

Celtic coins published by John White

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Slim numismatic publications often lie hidden in bound compilations or appended to significant works on related topics. One example is *British Coins in Gold, Electrum, Silver and Copper in the Possession of John White*, published in 1773. It consists of a Plate illustrating forty-two Celtic coins accompanied by two pages of text by White. This rare publication is not listed in British library catalogues to which I have access, nor is it readily locatable via internet search engines. A copy of *Twelve plates of English silver coins from the Norman Conquest to Henry the Eighth*, published by R. Withy and I. Ryall (1756) and offered for sale by John Drury in Catalogue 33 (1978), had White's Plate and essay bound with the book. The cataloger noted that the "plate is uncommon and the descriptive leaf very rare"¹. White's publication is referred to in *The Coins of the Ancient Britons* by John Evans (1864), and more recently catalogued in *Numismatic Guide to British and Irish Printed Books 1600-2004* by Harrington E. Manville (2005).

A small bound collection of numismatic notes and ephemera I acquired some years ago contains White's essay transcribed in a contemporary hand, along with thirty-nine of the coin illustrations, all neatly cut from the original Plate and pasted on six pages of the book. The compiler included the following comment:

The above accot. of British Coins together with their Engravings at the beginning of this Book & their weights also in the following page was extracted from a work of the learned & Ingenious Mr. White of Newgate St. a person as well acquainted wth. the coins of this Kingdom as any we have and who has made it his study for a great many years.

White's nefarious practices as a forger of coins have perhaps overshadowed other aspects of his creativity. He was obviously respected by at least some of his contemporaries both for his knowledge of coins, and for what was taken as a generous disposition. The Rev. Dr. Griffith acknowledged his assistance in assessing Anglo-Saxon and Norman coins found near his church²:

I have only to add...that the new types...together with near 50 pieces more, (consisting chiefly of the fairest and most curious specimens of this hoard), are in the valuable collection of Mr. John White of Newgate Street, to whose very obliging communications I am indebted for several particulars of this account, and also for drawing of the three types, which, as far as I can learn, are all unques.

John Evans suggested that White be credited with the first assigning of coin to the Iceni as illustrated and described in White's 1773 publication³.

¹ Douglas Saville kindly informed me that the Plate is also "very rare".

² Griffith, G. *Account of Coins, &c. found in digging up the Foundations of some old Houses near the Church of St. Mary Hill, London. 1774.* *Archaeologia*, (1777) IV, 356.

³ John Talbot, *Made for Trade: A New View of Icenian Coinage*, Oxford, 2017.

White peppered his collecting and scholarly endeavours by fabricating coins and other spurious antiquities, fooling many of his contemporaries with his productions. An overview of his counterfeiting activities can be found in a paper by C. E. Blunt and J. D. A. Thompson⁴. Hugh Pagan⁵ has suggested that White's dealing in coins may have reached a pinnacle following the death of Thomas Snelling⁶. Perhaps freed of peer oversight, the profits to be scurrilously obtained through his numismatic knowledge and engraving tools may have proved too great a temptation. His success in deceiving the numismatic establishment of his day has probably contributed to the energetic condemnations of later commentators, and his oblivion as an early enthusiast for Britain's first coins.

The obscurity of his 1773 publication has prompted this note, trusting that it may be of interest to students of the Celtic coinage. I came across its only internet presence in a compilation appended to Sir John Evans' copy of Withy and Ryall's book, now in the Ashmolean Museum collection⁷. Bound into this copy is White's text under the heading 'British coins | Table 1' followed by the accompanying Plate. The text and Plate are to be found about half way through the book along with other contemporary publications. The Plate has unfortunately been copied in its folded state, so that only half of the coin illustrations are visible and even these are not very clear⁸. I have reproduced the coin illustrations displayed as they appear in the compilation in my possession, with the attributions given by White based on the appropriations of earlier antiquaries. Illustrations of the silver coins 12, 13 and 14 are missing from the book, and confined in brackets in the following list. The Arabic numerals refer to the coins as numbered on the illustrations, and the Roman numerals refer to the figure bearing the illustration(s). Figures I and II illustrate gold coins, figures III and IIIa, silver coins and figures IV and V, copper coins. Nomenclature is that used by White.

Arviragos - I, 4; II, 10; III, 10, 15

Boadicia - II, 11, 13; V, 12

Comius - I, 8; III, 2

Caratacus - IV, 7

Cassibelin (whose chief City was Verulam) - I, 3; II, 12

Cunobelin - I, 2, 5; III, 3, 4 [12, 13, 14]; IV, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8; V, 9, 11, 13, 14

Elimaur - III, 1

Eppilius - III, 2

Lucius - I, 4⁹

Iceni - IIIa, 8

⁴ C. E. Blunt and J. D. A. Thompson 'Forgery in the Anglo-Saxon series', *BNJ*, XXVIII (1958), pp. 18-25.

⁵ Hugh Pagan 'Numismatics in London before the Numismatic Society of London' *Newsletter - The Journal of the London Numismatic Club*, (2000), VIII, No. 3, pp. 36-48.

⁶ Snelling died in 1773, the year of White's publication.

⁷ This is accessible at:

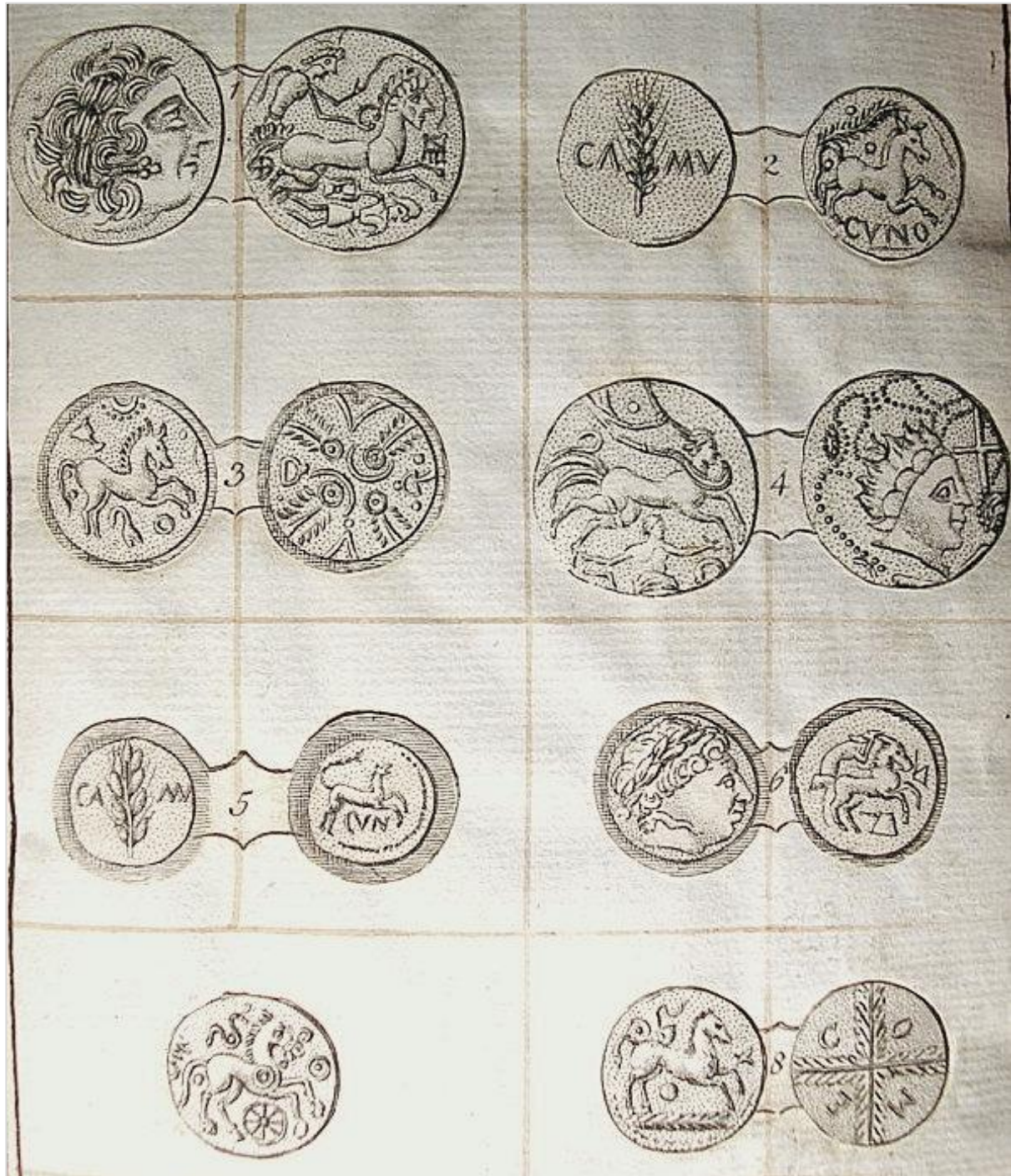
<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=62AGAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=Withy+and+Ryall&source=bl&ots=ISzvtmWqlo&sig=ACfU3U0sNgWuyL0ySVmxGFMIHzGdwtwFhg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwign6yX8ILqAhXlyzgGHbMmCrI4ChDoATAEegQIChAB#v=onepage&q=Withy%20and%20Ryall&f=false>

⁸ Another plate of coins headed *Nummi Argentei* and described 'lately found near and in the Isle of Thanet' was also published by White, and can be found prefixed or appended to other copies of Withy and Ryall's book.

⁹ Also attributed to Arviragos by White's antiquaries.

Novantes or Trinobantes, the tribute penny of Venutius - **III**, 4
 Verolam - **II**, 12; **III**, 2
 Camulodunum - **I**, 2¹⁰, 5; **III** [14]¹¹; **IV**, 5, 6, 8; **V**, 13
 Segontium now Silchester - **IIIa**, 9

Figure I



¹⁰ Also attributed to Cunobelin by White's antiquaries.

¹¹ As footnote 10.

Figure II



Figure IIIa



Figure III



Figure IV



Figure V



White appended a Table giving the weights of each of the 42 coins he illustrated, a precedent “hitherto little regarded”, and showing “that the British coins were full as correctly adjusted in their weights and proportions as either the Greek or Roman”, a fact that he claimed diminished the contemporary view of a barbaric coinage, and moreover, served to honour the Nation’s progenitors.

