

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTE: TWO ROMAN COINS FROM GREAT OONE'S HOLE CHEDDAR GORGE

by

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ABSTRACT

Two badly worn coins, believed be of Roman date were discovered in this cave in 1979. They have recently been rediscovered in the Society's museum and are described and illustrated here.

THE COINS

This cave was subject to a small archaeological investigation in the 1970s and a brief report on this work was published in the previous edition of these *Proceedings* (Mullan and Moody, 2014). When that report was written, the two coins of presumed Roman date which were excavated in June 1979 were believed to have been lost, however they have recently been rediscovered in the Society's museum and are reported on and illustrated here, for the record.

The coins are both very badly worn and thus are difficult to identify with any degree of certainty.

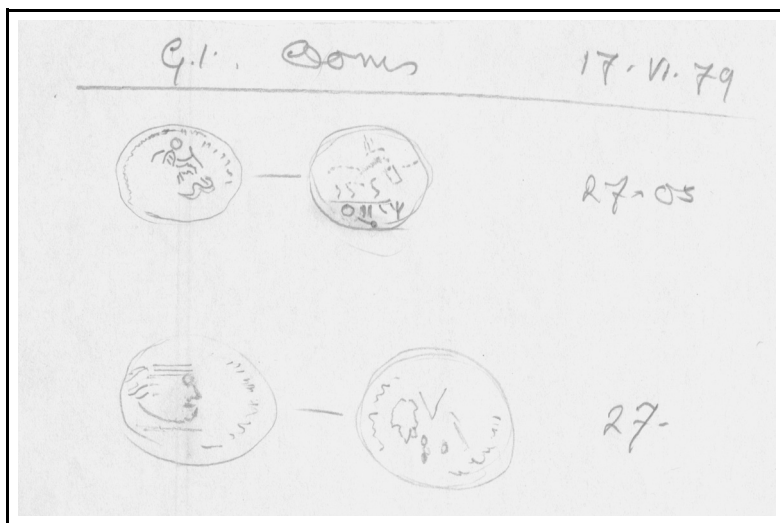


Figure 1. Drawing of the two coins made on their discovery.

Figure 1 shows the two coins as drawn in 1979 by C.J. Hawkes. It is clear from this that very little diagnostic information can be gleaned from the illustrations on them owing to their being so worn. Coins in this condition are frequently late third century AD Roman, but a note which accompanies the coins states: "*Imitatio 1) Fel Temp Reparatio mint. Lugdunum*



Figure 2. *Two coins, first side view.*

c.350-360 2) *Possibly the same c.* This implies that they are counterfeit fourth century coins copying a type of coinage introduced as part of the coinage reform of 348 AD by Constantius II and Constans. All these coins apparently bear the reverse legend FEL TEMP REPARATIO ('Restoration of Happy Times'). This has been colloquially translated as 'Happy days are here again!' (Smith, 2000).

DISCUSSION

A significant number of coins of Roman age have been recovered from the caves at the downstream end of Cheddar Gorge. The Cheddar Caves museum catalogue lists 66 items, covering from the first to the fourth centuries. This number is at variance with the numbers quoted by Branigan and Dearne (1991) who state that Tratman listed 74 coins in this catalogue of which only 22 could then be traced and that Boon had listed 375 coins. As one catalogue number, 4.10/1 appears to cover ten coins, it may be that they are counting all of these and ignoring the single coin attributed to the Ostrogoths (circa 500 AD). Both Tratman in the catalogue and Branigan and Dearne in their paper point out that although coin finds were attributed to both Long Hole and The Slitter, any finds made at the latter probably originated at the former. A further hoard of 47 coins from Pride Evans' Hole is dismissed by both Balch (1935) and Branigan and Dearne (1991) on the grounds that it had not previously been discovered by either Balch or by Pride Evans himself, but, as Boycott and Wilson (2012) have pointed out, even the best observers can miss archaeological material if it is not clearly in sight. Counterfeit



Figure 3. *Two coins second side view.*

Roman coins and, indeed, their makers' tools have also been found on Mendip (Barrett and Boon, 1972) so a find of two, possibly counterfeit, Roman coins in a Cheddar cave is neither surprising nor unusual.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Linda Wilson, the Society's museum curator for bringing the rediscovery of these coins to my attention and to Phil Hendy, of Cheddar Caves and Gorge, for the provision of a copy of the Cheddar Caves Museum catalogue.

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