Largest hoard of Iron Age coins discovered in recent times saved for Ipswich Museum

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The Wickham Market Hoard is the largest and most complete Iron Age gold hoard in existence, being made up of 840 gold coins. They were made around 2,000 years ago by the Iceni tribe whose tribal territory covered Norfolk, north Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire. They were buried about two generations before the Iceni warrior queen Boudica would famously lead her people in revolt against the Romans in AD 60.

This nationally important archaeological discovery, declared Treasure, has now been bought for Ipswich museum where the collection will be given a secure home and will be preserved for future generations.

People from across the region who live across the former Iceni homelands will have the chance to see and learn about the collection, with Norwich Castle Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge already in place to host a touring exhibition of the coins.

This was made possible thanks to funding of £225,900 from HLF, £40,000 from the Art Fund, £20,000 from the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund alongside contributions from the Headley Trust, Friends of Ipswich Museum and the Jennings Bequest*.

Cllr Bryony Rudkin, Ipswich Borough Council's Culture portfolio-holder, said: “This is a truly huge boost not only for the museums service but for the people of Ipswich, Suffolk and beyond who will now be able to see and learn more about this staggering find. It will prove to be a big visitor attraction for the town and I look forward to it going on display, not only here but around the region.”

Caroline McDonald, Curator of Archaeology, Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service, said: “I am delighted that a national treasure found in Suffolk soil will be kept in the county. The Iceni people buried their gold and kept it safe for 2,000 years – now Ipswich Museum is proud to take up the responsibility for keeping it safe for years to come.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “The Wickham Market Hoard was a wonderful discovery, helping us build our understanding of one of the most fascinating periods in the history of the East of England. It is absolutely fantastic that we have been able not only to ensure this collection is saved for the nation, but that it will held locally so that it can be enjoyed from people across the community, as well as visitors from further afield.”

Stephen Deuchar, director of the Art Fund, said: “We are pleased to have played a part in adding this important collection of Iron Age coins to the collection at Ipswich Museum. There it will be studied locally and engage younger generations with the region’s rich social history.”

The hoard was discovered in Suffolk in March 2008 by metal-detectorists, and the area was excavated by Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service that Autumn. Further excavations undertaken in 2009 uncovered the remaining coins revealing the true extent of the hoard.

Almost all the Iron Age gold coins were issued by the Iceni, and date from between 20 BC and AD 20. The hoard also unusually contains five gold coins from the Corieltavi tribe, who were based in the East Midlands, which adds further

evidence to understanding of significant ties between the Iceni and Corieltavi and the wider political landscape when tribal identity and loyalty was everything.

Local people will be able to get directly involved in the care for the hoard, with volunteers working alongside professional staff in supervised conservation activities. A young people's group will help develop alternative interpretations of the collection, whilst local school children will be invited to take part in a creative writing competition that will form part of the permanent exhibition.

Notes to editors

The breakdown of funding for the purchase of the Wickham Market Hoard and accompanying exhibition and conservation activities is as follows:

• £225,900 from HLF
• £40,000 from the Art Fund
• £20,000 from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund
• £10,000 from Headley Trust (they may offer another £10K but not yet decided)
• £10,000 from the Friends of Ipswich Museum
• £10,000 from The Jennings Bequest

The Art Fund
The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. It offers many ways of enjoying art through the National Art Pass which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24 million to 248 museums and galleries to buy art. It also sponsors the UK tour of the ARTIST ROOMS collection – reaching several million people each year, and fundraises: recent campaigns include bringing in £6 million to save the Staffordshire Hoard for the West Midlands and Brueghel the Younger's The Procession to Calvary for Nostell Priory. It is funded entirely by its 80,000 supporters who believe great art should be for everyone to enjoy. Find out more about the Art Fund and how to buy a National Art Pass on the Art Fund website.

Further information

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