

ART. X – *A Seventeenth century treasure trove in Furness*

By ANDREW WHITE, M.A., Ph.D., F.M.A., F.S.A.

WHILE I was searching through the Duchy of Lancaster papers in the Public Record Office at Chancery Lane a reference caught my eye. It was “DL44. 1052. Furness, Enquiry as to Treasure Trove (19 Jas 1)”. The actual documents proved to be every bit as interesting as the reference suggested, leading to the rediscovery of the circumstances surrounding a coin-hoard found near Ulverston in 1621-2. This hoard does not seem to have been recorded previously in any of the literature.¹

The documents consist of a Royal Commission issued to six of the Lancashire gentry, empowering them, “or any three of them” to enquire into the circumstances of the find, news of which had come to the Council of the Duchy, presumably via Thomas Rawlinson, bailiff in Furness, together with the sworn testimonies of various witnesses. This enquiry was not a matter of idle curiosity; Stuart treasuries were notoriously bare and treasure trove belonged to the King either in his own right or in his right as Duke of Lancaster, so such a find could be a small but welcome addition to the depleted royal resources.

The Documents

PRO DL44/1052

(cover) Special Commission to inquire of treasure trove in Furness in the countie of Lancaster, 19 James I (= 1621-2).

Commission

James by the grace of God of England Scotland France and Ireland King . . . to our trustie and wellbeloved John Preston Thomas Charnock George Preston James Anderton th'elder Roger Kirbie and James Anderton the younger esquires and to every of them greeting. Whereas our Chancellor and Counsell of our Duchie of Lancaster are crediblie informed of certaine treasure trove to a great value in Furneys p'cell of our said Duchie in our Countie of Lancaster . . . and preserve our right therein . . . You or any three of you [to act as commissioners to find out] what quantitie, value nature and kinde by whom and by what occasion, and in whose hands the same any pte thereof were or are remaying (if any such bee) . . .

Testimonies

Examinations taken at Ulverston the xviith daye of Aprill Anno dni Jacobi Anglie regis vicessimo et Scotie quinqgessimio quinto before John Preston, Roger Kirkby and James Anderton younger esquires, by vertue of his ma'ties Commission forthe of hys highnes Court of Duchie.

James Lindoe of Skathwait in the county of Lancaster labourer examined upon his oath saith that he with one Willm Ianson beinge pullinge downe an old wall in a field of widow Iansons, wyfe of Richard Ianson of Skathwait aforesaid, found a certaine quantety of gold and silver in a lead pott, but howe many peeces he knoweth not. And he beinge further examined what he did with the said gold and silver, saith hee put it into his hatt, and it beinge in his hatt, Willm Ianson aforesaid tooke a handfull of the gold and silver from hym, whereupon this examinee put the rest into his pocket and the eveninge followinge hee, this examinee, cominge into widowe Iansons house, hee delivered the gold and silver which he had unto widowe Ianson to be devided betwixt him and Willm Ianson aforesaid, and the said Ianson lykewyse delivered the handfull wch hee tooke from the examinee, to be devyded. And upon the devison of the same th'one halfe was delivered to this examinee mother, and th'other halfe widowe Ianson kepte her selfe, but howe many either part came too, hee knoweth not. This examinee further saith that before hee delivered the said gold and silver to be devyded, hee and Ianson ptd with vi peeces of the gold, twoe peeces to the wife of James Towers of Skathwait aforesaid for wch shee paid six pence and ffouer peeces to John Ashburner sonne of Richard Ashburner of Crayksyde, for wch ffouer peeces he gave them twelve pence in money and some aples.

Willm Ianson sonne of Margaret Ianson of Skathwait in the county of Lancr. examined saith as James Lindoe formerly examined hath sworne unto, onely this examinee further saith that presently after they had found the gold and put it into a hatt they sett it in a tree neare the place where it was found. Jenet the wyfe of James Towers of Skathwait aforesaid then comenge unto them did put her hand into the hatt wch had the gold in it, but whether shee tooke anie of the gold or silver forth of the hatt he knoweth not.

Margaret Ianson widowe of Skathwait in the county of Lancr. examined upon her oath saith that her husband in his lyfe tyme haveinge exchanged a certaine p'cell of Hempland, for a dale of ground at Skathwait aforesaid called the Hanginge Dale, wth one Thomas Fell. And this examinee haveinge set her sonne and one James Lindoe to kidd upp an old stone wall standinge in the said Hanginge Dale, did goe to bringe them their dinner at such tyme as the said Lindoe and her sonne had found gould. And this examinee saith that upon her comenge unto the feild the said James Lindoe did take gold and silver out of his hatt and put it into his pockett, amongst wch there was one peece of gould greater than the rest wch had a crosse upon th'one syde of it, further this examinee confesseth that in the eveninge of the said day shee did devyde the said gould and silver, and gave to widowe Lindoe her neighbour, one and twenty peeces wch she thought to bee gould, and nyne and fortie peeces of silver, but this examinee deposeth that she could not then see nor heare of the great peece of gold wth the crosse upon it wch shee had formerly seene in the field. And this examinee confesseth that she delivered twenty peeces of the gold and all the silver to Thomas Fell of Skathwait her neighbour, and th'other twoe peeces of the gould th'one to Richard Ashburner of Craiksyde and th'other to Willm Addyson servant to James Williamson, wch peece was afterward delivered to Mr Thomas Rawlinson his ma't's bailiffe within Furness.

Hellen Lindoe widowe, wyfe of Richard Lindoe of Skathwait in the county of Lancaster, examined upon her oath saith, that shee hearinge that her sonne and one Willm Ianson had found gold was sent for her by her neighbor widowe Ianson to

come to her house, whoe upon her comeinge thither Ianson's wyfe called to this examinee sone and her owne sone to deliver her the gold and silver wch they had found, who pullinge gold and silver out of their pockets gave it to the said widowe Ianson who first takeinge two peeces of gold to her selfe gave unto this examinee twenty peeces of gold and ffyfty peeces of silver and kept unto her selfe one and twenty peeces of gold and ffortie nyne peeces of silver, besydes the two peeces of gold wch before shee had deducted, and further this examinee saith that shee delivered eighteene peeces of her gold to Mr Thomas Rawlinson his ma'ties bailiffe wthin the liberties of Furness, and that shee delivered th'other two peeces of gold the residue of her twentie, to George Askewe of Little Urswicke her sonne in lawe.

Thomas Senhouse gentleman, examined upon his oath saith that hee beinge in companie with James Towers of Skathwait in the country of Lancr. the said Towers did showe a peece of gould to this examinee wch had a crosse upon th'one syde of it, and further saith that hee offered the said Towers xxiii^s for the gould, lykewyse the examinee deposeth that the gould soe showed him by Towers was none of the Rose nobles, but greater in quantity and of a different coyne.

James Towers of Skathwait aforesaid upon his oath saith, that his wyfe had in exchanged [sic] a peece of gold of James Lindoe for wch shee gave sixpence, and that the said Lindoe gave another peece of gould unto her for nothings, but the peece of gould wth the crosse upon it wch Mr Thomas Senhouse formerly deposed unto, hee denyeth that hee either had, or did see the same. And further saith that the twoe peeces of gould wch his wyfe had of Lindoe he exchanged in Kendall wth a man whose name hee knoweth not, and that hee this examinee had noe more peeces of the said gould.

Thomas Fell of Scathwait in the county of Lancr. examined upon his oath saith that hee had none of the gold nor silver found in the wale but onely twenty peeces of gold and certaine peeces of silver wch hee thinketh are about xlixⁿ, wch were delivered him by William Ianson his neighbor wch gold and money this examinee hath undertaken to answeere when he shall be lawfully thereunto caled.

Jenet the wyfe of James Towers of Skathwait aforesaid upon her oath saith that shee had three peeces of gold two of wch shee had of James Lindoe and the third shee found in the mould nere unto the wale where the pott wth the gold was found, and further shee saith, that her husband exchanged twoe of the peeces in Kendall, and th'other peece she this examinee parted wth to Willm Dodgson of Uluston but shee denyeth that shee had anie more of the gold found in the wale but the three peeces aforesaid.

Margaret Dodgson wyfe of Willm Dodgson of Uluston examined saith that her husband had (of Jennet the wyfe of James Towers of Skathwait) a peece of gold, for wch he paid xiiii^s vi^d in money, and further shee saith that her husband exchanged the said gold wth Edward Geldart younger of Uluston, for sixteene shillings.

The People

John Preston, Roger Kirkby and James Anderton junior were all Lancashire gentlemen. The first two lived in Furness, at Furness Abbey² and Kirkby Ireleth³ respectively, while Anderton had estates at Bardsea.⁴ All the other people were

presumably of yeoman stock, of varying degrees of poverty. The only exceptions were Thomas Rawlinson, his majesty's bailiff in Furness (and Steward of Conishead)⁵ and Thomas Senhouse, gent, presumably of the Workington family. What the latter was doing in Furness is not clear. His evidence on the nature of the coins is interesting, because he of all the protagonists may have had enough experience of handling gold coinage to recognize what was unusual.

The Location

As appears from the testimony of the people involved, this coin hoard was found in demolishing a field wall on the Ianson's property in Hangenge Dale at Scathwait near Ulverston. "Hangenge Dale" is presumably a geographical description, indicating that the land was on a steep slope. Scathwait is recorded on the modern Ordnance Survey map as the hamlet of Low Scathwaite (consisting of three or four houses and farms) and the farmstead of High Scathwaite, two miles and three miles north of Ulverston respectively, at SD 295823 and SD 298836. It is clear that Scathwait had a larger population in the 17th century. Early maps such as those of Saxton (1577) and Speed (1610) do not show it as a place-name. Later maps, such as Yates' Map of Lancashire (1786) suggest that High Scathwaite was then a hamlet, but it does not do to place too much credence in details like these.

The Scathwaites lie on a shoulder of high land between the river Crake and the Newland Pool, and the winding of the lanes in this area strongly suggests that the land was won from dense woodland, a view strengthened by the frequent references to "assarts" here in the Furness Coucher Book. Today it is largely open pasture, perhaps a monument to the demand for charcoal in the local iron-furnaces. Furness Abbey acquired a considerable amount of land in this area in the 13th and 14th centuries, including land in Scathwaite.⁶ Whether the Abbey owned the precise piece of land on which the coin-hoard was found cannot be determined, but a rental of Furness Abbey lands in 1537 includes four tenements with 60 acres at "Scatwhayte", one of them held by the widow of John Yenson, clearly an ancestor of Margaret Ianson's husband. At "Nether Scatwhayte" there were twelve tenements with 115 acres, all of them held by members of the Lyndall family. They are likely to have been ancestors of our Lindoes, and would have passed on their holdings by "tenant-right".⁷ The coincidence of names makes it very probable that the coins were found on land that had belonged to Furness Abbey.

A few other place-names are mentioned. Of these "Crayksyde" is to be identified with Penny Bridge, judging by the evidence of Yates' map of 1786. The settlement was earlier known as "Crakeford" or "Crackford" and appears as such even on maps dating after the building of the bridge. Little Urswick remains as it was. Ulverston and Kendal, as urban centres with greater varieties of shops and services, were clearly sensible places to dispose of gold coins for a profit.

The Coins

Reading through the depositions it is reasonably clear that the coin hoard was contained in a lead pot, in or under an old wall. There were 52 gold coins and 98 or

99 silver, making a total of 150 or 151. Mixed hoards are not common, representing only about 3% of all hoards between 600-1500 A.D., and the size of this one, whatever the currency, must have represented a considerable value, unlikely to have been accumulated by ordinary yeomen. Only one of the gold coins is described; a piece larger than the rest, with a cross on one side of it, referred to by Margaret Ianson and Thomas Senhouse. Despite the lack of detail we can rule out a number of possibilities. The witnesses would have recognised contemporary or recent coinage. Roman coins do not have a cross on them.⁸ Anglo-Saxon coins of silver are rare in this area and gold coins are quite exceptional anywhere. Gold did not figure in the Norman or Angevin coinage and only emerged in the 3rd coinage of Edward III (1343-51). Thomas Senhouse's assertion that these were not rose nobles, if true, would also tend to place them before Edward IV's reform of the coinage in 1464, which introduced the ryal, or rose noble.⁹ So, if the coins were English they were unlikely to pre-date the 14th century, or to postdate the late 15th century.

It is, however, possible that the coins were medieval but of foreign origin, which might explain Senhouse's failure to identify them. Furness Abbey had had many foreign contacts, which would form a possible source, and, as we have seen, the land may well have belonged to the Abbey at the period in question. Many medieval hoards of gold and silver do include foreign pieces, since bullion was of universal currency. If the coins were English it is tempting to place their deposition at the time of Lambert Simnel's uprising in 1487, when Furness must have been in a turmoil,¹⁰ but this is not susceptible of proof.

Witnesses varied greatly in their valuation of the coins, or rather what they would give or take for them. Jenet Towers gave sixpence for two gold pieces. John Ashburner gave twelve pence and some apples for four gold pieces. Both of these valued one gold piece at around three pence. Thomas Senhouse, on the other hand, offered 24 shillings for the large gold piece, while Jenet Towers paid sixpence for a smaller one. William Dodgson gave fourteen shillings and sixpence for one gold piece – perhaps the large one – which later changed hands for sixteen shillings. The great variation may be due to perceived differences in value between the large gold piece and smaller ones, but also to ignorance tempered by curiosity. These were relatively poor people, who would have had little experience in handling gold coinage, and who had little to go on but the practical bartering system that prevailed between neighbours.

The story is unsatisfactorily incomplete. We do not know what happened next. Did the individuals concerned forfeit their coins to the Duchy? Was anyone punished for concealment? There is no reference to the case in the Calendar of State Papers (Domestic) for the period, nor any official statement of the outcome. Ulverston Parish Registers are defective for the period in question and neighbouring parish registers such as those of Pennington, Urswick and Dalton are no help either, so we cannot even follow up the witnesses and fill out their lives a little.

A number of questions are raised, but not answered, by the various testimonies. It was perhaps fair that Margaret Ianson shared the coins with Helen Lindoe, her neighbour, on the grounds that their sons were joint finders. James and William may have been quite young and not regarded by their widowed mothers as reliable with money. But why did Margaret Ianson give most of her share to Thomas Fell? Was it merely for safekeeping or did she owe him money? And why did Helen Lindoe give

most of her gold to Thomas Rawlinson, the royal bailiff? Was it in lieu of rent? What was Jenet Towers up to? She seems to have gained a coin from James Lindoe free of charge and concealed another from her husband. It is tempting to visualise her as a flighty young woman. Perhaps she was keeping it as a sort of insurance.

Finally, the scribe who took down the depositions seems to be trying to render Jacobean Furness dialect in his use of “th’one . . . th’other” and various other decidedly old-fashioned usages.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to the Controller of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office for permission to publish this document, which is Crown copyright.

References

- ¹ J. D. A. Thompson, *Inventory of British Coin Hoards AD600-1500* (1956); I. D. Brown & M. Dolley, *Coin Hoards of Great Britain and Ireland 1500-1967* (1971).
- ² W. Farrer and J. Brownbill (eds.), *Victoria History of the County of Lancaster* Vol. 8. (1914), 312.
- ³ *ibid.*, 395.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, 333.
- ⁵ R. Somerville, *Office-Holders in the Duchy and County Palatine of Lancaster from 1603* (1972), 136.
- ⁶ J. C. Atkinson (ed.), *The Coucher Book of Furness Abbey* Vol. I, pt. I (Chetham Society, 9, 1886), 52, 55, 57, 61, 62; Vol. I, pt. II (Chetham Society, 11, 1887), 347-8, 384, 407, 414-6.
- ⁷ J. Brownbill (ed.), *The Coucher Book of Furness Abbey* Vol. II, pt. III (Chetham Society, 78, 1919), 604.
- ⁸ Some early-mid 5th century Roman gold coins did indeed have a cross on the reverse but it is most unlikely that the hoard was of this date, bearing in mind the extreme rarity of Roman hoards post-400 A.D. in Britain. I am grateful to Dr. David Shotter for useful discussions on this matter.
- ⁹ J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage, Vol. 2. Edward I to Charles II 1272-1662* (1975), 31ff, 69.
- ¹⁰ Farrer and Brownbill, *op. cit.*, 287.