FINDS OF CLIPPINGS OF SILVER COINS.

By Bernard Roth, F.R.C.S.

THE MARCHAM FIND.

George Borrow, in The Rommany Rye, chapter xli., tells us:—

"I told you that my grandfather was a shorter," said the jockey, "by which is meant a gentleman who shortens or reduces the current coin of the realm, for which practice he was scragg'd, that is, hung by the scrag of the neck. My grandfather reduced or shortened the coin of this country by three processes. By aqua fortis, by clipping and by filing. Filing and clipping he employed in reducing all kinds of coin, whether gold or silver . . . From a five shilling piece . . . he would file or clip to the value of five pence, and from lesser coin in proportion . . . Reducing the coin, though rather a lucrative, was a very dangerous trade. Coin filed felt rough to the touch; coin clipped could be easily detected by the eye."

While spending the summer vacation of 1903 in the neighbourhood of Abingdon, Berkshire, I made the acquaintance of Mr. John West, an old inhabitant of that town, and a member of this Society, who has collected coins found in the locality since he was a boy. He has a very interesting collection of coins and tokens, upwards of 2,000 in number, and ranging from the gold staters of Cunobeline and Tasciovanus to the money of the Georges, which he was kind enough to show me. Included in his series is the very remarkable "find" of silver coin-clippings, the first subject of this paper.

In September, 1900, some men who were levelling the ground of a hayrick yard at Marcham, a small village about a mile and a half to the west of Abingdon, found a number of small elongated and boat-shaped pieces of silver, about the size of oats before removal of the
Finds of Clippings of Silver Coins.

scales. Rather less than one-half of this silver was taken by some of them to a local jeweller, who only offered to purchase it at the metal value. As, however, a few letters could be distinguished on most of the silver bits, he advised the men to show the hoard to Mr. West, who recognised the pieces as coin-clippings and eventually bought that lot, which weighed 2 pounds, 7 ounces, 12 pennyweights troy. The other men took the remainder of the clippings, weighing 3 pounds, 1 ounce troy, to another jeweller, who paid them at the rate of one shilling and ninepence per ounce, and had the whole melted down. Mr. West's impression was that, as the clippings were found on land adjoining the house in which he lived for many years at Marcham, they had probably belonged to John Elwes, the miser, who would have much money passing through his hands.

This theory, however, is not consistent with the fact that I have been able to decipher clippings of coins extending from the reign of Edward VI. to the early years of Charles II., say about A.D. 1662, whereas Elwes was not born till 1714, dying in 1789. Mr. John West could not give me any further information about the find, so I inquired locally at Marcham. There I heard that the clippings were found in the rickyard whilst levelling a slightly raised portion of the ground where one of the staddles of a hayrick used to stand. They were contained in a small, decayed wooden box, which crumbled to pieces as soon as it was touched by the pickaxe. My informant in the village has the theory that the box containing the clippings was originally thrown down a large vaulted refuse-pit of an old house near by, when the place was possibly being searched by officers of justice; that the contents of the pit were emptied on to the surface of the hayrick yard many years afterwards, and remained there undisturbed until the time of the find.

Whoever was the original owner of the clippings had no doubt good cause to hide them, because the law was very severe in those days. Thus, "Clipping, washing and filing the proper coin of this realm . . . for lucre or gain" is made treason by 5th Elizabeth, chapter 2. And again, according to 6th and 7th William III., chapter 19, "Clippings or filings of the coin, bought or sold or
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>King/Queen</th>
<th>Coin</th>
<th>Obverse</th>
<th>Reverse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Edward VI</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. V. ED.</td>
<td>Rev. POSV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. X EL</td>
<td>Rev. MEV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. escallop EL</td>
<td>Rev. I... DE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Sixpence</td>
<td>Rev. m. m. pheon PO</td>
<td>Obv. ET' HI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Halfcrown</td>
<td>Rev. m. m. coronet</td>
<td>Obv. AE' B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Rev. IC m. m. lys E</td>
<td>Obv. ACOB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Rev. ET' m. m. mullet Q</td>
<td>Obv. HI' FR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Rev. T m. m. trefoil QVAE</td>
<td>Obv. RE# m. m. trefoil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Sixpence</td>
<td>Rev. m. m. thistle E#V</td>
<td>Obv. IACOBV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Halfcrown</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. thistle CA</td>
<td>(Scotch 30/- piece) Rev. IVN#.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. ACA</td>
<td>Rev. PICE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Sixpence</td>
<td>Obv. m. m. star C</td>
<td>Rev. O m. m. star.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Sixpence</td>
<td>Rev. m. m. (R)</td>
<td>Obv. RE# m. m. (R).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Rev. 1653</td>
<td>Obv. LAND m. m. sun TH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Charles II</td>
<td>Halfcrown (hammered)</td>
<td>Obv. VS II D</td>
<td>Rev. O AV.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specimens of Clippings, Marcham Find.**
knowingly found in the custody of any person other than the officers of the mint, is forfeited, with a fine of £500, half to the King, and half to the informer, and the offender shall be branded on the cheek with the letter R."

This theory of the original loss may possibly be correct, although it is difficult to understand how these silver clippings could have remained, for many years, almost as bright and as fresh as when they were first clipped, amongst the refuse of the pit. Is it possible, however, that the nascent ammonia of the decomposition may have exerted a preservative action? The wooden box, no doubt, would have kept the bits of silver clean from the soil, and yet would have allowed the ammonia gas to penetrate to them.

The first illustration to this paper represents fifteen selections from the clippings, reproduced in practically the same condition as they were when brought to Mr. West. It will be observed that the cut edges of many of the pieces are as distinct and as untarnished as if the clippers had been used only a few weeks ago; the ends of many of the bits are as sharp as needles, and consequently they require cautious handling. I have carefully examined one pound weight troy of them: it consists of 1,690 separate clippings, giving an average individual weight of 3'4 grains troy. I have been able to classify 648 of these, viz., more than a third of the whole number in the pound weight examined, and 99 bear definite mint marks. I will now describe these 648 classified clippings:—

EDWARD VI., 1547-1553. I have found three clippings of coins of Edward VI., one of which has the Southwark mint mark Y, of the years 1551-53, on the obverse, and is part of a shilling, see illustration, fig. 1; the other two are portions of sixpences.

PHILIP and MARY, 1554-1558. One clipping only can be attributed to Philip and Mary; it has on the obverse LIP • E, and on the reverse VS, and is part of a shilling.

ELIZABETH, 1558-1603. To Queen Elizabeth I attribute 144 clippings, of which 74 are apparently shillings, and 70 are sixpences or groats. The 22 clippings with mint marks are equally divided between the shillings and sixpences or groats.
SHILLINGS—Eleven with mint marks:—

Mint mark Coronet = 1567–70.
  " Acorn = 1573–74. (2)
  " Bell = 1582–84.
  " A = 1582–84. (3) Fig. 2.
  " Escallop = 1584–87. Fig. 3.
  " Ton = 1592–95.
  " Key = 1595–98.
  " 1 = 1601–02.

SIXPENCES or GROATS—Eleven with mint marks:—

Mint mark Cross-crosslet = 1558–61. (2)
  " Lys = 1558–61.
  " Pheon = 1561–65. Fig. 4.
  " Rose = 1565. (2)
  " Castle = 1569–71.
  " A = 1582–84. (2)
  " Ton = 1592–95.
  " 2 = 1602.

JAMES I., 1603–1625. 108 clippings can be attributed to James I., of which 17 are half-crowns, 52 shillings and 39 sixpences.

HALF-CROWN—One with mint mark Coronet = 1607–8. Fig. 5.

SHILLINGS—Eight with mint marks:—

Mint mark Thistle = 1603–4.
  " Lys = 1604–5.
  " Lys = 1604–5 or 1623–24. Fig. 6.
  " Rose = 1605–6 or 1620–21. (3)
  " Mullet = 1611. Fig. 7.
  " Trefoil = 1613 or 1614. Fig. 8.

SIXPENCES—Five with mint marks:—

Mint mark Thistle = 1603–4. Fig. 9.
  " Lys = 1604–5 or 1623–24. (2)
  " Key = 1609.
  " Ton = 1615.

CHARLES I., 1625–1649. The coins of Charles I. form by far the largest proportion of the pound weight of the find which I examined, viz.: 390 clippings classified as 136 half-crowns, 134 shillings and 120 sixpences.
HALF-CROWNS—Eighteen with mint marks:—

Mint mark Thistle (Scotch 30/- piece). Fig. 10.

“ Anchor = 1628 or 1638. (3)
“ Plume = 1630.
“ Crown = 1635 (Aberystwith mint, 1637–42).
“ Triangle = 1639. (3)
“ Star = 1640.
“ Triangle in circle = 1641. (2)
“ (P) = 1643.
“ (P) or (R) = 1643 or 1644.
“ Sun = 1645. (4)

SHILLINGS—Eighteen with mint marks:—

Mint mark Rose = 1631. (2)

“ Crown = 1635 or 1637–42 (Aberystwith mint). (2)
“ Ton = 1636–38.
“ Cross = 1637–42 (Aberystwith).
“ Anchor = 1638.
“ Triangle = 1639. (2) Fig. 11.
“ Star = 1640.
“ Triangle in circle = 1641. (3)
“ Plume = 1642 (Shrewsbury) or 1642–46 (Oxford) or 1643–46 (Bristol).
“ (R) = 1644.
“ Eye = 1645.
“ Sun = 1645. (2)

SIXPENCES—Twenty-five with mint marks:—

Mint mark Harp = 1632. (2)

“ Portcullis = 1633.
“ Ton = 1636–38.
“ Triangle = 1639. (6)
“ Star = 1640. (3) Fig. 12.
“ Triangle in circle = 1641. (3)
“ (P) or (R) = 1643 or 1644.
“ (R) = 1644. (2) Fig. 13.
“ Sun = 1645. (3)
“ Eye = 1645. (2)
“ Sceptre = 1646.

COMMONWEALTH, 1649–1660. The only clipping of the Commonwealth in the portion of the find examined, is that of a shilling which has on the obverse, m. m. sun, and LAND . . . . TH, and on the reverse the date 1653. Fig. 14.
CHARLES II. Hammered coinage, 1660–1662. As the hoard did not contain any clippings of milled money, and as the pound weight of the clippings examined, only yielded one piece which I could with any certainty assign to the Commonwealth, it had not occurred to me to search for specimens of the hammered coins of Charles II. Fortunately, however, Mr. L. A. Lawrence wrote to me and suggested the possibility of some of the pieces being of this coinage, as, in so fragmentary a condition, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the very similar issues of Charles I. and that of the first coinage of Charles II. Upon this, I carefully examined the pieces once more, with the result that whilst several may possibly be of Charles II., one certainly is. It is clipped from a half-crown of the hammered coinage of 1660–62, and contains on the obverse the letters VS • II • D, which are clearly a portion of the complete legend, CAROLVS • II • D • MAE • BRIT • FRAN • ET HIB • RES; and on the reverse O • AV as part of the inscription, CHRISTO • AVSPICE • REINO. Fig. 15.

The discovery of this piece deduces the date of the hiding, or loss of the hoard to about 1660–1662, and it may be something more than a coincidence that it should occur at the very time when an active search was being made for political suspects. Was this the hoard of some puritanical recusant, whose conscience, whilst allowing him to clip the regal money which he held in disrepute, would not permit him to knowingly injure the currency of the Commonwealth? Or, as Shakespeare has the dogma in a wider sense—

It is no English treason to cut
French crowns, and to-morrow the King
Himself will be a clipper.       

Henry V.

This at least would account for the curious incident of the presence in the hoard of one piece only of Commonwealth-money, possibly the result of an absent moment, and the troubles to his cause which immediately followed the Restoration might account for the hider’s sudden arrest upon political rather than felonious grounds.

It is again interesting to remember that it was in 1662 that the then new process of coining was introduced, with a view to render almost impossible the successful operation of this nefarious practice.
Thus we have the remarkable evidence before us of a find of clippings, probably deposited during the same year, which conclusively demonstrates the need for such a reformation of the coinage.

Towards the close of the preceding year it had been resolved to introduce the new process, and houses, mills, engines, and other materials for coinage of money by the mill, were ordered to be erected; all engraving of dies except in the Tower of London was prohibited, and Simon, the engraver, was required to bring in all the tools and engines for coining in his possession. In April, 1662, Blondeau, who had been again sent for out of France, was taken into the mint, and an agreement was entered into with him "to furnish all the mills, rollers, presses and other instruments, to cut, flatten, make round and size the pieces; the engine to mark the edges of the money with letters and grainings, the great presses for the coinage of monies, and other tools and engines for the new way of coining." Blondeau also engaged "to discover his secrets in rounding pieces before they are sized, and in marking the edges of the monies with letters and grainings unto his Majesty, and unto the Warden, Master and Worker, and Comptroller of the Mint," etc. Thomas Simon and John Roettier, a native of Antwerp, were ordered to furnish the dies, "but by reason of a contest in art between them," they could not be brought to an agreement. Both made patterns for the new money, and Roettier's having been preferred, he was ordered to make puncheons and dies for the new coinage. Simon then produced his memorable "petition crown," and failing to obtain favour from his superiors, ceased to work any longer for the mint . . . .

The crowns and half-crowns have the edges inscribed with DECVS ET TVTAMEN, and with one or two exceptions the year of the reign. The inscription, which was thus placed to prevent clipping without detection, was happily adopted to intimate that it was at once an ornament and a protection to the coin.1

I have not been able to come across any references in the indices of the Numismatic Chronicle or elsewhere, to the discovery of coin clippings, so anything of the kind must be extremely rare, and, with the exception of that described at the close of this paper, this find is possibly unique. We may make an attempt to estimate the number of complete coins which were treated by the clipper. The hoard weighed originally five pounds, eight ounces, twelve pennyweights troy, and as there are 1,690 clippings in the one pound 1

examined, it must have consisted of about 9,660 clippings. Each clipping with a mint mark probably represents a separate coin, so that at least 99 complete coins are included amongst the 648 clippings I have been able to classify: this gives between six or seven clippings as representing one perfect coin. If we apply the same proportion to the whole find, we have a minimum total of between 1,400 and 1,600 complete coins represented in it, consisting of about 356 half-crowns, 608 shillings, and 534 sixpences or groats, a large sum of money for those days. But it is obvious that only coins of good weight would bear so severe a mutilation, and as many would be already lightened by similar methods, the true total must have been largely in excess of these figures. The find is also interesting in giving us some idea of the proportion of the coins of the different reigns and denominations in actual circulation at the time they were clipped, and the clippings subsequently hidden, because it was not in the interest of the clipper of coins to hoard them after mutilation; he would pass them again into circulation as quickly as possible so as to escape detection.

Mr. Lawrence, in the letter to which I have already referred, raised other questions which may be of interest, viz., as to the average weight of the pieces, the condition of the coins from which they were taken, whether more than one was taken from each coin, and, finally, what was the method of their separation? I will reply to these in the order named.

The weight of the pieces.—I have only weighed the 99 clippings with mint marks and three others.

*Edward VI.*—A shilling-clipping weighs 4'6 grains, and the clippings of the two *sixpence* 2'3 grains and 2'6 grains respectively, an average of 2'45 grains.

*Elizabeth.*—Eleven shilling-clippings vary in weight from 2'5 grains to 6'1 grains, giving an average of 4'11 grains. The eleven *Elizabeth sixpence* or *groat*-clippings vary from 0'7 grain to 4'4 grains, giving an average of 2'15 grains.

*James I.*—A half-crown-clipping weighs 7 grains. Eight shilling-clippings weigh from 3'1 grains to 5'7 grains, giving an average of 4'37 grains.—Five *sixpenny*-clippings weigh from 1'6 grain to 3'7 grains, giving an average of 2'08 grains.

*Charles I.*—Eighteen half-crown-clippings vary from 5'4 grains to
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14 grains, giving an average of 8.29 grains.—Eighteen shilling-clippings vary from 2.2 grains to 6.5 grains, giving an average of 4.13 grains. Twenty-five sixpenny-clippings vary from 1.9 grain to 3.4 grains, giving an average of 2.68 grains.

Commonwealth.—The single shilling-clipping weighs 7.2 grains.
Charles II.—The half-crown-clipping weighs 7.5 grains.
The average weight of all the half-crown-clippings is 7.59 grains, the average weight of all the shilling-clippings is 4.88 grains, and the average weight of all the sixpence or groat-clippings is 2.34 grains.

The condition of the coins from which the clippings were taken.—All the clippings appear to have come from coins which had been more or less in circulation; some few pieces are almost in mint condition, but many are much worn, especially those of Queen Elizabeth. Many of the clippings exhibit on the convex border marks which prove that the coins had already been clipped to a less extent and then passed into circulation before the present clippings were filched from them.

Whether more than one clipping was taken from each coin.—There can be no doubt that several clippings were taken from each single coin, as is evidently the case with mutilated specimens of the coinage of Charles I. which I have had in my possession for many years.

The method of separation.—A large pair of clippers or nippers was most probably used: the marks of the instrument are equally evident on both the obverse and the reverse of most of the clippings, and they slope towards the middle of the thickness of the coin, causing them to have a bevelled cut margin. This can best be discerned in the largest pieces, viz., the half-crown clippings. I have tried some experiments with shears or large scissors, and find that if these are employed, the clipping tends to curl up at each extremity, and that the cut edge or margin is level, and at right angles to the surfaces of the clipping, very unlike the bevelled-off margins I have already described. With nippers I have been able to reproduce clippings exactly like those in the find, for clippings so cut remain flat and do not curl up. It will be noticed in the illustration that all the clippings of the find are flat. ¹

¹ Mr. Roth proved this contention by practical demonstration when reading the paper to the Society.—The Editors.
In conclusion of this account I wish to express my thanks to Mr. John West, for having allowed me to bring this remarkable find before the British Numismatic Society, and to Mr. Lawrence for his valuable suggestions.

**Table of the 648 Clippings which have been Identified.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Half-crowns</th>
<th>Shillings</th>
<th>Sixpences</th>
<th>Mint Marks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edward VI...</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip and Mary</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth ...</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70¹</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James I. ...</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles I. ...</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles II. ...</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|           | 154          | 263       | 231       | 99         | 648   |

**The Southwark Find.**

About the year 1897, which is as nearly as I can now ascertain the date, a house in Southwark was being demolished, when the workmen discovered an earthen vase, somewhat resembling a modern flower-pot, which contained a quantity of clippings from silver coins. The coins from which they had been taken were almost precisely of the period comprised in the Marcham find, which I have just described; for of the eight clippings from the hoard which Mr. A. H. Baldwin kindly submitted for my examination,² the earliest is of about the year 1594, and the latest of the year 1644. As these, however, represent but a small fraction of the whole, it is not improbable that the

¹ Including groats.
² They constituted all that he possessed, and are now added to my collection.
dates still more closely correspond, although it is more likely that
the deposit or loss would be before, rather than after the Restoration,
for in the troublous times of civil war such practices as false-coin ing
and clipping can almost pass unheeded by the authorities.

With the date, however, the similarity between the two hoards ends,
for whilst the clipper at Marcham was content to cut away small
straight pieces from the edge of the coin, the transgressor at South-
wark was far more methodical in his work and carefully removed
a complete outer ring from each coin. This throws a new light upon
our knowledge of the methods employed in the old days for defrauding
the revenue. In the Marcham case I have, I think, proved that the
sections were removed by means of a clipper and not of shears, for the
cut edges presented two facets, one above and one below. The South-
wark specimens on the other hand have quite a differently cut edge,
with only one facet, and each clipping follows and includes the whole
margin of the coin.

At the ordinary meeting of the Society on October the 12th, 1904,
I was able to demonstrate how this result was obtained by using a tool,
known as a tinman's bent-snips, and used for cutting sheet iron or tin.
Commencing by cutting obliquely through the legend of a coin of the
same period, and continuing the cut round the inner circle, I readily
removed the whole of the legend, with the result that the clipping was
very similar indeed to the eight specimens from the hoard which I then
exhibited.

The eight specimens referred to are all removed from shillings, a
feature which it would be interesting to check with the rest of the
hoard if that were now possible. They vary in weight from 35'5 to 50
grains troy, and may be described as follows:—

Elizabeth, Mint mark, Ton = 1592-95, weight 48'9 grains. Fig. 1.

James I. " Rose = 1605-6, 45 " 3.

Charles I. " Horizontal Anchor = 1628 or 1638, weight 44'8
[grains. Fig. 4.

" Vertical Anchor = 1628 or 1638, weight 42'8
[grains. Fig. 5.

The Southwark Find.

1. ELIZABETH.
m. m. ton.

2. ELIZABETH.
m. m. 2.

3. JAMES I.
m. m. rose.

4. CHARLES I.
m. m. horizontal anchor.

5. CHARLES I.
m. m. vertical anchor.

6. CHARLES I.
m. m. ton.

7. CHARLES I.
m. m. (R).

8. CHARLES I.
m. m. sun.

SPECIMENS OF CLIPPINGS, SOUTHWARK FIND.
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Charles I., Mint mark (R) = 1644, weight 50 grains. Fig. 7.
Sun = 1645, 44.1, 8.

It is quite possible that a search amongst the contemporary records of Criminal Trials might throw light upon the deposit of one or other of these curious finds, but the methods of a clipper were secret, and it is as likely that his gains were lost when Death in turn

Clipped his wings and cut him short,
Confined within the purlieus of his court. 

Dryden.