CAISTOR ROMAN PROJECT

Venta Icenorum

A Review of the Roman coins on the Historic Environment Record

Legionary Denarius Legio XX Valeria Victrix 32-31 BC

by

Ian Jackson 25/07/2017

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THE ROMAN COINS FROM VENTA ICENORUM

A Review of the Roman Coins on the Historic Environment Record

Introduction

Over the course of the ten years that the Caistor Roman Project (CRP) has been working in and around the Roman town of Venta Icenorum it has become increasingly evident that the story of its development and evolution during the Roman occupation is considerably more nuanced than that portrayed by Donald Atkinson on the basis of his work in the town between 1929 and 1935. Atkinson concluded that the town of Venta Icenorum was founded in the immediate aftermath of the Boudiccan revolt in AD 61 and towards the end of the Roman occupation enjoyed "a period of prosperity lasting until the middle of the fourth century" [1].

It is common knowledge that the area has attracted the attention of metal detectorists over the past forty years or so, some quite clearly illegal as the following extracts from the HER records attest. These records all relate to Norfolk Historic Environment (HER) Site Code 9787 (The extra-mural temple area).

"Sept. 4 1985: Two illicit detector users spotted in the NW part of the site, which had already been detected by us (see above). Escaped. T. Gregory Sept. 5 1985".

"Sept. 30 1985 Late at night, site hit again by metal-detecting; footprints discovered the following morning suggest eight detectors, including one on wheels! A very large number of holes reported. Raid followed spring-tining that afternoon. T. Gregory October 1985".

"Oct. 1 1985 Field hit again at night; two sets of footprints and a large number of holes, largely in the north-east part of the site. T. Gregory Oct 10 1985".

"Nov 17 or 18: Hit by night-time detecting again – many holes in growing barley. T. Gregory Nov 20 1985".

Whilst the above extracts paint a bleak picture they are the only references to night-hawking that I came across in working through the documentation. As this particular search of the HER focussed on those records containing a reference to coins there could of course be numerous other references to night-hawking elsewhere within the HER.

Despite the cultural vandalism displayed by the individuals who carried out nighthawking at Venta a number of conscientious detectorists were in the habit of submitting their finds to the Museum Service for identification and recording. The names of several of these individuals crop up repeatedly in the records. The sheer scale of these records is a tribute to the foresight and hard work of the late Tony Gregory.

I was clearly not aware of the scale of recorded coin finds at the outset of the project. Indeed, had I been aware of the enormity of the task I was setting myself I might well have had second thoughts. On the basis of the Roman coins that have been recovered during the work of the CRP, since its inception, I felt however that there would be value

in carrying out a review of the material held within the Historic Environment Record at Gressenhall. The purpose of the exercise was to ascertain the extent of the records relating to Roman coins and to see what if anything these records could add to the story of Venta Icenorum and its evolution throughout the course of the Roman occupation.

All of the comments/observations contained in this paper are based on the examination and analysis of the HER coin data. This data has yet to be compared with that from the excavations conducted by Donald Atkinson between 1929 – 1935 and more recently by the University of Nottingham/Caistor Roman Project excavations between 2009 – 2012. Much of the data retrieved from the HER for the purposes of this study will undoubtedly have been used in John Davies and Tony Gregory's "Coinage from a Civitas" (2). I have assumed that the records used by Davies and Gregory together with records that post-date the production of their study make up the sum total of the records that I have extracted from the HER to date.

Methodology

Following consultation with Heather Hamilton at Gressenhall a 1200m buffer zone was created to encompass the town and also specifically the Temple area. The buffer zone was then slightly altered to a shape broadly resembling an oblong (NHER Enquiry 16_10_37). This resulted in the exclusion of a number of find sites that otherwise met the search criteria but consequently did reduce the volume of data that needed to be processed. All records containing a reference to Roman coins within the adjusted 1200mm buffer zone were then extracted and scanned (See map at Appendix 1).

The majority of the record files comprise coin lists (see example at Appendix 2), with the addition of Museum Record Card entries that also contained references to Roman coin finds, (see example at Appendix 3), plus a small number of Archaeological Reports where Roman coins appeared within the documented finds list. The coin lists are typically written on Museum Service pro-formas and in most cases signed by the Member of staff who carried out the identification and cataloguing as mentioned above. Signatories included the well-known figures of Tony Gregory, John Davies, David Gurney and Adrian Marsden.

Exclusions/Adjustments

- All unidentified coins were excluded.
- Loosely dated coins e.g "3rd Century" were excluded
- Barbarous Radiates were allocated to Reece Period 14 (AD 275 – 296) as per the approach adopted by John Davies in "The Roman Coins from Lowbury Hill"(9).
- Coins with identification qualified by a ? were excluded unless either the Obverse or Reverse was positively identified.
- In a small number of instances the date range of a coin fell marginally outside a specific Reece Period. In these cases the coin was allocated to the Period containing the bulk of its date range.

The 50+ files extracted from the HER database contain coin lists varying in size from over 100 pages to a single page. The most productive site, in terms of coin finds, by some distance has been Dunston Field. With the above-mentioned exception/adjustments, each individual entry on the record sheets was transcribed on to an Excel spreadsheet, to enable collation and analysis to be carried out on a much larger dataset than I have previously been able to work with. There were many examples where identical coins had been bulk entered. This was particularly the case with 4th Century entries as the following example illustrates – "x26 HoV SR 364- 378". This required the following data to be entered 26 times into the spreadsheet – House of Valentinian – Securitas Reipublicae- 364 – 378.

By analysing this much larger dataset I hoped to be able to verify with a greater degree of confidence one or two trends that we had glimpsed when working on smaller datasets, and ultimately to compare the overall pattern of coin loss at Venta with other urban Roman sites in Britain. I have previously compared the coin loss data from Venta with that of Wroxeter and they proved to be somewhat different with Wroxeter's earlier foundation, circa AD 59, supported by the greater prevalence of early post-invasion coins when compared to Venta.

Towards the end of Roman occupation, the presence of Valentinianic and later coins at Venta was referred to in Sam Morehead's Report on the coin finds from the Church excavations during 2009 and 2010, although the dataset was too small to draw any firm conclusions. Similarly, an analysis of Michael Brely's coin finds within the area of the walled town from the period 1962 – 1971 also demonstrated the presence of post AD 350 coins in the vicinity of the church, again with the same caveat regarding the size of the dataset (4).

Results

A total of 7393 coins were entered on to an Excel spreadsheet. Of these 7299 (98.7%) were sufficiently tightly dated to enable them to be allocated to a specific Reece Period. As stated above the grand total excludes many illegible coins together with the following that have been analysed previously:

CRT 2009 – 2010 Coins [Total 262]

CRT 2011 – 2012 Coins – Trench Finds + Metal Detected Finds [Total 1772]

Michael Brely coins from fieldwalking within the walled area of the town between 1961 – 1972 – see above [total 254]

Wymer Field CRP excavation + Metal Detected coin finds [total 136 i.e 24 + 112]

Donald Atkinson coin inventory from 1929 – 1935 excavations [Total 1298 coins]

Adding the total number of coin finds from the HER (7393) to the numbers listed above gives a grand total at the time of writing of 11,115.

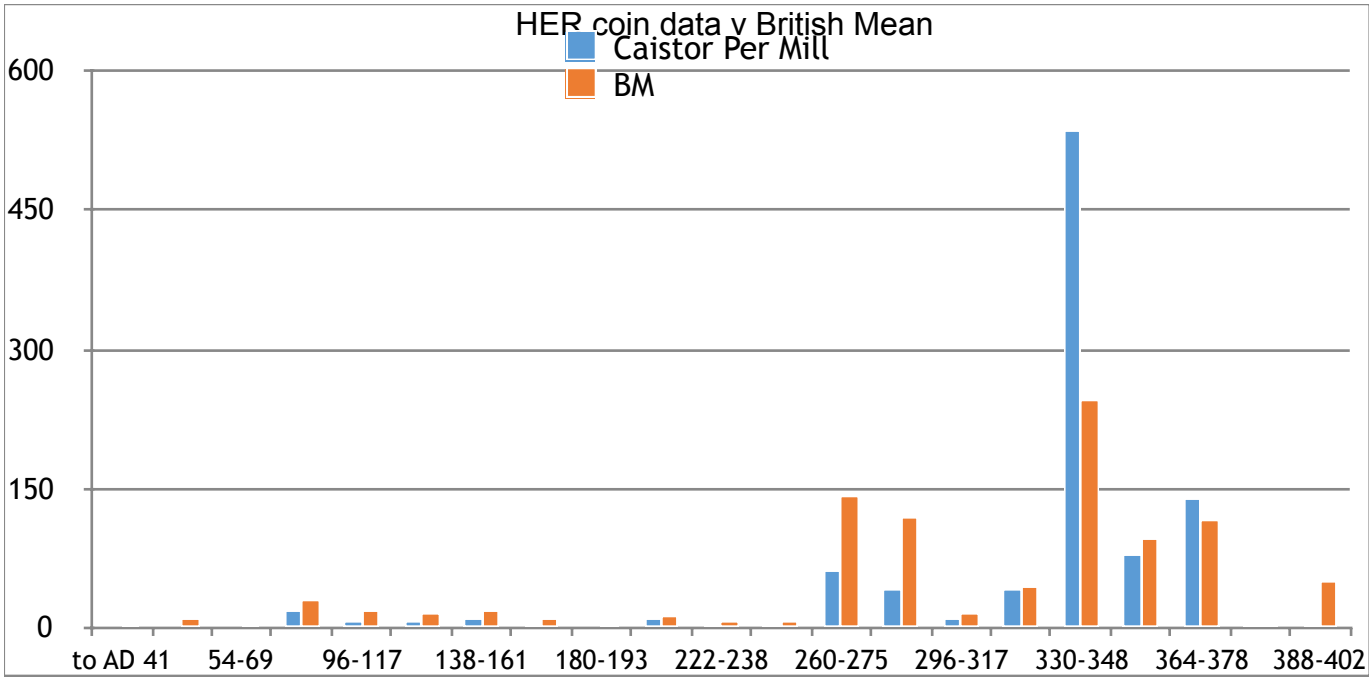
This appears at face value to stand favourable comparison with the quoted coin finds from Verulamium (9141), Cirencester (9981) and Silchester (8870) but these latter three counts are presumably based on the excavated coin finds and may not take account of

any metal detected element. A more representative comparison is therefore to be made by focussing on coins retrieved during excavations at Caistor and comparing this figure with that from the other sites referred to. Extracting the excavated finds from the 2011/2012 seasons and adding this figure (551) to 2009 – 2010 (262), Wymer Field (24) and Donald Atkinson's total (1298) gives a grand total for excavated coins to date of 2135. By comparison the coin count from the Wroxeter excavations is 774 so it may well be that, if we limit the comparison to excavated coin finds only, Venta lies somewhere between Wroxeter and the other three sites in terms of the volume of coin loss as measured by coins recovered during excavations.

The Early Coins from Venta

The earliest recorded coin finds to date are two Republican Denarii dating from the 1st to 2nd Century BC. In addition, there are five coins from the reign of Mark Anthony which date from 32 – 31 BC. Three of the five are described as legionary Denarii one of which bears the legend LEG XX i.e Legio XX Valeria Victrix, see below.

Venta appears to differ markedly from a number of major Roman urban sites in the comparative scarcity of immediate post-invasion coins. From the HER data, early post-invasion coins are represented in fairly small numbers with just nine coins of Claudius I and twelve coins of Nero (Reece Periods 2 and 3 - AD 41 - 69. This is well below the British Mean. This relative lack of early post invasion coins would appear to support the supposition that Venta was established somewhat later that the date proposed by Atkinson. Furthermore the relative paucity of early post invasion coins from the town and its immediate environs, i.e excluding the temple complex, might suggest that any military presence was probably on a small scale and relatively short-lived.



Dunston Field

Of the 7393 coins transcribed from the Historic Environment Record (HER) 4398 (59.5%) have been recovered from Dunston Field (HER Ref Code 9759). The next most prolific site is The Park with 790 recovered coins (10.7%). There are several possible explanations for this heavy bias towards Dunston Field including:

- Its size relative to the other sites in and around the town that have been metal detected over the past four decades or so. It should be stressed that no comparison of the actual sizes of the various HER coded sites has been carried out.
- It may simply have been more accessible over a longer period of time and therefore subjected to more regular and intensive bouts of metal detecting that the other sites.
- The sheer number of coins recovered from Dunston Field may be a reflection of the level of activity in that area. Could this, for example, be the main market area for the town. Given the confines imposed by the walling in of a much reduced footprint there would be some sense in this arrangement. There are no doubt other equally plausible explanations such as the area being the focus of votive activity and hence deliberate placement of coins rather than cumulative accidental loss.

At least eighteen different mints are represented in the coins recovered from Dunston Field; namely:

Amiens

Arles

Aquileia

C mint

Cologne

Constantinople

Gaul Mints I and II

Heraclea

Laodicea

London

Lyons

Milan

Nicomedia

Rome

Siscia

Tarraco

Thessalonika

Trier

The map overleaf shows the location of Roman mints during the reign of the House of Constantine. The only mint not identified on the map is Laodicea.

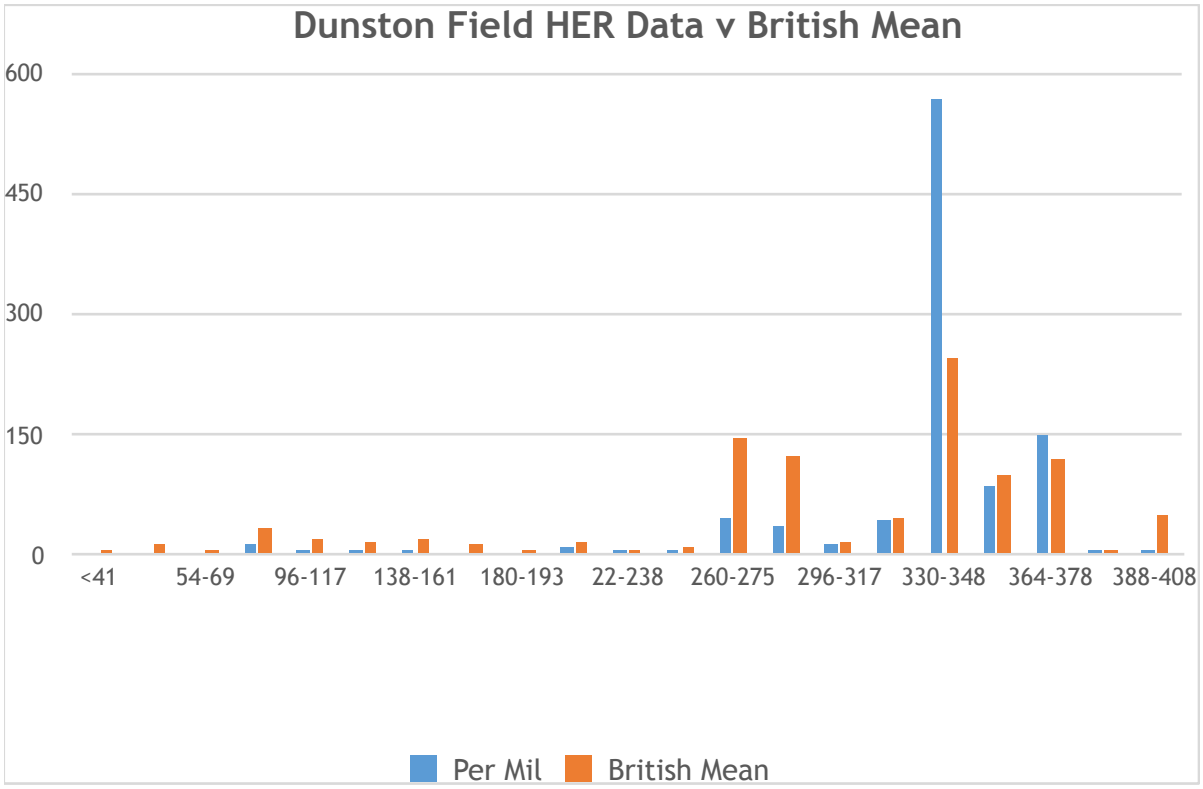
1533 of the recorded coins have an identified mint. The most commonly encountered mint is Trier followed by Lyons and Arles which is fairly typical for Roman sites in Britain, see Table below.

Mint	Number of Coins	% of Total where mint identified
Trier	734	47.9
Lyons	223	14.5
Arles	211	13.8
Rome	118	7.7
London	78	5.1
Siscia	42	2.7
Aquileia	30	2.0
Others	97	6.3

Interestingly, although only present as single finds, there have been four coins from eastern Mediterranean mints found in Dunston Field and nowhere else in and around Venta. The Heraclea and Nicomedia mints were clustered together around the Bosphorus with Cyzicus and Constantinople as shown on the above map. As these are single finds there could be any one of a number of reasons why they have ended up being "lost" in Dunston Field, or indeed exactly when they were lost.

The earliest coin recovered from Dunston Field to date is a coin bearing the legend L. Torqva/Q. This coin dates from 113 – 112 BC, the legend being the name of the moneyer Lucius Manlius Torquatus. Moneyers were private individuals who were permitted to mint money, a feature commonplace during the Republican period. Moving forward in time but still well in advance of the AD 43 Claudian invasion is a legionary Denarius of Mark Anthony, one of three recorded from the HER data:, the other two having been recovered from the North Field. Although not a Dunston Field find, one of the latter, interestingly is the coin referred to above bearing the legend LEG XX i.e Legio XX Valeria Victrix. This was one of the four legions that took part in the AD 43 invasion and was subsequently involved in a number of actions, including the defeat of Caratacus and the supression of the Boudiccan revolt. The twentieth legion also participated in the construction of Hadrian's wall.

The graph below shows the pattern of coin loss from Dunston Field for those coins that could be allocated to a specific Reece Period (4235) compared to the British Mean i.e the expected distribution based on the analysis of coin finds from 140 Roman sites across Great Britain. This range of sites encompasses villas, towns, temples, forts and villages (5).



Three features of the above graph are worthy of comment

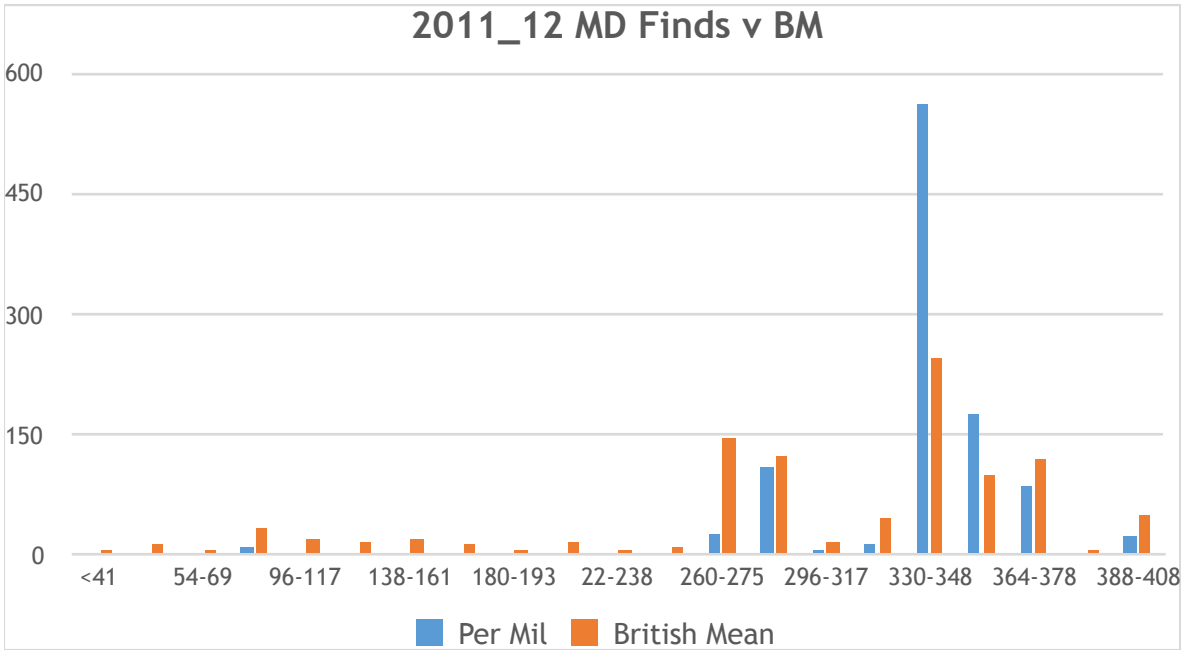
- For every Reece Period until Period 16 (AD 317 – 330) Venta falls below the British Mean. In otherwords coin loss, as recorded by metal detected finds, is below the average loss for some 140 Roman sites across the UK.
- Venta shows a marked divergence from the British Mean during Reece Periods 13 and 14 (AD 260 – 296 inclusive). This is one of the two periods during the Roman occupation when the presence of copies was particularly commonplace within the coinage in circulation at the time. Whilst the so-called barbarous radiates do appear in the record sheets is this the full story. For example is it conceivable that some of these finds might have been discarded by the finder. I suspect that this is not the case given the diligence shown by the detectorists involved.
- Where Venta really stands out from the norm is during Reece Period 17 (AD 330 – 348) and to a lesser extent Reece Period 19 (AD 364 – 378). The peak of coin loss in Dunston Field during the period AD 330 – 348 very much echoes what has been found from similar analyses of coin loss in other parts of the town and its hinterland.

The repeated divergence from the British Mean at Venta between AD 330 – 348 is so marked as to suggest that this particular period was characterised by something that is not simply a reflection of the large quantity of coinage circulating during this period.

Walton (3) refers to Reece's contention that "where the site exhibited values equivalent to double the British Mean this was deemed to represent a chronological period of abnormality". The pattern of coin loss at Venta falls within this category (see above graph). What has yet to be established is an explanation for this so-called abnormality.

The degree of coin loss at Venta during the Valentinianaic period, whilst not on the scale of the 330 – 348 losses, is the one other period where the British Mean is exceeded. This may suggest that Venta was still active well towards the end of the Roman occupation and perhaps beyond.

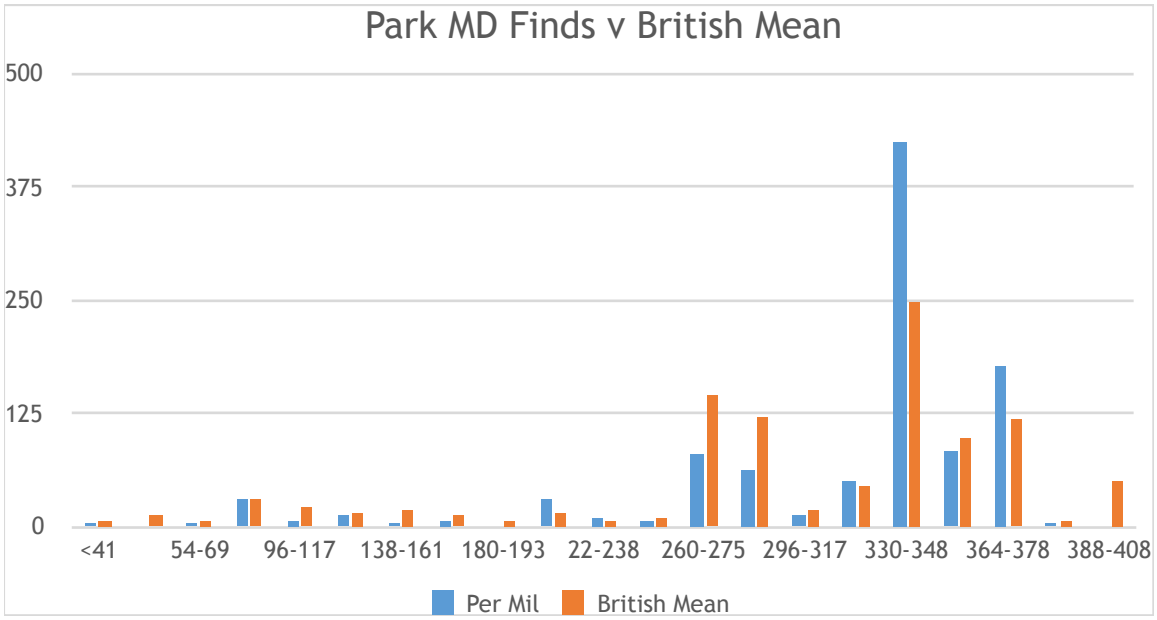
The graph on the next page shows the results of the more recent Metal Detecting work on Dunston Field.



The profile is very similar to that shown in the histogram illustrating the HER metal detected data.

The Park

The Park is the other area of Venta where a large number of metal detected coins have been retrieved (790). Although in numerical terms this is a significantly lower figure than recovered from Dunston Field a comparison of the two graphs indicates very similar profiles with the two main areas of divergence from the British Mean being Reece Periods 17 (330 – 348) and 19 (364 – 378). These show losses well above the British Mean with this being particularly marked in the former period.



Twelve mints feature in the coins recovered from The Park, namely:

Arles

Aquileia

C Mint

Cologne

Constantinople

London

Lyons

Rome

Siscia

Ticinum

Travelling mint (Republican period)

Trier

The most commonly encountered mint is again Trier, see Table below.

Mint	Number of Coins	% of Total where mint identified
Trier	59	44.4
Arles	26	19.5
Lyons	13	9.8
London	12	9.0
Rome	8	6.0
Siscia	6	4.5
Others	9	6.8

Copies

The coins of the period AD 330-348 (Reece Period 17) are often the most commonly occurring on Roman sites (6). To put this in to context, at the time of writing, over 25% of the Roman coins recorded on the Portable Antiquities database (PAS) date from this period (7).

The period is also characterised by having a significant number of copies of varying quality amongst the genuine articles. These copies can range in quality from the near perfect to abject examples where the figures resemble stickmen and the legends are either mangled or missing altogether (8). The HER metal detected finds from Dunston Field are no exception to this with a minimum of 383 out of 2477 (15.5%) coins recovered having been identified as copies. The true figure will be somewhat greater than this since in some instances multiple copies of the same coin are simply recorded as such with the added note “includes irregulars” i.e copies (see fifth entry in Appendix 2 which refers to 25x House of Constantine GE1 [Gloria Exercitus one standard] coins. Almost all of these copies consist of one of four common Reverse types, namely:

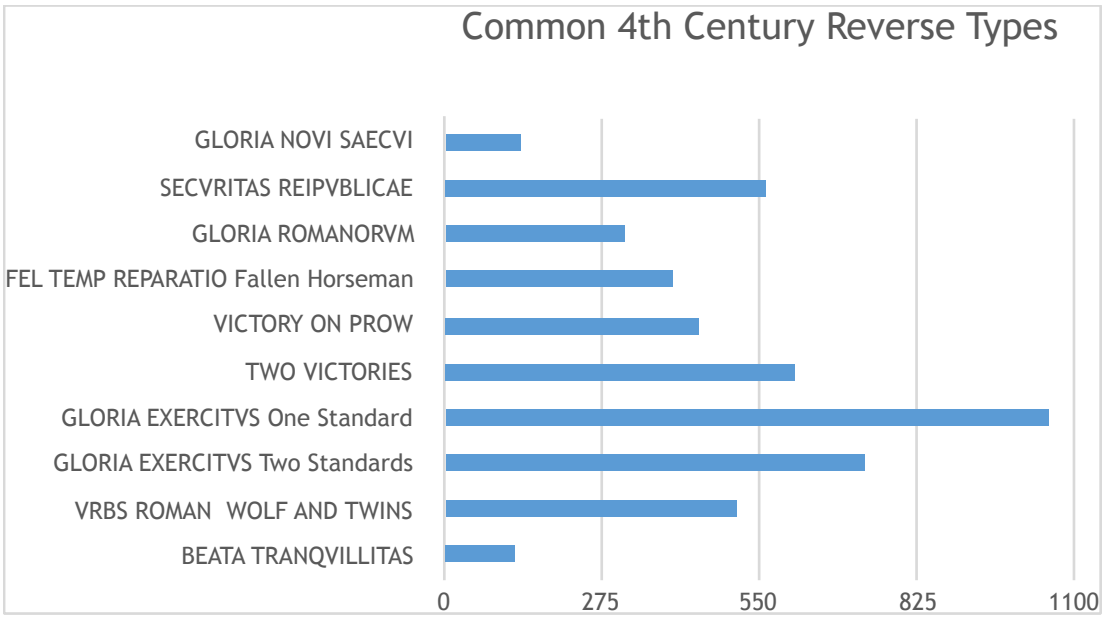
- GLORIA EXERCITVS - Two soldiers with two standards – AD 330 – 335
- GLORIA EXERCITVS -Two soldiers with one standard – AD 335 – 341
- Victory on Prow – AD 330 – 341
- VRBS ROMA Wolf and Twins – AD 330 – 341.

Further details of the commonly encountered 4th Century Reverses are given below.

4TH Century Reverse Types

The graph below shows the Reverse types most commonly encountered on the coins found on the HER data from the Venta search area. The most common Reverses comprising just

over 24% of the grand total are the GLORIA EXERCITVS two soldiers with one standard and the GLORIA EXERCITVS two soldiers with two standards.



Conclusion

The high levels of coin loss during the mid to late 4th Century in and around Venta suggests that there was a good deal of activity in the town during this period. Whether or not this reflects the "boom time" suggested by Atkinson to have peaked slightly earlier remains to be verified.

The evidence gleaned to date from both the HER records of metal detected finds together with the excavation finds data does seem to suggest that Venta is bucking a trend, certainly when compared with the statistics provided by a comparison with the British Mean. Since the latter is based on composite data from a large number of Roman sites in Britain is it safe to conclude that there is a valid explanation for the patterns of coin loss illustrated in the above graphs? Was there indeed something markedly different going on at Venta towards the end of the Roman occupation? Perhaps the continuing work of the Caistor Roman Project over the coming years will help to shed light on this intriguing phenomenon.

References

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9. The Roman Coins from Lowbury Hill by J. A Davies www.oxoniensia.org

Ian Jackson Second Draft 25/07/2017

APPENDICES

1. [a] File Search Area: Monument Type Findspot (records with Roman coins)

   [b] File Search Area: All Other Monument Types (records with Roman coins)

2. Example of completed coin record sheet

3. Example of Norfolk Museum Service Record Card

NHER Enquiry 16_10_37

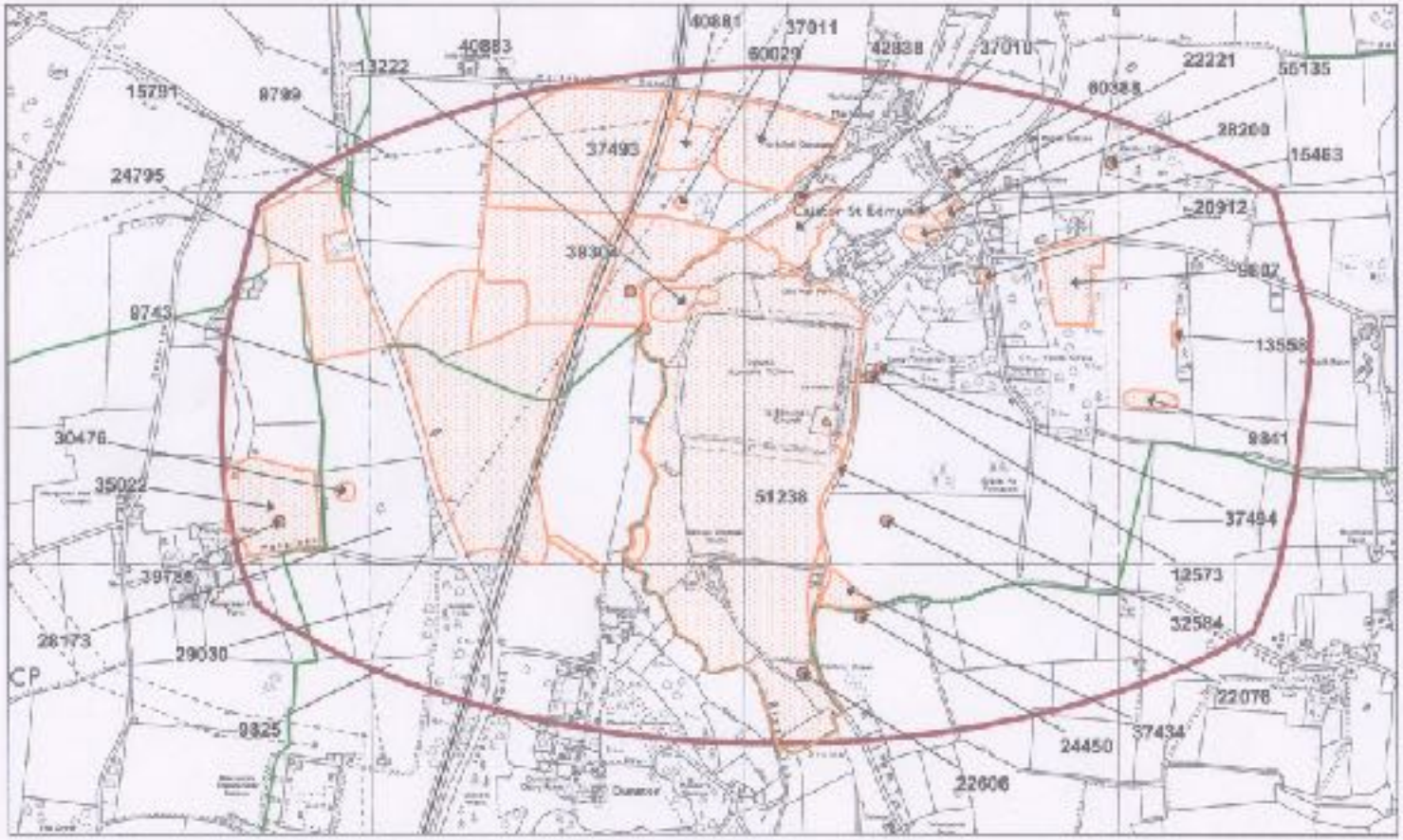
Scale 1:14528

Final Search Area: Monument Type Findspot (records with Roman coins)

Compiled by H. Hamilton on 15 December 2016

Norfolk County Council

Community and Environmental Services
Historic Environment Service



Appendix 1

NHER Enquiry 16_10_37

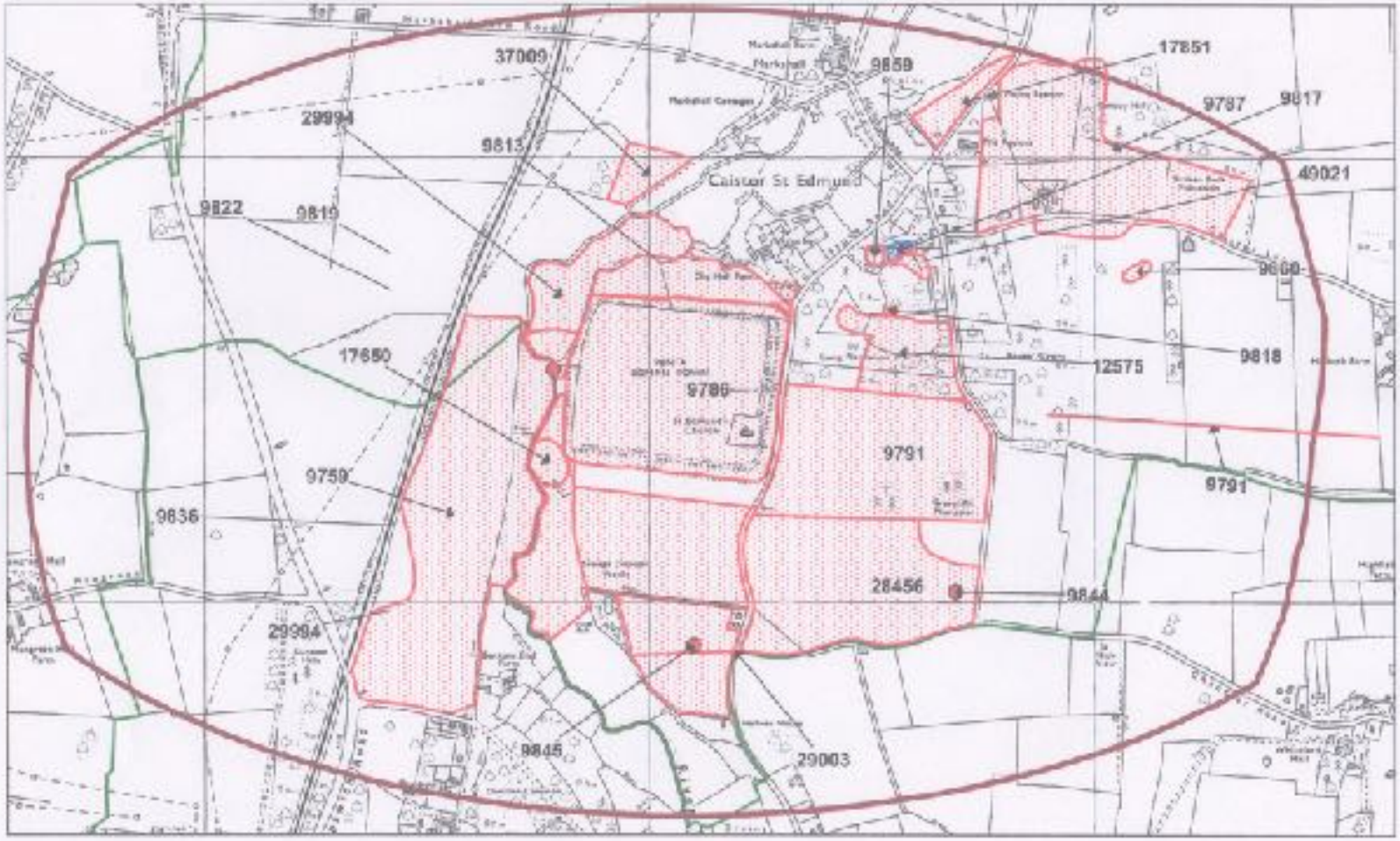
Scale 1:12179

Final Search Area: All Other Monument Types (records with Roman coins)

Compiled by H. Hamilton on 15 December 2016

Norfolk County Council

Community and Environmental Services
Historic Environment Service



Appendix 1b

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Appendix 2

SITE NO: 9759 PARISH & SITE: DUNSTON FIELD COLLECTION D BENNET PAGE 3 ROMAN COINS

No.	Emperor	Denom.	Reverse	mm	Mint	Ref	Date	Notes
-	VC		WT	R-S	Rome		330-40	
	"		"	#PLG	Lyons	LRBC: 205	330-5	
	"		"	TR-S	Trier		"	
	VR		"	TR-P	"	LRBC i 65	"	
25x	HoC		GE1				335-40	includes irregulars
	CONSTANTINE II		GE1	R*P	Rome		335-40	
	HoC		GE1	TRS	Trier		335-40	
	CONSTANS		GE1	-	-		"	
	"		"	TRP	"		335-40	
	CONSTANTINE II		"				335-40	
	HoC		"				340-6	. irreg
	CONSTANTINE II		"				335-40	
	CONSTANTINE I		"				"	
3x	THEODORA		PIETAS ROMANA				337-40	
	HELENA		PAX PUBLICA				"	
	CONSTANTINE I		Quadriga				338-9	
	CONSTANTINE II		GE2				340-6	irr
	CONSTANS		GE1	PLG	Lyons		340-6	irr
	HoC		"				"	"
17x	Cs/Cn		2V				347-8	
	CONSTANTINE II		2V	TR-3	Trier		347-8	
	"		"	D / TRS			347-8	
	CONSTANS		2V	TRS			347-8	

Sent. ______ Date ______

Appendix 3

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL INDEX PRIMARY RECORD CARD	COUNTY NUMBER	12573
PARISHDISTRICTSix inch O.S. sheet CAISTOR ST. EDMUNDSOUTH NORFOLKTG 20 SW		Eight figure reference 2331 0350

Brief description

•.May '1977. Found with metal—detector in SW corner of wood immediately NE of E gate of Roman town. 3 coins; dupondius of Antoninus Pius, Constantinopolis—type BAE, and unidentifiable 4th century coin, Inf & penes Rydal Sullivan, via NCH.

See also Schedule No. A.M.