



CHRIS RUDD

Huge Iron Age hoard found on Isle of Wight

967 Cranborne Chase type silver alloy staters found on the Isle of Wight 19 October 2005, as excavated. Some were still in the base of a broken earthenware pot. (Courtesy Isle of Wight Detecting Club.)

SHORTLY after 10.00am on Wednesday, October 19, 2005, a hoard of almost 1,000 Iron Age silver coins was discovered at an undisclosed site on the western part of the Isle of Wight, only two miles from where another Iron Age hoard had been found in March 2004.

The hoard and the base of an earthenware pot that contained it were dug up by 15 members of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club and were immediately reported to archaeologist Frank Basford, the island's finds liaison officer. A total of 967 coins were unearthed. Dave Clark, founder and chairman of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club, tells me that most of the coins were concentrated in a small area—19 of them were still in the bottom of the pot—while some of them were scattered across 265 feet of the field.

Frank Basford says: "It is an important, significant find. Iron Age coins themselves are common, but it is very unusual to find them in this quantity. This is certainly the largest hoard of its kind ever found on the Isle of Wight. It is impossible to say how the coins came to be buried. They could have been some sort of community savings and Iron Age people would sometimes bury their wealth in times of stress or trouble."

All the coins from this massive hoard, currently being examined at the British Museum, are apparently of a type known as Cranborne Chase. They were struck in a silver and copper alloy during the second half of the 1st century BC by the Durotriges "dwellers by the water", a close-knit confederacy of sea-faring peoples whose territory was centred on Dorset (named after them) and approximately matched that of Anglo-Saxon Wessex. They were minted on the mainland, probably in Dorset, and imported to the Isle of Wight, perhaps by way of trade or treaty.

The design of these Cranborne Chase staters was ultimately derived, after 200 years of copying across Gaul and southern Britain, from gold staters of Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. On one side is a highly stylised head of Apollo wearing a laurel wreath; on the other side is a Durotrigan-style disjointed horse with three tails and twelve blobs above

it—originally a Macedonian two-horse chariot driven by a charioteer holding a goad.

From a small sample of coins from this hoard that were cleaned and weighed by Frank Basford, the average weight seems to be around 4.5 to 5 grams, which suggests that they were not among the earliest and heaviest Cranborne Chase staters to be minted and probably contained 50 per cent or more copper, which is why they were all coated with green verdigris when they came out of the soil. Named after the Cranborne Chase excavations (1887–98) of General Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers (1827–1900), the father of modern archaeology and first Inspector of Ancient Monuments in England and Wales, Cranborne Chase staters are one of the commonest types of Iron Age coins found in Britain. In 1997 a hoard containing about 3,300 billion Cranborne Chase staters was found by metal detectorists and regrettably not declared. Cranborne Chase staters were issued in vast quantities for almost a century, becoming increasingly debased in both metal and design. Consequently, their present retail value is not as high as one might imagine.

The first coins from this enormous Isle of Wight hoard were discovered by Albert Snell of Shanklin, a 74-year-old ex postman and founder member of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club. He began detecting 30 years ago with a borrowed Seascope detector, but was using his own dearly beloved Minelab Explorer II detector when he found this hoard. I asked him how it happened. He told me that at 10.00am on October 19 last year he and 14 other members of his club started searching one of his favourite spots on the Isle of Wight. Most of his mates stayed at the top of the field where several English hammered coins had been found four days earlier. But "Alby", as they all call him, decided to go in the opposite direction, down to the bottom of the field. He said: "My Minelab Explorer II remained silent. I thought I was going the wrong way and wondered if I should join the others at the top of the field. But I decided to keep going where I was. I carried on down the field, getting further and further away from the main body of the group. Then suddenly it happened, a positive signal. I dug down nine inches and there was my first stater."

After he had found his second Cranborne Chase stater Alby called Dave Clark on his



Frank Basford, finds liaison officer, Isle of Wight County Council. (Photo Portable Antiquities Scheme.)

walkie-talkie and jumped up and down, waving his detector in the air to show him where he was. Alby soon got a much better signal. "I just knew I'd hit the jackpot," he said. "Paul was looking over my shoulder. He was with me when we found the last hoard. So I say, 'Go on, Paul, you dig it.' He does and as he lifts the turf out on his spade staters are falling out all over the place. We both look down the hole. We can hardly believe our eyes. By this time Dave has called everyone in and I step back so everyone can join in the fun."

How does it feel to find a gigantic hoard of Iron Age coins? Alby's wife, Barbara, told me. She said: "When he was talking about it the next day he was so choked up he just sat down and cried and cried." I know the feeling, Alby. When I dug up my first Cranborne Chase staters over 50 years ago I was so elated I was walking on air for weeks afterwards.

This is not the first major Iron Age hoard that septuagenarian Albert Snell has been involved with. On March 31, 2004 he and other members of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club found another Durotrigan hoard, only a couple of miles away from their recent find. This hoard comprised 157 coins: 18 Chute type gold staters, c. 68–65 BC (BMC 35–76); 138 Cranborne Chase base silver staters, c. 58–40 BC (BMC 2691–2708); and a rare Hampshire Thin Silver unit (BMC 2782–2787), struck by the Belgae c. 65–45 BC and neatly folded double. All the Chute and Cranborne Chase staters had been deliberately defaced with a chisel prior to deposition, including one which was cut in half due to the force of the chisel blow. I don't believe these were "test cuts" made to check the quality of the metal or to indicate that the coins had been withdrawn from circulation (why go to all that trouble?). I think that these coins were ritually "killed" before being buried as a votive offering in a handmade earthenware pot.

That's not all. In addition to the 157 Iron Age coins, the Isle of Wight Detecting Club also discovered three (apparently) Iron Age metal ingots with this 2004 hoard, plus seven very worn Roman bronze coins, three of which may be imitations of Claudian sestertii; but I don't feel that any of these Roman coins were deposited with the hoard. The three ingots—two silver alloy, one copper alloy—are big, bowl shaped and very heavy; I almost ruptured myself lifting the cuprous ingot onto a table. One of the silver alloy ingots has a coin-like slot on the top of it, where a coin had evidently not melted before the molten ingot cooled. This suggests that the three ingots—or at least the two silver alloy ones—might have been made with melted-down coins, possibly silver and billon Cranborne Chase staters, with some Chute gold staters added. The stater-size indentation and the British Museum's metal analysis of the two silver alloy ingots are compatible with this possibility.

The combined weight of the two silver alloy ingots—they both contain a little gold, as the earliest Cranborne Chase staters do—comes to approximately 16.5 kilograms, in other words, about 165,000 grams. If we estimate an average weight of 5.5 grams per Cranborne Chase stater, as with the 138 included in this hoard, then we may calculate—highly hypothetically, of course—that it could have taken as many as 30,000 Cranborne Chase staters to form these two silver alloy ingots.

I won't try to speculate on when or why this heavyweight hoard was consigned to the soil. I'll simply surmise that it was a communal sacrifice that could have been made up to half a century or more before general Flavius Vespasianus, commander of Legio II Augusta, conquered the Isle of Wight in AD 43. The irregular shape of the metal ingots and the sand still adhering to the base of the copper alloy ingot "suggest that all three were probably simply cast in sand or a similar depression, rather than a mould", according to Dr J. D. Hill of the British Museum.

How do these two substantial hoards of 2004 and 2005 add to what little we already know about the Isle of Wight in the Late Iron Age? At the very least they imply that wealthy people on the western part of the island, where both hoards were found, were trading or negotiating with the Durotriges in the second half of the 1st century BC, probably through the ports at Yarmouth and Hengistbury Head. Some might say that these two hoards provide further evidence that west Wight, if not the whole of the island, was controlled by the Durotriges. But I don't think this was the case.

Five years ago archaeologist Imogen Wellington said: "The numismatic evidence is strong enough to indicate that the Isle of Wight was not totally dominated by the larger tribal confederacies [Durotriges and Atrebatas/Regni] based in the south-west or central southern England for all of the Late Iron Age. Many of the coin finds [on the Isle of Wight] are of rare and unusual coins, found only in a limited area of the mainland, the CRAB coins being the best example." ("Iron Age coinage on the Isle of Wight", *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 20, no. 1, February 2001, p. 48). Wellington's "rare and unusual coins", such as the Yarmouth type gold staters (BMC 78–85) and the Hampshire Thin Silver type (BMC 2691–2708) in the 2004 hoard, were probably minted by the Belgae of Hampshire around the mid 1st century BC, when the Belgae seem to have dominated the Solent and its hinterland. I therefore think that the Belgae of Hampshire may, at this time, have controlled part or all of the Isle of Wight, rather than the Durotriges. The Belgae were geographically closer to the island than the Durotriges were and the two recent Durotrigan hoards might plausibly have arrived on the island as a result of Belgic insular trade or Belgic political treaty or even Belgic piracy.

On the other hand, the Isle of Wight may have maintained a measure of autonomy during the pre-Roman period, possibly with its own tribal polity, trading peaceably with all south-coast peoples, from the Cantiaci of Kent to the Dumnonii of Devon and Cornwall. Coastal finds of Gallic coins may attest to more distant mercantile connections with the Veneti, Baiocasses, Unelli, Osismii, Morini and Suessiones. The first recorded tourist

How generations of imitation turned a Greek gold stater into a silver stater of the Durotriges.



Gold stater of Philip II of Macedon.



Cranborne Chase type silver stater.

Below: Albert Snell, finder of the 2005 Durotrigan hoard. (Photo Isle of Wight County Press.)





Above, from top to bottom: Silver alloy ingot, 17–18cm diameter, 5.5 kg, 76% silver, 13% gold; Silver alloy ingot, 21–23cm diameter, 11 kg, 82% silver, 3% gold; Copper alloy ingot, 32–35cm diameter, 25 kg, metal content not analysed.

It could have taken 30,000 or more Cranborne Chase type silver staters to form the two silver alloy ingots. All three ingots were found with the 2003 Durotrigan coin hoard on the Isle of Wight.



Extremely rare silver unit of Crab(ba?) "the crab" or "the claw" who may have ruled on the Isle of Wight c. AD 42–43. (Courtesy of Celtic Coin Index.)

on the Isle of Wight was probably Pytheas, a Greek explorer, who may have landed at Freshwater Bay or Yarmouth around 325 BC to research the Cornish tin trade on behalf of metal merchants in Massalia (Marseilles). And the first recorded ruler on the Isle of Wight was possibly Crab, whose extremely rare silver coins (BMC 2788–2789) have been found on the island, as well as the mainland. Crab's coins closely resemble those of Epaticcus (c. AD 35–42) and his nephew Caratacos (c. AD 42–

43), so he probably reigned immediately before the Roman invasion of AD 43 and may have been deposed by Vespasianus. Crab's coins have traditionally been ascribed to the Durotriges, but the Isle of Wight now seems more likely. Crab may be short for Crabba, as in the Anglo-Saxon crabba "crab" and Low German krabben "to claw", and almost certainly refers to the pincer crustacean that frequents the shores of the Isle of Wight—a fitting name for a local ruler who may have clawed his way to power during a time of turmoil after Cunobelinus, "Britannorum rex", had died and King Verica had sailed from the Solent to seek aid from Rome.

Finally, I congratulate those members of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club who found the two important Durotrigan hoards of 2004 and 2005 and who reported them promptly to the island's archaeologist, Frank Basford. The

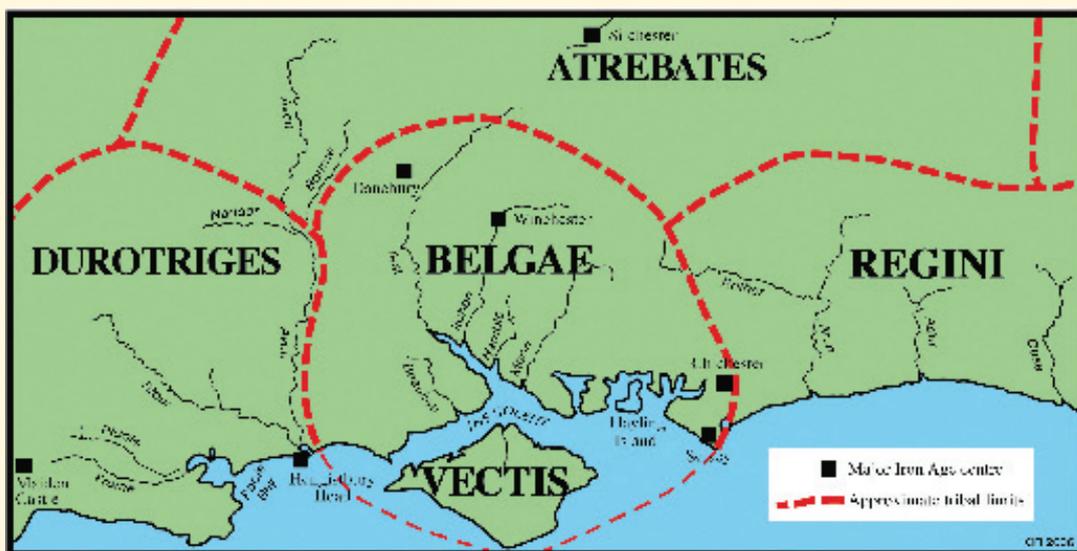
club was founded in 2003 by former landscape gardener Dave Clark, aged 62, who says: "It was wonderful seeing all those coins popping out of the ground. We are not in this for the money. Our club motto is 'pleasure not profit'. We just get a thrill from playing a part in helping to discover the Isle of Wight's ancient heritage. People sometimes say to me 'I wish I could go back in time'. I tell them that's precisely what I do every time I switch my detector on. It's my personal time machine and I can travel back over 2,000 years with it."

Acknowledgements

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Members of the Isle of Wight Detecting Club (now 70 strong) who unearthed the hoard of 967 Iron Age coins on October 19, 2005. Albert Snell the finder with his Minelab Explorer II (centre), Janet Clark (kneeling beside him) with Dave Clark, club chairman (standing behind her). (Courtesy of Isle of Wight Detecting Club.)



Coin finds seem to show that the Belgae of Hampshire dominated the Solent area c. 60–40 BC. If the Isle of Wight (Latin "Vectis") was allied to any mainland group during this period, it is likely to have been the Belgae. By c. 50 BC Commios had apparently taken control of Selsey, Chichester and Silchester. Durotrigan coins became increasingly debased and by 30 BC the Belgae had stopped minting coins. Did Vectis get attached to the Regni or Durotriges? Or was it a neutral trading zone?