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**Roman Dymock - A Personal Record**

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By the Revd. Canon ERIC GETHYN-JONES

PART I

While much is known of the pattern of Roman occupation in Gloucestershire east of the Severn, across the river much less exploratory work has been undertaken. Finds dating from the Roman period, nearly always accidental, were made, but these have not always been recorded nor their provenance pinpointed. This has happened in the past at both Dymock and Donnington, which will be considered here as a single unit, as they are indeed ecclesiastically, in this report, which will attempt to correlate all available evidence of Roman occupation, and to establish the exact location and nature of the material discovered. It will appear from excavations and chance finds that the main Roman settlement was on the rising ground where the church and the main part of the present village are situated; with the R. Leadon a mere stone’s-throw away, water there would be in plenty (FIG. 1).¹

I have found no mention of Romano-British remains being discovered in the Dymock area before the 19th century, but some of the coins in the Timothy Nourse collection, presented to the Bodleian Library in 1699, may have been found locally, for he was a Newent man;² but no details of them have survived, and they are presumably all included in the Bodleian collection without any further reference.³ The late 19th century large-scale Ordnance Survey maps of this district have the words ‘Roman road’ or ‘Pavement’ along sections of the road running south-east to north-west through Dymock from Gloucester to Stretton Grandison; some of these may be doubtful, but the matter is considered on its merits by Margary,⁴ and the road appears on both the 1956 and 1978 editions of the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain, in the latter case marking Dymock as a ‘minor settlement’. Let us now endeavour to see what lies behind this.

In June, 1908, when the Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society visited Dymock, the incumbent, Canon R. Horton, stated that ‘traces of paving remained for 100 yards along the village street. Roman coins had been repeatedly dug up, and a skeleton of a man with a Roman denarius of Carausius . . . lying near the skull (perhaps dropped from the mouth of the corpse) was found some years ago fresh as when minted.’ No further information relating to these finds has been traced, nor any detail regarding the exact provenance of the Gaulish gold coin (FIG. 3).⁵

On 27 May, 1909, G.H. Jack, addressing members of the Woolhope Club,⁶ referred to his belief that place-names such as Stanway, Garway and Greenway indicated Roman roads and ways. ‘Take . . . Greenway: this is a road crossing the modern main road three miles south from Ledbury towards Dymock, near Donnington Hall. I have had the pleasure quite recently of proving for myself the existence of a Roman building near this road, probably a villa, the exact situation being 400 yards north of the Greenway . . . I found the level of an ancient floor 2 ft. to 2 ft 6 in below the present surface level, and scattered about fragments of undoubted Roman pottery, part of a hypocaust tile, and nails and a portion of tesserae. The soil contains fragments of brick and ashes. I am told by the tenant that some time ago rough masonry was unearthed in the shape of an “upright coffin” containing a shelf and a perfect urn. Unfortunately the masonry was demolished.’ Later in the year Jack added further details. A Miss Holland of Malvern had
photographed, and a Mr Russell of Ledbury had measured, this construction before its destruction in 1906. It was 'circular, 18 in internal diameter, 5 ft in height inside, and domed over at the top, and built of uncoursed masonry, a greenish grit stone. The walls were 9 in in thickness and built without mortar.' It produced fragments of Roman red tile and pottery, and bones of sheep.\(^7\) The site was that of a gravel-pit (16 below, p. 95), and the only possible interpretation of this record is that the structure was a well.\(^8\)

This is the last clear reference so far traced relating to Roman remains discovered in the Dymock-Donnington area prior to the 1930s; and it was not until the late 1940s that well-recorded information began to emerge, on the basis of which the character of the occupation could be assessed.

PART II

Part II will take the form of a chronological summary of the locations within the village area surrounding the church where, since 1920, evidence of Roman occupation has been discovered. A brief catalogue of items will follow the description of each site. These latter are numbered for ease of identification on the key map (FIG. 2).\(^9\)

\(^{(1)}\) In the 1920s, when planting fruit-trees, a stone layer stated to be less than 2 ft. below the surface, was encountered. This site has not been investigated.

\(^{(2)}\) In 1932 three Dymock lads, digging in the bank of the old canal, discovered pottery and a small hoard of five bronze coins, identified by Gloucester Museum as 'Roman'. They were found at a depth of approximately 2½ ft
FIG. 2 Dymock: detail, with findspots as in Schedule.
and some feet in from the edge of the canal. One of the trio, Mr Horace Dudfield, pinpointed the site in 1964. The coins have been lost.

(3) In 1938, during construction of an inspection-pit in a bus shed at Bayfield, a complete pot and many fragments of varied pottery, again identified as Roman, were dug up. The whole vessel contained ashes, and was thought to have been a funerary urn. Once more the depth was 2 to 3 ft. The material has been lost.

(4) In 1939, a Victory as of Nero was dug up by Mr Horace Hill in his garden; it may be added that in 1973 he uncovered a denarius of Nerva (Roman Imperial Coinage, no. 10) within a few feet of the findspot of the as.

(5) Between 1939 and 1954 odd fragments of pottery, including black-burnished and coarse red wares, and oyster-shells, were dug up occasionally in the vicarage garden. No investigation was made.

(6) In 1944, a fresh strip of land was incorporated into the churchyard, and in 1946–7 the grave digger, Mr W. Harris, complained of large stones in some of the graves here. They appeared to have been dressed and probably represented building-material. Fragments of Roman pottery were also found. Since then, and up to my departure from Dymock in 1967, most graves in this extension produced pottery, while some also contained stone. Graves 97 and 103 deserve special mention from the number and interest of the items which they yielded. The pottery – and the quantity found between 1946 and 1966 was considerable – included a wide variety of fabrics and vessels, e.g. black-burnished wares, buff burnished wares, light grey wares, bead-rim jars, coarse native types, plain tankards and one with a coloured lip, rims of large storage-jars both red and grey, a large flagon-top, an amphora-handle, and samian. From Grave 97 came samian forms Dr. 18 and a large fragment of Dr. 27, with the stamp OFO, naming the potter Volus of La Graufesenque (South Gaul); Dr Grace Simpson dated it c. AD 45–55, on the grounds that its glossy red slip would not be expected on his early work from c. AD 50 onwards. From Grave 103 came a large quantity of pottery, mainly second-century, and blue-tile.

(7–8) In 1949–50 mains water and a new sewage-system were planned for the village, but strangely few pieces of Roman pottery were found when the pipes were laid along the village street; perhaps the present road directly overlies the Roman. At the points indicated, however, traces of walling were noted.

(9) In the spring of 1951 finds were reported at the site of the new filter-bed. The contractors stopped work for three days; the soil already scooped was sifted, the face of the pit was probed, and an exploratory trench was cut on the south side with the help of many willing hands. Few objects were stratified and it was mainly a case of salvage and recording; in the trench and pit, the bulk of the specimens came from a band 18 to 48 in deep. When the contractors resumed a careful watch was maintained. Thousands of fragments of pottery, numerous oyster-shells and bones, several metal objects and bone pins, and much iron-slag were found. A representative collection of all these items was retained, and may be described as follows.

A. Pottery – Samian (by Mr B.R. Hartley)
   (i) Form 18/1 or 31. East Gaulish, Antonine.
   (ii) Form 27. Central Gaulish, early or mid-second century.
   (iii) Form 31 (Ludovici Sb) with stamp CVCF, . . . , probably Cacillus of Lavoye, as the pale fabric, similar to that found in other Argonne products, suggests. Antonine.
   (iv) Form 37. Central Gaulish. This piece is of considerable intrinsic interest, with the large S-shaped double spiral found almost exclusively in the work of the ‘Large S’ potter, who also used the trisped ornament seen here in a vertical series. I do not know any example of his work with the large detached leaf used to fill a panel, however, though a similar but not identical leaf was so used by the ‘Small S’ potter (e.g., Newstead, p. 221, 6; Mumrills, fig. 80, 48 and Balmuildy, pl. xxxiv, 43). The column I have not noted in the work of either potter. Probably early Antonine.
   (v) Dr. 18/31 with the stamp SACRILLVS of Lezoux, AD 140–80.
   (vi) Form 31. Central Gaulish, with stamp W . . . which cannot be restored, but the Form is typically Antonine.
   (vii–viii) Form 31R, Central Gaulish, Antonine – same vessel.
   (ix) Form 31. Central Gaulish. The stamp cannot certainly be identified, but appears to fit known stamps of the Antonine Lezoux potter Antiquus.
   (xi) Form 31. Central Gaulish, Antonine.

Coarse Ware

Fragments of mortaria, tankards, storage-jars, colander, coarse native ware, black and buff-burnished wares, light grey ware covering the period from the first to the fourth centuries (unlike the samian, which included no first-century material). The late Dr G.C. Dunning wrote concerning some rough brownish-grey ware that it was probably native late Roman: ‘I think the best parallels are among the fourth-century cooking-pots at Richborough.’
B. Glass

(i) Fragments believed by Dr D.B. Harden to be from ‘window-glass or square-sided bottle’; later a large corner-piece of such a bottle, first-second century, was found.

(ii) A decorated piece from a double-handled jug, cf. I.A. Richmond, Roman Britain (Britain in Pictures series, Collins, 1947), pl. facing p. 17; first century, not third as stated; Rhenish.

C. Metal

The material preserved comprises (i) a knife; (ii) a finch-pin; (iii) a small dress-pin; (iv) a small ring; and (v) nails.

D. Bone

(i) includes sheep and cattle; a jaw-bone, found 18 in. below the Roman stratum as defined above, was identified by Dr J.W. Jackson as ‘wild boar’.

(ii) pins.

E. Slag.

Iron and probably glass slag were present.

(10) While the filter-bed site was being worked, I followed the Stile House stream for part of its course, and found samian and black-burnished ware in both banks at this point, which is almost in line with the bulldozed road found on the cricket-ground in 1955, and possibly represents a ford or bridge site.

(11) During the summer of 1951 a trench was dug across the field to the north of the churchyard. A few pieces of pottery were found, and a skeleton was dug up where the trench cut through Mr Horace Hill’s hedge. All this evidence had disappeared before being reported; I was on holiday.

(12) In 1952 Mr. H. Baldwin built a new house near ‘The White House’. Here too, Roman pottery was discovered some 15 to 24 in. below ground level. It included fragments of a large rimmed storage-jar in light grey ware.

(13) During August 1953, I noticed in a field at Rose Hill a burnt strip of grass in line with the known Roman road running from Dymock northwards towards Preston. Probing with an iron spike recorded a hard surface some 12 to 18 in. below ground. Permission to cut the trench was granted on the condition that it was closed within 24 hours; it was dug down to, but not through the road; photographs were taken. Later, possible traces of the same road were found in an orchard near Preston Court.

(14) In 1953–4 the present Rectory was built in the glebe orchard. Here again fragments of Roman, and one large piece of medieval, pottery were turned up.

(15) In 1953, Eric Lewis found a denarius of Tiberius, with reverse PONTIF MAXIM (Lyons mint) in fresh plough on the Hill Farm, in a field next to a holding known as Oysters; the coin was in almost mint condition.

(16) Early in 1953 I went to the gravel-pit which Messrs. Ballard, Jack and Russell had visited some fifty years earlier. Scratching the face of the pit, I found a fine fragment of Roman tile. A one-day dig was arranged, and a number of pieces of 2nd–4th century pottery, tesserae and fragments of tegulae and imbrices were found. In August and the following April two further days’ work yielded similar results, and in addition a wall was discovered, followed up for more than 40 ft by the Malvern Research Group in July 1957, adding more objects mainly of 2nd and 3rd-century date. (see above, p. 92).

(17) In September 1955, the cricket-ground was being extended, and as part of the operation a bulldozer was brought in to level the ridge on which the northern boundary-fence stood. It was found that the ridge was in fact the agger of a Roman road, which was later traced eastwards for nearly a mile, and may have a connexion with the reputed Roman ford over the Leaden at Ketford. Midway along the 100-yard length destroyed by the bulldozer were a number of very large stones, set flat, and together. This point was in line with the Portwaytop road leading out of Dymock, and it was suggested that this area of stone might represent a road-junction. The branch has been marked on the fourth edition (1978) of the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain on the basis of these findings. Some fragments of pottery were found.

In May 1956, on the advice of the late J. Neufville Taylor of Gloucester Museum, I invited Dr Graham Webster to Dymock; the results of this visit were (a) air-photographs of the cricket-ground area taken by Mr Arnold Baker on 9 July, showing inter alia the continuation of the road eastward as already mentioned; and (b) a full-scale excavation by the Malvern Research Group in the Donnington gravel-pit site in 1957 (see 16 above).

Late in 1957, Dr Webster asked that Mr Nicol and his team should be allowed in 1958 to explore the area behind the cricket-pavilion where the aerial photograph had confirmed the existence of the Roman road. Permission was granted by the Club, and ownership of the finds was vested in me as Rector (as had been the case at Donnington). Work began at Easter 1958. Evidence of pre-Roman occupation was found below the road-level, including Belgic pottery, a Dobunnic silver coin and a floor. Respectively in and above the road-metalling coins of Hadrian.
and Allcutus were found, while to the south-west another floor, perhaps a courtyard, was encountered; *Dymock down the Ages*, pl. 3, top left, shows a rather abraded Tuscan capital, with abacus, from this site.

Subsequent work by Mr P.L. Waters for the Malvern Research Group in 1965 and later years has not been published in extenso, but has shown that the Roman road was some 12 ft. wide; beneath it at point were two parallel ditches, a *dupondius* of Claudius I being found in one of them. Floors and occupation-debris of the second and third centuries, associated with two small bowl-furnaces and abundant quantities of iron-slag occurred; south-east of the village the road was again found, about 12 ft. wide, with an extensive iron-working area to the south, with gravel floors above the post-holes and beam-slots of earlier buildings, in a date-range of about AD 150 to 300. Another exposure, showing the road to be very much wider – nearly 20 ft, and about a foot thick, was recorded on a later occasion; a wall beside it bounded an area of metalling with occupation-traces of c. AD 150–250. The latest work reported in print is of similar results in 1987.

In linking up the School to the new sewerage system in 1958, Mr F. Baldwin came across, below the present road, several lengths of timber about 2 ft long by 4 in which disintegrated rapidly upon exposure; and beginning about the middle of the present road-line, a cobbled area bordered to the south by larger and dressed stones, at the level of the sewer-pipe. No record of date was recorded.

Early in 1959 – a fruitful year – when Yewtree Cottage was being linked to the sewer, much stone was found, but no more can be said.

During August, a new entrance-gateway to Hill View (now Spare-a-Penny) on Longbridge pitch was made by a bulldozer. In the spoil pushed to the back of the garden, pottery and a coin of Septimiuse Severus were found. The fragments included large store-jars, buff-burnished wares and native types. A little later, a bungalow was built a few yards further up the hill. More pottery and the complete upper stone of a quern (*Dymock down the Ages*, pl. 3, bottom left) were recovered.

In September 1959, while digging for a new classroom in the school garden, fresh discoveries were made. They included a stone wall running almost north and south, a cobbled area on its east side, traces of iron-smelting, slag and a large piece of burnt daub. South of this was an area 5 ft 9 in by 5 ft 11 in paved with stone flags, with upright flags all round, set into the natural subsoil, possibly a tank (*ibid.*, bottom right). Finds included a coin of Claudius I and another of Constantine I (c. AD 305–6); a plain bone pin; a thin bronze stud; etc., and an iron hook which much resembles the old-fashioned implement known locally as a 'lug', which, attached to a long shaft, is used to pull down apples and pears for cider- and perry-making (*Dymock down the Ages*, pl. 3, upper right, with comparison). Pottery included two stamped samian Forms, . . . *ITINM* on 18/31 and *ELI[I][]LI on 33, and two Antonine decorated pieces, Form 37 (*ibid.*, 10). A fair amount of coarse pottery including a plain tankard also occurred, as did roof- and flue-tiles.

In October, Mr Hawkins of Stallards Place, next to the School, when digging to double depth in his garden, found coarse wares including a black-burnished pie-dish.

In November 1959 Mr F. Baldwin, the contractor who had made and reported the discoveries at the School (21 above), found further fragments of Roman pottery in a water-trench which runs from Still House Bridge to the filter-bed.

In 1883–5 the railway was brought into Dymock, and as a consequence the road at the west end of the village was looped northward to meet the requirements of bridging the line. The railway was closed in 1962, and in 1973 the original road-line was re-established. During this work the cobbles of a road-surface were exposed south-east of the old railway-bridge. Associated with the cobbles were Roman buff pottery and iron-slag.

This concludes the catalogue of the main evidence for Roman occupation. Many odd items have been found in other parts of the village from time to time, e.g. (1) walling when a hydraulic ramp was installed at Well House Garage, and (2) several coins, notably an *antoninianus* of Gordian III, with reverse *VICTORIA AVG*, Rome mint AD 238–9; and an illegible specimen, probably of the second half of the fourth century, perhaps of the House of Valentinian. The date of finding and exact findspot of these coins I have failed to establish.

Thus ends the summary. The information therein has been recorded by me over many years. Since no-one else is in possession of it, it is proper to set it down for future use in any further work on Roman Dymock, and it supplements in its detail the more general account in the 1966 edition of my *Dymock down the Ages*. Most of the finds are deposited in the City Museum & Art Gallery at Gloucester; a few are at Dymock Church and Dymock School. The material is boxed and labelled with site-names corresponding with those recorded here.
Conclusions

I can add little to my remarks in *Dymock down the Ages*, 1–13, and a précis only is necessary here. It will be noted from the preceding catalogue that the main occupational spread covers an area of 35 to 40 acres, a conclusion with which Dr Graham Webster (who was kind enough to offer much advice during the course of my recording) has expressed agreement. The quantity and quality of the pottery, coins, glass and metal objects of first to fourth-century date confirm the belief that the present village is sited upon a small Roman town (Webster *in litt*. 6 October 1959, referring to his visit with Sir Ian Richmond).

As to the identification of this settlement, it may be observed that in the west of England section of the *Ravenna Cosmography* there is a route from *Magnis* (Kenchester) to *Glebon* (Gloucester); that road appears in three sections divided by two settlements, *Epocessa* to the north and *Macatonion* to the south nearer *Glebon*. Richmond and Crawford, in editing the British section of Ravennas, suggest an emendation of the more southerly name to *Magalonion*, involving the element mag- ‘great’, and if so the name would have been derived from a river-name *Magalona*; if this is so, the only river in that area is the Leodon, which flows into the Severn near Gloucester; Dymock stands on the Leodon, and the Roman road through the village runs parallel with the river and is rarely 100 yards distant from it. Thus the identification of Dymock with ‘*Macatonion*’ is reasonable. Richmond and Crawford render the meaning ‘Place on the noble stream’, which, as I say in *Dymock down the Ages*, well defines Dymock on the attractive Leodon. Dymock is in any case the only site discovered upon this road from *Magnis* to *Glebon* where such extensive evidence of settlement has been found.

![Image of coins](image)

**FIG. 3** Dymock: base gold coin of the Baiocasses, a Gaulish tribe centring on Bayeux, Normandy. Full size; see note 13. From the Lewis Collection, by courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

**Notes**

2. *Remarks & Collections of Thomas Hearne* i (ed C.E. Doble for the Oxford Historical Society, 1885), 3 (July 1705); 198–9. The collection consisted of gold coins (2), silver (121) and copper (409), and a ‘brass buckle’. No detail whatever is given, but Hearne remarks that the coins included ‘some of the fairest and most valuable in the whole Collection’. For Timothy Nourse see *DNB*.
3. As I was informed by the late Anthony Thompson, of the Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, in 1959.
5. *TGBAS* 31 (1928), 2. The coin is most likely to have been a base *antoninianus* rather than one of his silver *denarius*. For the Gaulish coin, see note 13.
8. This is the only reasonable explanation, despite the ‘doming’ which began 3 ft. below the modern surface, and was presumably no more than the inward collapse of the lining of the shaft. The account given by Jack includes a ridiculous opinion from B.C.A. Windle (later author of *The Romans in Britain*, 1923) that the feature was an ‘agrimensorial pit’ and the only one in Britain. He seems to have had little idea of the character and purpose of the markers used by the Roman land-surveyors; and attempts to trace regular Roman centuriation in Britain have never been very successful [Ed.].

9. The following account will therefore fill out the summary account given by Roger Leech in *Historic Towns in Gloucestershire* (CRAAGS, 1981), 30–1.

10. Some pottery is marked ‘Morgan’s Field’. The spoil was dumped in the bed of the old canal between the police-station and the railway-station, A in FIG. 1. With it went many pottery-fragments of little interest, and probably others overlooked in the hurried search.

11. Oyster-shells in large numbers have been turned up on Ockington Farm quite close to ‘Oysters’ and the Hill Farm field.

12. It is interesting to note that the hill leading out of the village along the road to Newent and Gloucester, and certain fields in that same area have *port* as the first syllable, e.g. Portwaytop (which is modern), *Portbule* in the 13th-century cartulary of Newent Priory (B.L. Add. MS 18,461), and Portfields in the 16th-century estate-records.

13. *Dymock down the Ages*, 10, shows the reverse of this coin to double size. It is an Allen Class *x* piece, Mack, *Coinage of Ancient Britain* (1964 ed.), pl. xxiii, 384a. A Gaulish base-gold coin is also mentioned as a Dymock find (Evans, *Ancient British Coins* (Supplement, 1890), 482–3). This is a coin of the Baiocasses of north-west Gaul, and exists in the Lewis collection of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, no. 30), now transferred to the Fitzwilliam Museum. It is of a variety having a boar below the horse on the reverse. The Dymock specimen is one of only two recorded singletons from British findsspots, the other being from Hurstbourne Tarrant (Hants.), with a lyre beneath the horse rather than a boar; however, a hoard of 45 coins from Rumbwood (Hants.) contained 43, of both varieties (A.M. Burnett and M.R. Cowell, *Brit. Num. Journ*. ivii (1988), 1–4, and esp. note 4). [I am grateful to Dr Burnett for this reference, and to Prof. T.R. Buttery for the Polaroid, FIG. 3 – Ed.]

14. No report on this work appears to have been published.


19. It is sad to report that the *as* of Nero and the denarius of Tiberius were stolen from the exhibition-case at Dymock Church.

20. It is worth remark that David Bick reported (*TBGAS* 96 (1978), 83) the occurrence of both coal and iron ore near Castle Turn, Dymock, seen during road-widening: ‘the ore was apparently worked, because two “levels” were driven into the bank from the roadside. There was also a shaft ... [or] well.’ So the iron-working reported by Canon Gethyn-Jones may well have depended on a local supply of ore, though the date of the workings actually observed is unknown and need not be Roman [Ed.]


22. Sir Ian Richmond visited Dymock with Dr Webster in October 1959. I asked him whether our Roman town was *Macatunonium*. He replied ‘I am not answering that question, but I suggest that in your report you state that the evidence leads you to believe that your village represents the site of *Macatunonium*, and I doubt whether anyone will question your opinion.’—It is to be observed, nonetheless, that Richmond had by 1949 marked *Macatunonium* precisely at Dymock, where the definite line of Roman road from Stretton Grandison joins the less certain line beyond to Gloucester [Ed.]

23. A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (1979), 405, accept *Magalonium* as more likely to be the correct form of the name, but are doubtful about a river ‘Magalona’. They give one doubtful instance of a Macat—name in Gaul. Doubtless unaware of the mass of evidence for settlement at Dymock, they do not attempt to locate *Magalonium* or indeed *Epessa* (rightly *Epessa*, probably). The only other comment seems to be Horsley’s (*Britannia Romana* (1732), 504), who supposed that *Macatunonium* stood in Ravennas for the *Ariconium* of the Antonine Itinerary, Weston-under-Penyard; but that is not likely [Ed.].