The Iron Age in Northern East Anglia: New Work in the Land of the Iceni

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Cover illustration: Enamelled and decorated lipped terret from Snettisham. Photograph by Neil Jinkerson. © Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service

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The Iron Age coins from Snettisham

Adrian Marsden

The site at Ken Hill, Snettisham, Norfolk Historic Environment Record site 1487 (hereafter abbreviated to NHER), has long been recognised as being of considerable significance. There are local tales that children were not allowed to play in Ken Hill woods because of the treasure believed to be buried there. Or perhaps this abandoned religious centre was still held to be the abode of sinister entities?

That the site was a religious centre is incontrovertible; over the years it has yielded many fabulous discoveries. The first torcs and hoards were found in 1948 and led to excavations which ran from that year until 1950. Further finds in 1964, 1968, 1973 and 1990 added considerably to the record. Over a hundred torcs of various types and materials were recovered together with Gallic and Gallo-Belgic staters and quarter staters and a large number of Linear type potins. One of the Gallo-Belgic quarter staters was actually retrieved from within a torc terminal, an enigmatic feature that is useful for dating evidence if nothing else.

Unfortunately, the site has been subjected to intensive illicit metal detecting over the years. Rumours persist of a further hoard of torcs being found in the late 1970s, not to mention the so-called Bowl hoard of several thousand Icenian coins which was illegally removed from the site in 1991 and probably smuggled out of the country. The loss of this information is to be deeply regretted but it seems unlikely that anything apart from second-hand or third-hand reports will ever surface to enhance the record.

Between 2003 and 2009 a metal detector survey accompanied by amateur excavation recovered a significant amount of material which, whilst it has not particularly altered our understanding of the site, has provided an assemblage that is of significant interest. This included Greek, Iron Age and Roman coins as well as quantities of scrap metal, generally gold, silver or electrum. Another excavation carried out at the site in 2004 is described in this volume by Natasha Hutcheson.

The large amount of precious metal fragments, comprising scraps of gold, silver and electrum, is interesting. These are clear evidence for metal working; some are plainly chopped from torcs and similar ornaments whilst others have been wholly or partially melted. It is possible, though unlikely, that they represent evidence for coining;

a putative blank was recovered in the 1948 excavations (Clarke 1954, 58). However, the weight of this disc, 10.71g, does not correlate to any known weight standard for Iron Age stater issues and it is most probable that it is not connected with coining. It is an attractive proposition, given Snettisham's undoubted status in the late Iron Age, that minting was taking place there but the evidence so far recovered does not support such speculation.

This speculation is further undermined by two other objects which bear superficial resemblance to coin blanks (Rainbird Clarke 1954, 59). These discs of gold, on display in Norwich Castle Museum's 'Boudica Gallery', do not, however, convince the viewer as blanks. They are overly large and overly thin; they were probably hammered out from a Gallic stater and a quarter stater respectively (Sills 2003, 376). It is more likely that these coins were being hammered flat to provide gold sheet; certainly they would have been useless as coin blanks. Again, they are evidence for metal working but not coin production.

An object that is almost certainly an Iron Age blank was discovered by metal detectorist Vince Butler at Fransham in 2008 and acquired by Norwich Castle Museum under the terms of the Treasure Act (NCM Accession 2009.228, Figure 1). This weighs 6.06g, a weight very comparable to that of a Norfolk wolf type stater. The fairly pale colour of the gold is also perfectly consistent with this theory, considering the steady debasement of these issues. Two other blanks, one in gold and the other with gold surfaces over a base core were offered at auction in Suffolk in 2009; these lacked a provenance but were probably local finds and most likely also originated at a minting site (Lockdales Auction Catalogue Sunday, 25 January 2009, 31, no. 699). Coin moulds have been found at Saham Toney, Thetford and Needham, all in Central or South Norfolk (Davies 2009, 119). Their absence (thus far) from Snettisham argues further that the place was not a mint site.

The Roman coins from the site, presumably evidence for continued votive activity at Snettisham, need not really detain us here except to comment upon the relatively small numbers that have been unearthed. Indeed, the amount of Roman coinage is so small that, were it not for the small, possible Roman temple enclosure identified by Hutcheson, one would probably not even speculate that religious activity was taking place at Snettisham at this date. Other Roman temple sites, such as Great Walsingham (NHER





FIGURE 1. PALE GOLD DISC, ALMOST CERTAINLY A BLANK FOR A NORFOLK WOLF TYPE STATER, FROM FRANSHAM.

2024) and Hockwold (NHER 5587) have produced vast coin assemblages. That Snettisham tails off so much in the Roman period is interesting. Was this site regarded, after the Boudiccan revolt, as a focus for Icenian discontent and were the inhabitants of Roman Norfolk encouraged to carry out their religious activity at other sites? Certainly, given the finds from Snettisham, the site was a major religious centre in the late Iron Age and it would not perhaps be surprising to find this status left the new Roman masters of the former Icenian kingdom uncomfortable. Great Walsingham is some distance from Snettisham but not enormously far away; the relatively small amount of Iron Age material from that site compared to the enormous quantities of objects connected with Roman votive activity may be taken to imply that Walsingham took over from Snettisham as the principal religious site in this part of Norfolk.

One Roman coin is worthy of comment, a serrate *denarius* of Aulus Postumius Albinus (Crawford 1974, 389, no. 372/1) dating to 81 BC. The early date of this coin suggests it might well have been an Iron Age loss or votive deposit.

This paper is, however, concerned with the Iron Age coins recovered from these investigations and what they can tell us about the site in the late Iron Age. The assemblage comprises four groups of coins, handed over for investigation in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009, together with a few other coins discovered separately, either by excavation or metal detecting. The third group is of the greatest interest, made up as it is of much non-local material, including much plated, irregular coinage. This group is in the process of being acquired by Norwich Castle Museum under the terms of the 1996 Treasure Act although at the time this paper was written was in the keeping of the British Museum and the author has not been able to examine all of the material personally. All coins mentioned in this paper carry numbers given to them at the time of their discovery, either finder's reference numbers

or small find numbers but, in the interests of brevity, these have been omitted in the catalogue below which lists all coins known to the author that have been discovered at the site since 2002. Some may have been missed but it is hoped that this catalogue is relatively complete.

The classification of the first group of these coins as Treasure rested on the premise that they formed part of at least two dispersed hoards, one of Icenian coins and the other of Trinovantian potins (Hill and Leins 2003, 43). It may be that some of these coins do constitute some of the components of dispersed hoards but the argument that all of them were connected is unsustainable. Most almost certainly represent casual loss at the site or accumulations due to votive activity. As will be seen, there are many other reasons against the Iron Age coins from Ken Hill being interpreted as the contents of a hoard; the mixture of denominations militates against this as does the fact that such a relatively high proportion of the coins are plated. The later groups have been rightly recognised as accumulated deposits that relate to votive activity; as such they also fall under the terms of the Treasure Act.

The Icenian material has a wide chronological spread and a mixture of denominations, ranging from Norfolk wolf type staters to late Pattern-horse silver units. Incidentally, this is further evidence that the Snettisham material does not represent a hoard.

A number of the Icenian coins are plated, a higher proportion than would be expected from such an assemblage. More have probably not been recognised as such. This raises interesting questions about the use or intended function of these coins which are discussed with reference to the plated foreign issues below. It seems likely that the preponderance of plated material reflects the particular usage of coins at this site and it is tempting to connect these examples to votive activity. If it was the symbolic act of giving a coin to the gods that was imbued



FIGURE 2. BASE NORFOLK WOLF JB TYPE STATER.

with meaning then it follows that the actual metallurgical makeup of that coin was less important than the act itself.

Some individual Icenian coins, although they do not tell us a great deal about coin use at Snettisham *per se*, are rarities and so should be mentioned in this paper.

Several boar-horse type silver half units were recovered. These are not particularly common finds. At least one is plated. Another, of good silver, has been fused through heat to another coin, perhaps a Bury type silver unit. This is interesting and suggests that some of these coins may have had a different fate intended for them than to have been offered up as votive gifts. They recall the chopped and partially melted fragments of gold and silver from the site and may be best placed within the same context, as the raw material for the working of precious metal.

Some of the subsets of Icenian coins are specific to northwest Norfolk, for example the ECEN symbol units, some die groups of Norfolk wolf staters with a left-facing wolf (also known as JB type staters: Figure 2, and the Bury D silver units (Figure 3). Snettisham, given its obvious importance, might be considered a logical site for the production of at least some of these issues. However, as mentioned above, no convincing evidence for this has so far been discovered. Given their distribution patterns in north-west Norfolk, however, they must have been struck somewhere relatively close to Ken Hill.

As mentioned, the Icenian material has a wide chronological spread; analysis of the groups by John Talbot found a surprising absence of his so-called phase six coinages and a low representation of his normally common phase seven coinages. This is puzzling and suggests a twenty or thirty year lack of coin usage at the site or at least at this part of the site.

The non-Icenian coins constitute a significant proportion of the assemblage. They range from Carthaginian and



FIGURE 3. ICENIAN BURY D TYPE SILVER UNIT.



Figure 4. Bronze Carthaginian issue, Late 3^{rd} century BC to early 2^{nd} century BC.

Greek issues to plated staters and quarter staters, many from the Continent (or perhaps native copying of coins from the Continent), and further imply that the Snettisham coins do not represent a hoard.

There are several coins from the lands surrounding the Mediterranean. A bronze coin of Miletus and another of Massilia attest to the early appearance of coins at Ken Hill. It is uncertain whether these coins, together with an illegible Greek bronze, came to Snettisham as currency intended for trade or as votive gifts.

A hemistater of Carthage represents one of the oldest coins from the site, dating to the late 4th or early 3rd century

BC whilst another Carthaginian coin, a bronze issue, is of comparable date (Figure 4). It shows a left-facing female head on the obverse and a horse standing in front of a palm tree on the reverse.

An identical issue was recently discovered at Heacham (Marsden 2010, 110) in 2009, perhaps suggesting some level of trade between Norfolk and the North African mainland in the later Iron Age. It is possible that the two coins found their way to Norfolk by other routes, through Spain for example, but it is most likely that they were brought over by Carthaginian merchants. Their presence in Norfolk, at a period so long before copper alloy coins had come into use, raises questions as to their significance.



Figure 5. Plated Gallic stater, 2^{nd} century BC.

Indeed, these bronze discs, with appealing designs on both sides, may have been appreciated more as works of art than as currency and this may be why the example found at Snettisham, together with the other bronze coins, was chosen as a gift to the gods. It is probably also significant that this early use of foreign bronze coins did not translate into a native production of copper alloy units as happened in some of the neighbouring territories. The large number of later potins discussed below are also imports.

A large plated Gallic stater of the second century BC (Figure 5) is another coin that has travelled to Snettisham from the Continent. Although not quite as old as the Carthaginian bronze it still belongs, like the many Roman Republican *denarii* found in Norfolk, to a period before coin use had properly begun in Iron Age Britain. Of course, it could have come over the Channel much later (as was probably the case with many Republican *denarii*) or it could have arrived at Snettisham as bullion for metalworking, the discovery that it was a plated imitation leading to its being discarded. Nonetheless, it is most likely that this was one of the first coins to travel to Ken Hill.

The overwhelming number of the Snettisham coins belong to the first century BC, to a period when coin use in the Icenian kingdom was, if not established, at least beginning. The non-Icenian material is a mixture, composed in the main of Gallo-Belgic issues with a smattering of British coins from outside East Anglia and a large number of potins, most of them Trinovantian Thurrock types.

Ten Gallo-Belgic type DC quarter staters were recovered, two in the 2005 batch, seven in the 2007 batch and a further one in 2009, and constitute a strange group. Only three of these are clearly genuine, struck in a yellow gold of high purity (Figure 6). The rest have the appearance of plated copies, with a pale surface and black encrustations suggestive of a base core reacting with elements in the surrounding soil (Figure 7). They compare closely with the other plated coins from the Snettisham assemblage and raise further questions. Gallo-Belgic staters and quarter staters do turn up as stray finds in Norfolk although admittedly the staters in particular are normally found in hoards. Plated copies of these coins are not, however, encountered as a rule. Whilst plated Norfolk wolf type staters do occur as do plated copies of the later Freckenham type staters, the same is not true of the Gallo-Belgics. Why, then, these seven plated quarter staters? Do they represent local products? If they were produced at the site, were they forgeries intended to deceive or are they



Figure 6. Gallic type DC quarter stater, mid-first century BC.



Figure 7. Plated copy of a Gallic type DC quarter stater, mid-first century BC.



Figure 8. Plated copy of an uninscribed Corieltauvian HB type stater.



FIGURE 9. PLATED TRINOVANTIAN DVBNO TYPE STATER.

in some way connected with votive activity, representing some form of 'temple money'? At the moment these are not easy questions to answer.

Interestingly, much of the non-Icenian British material is also plated or appears to be so. This group includes a plated uninscribed Corieltauvian HB stater (Figure 8) and a Trinovantian Dubnovellaunus type stater (Figure 9). Both would have been high-value coins were they genuine.

This high proportion of plated material is strange. Whilst the plated Gallo-Belgic quarter staters mentioned above form a discrete group that may be connected to local production, the scatter of other plated coins from far away is less easy to explain. Were these coins being withdrawn from circulation at Snettisham because the Iceni did not want bad foreign coin circulating in their realm or were they deliberately selected as votive offerings because they were base? Given the high proportion of plated, local Icenian material, the latter explanation may be the correct one. Here we may have an anticipation of later Roman practice where so many coins offered up in a votive context were of irregular origin.

A Corieltauvian scyphate type quarter stater is a rare find (Figure 10), only two being listed in Hobbs' catalogue of the British Museum collection; both of these were from the original hoard found at Clacton in 1898 (Hobbs 1996, 54, nos. 180-1).

Another interesting group is provided by the five Trinovantian G type 'Clacton' quarter staters (Figure 11). This is an unusual group considering only about thirty of these coins are known in the first instance and that these



FIGURE 10. CORIELTAUVIAN SCYPHATE TYPE QUARTER STATER.





FIGURE 11. TRINOVANTIAN G TYPE 'CLACTON' QUARTER STATER.

coins were furthermore produced outside Norfolk. This group probably does in fact represent a dispersed hoard. Unlike the group of Gallo-Belgic quarters, none are plated. What we might term a purse loss is the most likely explanation for the presence of these coins.

The 36 potins form a large and compact group, accounting for approximately 25% of the Iron Age coins recovered. They are almost all Trinovantian Thurrock types with an Apollo head on the obverse and a butting bull on the reverse. The dating of these issues is still a source of debate since no real evidence exists that can securely place them chronologically. It is accepted wisdom that they date to around 100 BC at the latest; however, this could easily be wishful thinking on the part of numismatists who wish to put back the appearance of a native British coinage to as early a date as possible. They are probably best placed in the first few decades of the first century BC.

Thurrock type potins are rare as stray finds in Norfolk; apart from Snettisham the only other location in the county that has yielded them in any numbers is a site in the Waveney valley. Given their proposed placement in the first half of the first century BC they may represent some of the earliest votive activity involving coins at Snettisham. Since, even putting their period of production forward to the first century BC, they would predate any native Icenian issues they may have furnished a useful source of votive offering to those unable or unwilling to give anything more splendid. Were these coins in fact being imported into the area to service a need for low-value gifts to the gods? It is strange that the Iceni did not, like a number of their neighbours, produce copper alloy units when they did strike their own currency. Perhaps the plated Icenian silver units were a more attractive alternative to bronze. Here, however, we enter into the realms of pure supposition when instead we might be wiser to see plated silver coins as simply an attempt to deceive the recipient and make a profit for the producer.



FIGURE 12. LINEAR TYPE KENTISH POTIN. FIRST CENTURY BC.

A large number of thinner potins of cruder appearance, the so-called Linear types, were discovered in the earlier excavations at the site in the late 1940s and many of these are on display in the Castle Museum, Norwich. One appeared in the later excavation and metal detector survey (Figure 12). These are Kentish products and their high tin content gives them a silvery appearance unlike the Thurrock types which are essentially of copper alloy albeit with a significant tin component.

Interestingly, there is an almost total absence of non-Icenian silver units, plated or otherwise, the foreign coins being almost always of gold (or plated copies of the same) or of copper alloy. Set against the large numbers of potins this is another strange anomaly. Were non-Icenian silver coins in some way not acceptable? Like so many of the questions raised by the Snettisham coin assemblage this riddle is not an easy one to solve.

It would come as no surprise that Snettisham, situated as it is on the north-western edge of Icenian territory, would have attracted visitors from beyond the tribal frontiers. The lands of the Corieltauvi lay north-west across the Wash whilst, to the south-west, beyond Peddar's way and the fen edge, the Catuvellauni were hardly distant. Indeed, it is fair to speculate, as has often been the case with religious sites across the ages, that Snettisham was not merely a religious centre but also a site where much trade between mortals took place. Even if the coins recovered at Ken Hill were all votive offerings many of these must have been brought there by visitors from beyond the Icenian realms. Many visitors to Snettisham may well have come a long way, their journeys being analogous to medieval pilgrimages where men and women travelled across Britain to worship at shrines such as Walsingham and Canterbury.

The Iron Age coins from Snettisham represent an interesting assemblage and the work carried out on them so far is still very much a work in progress. Many questions remain to be answered, the answering of which is not made any easier by the diverse and bewildering nature of the material.

Was the use of coins in a votive context a corollary to torc deposition? The finding of the Gallo-Belgic quarter stater in the terminal of one of the torcs is interesting here but does not really furnish any answers. Was the giving of coins connected to the chopping up of torcs and other items of gold and silver and the evidence for metalworking uncovered at the site? Were coins being melted down to make precious metal objects or was the reverse the case and objects were being dismembered to produce the metal needed for coining? Again, the answers are not easily forthcoming.

As argued above, it seems unlikely that coin production was taking place at Snettisham and the partially melted and fire-damaged coins imply that various forms of precious metal were going into the melting pot. The situation seems to have been a complex one with the most likely explanation being that recycling of gold and silver was carried out at the site and that this was probably connected in some way with votive activity. At the very least, however, the coins recovered from Ken Hill make it likely that this site was an important cult centre, a place of pilgrimage for men and women from areas well beyond the borders of the land of the Iceni.

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Catalogue

Greek coins

Hemistater of Carthage, c.310-270BC (2.26g)

Carthaginian bronze, late 4th/early 3rd century BC (2.32g)

Bronze unit of Massilia, 3rd century BC (5.43g)

Bronze unit of Miletus, magistrate Kleisippides, 3rd century BC (4.61g)

Bronze unit, further details illegible (4.82g)

Iron Age coins

Continental issues

Plated Gallic stater, 2nd century BC (5.09g)

3 Gallo-Belgic DC type quarter staters, Van Arsdell 69-1 (1.45g, 1.46g and 1.51g)

7 plated Gallo-Belgic DC type quarter staters (0.85g, 0.88g, 1.21g, 1.10g, 0.99g, 0.94g and 0.81g)

British, non-Icenian, gold and gold plated issues

Plated Corieltauvi HB type stater (3.55g)

Corieltauvi gold scyphate unit (0.59g: fragment)

5 Trinovantes G type gold quarter staters (1.31g, 0.96g, 1.10g, 1.05g and 0.76g:fragment)

Plated Trinovantes Dubnovellaunos stater, Van Arsdell 1650 (3.11g)

British, non-Icenian, silver issues

Corieltauvi, Boar-horse type silver unit (0.98g)

British potin issues

36 Thurrock type potins (4.25g, 3.07g, 3.41g, 3.15g:fragment, 3.57g, 4.84g, 4.22g, 4.02g, 5.48g, 5.55g, 6.17g, 3.58g, 4.10g, 3.14g, 2.53g, 3.44g, 3.65g, 3.47g, 2.05g, 3.90g, 2.80g, 4.26g, 3.79g, 4.01g, 3.38g, 3.51g, 3.93g, 2.81g, 3.92g, 3.28g, 1.31g, 2.72g, 2.88g, 2.78g, 2.80g and 2.18g:fragment)

Flat Linear I potin, Van Arsdell 129 (1.42g)

Icenian staters and quarter staters

2 Iceni JB type staters, Van Arsdell 610-2, (5.50g and 5.49g)

3 Base Iceni J type staters (3.33g, 3.40g and 3.17g)

Iceni, 'Irstead' type quarter stater (1.02g)

Plated Iceni, 'Irstead' type quarter stater (0.54g)

2 Iceni, 'Snettisham' type quarter staters (0.95g and 0.97g)

Icenian silver units and plated copies

2 Iceni silver units, early Boar-horse type (1.20g and 1.51g)

Iceni silver unit, Boar-horse type A, Van Arsdell 655 (1.15g)

5 Iceni silver units, Boar-horse type B, Van Arsdell 657 (1.06g, 1.10g, 0.98g, 1.18g and 0.65g)

Iceni silver unit, Boar-horse type C (0.57g)

Iceni silver unit, probably Boar-horse type (0.45g)

3 Iceni silver half units, Boar-horse type (0.50g, uncertain weight and 0.28g: fragment)

Plated Iceni silver half unit, Boar-horse type (0.38g)

5 Iceni silver units, Bury A types (1.20g, 1.21g, 1.18g, 0.84g and 0.88g)

5 Iceni silver units, Bury B types (1.36g, 1.23g, 1.17g, 1.00g and 0.49g:fragment)

Iceni silver unit, Bury type, further details uncertain (weight uncertain).

2 Iceni silver units, 'Snettisham' type (1.16g and 0.66g)

4 Iceni silver units, Face-horse Large Flan C types (1.28g, 0.92g, 0.92g and 0.60g: fragment)

Iceni silver unit, probably early Face-horse Large Flan type (0.67g)

Plated Iceni silver unit, Face-horse Large Flan C type (0.81g)

- 2 Iceni silver units, Face-horse 'Saham Toney' type (0.69g and 0.70g)
- 5 Iceni silver units, Face-horse type, Van Arsdell 794 (1.24g, 1.07g, 0.96g, 0.82g:fragment and 0.64g: fragment)
- 2 plated Iceni silver units, Face-horse type, Van Arsdell 794 (0.92g and 0.65g)

Iceni, Pattern-horse A type, Van Arsdell 679 (1.15g)

Plated Iceni, Pattern-horse A type (0.70g)

10 Iceni silver units, Pattern-horse ECEN type (0.99g, 1.14g, 1.13g, 1.08g, 1.13g, 0.77g, 0.82g, 1.02g, 0.84g and 1.11g)

- 9 Iceni silver units, Pattern-horse ANTED type (1.09g, 1.20g, 1.12g, 0.86g, 1.23g, 0.78g, 1.06g, 1.09g and 0.87g)
- 8 Iceni silver units, Pattern-horse, uncertain types (0.61g, 1.11g, 0.65g, 0.90g, 1.13g, 0.82g, 0.94g and 1.12g)

Plated Iceni silver unit, uncertain Pattern-horse type (0.60g:fragment)

Iceni silver half-unit, early Pattern-horse type (0.56g)

Iceni silver half-unit, ANTED type (0.37g)

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