

**THE HISTORY AND
DESCRIPTION OF THE WALLS
OF COLCHESTER (COLONIA
CAMULODUNUM)**

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The History and Description of the Walls of Colchester (Colonia Camulodunum) by P. M. Duncan

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Pl. 1.

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HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION
OF THE
WALLS OF COLCHESTER,

(COLONIA CAMULODUNUM,)

BY

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THE HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WALLS OF COLCHESTER.

BY DR. F. M. DUNCAN.



“ Our subjects, Sir,
Will not endure his yoke ; and, for ourself
To show less sovereignty than they, must needs
Appear unkinglike.”

Cymbeline, Act iii., Scene v.

CUNOBELIN, the Cymbelin of the heroic British traditions, does not exist in the verse of the bard alone, but is presented to the notice of the student of art, as a patron of those who earned a lasting reputation by inscribing classical figures upon the rude coinage of certain nations, deemed especially barbarian by the Romans.

A right regal patron of die-cutters was Cunobelin the Trinobantine ; his coinage in pure gold and in bronze, so familiar to the collectors at Colchester, has ever excited admiration, and will ever be a strong and convincing evidence in favour of the view which regards the commonly-received notions of British civilization as erroneous.

Year after year, both within and without the walls of Colchester, coins of Cunobelin are turned up from below the remains of the Roman occupation ; their abundance was asserted nearly a century ago, and even in these days of utilitarianism, the neat inscription upon the solid-looking money of the British King, is carefully noted and preserved.

But, occasionally, British coins are dug up in company with the flint arrow-head and rude fictile ware, denoting a remoter period of art than that of the time of Cunobelin. These rude pieces of stamped gold, bronze, and tin, marked with the effigies of frantic-looking horses and chariots, are recognized, by the numismatist, as attempts at imitation of the Gallic idea of the *Stater* introduced by the Phœcean colony at Marseilles. This rude money, in all probability, puzzled the youthful Cunobelin, quite as much as it did the modern antiquary; and when peace had followed the invasion of Caesar, and had been consolidated by the wisdom of this greatest British King, the royal wish for a better coinage, was stimulated by the increasing commerce with Rome.

Artists familiar with the Greek and Roman types of coins were, therefore, patronized, and the curious half-classical, half-Keltic series inscribed with the name of Cunobelin, and that of his city, *Camulodunum*, resulted. The name, and occasionally the features, of the British monarch, found themselves in strange company; and double-headed Januses, Sphinxes of all kinds, together with other Roman and Grecian outlines, must have excited the wonder of those who benefited by their circulation.

Although the artists had their fancies and crotchets, and executed them, still the King had his, and he retained certain types, which are, certainly, not classical—but, nevertheless, are very elegant; thus, the unharnessed horse, the ear of corn, and the naked spear-in-hand figure of the God of War, were engraven by the die-cutters. Cunobelin's name is not invariably placed in full, but *Cuno* or *Cunob* are frequently found upon his coins, and there is another abbreviation which is as interesting as it is important. The letters *C.A.M.* are frequently found, and the whole name, *Camuloduno*, is upon more than one coin. The classical scholar is immediately reminded of the *Colonia Camulodunum*, and of the Royal City of *Camulodunum*, conquered by Claudius in his *Trinobantine* war. The *Boadicean* war, the assault and destruction of the colony at *Camulodunum*, and the Roman victory, pass across the memory of the historical student, and, leaving the memory of the first rude coiners of the great Cunobelin, of Claudius, and of the founders of the *Colonia* far behind, the mind wanders past the age of

persecution and straggling Christianity, to the date when the British Church sent its representatives to Arles and Sardica, and when the Bishop of Colonia Camulodunum signed his name protesting against the Donatists.

The Antiquary recognizes, in the modern Colchester, the ancient Colonia Camulodunum, and revels in the inexhaustible stores of Roman remains, with which the city teems; he traces the ruined villa, the great roads, and the remains of camps; the cinerary urns, in long and dismal rows, are noted down, the inscribed slab and stone are before him, and the thousands of fractured pieces of fictile ware, and the large and solid tiles, give evidence of the art and industry of the local clay workers. The huge walls of the town, the remains of the gates, the mosaic and common tessellated pavements, and the endless variety of coins, have still to be described; and it will be found that, if the student of Archæology will submit to study details, and to leave theory for a future period, no better arena for his exertions can be found, than that of Colchester.



Camulodunum fell beneath the attack of an Emperor—no small honour—and Claudius made the most of his conquest. The elegant historian, who devoted part of his annals to British affairs, must be followed to discover the effects of Roman pride and British despair, and to learn the fate of the Colonia. Boadicea stands forth on the stage of history, and the eastern tribes of Britain are ripe for rebellion.

Early in the straggle, the Iceni—the inhabitants of what is now the district comprised by Suffolk, Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Norfolk—formed a league, and attacked the Propretor, Publius Ostorius. They were defeated, and the Roman General turned his attention to the West of Britain. Camulodunum, the spoil of Claudius, was the *point d' appui* of Ostorius in the east; by fortifying it, or by placing a large body of troops there, he could keep the Iceni in check, and move himself to the scene of his intended campaign.

A colony, supported by a strong body of veterans, was stationed, therefore, on the lands conquered from the enemy. Tacitus remarks that the garrison would be able to overawe the insurgents, and give to the Allied States a specimen of law and civil polity.

Ostorius died under fatigue and anxiety, and Aulus Didius, Veranius and Suetonius succeeded, in turn, to the command in Britain; under the last the revolt of Boadicea occurred, and the critical reader may observe, in the description given by Tacitus, in his 14th book of the Annals, that Camulodunum was not, as yet, surrounded by a wall. It may be quoted as follows:—"What chiefly fired the indignation of the Iceni and Trinobantes, was the conduct of the veterans, lately placed as a colony, at Camulodunum. These men treated the Britons with cruelty and oppression; they drove the natives from their habitations; and, calling them by the opprobrious names of slaves and captives, added insult to their tyranny. In these acts of oppression, the veterans were supported by the common soldiers, a set of men, by their habits of life, trained to licentiousness, and, in their turn, expecting to reap the advantages of a veteran. The temple built in honour of Claudius, was another cause of discontent. In the eyes of the Britons, it seemed the citadel of eternal slavery. The priests appointed to officiate at the altars, with a pretended zeal for religion, devoured the whole substance of the country. To over-run a colony which lay quite naked and exposed, without a single fortification to defend it, did not appear to the incensed and angry Britons, an enterprise that threatened either danger or difficulty." The fact was, the Roman Generals attended to improvements of taste and elegance, but neglected the useful. They embellished the province, and took no care to defend it. So says Tacitus. We all know what followed. The Romans shut themselves up in the Temple of Claudius, which was taken by storm, after a siege of two days, and the ruin of the colony was complete. Eight hundred and sixty years after the above-mentioned occurrences, we find, in the Saxon Chronicle, that Eadward the elder, son of Alfred the Great, erected two fortresses at Hertford, and one at Witham, and that the Danes, who had held Essex for 30 years, suffering a defeat at Wigmore, were, in their turn, besieged by the Saxons of Essex, Kent,