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A parcel of unrecorded coins from the Fyfield hoard of 1944

David Holman, Hugh Cloke & Lee Toone

Cataloguing of the coin collection of a now elderly numismatist of his acquaintance by one of the contributors (DH), revealed the presence of ten Tetrarchic *nummi* with some documentary evidence stating that they came from a hoard found at Kingston Bagpiazo (*sic*) in Berkshire in 1946 (Fig. 1). These had been purchased from the Hobby Shop in Wimbledon, apparently in 1967. The seller had originally had thirteen coins, but three (numbers 4, 8 & 10) had already been sold when the numismatist purchased the remainder. It is stated that a Mrs Laurey had given the coins in 1952 to someone for whom only initials are shown. The initials of the recipient are unclear, but the first letter may be a Y. It is presumed that the Hobby Shop had acquired the coins from the unknown recipient or an intermediary sometime between 1952 and 1967. It is also presumed – not necessarily correctly – that Mrs Laurey had been in possession of these coins since the time of their discovery. Enquiries to try to discover who Mrs Laurey was have been unsuccessful, so how and when she came to be in possession of the coins remains unknown. Furthermore, there is no certainty that her name is even spelt correctly because of the potential for information imparted orally to become garbled, and other spellings of this name are possible.

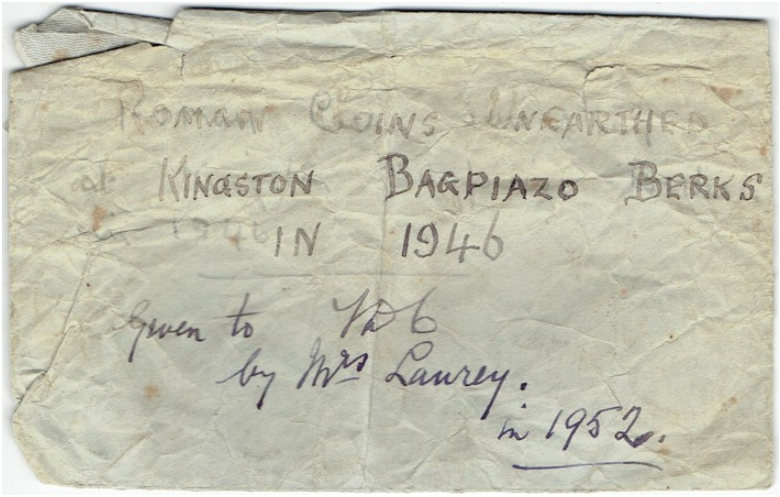


Fig. 1: Documentary evidence of the discovery (photo by David Holman)

The British Museum were made aware of the coins in 1965. It is not certain that they saw the coins themselves, and it appears that they may have only been sent a sheet with pencil rubbings of twelve of the coins made by an unknown hand (Fig. 2).[1] A letter dated 18 August 1965 from Nicholas Lowick, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins & Medals to an unknown addressee gives summary identifications of twelve coins, and the letter refers to the numbers shown against the rubbings. It appears that the British Museum was not told where the coins had come from, for the letter states that '*there is no doubt that they all come from a hoard of coins, probably deposited somewhere in Britain about the year 306 AD*'. Lowick's principal field of expertise was in Islamic coins, and a number of unfortunate errors are evident in the letter. There are two mentions of Coin 1, which is listed as both Diocletian and (correctly) Maximian, but no mention of Coin 6 at all. Furthermore, whereas the letter states that Coin 5 was of Constantius I, it is actually of Diocletian; the omitted Coin 6 is of Constantius I. The letter also states that all the coins are of the GENIO POPVLI ROMANI type but that is not correct as one of them (Coin 2) is of the FIDES MILITVM type (from the Ticinum mint, also not mentioned in the letter). Finally, some of the coins are of Galerius, another fact also omitted from the letter, and it appears that Lowick wrongly assumed that all the coins carrying the name MAXIMIANVS were of Maximian.

[1] No rubbing exists of the thirteenth coin because there was insufficient space on the sheet to include it.



Fig. 2: Rubbings of the coins (nos. 1-12)

Roger Bland does not list any hoards with a provenance of Kingston Bagpuize but does list a large hoard of coins mainly of the same type and date from the neighbouring parish of Fyfield, found in 1944.[2] This hoard was also listed by Anne Robertson.[3] It has been allocated the reference IARCH-B9547F by the British Museum as part of the Iron Age and Roman Coin Hoard project. It contained one *antoninianus* and 2,105 *nummi* with a deposition date of c.AD 307. The land on which the coins were found was owned by St. John Baptist College, Oxford, who deposited the coins with the Ashmolean Museum, which subsequently acquired them. The Fyfield hoard was found by chance sometime between January and March of 1944 when news of its discovery reached the Ashmolean. It was uncovered by a mechanical excavator approximately 1¼ miles south-west of the village of that name. This location lies just ½ mile south-east of Kingston Bagpuize. These villages are now in Oxfordshire but were in Berkshire until boundary changes in 1974. The difference in the date of discovery between the coins from Fyfield and the coins attributed to Kingston Bagpuize can be easily explained by the Ashmolean Museum's publication in 1946 of E. T. Leeds' booklet detailing the contents of the hoard.[4]

Hugh Cloke and Lee Toone recatalogued the Fyfield hoard for Eleanor Ghey's 2024 study of Tetrarchic hoards from the UK.[5] Their study involved comparing the coins currently housed in the Ashmolean with Leeds' 1946 published catalogue, and amplifying Leeds' cryptic description of the hoard's discovery in 1944. The hoard was discovered on the parish boundary between Fyfield and Kingston Bagpuize during the U. S. Army's expansion of an air base known as RAF Kingston Bagpuize beginning in January 1944 in the lead up to the D-Day invasion of France. Most of the U. S. Army personnel involved in this work were housed in Kingston Bagpuize so it is not surprising that Mrs. Laurey identified her coins as belonging to the "Kingston Bagpuize hoard". She may have been unaware of Leeds' catalogue which was published by the Museum for sale to visitors. We know from Leeds that some hoard coins were taken away at the time of the hoard's discovery by bystanders[6]. Many of these were later shown to Leeds for his cataloguing work and were returned to their owners which accounts, in part, for the

[2] Bland 2018, 247, no. 2003 (*Coin Hoards and Hoarding in Roman Britain AD 43-c.498*, BNS Special Publication No. 13, London)

[3] Robertson 2000, 239, no. 988 *(An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards*, RNS Special Publication no. 20, London)

[4] Leeds, E.T., 1946, *A Hoard of Roman folles from Diocletian's reform (A.D. 296) to Constantine Caesar, found at Fyfield, Berks*; Oxford

[5] Ghey, Eleanor, *Recent Discoveries of Tetrarchic Hoards from Roman Britain and their Wider Context*, British Museum Research Publications No. 236, 2024.

[6] According to Leeds', "The discovery at Fyfield was delivered to the Ashmolean Museum almost intact; a few pieces subtracted as specimens by witnesses of the find have all been seen or acquired." The single coin classified here as belonging to group 3, which was never shown to Leeds, qualifies his statement. Leeds also corrects an earlier report in 1944 that the hoard had been found in Kingston Bagpuize. He cites "*Oxford*, viii, No. 3, p. 14" for that earlier report.

discrepancy between the number recorded by Leeds (2,105 *nummi*) and the coins recorded by Cloke and Toone (2,128). The Cloke-Toone total in their New Fyfield Catalogue includes coins in three groups: 1) 2,061 coins recorded from their cabinet tickets (16 of which were not recorded by Leeds), 2) 66 coins not found in the cabinets but either recorded by Leeds or illustrated in his plates, and 3) one coin (New Catalogue no. 388) neither found in the cabinets nor recorded by Leeds but reported to Cloke and Toone by the current owner whose grandmother was gifted the coin by a lodger present at the hoard's discovery in 1944[7].

We know from these totals that some hoard coins made their way to the museum after 1946, and other coins taken away by bystanders were never recorded.

To assess whether any of the thirteen newly revealed coins are from the 66 coins shown to Leeds then returned to their owners, we (HC & LT) compared them to their respective numbers in the New Fyfield Catalogue. We found that no coins of these particular types were missing from the Ashmolean cabinets. So, they were either never shown to Leeds or are not from this hoard. The circumstantial evidence is very strong that they were originally part of the Fyfield hoard.[8]

KB no	Issuer	Mint	RIC No.	New Fyfield No.	Notes (New Fyfield Catalogue)
1	Maximian	London	6b	13	33 recorded examples, all accounted for
2	Galerius	Ticinum	55b	616-7	4 recorded examples, all accounted for
3	Galerius, Caesar	London	15 (POPV-LI)	21	47 recorded examples, all accounted for
4	Galerius, Caesar	Lyons	17b (POPV-LI)	before 418	None recorded with this reverse legend break
5	Diocletian	Trier	277a (POPV-LI) (off. B)	168	4 recorded examples, all accounted for
6	Constantius I, Caesar	Trier	213a (POPV-LI) (off. A)	150	10 recorded examples, all accounted for
7	Maximian	Trier	519b (POPV-LI) (off. I)	326	13 recorded examples, all accounted for
8	Galerius, Caesar	London	15 (POPV-LI)	21	47 recorded examples, all accounted for
9	Constantius I, Caesar	Trier	334 (off. A)	211 var	5 recorded examples from officina B, all accounted for; none from A
10	Diocletian	Trier	154a or 187a (less likely)	94-6 119-121	1 recorded with this reverse legend break; 12 examples accounted for; 2 missing from Ashmolean
11	Severus II, Caesar	Lyons	199a var (Bastien 377)	after 564	No recorded examples
12	Constantius I	London	52a (POPV-LI)	51	15 recorded examples, all accounted for
13	Maximian	Trier	170b (off. B)	129	12 recorded examples, all accounted for

Table 1: Catalogue of the new Fyfield hoard parcel

Although the presence of a second, much smaller, unrecorded hoard in the same area found at about the same time cannot be wholly discounted, it is highly likely that these thirteen coins are an unrecorded parcel from the Fyfield hoard. The ten available coins (Fig. 3) have now kindly been donated to the Ashmolean Museum to be reunited with the bulk of the hoard.

[7] See Ghey 2024, 124 note 63.

[8] See Ghey 2024, 125, note 69 for a discussion of four *nummi* now in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The coins were deposited there in 1951. They were described in the museum's accessions register as "part of a hoard found during the building of an aerodrome at [near] Oxford." Although the four Birmingham coins were not included by Cloke and Toone in their new Fyfield Catalogue, they, along with the thirteen coins discussed here, make it likely that more Fyfield coins remain to be identified within private collections.

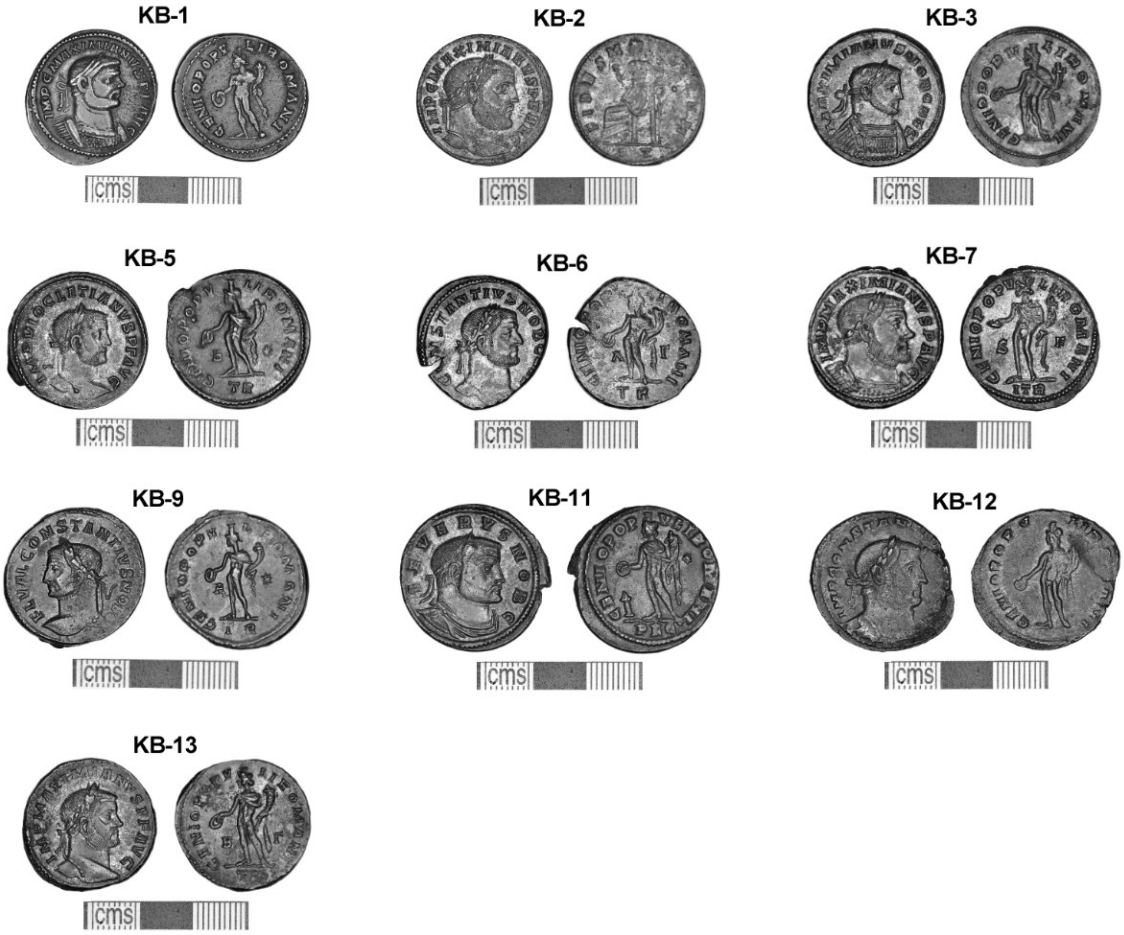


Fig 3: The ten available coins (photos by David Holman).

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