

some East Anglian types were modelled on south-eastern issues, and there were no East Anglian specimens in the Aiskew hoard.<sup>16</sup> Sometime in the mid- to late 780s is most likely. The cessation of Æthelberht's coinage presumably coincided at the latest with his execution in 794. If his coins were still being struck so late, the Light coinage in East Anglia may have continued slightly longer than at Canterbury and London. Room must still be made for Heavy pennies of Offa which were issued by East Anglian moneyers, but they are rare, and could again have appeared later than at the south-eastern mint-places (i.e. after 792/3). The chronology becomes less tight if Æthelberht's coinage, and the assertion of independence that it implies, had come somewhat before his execution, or if the possibility of Lul working for both kings simultaneously is entertained.<sup>17</sup> Much still remains to be determined about the earliest decades of the broad silver penny, and when even one new find can prompt such reappraisal of an obscure king's reign and coinage, it is fully to be expected that further discoveries might change our perspective in new and unexpected ways.

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## A NEW ROUND HALFPENNY OF ÆTHELSTAN (924–939)

HUGH PAGAN AND STEWART LYON

ENTRY 92 in *BNJ* Coin Register 2013 records a metal detector find made at Thornborough, Buckinghamshire, in May 2012 (EMC 2012.0167), described as follows :

Æthelstan II/Guthrum (880–90), Two-Line type, North –  
*Obv.* †EDLǼ[N?][A][R?][E]†, pincer cross with lozenge centre containing four small wedges.  
*Rev.* [ ]EEE[C, G or L?]/RI MO  
 Weight: 0.45 g. Die axis 270°.

An accompanying note records that this is a 'new type for the coinage of Æthelstan II/Guthrum'. Dr Peter Northover undertook a metallurgical (EPMA) analysis of the coin for the finder which is understood to have been consistent with this attribution, but no results of this analysis are available at present.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Chick 2010, 8–9; *Checklist* no. 46a.

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of East Anglian chronology at this time see Chick 2010, 94–5.

<sup>1</sup> Dr Peter Northover, *pers. comm.*



Fig. 1. Halfpenny of Æthelstan (twice actual size). (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.)

Figure 1 shows an enlarged illustration of the coin in question.<sup>2</sup> The readings of the inscriptions both on the obverse and on the reverse of the coin present difficulties, but it seems clear that the obverse inscription is intended to provide the name Æthelstan followed by the title **REX**, and there is no necessary reason to dissent from the readings provided in the Coin Register for those letters which are not printed within square brackets.

Our knowledge of the coinage of Æthelstan II/Guthrum is primarily based on the presence of some thirty coins of Æthelstan II as a small component part of the great Cuerdale, Lancashire, hoard, deposited no earlier than *c.*905,<sup>3</sup> with useful confirmatory evidence supplied by the Ashdon, Essex, hoard, for which the late Dr Mark Blackburn suggested a deposit date of *c.*895.<sup>4</sup>

All coins of Æthelstan II of Two-line type reported prior to the discovery of the present coin are of a uniform design, identical to that on contemporary coins of Ælfred of Wessex. The obverse type is a cross set within an inner circle and surrounded by an inscription giving the king's name and title, while the reverse type is a moneyer's name set out in two lines, normally divided by a pellet. On all but one of the coins of Æthelstan II of this type so far recorded the obverse inscription is divided into four separate blocks of letters, customarily reading **+ED EL TA** (or **TAN**) and **RE**, echoing the arrangement of the obverse inscription on coins of Ælfred of the same type and date. On coins of this type by just one of Æthelstan II's moneyers, Elda, the moneyer's name on the reverse is followed by the letters **ME FEC**, i.e. *me fec(it)*, whereas on coins of all other moneyers for the type the name of the moneyer is given on its own without any subsequent letters.

The obverse inscription on the present coin resembles that on coins of Æthelstan II in that there is a gap between the letters **ED** and the cruder letters read as **LA**, and another gap between the letters **LA** and the remainder of the inscription, and it is not unreasonable that an attribution to Æthelstan II should have suggested itself for this coin on that basis. Since, however, the present coin's obverse inscription is at the most divided into three blocks, not four, and the coin differs from all coins of Æthelstan II's Two-line type so far recorded in that it is of a different obverse design and in that on its reverse the name of its moneyer is set out in two lines divided by three crosses, rather than by a pellet, and is followed by the letters **MO**, the attribution to Æthelstan II cannot be taken for granted.

What indeed is clear from Mark Blackburn's illustrated corpus of the coinage of Æthelstan II/Guthrum, attached to the text of his excellent Presidential Address to the British Numismatic Society in 2004, and now available in his volume of collected papers,<sup>5</sup> is that Æthelstan II's coins of Two-line type were surprisingly uniform in style as well as in design, and that even the coins of the moneyer Elda, differing as they do in minor respects from some of those of his

<sup>2</sup> Our thanks are due to Dr Martin Allen for the provision of these images.

<sup>3</sup> The most recent discussion of the coins in the Cuerdale hoard is Williams and Archibald 2011 (see pp. 64–7 for a discussion of the hoard's date of deposit).

<sup>4</sup> Blackburn 1989, 13–38, where Blackburn suggests a date of deposit for the hoard of between 890 and 895, a dating which he subsequently modified to *c.*895 (see, e.g., Blackburn 2011, 4).

<sup>5</sup> Blackburn 2011, 21–5. It is proper to note here that Blackburn's corpus also includes the only certain coin of Æthelstan II of Temple type, by a moneyer Dunno, as well as another nine coins of Temple type with blundered obverse inscriptions, of which some are more likely than others to include elements of Æthelstan II's name.

moneyer colleagues, are not sufficiently distinct in character or in epigraphy to be associable with a separate mint. A coin such as the present one, bearing no obvious stylistic or epigraphic resemblance to those known to Blackburn, could only be realistically attributable to this reign if it had been struck at a different point in time or at a different location to those coins of Æthelstan II of this type already known, and the evidence of the Ashdon hoard, not likely to have been deposited any earlier than the year of Æthelstan II's death and probably deposited towards the mid 890s, tells against a potential scenario in which this coin might have been struck later in Æthelstan II's reign than the other coins of the type that survive. The evidence of the subsequent Cuerdale hoard, in which no coins of this type of Æthelstan II of differing style were present, points in the same direction.

An alternative attribution of the present coin to the reign of the tenth-century West Saxon king Æthelstan (924–939) offers no comparable difficulties. The case for doing so can be argued on a number of grounds, set out in what follows.

First, the way in which the reverse design is arranged, with the moneyer's name set out in two lines divided by a line of three crosses, is characteristic of coins of *Horizontal* type struck in the reigns of rulers from Eadweard the Elder to Eadgar, and is only rarely found on these coins' precursors struck in the reign of Ælfred. Among several hundred coins of Ælfred of this general character listed in *BMC*, the only coins on which the moneyer's name on the reverse is divided by a line of three crosses are a single coin of the moneyer Dudig of *BMC* type XIV (*BMC* 265);<sup>6</sup> coins of *BMC* type XVI of the moneyers Ælfstan, Æthered, Athelulf, Beornmær and Samson (*BMC* 441–452), with one coin of the same design that has defied interpretation (*BMC* 453); and coins of the moneyer Bernwald, all of *BMC* type XVIII, the 'Ohsnaforda' or 'Orsnaforda' type encompassing both regular coins of Ælfred struck at Oxford and their imitative Danelaw-struck counterparts (*BMC* 118–123, 125–151, 153), except for a single coin of *BMC* type XIV (*BMC* 210). What most, if not all, of these coins have in common is that they date from the 890s, i.e. from after the death of Æthelstan II, and it must be very unlikely that any of them would have served as a prototype for the reverse design of the coin under discussion.

Second, the reverse inscription, meaningless in the context of an attribution to Æthelstan II, is interpretable in an early tenth century context as a blundered rendering of the name of a moneyer Engelri or Ingelri. The letters RI at the end of the moneyer's name on the present coin are clear, and although the intention of the first letter of the inscription is obscure, a reading [ ]EELRI, in which the second letter E might readily be interpretable as a version of a letter G, and the first letter E might, by a leap of faith, be interpretable as an attempt at a letter N, brings this particular moneyer to mind. The moneyer is known, as Engelri, from a single coin of *Horizontal* type for Eadweard the Elder, in the British Museum ex Vatican hoard, and, as Ingelri, from two coins of the *Horizontal Cross Trefoil* variety of the *Horizontal* type in the name of the West Saxon king Æthelstan, *SCBI* 50, 218, and *SCBI* 29,453. On the first of these, struck from more crudely engraved dies than the second, the moneyer's name is rendered as INEELRI, with the first of the letters engraved as E certainly on this occasion representing a letter G, providing a parallel to the inscription on the present coin.

In the same king's *Circumscription Cross* type Ingelri, identified as an Oxford moneyer by the mint signature OX VRBI after his name, is known from coins struck from a pair of dies of good and literate style (*SCBI* 34, 91 and *SCBI* 7, 326); from coins struck from the same reverse die but from a blundered obverse die (*SCBI* 7, 327, and Dix Noonan Webb sale 4–5 December 2013, lot 2389); and, lastly, from a coin struck from the same blundered obverse die paired with a blundered reverse die (Rome, ex Forum hoard). Noticing this, Christopher Blunt remarked that Ingelri's coins of *Circumscription Cross* type 'present interesting problems', and pointed to other evidence that might suggest that 'something unusual may have occurred at Oxford' at this period.<sup>7</sup> What is in any event clear is that the stock of dies available to Ingelri both in the *Horizontal* type and in the *Circumscription Cross* type included dies engraved less

<sup>6</sup> Coins of this moneyer and type for Ælfred customarily have the inscription on their reverse divided by cross, pellet, cross.

<sup>7</sup> Blunt 1974, 67.

expertly than was the norm at the time, giving a context for the poor standard of epigraphy on the present coin.

Third, the weight of the coin, only 0.45 g, coupled with its small dimensions, strongly suggests that it is a round halfpenny. Although a round halfpenny of *Cross and Lozenge* type by a moneyer Eanr(ed?) has recently been recorded for the reign of Ceolwulf II of Mercia,<sup>8</sup> and both round halfpennies and a larger number of imitative Danelaw-struck round halfpennies have long been known for the reign of Ælfred, the denomination has not so far been recorded for the coinage of Æthelstan II, and the present coin is of very different character to those of Ælfred with which it ought to be roughly contemporary if it dated from the 880s. On any view, it belongs more naturally with round halfpence of the early tenth century, the evidence for which was ably summarised by Blackburn in 1993,<sup>9</sup> although further specimens have turned up since.

Fourth, the coin's obverse type, described in the Coin Register entry as being 'a pincer cross with lozenge centre containing four wedges', seems unlikely to owe its inspiration to potential pre-890 coin prototypes, for these are very much more formally set out and indeed mostly date from the early or mid ninth century rather than from any date close to that of the coinage of Æthelstan II. The obverse type is more readily explicable as one distantly influenced by coins of 'floral' design struck in the reign of Eadweard the Elder, such as a penny of a moneyer Athulf (*SCBI* 20, 760), which carries on the reverse a design of 'sprays and buds on steps'.<sup>10</sup> An irregular 'floral' type halfpenny of Eadweard the Elder is indeed already known.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the coin's find spot, at Thornborough Bridge, Buckinghamshire, two miles east of the town of Buckingham itself and not far at all from the historic county boundary between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, is more readily compatible with the coin having been struck in the 920s or 930s by the Oxford moneyer Ingelri rather than it having been struck by a moneyer based somewhere within the territory in East Anglia and the East Midlands ruled over in the 880s by Æthelstan II.

Although the coin in question should therefore not be regarded as a coin of Æthelstan II of East Anglia, but as a round halfpenny of Æthelstan of Wessex, round halfpence dating from the reign of the tenth-century Æthelstan are of the greatest rarity and just two others have been recorded. Both are of Two-line type, and the moneyers are respectively Clip<sup>12</sup> and Rihard.<sup>13</sup> The addition to these of the present coin by the Oxford moneyer Ingelri is on any view a significant addition to our knowledge of the tenth-century halfpenny series.

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<sup>8</sup> EMC 2004.0009; PAS BUC-08EE42; found Pitstone, Bucks, 2003. The coin is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

<sup>9</sup> Blackburn 1993, 123–4.

<sup>10</sup> The coin, and its die-duplicate *BMC* 98, are assigned to a West Midlands moneyer by Blunt, Stewart and Lyon 1989, 78.

<sup>11</sup> Blackburn 1993, 124. The coin is in the possession of one of the present authors (CSSL).

<sup>12</sup> Blackburn 1993, 124 (a coin of the *Horizontal Pellet* variety of Two-line type, and of a die-cutting style associable with Canterbury). The coin was found near Stowting, Kent, in 1990, and has since been acquired for the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

<sup>13</sup> Coin Register 2003, no. 167 (a coin of the *Horizontal Trefoil* variety of Two-line type, of Southern English style, but as yet not associable with any particular mint or die-cutting centre). The coin was found in the Towcester area of Northamptonshire.