THE PROBLEMATICAL FIND OF ANCIENT BRITISH AND GAULISH COINS FROM 'NEAR PORTSMOUTH' IN 1830

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In 1830 a major find of Ancient British and Gaulish coins appears to have been made 'near Portsmouth.' (Some sources record the find-spot as 'at Portsmouth' or plainly 'Portsmouth' but these are casually written simplifications of 'near...'). The find was briefly summarized by Derek Allen as hoard no. 38 in his 'Conspectus of Principal Hoards' and its importance is illustrated by the fact that it was included in this listing of hoards which included gold coins even though there was no record of any such coins in the find. Subsequently, Allen suggested that the coins 'found at Portsmouth, Hampshire' may not have come from a hoard. Although he did not give his arguments for this, it is not difficult to guess them. Some of the Icenian coins in the British Museum and ticketed as from the hoard date well after the Roman Conquest and are unlikely to have occurred in a normal currency hoard in conjunction, *inter alia*, with Armorican coins associated in date rather with the middle of the first century BC. Possibly Allen was envisaging the 'hoard' as rather a series of votive deposits at a Late Iron Age or early Romano-British shrine (as that at Hayling Island) and comparable with the coin series from the religious sites at Farley Heath in Surrey and at Harlow in Essex. In spite, however, of these expressed doubts, the find was more recently included in Commander Mack's listing of hoards containing Iron Age coins found in England, as hoard no. 12.

Allen's summary of the find was based upon some minor published references to it which are listed in his paper, and upon a group of coins preserved in the British Museum and provenanced as 'found at Portsmouth in 1830'. It is, incidentally, only the tickets to these coins which provide any indication of when the find was made. The purpose of this paper is to summarize and assess these and other printed sources to the find and to publish here some additional sources for it.

The principal source cited by Allen and Mack is the group of nine coins in the British Museum said to have been found at Portsmouth in 1830. Sadly, the donor's name is not recorded and they lack a registration number, showing that they were acquired before 1837-40 when registration of coins began. They appear to be the only extant group of coins purporting to come from the hoard and were described by Allen as 'no doubt a representative selection from a larger hoard'. The coins are:

2. Durotriges \(\mathbb{R}\) quarter-stater (Mack 319).

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3. Durotriges 'thin silver' series (Mack 321).
5-7. Baiocasses billon staters (Bib. Nat. 6978 etc.).
8. Iceni AR unit with ED legend (Mack 423), ill. John Evans, The Coins of the Ancient Britons (1864), pl. XV, no. 12, and Beale Poste, The Coins of Cunobeline and of the Ancient Britons (1853), p. 102, no. 3.
9. Iceni AR unit with ECEN legend (Mack 424).

There is a further Durotrigian silver stater in the British Museum ex John Evans's collection and described as 'from Portsmouth'. Allen accepts this as from the same find but the source from where Evans acquired the coin is not, unfortunately, recorded.

A more important source for the find, not cited in Origins, is a brief summary of it given by the collector James Dodsley Cuff to John Yonge Akerman and published by the latter in a footnote to a paper 'The Coinage of the Ancient Britons':

A few years since a parcel amounting to nearly 100 coins in silver and mixed metal were found near Portsmouth. They for the most part resembled those given by Ruding Plate 3 nos. 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52 and Plate 2 nos. 32, 33 and 34. Mr. Cuff who communicates this observes, it is worthy of remark that not one of them has the androcephalous horse.

'Mixed metal' in this context must refer to the very base silver of which Armorican coins were made. Thus no gold coins were present in the find and we may see that the stater of Verica, SCBI Copenhagen I, no. 13, which was 'found near Portsmouth' and which has a pedigree going back to before 1873, should not be associated with the hoard.

Cuff was perhaps the major private collector of his day. There is no difficulty in accepting that he had the opportunity of seeing the find in its complete state as is inferred in the footnote above, and that his summary may be treated as reliable. In fact, however, the footnote cannot be correct as it stands: Akerman must have misunderstood Cuff's original communication, for the coins referred to on plate 2 of Ruding are all of gold while coin no. 32 on that plate does depict on the reverse a human-headed horse. That coins on plate 3 are mentioned before those on plate 2 suggests that in his original communication to Akerman, Cuff had intended merely to indicate that coins of the type of those listed on plate 3 were present in the find, while the coins on plate 2 were possibly introduced for purposes of comparison or to elucidate on point of detail in some way. Accepting this, it may be seen that, according to Cuff, the chief coins present in the find were

1. Coriosolitae billon stater, class II (as Ruding pl. 3, 50).
2. Coriosolitae billon stater, class III (as Ruding pl. 3, 49).
3. Coriosolitae billon stater, class VI (as Ruding pl. 3, 46 and 47).
4. Coriosolitae AR stater, Mack 317 (as Ruding pl. 3, 52).

Two points should be briefly noted. It may not be assumed that the quarter-stater was of the same class as that given in Ruding. Cuff was obliged to restrict his parallels solely to Armorican coins illustrated in that work, and this was the only quarter-stater illustrated there. Strictly one should say only that billon Armorican quarter-staters of

\footnote{Numismatic Journal, i (1846), 221.}
uncertain tribes and of uncertain types were present. But that—according to Cuff—the full staters were of the Coriosolitae, suggests that it is likely that the quarter-stataters were issued by the same tribe. Secondly, it should be noted that the class VI stater of the Coriosolitae does depict the man-headed horse on the reverse. It is not, however, clearly visible upon coins no. 46 and 47 of Ruding’s plate 3 and is, indeed, either frequently heavily schematized so that the head is difficult to recognize as human, or is off the flan of the coin. In spite of this, however, some doubt must remain that coins of class VI of the Coriosolitae were indeed present or that the coins intended were perhaps struck by another tribe.

Cuff and Akerman, by their use of the word ‘parcel’, imply that the find was a hoard. This would appear to be supported firstly by the fact that a few types apparently predominated amongst the coins he lists—unlike the site accumulations at Farley Heath and Hayling Island—and, secondly, as the coins are broadly contemporary and are types known to have been found together in the Le Catillon hoard.

The summary given by Cuff contradicts the evidence of the parcel of coins in the British Museum in two major respects. Firstly, there is no mention of Icenian coins—even if only a small proportion had been included among the coins seen by Cuff it is highly likely that he would have referred to them. Such coins would, as has been mentioned above, be chronologically out of place in the find; they are not the sort of coin one would expect to find in a mixed-coin hoard in central southern England; no examples of Icenian coins have as yet been recorded from Hayling Island and there are very few with convincing provenances from either central southern England or the south-west. One may happily see them as intruders in this group.

Secondly, the four coins of the Baiocasses in the British Museum all show the man-headed horse on the reverse contradicting Cuff’s categorical statement that no coins with this motif were present. Since there is no reason for believing that Cuff saw a portion of the find from which coins of the Baiocasses had been abstracted, it must follow that these coins also are intrusive and that while they may derive from a hoard, it is not that from ‘near Portsmouth’ as known to Cuff. The belief that they are intrusive is to some extent corroborated by the fact that the Icenian coins cannot belong to the hoard.

Of the remaining coins in the British Museum group there are otherwise no a priori grounds for not considering them from the find. Coins of type Mack 321 were found in the Le Catillon hoard as were Durotrigian quarter-stataters of type Mack 319, and these one might well see as genuinely constituting minority elements in the parcel seen and described by Cuff. Several examples of both types are also recorded from Hengistbury Head, Hants, and thus may happily be seen as occurring in another Hampshire find.

A further major source for the discovery occurs in a grangerized copy of the Revd. Rogers Ruding’s Annals of the Coins of Britain and its Dependencies (1819) in the possession of Messrs. Spink & Son. One interleaved sheet carries the central heading in the hand of J. D. Cuff (who owned the book at one time): ‘3 silver coins found near

\[superscript 3\] Inf. from Dr D. Nash.

\[superscript 6\] I am grateful to Patrick Finn for giving permission on behalf of Messrs. Spink & Son to publish this reference here. The medieval annotations to the volume were discussed by C. E. Blunt, ‘Grangerized Copies of Ruding’s Annals’, Spink’s Numismatic Circular, lxxxiv (1976), 226–7.
Portsmouth in 18 with many others [sic] and the three coins illustrated beneath it, drawn by a not very competent artist, are as follows:


2. Durotriges Æ quarter-stater (Mack 319).


At first glance it would seem difficult to accept this drawing as depicting either an Ancient British or a Gaulish coin. The obverse head is reminiscent of those on the Saxon sceatta series and the reverse could also be located within that series accepting the limitations of the drawing. Dr J. P. C. Kent has suggested (in a personal letter to the writer) that the coin might be related to Brooke type 32b in the series. However, if the reverse is turned 90° clockwise it may be seen that the drawing is apparently a poor rendering of a coin illustrated by Hawkins (see above). It was described there as of base silver but neither its owner nor find-spot were named. Evans stated that the coin was from Gaul. While no other exact example appears to be known, a fair parallel to the reverse design, which appears to be a horse with raised hind quarters and with several additional 'leg ornaments', is now known from the excavations of the Iron Age shrine at Hayling Island (information kindly given by Dr D. Nash). Consequently, it seems reasonable tentatively to see the coin as the product of a mint in central southern England, possibly on the south coast.

The coins should not be seen in any way as a sample but perhaps as selected rarities present in it. It should be remembered that Durotrigian quarter-staters are fairly scarce today and that few were known before 1850.

Directly beneath these drawings, three further pairs of drawings of obverses and reverses of Icenian silver coins have been pasted on to the page. They are by a different, more competent artist and bear the initials of the collector William Brice by profession a Bristol solicitor. The three coins are:

1. Iceni, boar/horse type 3 (Mack 409).

2. Iceni, pattern/horse type ECE legend = second ECE series with horse stepping right (Mack 426).

3. Iceni, face/horse type 3 (Mack 413).

These are the only other drawings on the page and their proximity to the first group suggests strongly that the inserter had intended it to be understood that the three Icenian coins had also come from 'near Portsmouth'. While they might be held to support the evidence of the British Museum group of coins that Icenian coins were
present in the find they rather reinforce the evidence that the intrusive element in the find is larger than one might expect.7

Apart from the three coins in the grangerized Ruding above, curiously only two other coins from the find may be traced to the collection of Cuff. These are the two Durotrigian staters described as ‘found at Portsmouth’ which formed part of lot 187 in the sale of his collection at Sotheby etc. 8 June 1854, and which were purchased by Webster. Cuff was by profession an employee of the Bank of England but came from Corsley, near Warminster in Wiltshire, and retained a house there. Two further Durotrigian staters of the same type, Mack 317, appeared in lot 961 of the sale of the collection of C. W. Loscombe (of Pickwick, Corsham, Wiltshire) in 1855, and were described in the catalogue as ‘found at Portsmouth’. A silver coin of uncertain type, ‘found near Portsmouth’ with obv. side face to right, rev. figure of a horse and altogether ‘of very rude work’, appeared in lot 25 in the sale of the collection of the Revd. T. F. Dymock (of Hatch Beauchamp, Somersets.) at Sotheby etc. on 1 June 1858. It cannot be coincidence that the four collectors—Dymock, Cuff, Loscombe, and Brice—who are known to have had coins from the find in their collections lived in the west country and it seems quite likely that the coins from the find were dispersed at somewhere such as Bath or Bristol.

The Durotrigian staters in the collections of Cuff and Loscombe suggest that this coin was present in the find in greater proportions than the other evidence might suggest, but this is not difficult to accept. It may be noted that references are all to coins of silver and that no struck or cast bronze Durotrigian staters are mentioned, suggesting further that one is dealing with a hoard rather than a site accumulation of coins and that it was probably concealed in the earlier period of the development of the Durotrigian coinage.

The Durotrigian staters and quarter-staters, the ‘thin silver’ coin (Mack 321) and the coins of the Coriosolitae all suggest that the Portsmouth find is closely comparable to the Le Catillon hoard, whose date of deposit is placed in the 50s BC. There is no published evidence for the dating of the uninscribed silver coin, the third in Cuff’s group. The CRAB series, however, has been dated to the beginning of the first century AD and ‘not earlier than the latter part of Tincommius’ reign’, thus presenting difficulties of either dating or interpreting the find. However, it is surely significant that Cuff allowed the coin to be published in Hawkins Silver Coins (1841) and later passed it to the British Museum without giving the information that it came either from ‘near Portsmouth’ or from the hoard. This silence suggests that he may subsequently have had reason to believe that the coin was not from the hoard and was possibly not even a stray find from ‘near Portsmouth’. The coin may then, tentatively, be disregarded.

If this is so, then it is yet more disturbing that this further small group of coins has been contaminated by the addition of coins not with the same find-spot. The giving of spurious provenances to objects was a serious problem for mid-nineteenth-century collectors of antiquities: A. W. Franks discussed this at some length in a paper read before the Society of Antiquaries on 16 December 1858.9 It is not difficult to see that an

7 William Brice had also been deceived into purchasing his collection a number of the notorious forgeries by Emery (Blunt, loc. cit. 226).
8 D. F. Allen, ‘The Belgic Dynasties of Britain and their Coins’, Archaeologia, xc (1944), 37 and chart, 44.
unscrupulous dealer might find it more easy to sell common Icenian silver coins (and coins of the Baiocasses) to collectors in the west country by pretending that the coins had a find-spot in the south of England. If this is so, then the question arises, how much of the remainder of the hoard—if such it really is—can be accepted as genuine: might perhaps the entire find be a concocted one with the coins of the Coriosolitae seen by Cuff coming in fact from an early hoard found in the Channel Islands? There is, it may be noted, no contemporary local record of the find. One may not be positive when dealing with negative evidence in this way, but the third coin in Cuff’s small group of three coins may be felt to tip the balance in favour of an English find-spot as the only recorded comparative example comes from Hayling Island, not far from Portsmouth.

In conclusion then, the ‘near Portsmouth’ hoard may be summarized as follows: about 100 coins said to have been found of the following types: Durotriges AR staters (Mack 317), 6 + (BM, Cuff and Loscombe collections); AR quarter-staters (Mack 319), 2 + (BM, and Cuff); Hants thin AR series (Mack 321), 1 (BM); uninscribed AR from southern England (Mack —; Evans —), 1 (Cuff); Coriosolitae billon staters, classes II, III, and perhaps VI, large numbers (reported by Cuff); billon quarter-staters probably of the Coriosolitae, possibly more than one (reported by Cuff); uncertain, AR coin in the Dymock collection.

Coins of the Iceni and of the Baiocasses (BN 6979 etc.) and the inscribed CRAB coin (Mack 371) have at different occasions also been described as from the hoard almost certainly incorrectly.