



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 15 April** when **Patrick McNeill** will give a talk about **Wheathampstead from Above**, based on aerial photos taken in the 1940s.
- **The Society's AGM** will be held on the same evening, before the talk. The papers, including the financial report, will be circulated to all members before the meeting. There are vacancies on the Committee. Please have a serious think about nominating yourself for election.

History Society Logo



This image has been the Wheathampstead History Society's logo since its foundation in 2011. But what does it represent?

Looking for the answer, I found in Volume 1 of the

Victoria County History of Hertfordshire (1902) a plate of 'Ancient British Coins', with horses and wheels, that clearly identified the image on the logo as of a Celtic coin. I then started to look through more than 8,000 images of Celtic coins in the British Museum catalogue, starting at the back, page 85. Luckily, on page 77, I found the obvious source of the image, an 'uninscribed' gold *'stater'* – no lettering on it and related to early European coins – that was reported as found in Hemel Hempstead in 1884. Staters are roughly the equivalent of our £1 coin (symbolically, not in value!), in being a unit of the local or national currency. They were often divided down into smaller and more 'economical' units, like our £1 is divided into 50p, 20p and 10p coins.

The coin is one of many similar coins acquired by the Museum in 1919 from the collection of Sir John Evans KCB, 1823–1908, an early proponent of scientific archaeology and a prominent member of the St Albans Arc & Arc in the 19th century.

This coin is 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. This coinage was minted by Celtic tribes such as the Iceni of modern East Anglia, and, locally to us, the Catuvellauni.

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



The stater in the British Museum, about full-size. It weighs about 5.5gm

A 'carnyx' or Celtic war trumpet was 'handed to' the charioteer in early British designs, remaining long after he himself had disappeared. In the WHS logo it has become the nose-like feature of the 'face' that pareidolia may suggest above the horse in the sketch: the 'eyes' too, are artefacts of the logo's original computer manipulation.

Three similar coins have been reported as having been found in Wheathampstead: the source of this information is the Celtic Coin Index, which contains 75,000 computer searchable records of the more than 68,000 Celtic coins known in Britain. None of the three is as detailed or crisp as the one used in our logo, they are all in private hands, and one is probably not genuine.

A fully-referenced article about the logo is on the Local Research page of our website.

Ray Wilson