

Cambourne New Settlement

Iron Age and Romano-British settlement
on the clay uplands of west Cambridgeshire

Volume 2: Specialist Appendices

Web Report 5

Coins, *by Nicholas A. Wells*



Cambourne New Settlement

Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement on the Clay Uplands of West Cambridgeshire

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Volume 2: Specialist Appendices
Part 1. Artefacts
Part 2. Ecofacts

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The Coins

By Nicholas A. Wells

A total of 159 coins have been recovered from Cambourne, of which two are Iron Age, 156 Roman, and one post-Roman (a Queen Victoria penny). Most of the coins were heavily corroded, but careful cleaning and conservation prior to identification enabled all but 39 (all Roman) to be closely dated and it is unlikely that further cleaning will add to the general picture. The coins were recovered from four sites:

<i>Site</i>	<i>No.</i>
Lower Cambourne	137
Jeavons Lane	10
Knapwell Plantation	5
Mill Farm	2

A further five coins were recovered from the general area of the excavations but cannot be assigned to a specific site. A list of all the coins from the excavations can be found in the archive.

Summary of coins by period

To AD 238 (Table Coins 1)

This period is the least represented in the coins found at Cambourne, with only 18 dating from the Iron Age to the end of the *denarius* coinage in the early 3rd century. They are found in only two of the sites, Lower Cambourne and Jeavons Lane, though this is not necessarily an indicator of presence/absence of early Romano-British activity as this period is generally poorly represented in multi-period sites.

Table Coins 1. Summary of coins, to AD 260

<i>Issuer</i>	<i>Date range</i>	<i>Denominations</i>				
		<i>Denarius</i>	<i>Sestertius</i>	<i>Dupondius/As</i>	<i>As</i>	<i>AE Unit</i>
<i>Lower Cambourne</i>						
Northern CVNO	late 1st BC– early 1st AD	–	–	–	–	2
Claudius I	41–54	–	–	1	–	–
Antoninus Pius	138–161	–	1	–	–	–
Marcus Aurelius Caesar (Antoninus)	139–161	–	1	1	–	–
Marcus Aurelius	161–180	–	1	–	–	–
Faustina II (Aurelius)	161–175	–	1	–	–	–
Crispina (Commodus)	180–187	–	1	–	–	–
Uncertain 2nd century AD	98–193	–	1	–	1	–
Uncertain 1st/2nd century AD	41–193	–	–	1	1	–
Elagabalus	218–222	1	–	–	–	–
<i>Jeavons Lane</i>						
Uncertain 1st century AD	27 BC–AD 98	–	1	–	–	–
Antoninus Pius	138–161	–	1	–	–	–
Marcus Aurelius	161–180	1	–	–	–	–
Severus Alexander	222–235	1	–	–	–	–

The two Iron Age copper alloy units (Cat. nos 1 and 2), both from Lower Cambourne, are not unusual finds from Late Iron Age settlements. Their presence could be seen as an indication that a market economy was functioning at the site prior to the Roman invasion. However, this need not be so and it has been argued that their use was part of the existing economy ‘embedded’ in social relations (Haselgrove 1979, 206). Their use may also have continued for a generation after the Conquest (Haselgrove 1996, 82).

238 to 296 AD (Table Coins 2)

A total of 38 coins were struck during this period, all being radiates – the denomination (probably a double *denarius*) introduced by Caracalla in 214, and struck in preference to the denarius from 238. The vast majority of coins were struck between 260 and 296, from the sole reign of Gallienus (260–268) to the end of the British Empire (286–296). During this time large quantities of poorly struck and debased coins (with as low as 2% silver content) were issued and the increase in volume of the coinage must indicate a more widespread use of coin across the Western Empire in the second half of the 3rd century.

Table Coins 2. Summary of coins, AD 260–296

	<i>Issuer</i>	<i>Date range</i>	<i>Radiate</i>
<i>Lower Cambourne</i>			
	Gallienus (Sole Reign)	260–268	2
	Salonina (Sole Reign)	260–268	1
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Divus Claudius II</i>	275–286	1
	Postumus	260–269	3
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Postumus</i>	275–286	1
	Victorinus	269–271	1
	Tetricus I	271–274	1
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Tetrici</i>	275–286	1
	Gallic Empire	260–274	2
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Gallic Empire</i>	275–286	5
	Carausius	286–293	3
	Allectus	293–296	1
	Uncertain Radiate	214–296	1
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Uncertain Radiate</i>	275–286	10
<i>Jeavons Lane</i>			
<i>Copy of</i>	<i>Victorinus</i>	275–286	1
	Gallic Empire	260–274	1
	Carausius	286–293	1
<i>Knapwell Plantation</i>			
	Claudius II	268–270	1
<i>Mill Farm</i>			
	Gallic Empire	260–274	1

Aurelian’s reforms of *c.* 274 introduced a radiate with a higher silver content. However, judging by its relative absence from site assemblages either it was not supplied in any numbers or it was over-tariffed. In a society that had become used to small change this lack was remedied by the copying of previous issues –

predominantly those of Gallienus, Claudius II, and the Gallic emperors. Half of the coins of this period (19) are these copies – sometimes called ‘barbarous’ radiates – while there are no post-reform coins of the Central Empire. These radiate copies probably circulated until around 286 by which time large numbers of coins were again being struck, this time by the British usurpers, Carausius and Allectus (there are five of these from Cambourne) but it is possible that they may have been in use up to 296.

Fourth century AD (Table Coins 3)

Diocletian’s reform of the coinage in *c.* 294 introduced a large bronze unit with a small percentage of silver – often called the *follis* (however, in this report all copper alloy 4th century coins are termed *nummi* as, in reality, we have no idea of the actual names of the denominations circulating). Like the reformed radiate of Aurelian it is not found in any great numbers on British sites; only two coins of this period (both GENIO POPVLI ROMANI types; Cat. nos 57 and 63) are found at Cambourne. From AD 318 the volume of coinage increases again, tied to the debasement of the *nummus* and, most probably, its decline in value. By the middle of the 4th century large numbers of small bronze coins were produced, particularly in the 330s, 346–354 and finally 364–378, though only coins from the last period were truly copper alloy – bronze coins up to 364 mostly contained a small percentage of silver.

It is interesting that while the numbers of later coins do increase in their frequency at Cambourne, it is much less than expected. Conversely the latest coins issued that reached Britain, those of the periods 364–378 and 388–402 occur more frequently than one would normally expect. This is something that is dealt with in greater detail below.

Table Coins 3. Summary of coins, 4th century

<i>Issue period</i>	<i>Mint</i>							
	<i>London</i>	<i>Trier</i>	<i>Lyon</i>	<i>Arles</i>	<i>Rome</i>	<i>Aquileia</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Irregular</i>
294–305	-	-	-	-	-	-	(1J)	-
305–313	1 (+1K)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
313–318	(1J)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
318–324	-	1 (+1K)	-	-	(1J)	-	-	-
330–335	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
335–341	-	-	1	1	-	-	3	1
341–348	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4
350–353	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
353–360	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 (+1K)	3
364–378	-	-	4	7	1 (+1K)	1	14	-
378–388	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
388–402	-	-	-	-	1	-	11	-
Uncertain Roman			<i>Date</i>	<i>No</i>				
House of Constantine	-	-	317–363	1	-	-	-	-
Uncertain 4th century	-	-	294–402	10	-	-	-	-
Uncertain 3rd/4th century	-	-	193–402	21 (+1M)	-	-	-	-

Coins are from Lower Cambourne with the following additions:

J = Jeavons Lane; K = Knapwell Plantation; M = Mill Farm

Statistical Analysis

Site assemblages are almost always dominated by the most commonly used, low-value coins, despite the fact that hoard evidence shows that silver and gold were available to the population throughout the Romano-British period. This reflects the two tenets of applied numismatics; that coins which changed hands most often were lost most frequently and that the coin with the greatest chance of subsequent recovery was the most valuable (Casey 1986, 69ff.; Reece 1987, 29). Hence for periods where there are few or no coins in the archaeological record it could be due to a lack in supply or that the coins in use were of sufficiently high value to be sought after when lost (or a combination of both). Conversely, periods with many coins could indicate frequent transactions being made and, due to the low value of the individual coin, a degree of nonchalance regarding its recovery when lost.

The Cambourne assemblage, taken as a whole, should therefore represent the fluctuations of coin loss (and hence coin use) at the site. The methodology for the analysis of such coin assemblages has been well established (outlined in Reece 1995) and consists of expressing the total coin population of a site as a thousand coins, and then reflecting the various component parts as a factor of this. These component parts consist of 21 periods of coin use stretching from before AD 41 to 402, reflecting distinct periods/issues of coins. This then is set against a background of the average British coin assemblage to provide comparison and highlight anomalies in the group.

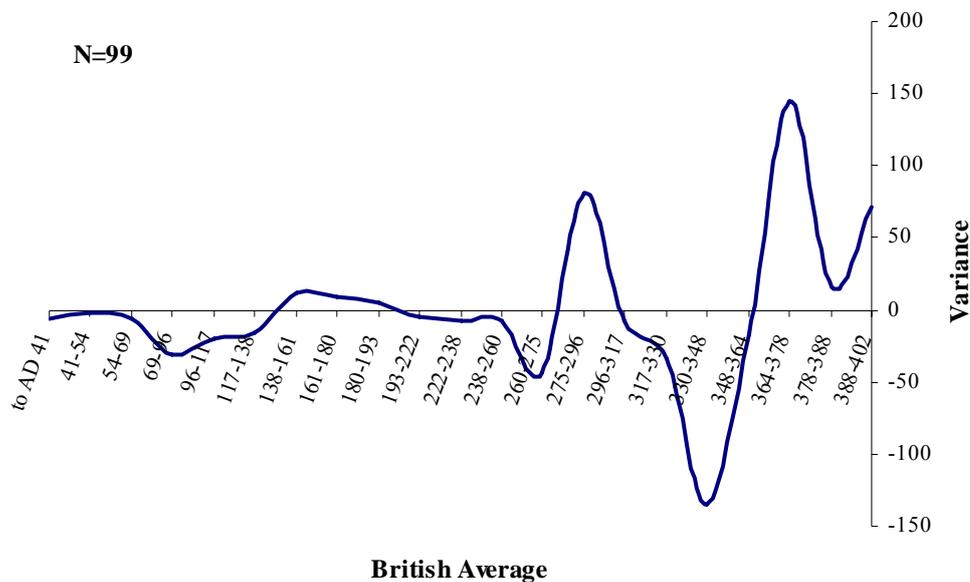


Figure Coins 1. Cambourne coin loss pattern

Most (137 – approximately 90%) of the coins from the Cambourne excavations are from Lower Cambourne and it is this specific assemblage that will be used in the following analysis as the numbers of coins from the other sites are so small that they would be statistically invalid.

Figure Coins 1 shows the coin loss pattern for Lower Cambourne represented as the degree of variance to the British average. Up until AD 260 the values are consistently close to the British average – either just above or below. Thereafter there are three pronounced peaks (275–296, 364–378, and 388–402) and two troughs, the last pronounced (260–275 and 330–348), indicating a degree of variance from the usual British picture. It may be that the 32 unassigned coins (see **Table Coins 3**) belong to the trough periods, but in what proportion it is impossible to say. However, it is equally likely that many of these coins belong to the three peak periods.

A possible explanation for the 260–275 and 330–348 troughs lies in the nature of the succeeding periods - each is followed by periods with a high proportion of copies. These copies would be using the fabric of the earlier coins, normally cut up into smaller pieces and then restruck with variable quality designs based either on the original or the newer types in circulation. Thus the reuse of coins from the preceding period to make copies creates these dips in the coin loss pattern.

The peak occurring in the 364–378 period is rather exceptional, and combined with the 388–402 peak does seem to indicate a greater degree of coin-loss in the last decades of Roman Britain, probably indicating continued use of the area into the 5th century – how long, though, it is impossible at this point to say.

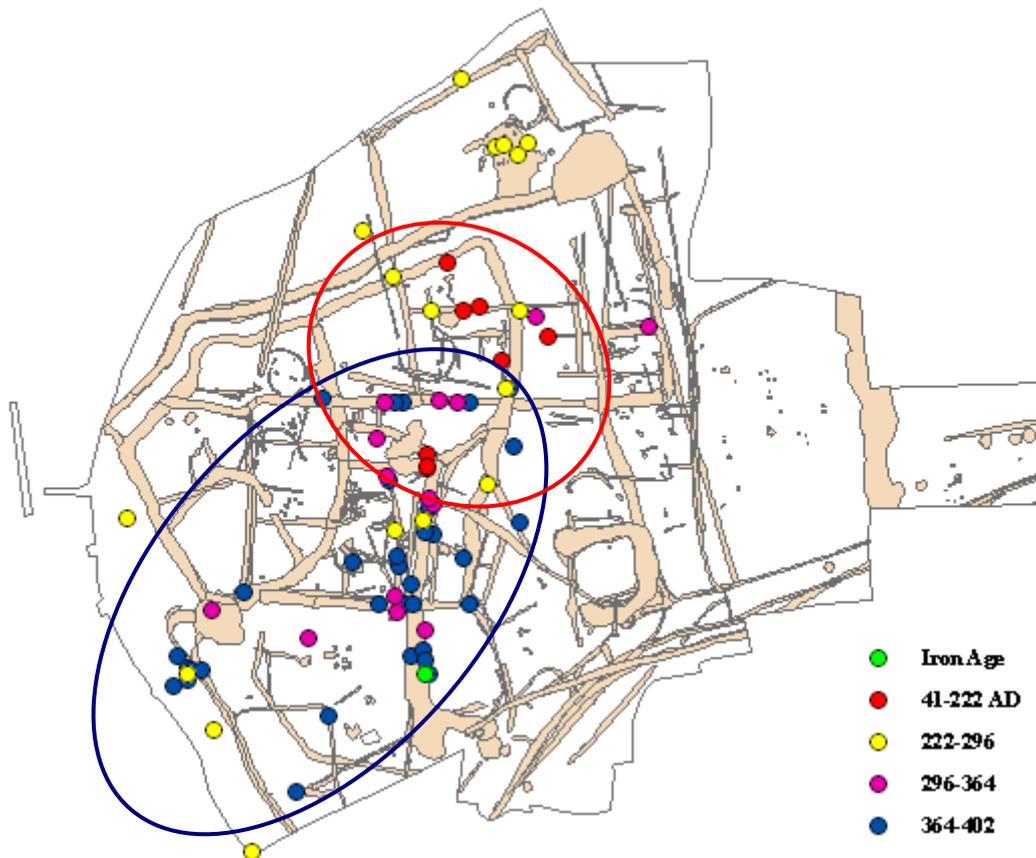


Figure Coins 2. Lower Cambourne: distribution of coins by period

Spatial distribution

The more detailed level of recording of 73 of the closely dated coins from Lower Cambourne allows a plot of their individual distribution (**Figure Coins 2**). The coins of the early period (to AD 222) are concentrated within a small area in the central part of site, while the coins of the succeeding period (222–296) are found over a much larger area, a pattern mirrored to a lesser extent by the succeeding period (296–364). The latest coins from the site (364–402) also show a general spread, but with a particular concentration in the south-west to central part of site. The coins tend to be either unstratified (43 examples) or from the upper fills of features where material accumulates during the general site formation process.

It is worth adding a note of caution here, because while the statistical analysis of coin assemblages is based on the assumption that the coins found in any site were lost at that site, this is not the same as saying that a coin found in any *particular part* of site was lost *there*. This problem is significant in any urban excavation where the detritus in which coins were lost would have been periodically swept away and dumped elsewhere – something recognised as happening at Cirencester (Guest 1998, 265–8). Similar occurrences are likely to have happened at any site, and so it is possible that the concentrations observed at Lower Cambourne may simply be the rubbish dumps of particular periods.

A more optimistic appraisal is that the distribution of the coins on the whole represents the shifting of particular activities around the site during the Roman period. What these activities were it is difficult to be certain about except that it must have involved the exchanging of coin, so perhaps we are looking at an area where people met to exchange goods for money – a market area possibly?

Twelve excavations were carried out by Wessex Archaeology within the Cambourne Development Area. Situated on the clay uplands west of Cambridge, which have seen little previous archaeological investigation, the results presented here are important in demonstrating the ebb and flow of occupation according to population or agricultural pressure.

Short-lived Bronze Age occupation was followed in the Middle Iron Age by small farming communities with an economy based on stock-raising and some arable cultivation. The Late Iron Age seems to have seen a recession, perhaps partly due to increased waterlogging making farming less viable.

From the mid-1st century AD new settlements began to emerge, possibly partly stimulated by the presence of Ermine Street, and within a century the area was relatively densely occupied. Several farmsteads were remodelled in the later Romano-British period, though none seems to have been very prosperous.

Dispersed occupation may have continued into the early 5th century at least, followed by a hiatus until the 12th/13th century when the entire area was taken into arable cultivation, leaving the ubiquitous traces of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture.

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