
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS
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Issue 2 by Andrew Brown – 19 March 2020

The Britannia *as* of Antoninus Pius, AD 154-155 (Reece Period 7)



From the end of the 1st century AD, but particularly into the first half of the 2nd century AD, a series of bronze *dupondii* and *asses* were struck in Rome that appear to have almost exclusive circulation in Britannia, probably reaching the province in batches particularly in the AD 150s. This has led to the adoption of the term ‘Coins of British Association’ for all of these related issues. Over 630 examples were identified by D. Walker¹ from the more than 12,500 Roman coins at the Sacred Spring in Bath, with almost 500 also known from the similar hoard-like deposit at Coventina’s Well on Hadrian’s Wall. The earliest type identified to date is of Nerva (AD 96-98), however perhaps the most distinctive are coins struck under Hadrian (AD 117-138) and Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161) with reverse types that depict Britannia in human form.

The most common Coin of British Association seen in Britain is the Britannia *as* type for Antoninus Pius – RIC III no. 934 – struck in Rome in AD 154-155 (Reece Period 7):

A copper-alloy Roman *as* of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161)

Mint of Rome, AD 154-155 (Reece Period 7)

Obv.: ANTONINVS AVG PIVS P P TR P XVIII², Laureate head right

Rev.: BRITANNIA COS IIII, S C³, Britannia seated left on rocks, head in right hand, to left a round shield and eagle-tipped sceptre.

RIC III, p. 142, no. 934; Walker, 1988: pp. 294, 297-8, nos. 73-122, 136-288, pls. XXXV-VI.

¹ See D. Walker, ‘Roman coins from the Sacred Spring at Bath’ in B. Cunliffe ed. *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath II: Finds from the Sacred Spring* (Oxford, 1988); see also Sam’s Academia page here:

https://www.academia.edu/12608461/Coins_of_British_Association_after_David_Walker_and_David_Shotter_with_additions_by_Sam_Moorhead

² ANTONINVS AVG[ustus] PIVS P[ater] P[atriae] TR[ibunicia] P[otestas] XVIII – Antoninus Pius, Augustus, father of his country, power of the tribune for the 18th time (AD 154-155)

³ BRITANNIA CO[n]S[ul] IIII, S[enatus] C[onsulto] – struck when Pius held his 4th consulship (COS IIII); the S C indicates issue by the authority of the Senate and appears on the majority of early Imperial bronze coinage



ESS-5A2744 – Antoninus Pius, RIC 934

The reverse type is often regarded as depicting Britannia mourning, her head held in her hand. However, coins of both Hadrian and Antoninus Pius that depict a seated Britannia suggest that in some examples she may instead be drawing a hood or veil towards her head. This could of course be quite a useful thing to do on a rainy northern frontier at the edge of the known world! Even in very worn condition, the reverse type for these coins is distinctive and will allow you to narrow the identification to this specific type:



WILT-0E621B – note the majority of the Britannia *asses* on the PAS appear very worn, if you have a good example, please don't forget to photograph!

The *dupondius* variant, RIC III, no. 930:



LIN-D1B7D7

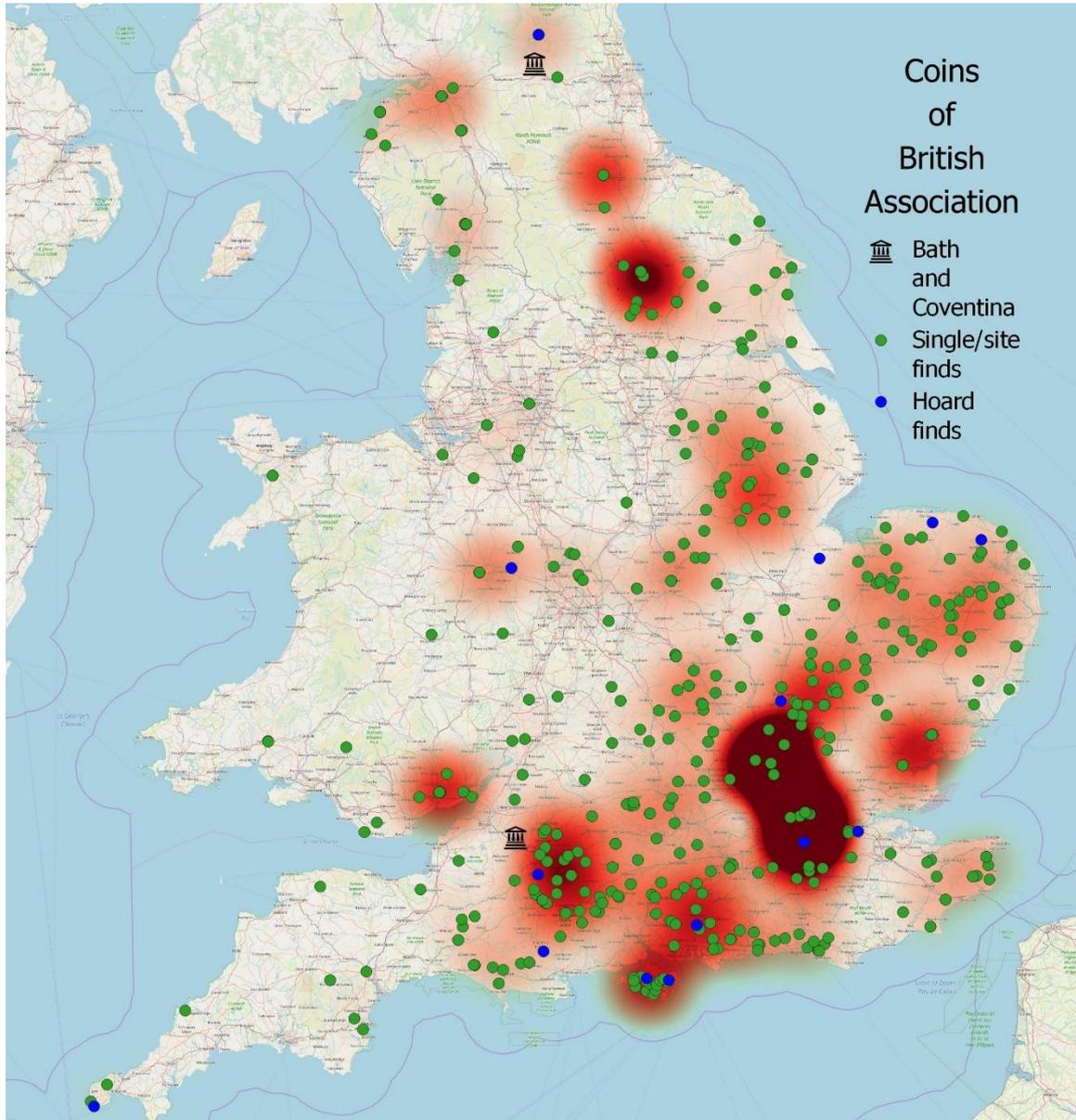


BM: 1859,0601.16

Coins of British Association on the PAS

I have been editing the Coins of British Association in general on the database, adding in the notes box the following: 'Coin of British Association' followed by the ruler and type, in this instance 'Antoninus Britannia'. It may be that many of yours have already been edited, but if you have any new ones or ones that are missing this in the notes box please do let me know. We currently have 156 examples of Antoninus Britannia types on the database, at least 130 of these are of the *as* type, while just 13 are identified as *dupondii* (the remainder falling in the either/or category!)⁴. This is reflected in hoard and site finds, too, with the *dupondius* generally much rarer than the *as*.

⁴ See <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/notes/antoninus+britannia/objectType/COIN> for the search results.



A preliminary plot of all the examples I have been able to find to date – almost 700 ‘Coins of British Association’ with a mixture of PAS finds (c.450 coins), site finds, and hoard coins – shows their distribution largely in the areas we’d expect coinage to be circulating in the 1st-2nd centuries AD and mostly south and east of the Fosse Way. There are notable concentrations around London, St. Albans, Colchester, Piercebridge, the Isle of Wight, and in the south west. However, the detail shows that the coins of individual rulers and indeed individual types amongst them have often quite different patterns of circulation. The next stage, therefore, is to plot these individually so that we can begin to untangle their distribution. Some interesting finds – in wells and one in the mouth of a skeleton! – suggest there may be multiple factors at play and some examples could have been deliberately removed from the circulation pool for means other than use as currency.

If you have any coin you think may be a Coin of British Association please remember to photo and send us the details!

Anerley, 19 March 2020