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THE FRING COIN HOARD

by Amanda Chadburn and David Gurney

Introduction (Fig. 1)

This report describes the discovery, excavation and interpretation of a partially-dispersed hoard of 153 silver Iron Age coins of the Iceni tribe, found at Fring in west Norfolk in March 1990. At the request of the finder and landowner, the precise provenance will not be published, but *bona fide* researchers may request further details if required from the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. In the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record the coin hoard is Site 25758.

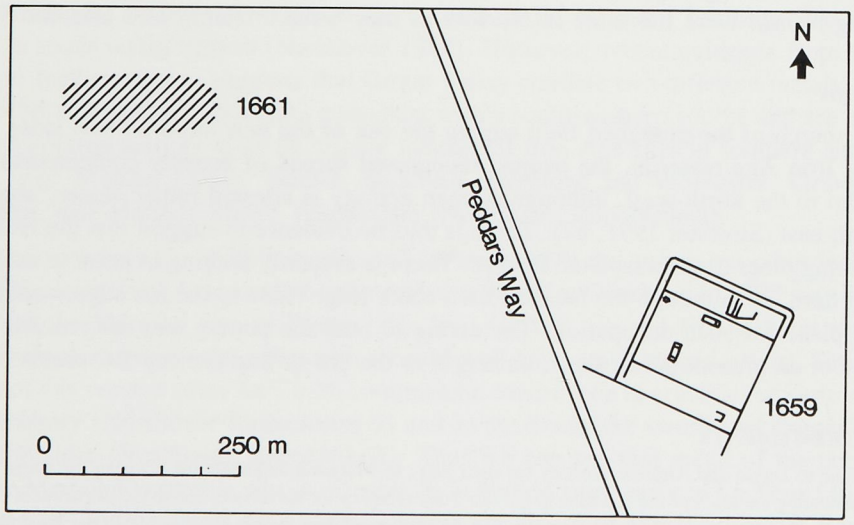

Fig. 1
Sites in the area where the hoard was recovered. The precise location of the hoard is *not* shown.
Scale 1:10,000

The coin hoard was found on a slope at *c.*30 m OD overlooking the valley floor (*c.*25 m OD), along which runs a small stream fed from a spring in Fring village which feeds the Heacham River. The adjacent higher ground rises to some 60 m OD to the north and south of this area. The drift geology is chalky boulder clay, overlying Cretaceous chalk. The area is Grade 3 agricultural land.

This would not have been a particularly attractive area for settlement in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, given the nature of the soils, but two adjacent sites, a probable Romano-British villa (Site 1661) and a ditched enclosure known from aerial photographs (Site 1659), occupy similar positions to the hoard, on the gentle valley slopes between the 45 and 35 m contours. The Roman road known as the Peddars Way traverses the area.

The hoard was declared Treasure Trove on 5 July 1990 at King's Lynn, and has since been purchased by the Friends of King's Lynn Museum. The hoard, along with the pottery and textile remains, will be displayed in King's Lynn Museum.

Other sites in the area (Fig. 1)

The two other sites in the vicinity are a probable Roman villa (Site 1661) and an enclosure (Site 1659). The former is probably the site where a tesselated floor was recorded in the 1790s, with later fieldwork recording a scatter of second- and third-century sherds with roof, floor and flue tiles. Coins of Vespasian, Hadrian, Faustina and Constantine have been recorded. The ditches of the latter site enclose some three hectares, with a double-ditched entrance around the north and west sides. The interior has three subdivisions, each with cropmark and surface evidence of internal structures. *Tegulae*, bonding tiles and flue tiles have been found, and pottery which, while mainly of the second to early fourth century, does include some sherds of the mid-first century. The coin list starts with an *as* of Vespasian, a *sestertius* of Antoninus Pius and two coins of the later second century, there are twenty-one *antoniniani* of the mid-third to early fourth century, and the twenty fourth-century coins end with the House of Valentinian and Gratian, AD 364-78.

Discovery and Excavation

Evidence of the hoard first came to light, in March 1990, when Mr John Bocking located by metal-detector a scatter of coins in the ploughsoil over an area of approximately five metres diameter. This and later work led to the recovery of fifty-three ploughsoil finds.

The distribution of these coins led to the excavation (by one of the authors (DG) and Mr Bocking) of the area where the greatest numbers of ploughsoil finds occurred, and in the course of this, a further seventy-three coins were recovered from the ploughsoil, including a nucleus of forty-two adhering coins. The removal of the ploughsoil exposed a natural subsoil of chalky boulder clay, through which ran the base of a subsoiler furrow. This contained a further twenty-seven coins, along with fragments of pottery and textile remains.

No evidence of any subsoil feature which might have originally contained the hoard was found, due to the disturbance of the area by the subsoiler. The archaeological evidence, such as it was, suggested that when the field was last subsoiled (in 1988), the furrow had been driven right through the centre of the hoard, hitherto undisturbed, smashing the pottery vessel and distributing the coins and sherds along the furrow and into the ploughsoil.

The Pottery Vessel (Fig. 2)

The hoard was almost certainly contained within the pottery vessel, and there is evidence to suggest that the mouth of this vessel was sealed by a piece of cloth (see below). Nine sherds were recovered, comprising five joining base sherds, a rim sherd joining upper body, and two non-joining sherds. From the sherds, a probable reconstruction can be deduced (Fig. 2).

The vessel is a wheel-made concave-sided cup or bowl, plain with a simple slightly 'pointed' rim. The fabric is a romanised hard medium-fine fabric, with inclusions of sparse quartz, mica

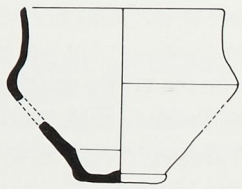

Fig. 2
The pottery vessel (reconstruction). Scale 1:4

and red iron ore, sandwich-fired with a grey core, reddish-brown margins, and dark grey to black surfaces horizontally burnished above the shoulder.

This vessel can be likened to the range of concave-sided 'Belgic' cups or bowls found in early Roman assemblages. Close parallels in West Norfolk are lacking, but the fabric is typical of local early Roman native wares, being a romanised version of the standard (sandy) Iron Age fabric. There is no reason to doubt that this vessel could have been in use in the mid-first century AD, contemporaneously with the circulation and hoarding of the coins it contained.

The textile remains
by Man-Yee Liu and Elisabeth Crowfoot

These were still organic i.e. not mineralised, of vegetable fibre (possibly flax or hemp), and of tabby weave with warp and weft thread loosely Z-spun. The fibres are rather coarse, but spinning and weaving are both even, no selvedge is preserved, and the thread count is *c.* 16/14-15 per centimetre. All fragments are clearly from the same weave, and there are clear flat areas and areas turned over double in tight folds as if gathered. There is no sign of sewing thread (or holes left by thread) holding the gathered areas together. The folds suggest that the fragments perhaps come from a piece of cloth tied over the mouth of the pot, rather than from a purse or the lining of a purse containing the coins.

The hoard (by A.C.) (Plate I).

The Fring hoard is one of the relatively large number of Icenian hoards which have been discovered over the last two centuries. Allen (1970) describes twelve hoards, but up to a further thirteen hoards containing Icenian coins have been reported since then (few of which are yet published).

The location of the hoard falls well within the territory of the Iceni tribe as defined by Allen (1970), and its composition is similar to that of many other Icenian hoards. It contains 153 silver coins, all of which are Icenian (just under half the Icenian hoards to date consist of exclusively Icenian issues). The Fring Hoard is about average in size for an Icenian coin hoard, the largest of which so far is the Field Baulk hoard found in Cambridgeshire, forty miles from Fring (Chadburn forthcoming a and b), which contained 872 silver coins.

There are three major coin types as defined by Allen (1970) within the hoard; Boar-Horse, Face-Horse, and Pattern-Horse. Within these broad types, there are thirteen recognisable Iceni coin types, along with a few unclassifiable Pattern-Horse coins detailed below (further numismatic details are discussed in Chadburn (forthcoming c)):

Coin Type	*Number*	*Pl. I. Nos.*
Boar-Horse B	2	1,2
Boar-Horse C	3	3,4,5
Early Face-Horse	2	6,7
Normal Face-Horse A	7	12,13
Normal Face-Horse B/C[1]	22	17,33
Pattern-Horse ANTED	31	42,52
Pattern-Horse ECEN	35	68,100
Pattern-Horse ED(N)	10	87,88
Pattern-Horse symbols	3	94
Pattern-Horse ECE A	17	121,122
Pattern-Horse ECE B	12	137,145
Pattern-Horse ECE B (reversed)	3	149
Pattern-Horse SAENV	1	152
Pattern-Horse unclassified	5	

The proportions of each group within the hoard are somewhat different to those worked out by Allen as an average for Icenian silver coin hoards. However, the hoard profile bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the Field Baulk hoard, with an apparent over-representation of Pattern-Horse coins compared with Allen's average:

	% *Boar-Horse*	% *Face-Horse*	% *Pattern-Horse*	% *Other*
Allen's average Icenian hoard	7	30	60	3
Fring	5	20	77	—
Field Baulk	4	20	76	—
Saham Toney	24	13	40	23

As with the Field Baulk hoard, this observation contrasts with the provisional distribution patterns noted by Allen, who concluded that the main distribution area of the Pattern-Horse series lay in the Breckland area of Norfolk, some distance from Fring, suggesting that the distribution patterns deduced by Allen mainly from hoards may need revising.

There are obvious differences between the coins found in hoards, including Fring, and coin assemblages from what appear to be settlement sites such as Saham Toney, Norfolk (Brown 1986) and Stonea Grange, Cambs (Chadburn forthcoming a and b). Settlement-related assemblages appear to contain a wider variety of coin types, including other Iron Age tribal issues (see also Gregory forthcoming), and a much higher proportion of plated coins and cores. In contrast, most Iceni silver coin hoards appear to have been selected for good quality coins as they contain few plated or underweight coins. The Fring hoard, for example, only contained three coins which may have been plated or were poorly alloyed (much copper is visible), although their weights are normal. Two coins are significantly overweight, No. 13 (Pl. I), which is a new type of Normal Face-Horse A coin, and No. 100 (Pl. I).

One other unusual coin is No. 42 (Pl. I), which is an obverse brockage of Anted as the obverse ("pattern") design appears on both sides. No. 42 was apparently struck twice on its reverse surface (on different die axes) with the obverse of a coin stuck in the upper die — creating a

Plate I

Selected coins from the hoard. Nos 1-5 Boar-Horse, Nos 6-33 Face-Horse, the rest Pattern-Horse (Nos 42, 52 ANTED, Nos 68, 100 ECEN, Nos 87, 88 EDN, No. 94 symbols, Nos 121, 122 ECE A, Nos 137, 145, 149 ECE B and No. 152 SAENV). Scale 1:1

brockage. But this error was spotted and the coin was rectified by being overstruck with the correct Anted upper or reverse die (i.e. showing a horse).

Another similarity between the Field Baulk and Fring hoards is the presence of a retrievable container. Most recorded Iceni coin hoards to date have not been associated with a container, but the Field Baulk hoard was associated with a globular beaker imitating Camulodunum form 91 (Chadburn forthcoming a and b), which has been dated by Valerie Rigby to AD 60-70.

The date of the hoard

Allen (1970) concluded that the majority of Iceni coin hoards were buried around the time of the Boudican rebellion, and since then, recent finds appear to support this hypothesis. Indeed, a recent hoard at Scole, Norfolk (Burnett 1986) included Roman *denarii*, the latest of which is a coin of Nero, dating to *c.* AD 61, and the general evidence appears to support a Boudican date of deposition for the majority of Icenian hoards, as might the Field Baulk pot of AD 60-70. The Fring hoard also seems to fit into this general pattern of a mid-first century AD deposition date, and could therefore have been hidden around the time of the Boudican rebellion. As well as the evidence from its container and the textile, the low numbers of presumed early Iceni coins in the hoard (i.e. the presence of only two early Face-Horse coins) might also indicate a late deposition date.

However, we know from Tacitus, *Annals*, that in AD 47/8[2] the Iceni revolted against Rome, and it is possible that there were a number of other occasions in the first century AD (both before and after the Conquest) when the Iceni may have hoarded their wealth. Thus, although the Boudican revolt was obviously a period of great instability when it is likely that at least some Icenian hoards were deposited, the Conquest period in general was obviously one of social and political instability, and it is perhaps unlikely that every Iceni hoard was deposited around AD 61/2.

CONCLUSIONS

The area around Fring was clearly important in the late Iron Age. Besides the Fring coin hoard, spectacular discoveries of torcs and coins have been made in the neighbouring parish of Snettisham. For example, the remains of over 100 torcs have been recovered in this area over the last fifty years (Robinson and Gregory 1987), and further examples are still being discovered in quantity. This concentration of artefacts and the presence of metal ingots have led several scholars to suggest that a metalworking site existed in the area producing artefacts of precious metals such as the Snettisham torcs (Robinson and Gregory 1987; Megaw and Megaw 1989), and it is possible that both the production and trade of prestige metal artefacts were carried out in, and from, this part of Norfolk. The area is adjacent to the Icknield Way and near to the coast of the Wash, both of which were probably utilised for trading purposes in the late Iron Age.

There are a number of possible preliminary explanations for the concentration of wealth in this area. Firstly, there is some evidence for the existence of a metalworking site in this area, and the concentration of metal artefacts (many broken) may represent metalworkers' hoards which would have been smelted down and reused. If such a metalworking site existed, a community with trading links could also have developed here. Nodal points of interchange at the junctions of trade routes, are often associated with the development of high-status settlements such as *oppida*, and it is therefore possible that some sort of rich trade-oriented settlement may have existed in this part of Norfolk in the late Iron Age. The Fring hoard could reflect the general

wealth of the population of this area, such as traders and metalworkers, or perhaps those who had social power and/or who controlled or used the trade routes. In times of political and social unrest, the wealth of those within such a settlement or community may well have been hoarded.

However, there are alternative explanations, and we should not dismiss the suggestion that the large concentrations of metal artefacts in the area could represent votive deposits, although there is little obvious evidence to support this suggestion to date. If votive, the torc hoards may reflect the wealth of a wider community, perhaps reflecting tribal wealth rather than that of the immediate area. Yet we have seen that the Fring hoard itself is probably mid-first century AD in date, and is similar in composition to those Icenian coin hoards which may have been deposited during the Boudican rebellion. It is therefore unlikely that the Fring hoard itself is a votive deposit, even if other metalwork hoards in the vicinity may be.

We can, however, state that there is a very high concentration of metal artefacts and coin hoards in this area, unusual in both quantity, variety and quality, which far exceeds that found normally within Icenian territory and from such a discrete area.

We have seen that the composition of the Fring hoard is very similar to other Icenian silver hoards, but that there are larger numbers of Pattern-Horse coin than is usual, contrasting with Allen's distribution patterns for Icenian coins (Allen 1970). It is becoming clear from the evidence of Fring and other recent hoard finds, that Pattern-Horse coins *are* found in large quantities outside the Breckland area of Norfolk, which Allen (1970) believed was the major area of distribution for these coins, and indeed, which he suggested might be the territory of a sub-tribe or *pagi* of the Iceni. Further work is clearly needed over the whole of East Anglia in order to clarify both the distribution of Icenian coins and the deposition date(s) of the numerous hoards of the Iceni.

1. Note that Allen's Face-Horse B and C have been amalgamated into a single group as the two 'types' form either end of a typological spectrum.
2. Prof. Christopher Hawkes, (pers. comm. 1989), has kindly suggested that a more likely date for the Icenian revolt of AD 47 is in fact, early AD 48. The new governor Ostorius Scapula arrived in the late autumn of AD 47, and his first task was to drive out enemies who had invaded pro-Roman tribes' territories, after the winter had begun. Only after all this did he prepare to define the province along the Fosse Way, and start to disarm the tribes to the south-east of it which led to the revolt. The length of time needed to perform these tasks makes it more likely that the revolt took place in early AD 48.

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A FURTHER GROUP OF LATE SAXON MOUNTS FROM NORFOLK

by Steven Ashley, Kenneth Penn and Andrew Rogerson

Amongst a remarkable group of decorated Late Saxon mounts of copper alloy from Norfolk and Suffolk previously published in this journal (Margeson 1986), only one, from Hethersett, carries a face as the main element in its decoration. Many more mounts, in a variety of styles, but all of the same basic form that Margeson has suggested is indicative of fittings from large boxes, have since been recorded on the county Sites and Monuments Record. Seven of these new finds, which share the common characteristic of depicting faces, of humans or animals, are described here.

Fig. 1 nos 1 and 2. Runhall. County number 25403. Private possession. These two mounts, found within a few metres of each other, are very similar, and differ only in minor details. Each is pierced by a single iron rivet at the top and through the curving basal flange. The front surface of no. 1 is covered by iron corrosion around the upper rivet, while only slight traces of the upper rivet survive on no. 2. Both are decorated with somewhat comical oval animal faces in relief. There is much emphasis on eyebrows, eyes and nose, but no sign of mouths. The long sides are unevenly wavy and marked by very faint linear decoration.

Fig. 1 no. 3. Hindringham. County number 25071. Private possession. A single rivet hole is placed at the top and through the curving basal flange. A bizarre oval animal face in relief has bulging eyes and an open fish-like mouth. Hair is indicated by diagonal grooves below an arched cordon and line of finely incised rectangles. Further faint decoration occurs on the flange and at the top. The long sides and the top are wavy and followed by a groove.

Fig. 2 no. 4. Middleton. County number 24141. Private possession. A rivet hole passes through the top and another through the deep flange, on the front and reverse of which are traces of corroded iron. An enigmatic face, perhaps human, is shown in relief, with lentoid eyes and a broad nose. Again there is no attempt to show a mouth. Above the eyebrows, relief decoration in the form of an inverted anchor may represent the bindings of a helmet. There are indications of ears in projections from the sides.

Fig. 2 no. 5. Brinton. County number 25803. Private possession. A rivet hole passes through a projection at the top, and two holes containing iron pass through the deep basal flange which is decorated on the underside with grooves. A deposit of iron corrosion is attached to the reverse of the flange. A face and ?helmet is shown in relief in similar fashion to no. 4. The eyes here are rounded and the nose broader at the base. Ears are again indicated by projections from the sides.

Fig. 3 no. 6. Erpingham. County number 12991. Private possession. There are rivet holes through a broken projection at the top and through the basal flange, the latter still containing iron. A human face is indicated by grooved decoration, although the nose is formed in low relief. There is no suggestion of ears.