

A HOARD OF EARLY IRON AGE GOLD TORCS FROM IPSWICH

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On 26 October 1968 five gold torcs (Plates XX, XXI, XXII) of the Early Iron Age were found at Belstead Hills Estate, Ipswich (Nat. Grid Ref. TM/13684273), by Mr. Malcolm Tricker of Swallow Road, Ipswich, while he was bulldozing a bank of sandy soil to provide a level site for new houses on what was formerly pasture land. He reported his find to Miss Elizabeth Owles of the Ipswich Museum who visited the site. She could find no trace of a burial or any associated archaeological material.

At a Coroner's Inquest held in Ipswich on 18 December the find was declared Treasure Trove. It was subsequently acquired by the British Museum and the full market value of £45,000 was paid to the finder. Replicas of the torcs are to be presented by the Trustees of the British Museum to the Ipswich Museum.

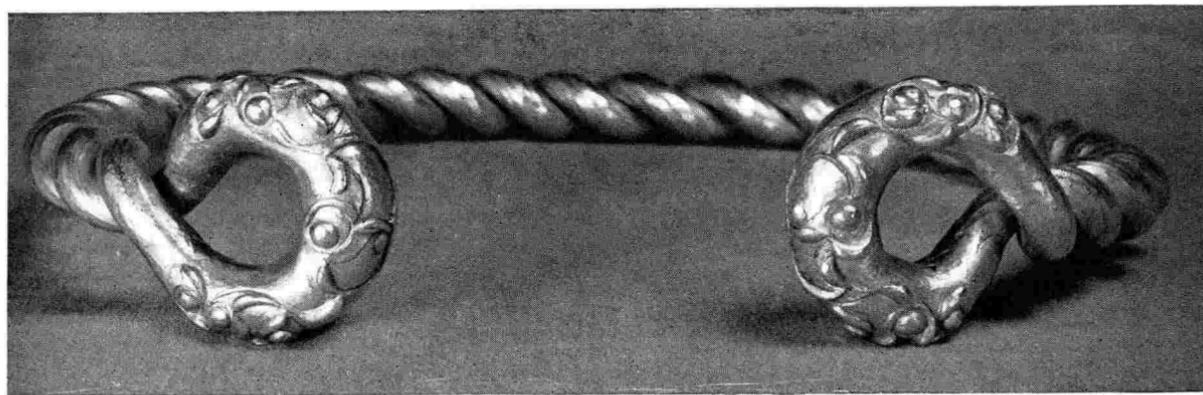
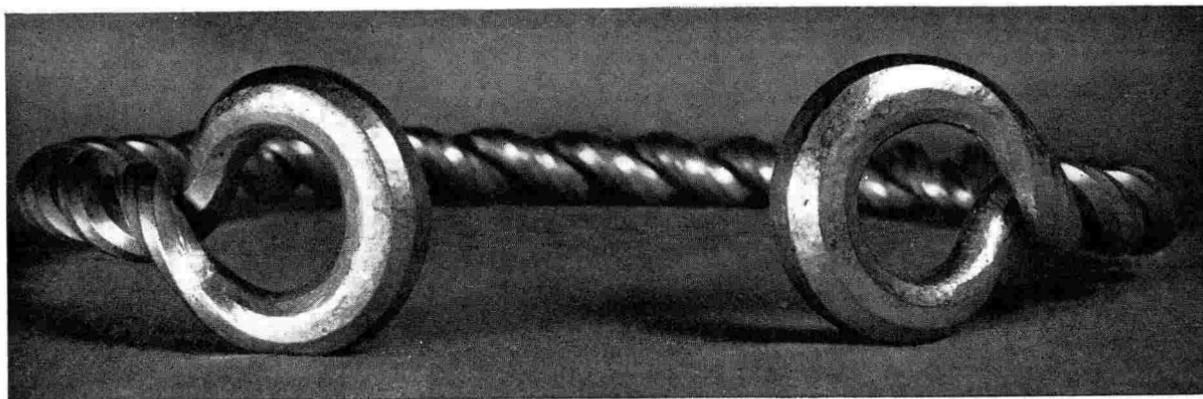
The torcs are all of gold, alloyed with a small proportion of silver. They vary in weight from 27 to 33 ounces and are about 8 inches in diameter. The hoop of each was made from two rods twisted together. One has plain ring terminals, those of the other four are decorated with embossed ornament typical of what may be called the Snettisham class, except that the areas of incised 'matting' and roundels of concentric ridges, which are found on other examples, are absent from those from Ipswich.

The finest example of the class, the great torc from Snettisham, contained a Gallo-Belgic Dc (Atrebatian) quarter stater in one of its terminals. A worn specimen of this kind of coin was found in the Le Catillon hoard, so that this type of coin, and presumably the great Snettisham torc, must date from somewhat before 56 B.C. This is consistent with Professor Piggott's dating of 60-50 B.C. for the Cairnmuir terminal which was associated with Gaulish gold 'bullet' coins.¹

Relative to the great torc from Snettisham the Ipswich torcs present a rough appearance. Careful examination under magnification shows that on three examples this rough appearance is due to unevenness of the plain part of the surface and to a series of scratches in the enclosed areas of the design. These scratches are evidently due to the chasing or chiselling of the relief ornament,

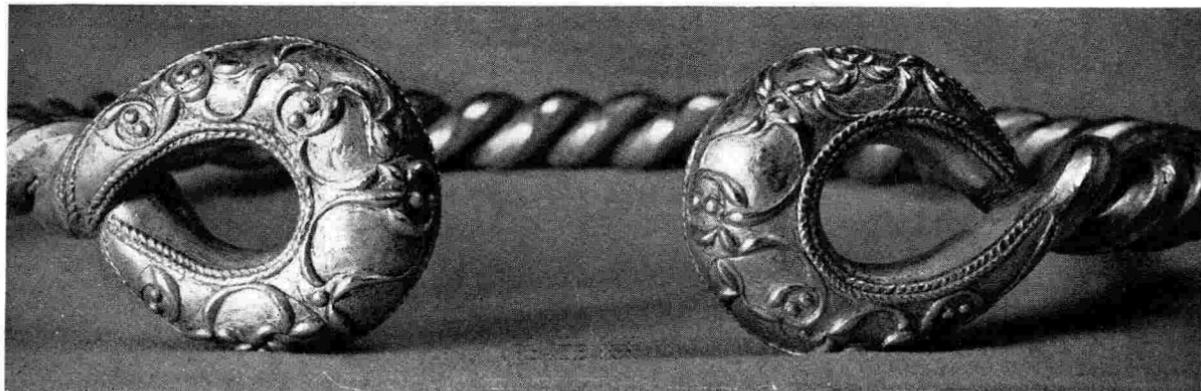
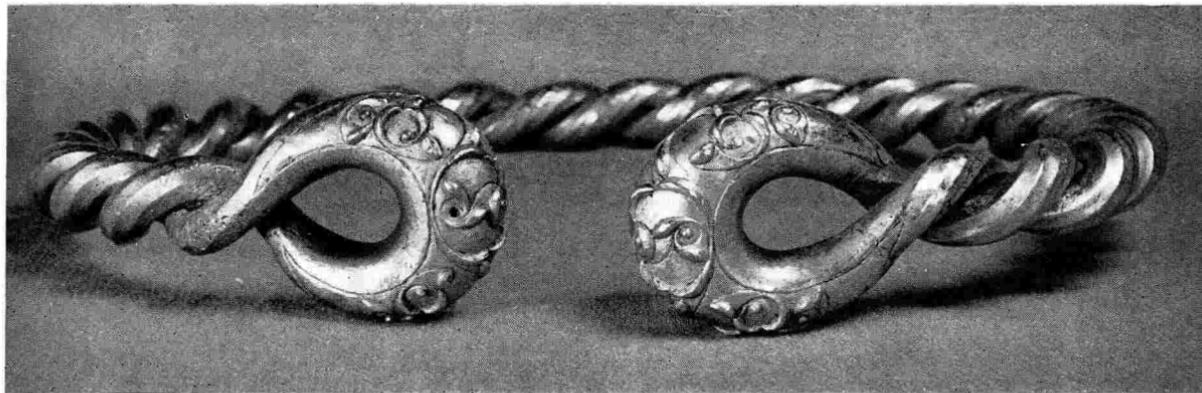
¹ See R. Rainbird Clarke, 'The Early Iron Age Treasure from Snettisham, Norfolk', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xx (1954), pp. 27-86; S. Piggott, *Ant. Jour.*, xxxix (1959), p. 31.

PLATE XX



Ipswich Gold Torcs, Nos. 1 (above) and 2 (below). *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum*

PLATE XXI



Ipswich Gold Torcs, Nos. 3 (above) and 5 (below). *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum*

PLATE XXII



Ipswich Gold Torc No. 4. *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum*

the lines of which they follow. Any such scars and irregularities on the Snettisham torc have been carefully smoothed out or concealed by incised hatching. A comparison between these three torcs from Ipswich and that from Snettisham indicates that the Ipswich examples were unfinished.

On the fourth decorated torc from Ipswich the ornament has been only roughly blocked out, and the surface reproduces without change that of the wax model from which it has been cast, except perhaps for some hammering. It appears to have been left at an even earlier stage of manufacture than the other three, since even preliminary chasing or chiselling is not apparent.

The Ipswich torc with plain terminals may be a finished article, since other examples of this form are known which there is no reason to regard as incomplete. However, the laboratory report suggests that it represents a primary stage before the decorated terminals had been cast on.

The five Ipswich torcs therefore appear to represent three stages of manufacture, and four, if not all five, should be taken as unfinished.

The evidence may be taken to indicate that the group belonged to a goldsmith. They were not associated with a burial, it is inconceivable that they were accidentally lost, it seems unlikely that unfinished pieces were buried as a votive or ritual deposit. The conclusion indicated is that they were deliberately buried by their owner or possibly as loot by some marauder, but in any case hidden for safety in some emergency with the intention of ultimate recovery.

Votive deposits of Iron Age date are indeed known in Britain and on the Continent. These, however, consist of tools and weapons thrown into lakes or rivers. Even if the incompleteness of the Ipswich torcs were disputed, or the possibility admitted of unfinished objects being included in a votive deposit, both the character of the objects and the nature of their find-place (on a hillside) argue strongly against a votive interpretation.

The torcs are, individually, outstanding examples of Early Iron Age craftsmanship. As an associated group the find is unique and of exceptional interest for the study of prehistoric technology; such a concentration of precious objects must also have significant historical and sociological implications.