

A HOARD OF IRON AGE COINS DISCOVERED AT SEDGEFORD, 2003

by Gareth Davies, Megan Dennis and Ray Thirkettle

Discovery

Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (SHARP) discovered a hoard of 39 Gallo-Belgic E gold-alloy staters (coins) in August 2003. SHARP is working to investigate the archaeology and history of the Sedgeford parish from earliest times to the present day. Work on the main Boneyard site has concentrated on an early Christian Anglo-Saxon cemetery site, but beneath these deposits important Iron Age evidence is now being uncovered. Several staters had been discovered on the site in previous years, but on 12 August Kev Woodward, a volunteer archaeologist working with the project, uncovered the majority of the hoard hidden within a cow bone. Metal-detectors have been used by the project regularly, and it was during a routine scan that the hoard was revealed. The bone was taken to the Sandringham Hospital, King's Lynn, where an X-ray revealed that it contained at least seventeen coins. Investigation of the bone under controlled conditions two days later recovered 20 coins. Further excavation on the site led to the recovery of eleven additional coins. Eight had been recovered during previous seasons. All coins have now been removed from the site.

General description

(Plates 1 and 2)

The hoard contained 39 Gallo-Belgic E coins in total (Plate 1), although others may have been lost during Saxon and medieval disturbances of the area. These coins were made in Northern France, probably by a tribe called the Ambiani, and were produced between 60 and 50 BC (Scheers 1977) or perhaps a little earlier (Haselgrove 1999, 137; 1984, 84) to pay mercenaries fighting against Caesar in the Gallic Wars. The hoard had been deposited in a pit that produced four fragments of Iron Age pottery but no other artefacts. The pit is part of a larger, multi-phase Iron Age site that has only been partially investigated. The remains of several large ditches, one with a large terminal, and several smaller gullies and pits are being investigated. The articulated skeletons of at least two horses, deliberately buried in pits, have also been excavated. The presence of occupation evidence on the site (including large amounts of pottery dating from the Early Iron Age to the 1st century AD, and including rare Gallo-Belgic imitation wares) warns against any simplistic interpretation of this as a ritual site. Further excavation in the years to come will allow a more complete interpretation of the site within the local landscape that includes the famous Snettisham hoards less than 5km away.

The coins

(Plates 1 and 2; Fig. 1)

Gallo-Belgic E coins were produced in Northern France but are quite common in Britain, their main area of distribution being Kent and Essex (Fig. 1). Evidence suggests that they may have been brought to Britain by mercenaries returning from Gaul after the Gallic Wars. Alternatively, hoards such as that found at Sedgeford may represent gifts exchanged between tribes. It is also possible that continental refugees or long-distance trade and exchange brought the coins to Norfolk.

The coins have an abstracted horse and charioteer on the reverse (Plate 2), whilst the obverse is blank. The use of a blank obverse die would have made minting the coins quicker. It is clear that the

large number of Gallo-Belgic E coins recovered from the Continent and Britain were produced in a very short period of time. Gallo-Belgic E coins have been separated into several types, 1–7. Types 1–3 are most commonly found in British hoards. The Sedgeford hoard conforms to this pattern in containing only these types.

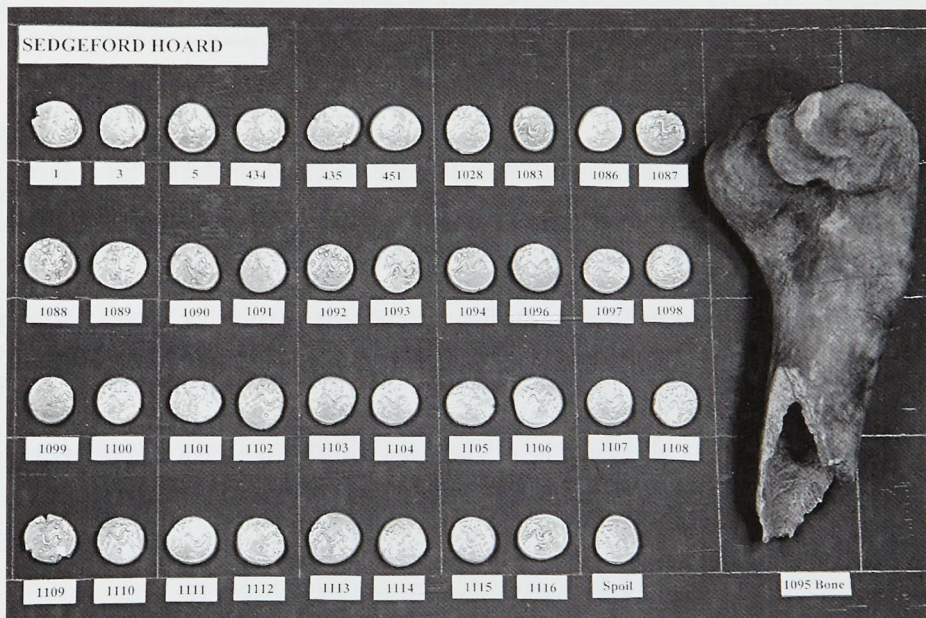


Plate 1. The hoard recovered at Sedgeford, 2003

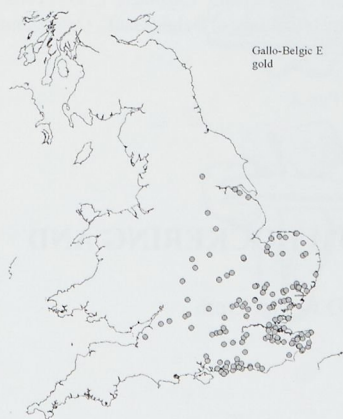


Figure 1. Distribution of Gallo-Belgic E coins in Britain

Map: Celtic Coin Index, Institute of Archaeology, Oxford



Plate 2. Gallo-Belgic E coin (SF 1109) from the Sedgeford Hoard

The bone

The bone is the distal end of a cow's right humerus. Measurements demonstrate that the bone is within the size range normal for Iron Age cattle. Only 30% of the original bone length survives and it is unclear whether or not it was broken before deposition. Thirty-nine coins would not all have fitted inside the bone as it survives today. In all respects the bone is ordinary. It shows no remarkable features and has the appearance of an ordinary item from butchery or food waste.

Discussion

The discovery of the Iron Age hoard is important, particularly as this is the only major collection to be uncovered in East Anglia as part of a long-term archaeological research project. It is only the second to be recovered from inside a bone (the other being the Honley hoard recovered in the 1800s in Yorkshire, which contained Roman and Iron Age coins and objects; Petch 1924). The hoard is the fifth Gallo-Belgic E hoard to be recovered from Norfolk (the others being Weybourne, 39 coins; Fring, 173 coins; Wormegay, seven coins; and Buxton-with-Lammas, fourteen coins). It may be significant that these finds are mostly from the north-west of Norfolk, an area that has been noted for the richness of its portable finery and for strong local regional traditions that are reflected in characteristic decorative styles, monument and artefact types. SHARP will continue to investigate the fascinating archaeology of this area in the future.

Full publication of the hoard will be in *The Sedgeford Hoard*, which will be available in Summer 2004.

May 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Plates 1 and 2 are by Hilary Snelling.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Haselgrove C., 1999. 'The Development of Iron Age Coinage in Belgic Gaul', *Numismatic Chronicle* 159, 111–68
 Haselgrove, C., 1984. 'Warfare and its aftermath as reflected in the precious metal coinage of Belgic Gaul', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 3(1), 81–99.
 Petch, J.A., 1924. *Early Man in the District of Huddersfield* (Huddersfield).
 Scheers, S., 1977. *Traite de numismatique celtique II. La Gaule Belgique* (Paris).

TWO ROMAN BROOCH FINDS FROM HOCKERING AND FELMINGHAM

by Justine Bayley, David Gurney and D.F. Mackreth

Multiple bow brooch from Hockering Site 36541

(Fig. 1)

In October 2001, whilst metal-detecting by Mr A. Carter, a further Roman multiple bow brooch was discovered at a site in Hockering. This is only the fifth example of the type to be recorded, and the fourth example of the double bow variety. For the earlier finds, see *Norfolk Archaeology* XLIII Part 1(1998), 177–9.