



THE GODDESS SENUNA AT ASHWELL

Ashwell is a large and attractive village situated north-east of Baldock. It has a fascinating and well-documented history and is passed through on the Icknield Way Trail between Baldock and Royston. It can boast an Iron-Age hill-fort, Arbury Banks, to the south-west and evidence of Roman occupation, a probably villa site on the northern outskirts of the village. Ashwell's importance as a centre of Roman/British activity received a boost in 2002 when several exciting discoveries were unearthed by a metal detectorist in a field at Ashwell End.

For some considerable time, while further excavations and investigations were being undertaken, the discoveries were not made generally known. With enthusiastic support from Dr Ralph Jackson at the British Museum and the willing co-operation of the landowner, the site was the focus of an archaeological dig each summer for three years. As a result of painstaking restoration and conservation, there is now a permanent exhibit in the British museum, entitled 'Near Baldock Hoard' which brings to life the story of the worship of a hitherto unknown Celtic goddess.

Now known as Senuna, the goddess is depicted as an elegant silver figurine with her hair coiled in a bun and dressed in flowing robes. Sadly, her face and arms have been destroyed by time but she is thought to resemble the Roman goddess Minerva. Discovered with her were a number of silver votive plaques, some gold plaques, beautiful jewellery, coins and other evidence of votive offerings such as animal bones.

The excavation also revealed the site of a shrine surrounded by a complex of buildings including workshops, accommodation for pilgrims and possibly the locations for the ritual offering of animals such as pigs. The shrine would have been the busy worship centre sometime in the 3rd or 4th century AD until political upheaval made it unsafe to continue. possibly Perhaps this was a reason for the safe burial of all the silver and gold until calmer times returned.

Ashwell Village Museum (open on Sunday afternoons or by special appointment) is now the proud owner of a beautiful replica of Senuna.

Perhaps the Icknield Way is a crucial part of the story –It must have been the route taken by pilgrims from miles around to reach Ashwell!



The silver figurine of Senuna, perhaps a water goddess, discovered at Ashwell