

# The Fakenham Hoard

CHRIS RUDD reports on a uniquely important Iceni gold hoard from the sacred land of Seahenge

**O**VER the weekend of March 6–7, 2015, an important hoard of 20 Iron Age gold staters was unearthed near Fakenham, north Norfolk, in the former territory of the Iceni, only 15 or so miles from where the sacred monument of Seahenge and the famous Snettisham gold torcs were found. Some 11 of the gold staters were minted locally in Norfolk, perhaps not far from where they were deposited, and nine had been imported from northern France, possibly by Gaulish refugees or by British mercenaries returning home after fighting Caesar.

The Fakenham Hoard was found by four metal detectorists on an organised dig. The first gold stater was discovered by Luke Davies who has been detecting for eight years. He says: “I had always struggled to find anything related to our Celtic ancestors and quite often dreamed of finding a Celtic gold stater. My first steps on the field instantly drew me to the very furthest corner and I paced towards it leaving everybody a long distance back. As I got to the corner I got a perfect clear signal on my Teknetics T2. I’ve used my T2 for many years and know when it’s going to be something nice. So I was feeling excited. The moment I dug my first shovelful out I saw a gold

colour. Shaking, I peeked a bit more and could see it was a gold stater. I started jumping and screaming and almost passed out”. (quoted from the *The Searcher*, June 2015).

The Fakenham Hoard was immediately reported to Norfolk archaeologist Dr Andrew Rogerson and is currently at the British Museum. Dr John Davies, Chief Curator for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, tells me that Norwich Castle Museum is keen to acquire the hoard.

The Fakenham hoard, possibly buried for safekeeping shortly after the mid-1st century BC, is important for three reasons:

1. It’s the first well attested hoard of Norfolk Wolf Right gold staters (*Ancient British Coins* [ABC] number 1393)—the earliest, heaviest, most gorgeously golden kind; the very first gold coinage minted by the Iceni, perhaps c. 55–50 BC. All other previous hoards of Norfolk Wolf staters, at least those of which we have solid knowledge, have been of left-facing wolves (ABC 1396); such staters are much commoner and often contain more copper than gold.
2. The Fakenham Hoard is the only securely provenanced, properly recorded Wolf hoard that includes Gallic War Uniface gold staters (ABC 16). Or you could say it’s the only well documented hoard of Gallic War Uniface staters that also contains Norfolk Wolf staters. Either way, it’s a highly significant “mixed” hoard, an important cocktail of local gold and imported gold. Important because the imported gold can be closely dated and because the imported gold had some impact on the design of the local gold.
3. The fact that almost half the coins in the Fakenham Hoard came from Belgic Gaul and the fact that elements of their Belgic imagery were copied extensively by local Norfolk moneyers support the growing belief that Iceni culture was influenced by Germano-Belgic culture. For example, in 2001 I noted that the wolven imagery of Norfolk Wolf gold staters was probably related to Norse mythology. More recently, Dr Daphne Nash Briggs, author of *Coinage in the Celtic World* (Seaby 1987), has published persuasive evidence of the Iceni’s linguistic links with ancient Germanic names—links which were formed over 400 years before Angles and Saxons settled in East Anglia. Dr John Davies and Dr Amanda Chadburn have also observed cultural similarities between the Iceni, the Germani and the continental Belgae (see *The Iron Age in Northern East Anglia: New Work in the Land of the Iceni*, ed. J. A. Davies, BAR 2011).



The Fakenham Hoard comprises 11 Norfolk Wolf (Right Type) gold staters, c. 55–50 BC, ABC 1393, and nine Gallic War Uniface gold staters, c. 58–51 BC, ABC 16. Like several other gold hoards, the Fakenham Hoard was buried in northwest Norfolk, which seems to have been a religious region for the Iceni since the Bronze Age. (Image by Steve Llewellyn, *The Searcher*, June 2015.)



As their name implies, Gallic War Uniface staters were minted to fund resistance to Caesar during his Gallic Wars, c. 58–51 BC. In Iron Age numismatics that's close dating. Struck around the River Somme by the Ambiani ("people around [the river]"), millions were made and thousands flooded into south-eastern Britain; hundreds of these imports have survived. Some were brought by rich refugees, others by British mercenaries returning home, others by cross-channel traders. Thanks mainly to metal detectorists, six hoards (Fakenham included) of Gallic War Uniface staters have been found in Norfolk, heartland of the Iceni. Five of the six hoards come from north Norfolk which seems to have been the political and religious power-base of the Iceni in the 1st century BC and, indeed, since the Bronze Age (Seahenge was only six miles from a sacred site at Snettisham). Norfolk's largest Gallic War Uniface hoard, more than 225 coins, plus part of a gold torc, came from Weybourne.

At least seven or eight hoards (Fakenham included) of Norfolk Wolf staters have been found, mostly by metal detectorists and all probably in Norfolk. Hard facts are hard to come by because

several of these hoards were illicitly recovered and inadequately recorded. For example, some say 57 Wolf staters (ABC 1396) came from the infamous "Bowl Hoard" of over 6,000 mostly silver coins nighthawked from Snettisham in 1991, together with a metal bowl and three ingots; others say these 57 staters were found nearby. By contrast, 44 Wolf staters, found in south Norfolk in 2013, were all reported, all accurately recorded.

Coins indicate that the Iceni had iconic and mythical links with Teutonic Europe. Odin can be seen on three silver coins (ABC 1531–37). The Iceni wolf must surely be related to the Scandinavian wolf, Fenrir ("fen dweller"). Neck torcs with coins occur not only on staters of the Iceni and Belgae (originally from Germany), but also on German staters. Even the name Iceni (oak folk?), could be of Germanic, not Celtic, origin, as could the names of several of their rulers, such as Ecen(os?) ("lord of the oaks").

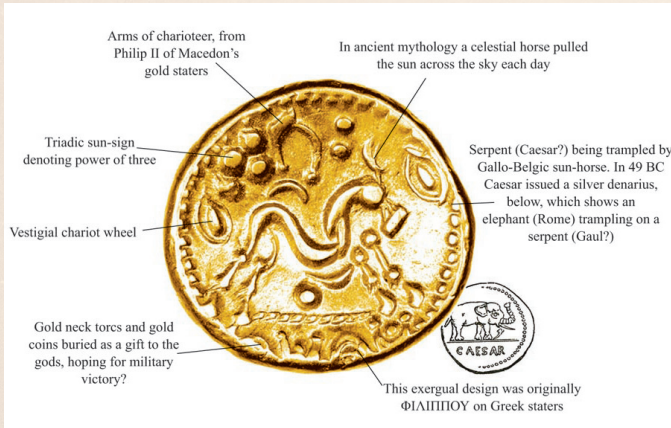
The sea didn't isolate the Iceni—it kept them connected, as we can see from the nine Belgic staters in the Fakenham Hoard. That's why the hoard is so important—it belongs in a museum.



"I started jumping and screaming and almost passed out" says metdet Luke Davies who found the first stater from the Fakenham Hoard. (Image by Steve Llewellyn, The Searcher, June 2015.)



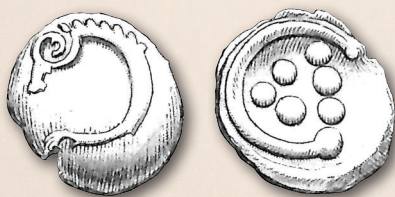
Seahenge, an upturned oak stump in a circle of oak timbers, dated 2049 BC, with a gold stater of Ecen[os], c. AD 10–43, ABC 1651. His name, which is not unlike the name of the tribe, Iceni, may mean "lord of the oaks". (Image © Wendy George, from front cover of Francis Pryor's *Seahenge: New Discoveries in Prehistoric Britain*, Harper Collins 2001.)



Anatomy of a Gallic War Uniface gold stater, ABC 16, Sills class 3, struck by the Ambiani c. 56–55 BC, during Caesar's first invasion of Britain. The Ambiani were a Belgic tribe who may originally have come from Germany.



Anatomy of a Norfolk Wolf (Left Type) gold stater, ABC 1396, struck by the Iceni c. 50–40 BC, found by metdet Scott Larcombe, near Lowestoft, Suffolk, 2011. The neck torcs on Norfolk Wolf staters were copied directly from Gallic War Uniface staters.



German gold stater, 1st century BC, LT 9421, with serpent, gold neck torc and gold coins. Two were found in Essex in a hoard of Gallic War Uniface staters.



Iceni silver unit, ABC 1495, with Belgic-style snake before head, tiny snakes forming horse's mane and Belgic swastika in front of horse.