



1. Unique gold stater of British freedom fighter Caratacus, struck c.AD 40-41 at Calleva (Silchester, Hampshire) about twenty miles from where it was found. CCI 20.0001. To be sold by Chris Rudd of Norwich, 15 November 2020. Estimate £30,000.

# The Caratacus Stater

ELIZABETH COTTAM and CHRIS RUDD

At 2:00pm, Sunday, 10 November 2019, a metal detectorist found a unique gold stater of Caratacus near Newbury, Berkshire, in the former territory of the Atrebatas. Having been examined by experts who confirmed its authenticity, it was recorded with the Celtic Coin Index (CCI) at the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford, and reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) of the British Museum. It will be sold by auction by Chris Rudd of Norwich on 15 November 2020 and is expected to fetch a record price for a British Celtic coin.

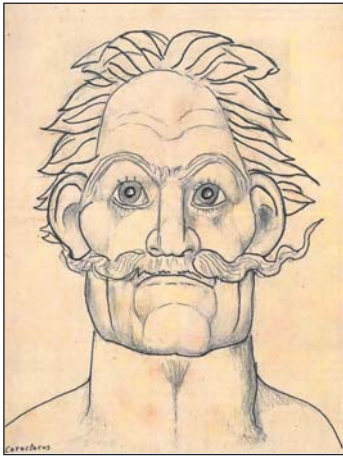
The discovery of this hitherto unknown coin has been widely acclaimed by numismatists, archaeologists and historians. It is considered to be crucially important for five reasons:

- Despite over a century of extensive excavation by archaeologists and more than forty years of intensive metal detecting, it is the first gold coin of this famous freedom fighter ever to be found.
- The patronymic [C]VNO on the obverse, with CARAT on the reverse, confirm that Caratacus was a son of Cunobelinus, king of the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes, a relationship originally recorded by Cassius Dio (*History* 60: 19-22) and later attested in an Old Welsh genealogy. Now, for the first time, the filial bond is hammered home in gold.

- The inscription also dispels any lingering doubt that the CARA named on silver coins, also found south of the Thames (as the stater was), is one and the same person as the historical Caratacus cited by classical authors.

- Like the main silver unit of Caratacus (ABC 1376) which closely mimics that of Epaticcus (ABC 1346), brother of Cunobelinus, this unique gold stater has an almost identical design and style of lettering as the gold stater struck by Epaticcus (ABC 1343). This may suggest that Caratacus was closely associated with his uncle or, at the very least, that he wished to be seen so when he succeeded him at *Calleva*.

- This gold stater is the only gold stater that can unquestionably be attributed to a son of Cunobelinus. Indeed, it is the only gold coin



2. For eight years Caratacus was on the run, the most wanted man in the Roman empire, leading Welsh tribes in a guerrilla war against the forces of Claudius.

of any kind, whether stater or quarter stater, that can safely be assigned – without debate, discussion or supposition – to one of the three sons of Cunobelinus known to history, the other two being Adminius (Suetonius, *Gaius* 44) and Togodumnus (Cassius Dio, *History* 60:20-21).

That's how scarce it is. Or, to put it another way, of the three sons named by classical authors Caratacus alone has, for sure, a gold coin to his name – this previously unpublished gold stater from near Newbury. That's how significant it is.

Elizabeth Cottam, director of Chris Rudd Ltd, says: “The great rarity and numismatic importance of this gold stater cannot be overstated. However, the celebrity value of Caratacus himself adds hugely to the desirability of the coin, to both the private collector and the public museum, and undoubtedly enhances its market value.”

## **Famous for 2,000 years**

People have been talking about Caratacus for 2,000 years. Not surprising when you consider who he was, what he did and how much publicity he's received. Born c.AD10 and possibly educated in Rome, he was a privileged prince in Britain's first famous royal family, a philo-Roman family it would seem. He was a charismatic character, a charmer even in chains, and a courageous commander who became an international celebrity.

After the death of his elder brother Togodumnus

in AD 43, Caratacus was sole heir to the former kingdom of Cunobelinus – the biggest, richest kingdom in Atlantic Europe. As the new uncrowned *Britannorum rex* (as Suetonius called his father), he was now the main focus for Druid-fuelled defiance of the Roman invasion. For as long as he was alive and fighting he could seriously delay and endanger Claudius's ego-driven plan for the rapid and at times consensual rape of *Britannia*. Which is why, for the next eight years, Caratacus was the most wanted man in the Roman empire, hunted relentlessly, from fight to fight, from fort to fort, in the mountains of Wales. Although thousands were involved, it was in effect a personal duel between to high-born men, Caratacus and Claudius.

In view of his inspiring leadership of the Welsh warriors and his daring hit-and-run defence of the Welsh people, we think that Caratacus may be more deserving of the title Prince of Wales than later princes whose Norman ancestors fought against the Welsh, not for them. By the time he'd been betrayed by Cartimandua in AD 51 and shunted off to Rome in shackles for showcasing, shaming and triumphal butchery, his fame had sped ahead of him, spread through all of Gaul and arrived in Rome before he did. Clever Claud turned this advance publicity to his own advantage. He paraded the manacled Caratacus and his family in public, but instead of executing him as expected, as Caesar had with Vercingetorix in 56 BC, he exercised mercy, pardoned him and set him free. By forgiving the famous freedom fighter and by giving him his freedom, Claudius made himself look bigger than his former foe. A win-win PR coup.

Though free to go – or was he though? – Caratacus remained in Rome, dined in Rome, and died in Rome. But his fame lived on and early in the 2nd century AD got a whole new lease of life, thanks to another great PR man, Tacitus, who gave a soul-stirring account of Caratacus's speech as he stood in chains before Claudius and the citizens of Rome. Though posthumously ghosted by Tacitus, either wholly or partly, this speech resounded down the centuries, fanning the flames of Caratacus's fame. Without Tacitus, Caratacus wouldn't be the man he is today.

Remembered in Welsh tradition and Welsh legend, Caratacus was later credited with bringing Christianity to Britain and being the

## ‘An amazing coin’

PROFESSOR CHRIS GOSDEN

father of Pope Linus. He featured in John Fletcher’s play *Bonduca* (1613), in J.C.Bach’s opera *Carattaco* (1767), in Elgar’s cantata *Caractacus* (1898) and, more recently, in various novels and the TV drama *Claudius the God*. Today Caratacus isn’t just well known, but well loved. Fondness for this 2,000 year old war hero is fittingly reflected in his name which means ‘beloved leader’ and may have been pronounced *Cara-tarkus*.

### Widely acclaimed

Since it was unearthed last year the unique Caratacus gold stater has been widely acclaimed for its great importance and great beauty. Here is a selection of scholarly notes and comments we’ve gratefully received from well known numismatists and archaeologists.

### ‘Most exciting’

David R.Sear, author of *Roman Coins and their Values* and the world’s best known authority on ancient numismatics, says: ‘The news regarding the gold stater of Caratacus is amazing and most certainly confirms the attribution of the silver coins bearing the inscriptions CAR and CARA. This must surely rank amongst the most exciting numismatic discoveries of the 21st century, if not of all time. This is one of the wonderful things about ancient numismatics that discoveries of this magnitude can still occur from time to time.’

### ‘Extraordinary’

Dr Philip de Jersey, author of *Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain* and many other works on Celtic coins, says: ‘What an extraordinary coin! Unlike the first ever Volisios Cartivellaunos gold stater, the existence of which had been predicted by Derek Allen in 1944, I don’t think any of us saw this Caratacus stater coming. It seems quite extraordinary after so many decades of metal-detecting – of what is after all a diminishing resource – that something quite so unexpected should turn up, and for a ruler who plays such an important role in British history. The simple fact that it is unique, after all those years of searching and all those thousands of finds, must indicate that it was a rare and unusual coin from the moment it was struck. There’s no other word but extraordinary!’

### ‘Extremely important’

Professor Michael Fulford, the archaeologist who has excavated at Silchester for forty years, says: ‘The find of a gold stater of Caratacus is extremely important in that it adds not only a new dimension to his coinage, otherwise found only in silver, but an insight into the resources he commanded at the time of the Roman invasion of Britain. The findspot near Newbury is interesting. It is only a few miles from *Calleva*, a major late Iron Age trading centre which is at the heart of the distribution of all the known findspots of Caratacus’ coins, and so the centre of the territory he commanded. At the time of the Roman conquest it extended over some 38 hectares (83 acres) and was defended by a massive rampart and ditch, some 2.25km (1.5 miles) in length. Very recently refurbished, if not constructed in its entirety by Caratacus, the ditch averaged about 13.5m in width and 3.5m in depth. It looks increasingly likely that *Calleva* was taken by the Roman army, probably early in AD 44. The skull of a young adult male, whether attacker or defender, found in 2019 near the bottom of the ditch at a point may well be a victim of the Roman assault.’

### ‘Uniquely rich insight’

In their forthcoming ‘Caratacus’, *Association for Roman Archaeology News*, Autumn 2020, Reverend Professor Martin Henig, author of *The Heirs of King Verica*, and Dr Daphne Nash Briggs, author of *Coinage in the Celtic World*, say: ‘Pre-Roman coins like this remarkable gold stater struck in the name of Caratacus (r. c. AD 40–43), found recently near Newbury, lend uniquely rich insight into the history and



3. Caratacus may have been descended from Cassivellaunos, commander of the British coalition against Caesar in 54 BC, seen here with dreadlocks, winged helmet (ABC 2472) and winged sceptre.



## ‘How beautiful’

DR DAPHNE NASH BRIGGS



4. Caratacus was a son of Cunobelinus, the most potent tribal ruler in Atlantic Europe, seen here in a Roman-style helmet. Bronze unit, ABC 2960.

politics of their age. This is because they are our only contemporary source of explicit, indigenous evidence for a crucial group of ancient British dynasts who were actively engaged with Julio-Claudian Rome. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Iron Age coins in Britain and Gaul as primary historical documents. The dies with which they were struck were all, in effect, the personal, authenticating, seals of tribal rulers and kings, scrupulously composed to flatter and project their various claims to legitimacy and their preferred self-images, and were employed to stamp the thousands, even millions, of blanks of currency metal that the richest of their authors dispensed for sundry military and civilian purposes.

Without them, we would know almost nothing reliable about most of these people – not their names, in many cases – nor their sequences in time, nor their family relationships and alliances, nor their exact territorial remit. From close study of their coinage, most recently, especially by John Sills (2017), a credible and increasingly detailed history can be pieced together.’

### ‘Find of a lifetime’

Dr John Sills, author of *Divided Kingdoms: the Iron Age gold coinage of southern England* and many other works on Celtic coins, says: ‘Just when you think you’ve seen everything something completely unexpected turns up out of left field – in this case the find of a lifetime. The

Caratacus stater is the most important single Iron Age coin ever found in this country, the only known gold coin of one of Britain’s greatest resistance leaders. His name is preserved in one of the oldest Welsh genealogies as *Caratauc map Cinbelin map Tuehant*, ‘Caratacus son of Cunobelinus son of Tasciovanos’, now confirmed for the first time on his coinage. He inherited his kingdom, the former territory of the Atrebatas, from Epaticcus in or soon after AD 40, and with his brother Solidu ruling Kent and the aging Cunobelinus still in control of the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes the north Thames dynasty now had no serious rivals. After the death of Cunobelinus in 42 or early 43 another brother, Togodumnus, inherited the main north Thames kingdom and the dynasty appeared secure, but Caratacus may have miscalculated at this point. The only person who stood in the way of the complete domination of southern England by the house of Cunobelinus was Verica, a former ruler of the Atrebatas who had been displaced by Epaticcus and now controlled only the kingdom of the Regini around Chichester. The details are hazy but Caratacus appears to have moved south and forced Verica into exile, whereupon he appealed to Claudius for help and the Romans launched the AD 43



5. Caratacus’s elder brother was Togodumnus who may have issued this excessively rare gold quarter stater, ABC 3008, c.AD 41-43. Only four known. Sold by Chris Rudd in 2014 for £10,200.



6. *The battle for Britain became a duel between Caratacus and Claudius who may once have met as friends in Rome. Caratacus unit ABC 1376 and Claudius tetradrachm BMC 228 (Pergamum).*

invasion. This probably gave the emperor an excuse to do what he had planned anyway, but we can't rule out Caratacus as the man who triggered the Roman occupation of Britain, without which the history of our islands would have been very different.

Until now it has been assumed that Caratacus struck only silver units and minims, in line with his brother Solidu, possibly because Cunobelinus had not given him the authority to mint gold. The new stater not only shows that this is wrong, but suggests that Caratacus struck a small number of gold coins shortly after he came to power. The stater is stylistically identical to those of his predecessor Epaticcus, and there is no doubt that the same engraver produced both coinages in fairly rapid succession. If even a year or two had elapsed his style would have altered, perhaps not by much but enough to be detectable.

So why was this coin struck, and why have no others turned up in the two hundred years or so that Iron Age coins have been actively recorded and published? The second question is easier to answer than the first, for it was probably unwise for anyone to own a gold coin of the leading resistance leader after the Roman invasion. Caratacus carried on fighting – and often winning – for several years after AD 43, and his career only ended when Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, betrayed him to the Roman general Ostorius in AD 51. In the intervening period it would not have been a good idea to be caught by the Romans with a Caratacus stater in your purse. We must also remember that his Atrebatian kingdom had been first taken over by Epaticcus, son of the Catuvellaunian ruler Tasciovanos, a decade or two earlier. Epaticcus appears to have evicted Verica, who claimed descent from Commios,

## 'I am thrilled. This is one of the Celtic coins of the century'

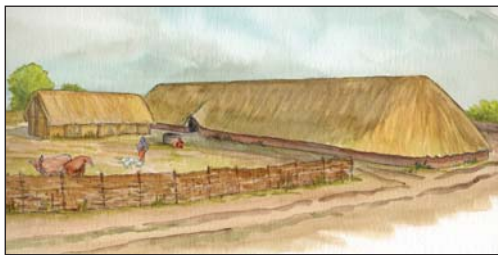
REV. PROFESSOR MARTIN HENIG

from his northern lands around Silchester, and the local population may well have seen their new rulers as usurpers. This cannot be the whole answer, however, and the unique status of the Caratacus stater must mean that very few were minted in the first place. If they were used, for example, as army pay there would be more known, even if his gold coinage was struck in a single episode and quickly discontinued. We're left with the likelihood that it was a high status issue struck at the beginning of his reign to cement his authority as a new ruler from a 'foreign' dynasty. In common with Epaticcus he copies the corn ear of Cunobelinus on one side and the mounted warrior of Verica on the other, trying in the process to bridge the gap between his ancestral home and his new kingdom. Caratacus stateres may well have been given out to the local aristocracy to show them who was now boss, but it looks as if they didn't go into general circulation. Two large hoards, Bentworth and Chawton, both in Hampshire, end with Epaticcus gold and may be related to the Claudian invasion; if stateres of Caratacus passed into circulation they should be present in these finds, but they're not.

So who was Caratacus the man? Without the Roman invasion probably no more than a local ruler, known only from his coins. Following it he eclipsed all other resistance leaders for almost a decade, despite the loss of his kingdom, and after many battles ended up leading the Silures of southern Wales and the



7. *Claudius spent only 16 days in Britain. Yet he was so proud of 'his' conquest he renamed his son Britannicus, seen here with Mars. Thracian sestertius, c.AD 51, BMC 226. Sold by Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG, Auction 59, lot 658, 6.10.2011, CHF 125,000 (£104,000).*



8. After his uncle Epaticcus died Caratacus took control of Calleva and in AD 43 dug or re-dug a defensive ditch around it, 1.5 miles long, up to 4.8m deep. Regal hall at Calleva, 47m long, c.AD 10-45.



9. This skull of a 25-35 year old male ?Briton was found in the ditch around Calleva. Did he die defending Calleva with Caratacus when the forces of Claudius attacked in AD 43-44?

Ordovices further north, both far distant from his homeland. According to Tacitus, before the final pitched battle with Ostorius he went round his troops invoking the names of their ancestors who had fought Julius Caesar a century earlier, in other words Cassivellaunos and his allies. Cassivellaunos is his closest exemplar in many ways. Unpopular beforehand with neighbouring tribes because of his habit of invading them, he united the southern states when Caesar invaded and pursued a policy of guerrilla war, as did Caratacus before his fateful decision to engage Ostorius in a pitched battle. By the time he was captured his fame had spread to Gaul and even Italy, and vast crowds turned out to watch him and his entourage being paraded through Rome. Even in his darkest hour, Tacitus tells us that ‘the others indulged in undignified pleading out of fear, but from

## ‘Unique, and a beauty’

PROFESSOR VINCENT MEGAW

Caratacus there was no downcast look, no appeal for mercy’. On seeing his noble demeanour the emperor freed him and his family, and as far as we know he lived out his days in Rome, having finally gained freedom of a sort, and immortality as a resistance hero.’

## ‘Truly sensational’

Rainer Kretz, Celtic numismatist, expert in North Thames dynastic coinage and the first person to realise that Dubn (ABC 3008) may be Togodumnus, says: ‘Having been struck by a ruler who until now was only known by three silver units – only one of them a substantive issue - and three minims, this represents a truly sensational find. Who, hand on heart, would ever had put his money on a Caratacus stater being found, but against all the odds here it is!’

Following Cunobelinus’s successful takeover of the Trinovantes - most probably during his father’s lifetime - he established himself at *Camulodunon*, later making it the tribal capital at the expense of *Verlamion*. He then set about using the formidable power base inherited from his father Tasciovanos to extend his influence over neighbouring tribal territories most probably through a combination of diplomatic and military means. At some stage it must have



10. Caratacus fought to save Britannia, seen here bare-breasted and defenceless, held down by a virile near-naked Claudius so he can rape or sodomise her. Stone relief, Aphrodisias.



become apparent that *Camulodunon's* location at the very edge of his kingdom was hardly an ideal location from which to control a continuously evolving multi-tribal kingdom. When part way through his reign he successfully gained control over part or all of the Atrebatian territories centred on *Calleva*, he installed Epaticcus, who may have been his brother, step brother or merely a close blood relative, as a co-regent under his control but authorized to strike his own coinage.

Two of Cunobelinus's sons now enter the frame, Dubn, most probably the Togodumnus of history, and the much better known Caratacus. It would appear that Dubn, for whom we now have an exquisitely crafted little quarter stater (ABC 3008), had been groomed to inherit the eastern portion of the kingdom on Cunobelinus's death, whilst his brother Caratacus had thrown in his lot with his uncle, as is suggested by the distribution of his coinage and its typological association with that of Epaticcus. The closeness of their relationship is now further accentuated by Caratacus's stater which like Caratacus's main silver unit (ABC 1376) is closely modelled on that of his uncle. The stater obverse, though ultimately harking back to Cunobelinus's Classic series, mirrors the Epaticcus obverse (ABC 1343) but the legend TASCII F is now replaced by CVNO, which several decades on had more relevance and carried greater authority. If we take a closer look at the Caratacus obverse, it becomes obvious that it was copied from two different Epaticcus obverse dies. The corn ear itself is modelled on one of the earlier obverses (probably Sills obv. 2) but the ornate base of the stalk copies the very distinctive arrangement of the last Epaticcus obverse die (Sills obv. 4), thus hinting at a smooth progression from one series to another. If there had been any doubt as to what part of the Catuvellaunian domain this stater belongs to, the unusual form of the letter A with the pellet replacing the crossbar - a special feature of both Epaticcus's and Caratacus's Atrebatian coinages - would quickly dispel this. Furthermore, the coin's weight at 5.35g suggests that it was struck to the same weight standard as Epaticcus staters and it was found in the same area as other Caratacus issues.

Although the new stater is neatly executed, the depiction of the rider and to some extent the horse are not on a par with the finest of the Epaticcus dies, but that should not detract from



11. *Caratacus as a semi-nude barbarian. In reality he was probably wealthy, well dressed, well educated (in Rome?), wrote Latin, had slaves, drank fine Italian wine from a silver goblet and wore the latest Roman armour.*

the extraordinary coin this is. Its slightly cruder style might be explained by the turbulent times and changing political landscape Caratacus encountered during his short reign. There are close parallels between Caratacus and Dubn in that both were chosen successors of aged rulers at a time when other factions of the Catuvellaunian hierarchy were also vying for power. Both their coinages were short lived but the fact that Caratacus struck several mostly smaller issues may indicate a slightly longer period in control.

**'A very important find,  
and a beautiful coin'**

DR JOHN A. DAVIES

# 'The most important single Iron Age coin ever found in this country'

DR JOHN SILLS, Coin News, July 2020

It seems likely that both the Caratacus stater and its North Thames relation, the Dubn quarter, were struck after the deaths of the previous incumbents around 40 AD and before the Roman conquest in 43 AD.'

## 'Most valuable'

Professor Colin Haselgrove, archaeologist, numismatist, author of *Iron Age coinage in south-east England: the archaeological context* and many other works, says: 'It must be in with a chance of being the most valuable Iron Age coin found to date. Everyone likes a British hero'.

**£30,000**

The unique Caratacus gold stater will be sold by auction by Chris Rudd of Norwich, 15 November 2020, and is expected to fetch £30,000 or more. For more information ask Elizabeth Cottam, Chris Rudd Ltd, PO Box 1500, Norwich NR10 5WS. Tel 01263 735 007.



13. Caratacus 'beloved leader' is the best known, best loved member of Britain's first famous royal family. He was also Britain's first famous freedom fighter and, by his deeds, the first real Prince of Wales. Caratacus was a charismatic character, a charmer even in chains, and a courageous commander who became an international celebrity.

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## 'An amazing coin'

DR ANDREW BROWN



12. Caratacus won lasting fame, thanks to Claudius and Tacitus. In 1862 Caratacus won the Derby, thanks to jockey John Parsons.



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