

## **Lost coin rediscovered 261 years after it was found**

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An ancient British gold war-coin, published by a Celtic priest and then lost for two centuries, was recently found in a London saleroom.

Early in 1749 a hoard of more than seventeen iron age gold coins, many of them imported from northern Gaul and all minted over two-thousand years ago, was unearthed at Carn Brea hillfort near Redruth, Cornwall, in the land of the ancient British Dumnonii who gave their name to modern Devon. The hoard was recorded by the Reverend William Borlase (1695-1772), a Cornish vicar and fervent Celticist who was convinced that Cornwall, with its supposedly uncorrupted Celtic language and megalithic monuments, could reveal the unwritten history of Britain's first inhabitants.



*Cup and Saucer Rock at Carn Brea, Cornwall.  
The rough stone wall of Carn Brea's neolithic enclosure  
took an estimated 30,000 hours to build.*



*Westerham North gold stater from  
Carn Brea hoard, 1749.*



*Same coin illustrated by Borlase, 1759.*

Five of the Carn Brea coins went to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Others disappeared from public view, including the Westerham Type gold stater shown here. Two centuries later, probably in the early 1970s, it turned up in the collection of war hero Henry Mossop (1919-88), 'The Flying Farmer' who was shot down over the Rhine on 21 June 1944, imprisoned for a year in Stalag Luft III and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his bravery.

Mossop never knew that this Westerham stater had come from the famous Carn Brea hoard and seems to have sold it privately to a US buyer, because it slid quietly without any fanfare into the 1982 Christmas catalogue of PMV, no.523 – its first known trade appearance. Presumably it remained in America until it reappeared, still unrecognised, in CNG Mailbid Sale 49, 17 March 1999, lot 2157. I've no idea who bought it, but at some point in the past decade it must have crossed the Atlantic again (travelling incognito) and returned to Britain, because on 17 March this year it was auctioned in London by DNW, lot 66, with its long and illustrious pedigree still not publicly acknowledged.



*Henry Mossop, DFC, 1969. He was a pioneer metal detectorist who in the early 1970s found a hoard of over 9,000 Roman coins at Kirmington, Lincs. He donated them to Scunthorpe Museum.*

But somebody with an eagle eye and photographic memory eventually spotted it. I'd like to be able to brag that it was me, but it wasn't. The credit for recognising that Mossop's Westerham gold stater came from the Carn Brea hoard must go to Dr John Sills, author of *Gaulish and early British gold coinage* (Spink 2003), who realised that it was the same coin as one illustrated by William Borlase in *Antiquities of Cornwall* (1759 ed.). John Sills was also the first person to identify four different types of Westerham staters and to suggest that Westerham North staters were probably issued under the authority of Cassivellaunos as emergency 'war money' to fund the British coalition against Caesar in 54 BC (The earliest British coins: dating the undated, *Chris Rudd List* 27, 1997, p.2-5).

Mossop's historic Carn Brea coin is a Westerham North type stater which was almost certainly struck by the Catuvellauni tribe who were based in Hertfordshire and whose name means 'men who excel in battle'. On 6 September it will be offered for sale yet again, this time by Chris Rudd and with its 261-year-old pedigree restored.

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