

# The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum Information Sheet



## The Winchcombe Coin Hoard

### Discovery

On 23 October 1997, three men were digging trenches and laying pipes during a construction project to build houses in Winchcombe when they saw a silver coin emerge from the earth. They had just discovered a hoard of 251 late medieval coins. The find was reported to the local coroner the next day and on the 29 October the coins were brought to the Art Gallery and Museum for identification and to begin the treasure process. They were subsequently purchased by the museum in 1998.

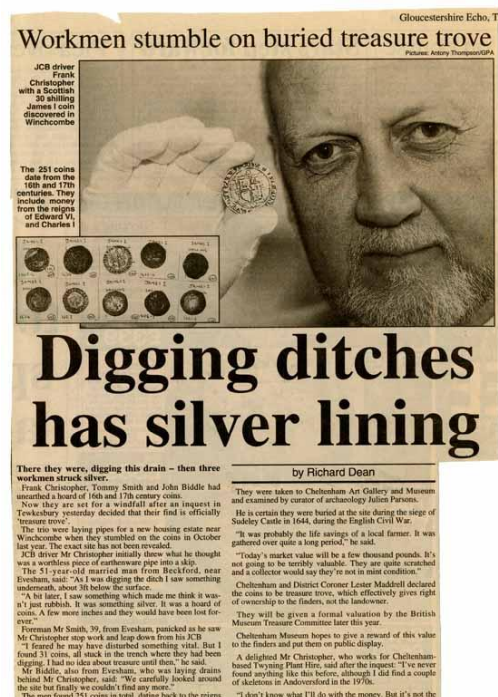
### The hoard

The hoard comprises of 251 coins all dating from the mid-16th to mid-17th century including examples from the reigns of 5 monarchs: Edward VI (1547–1553), Mary (1553–1558), Elizabeth I (1558–1603), James I (1603–1625), and Charles I (1625–1649), thus covering a period of just less than 100 years. The coins cover a number of denominations including the shilling, sixpence and half-crown. Three Scottish coins were also recorded in the hoard: one thistle merk and two 30 shilling coins. These would have been accepted in England, but were circulated at a lower rate. It's not uncommon to find Scottish coins in English hoards of this date.



Three sherds of pottery recovered with the hoard

The coins were stored in a ceramic jar. This was smashed during the construction work before the coins were discovered. Six sherds of the jar were recovered, and the finders were able to draw what they had seen. The drawings and pot sherds show us that the coins were stored in an early-17th century narrow-necked jar coloured with a dark brown glaze.



The report of the find in the Gloucestershire Echo, 11 June 1998, showing one of the finders holding a Scottish 30 shilling coin.

## Who buried it?

The overall worth of the hoard would have been £12, 15 shillings, seven and a half pence. Using the National Archives online currency converter it suggests it would have been equivalent to 182 days wages for a skilled worker in 1640. The calculation isn't an exact measure but it suggests that this hoard represents significant spending power. Since the hoard has a wide date range and many of the coins – from all periods – show significant wear from usage, the coins may have been collected over a long period of time. It is appropriate therefore to conclude that the hoarder had been saving money for a number of years from the early part of the 17th century and was possibly a person of modest means.



The obverse side of a shilling minted during the reign of Edward VI (1547–1553)

## Why was it hoarded?

The latest coins in the hoard were minted by parliamentary forces during the reign of Charles I and date to between 1644 and 1645. There are only a few coins from this year in the hoard so it would seem that the hoard was likely buried in 1644 or shortly after.

In 1645 England was at war. The English Civil War had been underway since 1642. Gloucestershire saw significant fighting around this time with both Cirencester and Gloucester being besieged. In 1643 Sudeley Castle (just one mile away from where the coins were discovered) was under siege. On this occasion the castle's forces were away so the castle was taken by Parliamentary forces in just two days – although they soon abandoned it. A year later, in 1644, Sudeley Castle was laid siege to again by Parliamentary forces, however this time more serious fighting took place causing significant damage to the castle and outbuildings.



Reverse side of a shilling minted during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603)

As the castle is only one mile away from the findspot and was laid siege to twice in the years leading up to the final coins in the hoard it is likely that this hoard was buried in fear because of the nearby fighting. The dates tie in well enough to suggest that the second siege of Sudeley may have even been the direct cause of the burial. The hoarder would have hoped to reclaim the money after the threat had passed. However they were, for whatever reason, unable to reclaim this treasure.

Tying down an archaeological find with a specific historical event such as a battle is often difficult, and it remains possible that this is a coincidence. However, as there is a large spike of coin hoards of this date across the county, such as those found at Painswick, Gloucester and Berkeley, it strongly suggests that the Civil War inspired the hoarding of wealth in Gloucestershire.

To find out more about the collections held by the museum contact:  
Collections Team, The Wilson, Clarence Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JT

**Tel:** 01242 387488 **Email:** [collections@cheltenhamtrust.org.uk](mailto:collections@cheltenhamtrust.org.uk)

**Visit our website:** <http://www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk/>