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COIN MOULDS

found in Herts

IT has recently been revealed that a colossal collection of broken coin-pellet moulds, made of baked clay in the late Iron Age, was discovered nine years ago in Hertfordshire. It is the second largest find of its kind in Europe. Archaeologists and numismatists anticipate that the discovery will contribute significantly to the knowledge of minting processes in pre-Roman Britain.



Over 2,000 pieces of Iron Age coin-pellet moulds were found near Puckeridge, Herts., in 1999. Scale 1:6.

The collection comprises over 2,000 fragments of fired-clay moulds which were evidently used to produce uniform globular metal pellets of three different sizes and weights. The globules were then presumably hammered flat to provide blank coin flans ready for striking with a pair of engraved dies. The moulds were roughly rectangular, about 13cm x 14cm, some with 25 large flattish holes, maybe for making gold stater blanks, others with 50 holes arranged in seven rows of seven with the 50th hole on its own in the middle of one pediment-shaped side (a characteristically Celtic way of counting).

Hundreds of fragments of similar pediment-style moulds have been found at *Camulodunon*, "fort of Camulos", modern Colchester, where king Cunobelin, "hound of Belinus", minted coins. Colchester archaeologist Philip Crummy says: "Analyses of Celtic coins have shown that the moneyers were very skilled at controlling the weight and the metallurgical content of the coins. There has been much argument over how coin-blanks were made. It seems most likely that the metal was not poured into the holes in molten form but was placed there as nuggets

or powder after being weighed. It was then heated either in an oven or with the use of a blow-pipe and a charcoal block" (*City of Victory*, 1997).

Some of the Hertfordshire mould fragments still contain a white slip at the bottom of the holes; the slip was probably placed in the holes to prevent the metal pellets from sticking to the mould when they were being extracted—a procedure which apparently necessitated breaking the mould-tray, which means that each mould-tray could have been used only once. It is hoped that traces of metal may also be found in some of the holes, which will help to determine the alloy mix, the denomination and maybe even the approximate date of the coins which were produced from the pellets. Hundreds of pieces of late iron age pottery, mainly of local manufacture, plus some animal bones and horns, were also found with the mould fragments.

This large assemblage of mould fragments and potsherds was unearthed by a mechanical digger in 1999 during road construction near Puckeridge, a Hertfordshire village whose quaint name means "the stream of the goblin or watersprite" (Eilert Ekwall 1935) or "raised strip or ridge haunted by a goblin" (A. D. Mills 1991). The fragments were dumped by the side of the unmade road and would have been destroyed or buried again the following week had they not been spotted by a 50-year-old coin collector who was walking his dog on Saturday morning. Realising what the fragments were, the collector hurried home and returned with buckets which he filled with mould fragments and pottery. The quantity of material was such that it required four trips to the site and many bucket-loads to recover it all that weekend, before work on the road began again on Monday.

Intrigued by the challenge of trying to reassemble his gigantic jigsaw of broken moulds, the finder washed all 2,000 fragments, sorted them out by hole-sizes, made countless attempts to fit them together (sometimes very successfully),



Mould with 25 holes, each 18mm diameter. Made for gold stater blanks? Scale 1:3.



Pediment-style mould, 15cm high, with 7 times 7 holes, plus 1—a typically Celtic way of counting. Scale 1:3.

conducted his own research into iron age minting methods, carefully conserved all the mould fragments and pottery in 28 plastic trays, digitally scanned the larger pieces, and kept the collection in secure storage for nine years, hoping that he would have more time to work on it and publish it when he retired from business.

Last year, sensing that the task was too much for any single amateur, however enthusiastic, he arranged for his remarkable discovery to be reported to Julian Watters, Finds Liaison Officer of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and earlier this year the collection was delivered to the Celtic Coin Index at the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, to be examined by professional archaeologists and Iron Age numismatists.

Were it not for the presence of mind of this coin collector in recognising the significance of the mould fragments when he saw them abandoned on a roadside one Saturday in 1999, were it not for his prompt action in recovering every single piece he could find on the surface and were it not for his diligence in safely storing them at home for nine years, this unparalleled opportunity to learn more about the minting techniques of the ancient Britons would have been lost forever, entombed under tons of concrete and tarmacadam. Well done, mate, and thank you!

Which ancient British king was responsible for commissioning the issue of coins for which the Puckeridge moulds were specifically made? With a bit of luck, some traces of metal may still be retrieved from some of the fragments—sufficient perhaps for analyses to be conducted, the results of which may encourage some informed guesses to be made by numismatists. However, before any metallurgical research is undertaken, we can make some uninformed guesses of our own.



Puckeridge findspot indicates moulds were made for a king of the Catuvellauni.

Firstly, the provenance of Puckeridge, five miles to the west of the Essex border, suggests that the moulds were probably prepared for the Catuvellauni, “men good in battle”—perhaps by an itinerant mould maker—rather than for the Trinovantes, “the battle-slayers”. Dozens of Catuvellaunian coins have been found by metal detectorists in the Puckeridge area and it has long been suspected that there may have been a Catuvellaunian mint site at the adjacent village of Braughing, less than two miles from where the moulds were found in 1999 and where six Roman roads converged. Secondly, the observation that the Puckeridge moulds probably have three different sizes of holes (two for certain) may be indicative of a well developed

denominational coinage, suggestive perhaps of the second half of the 1st century BC or the first half of the 1st century AD, rather than say the mid 1st century BC. Thirdly, the fact that Puckeridge is 20 miles away from the main Catuvellaunian mint at *Verlamion* (St Albans) may also hint at a sophisticated minting system with several production centres, which again may nudge us towards a later not earlier date for the moulds, though not necessarily. Fourthly, the largest cavities are about 18mm diameter, which may imply that they were designed for gold stater blanks (not all Catuvellaunian rulers struck gold staters), though they might have been made for big bronze blanks.

Given the above notions (they are no more than that) there are conceivably four kings of the Catuvellauni who could have ordered the Puckeridge moulds: Addedomarus, “great in chariots”, who ruled c.45–25 BC; Tasciovanos, “killer of badgers”, who ruled c.25 BC–AD 12; Andoco who ruled c.20–1 BC; and Cunobelin, “hound of Belinus”, who ruled both the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes c.AD 10–40, with his base at *Camulodunon*. My guess is that the most likely candidate may be Tasciovanos, because many of his coins have been found in the Puckeridge-Braughing area and because his power-base was at *Verlamion*, in the same county. On the other hand, it could equally be Addedomarus or Andoco. Cunobelin wouldn’t be my first choice because all his gold staters are branded CAMV or CAMVL for *Camulodunon*, though, of course, some of them could possibly have been minted elsewhere. I have discounted two close associates of Tasciovanos—Dias and Rues, “the red”, probably both subordinate to him—because neither seems to have struck any gold staters or quarter staters, or any big bronze coins (as Tasciovanos alone did).

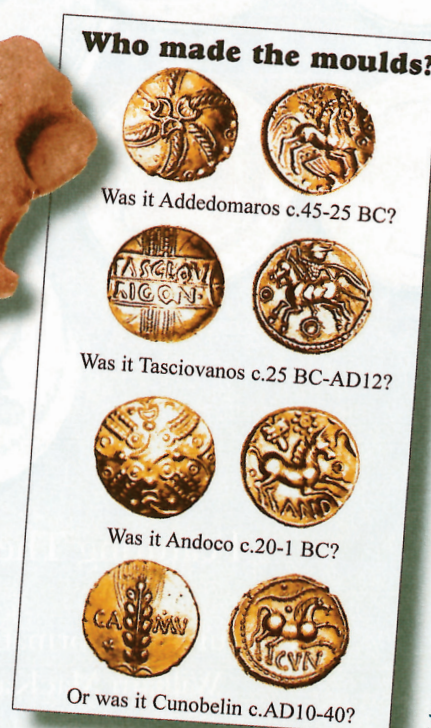
Portions of iron age coin-pellet moulds have been found at 23 places in England and at another 30 places in continental Europe, mostly in France. In the majority of cases these amount to no more than a few pieces per site. The largest single find was made at Old Sleaford in Lincolnshire, where 4,617 fragments of coin-pellet moulds and crucibles were excavated in 1960–63.

The identity of the Puckeridge finder and the location of his findspot will remain undisclosed until the immediate vicinity of the site had been more thoroughly investigated. The ultimate destiny of the Puckeridge collection is uncertain. I hope that it stays intact, like the mint debris from Old Sleaford, and that it may eventually be acquired by the British Museum, so that it remains accessible to future scholars.



A piece of mould found at Torksey, Lincs. Sold to a museum for £100. Scale 1:1.

Moulds with 18mm holes suggest it was a king who struck gold staters.



Picture sources: 1, 2, 3 images by PG, reconstructions by Jane Bottomley. 4, 5, 6 Cirtis Rudd.