

THE BRITISH
NUMISMATIC JOURNAL
2022

INCLUDING THE

*Proceedings of the British Numismatic Society
for the year 2021*

EDITED BY

MARTIN ALLEN

VOLUME 92

2022

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A HOARD OF ELIZABETHAN SILVER COINS FROM ST JOHN IN BEDWARDINE, WORCESTERSHIRE

MURRAY ANDREWS

Inside the front board of the first volume of the parish registers for St John in Bedwardine, Worcestershire, is an eighteenth-century handwritten note describing a group of Elizabethan silver coins found during grave-digging in 1722.¹ The text reads as follows:

N.B. Upon Saturday March 31. 1722 John Bury Grave-Digger of the Parish of St John in Bedwardine, found at the Bottom of a Grave lying five yards north by west from the yew Tree two shillings and four sixpences of Queen Elizabeth's Coin. The Shillings have Cross's upon them and they are now in my possession witness my hand Abdias Taylor Vic.

The author of the note, Revd Abdias Taylor, was collated and installed as vicar of the church of St John in Bedwardine in July 1724, suggesting that the coins had been safely retained for at least two years after their discovery.² Their subsequent fate, however, is less clear. Taylor's will, dated 27 September 1745 and proved at Canterbury on 23 January 1746, makes no reference to coins of any kind, and no coins associated with this find are currently preserved in the church or in Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery.³ In lieu of evidence to the contrary, it seems likely that the coins were sold to a jeweller, goldsmith, or collector, and have since been dispersed, lost, or destroyed.⁴

Despite its brevity, Revd Taylor's note contains important information relating to the contents and archaeological context of an otherwise unrecorded Tudor coin hoard. It is evident that the hoard consisted of six silver coins of Elizabeth I in two sizes, the larger of which were identified as 'two shillings' and the smaller as 'four sixpences'. The accuracy of these descriptions is difficult to judge, and it is possible that the references to 'shillings' and 'sixpences' are an anachronistic shorthand for Elizabethan coins of a similar size to eighteenth-century shillings (c.26 mm diameter) and sixpences (c.21 mm diameter), i.e. sixpences (c.25 mm diameter), groats (c.23 mm diameter), and/or threepences (c.19 mm diameter). This uncertainty has significant implications for the dating of the hoard. If the larger coins were indeed Elizabethan shillings, the '*Cross's upon them*' could be reasonably identified as Cross-Crosslet privy marks (1560–1), and the *terminus post quem* for the hoard would instead be set by the smaller Elizabethan sixpences, which were first introduced during Elizabeth's Third Coinage (1561–71). However, if the larger coins were actually Elizabethan sixpences, then the '*Cross's upon them*' might instead be Greek Cross (1578–80) or Latin Cross (1580–1) privy marks, setting the *terminus post quem* squarely within the period of Elizabeth's Fifth Coinage (1578–83).⁵ This uncertainty also impacts the valuation of the hoard, which must have lain somewhere between 2s. 0d. and 4s. 0d. at the time of burial in the mid- to late

¹ Worcester, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, Mf. 299/1 BA 8287/1a(i) Ref. 985.

² Le Neve 1986, 26.

³ The National Archives, PROB 11/744/266.

⁴ Georgian Worcester was home to a small community of coin collectors, any of whom might have expressed an interest in Taylor's coins. Among their number was one Mr Sheriff of Worcester, whose 'very numerous' collection of locally-found coins was consulted by the city historian Valentine Green in the late eighteenth century; see Green 1796, 107.

⁵ Brown, Comber, and Wilkinson 2019, 78.



Fig. 1. North-east facing view of the chancel and yew tree at St John in Bedwardine, Worcestershire

sixteenth century. Despite these issues, Revd Taylor's account of the coins found at St John in Bedwardine in 1722 is entirely consistent with a hoard removed from circulation in the years or decades after the Great Recoinage of 1560–1,⁶ and invites comparison with better-recorded Elizabethan silver hoards from Alciston (East Sussex; 12 AR, *dep.* 1584+),⁷ Sheriff Hutton (North Yorkshire; 16 AR, *dep.* 1572+),⁸ and Ynysfor (Gwynedd; 10 AR, *dep.* 1591+).⁹

The findspot of the hoard can be located with a reasonable degree of precision: Revd Taylor's 'yew Tree' still stands on the eastern edge of the churchyard (Figure 1) at NGR SO 84045 54463, placing the findspot immediately beside the east end of the chancel at NGR SO 84043 54466.¹⁰ The position of this hoard within the bounds of an Elizabethan parish cemetery finds parallels in the hoards from Bolton-le-Sands (Lancashire; 8 AR, *dep.* 1566+)¹¹ and Combe Longa (Oxfordshire; uncertain no. AR, *dep.* 1558+),¹² both of which were similarly found while grave digging. Whether these hoards represent 'safekeeping' deposits hidden on hallowed ground, deliberate or accidental deposits interred with corpses, or 'accidental losses' swept up in grave soil, remains unclear.

⁶ Challis 1978, 229–31.

⁷ Brown 1955–57.

⁸ Andrews and Ghey 2019, 262, no. 207.

⁹ Blunt 1966.

¹⁰ The eighteenth-century extent of the churchyard is illustrated on John Doharty's 1741 *Plan of the City of Worcester*: British Library, Maps K.Top.43.65.2.

¹¹ White 1984.

¹² Lewis 1840, 604.

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THE METHVEN, PERTHSHIRE, HOARD (2022)

N.M.McQ. HOLMES

A hoard of 68 coins, with the remains of a pottery vessel, was found during excavation work for a building extension in the back garden of a house in Methven.¹ A date of deposition of 1663 or later is indicated by the presence of coin no. 48 in the catalogue below.

Seventeenth-century hoards from Scottish soil which include continental taler-sized coins are far from rare, most of them apparently deposited during the Civil War period on the basis of the date of the latest coin in each hoard. A comprehensive catalogue of these was published in a previous volume of this *Journal* by Donal Bateson.² Hoards with a date of deposition later than 1660 are fewer in number, among them those from Stornoway (1954),³ Hillhead, Wick (1969),⁴ and Fauldhouse, West Lothian (1987).⁵

The most obvious, and perhaps on the surface unexpected, aspect of the Methven hoard is that it contains no Scottish coins at all. However, it is clear from the contents of other hoards from a similar period that English coins from the reign of Elizabeth I onwards must have greatly outnumbered contemporary Scottish issues in the pool available to those accumulating coins at that time. The Stornoway hoard, given a *terminus post quem* for deposition of 1669, contained 101 English coins and just four Scottish. The Fauldhouse hoard (*tpq* 1675) contained 127 English and ten Scottish. However, the Hillhead, Wick, hoard (*tpq* 1684) had just five English and two Scottish.⁶ It may be that by that date the predominance of English coins in Scotland had declined.

Turning to the continental element of the Methven hoard, the largest number (20) are from the various provinces of the United Netherlands, with one from the free city of Batenburg. There are none from the Spanish Netherlands, in contrast to the Hillhead, Wick, find, for instance, which contained 31 coins from the Spanish Netherlands and 16 from the United Provinces. This may not be of any great significance, however. According to Stevenson and Porteous, 'It is not necessary to make any economic distinction between the coins of the United Provinces and those of the Spanish Netherlands, since the coins of both circulated side by side throughout the Netherlands and were exported together.'⁷ Stevenson and Porteous do note, however, that the patagon of the Spanish Netherlands was a less valuable coin than the rijksdaalder of the United provinces and commanded less of a premium in international markets, so the absence of patagons from the Methven hoard may have been deliberate.

¹ Details of the exact location are retained by the Scottish Treasure Trove Unit.

² Bateson 2007.

³ Kerr 1956.

⁴ Stevenson and Porteous 1972. This paper includes a detailed table and discussion of the contents of Scottish seventeenth-century hoards known at that time.

⁵ Bateson 1991.

⁶ For a detailed breakdown of the contents of the majority of known hoards, the reader is referred to the table mentioned in note 4.

⁷ Stevenson and Porteous 1972, 137.