

The Chawton hoard

and Hampshire's "golden triangle"



Buried 15 miles northeast of Winchester c. AD 40–42, the Chawton hoard of 105 gold staters was probably a war-hoard, collected by Verica to fund resistance to the Catuvellaunian invasion of his kingdom. (© The British Museum.)



Left, Chawton hoard gold stater of Epaticcus of Calleva, son of Tasciovanos, copied from a stater of his brother, Cunobelinus of Camulodunon. Both ex Chris Rudd.



Until 1994 the Belgae of Hampshire were numismatically "dead". Today 84 coin types in *Ancient British Coins* are attributed to this long-neglected tribe.

THIS is the untold story, revealed here for the first time, of six Ancient British gold hoards from south of the Thames and how five of them—all found within 15 miles of each other—point to the pivotal importance of *Venta* (iron age Winchester) and the Hampshire Belgae in the rise and fall—and rise again—of the southern British kingdom of Commios and his heirs.

The Chawton hoard

Of the six hoards to be discussed, the most recently discovered was the Chawton hoard (COIN NEWS, "News and Views", March 2016). It was found in 2011/12 by metal detectorists near Chawton, Hampshire. Some 98 of the 105 gold staters in the Chawton Hoard were of King Verica whose name means "the high one" (as in "His Highness"). Verica was the third so-called "son of Commios" and undoubtedly the most successful of the three. During his reign of maybe three decades, circa AD 10–40, he ruled over the three main southern tribes of Britain—the Regini, Belgae and Atrebates—and for a while had some influence with the Cantiaci of Kent. Second only to Cunobelinus of *Camulodunon* (Colchester), king of the Catuvellauni, Trinovantes and Cantiaci, Verica was one of the most powerful kings in pre-Roman Britain and, like his arch-rival Cunobelinus, was probably well known in Rome. Indeed, Verica may even have been educated in Rome. Certainly much of Verica's extensive coinage—no fewer than 50 different coin types—indicates an intense interest in Roman imagery and imported Roman luxury goods, such as wine and vinous vessels.

The Chawton hoard was originally reported in COIN NEWS (December 2013) as the "Vine Leaf Hoard"—a curious name, in my view, considering its varied composition and the fact that only half the coins in the hoard are of the vine leaf type. The Chawton provenance was also never mentioned, despite being in the public domain (*The British Numismatic Journal* 83, 2013, pp. 266–7). A sad omission because the Chawton hoard, together with two other hoards deposited at the end of Verica's reign, came from the "golden triangle". The "golden triangle"—its three points are Winchester, Alton, East Meon—is a hoard-rich part of central Hampshire which has produced crucial evidence of the importance of *Venta* (iron age Winchester) and the Hampshire Belgae in the rise and fall of the Commian dynasty, especially the downfall of Verica. Before discussing Commios and his heirs I'll briefly summarise five other iron age gold hoards found south of the Thames. All five have previously been misreported, misattributed or, like the Chawton hoard, misleadingly misnamed. My key reference has been Dr Philip de Jersey's monumental *Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain* (CHIAB), Spink 2014, reviewed in COIN NEWS, August 2015.

The Bentworth hoard

The Bentworth hoard (CHIAB pp. 156–160) was the first of the five recorded gold hoards found in the "golden triangle" and the only one not discovered with a metal detector. It's a classic case of mistaken identity and misinformation. In 1890 Sir John Evans, the father of Ancient British numismatics, wrote:

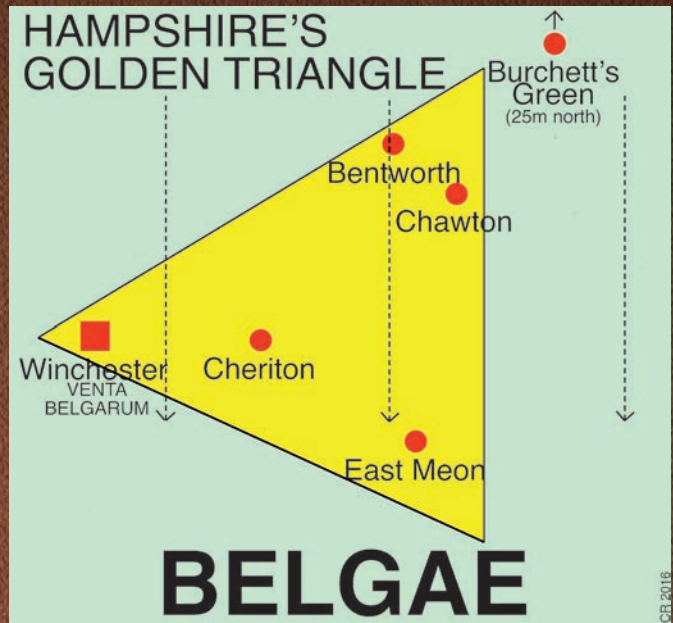
"There was found some years ago near Alresford, in Hampshire, a small hoard of the large coins of Verica, most of which came into my possession". (The coins of the Ancient Britons: Supplement, p. 509). Not surprisingly the hoard became known for the next hundred years as the "Alresford" hoard—a misnomer repeatedly published and perpetuated by numinous numismatists such as Derek Allen in 1944 and 1960; Richard Mack in 1953, 1964 and 1975; Robert Van Arsdell in 1989; and Richard Hobbs of the British Museum in 1996. Thanks to Philip de Jersey's recent relentless research, the reality of the so-called "Alresford" hoard looks somewhat different today. Evans' supposedly "small hoard"—now estimated to comprise around 100 gold staters—was actually unearthed c. 1870 "by a labourer whilst digging in a field" at Ham Farm, Bentworth, which is 12 miles from Alresford. Interestingly, the Bentworth hoard was found only a few miles from the Chawton hoard which contains about the same proportion of Verica staters (93 per cent) to Epaticcus staters (6 per cent).

The Cheriton hoard

Year after year from 1982 a dogged metal detectorist or "metdet" kept returning to his "hot site" at Cheriton, Hampshire, and kept finding gold coins (*CHIAB*, pp. 161–163). By 1996 he'd pulled about 82 gold coins from the earth, including 64 Chute/Cheriton and Cheriton gold staters (ABC 752–58) and 16 Hampshire Thunderbolt gold quarter staters (ABC 767). Most went to museums, others didn't. Van Arsdell (1989) says the staters are Durotrigan and the quarters are Cantian. However, 99 of the 103 provenanced Cheriton-type staters have been found in the Solent hinterland, home of the Hampshire Belgae, and not one, not a single one, has been recorded from Dorset, heartland of the Durotriges. Moreover, 33 of the 41 Hampshire Thunderbolt quarters with a recorded findspot also hail from the Solent hinterland and only one comes from Kent, home of the Cantiaci. In Iron Age numismatics it doesn't pay to be dogmatic. I believe, and it is only my belief, that the Cheriton hoard, found seven miles east of Winchester (well within Hampshire's "golden triangle") is a key piece of evidence that the Belgae of Hampshire were minting their own gold coins in the mid 1st century BC, until King Commios took control and stopped them.

The Winchester hoard

In 2000 "metdet" Kevan Halls, a retired florist, made an amazing discovery—arguably the most remarkable discovery ever made in Hampshire's "golden triangle". On a hill east of Winchester he found two matching sets of gold jewellery—gold jewellery so exotic and so expensive that it must surely have been specially crafted for a tribal king and his wife. But who? I'll give you five clues: (1) The jewellery can be dated c. 75–25 BC; (2) the style is Celtic; (3) but the way the neck and brooch chains are made is Roman; (4) and the purity of the gold is Roman; (5) yet Celtic-style jewellery like this would not have been worn by a Roman, certainly not in Rome. Richard Hobbs of the British Museum thinks that the two sets of jewellery may have been "acquired from a Roman patron, maybe presented as special gifts" (*Treasure: Finding our past*, BMP, 2003, p. 63). But who, when and where? My hunch is that Julius Caesar gave the jewellery to Commios in Gaul, c. 57–56 BC when he made him king of the Atrebatas. Commios was "a man of whose courage, judgement, and loyalty he had a high opinion", as Caesar himself says (*Bello Gallico*, 4.21). I think that the jewellery came to Britain with Commios and his wife c. 51 BC and later went to Winchester with him or one of his heirs. Dr Sam Moorhead of the British Museum agrees with me, saying "I think the jewellery was given to Commios or to one of his sons". Kevan Halls and the landowner received a Treasure award of £350,000. I think Caesar valued Commios more highly than that. He not only made him king of the Atrebatas in Gaul. He also gave him control of the Morini and sought his aid in raiding Britain—not once, but twice. I suspect that Commios didn't emigrate to Britain as a penniless asylum seeker, but as an "invited invader" with several warships of well-armed warriors, the



The Chawton hoard is one of five major iron age gold hoards found east of Venta, capital of the Belgae. Arrows suggest direction of Catuvellaunian invasion.



Most Chawton hoard coins were struck by Verica c. AD 10–40, a close contemporary of emperor Tiberius, AD 14–37, whose likeness can be seen on this Verica silver minim, ABC 1310.



Verica probably imported Italian wine, as hinted by this vine-leaf gold stater, ABC 1193, ex Chris Rudd, ex Bentworth hoard, c. 1870.

Chute/Cheriton gold stater, ABC 752, struck c. 55–45 BC by a ruler of the Belgae, not Durotriges. Ex Chris Rudd, ex Cheriton hoard, c. 1982–96.



First recorded Cheriton Smiler gold stater, ABC 755, ex Sir John Evans, ex Cheriton (hoard site?), Hants., 1870. Evans saw a bristly boar. I see a toothy grin or hairy head. A modern forger saw a chance to make money (see "The Farting Camel", ABC p. 201). (Image courtesy of Paul Sellier/JB.)



Literally COM.F is Latin for "son of Commios" or, more loosely, "of the Commios dynasty". Verica Warrior Rex gold stater, ABC 1190, ex Burchett's Green hoard, 1991.



The coin that renamed King Tincomarus ("great in peace"), previously and incorrectly known as Tincommios. Alton type gold stater, c. 25 BC–AD 10, ABC 1052, ex East Meon hoard, 1996. (© The British Museum.)

blessing of Caesar and Mark Antony, and a boatload of Roman gold to help him barter and battle his way into southern Britain. Indeed Commios could even have been Rome's first client king in Britain.

The Burchett's Green hoard

This undeclared hoard was dug up just south of the River Thames which separated the Atrebates from their bellicose foe, the Catuvellauni ("men good in battle"). It is still inaccurately known as the "Reading" hoard (CHIAB, pp. 58–60); Maidenhead is much nearer to where it was found. Before that it was called the "Hatfield" hoard—a mischievously misleading misnomer because Hatfield, in the heart of Hertfordshire, is 30 miles from the hoard site. A coroner was told that seven Verica gold staters (perhaps from this hoard?) could have been found abroad, having been lost by Verica on his way to Rome (COIN NEWS, December 1994, p. 19). Oh really? This is an important Verican war-hoard of about 92 gold staters, directly related in my opinion to the Catuvellaunian conquest of Verica's kingdom. It deserves a precise provenance. Last year I was reliably informed that the hoard was found by "metdet" Phil W. in 1991 in Temple Wood, Burchett's Green, Berkshire. Phil died in France some years ago. So I don't think he'll mind me sharing his 25-year-old secret with the readers of COIN NEWS.

The East Meon hoard

On March 17, 1996, "metdets" Pete Beasley and Pete Murphy found the so-called "Alton I" and "Alton II" hoards: 256 gold staters in all—217 of them issued by Tincomarus, son of Commios plus part of a gold bracelet and a Hellenistic style gold finger ring, all acquired by the British Museum (CHIAB, pp. 151–153). The best known thing about this misnamed hoard is that it helped Dr John Orna-Ornstein of the British Museum to re-name "Tincommius", as he'd been wrongly called for a century, as Tincomarus which means "great in peace" (COIN NEWS, July 1996, p. 16). Three other things should now be more widely known: (1) The "Alton I" and "Alton II" hoards weren't found at Alton or even near Alton. They were found just north of East Meon, a dozen miles distance from Alton. (2) Though buried 20 to 30cm apart, the "two" hoards, one of "Celtic" style staters, the other of "classical" staters, should, in my view, be regarded as one hoard in two holes. Dr Philip de Jersey says: "The hoards were buried in such close proximity (little more than handspan apart) that it is difficult to believe that they were not deposited at the same time, perhaps very early in Verica's reign" (CHIAB, p. 151). (3) On December 10, 1999, at or near the East Meon hoard site, Pete Beasley found a remarkable Roman gold pendant, inset with a triangular red cornelian

stone. Inscribed TI CAESAR, it bears the laureate bust of the emperor Tiberius whose reign (AD 14–37) closely matches the reign of King Verica (c. AD 10–40). Brett Hammond, CEO of TimeLine Auctions, describes it as "a unique and unparalleled pendant jewel, likely to have originated in a provincial workshop, possibly Alexandria". The pendant was shown to Dr Catherine Johns of the British Museum and, surprisingly, was returned to the finder due to doubt about its date. Having known Pete Beasley for 20 years, I valued the gold hoard for him, I have no doubt about the integrity of the finder nor the authenticity of this find, which was sold by TimeLine to an American collector for £34,500 (including premium). An amazing bargain, in my eyes, because I believe that Pete's Tiberian pendant was possibly given to Verica by Tiberius himself as a diplomatic gift for political and commercial services rendered to Rome. Such a gift isn't as unlikely as it may seem. Ancient sources testify that three of Britain's four southern kings—Commios, Tincomarus, Verica—were known, if not well-known, to Roman rulers of their time. Commios, as I've already indicated, was well acquainted with and much admired by Julius Caesar (*Bello Gallico*, 4.12 et al). Tincomarus was a supplicant of Augustus, stepfather of Tiberius (*Res Gestae*, 32). And Verica was almost certainly the "Bericus" that fled to Claudius, nephew of Tiberius (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 60.10). Moreover Verica was clearly an admirer of Tiberius because one of his silver coins (ABC 1250) shows a Tiberian-style bust of Verica, as I observed 18 years ago (COIN NEWS, October 1998, p. 30).

Return of the Belgae

In 1864 John Evans astutely cited the Belgae of Hampshire as possible coin issuers, but decided they weren't. For the next 130 years the Belgae were numismatically "dead" (COIN NEWS, August 2014, p. 16). Nobody gave them any coins. Mack didn't, Van Arsdell didn't, Hobbs didn't and nor did Dr Simon Bean in *The Coinage of the Atrebates and Regni* (OUSA, 2000), though he did concede that Cheriton Smiler gold staters (ABC 755) might conceivably have been "issued for a small kingdom with its capital probably at either Chichester or Winchester" (p. 45). Well done, Simon!

Now, after nigh on two millennia of near oblivion, the Belgae of Hampshire are coming back to life again, despite failed attempts by antiquarians and archaeologists [Camden (1590), Stukeley (1724), Guest (1851), Bushe-Fox (1925), Hawkes and Dunning (1930)] to resuscitate them. In 1994 I began assigning coins to the Belgae. Previously in 1989 Van Arsdell had stated categorically that "only one coinage circulated in the tribal territory" south of the Thames—the coinage of the "Atrebates/Regni" as he called them. However, by the time Liz Cottam and I published *Ancient British Coins* in 2010 we'd discovered over 80 coin types which could, with some confidence, probably be attributed to the Hampshire Belgae. Now the Belgae were returning—and returning in force. Today, thanks to the



Tiberius gold pendant with red cornelian, 62mm, found near East Meon, 1999. Given to Verica by Tiberius? Verica Tiberius silver unit, 12mm, found near Danebury hillfort, Hants, 1998. Is naked figure with lituus a cult statue of Commios? Verica's bust is clearly Tiberian. (Pendant image courtesy of TimeLine auctions, coin image courtesy of Chris Rudd.)

Chawton hoard and other gold hoards found in Hampshire's "golden triangle", we have further evidence of the importance of *Venta* and the Belgae in the rise and fall, and rise again, of the southern British kingdom of Commios and his heirs.

Evidence of archaeology

Evidence from recent archaeology seems to support our coin evidence. At Winchester Professor Martin Biddle has found what could be an iron age "regional political centre, possibly a royal site". Whilst this royal site, dated c. 150–50 BC, is too early to have been occupied by Commios and his sons, archaeologist Dr Francis Morris says: "*It is possible that Winchester remained a significant political centre in the late iron age, perhaps based on an elite residence which has not yet been detected archaeologically. Winchester (Venta Belgarum) was of course chosen as the civitas capital of the Belgae in the Roman period, which might suggest some sort of continuity*". Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe makes precisely the same point, citing *Venta Belgarum* as "*the strongest evidence . . . for a limited incursion [of the Belgae] into the east Solent region, penetrating Hampshire*" (*Iron Age Britain*, English Heritage, 1995, p. 64). That's not all. Archaeologists have also found a fragment of a late iron age coin pellet mould in central Winchester providing strong evidence that pre-Roman *Venta* was a mint site. What's more, no fewer than 13 Mediterranean coins of the 3rd/2nd century BC, including ten from Ptolemaic Egypt, have been found in the Winchester area, most from central Winchester. I guess that these early coins must have come up the River Itchen from the Solent, having originally arrived at *Vectis* (Isle of Wight) as a result of Marseilles tin-trading (a silver obol of *Massalia* has also been found at Winchester). Itchen, first recorded as *Icene* in the 12th century, is probably derived from an ancient British river-name dating back to the iron age or earlier. It may take its name from a river-goddess *Ica* ("the mighty?") and could be related to the *Iceni* of river-rich East Anglia and to the prehistoric Icknield Way.

Royal Winchester

Silchester in north Hampshire and Chichester in West Sussex have long been recognised as pre-Roman royal centres in the southern kingdom. By comparison the regal status of iron age Winchester has been somewhat overlooked. In the light of the major iron age "royal site" discovered in the middle of Winchester and the five major iron age gold hoards found to the east of Winchester—three of them indisputably linked to known iron age kings—this oversight is now inexcusable. Here's why:

i. The Cheriton hoard suggests that Belgic kings were minting their own coins in Hampshire, probably at Winchester, by c. 50–40 BC or earlier. In iron age Britain gold coins were only issued by kings.

ii. The Winchester hoard of gold jewellery suggests that a king of the Belgae who ruled in the second half of the 1st century BC (Commios or Tincomarus?) had a royal residence at or near Winchester.



Ten Egyptian bronze coins, like this 37mm bronze of Ptolemy II, 285–246 BC, were found at *Venta*, not far from the "royal enclosure". Evidence of long-distance Mediterranean trade and the importance of Winchester BC. (Image www.pinterest.com)

iii. The Tiberius gold pendant, also found east of Winchester, suggests that a later southern king (Verica?) also had a royal house at or near Winchester. Perhaps the same royal house as Commios or Tincomarus?

iv. The East Meon hoard looks to me like a regal war-hoard, deposited soon after Verica came to power, and suggests that he had something to fight for (or defend) at or near Winchester.

v. The Chawton and Bentworth hoards, like the Burchett's Green hoard, are both war-hoards in my opinion. I think both were buried c. AD 40–42, while Verica was defending his royal estate at or near Winchester—defending it from the attacking forces of the Catuvellauni, before retreating to the south coast and crossing the Channel to get help from emperor Claudius.

"Great King of Britain"

Verica's flight from Britain was by no means the end of royal *Venta*, the Hampshire Belgae or the southern kingdom founded by Commios. After the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, prompted no doubt by Verica's appeal for help, all three rose again to power and prestige, restored and rebranded by Rome. Togidubnus ("deep axe"), a Romanised British prince (also known today as Cogidubnus), was appointed "Great King of Britain" by Claudius or Nero. Based at or near Chichester (rebranded *Noviomagus Regnorum*), possibly at Fishbourne palace, Togidubnus ruled over an enlarged southern kingdom which included *Aquae Sulis* (Bath) in the land of the Dobunni and which had Winchester (rebranded *Venta Belgarum*) at the heart of the kingdom. In *Bloodline* (2010) Professor Miles Russell argues that Togidubnus was the same person as Togodumnus (or Togo-dubnus), a son of Cunobelinus (see *ABC* p. 143 and *COIN NEWS*, March 2014, p. 16). A son of Verica seems more likely to me. One thing is for certain. It would be 800 years before Winchester and the southern kingdom saw another king as powerful as Togidubnus "the Great". That king was Alfred the Great, King of Wessex.

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