

EMPEROR PUPIENUS – WHO HE?

Marcus Clodius Pupienus Maximus Augustus, that's who. Unless you have a degree in Roman history you may well never have heard of him. He is one of the 16 emperors and 6 empresses whose coins featured in the exhibition **"The High Weald Hoard"** at the Palace last year. Since many of our far-flung members will not have had the opportunity to see the exhibition, here's a quick overview.

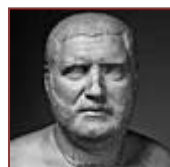


The hoard was discovered by a metal detectorist about 30 miles North East of Brighton. The 2,895 silver coins date from the third century AD. The empire was under threat from several directions and tough men had chances to seize power, though hanging on to it was another matter. As Professor David Mattingly has written: *"There were over 20*

recognised emperors and numerous co-regents and usurpers between 235 and 284, few of them dying peacefully in their beds. From 235-255 alone there were 10 legitimate emperors." The lives and deaths of these rulers make a fascinating read.

The earliest coin in the hoard is of Caracalla who was murdered by an officer of his personal guard in AD 217 while relieving himself at the roadside. Most embarrassing. He wasn't a nice man – Gibbon calls him *"The common enemy of mankind"*. Elagabalus is next, made emperor at 14; Gibbon says he *"abandoned himself to the grossest pleasures and ungoverned fury"*. He was assassinated at 18 by the Praetorian Guard in a plot hatched by his grandmother, Julia Maesa, sister of the better-known Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus. Both these empresses have coins in the hoard, as does Herennia Etruscilla, wife of Trajan Decius and mother of Herennius and Hostilian.

As its name suggests, the year 238, "Year of the Six Emperors", was particularly dangerous for those at the top. The young Alexander Severus was killed by his troops near Mainz; Maximinus Thrax (the Thracian) took power but he was of common stock and had risen through the ranks so when a revolt against taxes occurred in what is now Tunisia and the elderly Gordian I was declared Emperor, the Senate switched allegiance to him. Maximinus defeated Gordian (who committed suicide) and marched on Rome. Displeased to have a low-born provincial as ruler, the Senate selected the well-connected Pupienus and Decimus Caelius



Balbinus

Calvinus Balbinus as joint emperors (people like us). The former marched against Maximinus, whose soldiers, the Second Parthia legion, murdered him and his son, sent their heads to Rome, and surrendered to Pupienus. So all was quiet again?

Nope. Balbinus and Pupienus quarrelled frequently and one fine day the [Praetorian Guard](#) decided to intervene. They stormed into the room containing the emperors and killed them both.

Balbinus has a special claim on history. He had a marble sarcophagus made for himself and his wife. Discovered in fragments near the Via Appia and restored, it is the only example of a Roman Imperial sarcophagus of this type to have survived. On the lid are reclining figures of Balbinus and his wife.

On the very day of the double murder the young Caesar, generally known in English as [Gordian III](#), was proclaimed emperor. In 244 he was murdered in Mesopotamia, possibly by Philip I (Philip the Arab) and his wife Otacilia Severa. Philip ruled for 5 years but he, his wife and his son, the co-ruler Philip II, were killed in battle by their own troops.

The hoard includes only the third coin ever found in Britain of Gordian III's wife Sabinia Tranquillina, and only the second ever found here of Cornelia Supera, the wife of Emperor Aemilian, who ruled for only 2 months in 253. His reign was summarised by Eutropius: *"Aemilianus came from an extremely insignificant family, his reign was even more insignificant, and he was slain in the third month."* Quite an epitaph. And Wikipedia tells us that nothing at all is known about Cornelia Supera.

Of 'our' other coin-issuers, Trajan Decius usurped Philip and ruled for 2 years with his son Herennius Etruscus. They had the distinction of being the first emperors killed in battle by a foreign army – the Goths. Hostilian, brother of Herennius, succeeded him but lasted only a few months before the plague took him. Trebonianus Gallus lasted 2 years with his son, Volusian, as co-emperor, but they were murdered by mutinous troops. After Aemilian came Valerian who was captured by the Persians and never seen again. His son Gallienus secured the throne until his own assassination in 268. Postumus then seized power, creating what scholars have dubbed the Gallic Empire in the provinces of Gaul, Germania, Britannia and Hispania. He ruled for the better part of ten years before he was murdered by his own troops. Exciting times!

Curiously, while the Hoard was on display here, a bronze radiate of Gallienus was discovered in the West Sussex village of Forestside, where no Roman artefacts had previously been found.

The hoard has now returned to its owners, Brighton Pavilion and Museums. The next to be exhibited in Fishbourne will be the **Near Lewes Hoard** of the Middle Bronze Age (1400-1250 BC).



*Radiate of
Gallienus*

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