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THREE LATE MEDIEVAL AND TUDOR COIN HOARDS FROM GREATER LONDON

MURRAY ANDREWS

This note presents a descriptive account of three previously unnoticed late medieval coin hoards found in Greater London and known only from reports in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspapers.¹ While often lacking in numismatic detail, these reports contain reasonably high-quality information about hoard findspots and circumstances of discovery, in each case permitting tentative reconstructions of site- and feature-level depositional contexts on the basis of archaeological, cartographic, and historical sources.

1. St Alfege's Churchyard, London Borough of Greenwich, 1834. 174 AR pence, *tpq* 1280

On 1 September 1834 a hoard of silver coins was found in a churchyard at Greenwich. An account of this find, published in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (7 September 1834, p. 5), reads as follows:

SINGULAR DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT COIN. – On Monday last a boy of the name of Bradley jumped into a newly made grave in Greenwich church-yard, during the absence of Lamb, the grave digger, and whilst there broke off the corner of an old coffin which protruded from the adjacent ground, a small crimson velvet bag dropped from the coffin, which, upon examination, was found to contain 174 pieces of ancient silver coin. The boy immediately decamped with his prize, and it is supposed went off to London to dispose of it, although he says he gave most of the money away to his companions. Several of the pieces seen by the gentleman from whom we received this information, were of the reign of Edward I. or II.; one of them, which the same gentleman has in his possession, is about the size of a sixpence: on the obverse appears the King, full-faced and crowned with an open crown of three fleur-de-lis, with two leper flowers not raised so high, with the inscription "EDW. REX. ANG. DNS. HYB."; on the reverse a cross composed of a single line, tolerably broad, and continued to the outer rim, three pellets in each quarter, circumscribed with the place of coinage, "CIVITAS, LONDON". One of the pieces is of the coinage of Ireland: the King's head in a triangle, with the same inscription round the outer edge, and the place of coinage, "CIVITAS, DUBLINE"; the letters on all are Saxon. There was another piece without legible inscription, supposed to be either of William I. or II. The face was in profile, and a wand or sceptre in front. There does not appear to have been any of a later period than Edward II., so that there is every reason to suppose they must have been buried about that time.

On the basis of the newspaper report it is clear that the hoard consisted of 174 silver coins, of which two are described in detail and a third in more cursory fashion. The first coin, 'about the size of a sixpence', is evidently an Edwardian penny of the London mint, and the reporter's rendering of the obverse legend ('EDW REX ANG DNS HYB') is a reasonable match for a class 1a or 1c penny ('EDW REX ANGL DNS HYB') issued between May 1279 and

¹ This research was undertaken as part of the 'PRMC-L: Post-Roman and Medieval Coins from London' pilot project, which was generously funded by a grant from the British Numismatic Society's John Casey Fund.

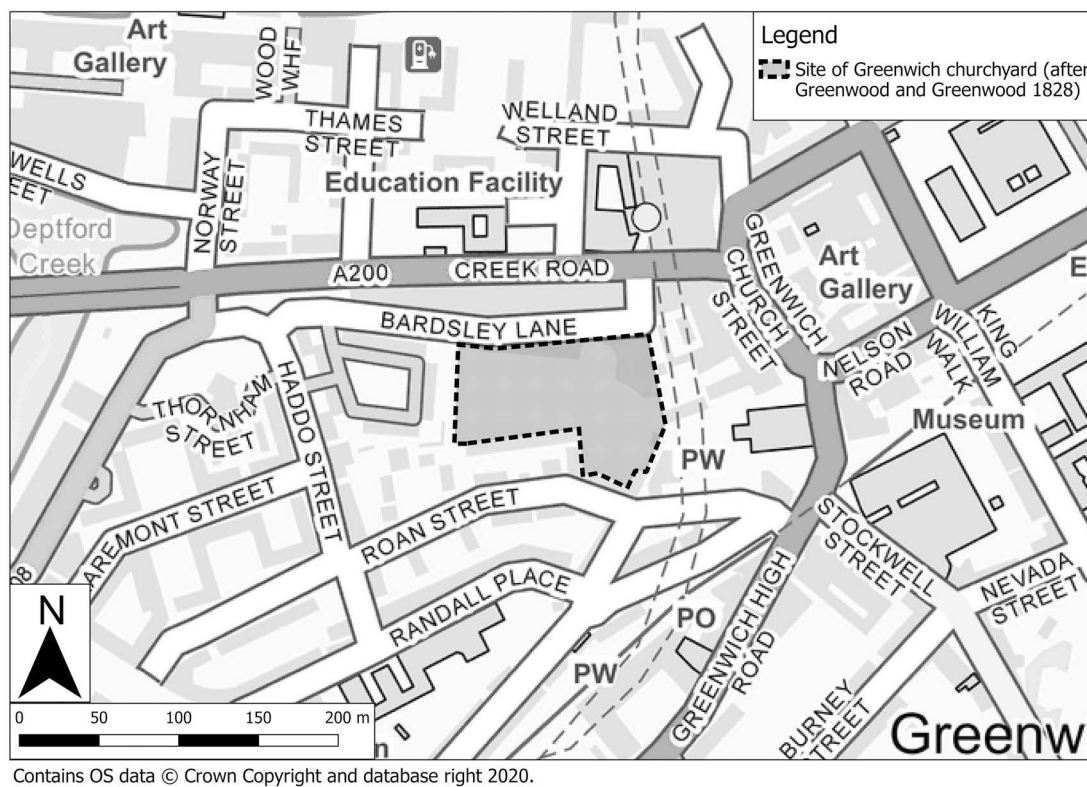


Fig. 1. Location map of the findspot of the hoard from St Alfege's Churchyard, Greenwich (contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2020)

November or December 1279.² The second coin, meanwhile, is clearly a Dublin penny of Edward I's Second Coinage (1279–1302), albeit of an indeterminate class. The identity of the third coin, 'supposed to be either of William I. or II.', is more ambiguous: the description of a profile bust with 'a wand or sceptre in front' implies a Scottish penny, most probably of Alexander III's Second Coinage (c. 1280–1286), but potentially even of John Balliol (1292–96) or Robert Bruce (1306–29). Frustratingly, it is this third coin that provides a *terminus post quem* of c. 1280 for the deposit as a whole. On the basis of the three described coins, the date of deposition of this hoard can be assigned to the period 1280–1351 with some certainty; much more speculatively, the date bracket might be narrowed to 1280–c. 1314, since Anglo-Irish and Scottish coins are uncommon in hoards buried after this latter date.³ Assuming that the 171 undocumented coins were also all pence, the nominal value of this hoard would be 14s. 6d., a large sum equivalent to three months' wages for a building labourer, or two months' wages for a building craftsman, in 1290.⁴

The 'Greenwich church-yard' named as the hoard findspot is evidently that of the parish church of St Alfege, depicted on Christopher and John Greenwood's map of 1828 as lying immediately northwest of the church building at approximately NGR TQ 3821 7762 (Figure 1).⁵ One of six London churches redesigned by Nicholas Hawksmoor in the early eighteenth century, the modern church of St Alfege occupies the site of an earlier medieval church dedicated to Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury (1006–12), who was allegedly martyred on its site by the Danes in 1012.⁶ The observation that the coins were found in a 'small crimson velvet bag' that fell out of a damaged 'old coffin' adds important contextual detail to the

² Allen 2003, 178.

³ Allen 2012, 354–5.

⁴ Broadberry *et al.* 2015, 311.

⁵ London, British Library (BL), Maps Crace Port. 6.225.

⁶ Egan 2003, 237–41.

hoard. Just eleven comparable instances of coin hoards deposited in medieval graves are known from England and Wales, which appear to fall into two separate categories: one in which small numbers of coins were placed on or near the head and shoulders during the burial rite, sometimes having been deliberately folded, and another in which larger groups of unadapted coins were placed around other parts of the body, usually the lower torso and waist, as though formed of purses or money pouches affixed to the burial costume.⁷ The first of these groups has been convincingly interpreted as evidence for the use of coins as apotropaic amulets or charms in burial rituals,⁸ but the second group – to which the Greenwich find, explicitly deposited within a small bag, presumably belongs – poses interpretative puzzles in light of contemporary *exempla*, in which moral tales of the punishments doled out to sinners buried with coins were used to warn Christians of the dangers of not rejecting earthly possessions at death.⁹ Potentially relevant comparanda are known from archaeological excavations at the Black Death cemetery at East Smithfield, Tower Hamlets, where hoards of coins contained in textile bags or purses are known from two separate adult female inhumation burials. Previous commentaries on these latter hoards have suggested that they represent accidental inclusions resulting from oversight during the burial ritual, perhaps reflecting conditions of accelerated putrefaction or hasty interment,¹⁰ but more recent work has situated them in a wider anthropological context of deliberately deposited ‘polluted’ objects tainted by their associations to the deceased, particularly those afflicted by intensely moralised diseases like leprosy, plague, or syphilis.¹¹ In lieu of further information relating to the coffin burial, including bioarchaeological indicators from the skeleton itself, it is difficult to assess whether any of these interpretations might also hold for the Greenwich hoard.

2. Queen’s Head Yard, Gray’s Inn Lane, London Borough of Camden, 1768. 61 AV and AR coins, *tpq* 1485

On 18 September 1768 a hoard of medieval gold and silver coins was found by labourers working at Queen’s Head Yard, Gray’s Inn Lane. An account of this find, published in the *Caledonian Mercury* (19 September 1768, p. 2), reads as follows:

Yesterday as some workmen were pulling down part of an old brick wall in the Queen’s-head-yard, Gray’s-inn-lane, a boy found the foot of an old stocking, containing sixty pieces of silver coin of Henry VII. and one piece of gold.

Numismatic aspects of this report are frustratingly terse. Since diagnostic naturalistic portraiture and regnal ordinals were introduced to English coins during Henry VII’s reign, there is no *prima facie* reason to discount the author’s attribution of the sixty silver coins from the hoard to this issuer. Indeed, if the silver coins were mostly or all groats, and the lone gold coin an angel, the hoard would have very many late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century parallels, most notably the hoard of fifty groats and a single angel of Henry VII found at Eglwys Brewis in the Vale of Glamorgan.¹² The lack of any reference to silver coins of Henry VIII, which also bear diagnostic legends and portraiture, may suggest a deposit predating the weight reductions of 1526.

Archaeological details, meanwhile, are rather more forthcoming. The coins were reportedly found ‘in the foot of an old stocking’, presumably made from cloth or some other textile; similar containers, usually interpreted as bags or purses, are known from at least thirty-one other medieval English and Welsh coin hoards, including the aforementioned find from Eglwys Brewis, which was found in a decayed hide bag or purse.¹³ Locational data is similarly rich. Though no longer extant in the London streetscape, Queen’s Head Yard is shown on John

⁷ Andrews 2019, 193–5.

⁸ Gilchrist 2008, 133–5.

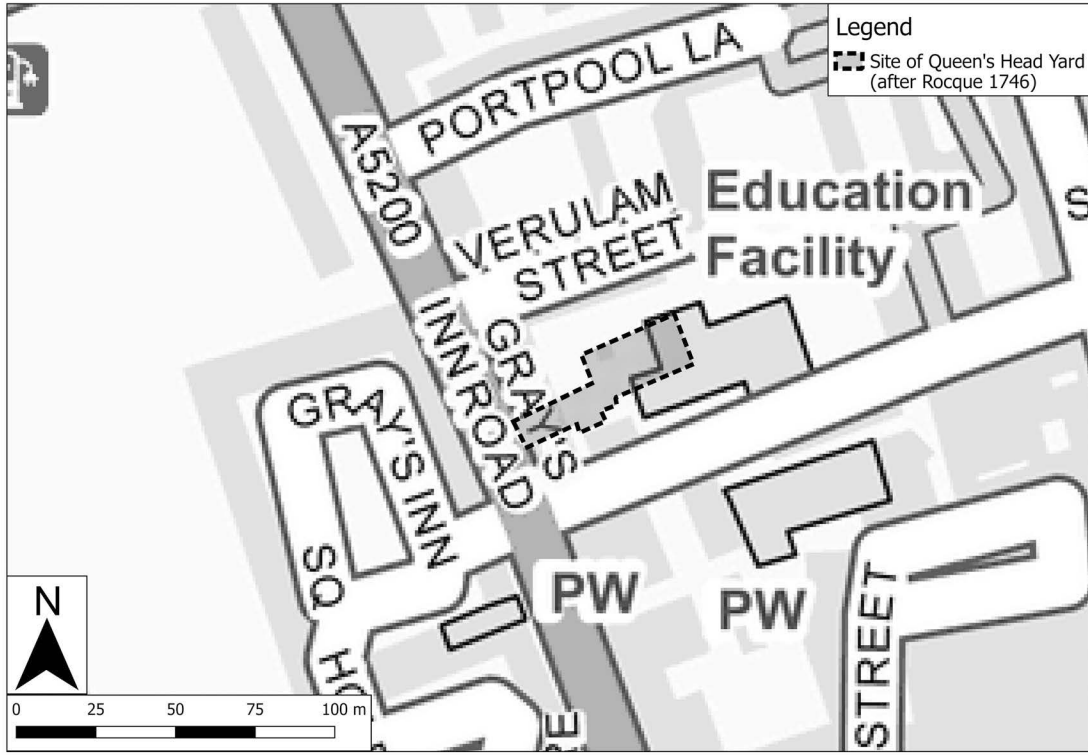
⁹ Travaini 2004, 177.

¹⁰ Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 102; Cook 2015, 169.

¹¹ Andrews 2019, 195.

¹² Andrews 2019, 95.

¹³ Andrews 2019, 182–3; Boon 1986, 124.



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Fig. 2. Location map of the findspot of the hoard from Queen's Head Yard, Camden (contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2020)

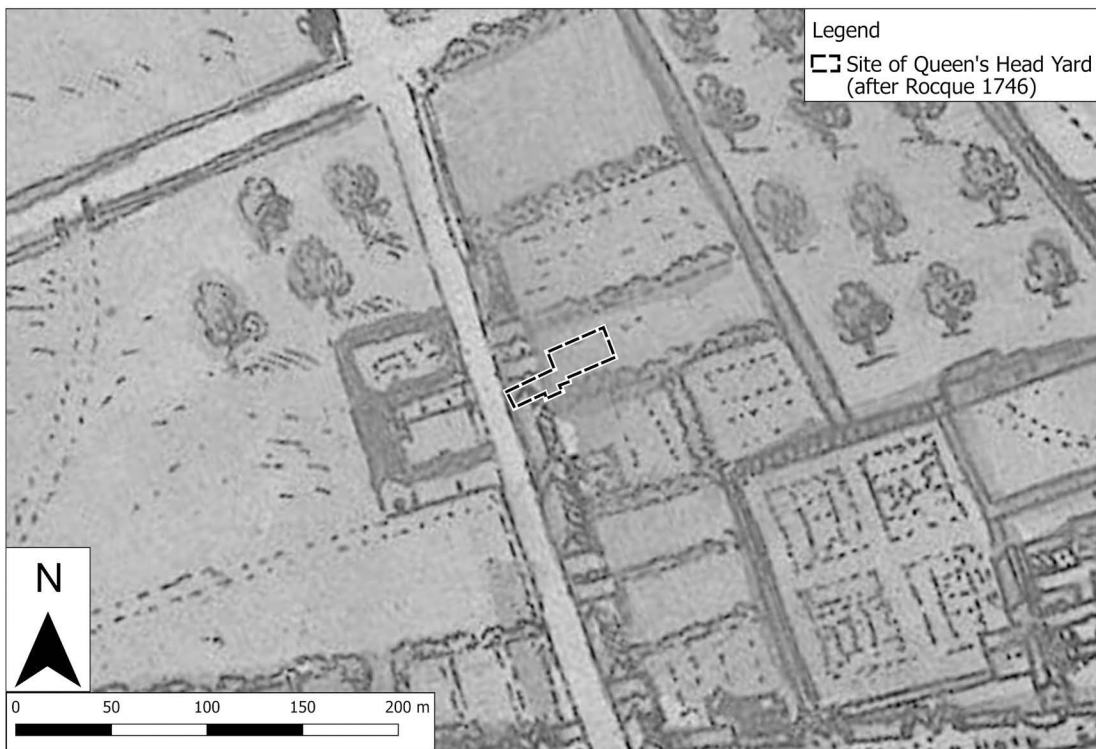


Fig. 3. Location map of the findspot of the hoard from Queen's Head Yard, Camden, overlain on Braun and Hogenberg's oblique plan of 1572 (contains data from Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, public domain)

Rocque's 1746 *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark* as having lain on the east side of Gray's Inn Lane, now Gray's Inn Road, between the modern streets of Baldwins Gardens and Verulam Street at approximately NGR TQ 3108 8183 (Figure 2).¹⁴ Two early oblique plans, one published by George Braun and Frans Hogenberg in 1572¹⁵ and the other by William Faithorne and Richard Newcourt in 1658¹⁶, show the site to have been occupied by multi-storied street-facing buildings – probably houses or inns – before the Great Fire of 1666 (Figure 3), and it is likely that the 'old brick wall' that contained the coins originally derived from one of these structures. The deposition of hoards in the walls of medieval standing buildings is a phenomenon with multiple parallels in the English and Welsh hoard record, and presumably reflects attempts by hoarders to deposit valuables in secure, familiar, and private locations; this particular configuration provides a third echo of the Eglwys Brewis hoard, which was also found in the wall of an old building.¹⁷

3. Dudley Court, St-Giles-in-the-Fields, London Borough of Camden, 1847. Uncertain number of AV and AR coins, *tpq* 1509

On 27 September 1847 a hoard of medieval gold and silver coins was found by labourers working at Dudley Court, St-Giles-in-the-Fields. An account of this find, published in the *Globe* (28 September 1847, 1), reads as follows:

DISCOVERY OF OLD COIN. – Yesterday a number of gold and silver coins of the reign of Henry VII. and VIII., and several spade guineas and gold seven-shilling pieces, were found by some labourers removing the ruins of some old houses that recently fell down in Dudley-court, St. Giles's. The coins were in a fine state of preservation, particularly the guineas of George III., and were purchased for a mere trifle by a clothesman, who happened to come up whilst they were examining them, and before they had time to ascertain their actual value.

The description of the coins found at Dudley Court is suggestive of two separate hoards deposited in broadly proximate locations. The earlier of the two is clearly of late medieval date, and consisted of an unspecified number of early Tudor gold and silver coins; the presence of coins of Henry VIII furnishes this hoard with a *terminus post quem* of 1509, while the presence of earlier issues of Henry VII suggests a *terminus ante quem* of 1544, by which date fine early Tudor silver had largely been removed from circulation.¹⁸ The later of the two hoards, meanwhile, consisted of 'several' gold guineas and third guineas of George III, and was presumably therefore deposited in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries.¹⁹

Richard Blome's 1755 *Mapp of the Parish of St Giles's in the Fields* records Dudley Court as a former name of Denmark Place, an east-west orientated road situated immediately north of Denmark Street connecting the east side of Hog Lane, now Charing Cross Road, to the west side of St Giles' High Street at approximately NGR TQ 2988 8130 (Figure 4).²⁰ This road lay at the north end of a 0.04 km² triangular island defined by the courses of St Giles' High Street, Charing Cross Road, and Shaftesbury Avenue, a plan form that exactly preserves the boundaries of the walled precinct of the Hospital of St-Giles-in-the-Fields, a leper hospital founded in the early twelfth century by Matilda of Scotland, the first wife of Henry I, and operated as a member of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem from 1299 until its dissolution in 1539 (Figure 5).²¹ The observation that both hoards were found while 'removing the ruins of some old houses that recently fell down' is therefore of considerable archaeological interest, potentially suggesting that upstanding medieval fabric from the hospital buildings remained an element of London's built environment well into the nineteenth century. However, it is equally possible that the earlier hoard was dug out of the ground while clearing subsurface structural remains, like the east-west aligned stone, mortar, and tile wall foundation from a

¹⁴ BL Maps Crace Port. 3.104.

¹⁵ Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek (UBH), VD16 B 7180.

¹⁶ BL Maps 183.p.1.(2.).

¹⁷ Andrews 2019, 191; Boon 1986, 124.

¹⁸ Allen 2012, 366.

¹⁹ This hoard will be examined in greater detail in a future volume of the BNJ.

²⁰ BL Maps Crace Port. 15.1.(2.).

²¹ Honeybourne 1967, 20–8.

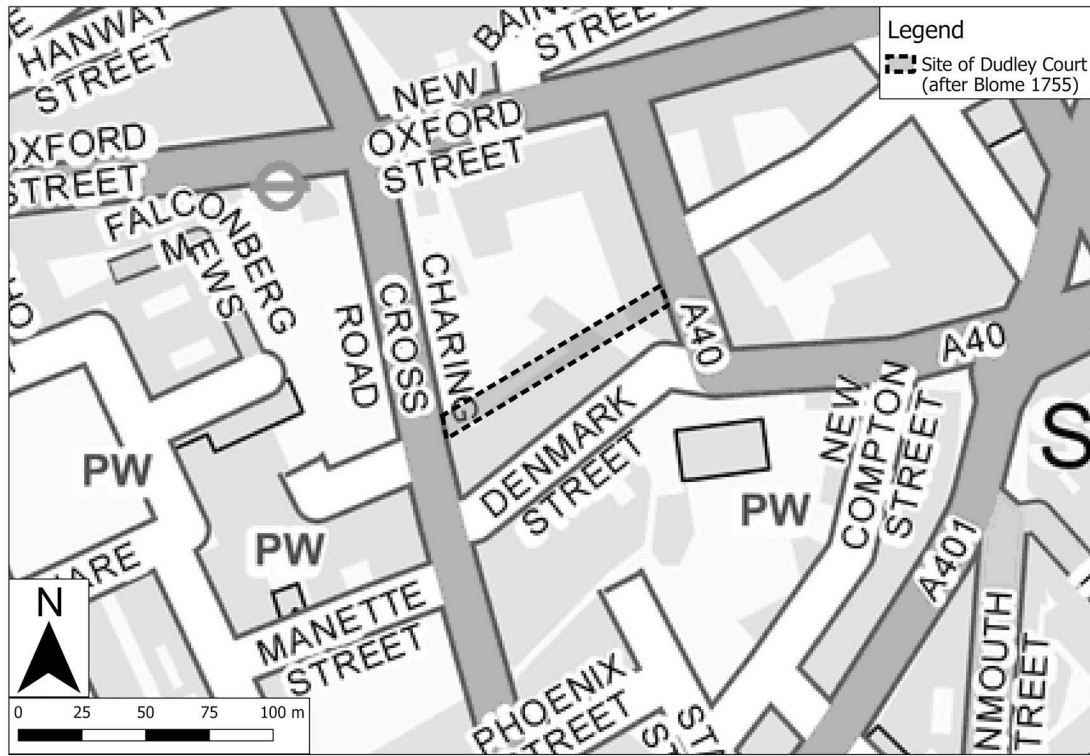


Fig. 4. Location map of the findspot of the hoard from Dudley Court, Camden (contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2020)



Fig. 5. Location map of the findspot of the hoard from Dudley Court, Camden, overlain on Braun and Hogenberg's oblique plan of 1572 (contains data from Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, public domain)

late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century hospital building observed during an archaeological evaluation at 1–6 Denmark Place in 1999.²¹ In any case, the locational attributes of the Dudley Court hoard provide a tantalising example of depositional practice at a medieval hospital site, with local parallels in the coin hoards from St Bartholomew's Hospital, City of London, and St Thomas' Hospital, Southwark.²²

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ANOTHER EDINBURGH-DUNDEE OBERVERSE DIE LINK FOR ROBERT II

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In his seminal paper entitled 'Scottish mints' Ian Stewart (later Lord Stewartby) noted that 'This group of coins [of Robert II with B or saltire behind the king's head] of the three mints [Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee] is clearly inter-related', and he listed six obverse dies – two groat, two half-groat and two penny – which were used in conjunction with reverses of two of the mints, and in one case all three.¹ At that time only half-groat dies were known in combination with both Edinburgh and Dundee reverses, however. The first, and I think only, previously published groat link between those two mints was found on a coin in the collections of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, which was described and illustrated as no. 477 in the *Sylloge of the Scottish coins* in that collection and that of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.² On this coin a Dundee reverse die was paired with the obverse die used for an Edinburgh coin published by Burns as no. 6, Fig. 327.³ This particular obverse die is distinguished by an unusually large letter B behind the king's head (for the moneyer Bonagius of Florence). It is the only known Robert II die on which this particular punch was used.



Fig. 1. Robert II groat of Dundee from obverse die also used in Edinburgh

A groat recently sold at auction in London⁴ (Figure 1) sees this same obverse die paired with a different Dundee reverse, not published by Burns but known from a coin acquired by the

²¹ Maloney 2000, 37.

²² Andrews 2019, 192–3.

¹ Stewart 1971, 228–9, 282, nos 31–36.

² Bateson and Mayhew 1987, Pl. 21.

³ Burns 1887, vol. I, p. 273.