

= Hallaton Helmet =

The Hallaton Helmet is a decorated iron Roman cavalry parade helmet originally covered in a sheet of silver and decorated in places with gold leaf . It was discovered in 2000 near Hallaton , Leicestershire after Ken Wallace , a member of the Hallaton Fieldwork Group , found coins in the area . Further investigation by professional archaeologists from University of Leicester Archaeological Services discovered that the site appeared to have been used as a large @-@ scale Iron Age shrine . Nine years of conservation and restoration has been undertaken by experts from the British Museum , supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £ 650 @,@ 000 . The helmet is now on permanent display at the Harborough Museum in Market Harborough alongside other artefacts from the Hallaton Treasure hoard .

Although it was found shattered into thousands of pieces and is now heavily corroded , the helmet still bears evidence of its original finely decorated design . It was plated with silver @-@ gilt and decorated with images of goddesses and equestrian scenes . It would have been used by a Roman auxiliary cavalryman for displays and possibly in battle . The identity of the owner is not known but the helmet was discovered on a native British ceremonial site , buried alongside thousands of Iron Age British and Roman coins . It is possible that the helmet was owned by a Briton who fought alongside the Romans during the conquest of Britain .

= Description and interpretation =

The helmet is an example of a three @-@ piece Roman ceremonial cavalry helmet , made of sheet iron covered with silver sheet and partly decorated with gold leaf . Such helmets were worn by Roman auxiliary cavalrymen in displays known as hippika gymnasia and may also have been worn in battle , despite their relative thinness and lavish decoration . Horses and riders wore lavishly decorated clothes , armour and plumes while performing feats of horsemanship and re @-@ enacting historical and legendary battles , such as the wars of the Greeks and Trojans .

It is the only Roman helmet ever found in Britain that still has most of its silver @-@ gilt plating attached . The helmet would originally have had two cheekpieces attached via holes in front of its ear guards . It has a prominent browguard , the shape of which is similar to that of the 3rd @-@ century Guisborough Helmet , discovered in 1864 near Guisborough in Redcar and Cleveland . The rear of the helmet bowl descended to form a neckguard .

As is the case with other Roman cavalry helmets , the Hallaton Helmet was very ornately decorated . The closest parallel to the Hallaton Helmet in terms of overall appearance is a helmet found in Xanten @-@ Wardt in Germany which , like the Hallaton example , is made of silver @-@ gilded iron with a wreath on the crown , a central figure on the browguard and a garland of flowers on the neckguard . A number of similar features have survived on the Hallaton Helmet . Its bowl is decorated with laurel wreaths while the scalloped browguard is edged with elaborate cabling . In the centre of the browguard is the (now heavily damaged) bust of a woman flanked by repoussé lions . Her identity is unclear , but she may have been an empress or goddess . The iconography is reminiscent of depictions of Cybele , the Magna Mater or " Great Mother " whose image was used to promote the values of the Augustan period a few decades after the helmet was deposited . However , the depiction has a number of features that are more in common with funerary art .

The earguards are in the shape of silver ears , and the neckguard is decorated with a scrolling leaf pattern . Six detached cheekpieces were found within the helmet bowl along with the disintegrated remains of a seventh , although only two would have been needed . Hinges were also found , as was the pin of one cheekpiece , which had been bent . It may have been forcibly removed or possibly sustained damage at a later date , perhaps from a plough . It is unclear why there were so many cheekpieces accompanying the helmet ; it is possible that they may all have been used on the same helmet to customise its appearance on different occasions , or alternatively they may have been intended as spares in the event of damage . The surviving cheekpieces are very elaborate . Five of the cheekpieces show equestrian scenes ; one depicts the triumph of a Roman emperor on horseback , holding his arm in the air as he is crowned with a laurel wreath by the goddess Victoria (

Victory) . A cowering barbarian is depicted below being trampled by the hooves of the emperor 's horse . Another less well @-@ preserved cheekpiece depicts a possibly Middle Eastern figure holding a large cornucopia , and a Roman helmet and shield below .

The helmet was found along with some 5 @,@ 296 Iron Age and Roman coins mostly dating to AD 20 / 30 ? 50 , the largest assemblage of Iron Age coins ever found in Britain . They had been buried at what appears to have been a pre @-@ Roman shrine where large @-@ scale animal slaughtering had taken place ; nearly 7 @,@ 000 bone fragments were also found at the site , 97 per cent of which were from pigs . Many appear to have been buried without the meat being eaten , suggesting that they had been used as offerings . The site is located on a hilltop which appears to have been encircled by a boundary ditch and palisade , with a possible processional way leading up to it . In Roman times it would have been located in the territory of the Corieltauvi , who inhabited an area of the East Midlands stretching from Northamptonshire to Lincolnshire .

It is very unusual to find a helmet of this type on a native ceremonial site . It was probably made between 25 and 50 AD , close to the date of the conquest of Britain in 43 AD ; this makes it one of the earliest Roman helmets ever found in Britain . Other British examples of later date were found in isolation away from settlements , as in the cases of the Guisborough Helmet and Crosby Garrett Helmet , or on Roman sites , as with the Newstead Helmet . Various suggestions have been put forward as to why the helmet ended up at Hallaton ; it may have been owned by a Briton who served in the Roman cavalry , it may have been a diplomatic gift from the Romans or it may have been captured in war . According to Dr Jeremy Hill of the British Museum , the first explanation is the most likely : " Here you probably have a situation where local Britons are fighting on the Roman side . " The Roman cavalry at this time was mostly recruited from native allies , not Italians , suggesting that Britons fought alongside the Romans as they carried out their conquest of Britain .

= = Discovery and restoration = =

The helmet was discovered by 71 @-@ year @-@ old Ken Wallace , a retired teacher and amateur archaeologist . He and other members of the Hallaton Fieldwork Group had found fragments of Roman pottery on a hill near Hallaton in 2000 . He visited the site with a second @-@ hand metal detector late one afternoon and found about 200 coins , which had been buried in a series of small pits dug into the clay . He also found another artifact , which he left in the ground overnight . The following day he returned to examine his discovery and found it that it was a silver ear . He reported the find to Leicestershire 's county archaeologist , who called in the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) to excavate the site . The dig took place in the spring of 2003 .

The helmet was too fragile to be excavated in situ so it was removed within a block of earth held together with plaster of Paris . It was taken to the British Museum in London for conservation , which took nine years of work by conservator Marilyn Hockey and her colleagues Fleur Shearman and Duygu Çamurcuo?lu . Corrosion and the effects of time had shattered the helmet into thousands of pieces , most of which were smaller than the nail on a person 's little finger . The reconstructed and conserved helmet was unveiled in January 2012 .

Leicester County Council was able to raise £ 1 million to buy the entire hoard and pay for the conservation of the helmet , with the assistance of donations from the Heritage Lottery Fund (which gave a £ 650 @,@ 000 grant) , the Art Fund and other trusts and charities . The helmet was valued at £ 300 @,@ 000 ; under the terms of the Treasure Act , Ken Wallace and the landowner were each awarded £ 150 @,@ 000 .

The helmet was put on permanent public display at the end of January 2012 at the Harborough Museum in Market Harborough , nine miles from the site where the hoard was found , alongside other objects found at Hallaton .