

9th September
Memory Verse

When thou passest through the waters,
I will be with thee;

and through the rivers,
they shall not overflow thee:

when thou walkest through the fire,
thou shalt not be burned;

neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Isaiah 43:2

An archaeological adventure to read¹



Like many local museums, the Landesmuseum in the German town of Trier has a collection of coins. Out of the blue, the collection's director, Herr Karl-Josef Gilles, received a telephone call on the morning of 9 September 1993 from Erich Eixner, an amateur archaeologist. Herr Eixner sounded a bit nervous. He said he wanted to hand over "a bucket and a big bag of gold coins"! Herr Gilles

made an appointment to see him the next day and was astonished to be handed a plastic bag containing 1389 gold Roman *aurei* (Roman gold coins worth 25 silver denarii) and a plastic bucket brimming over with yet more.

A team of archaeologists from the museum had been excavating a Roman well near a convent. What they did not know was that just nearby, the driver of a mechanical digger had dug up and torn apart an ancient bronze cauldron. The digger driver did not notice what his digger had done and the contents of the digger's bucket was sent to be dumped without anyone realising that a cauldron full of gold coins had been uncovered. The digger-bucket's contents were dumped at the site of a new car park where filling material was needed. A smaller load from the same hole was dumped near the excavation itself. Some amateur archaeologists with metal detectors were searching for finds in both areas and quickly began to find gold coins. Some were pocketed. Some were given away to workmen on the site. A passing tourist received one.

Then Erich Eixner, one of the amateurs, remembered something. The same digger had dumped the material containing the coins at both places and he had seen it working. That night he went to the convent site where he had seen the digger working and crept in. A Nun asked him what he was doing but he managed to distract her and then locate the spot where the digger had been at work. There was the rest of the bronze cauldron! He took it out and found an old plastic bucket that was lying about on the site to put it in. Then he started to look for loose coins. He found over 1000!

When he got home with his treasure he realised that he could not possibly keep it. Next morning he rang the museum.

As news of the find became known, people who had found or been given coins from the hoard began to take them to the museum too. Before long the museum had received enough coins to bring the total to over 2,500 coins. This hoard was the largest single find of *aurei* ever discovered anywhere!

¹ Information from *The Journal of Rome Archaeology* 27th November 2014 and other sources.

But why and when was such a huge sum of money buried in the first place?

It seems that the Trier Hoard, as it is now called, may have been buried and hidden away more than once. The hoard was probably hidden for the first time in 167 AD, when the Antonine Plague struck Europe. Then it may have been buried again when Augusta Treverorum (the Roman name for Trier) was attacked by Clodius Albinus (150AD-197AD), a pretender to the imperial throne (pictured right). The amount and type of coin led experts to believe that it could have been an army “pay chest” and calculate that the cauldron contained enough to pay the annual salary of about 130 Roman soldiers. When whoever hid it died, or perhaps was killed, its location was forgotten.



The adventures of the treasure hoard were not over once it reached the safety of the Landesmuseum. In 2019 three men broke into the museum with the objective of stealing it. They got into the museum by climbing up some scaffolding and prizing open a window. When they reached the place where the hoard was displayed, however, they could not remove the thick reinforced glass that protected it. Within three minutes the museum's security alarm started to sound and the men fled, leaving a sports bag behind. The attempt was probably made in order to melt the coin down which would have netted about 600 thousand pounds – and destroyed forever the historical value of the hoard. The museum immediately removed the hoard to a secret location while work began to increase the security of the display. At the time of writing² the hoard has still not gone back on public display although plans are afoot to re display it in the spring of 2022. DNA tests on the bag enabled the authorities to arrest one man.

Today's story illustrates what *sometimes* happens to amateur archaeologists. If you did your own archaeological dig on March 8th or 22nd June I don't suppose you found a bag of gold coins! However, you probably found some sort of treasure. If you did not do a dig then, why not do one today? You can look at the March and June lessons for tips on getting the best results.

Write an air letter

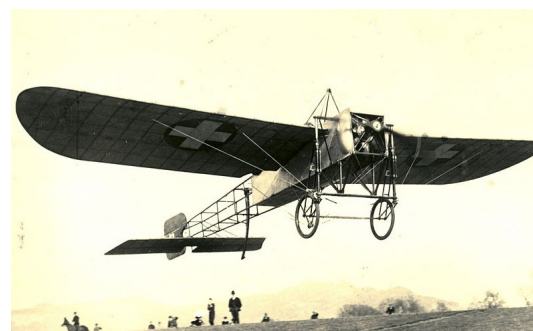


On September 9th 1911, Gustav Hamel, son of a London Doctor, took off from London Aerodrome in a Bleriot monoplane in a flight to Windsor Great Park. He was making the first flight of the first scheduled air mail service in Great Britain.

The idea of carrying post by aeroplane had caught the imagination of the public and a large crowd had assembled to see Hamel take off. The start had been planned for 3 pm, but it was a windy day and the flight was delayed again and again. Aeroplanes in those days were very light and were driven with low powered engines – the Bleriot monoplane was fitted with a

50 horse power Gnome engine – so that take-off was impossible in high wind. By 4.50 pm, however, Hamel climbed into the cockpit and set off, with about 9 kilos of mail on board. He reached Windsor Great Park in 13 minutes at an average speed of 105 mph, helped by a tail wind.

The air mail service, which had been planned as part of the Coronation celebrations, only lasted a few days. Sixteen loads were carried from Hendon and four from



Windsor, a total of about 15,000 pieces of mail, but the route was only twenty miles long and the cost was too heavy to make the service worthwhile at that time.

Hamel's flight inaugurated the first scheduled air mail service, although the practical difficulties led to its abandonment. Letters had, of course been carried by air before this, including by hot air balloon. It was in India that an air mail flight was arranged that was the inspiration for the Hendon to Windsor scheduled service. A large exhibition was held February 1911 which included an aviation display. The organiser of the display got permission from the Indian Postmaster General to get publicity for the exhibition and raise money for charity by having an airmail flight. Mail from people across the region was gathered in at a church and the airmail flight carried 6,500 letters a distance of just over 8 miles in 13 minutes.

Have you ever sent an airmail letter? Write a letter to a friend overseas – perhaps a missionary family – and take your letter to the post office. If you post the letter today it should get a post mark with today's date. Then your friend will receive a letter postmarked with the date of the anniversary of the first scheduled airmail flight! You could even write on the envelope, “Posted on 9th September, anniversary of the first scheduled airmail in 1911.” The post office clerk will put a special sticker on the letter as well as the stamp. The sticker says *par avion*. French is the language of the



International Postal Union and *par avion* is French for “by aeroplane.” The post office staff will be able to tell you roughly when your letter should arrive at its destination. Will it have a faster or slower average speed than Hamel's first airmail?³

3 You can find out about postage charges and weights for airmail here:
<https://www.postoffice.co.uk/mail/international-standard>