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# WHO WAS CARATACUS?

## How a new discovery helps to resolve an old controversy

**F**OR over 400 years people have been trying to attribute coins to Caratacus—some rightly, others wrongly. In 1581 the antiquarian historian William Camden illustrated a gold stater of Epaticcus (ABC 1343) in his monumental *Britannia*, misread the legend as CEARITIC and said it was “a coine of that warlike prince, Caratacus”. Another antiquarian, Reverend William Stukeley (1687–1765), copied Camden’s drawing of the Epaticcus stater onto his own plates, but changed the inscription to CARATIC, which better suited Stukeley’s equally mistaken attribution to CARATICVS, as he called the prince. In 1846 a numismatist who should have known better, Reverend Beale Poste, republished Stukeley’s stupid error in *The coins of Cunobeline and of the ancient Britons*. Worse was to follow. In 1862 Poste published engravings of two silver units of Epaticcus (both ABC 1346), misread both inscriptions as KERATI (supposedly a mixture of Greek and Latin letters), declared both coins to be of “Caractacus” and accused his critics of “the grossest misrepresentations”.

Three years later John Evans, the father of Ancient British numismatics, delightfully debunked these early attempts to donate the gold and silver coins of Epaticcus to his nephew Caratacus. In his seminal book *The coins of the Ancient Britons* (1864) Evans said Poste and others “sinned against light” because cartographer John Speed (1542–1629) had previously published a virtually correct reading of the Epaticcus stater legend. He added: “When any coins of Caratacus are discovered, if such an event ever takes place, we may, at all events, expect to find that Roman letters will have been used upon them, as they always are, without exception, on the coins of his father, Cunobeline, and his grandfather, Tasciovanus.”

Little did Evans know that some years later he would acquire a silver coin inscribed CARA, probably found near Guildford, Surrey, now in the British Museum (Hobbs BMC 2378, ABC 1376). Little did he realise that this coin, almost identical to Beale Poste’s silver coin of Epaticcus (ABC 1346), would be the cause of further controversy—controversy that would continue for over a century. In 1890 Evans published his CARA coin and attributed it to Caratacus, but not to the Caratacus known to history. Because Evans imagined that the historical Caratacus, the young general who fought the Romans until AD 51, was too young to have issued coins at the same time as his uncle Epaticcus—“it may, indeed, be some few years earlier”—he proposed that there were two princes called Caratacus, both from the same family—one a son of Tasciovanos, the other a son of Cunobelinus (named in memory of the first)—and that the CARA coin was struck by Tasci’s Caratacus, not by Cuno’s Caratacus (the historical Caratacus).

Due to the colossal authority that Sir John Evans wielded in the world of coins—he was knighted in 1892, the year he married for the third time—the doubts that he cast on the idea that the historical Caratacus could have issued any coins has lasted to the present day. The man who really dealt the death-blow to Evans’ uncharacteristically crazy invention of a second Caratacus was the great Celtic numismatist, Derek Allen. In 1940 Allen stated a compelling case for the coins of Epaticcus commencing “not earlier than the middle of his brother’s [Cunobelinus] reign, well into the second quarter” of the 1st century AD, in other words around AD 25–30. Allen dismissed Evans’ notion of a second Caratacus in no uncertain



Ancient and medieval authors say Caratacus was a son of Cunobelinus. Recent coin finds confirm this. So why do some archaeologists still dispute the fact? (Image © Miranda Aldhouse-Green, courtesy Colchester Borough Council.)



Stukeley copied Camden’s drawing of an Epaticcus gold stater (ABC 1343), changed the legend to CARATIC and attributed it to “Caraticus”. Found near Castle Eaton, Wilts, 1999. (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)



Bronze medal of Stukeley, 84mm, made c. 1775 (sold by Baldwin's, 23.9.2015, £4000), with engravings of four coins he attributed to "Caraticus Rex", all incorrectly (two were Iberian). (Medal: courtesy A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. Coin drawings: William Stukeley, engraved by P. Benazech, 1776.)



In 1862 Poste published two silver units of Epaticcus, both as clear as this one (ABC 1346), said they were of "Caractacus" and accused his critics of "the grossest misrepresentations". (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)



In 1864 Sir John Evans (pictured above) said Poste and others had "sinned against light" for falsely attributing coins to Caratacus. Then in 1890, to solve a supposed dating problem, he invented a second Caratacus. (Image courtesy of & © Ashmolean Museum.)

manner. He said: "The later date for Epaticcus, which is as certain as any fact in this period can be, makes this addition to the pedigree of the Catwellaunian dynasty unnecessary. We have a ruler with the name of CARA striking a coin of identical type with those of a brother of Cunobelinus in the same part of the country, not earlier than the middle of the reign of Cunobelinus. We also have a son of Cunobelinus named Caratacus, who in AD 43 was old enough to lead the main British army against the Romans. There is no longer any chronological difficulty in identifying the two, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that they are one and the same person."

It's now 76 years since Allen concluded that the CARA coin (ABC 1376) was struck by the Caratacus known to history. Most scholars have accepted Allen's conclusion without further debate, but not everyone has. Somewhat surprisingly, Richard Hobbs of the British Museum found it hard to reconcile CARA coins with the historical Caratacus. In his introduction to the indispensable British Iron Age coins in the British Museum (BMP 1996) he wrote: "The issues inscribed CARA present problems, as the style suggests contemporaneity with Epaticcus, son of Tasciovanos, implying a date of the late first century BC . . . On the other hand, Caratacus was operating in Wales as late as AD 51 (Tacitus, Annals XII, 33), which is hard to reconcile with his distribution pattern and the seemingly small output of his issues. On the basis of the present evidence, the issues inscribed CARA can be dated no more definitively than the late first century BC to the early first century AD." In other words, Hobbs doubts that CARA coins were issued by the historical Caratacus. Hobbs isn't the only doubter.

In his excellent book *Defying Rome: the Rebels of Roman Britain* (Tempus 2003) archaeologist Guy de la Bédoyère—you may have seen him on TV's "Time Team"—notes how closely CARA coins emulate those of Epaticcus and questions whether Caratacus was really a "son" of Cunobelinus. He says: "Our Caratacus need not even be the CARA of the coins, who might simply be another man with a similar name and perhaps indeed a son of Epaticcus." He then wonders if Caratacus might have been "the mysterious AGK" seen on coins (ABC 3002, 3005). He asks: "Is it too much to suggest that Caratacus was called Agrippa as a young man and designated philo-Roman successor [to Cunobelinus], but threw off his name and reverted to something more British once his father was dead?" Yes, Guy, I think you're asking too much of our credulity. Please read the paper that Derek Allen delivered to the Society of Antiquaries on April 4, 1940, published in *Archaeologia* 90, 1944.

Only six years ago another well known archaeologist, Professor Miles Russell, expressed doubts about the CARA coins. In his highly innovative and beautifully illustrated *Bloodline: The Celtic Kings of Roman Britain* (Amberley 2010) he said that "the CARA coins so closely emulate those of EPATIC that it may indicate that Caratacus was actually the son of Epaticcus". With respect, Miles, it merely indicates that Caratacus wished to be identified with his uncle Epaticcus. Why? Because he was taking over his territory and wanted the take-over to be as smooth as possible.

Personally, I've never had the slightest doubt that CARA coins were issued by the Caratacus attested by Roman authors and by medieval Welsh tradition. Moreover, the vast majority of experts in British iron age coins and British iron age archaeology are of the same mind. So what, I wonder, would convince the few remaining die-hard CARA-doubters and CARA-deniers? Would a coin that is inscribed with the names of both Caratacus and Cunobelinus? Well, I'm delighted to be able to tell these CARA-doubters and CARA-deniers and the readers of COIN NEWS that such a coin has been found.

On Thursday, April 28, 2016, metal detectorist Andrew Aartsen found a silver minim at Greywell, Hampshire, well within the former territory of the Atrebates, which Caratacus invaded or inherited, and less than ten miles from their capital of Calleva (modern Silchester), which Caratacus is thought to have occupied and where the minim was probably minted. Like the CARA silver unit (ABC 1376), this tiny coin—only 8 millimetres in diameter, only 0.27 grams in weight—looks just like a silver minim of Epaticcus (ABC 1370), except for the two all-important names it carries. The obverse is inscribed CAR

for Caratacus—who else could it reasonably be? The reverse is inscribed CV for Cunobelinus—who else could it reasonably be, knowing as we do that several ancient and medieval authors have described Caratacus as the son of Cunobelinus? We also know that it was the custom of pre-Roman, pro-Roman princes north and south of the Thames to cite the name of their father on their coins (patronymic is the numismatic term) as proof of their royal legitimacy. As far as I'm concerned, this newly discovered minim is the "missing link"—the ultimate piece of numismatic evidence that southern coins inscribed CARA or CAR were issued by the historical Caratacus. Never before has such a small silver coin likely to have such a large influence on confirming the identity and paternity of a famous British ruler. Well done, Andy, for finding it!

I'll close my defence of Britain's famous defender by disclosing a little known fact to COIN NEWS readers. There is actually another coin which combines the names of Caratacus and Cunobelinus, and that is an exceedingly rare silver unit of Caratacus which for 120 years lay camouflaged as a coin of his father (ABC 2903). How come? Because the inscription CAR was misread as CAM, short for Camulodunon (Colchester, Essex) where most, if not all, of Cuno's coins were minted. It was only when we were compiling *Ancient British Coins* (Chris Rudd 2010) that we spotted the letter R on another specimen (CCI 98.0150), like the eagle-eyed Richard Hobbs had already done in 1996 with the British Museum's example (BMC 1896). Only four specimens of this elusive CVN-CAR coin are known, all rather worn. But there's no longer any question that it was struck by Caratacus, son of Cunobelinus, and it was published as such five years ago by my colleague Elizabeth Cottam ("An unrecognised coin of Caratacus", *Chris Rudd List 118*, July 2011, p. 5). In my view, these four rare CVN-CAR coins and Andy's unique CAR-CV minim should between them dispel any vestigial doubts that Caratacus was a son of Cunobelinus, as ancient sources say he was.



Evans thought his Caratacus silver unit (ABC 1376) may have been struck before those of Epaticcus (ABC 1346) by a son of Tasciovanos, after whom the historical Caratacus was named. (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)



Noting how the "argument has raged," Derek Allen (pictured above) demolished Sir John Evans' notion of a second Caratacus in 1940 and demonstrated that CARA and Cuno's son Caratacus "are one and the same person". (Image © The British Museum.)



TA on this silver minim (ABC 1370) is for Tasciovanos, father of Epaticcus, clearly demonstrating this family's practice of placing a patronymic on their coins. (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)

Silver minim of Caratacus (ABC-) found at Greywell, Hants., 28.4.2016. CV is for his father Cunobelinus, conclusive evidence that CARA coins were struck by the historical Caratacus. To be sold by Chris Rudd on November 20, 2016, estimate £1,250.



An archaeologist fancies Caratacus may first have been called Agrippa and changed his name when his father died. Agr gold quater stater (ABC 3002). (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)



Silver unit of Caratacus (ABC 2903) in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (BN 9564), for 120 years thought to be of Cunobelinus because CA[R] was misread as CAM. (Paul Sellier, 1890.)

The clear CAR on this coin (CCI 98.0150), combined with clear CVN on the previous coin (BN 9564), shows that both were struck by the historical Caratacus. (Image courtesy Chris Rudd.)



As a national hero who fought for Britain, Caratacus surely merits more respect, more accurate representation, than he has hitherto received from antiquaries, archaeologists and numismatists. Roman authors treated him better than some British writers have done. (Image: Caractacus, from William Blake's *Visionary Heads*, c. 1819.)