**Toolkit for Finds Reporting:**

**Roman Coinage**

*A guide to the reliable and consistent reporting of Roman coins*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The **Toolkit for Finds Reporting: Roman Coinage** is a nationally recognised guide for anyone engaged in the planning, commissioning, production or monitoring of a specialist report on Roman coins. It has been designed to be used for the reporting of Roman coin finds from all types of archaeological projects (surface collection, watching briefs, evaluations and full-scale excavations), and at all stages of a project’s life cycle (planning, execution, post-excavation assessment and preparation of archive reports and publications).

This Toolkit has been created specifically to apply to archaeologically-recovered coin assemblages (though it could be developed for the reporting of other coin finds too, for example hoards and single finds including those recovered by metal detector).

The Toolkit is a guide to the reliable and consistent reporting of archaeologically-recovered Roman coins (commonly known as **site-finds**). It is not the intention to dictate how the analytical process should take place as this will depend on a combination of variables that affect the feasible level of analysis (e.g., type of archaeological project, size and condition of the coin assemblage, nature of the excavated remains, etc). The standardised identification and quantification of Roman coins are, however, the necessary first steps towards the integrated, informative and meaningful analysis of these important artefacts as archaeological finds.

Following the [FAIR Guiding Principles](https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/) (**F**indability, **A**ccessibility, **I**nteroperability, and **R**euse of digital assets), this Toolkit establishes the archaeological standard for the reporting of Roman coins.

Identification and reporting of Roman coins should be undertaken by a specialist, or specialists, with experience of archaeology and numismatics.

Specialists who are able to bring together knowledge and expertise from both of these disciplines should be distinguished from their ‘pure’ numismatic and archaeological colleagues. Instead of ‘coin specialist’ or ‘applied numismatist’, a less ambiguous title for such specialists is **archaeological numismatist**.

An archaeological ‘specialist’ is defined by CIfA as:

*An individual who is competent in, and specialises in, collecting, recording, analysing, interpreting and reporting on specific materials, objects or scientific data. A specialist will have developed expertise through the extensive study of their particular field, working to accepted standards of practice and ethics, and reporting in reputable peer reviewed sources. They should also be accredited in line with any recognition schemes in place for their field of expertise. Membership of a study group or special interest group is a valuable way of acquiring and sharing knowledge and is also recommended.*

This professional definition should be applied in conjunction with the following statement from the CIfA Standards and Guidance:

Following rule 1.4 of the Code of conduct a member shall not undertake archaeological work for which they are not adequately qualified.

Trainee or novice specialists should always work under the guidance of an experienced and established archaeological numismatist.

The Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the following CIfA / Historic England Toolkits and standards and guidance documents:

* [Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers’ Guide](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/morphe-project-managers-guide/heag024-morphe-managers-guide/)
  + MoRPHE (Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment) Project Planning Note 3: Archaeological Excavation, Historic England (2008)
* [Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (2014)](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GFinds_1.pdf)
* [Toolkit for Finds Recording](https://www.archaeologists.net/toolkits/finds-recording)
* [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](https://www.archaeologists.net/reporting-toolkit)
* [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data](https://www.archaeologists.net/digdigital) (*Dig Digital* online resource)
* [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit)

**BACKGROUND**

Coins are relatively common finds from archaeological excavations of Romano-British sites. Different settlement types tend to produce distinctive patterns of coin loss (e.g., military and urban sites, religious sites, villas and other rural settlements), while coins are more common from some parts of Roman Britain than others.

A previous standards and guidance document for Romano-British coin reports, commissioned by English Heritage in 2004, failed to gain traction in the historic environment sector and was removed from Historic England’s website in 2015 (Brickstock 2004). Currently, there is no industry standard setting out the minimum requirements for Romano-British coin reports.

Roman coins are unique among archaeological artefacts in that they were produced by the state in order to serve the state’s needs - the emperor’s coins were issued in order to pay for the costs of the army and the civil service, to store wealth and to distribute imperial largesse, as well as to facilitate trade and commerce. Although Roman coinage changed significantly from the 1st to the 4th centuries, in theory Rome’s currency always consisted of a tri-metallic system (gold, silver and bronze), composed of interchangeable denominations of different monetary values (normally for a fee collected by money-changers). Low-value small-change denominations are most common from archaeological excavations, whereas higher value coins are more often found in hoards.

Almost all Roman coins can be dated to an emperor’s reign (and, in some instances, more closely to a particular year or years), and the absolute dates provided by these objects are the basis for the typological sequences of many other artefacts, as well as the dating of excavated sites.

Numismatics, the study of coins and currency, is one of the oldest historical disciplines in western academia. Traditionally, numismatic knowledge was based on the study and arrangement of coin types into chronological sequences, determined by the reigns of rulers as well as historical events. The 20th century saw a greater focus on the examination of coins contained in hoards to better understand coin production and supply, as well as circulation patterns, while the analysis of coins as archaeological artefacts (‘site-finds’) developed in the UK from the 1970s (e.g., Casey & Reece 1974; Casey 1986; Reece 1987; Reece 1995).

In the UK, ‘applied numismatics’ is often used to describe an investigation of archaeologically-recovered coins, but this term is loosely defined and can mean different things to numismatists, historians and archaeologists. For example, the introduction to ‘The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage’ highlights the application of numismatic knowledge to the study of history, art history and economic history, but does not mention archaeology or social history (Metcalf 2012).

In order to avoid ambiguity and confusion in the future, **archaeological numismatics** would be a clearer designation for the study of archaeologically-recovered coins, including site-finds (see [The Journal of Archaeological Numismatics](https://www.cen-numismatique.com/)).

The great variation in the content and quality of specialist archaeological artefact reports, including Roman coins, was highlighted as a significant concern in the HE-funded Project 7090 *Review of the Standard of Reporting on Archaeological Artefacts in England* (Cattermole 2017). This project looked at over 1,000 unpublished specialist artefact reports from grey literature and a further 61 published specialist artefact reports from journal articles. These were scored against a checklist of criteria to assess the reports’ overall quality, which highlighted that existing standards and guidance were not being used effectively:

* Only 56% of specialist artefact reports met 50% or more of the criteria;
* Only 12% of specialist artefact reports met 75% or more of the criteria;
* Only 0.7% of specialist artefact reports met 90% or more of the criteria.

Concerns about the lack of a consistent methodological approach to Roman finds reports, including coinage, were highlighted in the HE-funded *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* project and related publications (Fulford and Holbrook 2018). For instance, in the discussion paper exploring the recovery, reporting and analysis of artefacts:

*There is, in particular, a need for considerably greater consistency, especially concerning the full quantification of artefact assemblages, and this is of fundamental importance if we are to capitalise on and extract maximum value from the artefacts excavated from Romano-British sites.”* (Brindle 2016, 1).

References:

* Brickstock, R.J. 2004. *The Production, Analysis and Standardisation of Romano-British Coin Reports*. English Heritage: Swindon.
* [Brindle, T. 2016. *Approaches to the Investigation, Analysis and Dissemination of Work on Roman Rural Settlements and Landscapes in Britain: A Review. Paper 5: The Recovery, Reporting and Analysis of Artefacts*. Cotswold Archaeology: Unpublished discussion paper.](https://cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/community/discover-the-past/developer-funded-roman-archaeology-in-britain/methodology-study/)
* Casey, R. & Reece, R. (eds) 1974. *Coins and the Archaeologist.* Oxford (Reprinted in 1986).
* Casey, J. 1986. *Understanding Ancient Coins. An Introduction for Archaeologists and Historians.* London.
* [Cattermole, A, 2017, *Review of the Standard of Reporting on Archaeological Artefacts in England*. Historic England Project No. 7090: Unpublished report for Historic England.](http://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/7090FinalReport.compressed.pdf)
* Fulford, M. and Holbrook, N. 2018. ‘Relevant Beyond the Roman Period: Approaches to the Investigation, Analysis and Dissemination of Archaeological Investigations of the Rural Settlements and Landscapes of Roman Britain’, *Archaeological Journal* 175 (2), 214-230.
* Metcalf, W. 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*. Oxford.
* Reece, R. 1987. *Coinage in Roman Britain.* London.

**COINS AS ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTEFACTS**

Roman coins are numismatic objects that have much to tell us about the economic and political histories of the Roman world. **Site-finds** (i.e., archaeologically-recovered coins), however, tell different stories too and if we are to ‘capitalise on and extract maximum value’ from these objects, the reporting of Roman coinage should follow the same principles and processes as other archaeological finds (e.g., [pottery](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/standard-for-pottery-studies-in-archaeology/) and small finds).

Most archaeological coin reports treat site-finds squarely as numismatic objects rather than excavated artefacts. Roman coins are listed and shown on graphs according to the dates when they were struck, without consideration of the length of time they might have been in circulation before being deposited. They are also almost always interpreted as monetary objects that together are thought to reflect a settlement’s economic fortunes. Although there are a few notable exceptions to this picture, particularly for sites known to have been places of religious significance (e.g., Walker 1988; Eckardt and Walton 2021), the analytical methodologies in use today have not altered significantly since the 1970s and 1980s.

It remains the case that coins are divorced from their stratigraphic origins in the majority of reports and publications describing excavations of Romano-British sites and, consequently, from the other artefacts with which they might have been found. Beyond providing absolute dates for a site’s chronological sequence, coin reports tend to have little to add to the broader understanding of excavated Romano-British settlements and the lives of their inhabitants.

To achieve a more universal approach to the study of site-finds therefore requires bringing together numismatic and archaeological knowledge and understanding. A better appreciation of the archaeological contexts that produce Roman coins is an obvious starting point; a coin dropped during a commercial transaction in a shop or at a market stall, for example, became an archaeological artefact in different circumstances to a coin recovered from a pit filled with domestic rubbish, or a coin placed in a grave.

Understanding site formation processes and archaeological stratigraphy is vitally important in the study of site-finds. Coins are cultural as well as monetary objects that had histories after the moment when they were struck and issued into circulation. Object (or artefact) biography is one approach to exploring these important archaeological themes, which can be envisaged as consisting of the following connected episodes in a coin’s use-life:

* + 1. Production
    2. Supply
    3. Use / circulation / reuse
    4. Loss / disposal
    5. Discovery
    6. Archaeological / museum artefact

References:

* Eckardt, H. and Walton, P. 2021. *Bridge over Troubled Water: The Roman Finds from the River Tees at Piercebridge in Context*. London.
* Walker, D. R. 1986. *Roman Coins from the Sacred Spring at Bath*. Oxford.

**CURRENT STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE**

General standards and guides to good practice

* [Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers’ Guide HEAG024 v1.2](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/morphe-project-managers-guide/heag024-morphe-managers-guide/)
  + Historic England, 2008 MoRPHE (Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment) Project Planning Note 3: Archaeological Excavation
* [Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GFinds_1.pdf) (PDF)
* [ALGAO Advice Note For Post-Excavation Assessment](https://www.algao.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ALGAO_England_PXA_Advice_Note.pdf) (PDF)
* [Toolkit for Finds Recording](https://www.archaeologists.net/toolkits/finds-recording)
* [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](https://www.archaeologists.net/reporting-toolkit)
* [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data](https://www.archaeologists.net/digdigital) (*Dig Digital* online resource)
* [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit)
* [Portable Antiquities Scheme recording guides](https://finds.org.uk/counties/findsrecordingguides)

Other specialist finds standards

* [Barclay, A, Knight, D, Booth, P, Evans, J, Brown, DH and Wood, I, 2016 A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, Study Group for Roman Pottery and Medieval Pottery Research Group](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/standard-for-pottery-studies-in-archaeology/)
* First Aid for Finds: Practical Guide for Archaeologists (1998; third edition). Hertford: Rescue, The British Archaeological Trust.

Archives

* [CIfA Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIFAS&GArchives_2.pdf) (PDF)
* [CIfA Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit)

Thesauri, word lists and reference catalogues

* [Archaeological Objects Thesaurus, Forum on Information Standards in Heritage](http://www.heritage-standards.org.uk/fish-vocabularies/) (FISH)
* [British Museum Materials Thesaurus](https://terminology.collectionstrust.org.uk/British-Museum-materials/mathesp.htm)
* [British Museum Object Names Thesaurus](https://terminology.collectionstrust.org.uk/British-Museum-objects/)