

The Wheathampstead History Society Logo

This image has been the Society's logo since its foundation in 2011 and recently I was asked by a newish member what it was or represented. I had to answer that I did not know, because I didn't, but that I would try to find out. So, I asked the same question of the Society's Committee members. Their responses suggested it was a computer modified image of a possibly Saxon coin found in Wheathampstead.



The coin is certainly not Saxon. And I was sure there are no coins in the British Museum listed as found in Wheathampstead. Not being familiar with numismatic sources, I resorted to the Big Red Book – the Victoria County History of Hertfordshire – and in Volume I, 1902, [1.] there are plates of 'Ancient British Coins', with horses and wheels, clearly identifying the logo image as of a Celtic coin. See also [2.][3.]

Naively, I then scanned all of over 8000 images (100 per webpage) of the Celtic coins in the British Museum [4.]: as always, and luckily, I started scanning backwards from the 85th webpage! On the 77th webpage is the obvious source of the image, an 'uninscribed' gold 'stater' [5.] – no lettering on it and related to early European coins – that was reported as found in 1884 in Hemel Hempstead. No other coin in the BM matches this image so well and I didn't search elsewhere.



British Museum
1919,0213.91
Obverse – reverse,
about full size.
Gold, ca. 5.5gm,
(85gr.)

Registered as 1919.0213.91, the coin is one of many similar coins acquired in 1919 from the collection of Sir John Evans KCB, 1823–1908, an early proponent of scientific archæology. He was a famous member of the 19th C. St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archæological Society, (SAHAAS), the 'Arc & Arc'. He also founded methods of 'typing' coins.

This coin is specifically one of the pre-Roman tribal issues featuring a stylised horse with a wheel symbol beneath or nearby, a very common theme on British Iron Age coins, often linked to tribal symbolism and possibly influenced by imported Celtic designs. [2.][3.] This tribal coinage is attributed to, and was minted by, Celtic tribes such as the Iceni of modern East Anglia, and locally, the Catuvellauni of Herts, Beds and North Thames, whose territory included the area round Wheathampstead and who ruled from Verlamion in the late Iron Age, about 60 – 20 BCE.

The earliest imports had been Gaulish versions of 3rd century BCE *Philippeioi* coins issued by Philip II of Macedonia, [1.][5.] which had Apollo's head on the obverse and a two-horse chariot (a 'biga') on the reverse, with Philip's name beneath. The chariot became corrupted to a wheel, and the horses to a single horse, sometimes with 6 legs or 3 tails! Among other details suffering with each die engraver who tackled reproducing, or making forgeries of, current and earlier versions, the obverse Apollos mostly became abstract curly patterns.



Philippeioi
adapted from [1.]
Obverse – reverse,
about full size.

Of recent interest [6.] is that a 'carnyx' or Celtic war trumpet replaced the charioteer's spear in early British designs, remaining long after he himself had disappeared. In the logo image it has become the 'nose'-like feature of the 'face' that pareidolia may suggest above the horse. The 'eye pupils' you 'see', too, are artefacts resulting from the photography and manipulation of the image.

Three similar coins – they are all type ABC2442 and CCI 03.0048 – have been reported as having been found in Wheathampstead. The source of this information is the Celtic Coin Index, (CCI) [7.], which contains 75,000 (computer searchable, thankfully!) records of the 68,000 plus Celtic coins known in Britain. But, none of the three [8.][9.][10.] is as detailed or crisp as the one used in the logo, they are all in private hands, and one is probably not genuine.

References and Notes

1. **Victoria County History of Herts:** Vol. I. Ed: W. Doubleday. Pub: London 1902, Constable. An excellent introduction to these coins and their antecedents starts on page 237. The chapter headed '*The Pre-Historic Period*', but listed in the Contents as '*Early Man*', was by Sir John Evans.
2. **Evans, John FSA:** *The Coins of the Ancient Britons*. Pub: London, 1864, Russell Smith. Aka. 'CAB' but often referred to elsewhere as ABC too. There is however a modern ABC . . .
3. **Cottam, E., de Jersey, P., Rudd, C., Sills, J.:** *Ancient British Coins*. Pub: Aylsham, 2010 Chris Rudd. Updated 'typing' reference, these staters are 'ABC 2442', see examples [7.] below
4. **British Museum Collection** website: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/>
5. **See also [2.] above.** *Staters* are roughly the equivalent of our £1 coin, (symbolically, not in value!) in being a unit of the local or national and current currency, and often divided down into smaller and more 'economical' units, like our £1 is into 50p, 20p and 10p coins. They were made by stamping a gold disc between two carved 'dies', (a bit like making a wax seal?) so often the patterns on them were corrupted during 'minting'.

Gold staters were minted by Gallic chiefs, modelled after the *philippeioi* of Philip II of Macedonia, brought back by mercenaries after serving in his armies, or those of his son Alexander the Great. Then Gallic staters were imported to Britain on a large scale so creating a Celtic currency, albeit localised, and regulated by the local 'kings'. Late Celtic staters, of up to 2cms in diameter, generally weigh between 4.5 and 6.5 grams, 0.14 - 0.21 oz.

6. **BBC: Digging for Britain.**

Presented by Professor Alice Roberts, **episode 2, series 13, 2026** is available on the **BBC iPlayer**. Discovery of a complete and almost perfect *carnyx*, or 'war trumpet', hailed as best in Europe, and most important such find in many decades.

7. **Celtic Coin Index.**

Huge searchable site, featuring 68,000 Celtic coins.

Refs [8.], [9.], [10.] shown alongside, top to bottom, are at full size, and their records on CCI are examinable on the Celtic Coin Index at:

<https://cci.arch.ox.ac.uk/id/CCI-03.0048>.

8. British gold stater, type ABC 2442, CCI 03.0048. 5.94 gms.

Found: nr. Wheathampstead, Herts.

Source: London Coins 141, 1st/2nd June 2013, Lot 1052

9. British gold stater, type ABC 2442, CCI 03.0048. 6.91 gms.

Genuine? Found(?): Dec 2007

Source: Spinks 247, 5 July 2017. Lot 52 CB Dec 2007

10. British gold stater, type ABC 2442, CCI 03.0048. ?? gms.

Found: nr. Wheathampstead, Herts Found(?): 6 Oct 2002.

Source: Owner N. Tr(?)ggs, by email 8 Jan 2003.



**L-R: Obverse – Reverse
Note Apollo's head
corrupted to symmetric,
linear & abstract patterns.**