

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

- What is it?
A figurine of a man wearing a hooded cloak
- What is it made of?
Copper alloy
- What are its measurements?
65 mm high, 48mm wide and 17 mm thick, weight 65.8g.
- Who is the artist/maker and what are their dates?
Unknown, probably Romano-British
- What date is the item?
Roman (AD 43-410)
- What condition is it in?
Good but incomplete - the lower parts of the legs and arms are missing.

2. Context

- Provenance
The export licence gives the provenance as “Recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme PAS number ESS-33D3A2”.
The object was reported by the finder to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and recorded on the scheme’s database with the reference ESS-33D3A2: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/631306>
This database entry gives the information that it was found by a metal detectorist on cultivated land in the parish of Roxwell, Essex, in January 2014. A six-figure grid reference was provided by the finder.
- Key literary and exhibition references
Worrell and Pearce 2015, no. 17, pp.375–6.

3. Waverley criteria

- Which of the Waverley criteria does the item meet? (If it is of ‘outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art learning or history’ which area of art learning or history).
Criterion 1: Is it so closely connected with our history (including local history) and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?
Criterion 3: Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?
- Very briefly why?
The figure wears a hooded cloak known as the *birrus Britannicus* mentioned as specifically British in the Edict of Diocletian in 301 AD. It is extremely unusual for portable art of this period to show a distinctively British character; figurines are more usually shown wearing a hooded garment of a style common to Gaul and the North-Western provinces in general. The province of Britannia was known as an

exporter of woollen garments in the wider Roman Empire but the archaeological evidence for this is limited.

As a uniquely detailed three-dimensional illustration of the *birrus Britannicus* it is important for research on Romano-British costume. It can be compared only to the (two-dimensional) mosaic depicting a personification of Winter at Chedworth Roman villa. It is also extremely significant for our understanding of the relationship between textual and archaeological sources

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

What does it depict?

The figurine depicts a standing male figure wearing a long hooded cloak over a short belted tunic. The figurine has been truncated below the knees and has both arms outstretched, the left arm raised above the elbow. He carries a quiver over his right shoulder. The cloak is shown worn with the hood up and gathered around the neck, falling at the back in V-shaped pleats to the knees and with straight side edges at the back incised with a zig-zag border. It appears to be fastened at the right shoulder, possibly with a brooch. There is a pierced hole on one side of the cloak, perhaps suggesting the figure was attached to another object as a mount, though the detail on the reverse would suggest that it was to be viewed in the round.

The figurine may depict a deity or a personification but this cannot be identified with certainty due to the lack of a direct parallel and absence of an inscription. Various possible identities are discussed by Worrell and Pearce (2015, 375–6). The deities known as the *Genii Cucullati* are depicted in the religious art of the North-Western Roman provinces as wearing hooded cloaks but these are usually full-length and worn fastened down the front. The figure could perhaps be intended as a personification of Winter (as in the mosaic at Chedworth Villa, Gloucestershire depicting the seasons, where Winter is represented holding a hare and a branch), or a more generic representation of a hunter; the active pose of this figure suggests it may have held distinctive attributes, now missing (for example a bow or an animal). He differs from British sculptural representations thought to depict a 'hunter god' (for example Appendix 2.5), in that he wears a cloak rather than a Phrygian cap (the latter reflecting the influence of religions from the eastern Roman Empire, such as Mithraism).

What does it tell us about that period?

Figurines are portable items and likely to have been displayed in a domestic or religious setting. Metal figurines tend not to be mass-produced items and display a great diversity in artistic skill and subject matter. This figurine does not appear to be copying a known type from classical art and is not instantly recognisable as a deity from the standard Roman pantheon. It is therefore more likely to relate to cult or daily life in to the local area.

Who made it/painted it/wrote it?

The artist is unknown but the style of the artefact suggests local Romano-British manufacture rather than an imported item. The head is large in comparison with the body and the facial features are simply rendered. Its style can be compared with other figures showing a fusion of classical and

indigenous art traditions (for example the figures of the Southbroom hoard from Wiltshire, in the British Museum).

No. of comparable items by the same artist already in the UK, in both public and private collections?

No direct parallels to this figure are known.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

Significance of figures associated with the item(s): maker/client/owners?

The item cannot be associated with any known historical figures.

Significance of subject-matter?

The “*birrus* [or *byrrus*] *britannicus*” is mentioned in Diocletian’s Edict on Prices of AD 301 as a woollen product from Britain. This decree was an attempt to fix maximum prices for a comprehensive list of goods and services, and survives in the form of fragmentary inscriptions at various locations in the eastern Roman Empire. In a list of textiles, fourteen types of *birrus* are mentioned, one of which was associated with Britain and set at a maximum price of 6,000 *denarii* (Caputo and Goodchild 1955, 115). The province of Britannia was therefore clearly known as an exporter of quality woollen garments in the wider Roman Empire but the archaeological evidence for this is limited and literary description of its appearance is lacking. In general, it is difficult to match the evidence for clothing with the variety of terms used for them in the sources and it is therefore necessary to rely on artistic representations and surviving artefacts to obtain information on the costume of the period. Representations of the costume of ordinary people are particularly valuable for this reason.

The hooded cape worn by the Piercebridge ploughman (Appendix 2.1) is often cited as an example of the *birrus Britannicus* (e.g. Millett 2005, 39 fig. 35) but it can be argued that it in fact represents a leather garment (Manning 1971, 127; Wild 1968, 183) – it falls stiffly over the head and shoulders and fastens at the front of the neck. This figurine appears to depict agricultural labour but may be a representation of the Roman ritual of ploughing to mark out or reinforce the boundary of a settlement. Nevertheless short capes of this sort appear in other examples of art from the North-western provinces of the Roman Empire, such as the wall-painting from Trier (Appendix 2.6) showing agricultural labourers working near a villa.

Another cloak depicted in Roman art is the long hooded cape worn by the so-called *Genii Cucullati*, sometimes referred to as the *cucullus*. Hooded deities are depicted in this way throughout the Empire and may be representations of the deity Telesphorus, but the triplicate representations of the *genii cucullati* are a British phenomenon (for example the relief from Housesteads,

(Appendix 2.2)). This type of cloak does not appear to be worn with a brooch and has a seam or opening down the front. It is usually full length.

The Chedworth personification of Winter (Appendix 2.3) is less generic than many other depictions of Winter; the Seasons are more commonly female and other Romano-British mosaics (such as that from Bignor, West Sussex, Appendix 2.4) appear to show female busts with covered heads rather than this distinctive hooded cape. This representation seems to be showing male rural dress. In common with the figurine in question, the cape has an integral hood and is worn pushed back. However it is shorter and the representation lacks detail.

It is therefore argued that the figurine is an unusual representation of a hooded woollen cloak of a type associated with Britain. The figurine in question displays useful details that are unique to this artefact, including a twisted or braided border around the edge of the hood and the zig-zag border down the long sides of the cloak at the back, perhaps a representation of woven or embroidered decoration. Very few fragments of woollen textile survive from Roman Britain and depictions of dress on funerary monuments and mosaics can be stylised and / or lacking in clear detail due to loss and wear, making this representation of great value.

Significance of materials/process/usage?

The materials and production technique do not appear to be of outstanding significance. However copper alloy figurines are relatively rare finds from Britain and there has been little research on their production.

Is/are the item(s) of local/regional/national importance?

It is argued that the item is of national importance in terms of being a clear and detailed depiction of Roman clothing associated with the province of *Britannia* in the Roman period. The British provenance and likely local manufacture of the figurine strengthens this association. At the beginning of the fourth century AD Britain was known throughout the Empire for its woollen textiles. In addition, its given provenance in Essex would make it a suitable acquisition for a local or regional museum as a significant local find.

Summary of related items in public/private ownership in the UK

A recently published corpus of metal figurines from Late Iron Age and Roman Britain identified around 1000 known figurines (Durham 2012). However none of them form a good parallel to this one in terms of subject matter.