

CHRIS RUDD

## Celtic gold hoards lost by slave traders?

**O**VER the last few years two large hoards of Corieltauvian gold staters have been found by metal detectorists in the East Riding of Yorkshire and both been declared treasure by HM Coroner, it has recently been revealed.

One hoard of over 100 gold staters was discovered by Jack Cooper and Alec Thompson whilst metal-detecting near Beverley. The coins in this hoard were struck in the late 1st century BC and are of three main types: South Ferriby, Kite and Domino—all uninscribed. They have been acquired by Hull and East Riding Museum.

The other hoard of more than 50 gold staters was unearthed by metal detectorist David Scott near Driffield. As well as many South Ferriby, Kite and Domino types, this hoard also included several later inscribed coins of Vep CorF and Volisios Dumnovellaunos. Most of the coins have gone to Hull and East Riding Museum. David Scott, a marine mechanical engineer, aged 60, has been metal-detecting since 1976 and has found three other coin hoards. He says: "I found my first Celtic gold stater from the Driffield hoard at 11.00am on a wet morning in March 2002. It was teeming down with rain and I was following the tyre marks of a tractor that had just deep-ploughed the field for potatoes, when up popped the gold. I was using my Redheat Lightning mark 4 detector, which I've had for three years. I told the farmer and then took the coin to Simon Holmes."

This is a great example of a responsible finder who reports his finds promptly and accurately. Simon Holmes, Finds Liaison Officer for North and East Yorkshire, says: "The Driffield staters are an exciting addition to the corpus of Iron Age numismatics both regionally and nationally. They are a source of wonder as they pose many questions, such as why are they here and under what circumstance did they become part of the archaeological record? Responsible metal detecting and the reporting of finds such as these to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, illustrates the true value of metal detecting. Without such commendable behaviour the archaeological record would be a lot poorer and metal detecting a very questionable hobby."

Dr Philip de Jersey, Keeper of the Celtic Coin Index at the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford, comments: "The Driffield hoard is perhaps the most significant hoard of Corieltauvian coins to

have surfaced since the South Ferriby finds of a century ago. The combination of uninscribed and inscribed types it contains will be of enormous value to numismatists in their continuing efforts to work out the correct order of these beautiful, complex coinages."

In May Dr Jonathan Williams kindly allowed me to inspect some of the gold staters from the Beverley and Driffield hoards at the British Museum, while Dr John Sills, author of *Gaulish and Early British Gold Coinage* (Spink 2003), was weighing and photographing them. I had not seen so many Kite and Domino types before and can confirm that they really are "beautiful, complex coinages" as Dr Philip de Jersey calls them.

Both hoards were obviously deposited by very wealthy people, but why were they buried and why so far north of Corieltauvian territory? I asked Craig Barclay, Keeper of Archaeology at Hull and East Riding Museum. He replied: "It is possible that the British hoard was deposited by people fleeing from the advancing Roman army. Or maybe these two hoards were to be used as funds for purchasing slaves from north of the Humber. I dare say we'll know much more when the contents of the hoards have been thoroughly examined."

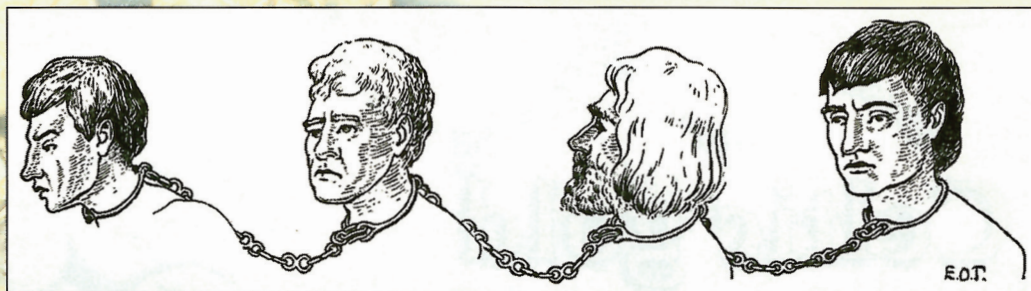
Were these two large hoards of gold staters left behind by Corieltauvian slave-traders? One cannot exclude the possibility. Commenting on slavery in Late Iron Age Britain, Barry Cunliffe, Professor of European Archaeology at the University of Oxford, writes: "While slavery probably existed in British society the consumption of slaves would have been slight. But once Roman entrepreneurs had moved in on the trade routes to Britain their demands would have

*Gold staters from the Beverley hoard (courtesy Simon Holmes).*

*Gold staters from the Driffield hoard (courtesy A. G. Gillis).*



# Spotlight on Celtic



Slaves in an Iron Age gang-chain. A chain like this was found at Llyn Cerrig, Anglesey (illustration from *Pattern and Purpose* by Sir Cyril Fox, 1958).

been such that slaves became a cash crop practically overnight. One has only to look at the effects of the American slave trade on the tribes of West Africa to appreciate the disruptive potential which was unleashed" (*Iron Age Communities in Britain*, 3rd edition, Routledge, 1991, pp. 524-525).

At this stage the hypothesis that the Beverley and Driffield hoards might have represented slave money remains highly speculative. The official summing up is far more prosaic: "Both hoards are very interesting as they are geographically relatively close to each other and are also very similar



Two slave chains can be seen on this silver coin of the Cantiaci, c. 50-30 BC. A slave is thought to have been worth one amphora of Italian wine, as shown above (Chris Rudd List 66, November 2002)..

in content and context. The composition and date ranges for both these hoards reinforce the notion that the East Riding of Yorkshire was a very affluent area of the British Isles in the decades leading up to the Roman invasion in AD 43." (*Portable Antiquities Scheme Annual Report 2001/02-2002/03*, Resource 2003, p. 57).

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr Jonathan Williams, Dr Philip de Jersey, Dr John Sills, David Scott, Simon Holmes, Craig Barclay and Andy Gillis for their help with this article.

## NIGEL MILLS

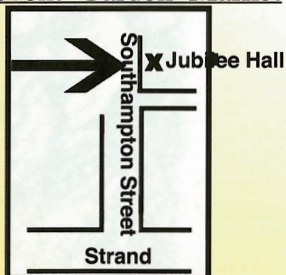
*An established dealer in coins  
and artifacts for over 20 years.*

### I NEED TO BUY THE FOLLOWING:

- Anglo Saxon Sceats and Merovingian Thrymsas
- All English Hammered Coins
- Roman Sesterti and Allectus Bronze
- Celtic & Roman & Saxon & Medieval Artifacts

Every  
Monday  
8.30-14.30

Covent Garden Market



If you would  
like me to visit  
to value your  
collection this  
can be arranged

Postal address only - NO callers

51 Crescent Road, South Woodford, London E18 1JA

**Tel: 020 8504 2569 mobile 07803 200825**

