

An Iron Age miniature boar figurine from Great Sturton, Lincolnshire

Antony Lee, The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire

Iron Age boars have become something of a recurring theme at The Collection in recent years. In 2009 we were delighted to acquire a bronze boar figurine from Rothwell Top (featured in issue 85 of Lincolnshire Past & Present), and earlier this year we welcomed the famous Witham Shield back to the county for the first time in over 150 years in a British Museum Spotlight loan (see issue 91 of Lincolnshire Past & Present).

In July of this year, another bronze boar figurine was acquired by the museum, increasing the number of finds of these charming and fascinating objects known from the county to three. This example, discovered at Great Sturton, is one of the smallest examples ever discovered, at just 37mm long. This miniature boar is freestanding and, just like the Rothwell Top example, shows no sign of ever being attached to another object, such as a helmet. Both were perhaps originally intended as votive deposits, though the Roman author Tacitus mentions the practice of a Germanic tribe, the Aestii, who carried boar figurines around for protection, even in battle, as symbols of a mother goddess (Germania, 45). Perhaps a similar custom existed in Iron Age Britain?

The Great Sturton boar lacks the incised details of tusks and hair seen on the Rothwell Top boar, but shares a number of similarities. Both have a rounded realism that sets them apart from many other boar figurines found nationally, which are often spindly and spiky in appearance, and both display enlarged dorsal bristles and alert, forward-facing ears. All three Lincolnshire boars have been discovered on the western edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds, in relatively close proximity, though too few have been found to firmly suggest that this represents a specific focus for their use.

The Collection would like to thank the Friends of Lincoln Museums and Art Gallery for their generous grant towards this acquisition and Norwich Castle Museum for bringing the boar to our attention.

