

NOTES

AN EIGHTH-CENTURY ANGLO-SAXON COIN FROM WALTON, AYLESBURY

The coin described here was found about 1 km SE of the modern town centre of Aylesbury in about 1962 when Mr. King, the father of the present owner, was gardening at 45 Highbridge Road, Walton, Aylesbury (SP 8254513510). It is a base silver 'sceat' or penny dating from the second quarter of the eighth century, and minted in East Anglia, Middle Anglia, or Lindsey. The coin was shown at the County Museum, and Mr. King has since kindly agreed to allow the Museum to acquire it¹. It is the only eighth-century coin to have been found in Aylesbury, and one of only a very small number from the County.

The designs of the sceat (Pl. XII) are purely pictorial, without any accompanying inscription. In a simple, almost 'match-stick' style, the two sides depict respectively an animal and a bird. The spaces around the designs are filled up with random patterns of dots, and there are two crosses, in front of and above the bird. The coin is thin, and weighs only 0.89g. It is classified by S. E. Rigold² as Series Q.

The stepping animal and the bird are both familiar from other sceattas, engraved in different styles. The animal is associated especially with Northumbria, while the bird motif, here with drooping tail-feathers which make one think of a cockerel, is used widely in Mercia and Wessex. It is the distinctive 'match-stick' style, as much as anything, which allows us to group together some fifteen or twenty sceattas all with related designs including the same animal and bird, either together or in combination with other designs (a bust, a standing figure) and to think of them as coming from a single workshop or mint. As the coins have no inscriptions to guide us, the only way we can hope to locate that workshop is by gathering up the evidence

of finds, such as this one, and preparing a distribution map. There are hardly any provenanced finds³, and that is why the Aylesbury coin is historically so important. There were two similar coins in a little hoard found near Cambridge a hundred years ago, and there is one from Suffolk. Two specimens of related kinds have come from Lakenheath, in the north-western corner of Suffolk, and another from Burrow Hill, Butley, Suffolk. At least one has been found at Reculver, near the Isle of Thanet, but that is a prolific site, and the fact that so few sceattas of this type have been found among about 80 from east Kent is strong negative evidence that they formed no significant part of the currency there. Similarly their absence from the prolific site of Hamwic (Southampton), where more than a hundred sceattas have been found, proves very convincingly that their home region was distant from Wessex. There are one or two related finds from Yorkshire, but other southern types of sceattas also turn up in Northumbria. By a process of exclusion, therefore, and by a careful consideration of negative evidence which it would take too long to discuss fully, we may deduce that the Aylesbury coin was minted probably in East Anglia, Middle Anglia, or Lindsey. It is tempting to assign series Q to Lindsey.

If so, it has drifted south from its place of origin, to be lost eventually near Aylesbury. In the eighth century most coin was minted at the ports in the east or south of the country, and a drift into the hinterland was more or less a corollary of that. A slightly earlier sceat, which is definitely East Anglian, has for example been found as far afield as West Wycombe.

In assessing the style of the Aylesbury coin,



Plate XI Eight-century base silver sceat of series Q, found at Aylesbury. Enlarged approx x 4.5 diameters.
The sketch shows the actual size of the coin.

a necessary precaution is to see whether there are other specimens stylistically so close that one can be confident that the dies were cut by the same workman. (If the style were irregular, one would have to ask whether the coin was an unofficial copy.) Fortunately, there are good

parallels, in a coin that passed through the Montagu and Lockett collections, and in a specimen which Evans noted as having been bought in London in 1894. They show that the Aylesbury coin is the work of an official mint.

D. M. Metcalf

REFERENCES

1. I am indebted to Mr. G. C. Lamb, who suggested that I record the coin, and to the County Museum for supplying the excellent enlarged photograph of it, Acc. No. 99.1983.
2. The standard classification of sceattas is an alphabetical list of 'series' (rather than 'types'), set out in S. E. Rigold, 'The principal series of English sceattas',
3. *British Numismatic Journal* 47 (1977), 21-30.
4. See S. E. Rigold and D. M. Metcalf, 'A check-list of English finds of sceattas', *ibid.*, 31-52. An updated check-list is in press, to appear in *Proceedings of the Seventh Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History* (British Archaeological Reports, Oxford, 1984).

"ALL HUMAN LIFE IS HERE

The unlettered poor are the secret people of history, surfacing in the record only in the passionless Latin of those who set down on parchment their encounters with the law. And for our county even these details are rare, the records of the Clerks of Assize surviving only sparsely. The presence of a bundle of witnesses' depositions along with the indictments for a sitting of the Assize Court, is therefore of considerable interest. They allow us a glimpse of the lives of some of the humblest members of society; sometimes we can hear their actual words.

The year is 1704. The Public Record Office reference is ASSI 35/145/11.

John Jones was born in the West Indies, but for six years in this country he had gone about selling books and ballads. By this means he contrived to support a wife and three small children. But in August, at the Fair at Winslow, the 'bellman' demanded that he show his authority for carrying on this trade to a Justice of the Peace. Instead of a Justice, however, Jones found himself before a Captain Andrews, who asked if he were willing to serve Her Majesty. When Jones protested that he had a family to support he was thrown into Aylesbury gaol. 'Committed' is the word

used, but since no J.P. figures in the story, Andrews' action seems to have been arbitrary, and possibly illegal, though pressing for the Army was lawful. Thus were the ranks of Marlborough's armies filled.

Desperation drove the unfortunate Jones to desperate measures. Francis Woodcock, the undergaoler, deposed that he was sitting at the door of the gaol when he heard 'a cry of sending for the doctor'. It was Mrs. Jones. She had, she said, prevented her husband going for a soldier by fetching an axe and cutting off his thumb.

An apothecary, John Piddington, was sent for, and Jones asked anxiously if he thought the loss of a thumb would keep him from the Army. Piddington said he thought it would, as he would not be able to 'poyze his muskett'.

The Joneses were indicted for conspiracy, and the jury returned a true bill. What became of them is not known, as the gaol deliveries are wanting.

Fairford Price, of Hardwick, tailor, was luckier, though he too was disadvantaged: he had a bad reputation — so bad as to bring the constables to his father's house when money

was missed from the house of the Dowager Countess of Lindsey.

John Mandeville, the countess's rent collector, said that on a Sunday night in early January he was counting money at a table by candlelight, and on returning after a brief absence found the candle blown out. The cause, he discovered, was that four quarries had been removed from a window; and the money was gone. There was a ladder near the window. He called the constables and went to search suspect houses. Fairford Price claimed to have been in bed from nine o'clock at night until six the next morning. But after being searched by the constables he was alleged to have said, 'Damn your hide an I have the money still'. Later a hole was found in a haystack belonging to the elder Price, and the money was inside.

The jury said '*ignoramus*', which seems fair. A modern jury would surely not convict on evidence as inconclusive as this.

Inconclusive evidence did not always help the accused however.

On Sunday 23 November, 1704, Richard Barton, a yeoman of Little Horwood, saw one of his pigs 'muzzling' something in his dunghill. Whatever it was was covered with dirt, but Barton could see enough to make him uneasy. He fetched water to sluice it clean and found he was looking at the face of a dead baby.

Elizabeth Barton, his wife, recalled that not long before she had taxed the maid, Susannah Goodspeed, with being pregnant. The girl had denied it, but now she broke down and confessed that it was her child, born dead. It was her poor babe, she sobbed, and had it been born alive she was resolved to have travelled the country with it on her back before she would have done it any harm. The child, a girl, had been born, she said, when she was alone in the house, a week ago last Saturday. She had hidden the little corpse in her bed until the following Thursday, when, her

master and mistress being gone to Winslow market, she buried it in the dunghill. The all-male inquest jury, which included her employer, decided that the child had been born alive and that Susannah had killed her. The assize jury returned a true bill to a charge of murder, and it is to be feared that this unhappy and probably rather simple young woman was hanged.

In this bundle we find Tobias Goodridge of Chalfont St Peter describing how, by the light of a bonfire, he recognised two men who attacked him in Rutter's Dell. They had been drinking with him in an inn at Rickmansworth, where he had sold a quarter of wheat in the market. Tobias had defended himself with his cane, but lost it, and was overpowered and robbed of 6d in farthings and halfpennies. Evidently after his visit to the inn there was not a great deal left of the price of a quarter of wheat.

John Brooks confesses to having picked up a purse that had fallen from the breeches of a fellow servant, thrown on a form by his bed.

John Wingfield of Amersham, butcher, tells how two men, one of them 'pretending to be a seaman', the other a Londoner, had tried to sell him twelve pigs, which they said they had bought at Brackley Fair. But since they asked a very low price, and since moreover Brackley Fair had been held only the previous day and was thirty miles distant, he suspected that the pigs were stolen. He was right. They belonged to Henry Lorimer of Ludgershall, who had lost them out of 'Mr Grevile's wood at Wootton Underwood'. Robert Chitch of Chalfont St Peter was more credulous than Wingfield. He paid £10 for the animals and no doubt lost his money.

Peter Harden of North Crawley had threatened to burn down the houses of his neighbours, whom he blamed for his son having been pressed for the Army.

'All human life is here' as the *News of the World* used to say.

John Chenevix Trench



Plate XII Cheddington hillfort. Photo: Buckinghamshire County Museum.

CHEDDINGTON HILLFORT

A previously unrecorded enclosure was photographed from the air by D. R. Wilson in July 1973, by Professor J. K. St Joseph in 1975 and again by the writer in July 1977 (PL XIII).

The perimeter defence of the roughly circular enclosure showed as a pair of continuous dark lines in the ripening crop, about 15 to 20 m apart. A little over half of the circuit was evident, the remainder lying within woodland and scrub on the lynched southern slope of Southend Hill, Cheddington, which it encompasses (SP 919165). The area enclosed is roughly 5 ha (12.3 acres). No entrance can be seen. There are hints of one or more internal ditches perhaps of a different phase to the main enclosure. Although the cropmarks appear to indicate twin ditches or palisade trenches they follow each other fairly closely and on occasion twin cropmarks have proved on excavation to occur above a single large ditch (Hampton and Palmer 1977, 176-7). The hill, which rises to 140 m OD (460 ft), is of chalk. Since it is under plough, shallowly cut internal features are likely to have been damaged.

The whole may be designated a 'hillfort',

but dating this class of site is no longer a straightforward matter. Once always ascribed to the 'Iron Age', hilltop enclosures have in a number of cases been shown to have antecedents in the second millennium BC, for example Rams Hill, Berkshire (Bradley and Ellison 1975); and the occupation of Ivinghoe Beacon which lies only 4 km to the east is suspected to have commenced in the early first millennium BC (Cotton and Frere 1968, Green 1981).

The proximity of the Cheddington enclosure to Ivinghoe Beacon is of considerable interest and although Cheddington encloses a larger area, 5 ha (12.3 acres) compared with 2.1 ha (5.42 acres), it seems likely that one was a replacement of the other. It would certainly have been helpful in this respect to have examined the site on the ground, but unfortunately permission has been withheld.

Nevertheless, on the evidence available, the site has been submitted to the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments as a suitable candidate for scheduling.

Michael Farley

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