

THE SHREWSBURY HOARD (1936) OF PENNIES OF EDWARD THE ELDER

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THE Shrewsbury hoard of coins of Edward the Elder was found in February 1936 in Castle Foregate, Shrewsbury, by workmen employed by the Co-operative Wholesale Society Building Department (Vere Street, Salford), while digging foundations for a new garage for the Shrewsbury Industrial Co-operative Society, replacing a group of cottages which until then had constituted Britannia Place. The findspot lies about 300 metres outside the conjectured northern edge of the Saxon *burh* and either on or close to one of the routes into and out of the town – the only one, incidentally, which does not involve a river crossing, although it does run close to the Severn.

The chief source of information for the discovery is an account in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* of 6 March 1936, but it provides very few details of either the nature of the find or the circumstances of its discovery. The coins were found about a yard below the ground surface. There is no reference to a container, suggesting that the coins may not have been within a pottery or metal vessel but in one made of a perishable material, such as wood, leather or cloth or perhaps none at all. The coins were arranged neatly in stacks, i.e. *rouleaux*, and are said to have numbered two hundred in all. This estimated figure should, however, be treated with caution. The statements in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* account – the first blow of the pick shattered half of them to pieces and many of them crumbled away to powder, which is confirmed by the broken and chipped state of the surviving coins – suggest that it cannot be considered reliable. It could be an exaggeration or an underestimate of the true figure, although the reference to *rouleaux* suggests that it may well err on the low side. According to the classification of the sizes of early medieval coin hoards from the British Isles proposed by Michael Dolley,¹ this would almost certainly rank as a 'three star' hoard, i.e. comprising between 120 and 1199 coins. Excluding the extremely large hoard from Cuerdale and the less well documented find from Drogheda (1846), it may be considered with the Harkirk find (1611) as one of the largest hoards deposited in the first quarter of the tenth century as yet known from the British Isles. This alone makes it so particularly unfortunate that so little is known of its contents. It may be noted at this point that there is no suggestion that any jewellery or ingots/hack-silver were present in the find. There is also no hint that it included any dirhems or fragments, which would certainly have survived the ravages of time and the circumstances of the discovery better than their European counterparts. This is as one would expect of a find made in the heart of English Mercia and which comprised almost certainly, as we shall see, mainly West Saxon coin.

The *Shrewsbury Chronicle* records that Mr J. Judge, the foreman in charge, identified the coins as of silver and 'sent them up to the museum where there are seven remaining.' At present there are only six coins from the hoard at the Clive House Museum, Shrewsbury, and no details exist of a seventh one. However, the coins had, in fact, been taken to the museum by Mr E. Hampson, who at that time was secretary of the Shrewsbury Industrial Co-operative Society. Mr Hampson has written to me that he was not present at the discovery and that he did manage to secure only six coins from the find, apart from two very small fragments which he himself retained: over the years these fragments deteriorated without any laboratory conservation and were discarded by him only recently. Mr David

¹ R. H. M. Dolley, *SCBI 8: The Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum*, (1966), 47ff.

Gibson, who was also employed at that time with the S.I.C.S., has described the discovery of the hoard as follows:

After Mr Judge had pronounced them 'silver coins', a completely undisciplined scramble occurred; workmen dropped tools to join the search and soon there were no more than odd traces from which Mr Hampson managed to secure the best preserved.²

The fate of these other coins is unknown. Contact with other museums in the Midlands and North of England has confirmed that there are no strays from it in any museum collection in those areas.

No coroner's inquest was held on the find. At the time when A. J. H. Gunstone was preparing *SCBI 17: Ancient British, Saxon and Norman Coins in Midlands Museums* (1971), the coins were by accident not brought to his attention and so were not included in that volume. They have been briefly summarised in the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 59 (1978), 260f. The six surviving coins, all regal issues in the name of Edward the Elder, are as follows:

- 1-4 *BMC ii* = Br. 13 = North 649 (two line type): moneyers – Athelulf, Hathebold, Rægenulf (2)
 5 *BMC iii* = Br. 12 = North 651 (portrait type): moneyer – Wulfred
 6 *BMC xiv* = Br. 2 = North 655 (cross moline type): moneyer – Wulfheard.



The coins are classified below according to a scheme proposed by Mr Stewart Lyon in an essay in a forthcoming volume on tenth-century coinage in which the coins of Edward the Elder are divided into six series or phases. The individual weights are not given as most of the coins are chipped or incomplete.

1. *BMC ii* Athelulf

Obv. +EADVVEARDREX *Rev.* :/AÐEL+/+++/VLFMO/:

Die ratio → . Diameter of flan: 21 mm. From the same dies as *BMC 7*, from the Cuerdale hoard (the diameter of which is also 21 mm).

The coin is from the second series of the coins of Edward the Elder. It has on the obverse a small inner circle, 10 mm in diameter, the size of which is characteristic of both series one and two. The alignment of the central cross on the obverse with the initial cross (in contrast with the following coin), the oval, slightly tilted form of the letter O and the smaller, neater lettering on both obverse and reverse are, however, specifically characteristic of the second series.

The large number of coins of Athelulf in the Forum and Vatican hoards shows that he was a moneyer of considerable importance under Edward the Elder and it is reasonable to identify him with the Athelwulf who struck coins of Æthelstan's type v at Winchester. He

² Quoted in a letter to the writer from Mr W. E. Jenks.

may or may not be the person of the same name who struck coins at Canterbury in the name of Archbishop Plegmund in the first series of his coins (North 253) and in the chronologically later Pallium type (North -), the sole recorded example of which was in the Harkirk hoard, and is clearly to be disassociated from Athulf (whose name is consistently spelled in this form), who struck coins of types *BMC* vii, ix and xi of Edward the Elder at a mint in North West England.

2. *BMC* ii Hatheald

Obv. †EADVVEARDREX *Rev.* ∴/HAÐE/††/BALDM†/∴

Die ratio ↖. Diameter of flan: 20.5 mm.

A coin of the same dies is in the British Museum (1928/6/11/4), ex L. A. Lawrence and possibly the same coin which had formed part of lot 149 in the sale of the collection of William Hoare of Southsea (Sotheby etc., 25 March 1850). They have an obverse die-link with *BMC* 20, a two-line type penny of the moneyer Beornwald from the Cotton collection, and from a major hoard found probably in the North Midlands in c.1600. A coin of Hatheald from different dies occurred in the Forum hoard (1883) and is no. 44 in De Rossi's list.³ This is a chronologically later coin with neat, Winchester style lettering and with a positive attempt in the reverse legend to leave a space between EADVVEARD and REX, and between REX and the initial cross. This coin shares an obverse die-link also with a coin of Beornwald in the British Museum (not in *BMC*; 1962/3/7/4, ex Spinks). Beornwald/Beornwold are clearly to be identified with Bernwald, who struck the prototype OHSNAFORDA coins at, it is now believed, Oxford, late in the reign of Alfred.⁴ (Whether the moneyer Beornwald who struck mint-signed coins at Wallingford under Æthelstan is the same moneyer or a homonymous son or grandson is uncertain.) The coins of Edward the Elder's moneyer, Hatheald, may then be attributed with reasonable probability to Oxford.

The Shrewsbury hoard coin has a very small inner circle on the obverse measuring 9 mm in diameter, characteristic of both the first and second series of the coins of Edward the Elder. The large, ungainly lettering and the fact that the central cross is set obliquely and aligns neither with the initial cross nor the first letter of the legend are characteristic of the first series. The form of the A, however, which is uncapped and has a wedge at the apex, belongs rather to the second series. This would suggest that the coin is transitional between the two series. It is, however, significant that no coins of Hatheald occurred in the Cuerdale hoard, suggesting that the coin may be ascribed alternatively to the latter part of the second series, but still showing several features characteristic of the first series. The phenomenon is also to be seen on certain late portrait type pennies of the moneyer Wulfred which may be ascribed to the latter part of the second series from the style of the king's bust on the obverse, which is shown with 'linear' drapery, a post-Cuerdale feature: the reverses, however, employ the large, ungainly lettering more characteristic of the first series of Edward the Elder's coins (e.g. F. Elmore Jones (Glendinging, 12 and 13 May 1971) lot 46).

3. *BMC* ii Rægenulf

Obv. †EADVVEARDREX *Rev.* ∴/RÆGEN/††††/VLFM†O/∴

Die ratio ↓. Diameter of flan: 21 mm. From the same obverse die as the following coin.

4. *BMC* ii Rægenulf

Obv. [†E]ADVVEARDRE(X) *Rev.* ∴/[R]ÆGEN/[††††/VLFIT†O/∴

Die ratio →. Diameter of flan: 20.5 mm. From the same obverse and reverse dies as *SCBI* 6: *National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh*, Part 1, 100 and the same obverse die as the previous coin.

³ 'The Forum Hoard, found in excavations near the house of the Vestal Virgins 1883', Appendix I in C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Athelstan, King of England 949-939', *BNJ* 42 (1974), 35ff., pp. 141-155. C. F. Keary 'A hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins found in Rome and des-

cribed by Sig. de Rossi', *NC*, 3rd ser., 4 (1884), 225-55.

⁴ Presidential address by Stewart Lyon, 'Historical Problems of Anglo-Saxon Coinage -- (4) The Viking Age', *BNJ* 39 (1970), 196-97.

These two coins belong to the third series of the coins of Edward the Elder. The diameter of the inner circle on the obverse measures 12 mm and it was subsequent to the second series that it broadened significantly from 9–10 mm to between 12 and 13 mm. At the same time the flan size increased to between 21 and 22 mm. The small size of No. 4 above would suggest that the coin is either transitional between the second and third series or that it was struck relatively early within the later series. Its die duplicate, however, *SCBI Edinburgh* 100 measures in diameter between 21.1 and 21.5 mm, a more acceptable figure for the third series. The lettering on the obverses and on the reverse of No. 4 is small and neat, here characteristic of the third series. The space between the final *D* of *EADVVEARD* and the *R* of *REX* suggests a preliminary attempt to separate visually the two words. The effect, however, is lost by the long space between the *R* and *E* of *REX*. As with the coins of the second series, the *A* is barred with a straight bar and capped with a small wedge.

Rægenulf struck mint-signed coins at Winchester under Æthelstan and the style and quantity of the surviving coins in his name shows that he was working at that mint under Edward the Elder also.

5. *BMC* iii Wulfred

Obv. †EADVVEARDREX *Rev.* ∴/VVLF+/++++/REDITΓ⊙/∴

Die ratio \. Diameter of flan 20.5 mm. From the same obverse die as F. Elmore Jones (Glending, 12 and 13 May 1971) 46, ex Vatican hoard (Glending, 16 May 1929) 38.

This coin dates late in the series of portrait type pennies by Wulfred, having linear drapery on the king's bust on the obverse and neat, 'Winchester' style lettering on both the obverse and reverse. Although the F. Elmore Jones coin to which it is die-linked has a reverse with large ungainly lettering, characteristic of the first series of Edward the Elder's coins, both this and the Shrewsbury hoard coin must date after the deposition of the Cuerdale hoard, as the portrait type coins there were all of the early type with 'solid' rather than linear drapery on the king's bust. The deposition of the Cuerdale hoard may be placed in the second phase of the coins of Edward the Elder. The style of lettering and the small diameter confirm that the coin dates before the end of the second series.

An obverse die-link has been noted by Mr Lyon between *BMC* 67, a non-portrait type penny of Wulfred from the Cuerdale hoard, and one of the moneyer Athelulf from the Morley St Peter hoard (*SCBI* 26: *Museums in East Anglia*, 123). Athelulf, it has been suggested above, worked at Winchester and it follows that Wulfred probably operated at that mint too. This is supported by Wulfred's obvious considerable importance as a moneyer, shown by the large number of dies he may be seen to have employed in both the portrait and the two-line types.

6. *BMC* xiv Wulfheard

Obv. †EAD[V]VEARD·REX *Rev.* Δ/VVLFHE/° (floral motif) · °/ARDITΓ⊙/Δ

Die ratio ←. Diameter: 22 mm. (HE ligatured and lower triangle inverted)

Type *BMC* xiv of Edward the Elder has been the subject of a recent paper by the late Dr Michael Dolley in which it has been shown that those coins of this type struck by the moneyer Wulfheard were probably minted at Winchester, while the sole surviving coin of the type by Eicmund (who had also struck coins in the name of Archbishop Plegmund) was a product of the mint at Canterbury.⁵ This is supported by the styles of the lettering on the coins of the two moneyers. Those by Wulfheard have a neat sophisticated lettering, characteristic of the dies cut in or for the Winchester area in the second and third series of the coinage of Edward the Elder; on the coin of Eicmund, the lettering is more crude and more at home in style with other coins attributable to the mint at Canterbury.

The type is extremely rare. Five other examples struck by Wulfheard may be traced,

⁵ Michael Dolley, 'The Mint or Mints of *BMC* type XIV of Edward the Elder', *NGrc* (1976), 276f.

while one other, whose present location is unknown, is recorded from the Harkirk (1611) hoard. There are two surviving examples of a variant form, where the normal reverse of a type *BMC* iii coin replaces the characteristic type *BMC* xiv reverse. These may be classed as type *BMC* xiv/iii 'mules'. Six obverse dies for the type can be recognised, and for the true type *BMC* xiv, four reverse dies. The die combinations are as follows:-

<i>Obverses</i>	A	B	C	D	E		F
	∖	/					
<i>Reverses</i>	a		b	c	d	two-line type reverse as type <i>BMC</i> iii	

The coins have an added interest in that on the reverse dies appear the following die identification marks:

- a a pellet abuts the left side of the left annulet
- b there is unnaturally wide spacing of the vv of the moneyer's name
- c the left annulet has a pellet in the centre
- d a pellet abuts the left side of the right annulet.

A comparable mark appears on only one of the obverse dies. On E there is a pellet adjacent to the final *n* of the king's name.

The coins are as follows:

- Aa British Museum (*BMC* 113). An unprovenanced eighteenth-century accession. It is almost certainly the Tyssen coin illustrated in Ruding plate 16, no. 6. Illustrated in J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage* (1963), plate ix, no. 8.
- Ba *SCBI* 16: *Ancient British, Romano-British and English Coins formed by Mrs Emery May Norweb*, Part 1 (1971) no. 152, ex Baldwins and said to be 'probably a stray from the Vatican (1928) hoard.'
- Cb *SCBI* 9: *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, Part 1 (1967) no. 317, ex Lockett 515, Drabble lot 406 and from the Vatican (1928) hoard.
- Dc C. E. Blunt collection, ex Ryan lot 753, Bruun lot 76, Carlyon-Britton part 1, lot 371, with provenance going back to the Dimsdale sale (1824), lot 479.
- Ed Shrewsbury Museum, from the Shrewsbury (1936) hoard.
- F/two-line type
 - i. R. C. Lockett Lot 2720, from the Vatican (1928) hoard.
 - ii. *SCBI* 20: *The R. P. Mack Collection* (1973), No. 769, ex Ryan lot 754, from the Vatican (1928) hoard. From the same dies as the previous coin. Both are die-linked to a type *BMC* iii (portrait type) penny of Edward the Elder by the moneyer Wulfheard.⁶

Unlocated coin from dies not identifiable.

- i. Harkirk (1611) hoard, which was subsequently sent into Wales for safety during The Civil War.

Although it has been argued that type *BMC* xiv should be dated after c.915,⁷ Mr Lyon has now shown that a substantially earlier commencement date for the type must be accepted, c.910.⁸ The type *BMC* xiv/iii 'mules' date late within the second series of Edward the Elder's coins because of their small flan size and because they employ a reverse die also found on a type *BMC* iii (portrait type) coin of this series. The true type *BMC* xiv coins are, however, generally substantially larger in size – Aa measures 21 mm; Dc and Ed are 22 mm, while Cb measures 22.6 mm. The square, neat and precise lettering of the type and the care in the spacing to leave gaps between the king's name and REX, and between REX and the initial cross are characteristic of Winchester coins of the second and particularly the third series of coins of Edward the Elder.

The approximate date for the concealment of the Shrewsbury hoard depends upon two factors – the evidence from the coins themselves and the inferences that may be drawn from their findspot. It is regrettable that we know of six coins only from the find and that we are obliged to accept them as a representative sample from it. As a group, however, the

⁶ Stewart Lyon, 'A Significant "Winchester" Die-Link in the Reign of Edward the Elder (899-924)', *NCirc* (1983), 261-62.

⁷ Dolley, 'The Mint . . . of Edward the Elder'.

⁸ Lyon, 'Winchester Die-Link'.

coins appear significantly compact both geographically and chronologically. Five of the six coins come from Winchester; the last probably comes from the not too distant mint of Oxford.⁹ The dating of the individual coins may be summarised as follows:

1. (Athelulf) From series 2 with a die-duplicate in the Cuerdale hoard.
2. (Hathebald) Possibly from late in series 2.
- 3, 4. (Rægenulf) From series 3, but probably early.
5. (Wuifred) Late in series 2.
6. (Wulfheard) From series 3.

Conspicuously absent are not only coins of Alfred (which were well represented in the Harkirk hoard, the only other English hoard so far known to have included a type *BMC* xiv coin) but also true coins of series 1 of Edward the Elder, as seen in the Cuerdale hoard. This would suggest that the Shrewsbury hoard comprised entirely or principally recently struck coinage brought together in Wessex and possibly at Winchester itself.

If this is so, then because the first coin has a die-duplicate in the Cuerdale hoard, the Shrewsbury hoard should date within a tolerably short period of the deposition of that hoard, perhaps as short a time as five or so years. The date of the deposition of the Cuerdale hoard is currently put at c.903. Mr Lyon has, however, suggested to me that this figure might well be brought forward to c.905 for two reasons. First, two chronologically distinct series of coins of Edward the Elder are present in it. Secondly, the hoard included a fragment of an Italian coin in the names of Pope Benedict IV and Louis the Blind, which appears to be restricted in date to between 901 and 903. Allowance should be made for reasonable time for the coin to reach England from Italy. On this dating, therefore, the Shrewsbury find may have been concealed in c.910.

With regard to the actual concealment of the hoard, it is possible that the deposit of such a large quantity of coin from Wessex close to one of the most important *burhs* of Mercia may be associated in some way with the activity of the West Saxon army either in northern Mercia or in association with the Mercian host. It is not inconceivable that Edward the Elder's army participated in the restoration of Chester in 907. In 909 he dispatched a combined Mercian and West Saxon host against the Northumbrian Danes, while in 910 a rapidly conscripted army from Mercia and Wessex harried a retreating Danish army which earlier in that year had raided into Mercia as far as the Bristol Avon and finally annihilated it at Tettenhall in Staffordshire. (The raid would have provided a suitable explanation for the concealment for the hoard but would not explain in itself the strong West Saxon element in it.)

Michael Dolley, however, has drawn attention to the phenomenon of the occurrence of a small number of medieval hoards which had been concealed 'just outside the then limits of towns'.¹⁰ He suggests that such hoards may have been concealed by merchants or travellers before entering a town and not wishing to walk its narrow streets with wealth about their person. On this interpretation the Shrewsbury hoard may have been concealed by a merchant or traveller from Wessex. It finds a good parallel in the Shaftesbury hoard of coins of Æthelred II, concealed a short distance outside the Saxon boundaries of that town and, to judge from the high proportion within it of coins struck at Lincoln and York, quite plausibly concealed by a merchant or traveller from the North Eastern Danelaw, mis-trustful for his personal safety in Wessex.¹¹

⁹ It should be noted that as early as the first decade of the tenth century there was at least one major mint active in north west Mercia. The absence of Mercian coins in the hoard (save for that which may be attributed to Oxford, which was not annexed to Wessex until 910) thus confirms the southern emphasis of the hoard.

¹⁰ R. H. M. Dolley, 'The Shaftesbury Hoard of Pence of Æthelræd II', *NC* (1956), 267-80.

¹¹ It could, however, be argued that a town-dweller anticipating the plundering and perhaps firing of his town would be more likely to conceal his wealth in the open countryside rather than within its walls. Because, however, of the 'non-local' nature of both the Shrewsbury and Shaftesbury hoards, Dolley's 'traveller' hypothesis still remains valid for these hoards.

As at present the precise dating of the coins of Edward the Elder is not possible and as there is no certainty that the Shrewsbury hoard must be associated with a particular historical event, the concealment of the find cannot be closely dated. At the present state of our knowledge the approximate date of c.910 suits both the numismatic and historical evidence.

Acknowledgments

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and the late Professor Michael Dolley gave -- as always -- much help and friendly advice. Above all, however, I am indebted to Mr Stewart Lyon who has freely shared with me his unrivalled knowledge of the coinage of Edward the Elder and allowed me to see in advance and quote from his unpublished study of the coins of that king.