexander III: it was interesting to see how she tied iconographic changes to specific events or locations on Alexander's campaign. I wonder whether I can attempt this sort of history with the Roman coinage of a specific emperor.

I also loved exploring the museum before all the visitors were allowed to enter. As a Classical Archaeologist, seeing the Elgin marbles (**Fig. 9.**) and the Rossetta stone alone was truly breath-taking: these are memories which I will always remember.

Lastly, I simply enjoyed socializing with all the different people I met in the Department – either eating pizza in the BM Pizzaria or chatting away in the pub. Everybody was so kind, fun and welcoming – they were my sort of crowd!

To conclude, this placement has ultimately confirmed my wish to become a numismatist who works with archaeological material. Moreover, with everything I learnt and all the contacts I have made – I hope I am also a step closer to this ambition. At the moment, I am currently arranging the possibility to return and continue working with the Frome Hoard over summer – I still have so much to learn, and I cannot think of a better way to do so. I loved every single moment of this placement.

Moreover, since this placement, I have been busy attempting to improve my numismatic skills. I have attended a conference where I bumped into some of the curators from the Department, and a very interesting Money & Medals Network training day on exhibiting coins. I hope to continue learning more about Third Century Roman Britain and its coins. Currently, I am starting to think about doing a master's degree and where this might be.

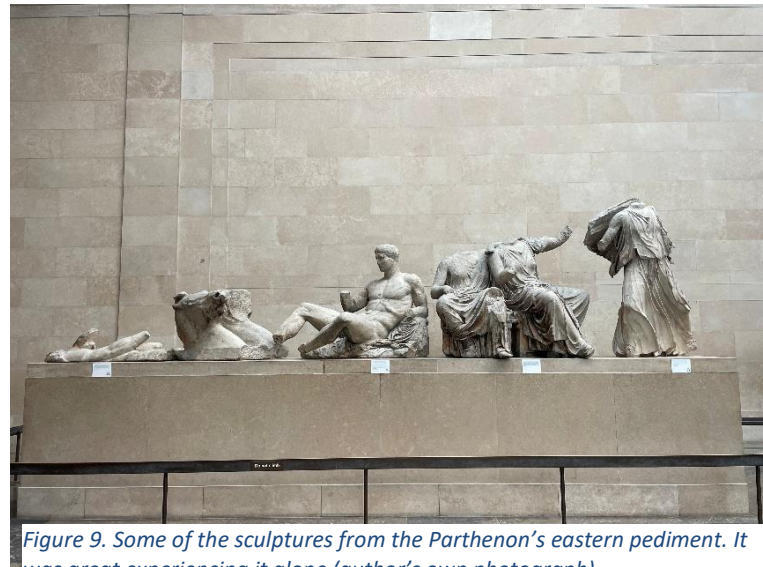


Figure 9. Some of the sculptures from the Parthenon's eastern pediment. It was great experiencing it alone (author's own photograph).



It was truly an honour being a part of the process (albeit a rather small one -**Fig. 10.**) that will see a hoard, which has interested me very much over the past two years, someday published and in a museum.

Figure 10. A box containing the 9289 Victorinus Coins from the Frome Hoard which I processed with Matt. This box represents only ~17% of the total count (author's own photograph)!

