THE TENTH-CENTURY MINT "ÆT WEARDBYRIG"
By F. Elmore Jones and C. E. Blunt

In the Skye hoard of 1891 was found a penny of Athelstan, B.M.C. V, reading

\[ +Æ/ÉBÉLSTANREXBRITE+ Æ/ÉBÉLSTANREXBRITE+ \] [Pl. XXXVII. 1]

This mint was hitherto unknown and, in recording the hoard, A. B. Richardson confidently attributed it to Wardborough, Oxon., and added: "The discovery of this coin in the hoard is most interesting, as its identification was rendered certain by the occurrence also of coins of Oxford."

Grueber and Keary, writing two years later in the second volume of the British Museum Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Coins, support the attribution and regard it as "beyond question" and for the same reason.

In the same year John Evans (who seems to have been writing independently of Grueber and Keary as neither makes reference to the other) published an article on this coin in the Numismatic Chronicle in which he reviews in some detail the various possible attributions and concludes: "So far, however, as the coin from Skye is concerned, there can be no doubt that it was coined at Weardbyrige, while the identification of this place with Wardborough, or Warborough, in Oxfordshire, if not beyond all cavil, may still be regarded as founded on reasonably safe grounds, especially as coins struck at Oxford occurred in the same Find."

Evans's article should be consulted for details of his arguments and, in particular, for his review of the charter and other contemporary evidence.

All the foregoing writers agree in identifying the mint in question as being at the burgh which Æthelflæd is recorded to have built in 915 at Weardburh 4 and all regard this as Warborough (or Wardborough) in Oxfordshire. Æthelflæd built three burghs that winter, one at Chirbury in Shropshire near the Welsh border, one at Runcorn in Cheshire on the Mersey, and one at Weardburh, the identification of which is still regarded by modern historical scholars as being in doubt. From this it seems clear that the suggestion, made on numismatic grounds, that the Weardburh of the Chronicle is to be identified with Warborough, Oxon., has not found favour with the historian. It may, therefore, be timely to review afresh the numismatic evidence, particularly as additions can now be made to it.

In the Taffs sale (1956, lot 73) was a penny of Athelstan, B.M.C. V,

4 A.S.C., Mercian Register, sub anno 918 (corrected date 915).
The Tenth-century Mint "Æt Weardbyrig"

by the moneyer Burhtelm that was tentatively attributed to Shaftesbury. This coin reads

+EBEL•Z:TÁIRE+BR
+BYRHTHEL:I:OTTEARI• [Pl. XXXVII. 2]

It was exhibited by Mr. Taffs at meetings of the Society on 26 October 1932 and 24 January 1951. On the former occasion it was the subject of a note by W. J. Andrew who attributed it to the mint of Derby; on the latter occasion it was illustrated. This may be the coin referred to in the Dymock manuscript (in the possession of Mr. J. D. A. Thompson), which gives Cuff as his source. It is not, however, identifiable in the Cuff sale (1854). Dymock gives the reading BYRNTEL MOTTEAR.

In the Chester (1950) hoard, a coin of Edgar, B.M.C. III, was found which is unquestionably from the same mint. The reading is

+EADGARREXESXLORVM
+ÆDELFEÐMOPRDREIFÆT• [Pl. XXXVII. 3]

In the British Museum Catalogue a coin of Edgar of the same type (no. 6, p. 169), by the moneyer Ælfstan, is attributed to Derby. The reading is

+EADGAR REX ANGLO
+ÆLFSTAN M-ÐVRDBY [PI. XXXVII. 4]

and the British Museum acquired it in 1843 in the collection of George Petrie, a distinguished Irish archaeologist, many of whose coins of this period are believed to have come from Irish finds. In an appendix to the list of provenances of the Anglo-Saxon coins in the two volumes of the catalogue, Mr. Dolley and Mrs. Martin (then Mrs. Strudwick) accepted the reattribution of this coin from Derby to Wardborough.

Three other coins may be relevant. One is an Athelstan penny, B.M.C. Vs, reading as follows:

+ÆDELSTAN REX TOIBR
+MONDIGNMNVERI [Pl. XXXVII. 5]

B.M.C. 85, there attributed to Warwick but by Brooke to Wareham. The second is a penny of Athelstan in the Rome (Forum) hoard, the identification of which was left open in the reports made by De Rossi and Keary. It is of B.M.C. V and reads as follows:

+ÆDELSTANREX TO BR
+MON - - GNMOINVR [Pl. XXXVII. 6]

De Rossi has read the two missing letters as FA. But from the photo-
The Tenth-century Mint "Æt Weardbyrig"

graph of the coin the reading seems doubtful. The third is a hitherto unpublished penny of Edwig, B.M.C. II, reading

+ÆADVVG REX+ and on the reverse (in three lines)
+MANN/MONE/+W+E+ [Pl. XXXVII. 7]

There can be no doubt that the coins from Skye and Chester [Pl. XXXVII. 1 and 3 respectively] are from the same mint. The attribution to Weardburh of the coin from the Taffs sale is, in our view, amply justified. The moneyer is the same as on the Skye coin, the style similar, and the king on both coins has the very unusual title Rex Britanniae.

About the Edgar coin (B.M.C. 6) [Pl. XXXVII. 4], referred to above, a little doubt may be felt to remain, but now that it can be demonstrated that the mint of Weardburh was active in Edgar’s reign it is a question of considering whether that mint or Derby is the more likely. Brooke accepted the Derby attribution (as he could hardly fail to do in the absence of the coin since found at Chester), and appears to have read the inscription VR[BS]D[EOHAB]. This is not a happy reading and, if correct, would be the only one we have seen in which Urbs is associated with the mint name of Derby on coins at this time. The alternative, if the Derby attribution is to be accepted, is to regard the legend as one in which the letters are confused, a not unusual feature of Derby coins at this period. A rearrangement would give DVRBY. But this would still be unsatisfactory; such a spelling is never found on Derby coins. Acceptance of the alternative attribution, namely to Weardburh, presents no difficulties and in the light of the coin from the Chester hoard is, in our view, preferable to the somewhat strained attribution to Derby.

The two Monthegn coins of Athelstan [Pl. XXXVII. 5 and 6] and the WE coin of Edwig [Pl. XXXVII. 7] are mentioned here, in order to consider whether any of them is to be associated with Weardburh.

Monthegn is also known as a moneyer of Athelstan for the curious type B.M.C. III which has a flower design above and below the moneyer’s name, somewhat reminiscent of the flower types of Edward the Elder. He is also known as a moneyer of Edmund of B.M.C. I, the variety that has a rosette of pellets above and below the moneyer’s name. Neither of these coins has a mint name. The type of the first coin and the use of rosettes on the second both point to a Mercian origin, possibly north-west Mercia, and we feel that Brooke’s reattribution to Wareham cannot be sustained.

The coins of Edwig’s type B.M.C. II divide themselves into two groups. On the one no mint name appears but the letters in the middle line of the reverse legend effectively continue the word Moneta, which begins on the bottom line. These have rosettes above and below the reverse legend and, as has been pointed out in the report on the Chester (1950) hoard, may be attributed to north-western mints1 and

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1 English Coins, p. 62.
the tentative selection of Chester may now be said to have found general acceptance.

The second group bears in the middle line the name of a mint and has a trefoil of pellets above and below the reverse legend. The following mints can be recognized with reasonable certainty in this second class: Bath, Bedford, Hertford, Oxford, and Winchester. Huntingdon is probably to be read on B.M.C. 12; the same moneyer struck a coin of Edgar, B.M.C. V with the mint name VN.¹ Newark is possible for the coins that read NIPE or NEPE by the moneyers Cilm and Clac; a number of coins of the Hampton mint still await definite allocation between Southampton and Northampton; there is a mysterious coin by the moneyer Elfred from a mint that reads HNDI and finally the coin of Mann from the mint WE.²

From this it appears that the north-western group is to be identified by the use of the rosette of pellets on the reverse and that the type, modified by the use of the trefoil in place of the rosette of pellets, was issued in Wessex and in the central and southern part of Mercia, extending to Bedford and possibly Huntingdon. The mint WE, the coin of which has the trefoil of pellets, should, therefore, be looked for within that area.

It remains to be seen whether the numismatic evidence can provide any clue as to the area in which Weardburh might be sought and, in the light of that, whether any of the three coins of doubtful origin are likely to have come from that mint.

Athelstan’s type, B.M.C. V, with a small cross in the centre on either side, was struck over a wide area with generally little in the style to enable district allocations to be made on this basis alone. The name Burhtelm, the moneyer of the Weardburh coin, is only found elsewhere in this reign on coins of Langport and Shrewsbury. Another clue may lie in the curious title Rex Britanniae to which reference has been made. We have seen this title used in Athelstan’s reign at Gloucester, Hereford, and Stafford only.³

The undoubted Weardburh coin of Edgar, from the Chester hoard, has a moneyer Æthelfeth. This name (spelt Æthelferth) is found on a London coin of Edgar of B.M.C. V and on an Ilchester coin of B.M.C. VI.⁴ The type of the Weardburh coin, B.M.C. III, is again one that is found widely spread over the country. Differences in style are, however, found, and one can confidently rule out on these grounds the York area. Similarly one can probably rule out Chester and Derby on the grounds that the former generally have the To Brit title and the latter either To Brit or Saxoru. In the remainder of the country the title Anglorum is most usually found, although To Brit is used as an alternative at Tamworth and Wallingford and exclusively at Shrewsbury.

¹ Lockett sale (1955) 629 ex Grantley 1094.
² The last two coins mentioned are in Mr. Blunt’s collection; the former ex Grantley 1082, the latter without pedigree.
³ Gloucester, B.M.C. 20; Hereford, B.M.A. 517; Stafford, Bagnall collection.
⁴ London, Hunter collection; Ilchester, Stockholm, Hildebrand, 10.
The second coin of Edgar which we attribute to Weardburh is by the moneyer Ælfstan. A moneyer of this name struck B.M.C. II and VI in this reign at Chester and B.M.C. VI at Bedford and Exeter. It will be noted that Ælfstan is not known as a Derby moneyer unless indeed the coin that we attribute to Weardburh is of that mint.

Much of the evidence thus produced is either inconclusive or negative. The two most important points, in our view, are the use by Athelstan of a title that he only uses elsewhere on coins of Gloucester, Hereford, and Stafford, and the occurrence of the moneyer Berhtelm at Shrewsbury. Taken together these might be held to justify a very tentative attribution of the Weardburh coins to the west Midlands, possibly to the country that marched with Wales.

The location of the mint in that area would not entirely rule out the attribution to it of the Montegn coins of Athelstan and Edmund. We feel, however, that the use of the title To Brit, coupled with the use of the Chester rosettes of pellets, makes such an attribution unlikely. Similarly we see no sufficient grounds to attribute to Weardburh the Ædwig coin, reading WE, which could have come from one of several other mints.

We are indebted to Mr. Stephenson of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland for kindly supplying us with a cast of the coin from the Skye hoard, to the authorities at the British Museum and the Museo Nazionale in Rome for casts and photographs of the coins in their care, to all these gentlemen for permission to describe their coins here, and to Mr. R. H. M. Dolley for help and advice on many points.