THE OXFORD MINT IN THE REIGN OF ALFRED.

BY P. W. P. CARLYON-BRITTON, F.S.A.—President.

The exclusion of the coins of Alfred the Great bearing the mint-name “Orsnaforda” from Mr. C. L. Stainer’s monograph on the early Oxford coinage entitled “Oxford Silver Pennies,” printed for the Oxford Historical Society at the Clarendon Press, 1904, leads me to think that a note on this subject may not be unwelcome at this season. The author remarks that the only argument hitherto used for their attribution to Oxford appears to be that they must be Oxford pennies until the contrary is proved. He then gives some reasons against this attribution of the coins, which may be summarized as follows:—

1. That there is a praiseworthy prejudice in favour of assigning an Alfred coinage to Oxford.
2. That the “Orsnaforda” coins have been found in Lancashire only.
3. That the Cuerdale find contained a large number of St. Eadmund pennies, bearing moneyers’ names which are seldom English, a few of the “Ælfred Rex Doro” type, some of the “London,” and a number of the “pall” types (British Museum Catalogue, Types XIV and XV).
4. That the “pall” type is distinctively Norse or Danish, and should never have been included, as it has been, in the West Saxon series.
5. That the “London” type is also Danish.
6. That the Canterbury pennies have the same Danish character, as can be seen by comparing them with those of the Northumbrian Kings, Cnut or Siefred.
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7. That the "Orsnaforde" pennies are mostly of the same type as those of Earl Sihtric, whilst some bear the long cross on the reverse which is frequent on those northern issues.

In reference to these seven formidable counts of indictment against the Oxford coinage of Alfred it may be remarked that to establish his point Mr. Stainer would, with one fell stroke of his pen, transfer not only the Canterbury and London coins of Alfred to Northumbria, but also the more general types bearing on the obverse the small cross pattée and on the reverse the name of the moneyer in two lines, divided by crosses or other ornaments, and which he refers to as the "pall" types. As a logical sequence the great bulk of the coins of Edward the Elder and of many subsequent kings would follow suit and also depart to Northumbria.

In fairness to Mr. Stainer and also to Mr. James Parker, the author of "The Early History of Oxford (727 to 1100)," attention is drawn to the circumstance that Mr. Stainer's reasons are, with certain grotesque additions of his own, adopted by him from an appendix to Mr. Parker's book, also published by the Oxford Historical Society.

In answer to the specific heads above set out, I make the following replies:—

1. That, apart from prejudice, there are circumstances in favour of an Oxford coinage of Alfred being a likely fact.

2 and 3. That the circumstances in which the Cuerdale hoard was collected and lost are fully recounted in Mr. Andrew's "Buried Treasure," and that these warrant the supposition that Oxford coins would naturally be included in the hoard.

4. That the "pall" types have nothing of a Northumbrian character about them and were certainly issued by a Christian monarch. The names of the moneyers clearly show them not to be of Northumbrian origin. Mr.

1 British Numismatic Journal, I, 9.
Probabilities of an Oxford Coinage.

Stainer’s reference to the coins with the obverse legend arranged in \textit{four} divisions so as to leave spaces forming a \textit{cross}, as well as to those having \textit{three} spaces to form a \textit{pall} (indicative of Canterbury) as “the pall types,” is merely an incidental indication of the want of care and thought bestowed by him in dealing with this branch of his subject.

5. That the London type is obviously \textit{not} Danish. The majority of such coins have been found in London with pennies of Edward the Elder of undoubtedly English manufacture. That the absurd attempt to make the coin of Halfdan bearing the London monogram the prototype of Alfred’s London coins, and which has evidently led Mr. Stainer astray, has already been sufficiently exploded and ridiculed by Mr. Andrew in “Buried Treasure.”

6. That the ordinary Canterbury or “Doro” coins are not of Danish character, but are similar to those of Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, at the time of their issue.

7. That the “Orsnaforda” pennies are quite as much like the Exeter and Winchester coins of Alfred and the similar Bath coin of Edward the Elder, as the unique coin of Earl Sihtric is like the Orsnaforda or other coins of Alfred and Edward just alluded to.

That there are Danish imitations of Alfred’s coins of London and Canterbury and also of his more general types, no one will deny, but that is very different from saying that all the coins of Alfred of London and Canterbury were struck in Northumbria.

Mr. Stainer, after specifying his objections as above, further remarks that, looking at the Orsnaforda pennies described in the British Museum catalogue, it seems as though some species of corruption had been gone through \textit{before} a passable reading such as \textit{ORSNAFORDA} was evolved. He then instances some cases where the second letter especially is in doubt. An examination of the coins themselves will convince anyone accustomed to Saxon coins that the best executed
coins are those reading ORSNAFORDA, OHNSNAFORDA, and OVNSNAFORDA, and many of the blundered examples are obviously incorrect copies from these.

Mr. Stainer deduces from his arguments the proposition that "the more grammatical" forms ON SNEODRA, ON SHAFORDA, or ON SNAFORDA are the correct readings. But to arrive at this conclusion he has to separate the first two letters from the entire word and makes two words, the first being ON, for in or of, an absolutely unknown idiom on coins of this date and never at any time used without the name of a moneyer preceding it.

He then alludes to the Sihtric penny bearing the name SÆELDFOR with that of the moneyer Gundibert and suggests that the Lancashire town of Salford might have strong claims, but whether to the SÆELDFOR piece or to the ORSNAFORDA pieces or to both is left uncertain by the text.

The Sihtric coin is doubtless copied from its Alfred prototype, just as many other types were copied in Northumbria and elsewhere from those of Alfred and the succeeding Kings of Wessex, no doubt with the intention that they should pass current in Saxon England.

All the ORSNAFORDA pennies bear the name of the moneyer BERNVALD, and this name appears as one of those who coined at Canterbury for Alfred and Plegmund.

The name, as BærNVæLD, occurs on other coins of Alfred, e.g., British Museum Catalogue, Type I, var. a, and as BERNVALD on Type XIV of those of his son and successor Edward the Elder. A moneyer of similar name coined for Athelstan at Wallingford.

The idea of a Northumbrian attribution for the "Orsnaforda" coins seems therefore to be absolutely unsupported by the facts. The historical evidence raises no question on the fact that Alfred was in a position to coin at Oxford, and the sole difficulty is occasioned by the graphical circumstance that the second letter in Orsnaforda is an R instead of a L, on the supposition that the reading was intended to have been OESNAFORDA for OXNSAFORDA. In this connection it may be noted that kaunsama = K, or C (hard), of the Gothic Alphabet of Ulfilas is practically the same as the letter raitha = R, of the same
Evidence from the Coins.

alphabet; both letters are nearly closed where the top adjoins the upright initial stroke, and the only difference is that this initial stroke is slightly prolonged below the level of the tail of the letter in the case of raiitha.

On the other hand, if OVSNAFORDA, which appears on some of the coins, was the intended name of the mint, it will meet the case exactly. It may be noted that the forms BRISTOW and BRISTOLL for Bristol (anciently Brigstow) both occur on the groats of as late a date as Edward IV. Such variations, due possibly to dialect or to inaccurate copying from written instructions to the die sinker, are not infrequent, and we have only to look at the coins of Alfred's first type (of the same type as those of his brother Æthelred I. and Burgred, King of Mercia) to find his name most frequently rendered ÆELBRED, and this not by one moneyer only, but by many.

We may therefore, I think, safely conclude that the ORSNAFORDA coins were struck at Oxford in the last part of Alfred's reign, and that they are of the same issue as those minted at Exeter and Winchester; that the name is intended for OVSNAFORDA = the ford over the Ouse, the old Anglo-Saxon name for the Isis, and a form that is still preserved in the name Ouseney or Osney, the island in the Ouse, where the celebrated Abbey of that name was erected; and that the name OXNAFORDA or OXENAFORDA is another and later form of the same name.

So far I have been content to show that upon the general probabilities of the case there can be no doubt at all, that the coins of Alfred bearing the legend OVSNAFORDA and ORSNAFORDA and any variation of the word, were issued at Oxford, or, as it was then called, the Ouse-ford. But now I will carry the point a long step forward and endeavour to prove from the coins themselves, that during the reign of Alfred the Great the actual neological changes occurred by which the river Ouse became the Isis and Ousnaford, first Isisford and then Oxford. If I succeed, as I trust to do, in this, it will be but another instance of how, as yet, the evidence of our coins has been a neglected chapter in our British history.

The reader need scarcely be reminded that numismatic inscriptions in those days were, as they are now, almost invariably in Latin, but
that Latin, as in the early chronicles, was far from classical. As we have seen, the legends on the coins under discussion are usually on the obverse—ELFRED ORSNAFORDA or OVSNAAFORDA,—REX of course being understood. Turning to the coins of Athelstan of some forty or fifty years later, we find a series of coins bearing on the obverse ÆDELSTAN REX and on the reverse legends such as SIGELAND MO OX VRBIS for Sigeland Monetarius Oxonis Urbis, and in this not only do Mr. Stainer and every one else agree, but the example is taken from his book. Hence, if my contention is right, the changes from OVSNAAFORDA to OVSNIS URBIS occurred between about 870 or 880 and 940.

Camden tells us that “Leland with some show of probability derives the name (of Oxford) from the River Ouse, in Latin Isis; and he believes it to have been heretofore called Ousford, since the little islands which the river here makes are called Ousney.” Hence, as previously explained, we have OVSN[I]A FORDA or OVSNÆ FORDA on the coins. Up to the time those coins were struck the river was evidently known as the Ouse. But when it became commonly known as the Isis, what would Oxford be called? Classically it ought to be ISIDIS VADUM, and that is the name given to it in the “List of Latin names of places in Great Britain and Ireland,” in Mr. Charles Trice Martin’s “Record Interpreter,” just as Ousney or Oseney near Oxford is termed Isidis Insula. But the Saxon engraver whose version of the Classical OUSÆ VADUM became OVSNAAFORDA would anglicize it also to ISIS FORDA or, as Isis is from the Greek and therefore irregular and as fyrd is also the Anglo-Saxon for a ford, we might equally well expect ISIRIS FIRDA. I now refer you to the coins of this particular type, and you will find two or three actually reading ELFRED ISIRI FIRIA for ELFRED ISIRIS FIRDA. Thus within a period of fifty years we have upon the coinage of the same town contracted forms of, first OUSNE FORDA, second ISIDIS FIRDA and third OXONIS URBIS. Therefore the first change from Ouseford to Isisford occurred in the reign of Alfred and the second from Isisford to Oxford in that of his successor Edward the Elder or of Athelstan. Other Latinised forms for Oxford are ISIACUM, OSSONIA and OXONIA, while (in addition to Isis) OUSA, OZA, USA, and VUSA all signify the Ouse.
The Change of Name.

But why were these curious changes made? This is a more difficult problem to answer because we have to descend from fact to theory. There are several rivers of the name Ouse in England, particularly the Yorkshire Ouse, the Lincolnshire and Buckinghamshire Ouse, for the word was probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon *a-s*, *wōs*, *i.e.*, water running slowly. So long as these were in the separate kingdoms into which England was divided no confusion arose, but when Alfred annexed Mercia there were two rivers of this name within eighteen miles of each other, both bounding the County of Oxford. Thus another name was almost necessary for one, and so Alfred, when he chose Oxford for his place of mintage, probably changed the name of its river to the Isis, the "Goddess of the River." It may be, however, that another inducement influenced him. Mr. Andrew has shown that when the Normans settled in England they found that the Saxon name of Lincoln was pronounced LINCEUL, which meant in their own tongue "the shroud of death," and as Huntingdon tells us, although he does not give the reason, their Kings refused to visit the city. As this was a serious loss to the citizens, the name was promptly changed to NICOL, though it gradually drifted back to its old form.1 Surely it is more than a coincidence that Roger of Wendover should tell us of Oxford, that in consequence of the legend of St. Frideswide (which dated from about 727) "the Kings of England have always been afraid to enter that city, for it is said to be fatal to them, and they are unwilling to test the truth of it at their own peril." This alone, in the superstitious days of King Alfred, would be reason enough to induce him to alter its old name of OUSEFORD, and thus break the letter, if not the spirit, of the fatal tradition.

The change to Isisford is therefore reasonable; but within fifty years it became Oxford. The name Isisford would be quite foreign to the Saxon tongue, and in all probability it was shortened to the word FORD, or, as it is on the coins, FORDA, which, by the way, is the only portion of OVSNAFORDA which is rarely blundered. Every genealogist knows how in later times Norman names became translated into the

vulgar tongue, how Le Blanc became White; Faber—Smith; De Ariete—Ram; Le Lorimer—Sadler; De Fonte—Spring; De Quercu—Oak, and so on. It may be that something of the same sort occurred in the name of Oxford, for FORDA when translated becomes the "cow with a calf." On the other hand, it is curious that wherever runs a river Ouse we constantly find words beginning with OTT or OT such as Otmoor, near Islip, six miles north of Oxford, and more rarely OX, as for example, Oxton, at the junction of the Wharf and the Yorkshire Ouse. The explanation is that the root of the words Ouse, otter, and water is the same, and hence our verb to ooze. From Ottford to Oxford is but an inflexion.

Looking backward, it is curious that no one should have associated these coins with Leyland's old name for Oxford; it is surprising that no one should have translated the meaning of ISIRI FIRA; and it is astounding that anyone should venture to remove the whole series, to say nothing of the sister coins of London and Canterbury, into some unknown and imaginary mint in Northumbria, when the whole story and much of the early history of Oxford itself lies written on the coins before us so that "he may run that readeth it."

**Description of Plate.**

1. **Obverse.**—ELFRID+ FORDA **Reverse.**—BERHV ALDNO Weight, 22.5 grains.  


2. **Obverse.**—ELFRED FORDA **Reverse.**—+ + + Weight, 22.5 grains.  


3. **Obverse.**—ELFRED FORDA **Reverse.**—+ + + Weight, 25.6 grains.  

Description of Plate.

4. Obverse.—ÆLFRED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 19 grains.
   FORDA  ALDMO


5. Obverse.—ÆGERID  Reverse.—++  Weight, 17.3 grains.
   LORDA  YLDMO


6. Obverse.—ÆLFRED  Reverse.—++  (A halfpenny.) Weight, 9.7 grains.
   FORDA  ALDMO


7. Obverse.—ÆLFRED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 20.2 grains.
   FORDA  ALDMO


8. Obverse.—ÆLFRED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 20.5 grains.
   FÖRDA  ALDMO


9. Obverse.—ÆVLERED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 24.3 grains.
   FÖRDA  ALDMO


10. Obverse.—ÆDRED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 21.2 grains.
    FÖRDA  ALDMO


11. Obverse.—ÆDRED  Reverse.—++  Weight, 22.2 grains.
    FÖRDA  ALDMO

    Same obverse die as No. 10.
The Oxford Mint in the Reign of Alfred.

12. Obverse.—ELFRED
   Reverse.—+ + +
   Weight, 22.5 grains.

13. Obverse.—ELFRED
   Reverse.—+ + +
   Weight, 177 grains.

14. Obverse.—ELFRED
   Reverse.—+ + +

15. Obverse.—ELFRED
   Reverse.—+ + +

16. Obverse.—ELFRED
   Reverse.—H—
   Weight, 21 grains.

17. Obverse.—EHPR
   Reverse.—(A halfpenny.)

18. Obverse.—ERDE
   Reverse.—+ + +


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X.—XIII. CENTURIES.