

A NEW ANGLO-SAXON MINT—MEDESHAMSTEDE

By R. H. M. DOLLEY

IN papers in the *Journal* and in Spink's *Numismatic Circular*, the late W. C. Wells claimed that "from the year 1070 the abbot held the privilege of a mint and one moneyer within the abbey precincts at Peterborough, and that he held the further privilege of employing one moneyer alternatively at Stamford or at Peterborough, according to his discretion and convenience".¹ Wells unfortunately was not a trained historian, and his uncritical handling of his sources—too often cited from inadequate translations—means that one day his papers will have to be rewritten, preferably by a student with rather more acquaintance with palaeography and diplomatic than the present writer. The purpose of this note is simply to draw attention to new and concrete evidence for a state of affairs which the historian had long suspected, namely that the abbot's privilege of having a mint within his monastery was inherent in the charter of Eadgar, and that it was first exercised not in 1070 but at least as early as the penultimate decade of the tenth century. This new evidence occurs in one of the Swedish hoards, and once again the Society is under a heavy debt of gratitude to Dr. Nils Ludvig Rasmusson who has given me permission to publish separately in the pages of the *Journal* a coin of truly cardinal significance.

The coin occurs in an early-eleventh-century hoard from the island of Gotland.² It is of Æthelræd's *First Hand* type, which I believe to have been struck for several years from c. 985.³



Unfortunately it is badly chipped, but even so weighs 1.015 gm. or roughly 15½ gr. The style of the coin, and especially the treatment of the bust, is remarkably good, though the obverse is marred by a

¹ 'The Stamford and Peterborough Mints', *Brit. Num. Journ.* vol. xxii, p. 35, xxiii, p. 7, xxiv, p. 69; *Numismatic Circular*, Mar. 1929, p. 101.

² SHM, Inv. 14379. Barshage: Othem s:n. Gotland: cf. Stenberger, *Die Schatzfunde Gotlands*, pp. 162-3.

³ For the dating of late Saxon types cf. my paper *N.N.U.M.* May, 1954, p. 52. It is perhaps worth remarking that the dates I have suggested for a number of Scandinavian hoards on the basis of the English coins alone coincide remarkably with those arrived at by Dr. Peter Berghaus from the German coins alone.

slight blundering of the legend, the surviving portion of which reads clearly:

+....REDREDREXANŦo

Such a repetition of a syllable, however, is one attributable to a surfeit rather than to a lack of care. The reverse legend reads:

+HILDEŦOMEŦ.... (Text block and **PI. II**).

It is tantalizing that the reverse legend should break off in the very middle of the mint-name, but the loss will be felt not so much by the numismatist as by the student of English place-names who is deprived of what promised to be an unusually full rendering of the name of an otherwise unknown mint.

The form of the personal name HILDE is almost certainly the genitive from a nominative HILD. Both forms are found on coins. Such an uncompounded name has aroused suspicion, and the strong feminine is also irregular, so that it has been suggested that the die-cutter was short of space and suppressed the deuterotheme of a name such as Hildesige or Hildewine. However, the simple element is far too well attested on a number of dies cut over many years, and my friend Mrs. Ulla M. Ericson of Lund accepts the name HILD with genitive HILDE as a genuine example of that comparative rarity, a Saxon uncompounded name. The name is exceptional, then, and it is a pointer of the greatest significance that it is found—the new coin apart—at one mint and at one mint only, Stamford, where Wells himself showed that the abbots of Peterborough exercised a limited privilege of coining. Moreover, Hild is found coining at Stamford throughout the decade immediately preceding the issue of the new coin reading MEŦ . . .¹ Prima facie, then, the new coin was struck in the vicinity of Stamford, and I do not feel that the Peterborough attribution can be seriously disputed.

Wells, incidentally, perpetuates the old heresy that the name of Medeshamstede was altered to Burgh or Peterborough under Eadgar and during the abbacy of Ealdulf.² It is hard to see how such a tradition could have arisen, for the text of the so-called "Peterborough Chronicle"—with which Wells professes familiarity—specifically states that the wall was not built nor the name changed until the abbacy of Cenwulf.³ Cenwulf did not succeed Ealdulf until 992, when the latter was elevated to the sees of York and Worcester on the death of Oswald.⁴ Thus, the evidence of the new coin is completely in agreement with our primary historical source not only for the history of Peterborough but for that of our country as a whole.

The form MEŦ . . . for the mint-name will occasion no surprise among those familiar with the principles of the philology of late Saxon place-names. It is a well-attested phenomenon, commented on by Ekwall in his introduction to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*

¹ Cf. Wells, *Brit. Num. Journ.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 17, 27; xiv, p. 76.

² *Brit. Num. Journ.*, vol. xxii, p. 50 (reprint, p. 16).

³ Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, i, p. 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Place-Names, that the Scandinavian settlers had difficulty in pronouncing "d" where it occurred between two vowels, and usually converted it to "th". The abbey at Medeshamstede was very much in the Danelaw, and probably drew its dies from Lincoln. Consequently a form METHESHAMSTEDE is precisely what we should expect. There is an exact numismatic parallel afforded by the name of the mint now covered by the sea which is associated with the present Bradwell in Essex. In manuscript D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the name appears as "Iudan byrig", in Roger of Wendover as "Uithabiri", and on the coins as "G(i)otha(n)byri(g)".¹

The new coin is the first that can with confidence be attributed to the Saxon mint of Medeshamstede/Peterborough, and some may even claim it as the only certain coin of the abbey struck by Saxon or Norman. I suspect, however, that Hild was not the only Saxon moneyer who struck there during the reign of Æthelræd II. In a very early number of the *Numismatic Chronicle*, tucked away in the Proceedings, there is recorded, in the most tantalizing manner, a coin of that reign which is alleged to read on the reverse:

+PIZTANM^oOMEÐEL².

Philologists have informed me that "Methel" is found as an element in comparatively few English place-names, and cannot be associated with any where there is the least reason to suspect the existence in those days of a "burgh". Unfortunately the coin in question cannot now be traced—not even the type is known—and it was communicated to the Society on the strength of a cast. Inasmuch as the form PIZTAN is without parallel and philologically objectionable, I think that there can be little doubt but the reading as recorded is corrupt. The form PVLSTAN is found at Stamford at precisely the time of the Hild coin of Medeshamstede, and I would like to suggest that Wulfstan also worked for abbot Ealdulf—or his successor Cenwulf—in the monastic mint situated within the abbey itself. It is noteworthy that the S in the personal name is reversed, and I would suggest that the coin in fact read +PVLZTAN (or even +PLZTAN) M^oOMEÐEZ. We all know how easy it is to fail to distinguish horizontal strokes where they coincide with the inner and outer circles. A classic example is afforded by a coin in the Igelösa hoard from the mint of Tamworth. Originally this was reported to read as regards the moneyer's name "Beoruce" (BEORVCE). In fact it is clearly "Deorulf" (DEORVLF), who was already known at the mint. However this may be, the attribution to Peterborough of the "Hand" type coin reading +HILDEM^oOMEÐ . . . is not likely to be disputed, and a completely new mint is added to the list of those operating in the late Saxon period.

¹ Ibid., p. 112, cf. ii, p. 148.

² *Num. Chron. (Proc.)*, 1850, p. 6.