

ANCIENT BRITISH GOLD COINS FOUND IN
WHADDON CHASE.

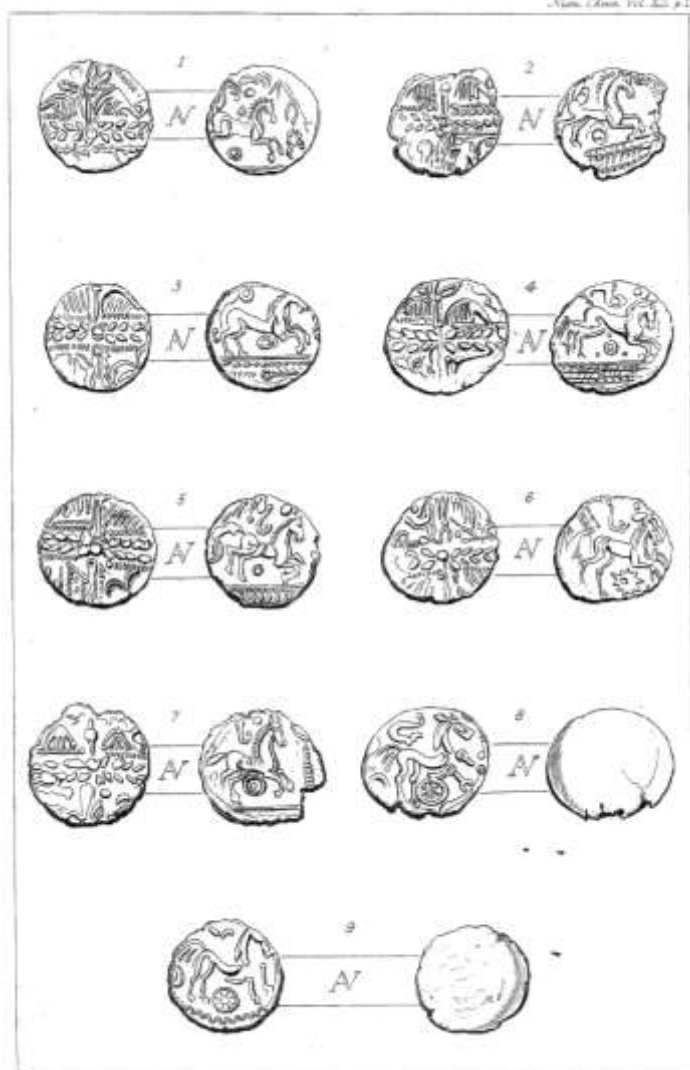
Through the kindness of J. Y. Akerman, Esq., we have the gratification of presenting our members with a plate containing several examples of these interesting coins. We are also indebted to him for the following authentic account of the discovery, and a few particulars which appeared in the *Numismatic Chronicle*:—

The coins were discovered in February, 1849, by a tenant of Mr. Lowndes, whilst ploughing a portion of "Whaddon Chase, which had been recently cleared and enclosed. The discovery attracted many persons to the spot, some of whom contrived to get possession of nearly one hundred specimens, which have been dispersed. About 320 reached the hands of Mr. Lowndes.

Fragments of an earthen vessel are said to have been turned up where the coins were found; but, on enquiry, we could gather no satisfactory information on this point, and it is not known whether they were contained in some description of urn, or placed in a less fragile depository. The passing and repassing of the plough, had scattered the coins over the surface of the land, and driven many of them nearly half-a-foot into the clay, which was dug out and burnt, whereby several pieces more were recovered.

On visiting the spot, we could perceive no traces of pottery, nor any evidence of the ancient occupation of the spot; but from the name of the field in which they were discovered, "Narbury," we were led to examine the neighbourhood, and our search in a part of the adjacent Chase, yet uncleared, brought us upon a very perfect Roman camp, enclosing an area of about five acres. The vallum and fosse appear to have undergone no material alteration since the position was abandoned.

Though these coins are extremely interesting to the numismatist, it is greatly to be regretted that not a single example of an inscribed coin occurs amongst them. About one fourth consists of pieces of a type already well known, stamped on one side only with the rude figure of a horse, the head grotesquely shaped, and re-



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sembling the bill of a fowl, and the limbs disjointed. The rest have, on some examples, a tolerably well-executed figure of a horse unbridled and at liberty, and on the reverse, a wreath dividing the field; one of the divisions being filled up by various unknown objects, the other by a flower which we shall not attempt to describe with the pen, but which is accurately represented in the engraving No. 1. The more perfect striking, and fair preservation of some of the coins of this description, enables us to identify others of less perfect type.

It is not easy to discover the meaning of the types of British coins of the degenerate class, to which these pieces certainly belong. The progress of corruption of design seems to us to have been sometimes influenced in a great measure by the skill, or want of skill, of the engraver ; but we shall not err much in the conjecture, that these coins are of a later period than those of Cunobelin, with the wheat-ear and rampant horse. We hold in common with the numismatists of the Continent, that the rudest coins of this class are the latest; and with this view, we do not hesitate to ascribe the Whaddon Chase coins to the important period just previous to the annexation of Britain as a Roman province ; * a period on which but little light is shed by Dion Cassius, and the history of which, owing to the loss of a most important book of Tacitus, must be investigated principally by means of the few numismatic monuments which have descended to us.

A person residing in the village of Whaddon showed us a coin similar to those of the first seven specimens, which was found by a labourer in a part of the Chase about five years ago ; but he could give us no particulars as to the precise spot where it was picked up.

As before observed, it is all but hopeless to attempt an illustration of pieces which bear no traces of inscription, nor any very satisfactory indication of what may have been the prototype, for we must regard them as belonging to the class of degenerate British coins. All that can be done, therefore, is to chronicle their finding, and patiently wait the chance of future discoveries.

Any conjectures as to the accident which led to the deposit of these coins in such a place ; whether they were

* The resolute struggle of the Britons for their independence ended in this part of the island.

the produce of plunder, or the buried hoard of a British chieftain, or the spoil of some Roman soldier located in the adjacent camp, are questions which may amuse, but can elicit nothing of value to the antiquary.

The average weight of these coins is just under 90 grains, Troy ; a very few only exceeding that weight by half a grain. Though so truly adjusted, however, their fineness varies considerably. They may be estimated at about 12s. each, being inferior to our gold standard, and alloyed with silver.

The spot where the coins were found is called "Narbury." Knowing this to be a provincial form of Norbury, or Northbury, Mr. Akerman said that he was not surprised at finding a fine Roman camp in an adjacent part of the Chase not then cleared. The fosse and vallum were quite perfect, enclosing about five acres.

On hearing of the discovery of the Whaddon Chase coins, Mr. Lowndes, as Lord of the Manor and owner of Whaddon Chase, instituted a legal inquisition, an account of which, as founded on the ancient law of Treasure Trove, may not be without interest.

Evidence of the discovery having been given before the Coroner D. P. King, Esq., the Solicitor on behalf of Mr. Lowndes, Lord of the Manor and ancient Chase of Whaddon, produced a grant given by King James the First, in the fourteenth year of his reign, to "George Villiers, Knight, Master of the Horse, one of the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, and a Knight of the Garter, &c.," of "the manors of Whaddon and Nash, the Queen's Park in Whaddon, the Chase in Whaddon, with all coppices, mines, goods and chattels abandoned, goods and chattels of felons, fugitives, strays, franchises, liberties, &c., of every kind, nature, or sort."

The Coroner stated to the Jury his having received notice of the finding, and consequently the obligation (by his office) to make such a novel inquiry : and then explained the law as affecting Treasure Trove, and the operation of the grant from the Crown. The Jury found that Mr. Lowndes was, as the present Lord of the ancient Chase, entitled to the coins.