

The Treasures of Durobrivae

by *Graham Webster*

The recent finds of Christian silver (p. 7) and the gold coin hoard (*Durobrivae* 3, 1975, 10) have highlighted once more the problem of treasure and the treasure hunters. As the law stands anyone finding gold and silver when walking over land with the landowners' permission is likely to be rewarded by the Crown, almost to the full value. The treasure hunter sees here an exciting sport which has as much chance of hitting the jack-pot as the football pool! The fact that Durobrivae is protected under the Ancient Monuments Acts seems to have little relevance. While some of the hoards are of great historical value in themselves, the serious archaeologist is appalled at the thought of people with no knowledge scouring ancient sites, digging little holes and recovering artefacts from the soil. This wholesale ravaging of sites all over the country is a serious matter, since none of this material will ever be studied in its proper archaeological context and most of it vanish totally. There seems little prospect of new legislation or action by the government, and landowners seem unable to prevent the mass invasion of their property.

But who is really to blame? How do the treasure hunters spot their prey so easily? The real culprit must surely be the plough, which is biting more deeply and regularly into the layers of our ancient burial and occupation sites. A single ploughing over a Roman town can shave off three centimetres over the whole area. The Christian treasure was revealed by the plough, yet originally it must be assumed that it was buried for safety well over a metre below ground. The implication is that we have lost the top metre of the Roman town over the greater part of its interior. This is far more damage than could have been done by an army of treasure hunters. The only answer to the problem is to put all our major sites down to grass immediately, and to pay compensation to farmers for any loss they might incur. It might even discourage the treasure hunters, since no new material would be annually brought to the surface. We must encourage the government to think along this line and there may be then a faint possibility of saving what little is left of our early history.