NOTES ON THE MINT AT ABERYSTWITH IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES I.

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DURING an autumn holiday spent last year at Aberystwith, I employed some time and trouble in ascertaining all I could about the mint established in the Castle during the reign of Charles I., and about the coins struck there. I was then unaware of the article under the title "A Glance inside the Mint of Aberystwith in the reign of Charles I.," by our member Mr. Henry Symonds, printed in vol. viii of The British Numismatic Journal, but upon my return home I read that paper with much interest, and I hope that some of the information I gained on the spot may be useful to supplement what has been already placed before this Society.

During my stay in the old town I had access to all sources of printed information in the National Library there, also in the Public Library, and I closely examined the coins of the Aberystwith mint in the Museum of the University of Wales. I was much helped in my researches by the courtesy of the Head Librarian at the National Library, by the Director of the University Museum, and by his deputy, Mr. Frank Wright; also by Mr. George Eyre Evans, who has allowed me to make extracts from his publications in the Welsh Gazette for the purposes of this paper.

Mr. Evans was one of the party permitted to make excavations in the Castle area in 1903, the result being reported in the Archaeologia Cambriensis for 1904 by Mr. Harold Hughes. The exploration was successful in correctly locating the room in the Castle buildings where
the mint operations were carried on, for beneath the debris of the existing floor were found charcoal and ashes in abundance, as well as the broken bases of three crucibles which had evidently been used for melting the silver; although neither coins nor scraps of metal were found there, nor any dies or other implements.

I made a rough plan of the Castle ruins as they exist now, from which the plate at the head of this paper is copied, and upon it is marked the room used for the coining operations. It is probable that the winding stairs communicating with this room led to an upper chamber, used as a store place for dies and bullion, as the area of the lower room would be too small, except as an actual workshop. I here, as Plate II, illustrate an etching by Mr. E. Vincent Wareing, of one corner of this room, showing the lower part of the spiral stairs and the curious recess in the wall. The three bases of the crucibles can be seen in a glass case in the Town Library and Reading-room at Aberystwith. They are about the size of a modern penny in diameter and just show the base of the cupped interior, but their sides would of course expand in the upper parts, now missing.

On July 30th, 1637, Charles I. sanctioned the coining of silver in the Castle at Aberystwith under Thomas Bushell in the following words:—“A Mint shall there be established for the better encouragement of the poor miners by a more timely and speedy payment out of their own labours . . . . The monies there made shall be stamped with feathers, on both sides, for a clear difference from all other his Majesty’s coins.” This order does not seem to have been quite strictly obeyed, for some of the existing coins carry the plumes on one side only.

While the three ostrich feathers—the badge of the Prince of Wales—form an appropriate mark to indicate the Welsh origin of the silver, it must not be supposed that this mark alone is sufficient proof that any given coin was minted at Aberystwith. Probably it always indicates that the coin has been struck in Welsh silver, but not necessarily at the Aberystwith mint in the castle.

Silver coined at the Tower of London and elsewhere was also stamped with the plumes if the metal had been extracted from the Welsh mines.
I need not enter into the intricacies of the Welsh coinage and its dies, but will merely remind my readers that the distinctive mark of the Aberystwith mint was a conventional representation of an open book which was usually placed at the beginning of the inscription on both sides of the coin; for I understand that Col. Morrieson is preparing a monograph upon this subject, and I prefer to leave it to his more expert pen.

There is, however, one little detail in the coinage to which I should like to refer, although I am afraid that in doing so I am taking the part of Ishmael, for I am told that every expert's opinion is against me, and dubs it a mere die-flaw. I allude to a peculiarity of device on some of the threepences that I have examined, but not on the majority of them. I am indebted to my wife, who was with me during these researches and takes great interest in all my hobbies, for first noticing this peculiarity. It is that a spear, or sceptre, is seen apparently running through the mural crown behind the plume.

I have not found this mark on any coin except an occasional threepence, and I would call attention to the copper farthings of Charles I. which bear on the obverse two sceptres in saltire through a royal crown. This very similar design gives some reason for my belief that the variation was intentional, and not the mere accident of a flaw in the die.

The open book, as the mint mark to which I have referred, when examined with a lens seems to have four strings, or ribbons, two on each cover, presumably for tying up the book instead of using clasps.

Ruding says that the lead mines near Aberystwith "are so rich in silver as to come under the denomination of mines royal," and that Customer Smith, about the latter end of Elizabeth's reign, first discovered silver in them, and sent it up to the Tower of London to be coined. After his death the design was prosecuted and more perfected by "Sir Hugh Middleton, who farmed the principal" mines at a yearly rent of £400. "He coined at the Tower at his own heavy charge."

I will now quote from the published articles of Mr. George Eyre Evans, who writes under the nom de plume of "Philip Sidney."
Bushell appears before us on October 22nd, 1636, when he addressed a petition to Charles I. The recent death of Sir Hugh Middleton had opened the way for him to come into Cardiganshire to carry on the working of the silver mines discovered in that county by Sir Hugh. He reminds His Majesty that on May 12th, 1625, he, the King, "finding Sir Hugh's endeavours bent for the public good" had granted him, by Letters Patent, "for 31 years, all the mines-royal in the said county, with a proviso that all the silver should be coined at the Tower mint: which has been done to the value of £50,000." Bushell prays the King that the privileges granted to Sir Hugh may be ratified to him. "Although the silver ore grows richer in value by one-third part, yet in regard of inundation of water and Sir Hugh's death, the mines are likely to decay, and the greatest treasure in the King's dominions to be buried in the earth." On October 14th, Bushell had bought the lease of the mines from Dame Elizabeth Middleton, widow of Sir Hugh, "under an annual rent, that by way of adit petitioner may make it a work worthy the royal name." Charles was inclined to look favourably on Bushell, "since he endeavours to perfect the silver mines in Wales without the aid of the King's purse." Other reasons were that there had been "brought to the Mint these 16 years, of pure silver, 100 lbs. weekly, and were it not for the presence of inundations, they might as easily land 100 lbs. a day, as they have done weekly."

Bushell knew how to enlist the interests of the Government, for he urged that the "possibility of those great riches should not be buried in oblivion for want of the King's favour, as the great treasure of the West Indies was to His Majesty's predecessors by omitting the time when it was offered them." The King referred the petition to the Council on November 6th. The Attorney-General, Bankes, reported on December 3rd that he did "not discern any inconvenience, if His Majesty be so pleased, in confirming the patent to the petitioner." On January 25th, 1637, it was ordered that Bushell (having given

1 This does not agree with Ruding. See ante.
satisfaction to the Lord Treasurer that the works should go on) be granted the prayer of his petition. No sooner was Bushell in possession of the mines than he began to agitate for a mint to be set up at Aberystwith.

In July he again addressed the King. Understanding that His Majesty had granted a mint for Ireland, as well as that his predecessors had allowed mints at Durham, Bristol, and Kidwelly Castle, Bushell stated seven reasons why a mint in Wales might prove of great consequence to the King, both by way of "honour and profit."

The mines worked by Sir Hugh were "drowned by water," but Bushell had "discovered how to drain them by way of adit." The quantity of silver was stated to be considerable, and "in all mines the deeper they go, the richer the miner finds the ore to be." The charge of sending up the silver to the London mint, with the great charge of digging, was said to have undone Sir Hugh. A mint in Wales would afford the requisite encouragement. Bushell anticipated the separation of £300 of silver weekly, therefore he "prayed the allowance of a mint at the Castle of Aberystwith." He proposed to establish it in the Castle at his own charge, paying the King his mintage at the same rate as the Tower of London had paid, and presenting to the privy purse, at every new-year's tide, a wedge of silver containing £100 sterling, provided he be discharged of all accounts concerning the profit of the mint, except as to answering about the fineness and weight of the silver coined. He offered to give the King a clear tenth of all silver wrought in Wales, and promised not to coin bullion obtained elsewhere; and that whenever the King thought the mines "fit to be taken into his hands, he would lay them at his feet."

The officers of the mint in the Tower had, however, something to say to this proposal. "Whether such a proposal may be agreeable to your Majesty's service, we submit to your great wisdom. Besides payments to officers, there are many disbursements to labourers and others necessarily incident to a mint, but if Bushell should pay yearly £100 for the property of this intended mint, and so take all upon himself at adventure, your Majesty will not be informed as to the state of the mint, which we esteem to be a matter of great consequence." They
also urged that mints had ever been erected in cities of great traffic, "and now only in the Tower of London, as a place of honour and security" also near His Majesty and the Council, before whom the trial of the pyx must be; and that it should be considered whether a mint should be erected before it be ascertained that there will be a sufficient quantity of bullion to supply the same.

Notwithstanding these suggestions, an order of the King in Council was issued from Greenwich on July 9th, 1637, which empowered Bushell to erect the "suggested mint at Aberystwith, at his own expense, the same to be regulated by Sir William Parkhurst, Warden of the Mint." Bushell was to make a yearly account of the profits belonging to His Majesty, whose signature would be affixed to the necessary document so soon as it was prepared by the Attorney-General.

From other sources I have ascertained that Bushell was to have, at his own cost and charges, such quantities of irons, being graven in the Tower of London, by His Majesty's chief graver, as should be sufficient. They were to be defaced, when unserviceable, and to be returned to the Tower. Bushell was to bear all expenses whatsoever.

His Officers and their salaries were—

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Salary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Edw. Goodyear, Esq.</td>
<td>£40 per annum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rich. Hull, Gent.</td>
<td>£40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam. Remush, Gent.</td>
<td>£40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humfrey Owen, Gent.</td>
<td>£20</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Cherry Lickham</td>
<td>£10</td>
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Between the mines and the mint Bushell acquired an immense fortune within the short space of 11 or 12 years, before the breaking out of the Civil War, for which he was not ungrateful, for he clothed, at his own cost, the King's army, furnished him with a loan—it may be called a present—of £40,000, and then raised a regiment among his own miners, which he clothed and maintained down to a very late period of the contest. He died a poor man, but a very loyal subject.

As to Sir Hugh Middleton, or Myddelton, Bushell's predecessor at the Welsh silver mines, it is almost unnecessary to remind Londoners that he was the famed constructor of the New River Scheme.
During the progress of the Civil War Aberystwith Castle was besieged and finally taken. It was intentionally made a ruin by Cromwell's soldiers, who blew up large portions of the walls with gunpowder.

In the account given by Mr. Symonds of the various implements of the mint that were removed from Aberystwith Castle, no mention is made of anything like a rolling-mill for spreading the metal into plates or strips, although reference is made to the "syzel," viz., the metal which remained after cutting the blanks from the strips or sheets. The question therefore suggests itself, Were rolling-mills in use at that time and place, and if so, were they left behind on account of their weight and little value, when the dies were removed; or was the metal, after being poured from the crucibles, beaten out on an anvil with a flat-headed hammer such as goldbeaters use?