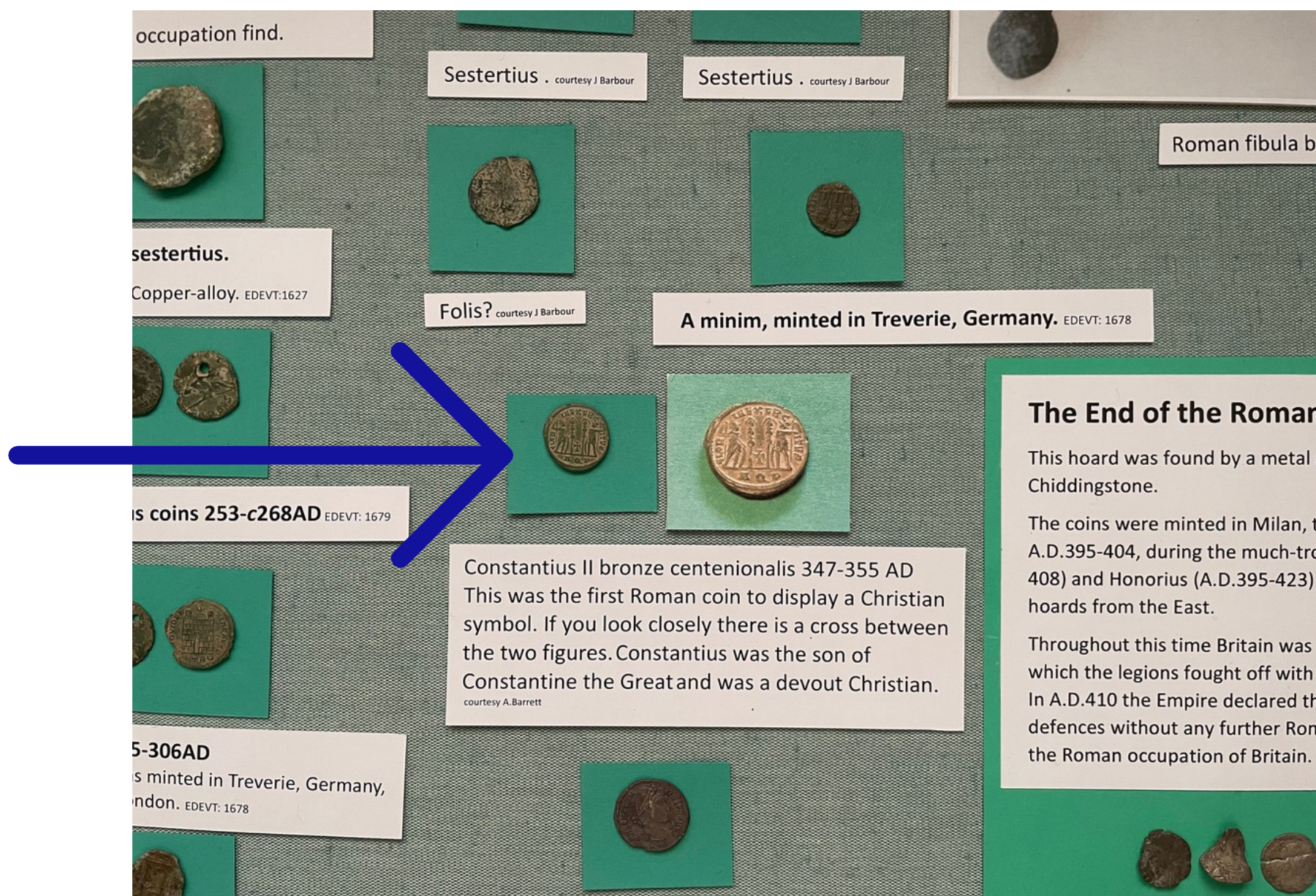


Object of Interest

MARCH 2026

Constantius II Bronze Centenionalis



One of the first Roman coins to display a Christian cross, found in Chiddingstone

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Object of Interest

M A R C H 2 0 2 6

Constantius II Bronze Centenionalis

This Roman coin was found in Chiddingstone and was minted between 347AD and 355AD in Aquilei, near Venice, under Emperor Constantius II. It is known as a bronze centenionalis, which is a large coin introduced between 320AD and 340AD. The obverse side shows Constantius II with pearl-diademed hair, reflecting his imperial wealth, and a draped and cuirassed bust, reflecting his status as a military leader. The reverse side of the coin shows two soldiers facing each other, holding spears and shields. Interestingly, the Christian cross stands between them. This is what makes this coin so special: it is an example of one of the first Roman coins to show a Christian cross.



EDEV:1681

The Legalisation of Christianity in The Roman Empire

Constantius II's father was Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. Before Constantine the Great's rule, Christians were heavily persecuted across the Roman Empire. This all changed in 312AD at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, where Constantine fought against his brother-in-law. According to legend, the night before the battle Constantine had a dream in which Jesus told him to fight under the sign of the crucifix. The next morning, he painted the cross on his soldiers' shields, and when the battle was won he believed it to be God's work. The following year, Constantine allowed Christians to practise their faith legally without persecution under the Edict of Milan. Due

to this, Constantine is often celebrated as a great Christian leader. However, scholars have debated the extent to which he actually believed in Christianity; some suggest he still followed his family's cult of Sol Invictus, a military sun god. Ultimately, Constantine only officially became Christian when he was baptised on his deathbed in 337AD.

The Spread of Christianity in Roman Britain

The rise of Christianity in Britain under Constantine the Great and his son initially mirrored its spread across the continent. After Constantine's conversion, Christianity became popular among the elite as it showed loyalty to the emperor. Wall-paintings appeared in villas showing Christian iconography: see the wall-painting below in nearby Lullingstone Villa portraying Christians praying. The spread of Christianity began in urban areas, led by bishops. By the time Constantius II was Emperor, we have evidence that it was present in rural areas too, as shown by Christian cemeteries. However, after Constantius II's death in 361AD, the growth of Christianity in Britain slowed compared to the rapid spread through the continent. Once the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain in the fifth century, their pagan deities took over and Christianity almost disappeared in Britain until Augustine converted King Æthelberht of Kent in 597AD.



Wall-painting from Lullingstone Roman Villa, Kent. © Trustees of the British Museum