

# Shahabuddin



## The Day Eric Picked Up a Roman Fortune

A hoard of gold and silver coins and artifacts just uncovered in a farmer's field in the East of England is being called one of the most important finds this century.

The lucky man who found the treasure was Eric Lawes, a retired electrical labourer whose hobby is metal-detecting. He had been asked by a friend on a nearby farm to use his detector to help find a hammer lost in a field.

Going out on a quiet morning with his metal detector was something Lawes enjoyed, and this morning appeared to be no different from many others. On an average trip out he would turn up the same old things — parts of old farm implements, once in a while a horseshoe, an old button or a new coin — just interesting bits to feed the imagination.

He did not find the hammer, but his detector, which signals when there is a metal object within inches of the ground surface, turned up a gold coin. He dug a bit, found a few more, and before he knew it had handfuls of gold and silver coins, necklaces and spoons.

To the great joy of archaeologists, Lawes and the farmer, Peter Whatling, reported the find to the police immediately so that the treasure could be properly excavated. The treasure site was guarded by police overnight, and the next day archaeologists uncovered thousands of coins, some figurines, containers, necklaces and bracelets, all of silver or gold.

Examinations of the surrounding soil showed that the treasure had originally been buried in a wooden box. Study of the earth around the treasure, which is vital to understanding its history, has been difficult with other finds because the finders dug them up without the help of archaeologists. The find is "priceless in terms of the knowledge it will give us," said Roman specialist Judith

More than one Empire is gone but not forgotten in Britain. For more than 400 years the island was just a tiny piece of the vast Roman Empire that stretched from northern Africa to the Persian Gulf and throughout Europe. It collapsed 1,600 years ago but has left behind riches that are still surfacing today. **JILL FORRESTER** of Gemini New Service reports on the latest treasure and the 69-year-old pensioner who found it

Plouviez to reporters.

It is likely that the treasure was buried at the end of the period of Roman rule in Britain, about 1,600 years ago. "Whoever concealed the box must have been every wealthy," said Plouviez. "The fact that they did not retrieve their belongings suggests they were victims of the widespread social unrest in the early Fifth Century." Some of the items were decorated with Christian symbols, corresponding with the arrival of Christianity at that time.

The Romans were unwelcome guests who arrived on the island in about 43 AD. They knew little about the landscape, climate or inhabitants, their interest being simply in enlarging the empire. In some written records they described Britons as simple savages with too many wives and no shoes.

They built monuments and fortresses to establish military control and to demonstrate their success to Rome. They took slaves, levied high taxes, demanded as a religion worship of the Emperor and were largely disliked by their subjects.

At the same time, however, they built elaborate roads, waterways, sewage systems and set up systems of justice and government. Still, Britons were relieved when, after 400 years, the empire collapsed under its own weight and the Romans departed. They now problem was that without the Roman army, they found themselves with no organised defence against invaders from the north.

The new invaders took the island into a new era known as the Dark Ages and most Roman systems were not maintained, but the Romans left their mark on the island's people and most remarkably on its landscape. Viewed from the air today, many well organised Roman cities, roads, and waterways can be recognised, even after

centuries of tilling on the land.

A few of the roads are still in use, some with the original paving stones. Among other ruins, there are still remains of Hadrian's Wall, an enormous defensive fortification built across the North of England to stop the Celts.

Hoard of riches under the ground seem still to be worth dreaming about — nine or more discoveries worth more than a million pounds have been uncovered in the last 15 years. Estimates of the value of this most recent treasure place it around £ 10 million.

According to British Law dating back to the 11th Century, when the monarch was looking for all possible ways to fill his coffers, all treasure, buried or otherwise, belongs to the state unless it can be returned to the owner.

After the British Museum has assessed the value of the treasure, Lawes is likely to be awarded a tax-free cheque for the full value of the treasure, in return for immediately turning it in to the police. In cases where finders have held on to the treasure before turning it in, they have been awarded only partial value of the items.

Lawes has agreed to give half of any money he receives to Whatling, since that is the standard agreement metal-detecting enthusiasts make with owner of the land before setting out on their leisurely treasure hunts.

Lawes, a softspoken Englishman, says receiving the award may change life for him and his wife. He expects to move house and travel — where to they do not yet know. They have two grown sons but no grandchildren. He has every intention of continuing with his metal detecting, and says since the find he has also become quite interested in Roman history, something he knew nothing about before.

The writer is a Canadian freelance journalist based in London.

### AD 116: Roman Empire at its height

