
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS BY SAM MOORHEAD & ANDREW BROWN

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The emperor Carinus (AD 282-5) and Britain¹



Carinus was the son of Carus (AD 282-3). Initially, he was a junior emperor (Caesar) under his father (see **Fig. 1**), but in autumn 283 he was raised to the rank of Augustus. Whilst Carus and his other son, Numerian, were campaigning in the East, Carinus remained in Rome and governed the Western Empire. He even had to suppress the revolt of Julian of Pannonia in 285. Carus died campaigning in Mesopotamia in late 283, and Numerian was murdered the following year. Carinus continued to rule and even gained an initial victory against Diocletian in 285; however, he was murdered shortly afterwards.



Fig. 1. Copper-alloy radiate of Carinus as Caesar (AD 282-3), PRINCIP IVVENT. Mint of Siscia. RIC V, pt 2, no. 197var. **WILT-D8E15C**

¹ I have very briefly covered this topic before in S. Moorhead and D. Stuttard, *The Romans who Shaped Britain* (2012), p. 172.

Carinus and Britain

We know from an inscription found near Ostia (port of Rome) that Carinus (and Numerian) took the title *Britannicus Maximus*.² This does indicate that there was a military campaign in Britain around AD 284 which was either conducted by Carinus or officers in the province on his behalf (a governor or legionary legate). However, a poem by Nemesianus strongly suggests that Carinus might have been present in person, as it refers to ‘wars under the north star’ which strongly suggests Britain:

‘Soon I shall gird myself with a better lyre to record your [Carinus and Numerian] triumphs, sons of the most gallant deified Carus, and will sing of our coast beneath the twin boundaries of the world and the subjugation by the brothers’ divine spirit of the peoples that drink the Rhine and Tigris and the distant start of Arar [Saône] and the source of the Nile at its origin; nor shall I be silent about, first, the wars which you with successful hand lately completed under the north star, Carinus, almost outstripping your divine parent....’

Archaeological evidence for Carinus in Britain

An inscription, dedicated to Carinus as Caesar (AD 282-3) on sandstone was found near the Roman villa at Clanville in Hampshire (RIB 98) (**Fig 2**). It might be part of a milestone, but this is not certain. Because he is titled Caesar, this might predate the campaign in Britain. It is interesting to note that his name is spelt with a K, Karinus. This occasionally occurs on his coins as (see **Fig. 5**).



Fig. 2. Stone inscription for Carinus from Hampshire: M(arco) Aur(elio) Karino n(obilissimo) Caes(ari) – ‘For Marcus Aurelius Karinus, most noble Caesar’

One of the most spectacular Roman coins on the PAS Database is a gold *aureus* of Carinus found in Nottinghamshire in 2006 (**Fig. 3**). Three other specimens of this coins with this reverse type are recorded in RIC; only one other is known which shares the same obverse type. What is interesting is that of the ten known finds of gold coins in Britain, from the period AD 268-85, one is of Divus Carus, one of Carinus as Caesar, two of Carinus as Augustus and one of Carinus and Numerian.³ This little spike in gold coin-loss requires some discussion. In the later Roman period, gold coinage was to become increasingly controlled by the imperial court and one can argue that the finds of gold coins might indicate an imperial presence.⁴ Therefore, this group of gold coins of Carus’ dynasty in Britain might indicate that Carinus was indeed present for the military campaign in the Province.

² CIL xiv 126; A. R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (2005), pp. 367-8. It is interesting to note that the title *Britannicus* did not appear on the coins of Carinus.

³ R. Bland and R. Lorient, *Roman and Early Byzantine Gold Coins found in Britain and Ireland* (2010), pp. 20 and 359.

⁴ I also argue the high incidence of finds of gold coins of Licinius in Britain might also reflect a visit to the province by Constantine I. See Moorhead and Stuttard 2012, p. 196, and I might return to these coins in a later issue of *Daily Coin Relief*.



Fig. 3. Gold *aureus* of Carinus as Augustus (AD 283-5), Mint of Siscia
Obv. IMP C CARINVS P F AVG; Laureate and cuirassed right
Rev. VICTORIA AVG; Victory advancing left, holding wreath and palm
RIC V, pt 2, p. 176, no. 312; Bland and Loriot 2010, p. 229, no. 483
DENO-3B3AF6

Records of coins of Carinus on the PAS Database

‘Reformed’ radiates (sometimes called *aureliani*) from the reign of Aurelian (AD 270-5) to the early years of the reign of Diocletian and Maximian (AD 284-96) are generally scarce as single finds in Britain. They are proportionally much more common in hoards from the period, notably in the massive Gloucester Hoard of 15,376 coins, secluded around AD 296 at the end of the reign of Allectus.⁵ These pieces were hoarded more because they were of a significantly higher intrinsic value than the very base radiates of Gallienus (sole reign), Claudius II and the Gallic emperors, struck between AD 260 and 275. Indeed, the earlier, baser, radiates did continue to circulate into the AD 290s, apparently being more ‘popular’ for everyday transactions.

Of the reformed radiates (*aureliani*), those of Tacitus (AD 275-6; 883 coins on the PAS Database) and Probus (AD 276-82; 1857 coins on the PAS Database) are the most common. Those of Carinus are rare with only 27 specimens which includes four Divus Carus pieces (see **Fig. 6**). This is a very small number. That these coins came to Britain in larger quantity is shown by the Gloucester Hoard which had 324 of such pieces, but this is still a fraction of the total coins for the period. **Table 1** shows the number of coins of Tacitus, Probus and Carinus in the Gloucester Hoard compared with those on the PAS Database. The figures for Tacitus and Probus are comparable, but it is clear that the proportion of Carinus coins is much smaller on the PAS Database than in the Gloucester Hoard.

Emperor	Gloucester	Gloucester %	PAS	PAS %
Tacitus	3646	34.5	883	32
Probus	6584	62.5	1857	67
Carinus	324	3	27	1
Totals	10,554	100	2,767	100

Table 1: Relative quantities of coins of Tacitus, Probus and Carinus in the Gloucester Hoard and on the PAS Database.

⁵ R. Abdy, E. Besly and F. López-Sánchez, ‘Gloucester, Gloucestershire’, in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain XIII* (2010), pp. 21-128. PAS Database: : IARCH-9E92C4 for summary.

Carinus as Caesar (AD 282-3)

There are only seven coins of Carinus as Caesar under Carus. Two are from Rome and one each from Lugdunum, Ticinum (Pavia) and Siscia (Sisak in Croatia).

The two Rome coins have the reverse PIETAS AVGG / Sacrificial implements (Fig. 4) which is a standard type for new Caesars, chosen as a type because their first office was a priesthood.



Fig. 4. Copper alloy radiate of Carinus as Caesar (AD 282-3), PIETAS AVGG, sacrificial implements. Mint of Rome. RIC V, pt 2, no. 155. **NLM-744066**. The obverse legend M(arcus) AVR(elius) CARINVS NOB(ilissimus) CAES(ar) translates as ‘Marcus Aurelius Carinus most noble Caesar’

The coin from Ticinum (Fig. 5) is particularly interesting because it spells the emperor’s name KARINVS. This links nicely to the inscription from Hampshire, noted above (Fig. 2).



Fig. 5. Copper-alloy radiate of Carinus as Caesar (AD 282-3), with name spelt KARINVS, PRINCIPI IVVENTVT, Prince standing left, holding standard and spear. Mint of Ticinum. RIC V, pt 2, no. 352. **FASAM-BFF4E1**

The Siscia coin (Fig. 1, above) has the standard XXI mark in the exergue, which is thought to mean one part silver to twenty parts copper (ie 5% silver). It is a new variety to RIC because there is no star above the T in the reverse field.

Divus Carus coins

Carinus struck a series of Divus coins for his father Carus. Three of the pieces on the PAS Database come from Lyon (Lugdunum) (**Fig. 6**) and one from Rome.



Fig. 6. Copper-alloy radiate for Divus Carus, struck under Carinus, CONSECRATIO, Eagle standing left. Mint of Lyon. RIC V, pt 2, no. 29. **LEIC-64B6C4**. DIVO CARO PIO translates as 'To the Divine and Pious Carus'. The II in the exergue denotes it is from the second workshop (*officina*) at Lyon.

Carinus as Augustus (AD 283-5)

From late 283, Carinus struck coins as Augustus. There are twelve pieces on the PAS Database, seven from Rome, two from Ticinum and one each from Lugdunum and Antioch.

One piece from Rome (**Fig. 7**) bears the mintmark KA ϵ . The KA is Greek for XXI, hence stating that the coin is 5% silver (see **Fig. 1**). The *epsilon* means that the coin was struck in the fifth workshop (*officina*) at the mint of Rome.



Fig. 7. Copper-alloy radiate of Carinus as Augustus (AD 283-5), FIDES MILITVM, Fides standing left, holding two standards. Mint of Rome. RIC V, pt 2, no. 251. **BH-CB5827**. The double piercing was probably for suspension from a cord or for sewing to clothes.

The Lugdunum coin shows the inscription for Carinus as Augustus: IMP(erator) C(aesar) M(arcus) AVR(elius) CARINVS AVG(ustus) (**Fig. 8**).



Fig. 8. Copper-alloy radiate of Carinus as Augustus (AD 283-5), SAECVLI FELICITAS, Emperor standing right holding spear and globe. Mint of Lyon. RIC V, pt 2, no. 214. **SF-374B84.**

Eastern mint coins are always rarer in Britain. There is one coin from Antioch for Carinus as Augustus, showing the emperor receiving Victory from Jupiter. The standard XXI appears in the exergue again; the A in the field, between the legs of the figures, denotes that the coin was struck in the first workshop (*officina*) at Antioch.



Fig. 9. Copper-alloy coin of Carinus as Augustus (AD 283-5), VIRTVS AVGG. Mint of Antioch. RIC V, pt 2, no. 325. **LANCUM-61C9E6**

There is a certain irony that, although Carinus might have campaigned in Britain, his coins are very rare as single finds. I hope that this short piece might rehabilitate him somewhat as another character who played a role, however minor, in determining the fortunes of Roman Britain.

Greenwich, 25 March 2020