A REMARKABLE PENNY OF KING ALFRED.

By L. A. Lawrence, Director.

The coin, of which the following is the description, came into my hands during a search for examples of the forger's nefarious art.

Obverse.—ELFRED REX. Large bust of the king bearded and filleted to the right. Inner circle broken by the bust cutting through it above and below. Legend beginning on the left; the last letter of REX being represented just within the inner circle below the letter E. The whole within a dotted outer circle, parts only of which are evident on the coin.

Reverse.—ÆÆELÆLF MO in two lines across the field; in the centre, three crosses, that to the left, in saltire; a similar cross before the moneyer's name; above, a pellet. Parts of an outer beaded circle visible. Weight, 22 grains.

The work is very rough on both sides. The coin is, unfortunately, much blurred on the obverse by having been struck more than once. The impressions of the two, or possibly three strikes are at such a distance from each other as almost to conceal another feature which I discovered on careful examination of the coin. This is, that besides being double struck, it is overstruck on another coin. The underlying impression happily remains in great part on the reverse, where absence of the double striking allows it to be seen. The earlier coin was of the London monogram type. Parts of the letters L, D and I are visible and nearly the whole of the N and O. The cross-bar of the N is clearly traceable through the central cross on the coin.
What the obverse type was I am unable to ascertain with sufficient confidence to be satisfied.

The general type of the obverse, namely, bust cutting through the inner circle above and below, is quite unknown. The reverse, however, is that of a common type and only varies in having two of the crosses in saltire instead of erect. The combination of the two sides is quite new. In searching the various text-books for some information concerning the coin, I could find nothing until our President informed me that there was an illustration resembling the obverse in Sir A. Fontaine's *Numismata, Anglo-Saxonica et Anglo-Danica*, published at Oxford in 1704.

![Reproduction of a woodcut, made in 1704, of a penny of Alfred with similar obverse.](image1)

This book I found in the Museum, and there, sure enough, was the obverse of my coin line for line, omitting, of course, the double and overstriking. The reverse of the coin figured, however, was of the London monogram type, but the preceding coin on the same plate was also a coin of Alfred, and the reverse was the counterpart of my coin, although the obverse attached to this reverse was the small cross within a circle surrounded by the king's name and title. The two crosses, as on my piece, were in saltire. I can find no further light elsewhere, for both *Ruding* and *The Numismatic Chronicle* are silent with reference to this piece.

![Reproduction of a woodcut, made in 1704, of a penny of Alfred with identical reverse.](image2)

1 The reverse of the coin is inverted, as the monogram had not been deciphered in 1704.
Its authenticity considered.

The authenticity of this single example requires patient search for some definite proof. At present I should not like to say that it is beyond doubt, and yet I should be very sorry, and indeed quite unable, to call it a forgery. In cases of this kind all that can be argued is best said by summing up the good points against the bad points, and making an arithmetical subtraction of the less from the greater. To my mind, the good points are in such preponderance that I cannot do better than state them in detail. 1. The edge: I consider it typically good. 2. The lettering: every letter taken separately, although often apparently of very poor workmanship, I have been able to note on undoubted coins of the period. Although it was the rule to form the square letters with wedge-shaped serifs, the thinner end being that in approximation to the vertical stroke, letters are known such as are shown on this coin, where the horizontal strokes are of nearly equal thickness and are quite joined to the vertical strokes. 3. The weight is correct. 4. The general design also is correct as a combination. 5. The double striking: the striking was evidently done by hand, as the double striking is only on one side. This was the invariable process of the period, and the evidence is therefore all in favour of originality, for in modern times a press is always used, whereby a truer and better impression can be obtained with less exercise of skill. 6. The use of a coin as a flan: this argument may be used either way; coins in ancient times were constantly reissued by overstriking later impressions upon them. They have also been used by the forger to meet the difficulties of metal, weight and edge. If the design of the original coin can be deciphered there is so much less left to doubt. Thus, if the date of the underlying coin can be shown to be later than the date of the overstrike, there can be no doubt of the falsity of the latter. When, however, the overstrike is of later date, the rarity of the earlier coin must be taken into consideration. Many forgeries of Henry I. and Stephen's time have been shown to be false because they were overstruck on the later short-cross pennies. Another series of false coins, of William I. and William II. were struck on PAXS coins of the former; examples of common coins being thus used to strike forgeries of later and rarer types are plentiful.
On the coin under discussion, the overstriking on a London monogram type is most significant. No forger, to my mind, would use a type of such rarity on which to strike so poor a production as this piece. The London monogram coin used might, it is true, be a forgery itself, but, if so, why should he use it, for it could not add to the pretence? I think the evidence of the edge of this piece is in favour of the originality of the monogram type and thus in favour of the authenticity of the later strike. 7. The moneyer, ADELYLF: coins bearing this name are not uncommon. The usual type is—Obverse: cross within circle, outside of which are the king's name and title. Reverse: the moneyer's name and title in two lines across the coin, divided by three crosses. The only other type of Alfred's money bearing this name is that variety of the London monogram, illustrated, Hawkins 620, and read by our President LONDONIENSIS¹. Three specimens of it were found at Cuerdale; they are all of very peculiar and unusual work. Mr. Haigh, in Numismatic Chronicle, New Series, vol. x, refers to Alfred's Mercian type as bearing this name. I cannot trace the coin, and it is outside the question here being discussed, as that type has nothing in common with the monogram types. 8. There was a coin in the Montagu collection, figured in the sale catalogue, which is another mule of the monogram type. Obverse: small cross without any inner circle; surrounding it, the king's name and title. Reverse: London monogram dividing the moneyer's name TILEVINE. 9. A coin of Alfred's time with Obverse, bust surrounded by the name HEREBERT, bears some resemblance to this coin as far as regards the bust, for both specimens present the long beard.

The only point I can bring forward against the coin is the poor and strained workmanship.

Now to sum up.

1. Is the coin genuine? If so, it was struck by ADELYLF in Alfred's time over one of Alfred's monogram types. This supposition would account for everything.

2. Is it false? Supposing this—the forger had Fontaine's plates, a rare work, before him. He chose two coins to

¹ British Numismatic Journal, vol. i, p. 3.
make a unique combination. He also chose a monogram type for his flan so that he would get the right edge and the right weight, and he struck it by hand to obtain the double striking on one side only. The ability which enabled him to manipulate it so far, should have put better work into the die itself. Again, if this coin be false, can we pass as genuine the same workmanship and design on the coins illustrated in Fontaine’s plates? Yet the art of the forger in 1704 would scarcely have met the difficulties I have referred to, in concocting an Anglo-Saxon variety in anticipation of the discovery of bearded portraits of Alfred at Cuerdale in 1840.

The conclusion which forces itself on my mind is that the coin is genuine.

A few words on overstrikes may not be amiss. It seems to be a most difficult thing to get rid of the earlier impression by overstriking. Some time since, I was lent two modern bronze pence which had been purposely overstruck at my request. Each impression was clearly traceable, although heavy machinery had been used in their production.

Overstrikes must not be confused with double-struck coins, which are merely coins struck with the same pair of dies more than once. In this case the coin must have shifted before receiving the second blow. These pieces are not of great interest, and the double-striking varies from a slight movement producing a little blurring to a complete somersault in which both sides of the coin show parts of obverse and reverse. Overstrikes are coins struck with a second pair of dies. These are the interesting pieces for study, and a careful examination of them will, as a rule, well repay the student. Most important results as to the sequence of types are to be obtained and the question of originality may depend almost entirely on knowledge gained of the coin used as a flan. It is, therefore, useful to be able to judge whether the marks on a coin indicate overstriking or are due to some other agency. It must be remembered that when a coin is overstruck, most of the former impression disappears;
what is left is represented by faint lines outlining the remains of the original design. This may be more readily understood by remembering that in overstriking, the prominent parts of the design are hit back into the ground work. The result of this is that on each side of each raised line there is a very narrow depression or channel. These are what catch the eye in examining a coin, and they ought to indicate the original design or some sufficient part of it. It must be called to mind that the design is usually spread by the pressure, and that the space between the narrow depressed lines is in reality the design. The moneyers of old seemed to understand the difficulty of getting rid of the earlier impression in overstriking, and intentionally struck more forcibly. The result now is that many of our finest and best struck up pieces exhibit marked signs of overstriking.
COINS OF ÆTHELRED II., HAROLD I., WILLIAM I., WILLIAM II., HENRY I., AND HENRY II., OF THE LAUNCESTON MINT.

X.—XII. CENTURIES