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A CIVIL WAR COIN HOARD FROM LONDON

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In September 1761 a hoard of seventeenth-century silver coins was found in Northumberland Alley in the City of London. This find does not appear in Besly and Briggs's monumental catalogue of Civil War-era coin hoards, and seems to be otherwise unknown to modern scholarship.² The principal source for this discovery is a notice in the *Ipswich Journal*, which reads as follows:

Yesterday an old House in Northumberland Alley, Crutched Friars, which had been for twenty Years uninhabited, fell down; when, in searching the Ruins, a large Bag was found filled with half Crowns to a considerable Value, which were grown quite black with Time. The Money amounting to about 100 Pounds, which was found Yesterday in an old House in Northumberland-Alley, in Fenchurch-Street, was some of King Charles the First's Coin.³

While no coins from this find are known to survive in public collections, the description of a 'large Bag ... filled with half Crowns' of Charles I is in keeping with better-recorded Civil War-era hoards from England and Wales, and suggests that the Northumberland Alley find must similarly date to the period *c.* 1625–60.⁴ The contemporary valuation of *c.* £100 implies a hoard of roughly 800 halfcrowns, which would rank among the most valuable silver finds of this period. In compositional terms, the hoard is somewhat unusual for a find of its size, with comparable examples from Ryhall, Rutland (£160 1s. 0d., *dep.* *c.* 1641–3), Thorpe Hall, North Yorkshire (£107 2s. 10d., *dep.* *c.* 1641–3), and Breckenbrough, North Yorkshire (£93 5s. 0d., *dep.* *c.* 1643–4) tending to mix halfcrowns with larger numbers of shillings and sixpence and a handful of gold coins.⁵ However, it is not entirely without parallel, as the enigmatic 'Cotswolds'/'South Midlands' (£21 0s. 0d., *dep.* *c.* 1635) find of *c.* 1900 seems to have consisted exclusively of halfcrowns, as did two poorly-recorded finds from Lichfield, Staffordshire, and Forcegarth, County Durham.⁶ In any case, the hoard clearly represents a large and selective group of high-value currency, and must surely have been hidden with the intent of future recovery.

The notice in the *Ipswich Journal* localises the hoard's findspot to an 'old House' in Northumberland Alley, a small passage running north-west to south-east between Crutched Friars and Fenchurch Street in the east of the City of London (NGR TQ 3348 8102). This building can presumably be identified with one of the townhouses and commercial properties shown on Faithorne and Newcourt's 1658 map of London, whose survival into the eighteenth century rested in no small part on its fortunate position 900 m south-west of the Whitechapel Civil War defences and 180 m beyond the north-eastern extent of the Great Fire of 1666.⁷ The observation that the coins were found in a 'large Bag' after the building's collapse may suggest that it had been originally concealed in a wall cavity, among roof beams, or beneath a timber floor, which rank among the most common hiding places used by hoarders in the Civil War period.⁸

¹ Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

² Brown and Dolley 1971; Besly and Briggs 2013; Besly 2015.

³ *Ipswich Journal*, 5 September 1761, 3.

⁴ Besly 2015, 184.

⁵ Allen 1949–51; Clough and Cook 1988; Besly and Briggs 2013, 181, no. E2.

⁶ Oman 1909; Robinson 1970, 166; Besly and Briggs 2013, 190, no. K21.

⁷ Jeffries 2017, 297; Mills 2021, 63.

⁸ Besly and Briggs 2013, 171.

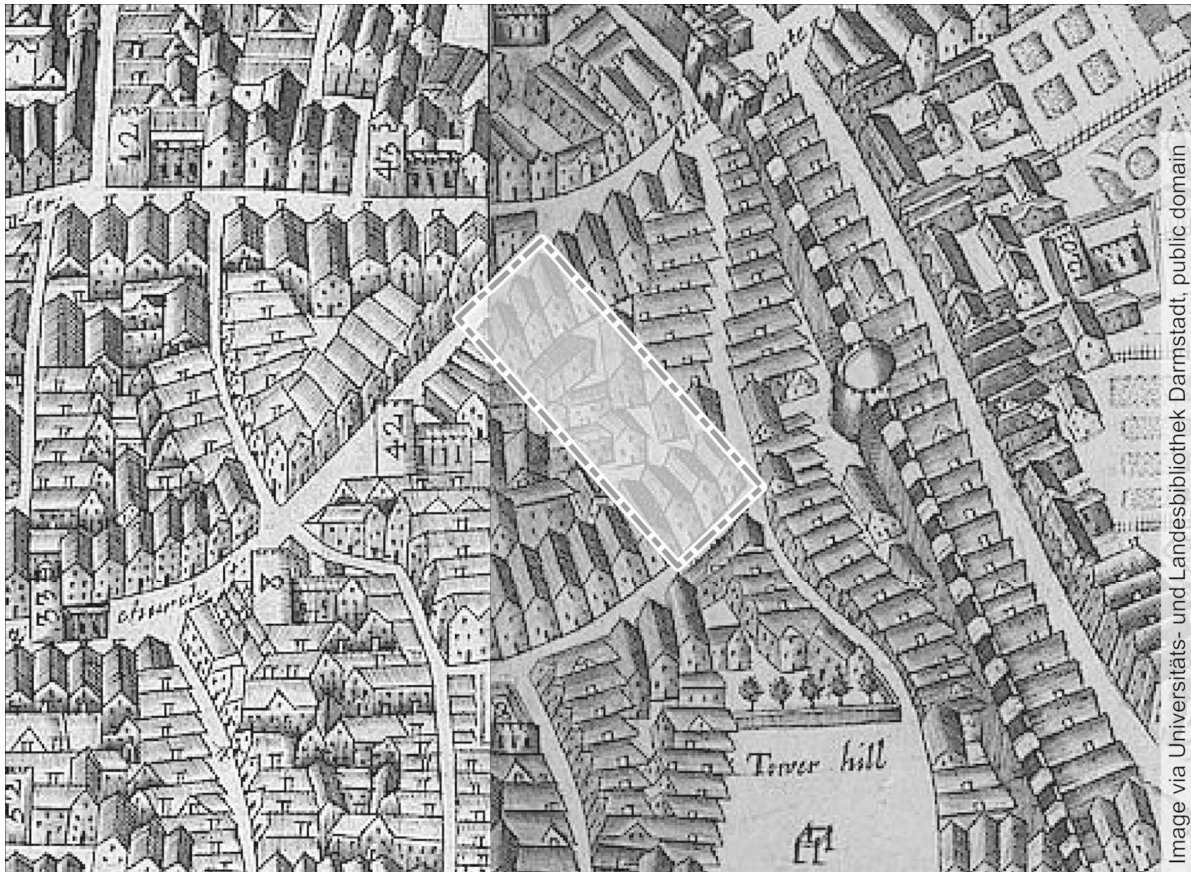


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Fig. 1. Findspot of the hoard overlain on Faithorne and Newcourt's 1658 map of London

While much of the seventeenth-century archaeology of Northumberland Alley has been obliterated by later building footings,⁹ including those of the tea and drug warehouse built for the East India Company in 1796, some written evidence for its residents survives in the form of the 1666 hearth tax returns for St Katherine Colman, a small parish in the Aldgate ward of the City of London.¹⁰ The returns list no fewer than twenty-six dwellings in Northumberland Avenue, whose occupants included men and women of the 'middling sort', like Robert Greene and widow Andrewes, as well as poorer individuals like John Evens and Francis Jorden. Assembling a stockpile of coins worth *c.*£100 would have been a considerable task for a person with such a modest social status, and it therefore seems likely that the hoard represents a significant body of household savings accumulated over a prolonged period, perhaps a lifetime or more.

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⁹ Richardson 1983, 279; Greenwood and Maloney 1995, 336; Schofield and Maloney 1999, 150.

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AN UNUSUAL HOARD OF COUNTERFEIT SCOTTISH CHARLES I TWENTY-PENCES FOUND AT THURNSCOE, SOUTH YORKSHIRE (2014–2015)

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Between 31 October 2014 and 10 April 2015 a hoard of ninety-five coins was found in four batches at Thurnscoe, a village near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. This was subsequently recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) website,¹ with the ID number SWYOR-9E9B0E. The hoard was declared Treasure Trove in 2016, and is now in the Barnsley Museum. Dr Barrie Cook provided a detailed description of the hoard on the PAS listing, both of its composition and potential importance.² However, research by the author of this article into coinage crimes during the English Civil War and the Republic (1642–60), for a PhD thesis that is now completed, can shed further light on its probable importance, and also the possible context of its deposition.³ It will also be shown that the study of this hoard could help to further our understanding of this interesting but also complex period of British numismatic history, during the conflict and upheaval of the English Civil Wars of the 1640s. That is, both in terms of the circulation of Scottish twenty-pences and also coin counterfeiting, especially in Yorkshire, which was one of the epicentres of this conflict, and where this particular coin hoard had been found.

As previously stated, the Thurnscoe hoard numbered ninety-five coins. Four of these were official English coins, a halfgroat, two groats and a sixpence from the reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I, which were all considerably worn, as well as sixteen official twenty-pence pieces of Charles I's Third Scottish Coinage (1637–42). What is particularly interesting is that the rest of the hoard is composed of seventy-five contemporary counterfeit Scottish Charles I twenty-pence pieces, either complete or fragmentary. Some examples of these twenty-pences can be seen in Figure 1. Dr Cook suggested that this hoard could have been deposited on a single occasion, perhaps in the mid to late 1640s, that is during the English Civil Wars (1642–49), or even as late as sometime during the subsequent Republic of the 1650s. Also, the counterfeit Scottish twenty-pences are described as being substantially silver, although their fineness had not been tested when the catalogue was compiled. The author of this study has not had the opportunity to study the coins first hand, and thus is dependent upon the description and pictures of them on the PAS website. However, based on the available photographs of examples from the hoard, the vast majority of the counterfeits are clearly silver plated on copper-alloy cores.

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¹ <<http://finds.org.uk>>.

² Downes 2014.

³ Whittell 2021.