

Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service

Ancient gold of the Iceni found in Suffolk

A morning's metal detecting back in 2008 led to the discovery of 840 Iron Age gold coins - the largest hoard of its type found in Britain in over 150 years. Now Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service has until the end of June to raise £300,000 to save this outstanding archaeological treasure for the nation and people of Suffolk.

The coins were buried just over 2000 years ago by members of the Iceni tribe whose kingdom covered Norfolk, north Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire. The coins were buried about 40 years before queen Boudica led her famous revolt against the Romans. They offer an unparalleled glimpse into life on the eve of the Roman invasion and are part of the origins and long history of Suffolk communities.

Whilst the museum gets down to the business of fundraising people will be able to have a sneak preview of 200 of the coins at Ipswich Museum from May 3rd until June 10th. The coins officially belong to the Crown until the museum has raised the money to buy them and they are on display with special permission from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Caroline McDonald, Curator of archaeology at the museum is particularly excited at their arrival. 'Suffolk earth has revealed some of the nation's most outstanding treasure finds in recent decades. The Amazing Anglo-Saxon ship burial at Sutton Hoo in 1939, the stunning silver Roman dinner service found at Mildenhall during World War II and more recently the Hoxne hoard of Roman coins and artefacts found in the 1990s. All of these finds are now in London at the British Museum. The opportunity to purchase the Wickham Market coin hoard is the first time we could retain a national treasure in Suffolk. It will be far better appreciated and understood here and gives everyone in the county something to be proud of'.

The museum service has begun the fundraising process by applying to the country's major funders of heritage and the arts which includes the Art Fund and a special grant fund administered by the V&A Museum. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund has been especially fast-tracked in order to meet the June deadline.

Caroline urges everyone to come and see the coins whilst they are on display at Ipswich Museum. 'Colchester and Ipswich Museum has an outstanding record for fundraising but until we raise all of the money this may be the only chance to see some of the hoard on display in Suffolk. This is our history at its finest so come and share in the excitement'.

Contact

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The Wickham Market hoard of 840 gold coins dates from between 20 BC and AD 20. It consists of 835 coins of the Iceni tribe along with five coins of the Corieltavi, a neighbouring tribe found in Lincolnshire. It is currently the largest, most complete hoard in Britain and a unique resource for people interested in Iron Age and Roman history and the history of Suffolk and East Anglia.

It was buried about 40 years before the revolt led by Boudica against the Romans in AD 60/61 which saw the destruction of the Roman towns of Colchester, London and St Albans.

The coins may have been buried as a gift to the gods or for safe keeping. At the time Cunobelin, the leader of the Hertfordshire based Catuvallauni had already taken over the Trinovantes tribe of south Suffolk and Essex and were looking to expand into Iceni territory. He was unsuccessful but it may have been enough to worry people living near to the tribal borders.

Iron Age coins were not used like money is today. They were a form of 'portable wealth' probably given to loyal warriors who served their tribal leaders. Each Iron Age tribe produced its own coins with their own designs. By tracking the spread of coin discoveries archaeologists are able to plot tribal territories and understand the political landscape of ancient Britain.