

# **Woodeaton Coins**

J. G. Milne

The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 21. (1931), pp. 101-109.

Stable URL:

http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0075-4358%281931%2921%3C101%3AWC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-3

The Journal of Roman Studies is currently published by Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <a href="http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html">http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html</a>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <u>http://www.jstor.org/journals/sprs.html</u>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

#### By J. G. MILNE

## (Plate xIV).

The site on Middle Hill at Woodeaton, known as the 'Roman field,' has long been famous locally for the number of objects which have been picked up on its surface : and a detailed account of the chief finds, so far as they could be traced, was given by Miss Taylor in vol. vii of the *Journal*. In regard to coins, however, a good deal can now be added to her account from the collections that have come to the Ashmolean Museum since it was written<sup>1</sup>: and it will be seen that there is some evidence to be derived from them as to the currency in use during the period when the place was a centre of activity.

It is not easy to say exactly what this activity was: though numerous coins and small articles, especially fibulae, have been found on the surface, there are hardly any traces of permanent buildings on the site. The Oxford University Archaeological Society, in the course of its trial excavations,<sup>2</sup> came on some fragments of painted plaster which look as if they had belonged to a substantial erection, but there were no foundations of a corresponding character discovered. Potsherds are not uncommon, but are nearly all of late and rough ware, and seem to be distributed irregularly about the field. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that the place was continuously inhabited by a population of such importance as would be expected from the multitude of small finds.

One explanation that has been put forward to account for the special frequency of fibulae at Middle Hill is that there was a factory of such articles in the neighbourhood, but no furnaces or workshops have been identified, and there is no obvious reason why Woodeaton should have been chosen as a site for such a factory, as it is not near to supplies of metal and has no exceptional advantages in other respects. It is true that some deposits of slag have been found at Drunshill, on the other side of the Woodeaton valley : but, even if these mark the site of a furnace, which is possible, it is more likely that the furnace was for the smelting of iron ore, which can be obtained in the district.

So far as the finds at Middle Hill are concerned, it would be possible to explain them by the supposition that the field was the scene of a

<sup>1</sup> The Ashmolean Museum collection of coins from Woodeaton includes those of Canon Gordon, Mr. H. Parker, and Mr. P. Manning, with smaller lots found in the excavations of the Oxford University Archaeological Society or acquired at various times: the important collection of Mr. Windham Hughes is also at the Museum on loan. The Rev. E. A. Sydenham has kindly supplied lists of coins in his own possession and in that of Sir Arthur Evans.

<sup>2</sup> A short description of these excavations was given in the *Antiquaries Journal* i (1921), 339.

periodic market or fair. Woodeaton was a convenient spot for traders from all parts of England : it is centrally situated, and is near the crossing point of two main roads, which, though not first-class Roman military roads, were old-established commercial roads, and so probably more useful for the traders than the military roads.<sup>1</sup> The accommodation required would be provided, as at medieval and modern fairs, largely by temporary stalls : this would account for the scantiness of traces of permanent buildings. The apparently random distribution of the objects found over a fairly wide area is consistent with their having been lost from a number of stalls in the course of trafficking, in a way which can be understood by any one who has visited a large fair in a field : the small coins and fibulae, if dropped on a wet day and trodden under foot, would be hard to retrieve from the clay of Middle Hill.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the objects are almost all of metal does not mean that the trade was in metal articles only, since wood or stuffs would naturally perish in course of years in the ground.

Whatever the exact form of the business which led to the accumulation of these relics on the site may have been, it is clear that the whole of them must be regarded as forming one series : there is no reason for attributing the coins to a different period from the other objects. They can accordingly be used to help in cross-dating : and in this connexion the fibulae are specially valuable for the purpose of determining the lower limit of time for the occupation of the field. As will be seen by a reference to Miss Taylor's article, the fibulae are all of 'Romano-British' or 'Late Celtic' types : there is nothing whatever of Saxon style to be found among them. If any Saxon influence had begun to be felt in Oxfordshire while Woodeaton was still a trade-centre, it would almost certainly have been reflected in the fibulae : the Saxon taste in brooches was so different from the Celtic, that it would have had to be consulted. It may be concluded, therefore, that the Woodeaton market had ceased to exist before the Saxon occupation of Oxfordshire became effective : probably the gradual advance of the Saxons broke up the trade-routes and so caused the abandonment of the site : and it may also be concluded that the coins, like the brooches, are all of the period before the arrival of the Saxons.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A parallel example of the debris left by this kind of marketing may be found at several places on the coasts of the Mediterranean, where the best hunting ground for coins and small antiquities is at the water's edge in old harbours. Presumably, produce and goods were brought in boats, which were made fast with their sterns to the shore, and the occupants sold articles over the stern in ancient times as they do to-day: and then, as now, the process would result in a coin or article occasionally dropping into the water—the smaller the object, the less likely its recovery.

<sup>3</sup> The only object which suggests Saxon influence is a coin, or rather a quarter of a coin, of Constantius II (pl. xiv, no. 22), which has been neatly cut, like the Saxon farthings of later date. When the Romano-Britons clipped coins, they did it very roughly: but the careful quartering of this coin can be paralleled in Germany. A single coin, however, cannot be taken as proving the presence of Saxons on the site.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The old trade routes, which had been developed along the lines most convenient for pack-horse traffic, would not be superseded for local traffic by the new roads made by the Romans, which were essentially arterial roads for long-distance journeys.

The date of the commencement of activity at Woodeaton can be deduced from the coins : the list appended to this article shows that comparatively few are of the first century A.D., or earlier, and it may be added that these are all worn by circulation, for the most part very markedly : the earliest specimens in good condition are of the reign of Domitian. The coins of the second century are much more numerous and in a better state of preservation as regards wear. It may be inferred that the market was developed after the Roman pacification of central Britain, in the last quarter of the first century;<sup>1</sup> and the coins show that it continued to exist throughout the Roman occupation.

A more difficult problem is, how long it went on after the withdrawal of the Romans : and to settle this, an examination of the later types of coins is necessary. There are, among the Woodeaton finds, large numbers of what are commonly called 'barbarous imitations' (pl. XIV) : and the same kind of coin is of frequent occurrence on other Romano-British sites in the district. The question is, whether these are to be regarded as approximately contemporary with the official issues from which they were copied, or as forming a currency which lasted for a considerable period after them.

There is reason to think that copies of Roman coins were made and circulated in Britain from the very beginning of the Roman occupation. The bronze coins of Claudius, in particular, seem to have been freely imitated : most collectors are familiar with the crude pieces, roughly designed and irregularly struck or sometimes cast, usually with the reverse type of Minerva, that are found on Roman sites in Britain. It was perhaps natural that the Britons should copy the coins which formed the latest currency among the Romans who came over and settled in their country : they would regard these as a kind of standard type. But the habit of copying went on, and reproductions of later types, which are obviously not of official workmanship, are found in the second century and still more frequently in the third.

There is, however, a distinction to be drawn between the earlier and later groups of copies : imitations of coins of the first, second, and third centuries down to the time of Gallienus are always 'colourable,' though unskilful, attempts to reproduce the types, and as a rule are not dissimilar in size to the originals. But from about A.D. 270 onwards, besides colourable imitations there appear large numbers of pieces in which the types are so debased as to be unintelligible, the legends are reduced to dots and dashes or omitted entirely, and the flans are small and irregular : and these barbarous copies do not look

Manor House, at the foot of the hill. Some broken bronze celts have been turned up, but these may have been merely scrap-metal. The stiff clay soil of Middle Hill, in his opinion, would be most unlikely to attract early settlers.

 $<sup>^1</sup>$  Mr. E. Thurlow Leeds does not think that there is any evidence of pre-Roman occupation at Middle Hill. The British coins found at Woodeaton in the seventeenth century and recorded by Dr. Plot seem to have been from the neighbourhood of the

as if they would be likely to find acceptance if circulated side by side with official issues.

A find made at Woodeaton supplies some evidence as to the nature of the currency there about A.D. 340.<sup>1</sup> It consists of 1551 coins, nearly all being of the last issues of Constantine the Great and the first of his sons-i.e., the 'Gloria Exercitus' type with two standards and with one: the majority are of the earlier type with two standards. From issues before this there are only 8 coins of Constantine and Licinius and their sons, 2 of Tetricus, much worn, and 3 rough copies with radiate heads. Among the 'Gloria Exercitus' pieces there are 13 which can be definitely regarded as unofficial, on account of the crudeness of the execution and blundered legends: but they are near enough to the originals to be classed as colourable imitations, and so rank with the first or second century copies. The copies with radiate heads are inferior in every respect, and have no legends and barely recognisable types : but, as the coins of Tetricus found with them, which belong to the class from which they were copied, have been reduced by wear to much the same condition of illegibility, the difference between them and the official originals is not very noticeable.

This hoard suggests that copies were made from any official coins that were current, and circulated alongside of them : they were made to resemble the originals as closely as the workman was able; if he was following a newly issued coin in good condition, he could reproduce most of the type fairly accurately : but, if his model was an old and worn piece, he would miss some things and guess at others, with the result that his design would become unintelligible.

The latter conclusion is supported by the evidence of a hoard found near Bristol, which comprises 269 coins and some bits of bronze scrap, one lump apparently from a small crucible.<sup>2</sup> There is one worn coin of Victorinus; the rest are all very rough copies with radiate heads on the obverse and reminiscences of the types of Claudius II, Tetricus, and Victorinus on the reverse. Very few have even an attempt at letters or anything to represent the original legends: the heads are in all stages of degradation, sometimes reduced to nothing but zig-zag lines which are derived from the radiate crown<sup>3</sup>: and it is not even possible to guess from what some of the reverses were copied. The flans are of all shapes and sizes, and look as if the metal had been cast in thin sheets and broken or chopped up. But none of these copies shows any sign of wear by circulation : they appear to be fresh from the workshop, and it may be surmised that

and British staters some five or six centuries earlier : the stater of Philip, from which these derived their types, had a laureate head on the obverse; but successive copyists left out more and more of the head, till the only thing that remained was the laurel wreath.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See below, p. 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This hoard has been presented to the Ashmolean Museum by Sir Arthur Evans.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The degradation of the obverse type of a radiate head into a few lines representing what was originally the crown is similar to what occurred on Gaulish

they were imitated from coins like that of Victorinus found with them, the types on which had been rubbed and defaced.

The majority of the barbarous copies found scattered about the 'Roman field' at Woodeaton (pl. XIV) are apparently of a later origin than those in the two hoards just described: they are derived from types struck after the death of Constantine the Great, the favourite one being the FEL TEMP REPARATIO of Constantius II with a soldier stabbing a fallen enemy. There are, however, imitations of the third century coins with radiate heads, and of Constantinian coins, in some numbers: and all alike are found in various stages of degradation, the lowest showing merely a few jumbled lines, which can only be traced to their source by comparison with other examples where the decay of the design is less advanced. The types of the house of Theodosius are also copied: and it is evident that the production of these imitations went on down to the close of the Roman occupation.

It will be seen from the list appended that the imperial coinage was still coming to Woodeaton at this period : though there is a diminution in the number of specimens identifiable as belonging to any reign after that of Valens, coins down to Arcadius and Honorius are found. This accords with the general evidence obtainable from finds in the Oxford district,<sup>1</sup> where examples in good condition of the issues of Theodosius and his sons are noticeably rarer than those of the earlier part of the fourth century : and it would seem probable that remittances of coin to Britain in bulk dwindled considerably about this time.<sup>2</sup> Such coins as came over would be passed from hand to hand in the course of trade, and by the time they reached central Britain would be so worn as to be illegible : it is these coins which furnish the numerous ' fourth-century minimi, unidentifiable' that figure in the lists of finds from so many Romano-British sites.

But, if coins of official mintage of the last quarter of the fourth century are few at Woodeaton, it does not mean that the place was becoming deserted. The number of barbarous imitations found there is very large : in the Ashmolean Museum alone there are more of them than of all the fourth century official issues, although these unattractive bits of brass are less likely to be kept by collectors than coins which are recognisable<sup>3</sup>: and, unless it is assumed that the

<sup>1</sup>I have dealt mainly with evidence from the Oxford district, as this is the area from which finds habitually come to the Ashmolean Museum. Other districts may possibly show different results.

<sup>a</sup> It is assumed that most of the Roman coins found in Britain in good condition came over by remittance in bulk, at the periods when there was no mint operating in this country : probably these remittances would mainly be official ones. Roman coins found in countries which were not in the Empire—for instance, in the Baltic area—are almost always very worn, as would naturally be the case when they had drifted along in commerce. It may be added that this drift would be a lengthy process, while an official remittance would travel fairly quickly—on the analogy of remittances under similar conditions in the East, perhaps at an average rate of about ten miles a day.

<sup>3</sup> It is hardly worth while to give exact figures, for the reason stated in the text. In the Gordon collection there are few barbarous pieces: Canon Gordon, who lived at Elsfield, close to Woodeaton, appears to have got the pick of the coins found during many years, and chosen the most presentable : in the Manning collection, on the other hand, which was formed by an omnivorous student of antiquity, there are 260. habit of losing money became much more common among the Romano-Britons at Woodeaton at the close of the fourth century, it would appear from the evidence of the coin-finds that the Roman field continued to be frequented throughout the fifth century very much as it had been in the fourth.

The length of currency of the barbarous imitations is, however, a matter on which further evidence is wanted, and it is partly in the hope of eliciting such evidence that these notes are published. There is no sufficient ground for attributing any Anglo-Saxon coins to an earlier date than about A.D. 625, and in central Britain 650 is probably nearer the mark: is it safe to conclude that the Romano-Britons continued to strike debased copies of Roman coins, and to use them, for a period of something like two centuries ?

It is on general grounds improbable that the Britons, having become accustomed to the use of coins for purposes of trade, should give up the habit : but, if they did use any coins, it must have been these small bronze pieces. Frankish or Byzantine coins are found sporadically in various parts of the country, especially in the southern counties : but they do not occur in such numbers anywhere as to suggest that they were a recognised medium of exchange, and it is more likely that they were brought over as curiosities or as ornaments : the Byzantine gold pieces in particular are often pierced or mounted.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, there is reason to think that the Saxons, when they occupied central Britain, came on these barbarous imitations in the hands of the native population: examples occur in early Saxon graves—for instance, there are local finds in the Ashmolean Museum from Wheatley, Frilford, and Stone.<sup>2</sup> The types of the first Anglo-Saxon coins are also in many cases clearly derived from Roman originals, sometimes fairly direct copies of official issues, but more commonly in a degraded stage comparable to that of the Romano-British bronze: and it is natural that, when the Saxons saw the people amongst whom they lived using coins, and realised the advantages of these for trade, they should imitate the designs of the local currency as soon as they decided to adopt the idea of issuing coinage for themselves.

The continuous and repeated copying of types over a long period may be paralleled from Egypt, where in the fifth century com-

excavations in which were published in Archaeologia xlii, 417-485, is a transitional one, and shows an apparently continuous use of coins in graves from Romano-British to Saxon times. The Saxons evidently found Roman coins in good condition at times, and kept them probably as curiosities or ornaments : there are instances of this at Frilford, and also in the cemetery at Brighthampton, described in Archaeologia xxvvii and xxvviii, the most notable example being in grave 22 (xxviii. 86), where a woman had buried with her ten third century silver coins pierced for suspension.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A gold solidus of Maurice in the the Ashmolean Museum, found at Dorchester (Oxon), is so worn as to suggest that it may have been brought over in trade : but this is an isolated example.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Wheatley coin (1883/36) is apparently derived from Constantinian types: two coins from Frilford (1912/53) are of the same class: that from Stone had a degraded radiate head and what may be a standing figure. The Stone coin was described in *Archaeologia* xxxiv, 26, as of Magnentius. The Frilford cemetery, the earlier

paratively little official coinage seems to have been in circulation, and the needs of the interior part of the country were supplied by local productions.<sup>1</sup> Here the evidence of finds, which are more closely datable than anything that has been obtained in Britain, shows that throughout the century the issues of the preceding century were copied and recopied, gradually becoming more degraded, till in the reign of Zeno a considerable part of the money in circulation consisted of pieces which were at about the same stage of debasement as the worst of the Romano-British imitations, with small and irregular flans, no legends, and designs reduced to a jumble of lines. At the same time much more presentable copies were made at one centre, consisting of reproductions on a reduced scale of earlier coins, mainly Constantinian, which suggest that a hoard of these coins had been discovered and used for models.

If this analogy holds good in Britain, it tends to show that close copies of official issues may have been made at a considerably later date than that of the originals, and so may explain some of the better designs on early Anglo-Saxon coins. But such revivals form only a small part of the Egyptian currency: and similarly in Britain, while there may have been occasional reversions to type, the general trend seems clearly to have been one of continual degradation.

The problem of the currency of Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries, really requires for its solution the identification and exploration of some sites occupied during that period : and at present it is hard to say where they can be found. Woodeaton probably supplies evidence for the fifth century, but it does not seem to have been a regularly inhabited site, and if, as suggested, it was a market, the insecurity of communication might well lead to a cessation of activity there long before the Saxon settlers were so far organised as to issue coins.

#### COINS FOUND AT WOODEATON.

[As many of the coins recorded from the 'Roman field' are not in the Ashmolean Museum, it is not possible to give a full list with details of condition here, and a mere catalogue of types would not be of much value. But it is worth the space to state the number of examples of each reign that can be identified.]

The three British coins recorded as found on the site are noted in Miss Taylor's article : two of them, it may be observed, are plated.

The Roman coins are :--Republican  $\mathcal{R}$ , 10: Augustus, 3  $\mathcal{E}$ : Claudius, 8  $\mathcal{E}$ : Nero, 2  $\mathcal{E}$ : Galba, 1  $\mathcal{R}$ : Vitellius, 1  $\mathcal{E}$ : Vespasian, 1  $\mathcal{R}$ , 2  $\mathcal{E}$ : Titus, 1  $\mathcal{E}$ : Domitian, 4  $\mathcal{R}$ , 4  $\mathcal{E}$ : Nerva, 1  $\mathcal{R}$ : Trajan, 5  $\mathcal{R}$ , 7 $\mathcal{E}$ : Hadrian, 6  $\mathcal{R}$ , 9  $\mathcal{E}$ : Antoninus Pius, 3  $\mathcal{R}$ , 20  $\mathcal{E}$ : M. Aurelius, 3 R, 16 Æ: Commodus, 2 R, 2 Æ: Sept. Severus, 9 R: Caracalla, 4 R, 1 Æ: Elagabalus, 1 Æ: Sev. Alexander, 8 R, 4 Æ: Maximin, 1 Æ: Gordian III, 1 Æ: Philip, 1 Æ: Decius, 2 Æ: Gallus, 1 Æ: Valerian, 4: Gallienus, 32: Postumus, 13: Victorinus, 10: Tetricus, 39: Claudius II, 42: Quintillus, 1: Aurelian, 2: Probus, 3: Carinus, 1: Carausius, 14: Allectus, 7: Diocletian and colleagues, 10: Constantine I, etc., 290: Constantine II, 59: Constantius II, 131: Constans I, 147: Magnentius, 48: Julian, 2 Æ, 1 Æ: Valentinian I, 29 Æ: Valens, 4 Æ, 69 Æ: Gratian, 2 Æ, 10 Æ: Valentinian II, 1 Æ, 9 Æ: Theodosius I, 5 Æ: Arcadius, 12 Æ: Honorius, 2 Æ.

[Coins of Caesars and other members of the imperial house have been grouped with those of the emperors under whom they were struck, except where, as in the case of the sons of Constantine, the information available is not complete. Antoniniani before Valerian are treated as  $\mathcal{R}$ : after this, they are not distinguished.]

The hoard of early fourth century bronze found at Woodeaton is the property of Mr. Windham Hughes, who has deposited it on loan at the Ashmolean Museum. The contents may be summarised under the following heads :—[A] Before 330, [B] (I) Constantine I and family, 'Gloria Exercitus' type with two standards: (2) the same with one standard: (3) Helena and Theodora, issues contemporary with (I) and (2): (4) Urbs Roma and Constantinopolis, the same, (5) sundries—viz., Divus Constantinus, quadriga type (3), Aeterna Pietas (I); Constantius II, Virtus Augusti type (I); Hybrids (5).

[A] Besides two partly legible coins of Tetricus and three barbarous copies with radiate heads, there are Licinius I, c.74 (2), SMNA and SMNB: Licinius II, c. 21, SMNF: Constantine I, c. 536, TT. and c. 640, PLN: Crispus, c. 77, SMKA: Constantine II, c. 18, PLG, and c. 83, —R.

[B] The total number of coins included under this head is :---

	L 2							
C	Constantine I	••	••	195	Helena	••	•••	60
	Constantine II			301				63
C	Constantius II	• •	• •	183	Urbs Roma			
	Constans I				Constantinopolis			
	Delmatius			5	Hybrids	••	••	- 5
τ	Jncertain sons c	of Cor	nstan-					
	tine I	••	• •	IO				

The numbers belonging to the respective mints are :---

		(I)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Treviri	••	252	140	123	444	7
Lugdunum	••	IIO	<b>2</b> 9		132	3
Arelate	••	84	9		40	

#### WOODEATON COINS

	(I)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Roma	21	I		7	
Aquileia	5	2		2	
Siscia	13			5	
Thessalonica	I			I	
Heraclea	2			2	
Constantinopolis	8 2			I	
Nicomedia	3			I	
Cyzicus	6			3	
Antiochia	Ι				
Uncertain	17	31		35	

There are 3 fragments which cannot be classified.

### ADDENDA.

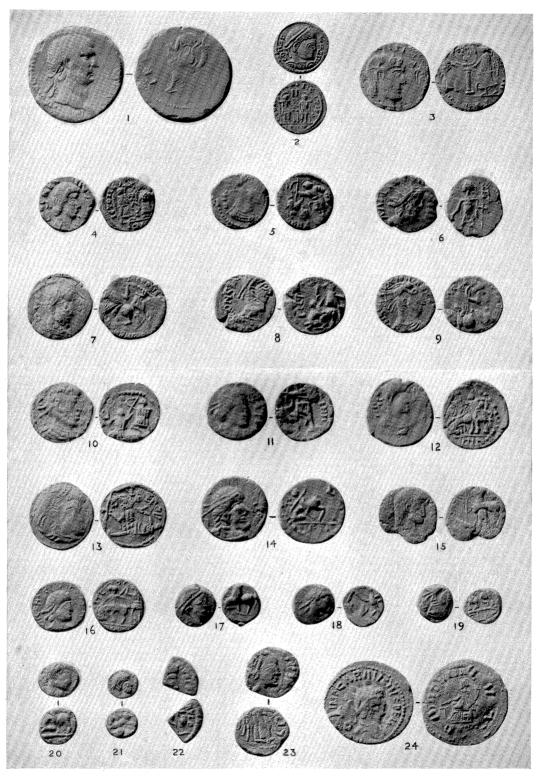
(I) Since the foregoing article was sent to press, a note by the late Mr. H. Hurst, dated May 19th, 1884, has been found in the Ashmolean Museum attached to two oyster shells; as it contains some information apparently unrecorded elsewhere, it is copied in full.

'2 oyster shells from the Middle Hill field Woodeaton whence so many coins come. There are signs of a demolished wall or building for about 95 yds., N. and S. direction. At the S. end is the "heap" in the wood of the year 1724 now quite flat with the soil. Mr. Chapman about 1880 dug 5 feet fully into it without ascertaining the depth of the hole. He thinks the hole is pretty round about 8 ft. across. Roman and British remains abound there. The N. end of the destroyed masonry had stones of 2 ft. 9 in. cube in it. Just beyond the masonry is a great depth of fine black soil.'

So far as this evidence goes, it suggests a boundary wall rather than a building, with a rubbish pit at the end.

(2) A second example of the imitation of a coin of Constans, illustrated on pl. xIV, no. 2, from the Windham Hughes hoard, is in the Gordon collection: both are struck, not cast, and are from the same dies, but the dies are differently adjusted: both also are in very 'fresh' condition, showing no signs of wear. The latter fact gives some ground for a suspicion that they were produced at no great distance from Woodeaton, which is strengthened by the appearance of several other fourth-century imitations found on the site. J.R.S. vol. xxi (1931).

PLATE XIV.



ROMANO-BRITISH COINS FROM WOODEATON. (See p. 103 ff.).  $\frac{1}{1}$ .

1. Contemporary copy of dupondius of Trajan. 2. Contemporary copy of Constans. 3-5. Copies overstruck on earlier coins. 6. Debased copy of third century type. 7-14. Debased copies of Constantius II overstruck on Constantinian coins. 15-21. More debased copies of the same on smaller flans. 22. Quartered coins (p. 102, n. 3). 23. Very debased copy of Victory type. 24. Carausius overstruck on Gallienus.