

Worn by Boudica's hairdresser? Chris Rudd

On 5 September my personal collection of British antiquities will be sold. Some items have doubtless been found by readers of *The Searcher*, including perhaps a bronze pendant discovered near Fakenham, Norfolk, c.2003.

The pendant is a miniature pair of hair-shears, looped to be worn around the neck. One blade is decorated with Celtic scrolls, identical to the scrolls on a life-size pair of bronze hair-shears found at Hamperden End, Essex, dated c.20 BC-AD 70. My pendant belongs to the same period. I believe that the Hamperden End shears and the Fakenham miniature shears are hair-shears, not sheep-shears, as indicated by the refined design and delicate Celtic-style decoration. In my opinion this pendant was a 'badge of office'. Was it worn by a shaggy Iceniian sheep-shearer? Surely not. By an Iceniian male barber? Well, maybe. But I think it is more likely to have graced the neck of a high-class ladies hairdresser. Indeed we cannot rule out the possibility that this bronze pendant may have been worn by a woman (a slave-girl perhaps?) whose task it was to tame the long red locks of Boudica herself.

This is not as fanciful as it may seem. Boudica is popularly portrayed as a barbarian rabble-rouser, savage in appearance, savage in speech, savage in combat. But this is probably part fantasy, fostered by later Roman authors. The reality, as I understand it, is that Boudica was a sophisticated woman of royal birth who was wedded to one of the wealthiest men in Britain, Prasutagus, a client-king who had probably embraced Roman values and who ruled the Iceni on behalf of the Roman emperor.

Both Prasutagus and Boudica probably lived a life of extraordinary luxury, ran their royal household on slave labour and, as Professor Miranda Aldhouse-Green says, were "involved in grinding the faces of the poor in their own tribe before the events of AD 60" (*Boudica Britannia*, 2006, p.137). Would Boudica have adopted a Roman hairstyle? Why not? Could she have afforded her own royal hairdresser? Of course she could. Boudica was undoubtedly a powerful woman in her own right because she led a large and almost successful national rebellion in AD 60. That's no fantasy. That's an historical and archaeological fact.

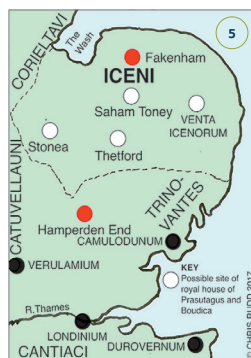


However, she inherited much of her power from one of the most potent men in Britain in the AD 50s – King Prasutagus. And King Prasutagus got his power from Rome, though he could well have been a minor Iceniian ruler prior to AD 43. Moreover, he may have got much of his money from Rome, in the form of a fat loan from Seneca. If it hadn't been for Prasutagus, we might never have heard of Boudica. Equally, we could say that if it hadn't been for Boudica and her atrocities – she torched three towns, burned hundreds of the inhabitants alive and allegedly skewered women lengthways and stuffed their severed breasts into their mouths – we might never have heard of Prasutagus.

Just as it takes two to make love, it often takes two to make war, as the two blades of my pendant shears remind me.

Picture credits

- 1 Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.
- 2 Courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.
- 3 Jane Bottomley © Chris Rudd.
- 4 Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG, Auction 100, lot 436.
- 5 Chris Rudd.
- 6 Sue Walker White.



1. Iceni hair-shears pendant, 48mm, found only 20-40 miles from where Boudica lived. To be sold by TimeLine, 5.9.2017.
2. Catuvellauni hair-shears, 10-11cm, found Hamperden End, Essex. Same Celtic scrolls as Iceni pendant, same period as Boudica.
3. Boudica checks her Roman-style hairdo. Her hairdresser wears the Iceni hair-shears pendant.
4. Boudica may have looked and lived like a Roman lady. Sestertius of Agrippina, c.AD 50-54. Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG, Auction 100, 29.5.2017, lot 436.
5. The Romano-Iceniian client-kingdom of Prasutagus, c.AD 43/47-60, is roughly indicated by the broken line.
6. Silver unit of Esurprasto who was probably the historical Prasutagus.

Mr Celtic sells his antiquities

Iron Age Celtic Chequered Mount of the Brigantes, found near Scarborough, Yorks.

Bronze Age Sompting Type Socketed Axe Head, with distinctive double-crescent ridged decoration. Ex Sir Richard Ground Collection.

Romano-Celtic Enamelled Lunar God Brooch (Cernunnos?), found near Winchester, Hants.

Chris Rudd, Celtic coin dealer, is selling his personal collection of British stone and bronze axeheads, Celtic enamelled mounts and Roman brooches 5 September 2017. For a catalogue please contact TimeLine Auctions Limited, 23-24 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6HE, UK. +44 (0)20 7129 1494, enquiries@timelinauctions.com

Chris Rudd Collection