

1. CELTIC COINS

It seems likely that the indigenous tribes of southeast England began to have contact with Celts from the Continent as early as the beginning of the first millennium B.C. This reached its peak in the 2nd Century B.C. when a large area from Dorset in the southwest to Lincolnshire in the northeast gradually came under the rule of a new wave of Brythonic Celts. By the middle of the first century BC the Celts had established several kingdoms, the Cantiaci (Cantii) in Kent, the Regnenses in Sussex, Atrebates in Surrey, Durotriges in Dorset, Dobunni around the Severn, Catuvellauni in Hertfordshire, Corieltauvi in Lincolnshire, Iceni in Norfolk and the Trinovantes in Suffolk and Essex. Celtic expansion into the rest of England continued until after the Roman conquest.



On the Continent the Celts of Gaul (roughly modern day France) had been introduced to the concepts of coinage through their contacts with the Greek Colonies along the south coast of France. When they began making their own indigenous coins they at first used Greek coins as models but later, when the colonies came under Roman rule, Roman coins also served. These early coins were based on the well-known gold *stater* of Philip II of Macedon (below), father of Alexander the Great, from the mid-4th Century B.C., which had an obverse showing the head of Apollo wearing a laurel wreath and reverse design of a two-horse chariot (*biga*).



Gold stater of Philip II used as a prototype for Celtic gold coins

Celtic imitations rendered this design as disjointed and enlarged, highly stylised, abstracts, the obverse concentrating on the laurel wreath and the reverse on just one of the horses. Coins based on

this design were imported to Britain during the mid- to late second century B.C. Celtic imports reached their peak during the mid-first century B.C., at the time of Caesar's wars with the Gallic tribes (circa 58-50 B.C.), the most common being the uniface Gallo-Belgic gold *stater* of the **Ambiani**, a tribe from the Somme Valley.



Gallo-Belgic gold stater of the Ambiani circa 55 BC

Probably all these imported coins were made of gold. When the first coins were minted in Britain, circa 80 B.C., they were of cast bronze (potin) and based on coins of Massilia (Marseilles) which had a head of Apollo on one side and a butting bull on the other. On the earliest coins in this series the origin of the prototype can be clearly seen but as each batch of coins led to successive copies the design quickly deteriorated and by 40 B.C. consisted of just a few lines and circles. Many of the coins still have the casting sprue that linked all the coins in the moulds. The early coins are known as the "**Thurrock Type**" and are found mostly in Kent in the territory of the **Cantii**.



Cantii "Middle Dump" potin, circa 45-40 BC, showing stylised head of Apollo and crude bull.

Other coins quickly followed and by the time of Caesar's attempted invasions, in 55 B.C. and again the following year, Celtic coins were being minted by all of the south-eastern tribes of Britain in gold, silver and bronze. Shortly after Caesar's departure from Gaul in early 49 B.C., Celtic coins in Britain began to be inscribed with the name of the ruler. The first of these was Commios of the **Atrebates** (and possibly the Regni), circa 50-40 B.C., who was mentioned in Caesar's "Gallic War" (*see Appendix 2*). A later successor, Tincomarus (in old books, before the correct rendition of the name was discovered, he was listed as Tincommius), issued coins circa 10 B.C. to A.D. 8., followed by Verica (circa A.D. 10 -35) and Epaticcus (A.D. 35-42). The Roman prototypes of some of these later coins can be clearly distinguished.



**Silver coin of Epaticcus AD 35-42
with designs based on a Roman *denarius***

About the same time as Tincomarus, there was a ruler of the northern Atrebates called Epillus, who issued inscribed coins from Calleva (modern Silchester). He also issued coins in Kent. His successor in Kent was Dubnovellaunus, king of the Trinovantes, who seems to have annexed Kent and probably reigned circa 25-10 B.C.

The first inscribed coins of the **Trinovantes** were for Addedomaros, circa 45-20 B.C., who was succeeded by Dubnovellaunus.



**Silver coin of Tasciovanus 20 BC - AD 10
with designs based on a Roman *denarius* of Augustus, showing a bull on the reverse.**

About 20 B.C.-A.D. 10 Tasciovanus issued coins for the **Catuvellauni**, some of whose coins bore the legend TASCIO/RICON. RICON means chief of tribe or king. They included designs copied straight from Roman *denarii* of the ruling emperor at that time, Augustus, such as the one illustrated. Contemporary with later coins of Tasciovanus were those of Sego and Andoco (10 B.C.-A.D. 10) who appear to be subordinates.

The two tribes, Trinovantes and Catuvellauni, were united in A.D. 10 by Cunobelin (Shakespeare's Cymbeline) who reigned until just before the Roman occupation which began in A.D. 43. His main base was Camulodunum (Colchester) and his coins bear both his name CVNO and the name of his capital CAMV. The reverse design of Cunobelin's coins show an ear of corn, which is simply a reinterpretation of the head wreath of Apollo from earlier coins. He exercised his power through a number of petty local kings and possibly one of these, a son called Amminius, reigned briefly in Kent A.D. 38-40 before he was forced to flee to the Romans in Gaul. Cunobelin's successor, Caratacus (Caradoc), minted coins almost identical to those of Epaticcus of the Atrebatas



Gold stater of Cunobelin with reverse CAMV(Iodunum)

Further north, the **Corieltauvi** issued signed coins, although the actual names of the rulers are unclear. These include the legends AVN COST, AVNT, IISVP, and VEP CORF. Both coins illustrated are uniface, something characteristic of their coinage.



**(Left) Corieltauvi uniface silver half-unit, circa AD 12-15, inscribed VEP (Corf)
(Right) Corieltauvi uniface silver unit, circa 5-1 BC, inscribed AVN COST**

In Norfolk the inscribed coins of the **Iceni** bear the legends ANTED and ECEN, the latter possibly being the tribal name and may therefore be abbreviated still further to ECE. Slightly later coins are marked AESV and SAENV, all from the first decades A.D. Extremely rare coins of the last king, Boudicca's father, are inscribed in Latin SVBRIPRASTOESICOFECIT (Under King Prasto Esico made me). The name of Boudicca's father is more normally given as King Prasutagus.



Silver coin of the Iceni with legend ECE

Coins of the **Dobunni** also bore names from circa 50 B.C. onwards. These include BODVOC and CORIO, the earliest rulers, then CATTI and COMVX and, finally, ANTED (of the Dobunni) and EISV.



Dobunni silver coin, circa 15 BC - 30 AD, with stylised head on obverse and wheel above a horse on reverse

Alone of the tribes producing coins, the **Durotriges** continued with uninscribed coins such as the "**Badbury Rings**" type silver stater until conquered by the Romans. Their final coins were of extremely base silver (billon) and of a poor standard.



"Badbury Rings" silver stater of the Durotriges

Appendix 1

"For money they (i.e. the Britons) use either bronze or gold coins or iron ingots of fixed weights." (from "De Bello Gallico", V, 2 - Julius Caesar. He does not mention silver coins, but it is doubtful if any silver coins had been produced before his time. In the following decades they are reasonably plentiful).

Appendix 2

Commius in "De Bello Gallico" by Julius Caesar

"When news (of the impending Roman invasion) was brought to the Britons, envoys were sent (to Caesar), offering to submit to Rome. Caesar made them generous promises and sent them home, accompanied by Commius, whom he made king of the Atrebatians after the conquest of that tribe, a man of whose courage, judgement and loyalty he held in great esteem and who was greatly respected by the Britons. He instructed Commius to visit as many tribes as possible and urge them to entrust themselves to the protection of Rome." (De Bello Gallico, IV, 20-38)

"The defeated enemy (i.e. the Britons).....sent an embassy to ask for peace. With them came Commius the Atrebatian, whom Caesar had sent on ahead to Britain" (De Bello Gallico, IV, 20-38)

"Command of this (Gallic) relieving army was entrusted to Commius the Atrebatian. In former years this Commius had rendered Caesar loyal and useful service in Britain and Caesar had ordered that his tribe be exempt from tax and have its independence restored. He had also made Commius chief over the Morini, (a tribe in Gaul)" (De Bello Gallico, VII, 68-90).

"Deputations had come warning him (Caesar) that the Bellovaci were preparing for warunder their own leader Correus and Commius the Atrebatian.

.....A few days before Commius had left to get help from the German tribes.

.....It raised foolish hope in the Bellovaci especially when Commius returned from his mission to the German tribes with five hundred horsemen.

..... When they (the Bellovaci) heard that Correus was dead they insisted that envoys be sent to Caesar. Commius fled (for safety) to the German tribes who had supplied reinforcements.

..... Only Commius kept away for the year before Labienus had found out that Commius was intriguing and plotting against Caesar.

(Labienus decided to have Commius killed), "At the prearranged signal a centurion made a sword thrust but only inflicted a severe head wound. Both sides immediately drew their weapons, both with a desire to escape rather than fight. The Romans thought that Commius was mortally wounded. After this experience Commius was said to have resolved never to have come again into the presence of a Roman." (De Bello Gallico, VIII, 1-23)

In the final chapter of Caesar's narrative he describes how Commius, leading a band of horseman tried to revenge himself on his attacker, after which Commius surrendered to Mark Antony (Caesar's lieutenant) and was spared. (De Bello Gallico, VIII, 24-49).

Appendix 3

The coinage system

The coins themselves fall into distinct categories with reasonably consistent weight standards.

Gold - The Gallo-Belgic staters imported to Britain between 80 B.C. and 55 B.C. weighed circa 6.0-6.5 gm. The British staters that followed weighed between 5.0 gm and 5.8 gm, with a peak among observed specimens of circa 5.5 gm, a fairly consistent standard throughout. Accompanying these were what are obviously intended to be quarter staters, weighing between 1.1 and 1.4 gm (peak circa 1.35 gm). Earlier Gallic imports were heavier, between 1.4 and 1.6 gm. All the lightest examples noted were made by the Icenii circa 40 - 1 B.C., weighing between 0.8 and 1.0 gm, who were also responsible for most of the lightest staters observed, 4.2 to 4.9 gm, some of base gold.

Silver: the standard unit was circa 1.2 gm, with a range of weights mostly between 0.8 and 1.3 gm and a peak among observed specimens of 1.1 gm. In addition to these were very small quarter units weighing between 0.2 and 0.4 gm. Because of the difficulties in ancient times of weighing small amounts accurately, it is not easy to decide the intention of the small number of silver coins weighing between 0.5 and 0.7 gm. Were such coins intended to be half of the standard unit or just oddments that fell either below the normal range of the standard unit or heavy specimens of the quarter unit?

An exception to the standard unit were coins of the Durotriges which began circa 4.5 to 5 gm, declining to circa 3.25-3.7 gm and then to circa 1 gm. The lighter coins were all heavily debased.

Bronze: these coins are much scarcer than any of the denominations in precious metals, with a wide discrepancy in weight, which prevents the identification of a single standard. The early potin coins of the Cantii were the heaviest, and if there was a standard in the later period it was probably circa 1.4 to 1.7 gm.

There is no obvious mark on any of the coins to indicate what value was placed on any of them in terms of the others. However, during this period gold seems to have been valued at about twelve times the equivalent weight in silver, which would make the Celtic gold stater worth approximately 50 silver units.