

# King Alfred's Body

*'A most extraordinary find!' – this verdict follows conservation works to the 19th-century King Alfred statue in Trinity Church Square, Southwark. Chris Constable, archaeologist for Southwark Council, monitored the work. With Dr Kevin Hayward and Professor Martin Henig, he reveals the results of this unusual investigation.*

A grand statue of King Alfred stands at the centre of a railed garden in Trinity Church Square, Southwark. After centuries of exposure to the elements, it needed maintenance and repair. The Heritage of London Trust and Trinity House, the maritime charity and custodian of the statue, funded London Stone Conservation Ltd to undertake cleaning and conservation works during the summer of 2021.

Trinity Church Square, with Trinity Church at its heart, is located almost directly south of Borough Tube Station, within the triangle of roads formed by Borough High Street, Great Dover Street and Harper Road. This is within the area of the Roman cemetery lying between, and to either side of the lines of Watling and Stane Street – various notable burials and funeral monuments have been discovered in the past.<sup>1</sup>

A picture from 1831 shows that Trinity Church had been completed by that date and the garden laid out to the north with the statue of King Alfred clearly visible in its present location. When the Alfred statue was listed Grade II in 1950, it was noted that there was limestone within the lower part of the sculpture, with upper parts of Coade or another artificial stone, in a late 14th-century style. Two legends were repeated in the description – that the sculpture was medieval, from those installed by Richard II at Westminster Hall, or was sculpted for Carlton House's gardens – home to the Prince of Wales for much of the later 18th century.

The cleaning, removal of loose material and inappropriate later repairs revealed the Alfred statue to be constructed from a Bath Stone base, with a Coade Stone upper body and base panels. Both had been covered in a hard mortar to protect the fabric of the statue, to provide a unified exterior appearance, and to disguise the joins. Removal revealed the extent of the Bath Stone and showed that the Coade Stone components had been carefully designed to fit and incorporate the Bath Stone fragment. The earlier stone, c. 1.1m of a 2.6m-tall statue, consisted of the right leg and gathered and draped folds of cloth.

PCA's Kevin Hayward was invited to examine the cleaned sculpture. He concluded that the base was

made from a South Cotswold limestone (Bath Stone) of a type that is used in about 90% of all native stone sculpture in Roman London. Showing well-carved muscle definition, it was likely to have been carved by a continental craftsman used to working British stone. Carvings of this quality are typical of the early to mid-2nd century AD and it probably belonged to a temple complex. He also considered it to be the largest surviving piece of Roman statuary in native stone in the province. Martin Henig, a leading Roman art specialist, deems it to be a most extraordinary find. He believes it to be part of a twice life-size cult statue of a goddess, almost certainly of Minerva, from a major temple complex, which was partly excavated at nearby Tabard Square in 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Further research continues concerning the sculptor and the commissioning of the statue. The key figure who obtained the sculpture must have been William Chadwick, a local builder, who laid out the garden to the north of Trinity Church. The sculptor is thought to be James Bubb, who first created the Alfred statue as one of a pair for the new Manchester Town Hall in 1822.<sup>3</sup> When the sculpture was found to be too large, another near life-size Alfred, also designed by Bubb, was installed instead. The two are remarkably similar, and the Manchester Alfred includes details from the Roman fragment incorporated into the Trinity Church Square Alfred.

One point of interest remains. The legends linked to the Alfred statue allude to stories that it contained an earlier sculpture – this has now been proved to be true!



**ABOVE** King Alfred conserved with the former Trinity Church behind (John Clark)

**BELOW** During conservation, the Roman fragment consisting of right leg and drapery was revealed with panels of cleaned Coade Stone to either side and fitted below the fragment. The join between the Roman fragment and the upper torso of Alfred is just below the moulded belt. (K Hayward)



Stibbington-cum-Sibson near Barnack in Lincolnshire.

3. T Cavanagh *The Public Sculptures of South London* (2007).

1. Notable examples include funeral monuments and a *bustum* burial at Great Dover Street in 1996–7; the 'Harper Road woman' – an early Roman burial in 1979; and a Roman sarcophagus in Harper Road in 2017.

2. PCA excavations at Tabard Square revealed a temple complex dating from the mid-2nd–4th century AD. Comparison may be made with a somewhat smaller statue of Minerva from

# HS2 excavations in West Ruislip

*Although excavated last year, Iron Age evidence from West Ruislip is only now coming to the fore. Emma Tatlow, Pieta Greaves and David Holman from the HS2 project,<sup>1</sup> explain what has been found on a site in West Ruislip.*

**ABOVE** The coin hoard after excavation

In July 2021, newspapers and media revealed the discovery of over 300 Iron Age coins dating to the 1st century BC, tagged as the 'Hillingdon hoard'. The discovery came as part of the archaeology undertaken for the HS2 project – the construction of a new railway linking London to Birmingham – where the route has been divided into many sections and allotted to various units for excavation. The area covering the Euston area and extending as far as West Ruislip golf course is designated as Area South of the HS2 project.

Archaeologists from Archaeology Wales had been working in West Ruislip in August 2020 on land temporarily occupied as part of the construction project. As they were nearing the end of the excavation, a heavy storm flooded the London clay trenches which Emma checked it was safe to dig. An area of different-coloured soil had appeared within a trench some 43cm below ground level. A clump of metal discs was starting to make an appearance and, on closer inspection, the discs were found to be a hoard of Iron Age potin coins.

The find was reported to the coroner of the London Borough of Hillingdon, and the archaeologists discussed the find with Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). The coins were then taken to Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, where they were carefully cleaned and conserved by freelance conservator, Pieta Greaves, who had also conserved

the Bronze Age Havering Hoard.<sup>2</sup>

After over three months of detailed work, Pieta completed the conservation and recorded the work done. She had found that the burial conditions of the bunched coins had led to some of the coins being broken in antiquity. Others were fragmentary when deposited, making it uncertain as to just how many coins had been in the hoard. However, it is thought that there were about 329 coins – 274 were essentially complete and there were fragments of 55 more, but there were also many smaller unidentifiable fragments with no indication of broken edges. This indicated that they were fragments when they were deposited and may have been the remains of mis-cast coins.

David Holman, an Iron Age potin coin specialist, has been working on potin coins for some years and had found that the existing cataloguing system for potin coins was inadequate for more recent hoards.<sup>3</sup> He was asked to produce an assessment of the 'Hillingdon' hoard and was able to use his revised cataloguing system. The original coin design was based on coins from Marseille showing the head of Apollo facing left, on one side, and a charging bull on the other. The design was clear, but became more and more stylised as copies were used to produce copies.

Three previously unrecorded varieties were found in the hoard. Coins were not confined to this original design and new later types were introduced and similarly stylised, so that the design on the latest coins in the hoard consisted of a mere jumble of curved and straight lines, indicating that they were being produced by makers who did not understand what they were copying.

Such coins were cast in moulds from a high tin



**RIGHT** The rain-soaked trench where the coin hoard was found

**CENTRE** A close-packed group of the coins as they first appeared

**BELOW** An early view of what was to come





bronze to produce a silvery appearance. Their irregular shape reveal how they were manufactured – the straight sides indicate the casting sprues where they have been snapped or cut from a strip when they were cast in a long line in a mould probably made of clay. Some have small holes in the flan caused by trapped air bubbles or where the metal has not flowed properly. Other coins had striations visible on the metal surface of the coins, and it is thought that wood may have been impressed on the clay when making the mould.

Such coins were produced in Kent and the south-east in the mid-1st century BC, and are likely to have been produced by anyone who had metalworking skills rather than the potins being a regular coinage. A cluster of such hoards have already been recorded around the Thames Valley, Essex and the Hertfordshire border area. A similar-sized hoard of potin coins (over 360 coins), although earlier in date, was discovered buried with several pots in a pit or ditch at Shepperton, near Sunbury in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Several other smaller Iron Age hoards have been found on the Thames foreshore – at Isleworth Eyot on the Middlesex side, and at Barn Elms on the Surrey side, as discussed by Cotton & Wood.<sup>5</sup> Records of other small hoards in Greater London can be found in the PAS.

Earlier Iron Age coins were thicker, but designs became simpler and the coins became thinner. These later coins were known as Flat Linear 1 potins, and the Hillingdon potin coins fit into this category. The stylised quality of this hoard indicates that they date to late in the Iron Age, and the latest coins date to 55–50 BC. One of the closest parallels is the New Addington hoard found in Surrey in 1978–9 (but later stolen).<sup>6</sup> However, the size of this new hoard is larger than others of that date found previously, and is thought to be the largest of its kind found in Britain. It fills a gap in the hoarding sequence and provides useful information on Flat Linear potins.

There is no known Iron Age settlement recorded nearby. Archaeologists believe the coins may have been buried to mark a property boundary, or deposited as a votive offering in a woodland clearing or sacred spring (the coins were found close to the River Penn, and there were springs on the site), or were buried in a time of crisis (the last coins are dated to just before Caesar's invasion of 54 BC). They were found packed together, but there was no evidence of a container, so it is most likely that they were buried in a leather or textile pouch which has not survived.

The excavations in the area have been completed and the coins lodged with the Treasure Registrar at the British Museum, who will make a recommendation to the Hillingdon Coroner to enable an inquest on the coin hoard to be held and a decision made as to where the coins will finally be lodged. Records of the coins will be placed on the PAS.

However, the Iron Age hoard was not the only interesting find from this site. There were long-blade flints which are likely to be of the late glacial/early Holocene age, and which are comparable to the early phase of activity at Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge, a site not that far from West Ruislip (Jon Cotton pers comm).

There was also evidence of a Bronze Age settlement – a possible roundhouse, as evidenced by postholes, and two cremations. In the medieval period, small industrial areas exploited the nearby clay, wood and water. There was evidence for iron smelting and pottery production with a kiln and dumps of pottery. A further kiln for producing tiles continued in use until the 17th century. Surprisingly, there was even Romano-British kiln furniture, although there was no other evidence of Roman activity.

You can view the webinar about the discovery, which was broadcast during the 2021 Festival of Archaeology at <https://youtu.be/djr6RGNCp1M>

Our thanks go to the HS2 project for the images.

**ABOVE FAR LEFT** Three coins before conservation  
**CENTRE LEFT** A very stylised head of Apollo  
**CENTRE RIGHT** Reverse showing an unrecognisable view of the bull  
**RIGHT** One of the new varieties [Hoard no 228, type G2/6]

**BELOW FAR LEFT** Holes in the flan caused by a casting flaw [No 37]  
**LEFT** Striations on flans indicate wood grains [No 186]  
**RIGHT** Coin with only one sprue from the end of a strip  
**FAR RIGHT** Coin with two sprues from the middle of a strip



1. Emma Tatlow, Costain Skanska JV, is the Historical Environmental lead for Area South; Pieta Greaves is a freelance conservator with Drakon Heritage & Conservation; David Holman is a freelance specialist.  
 2. For the Havering Hoard, see *London Archaeol* **15** (12) (Spring 2020), 342–4.

3. D Holman 'A new classification system for the Flat Linear potin coinage' *British Numismatic Journ* **86** (2016), 1–67.  
 4. P de Jersey *Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain* British Numismatic Soc Spec Pub 12 (2014).  
 5. J Cotton & B Wood 'Recent historic finds from the

Thames foreshore and beyond in Greater London' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **47** (1996), 25–8, cat nos 35 & 36.  
 6. A P Fitzpatrick 'A hoard of Iron Age class II potin coins from New Addington, Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* **80** (1991), 147–52.