A HOARD OF PENNIES OF EADGAR FROM LAUGHRARNE CHURCHYARD IN SOUTH WALES

By R. H. M. Dolley

Through the kindness of the Rev. J. P. Gordon Williams of Haverfordwest, I am able to put on record some account of a quite unpublished find of silver pennies of Eadgar from the churchyard at Laugharne in Carmarthenshire. The discovery was made ‘between the wars’ when gravediggers were filling in after an interment, and the presumption is that the coins had been brought to the surface during the excavation of the grave. They were described as forming a single rouleau about the size of a man’s little finger, and from this it may be estimated that the hoard comprised originally as many as sixty coins. The men broke many of the coins when attempting to split up the rouleau, and these fragments seem to have been shovelled back into the grave with the rest of the filling. The coins that survived this treatment were divided between the two men, but do not seem to have numbered more than a dozen. One group passed into the hands of children and may be assumed to have disintegrated almost at once, but four coins fortunately found their way into the possession of Mr. Gordon Williams. They were submitted to the British Museum but at that time there seems to have been little interest in Anglo-Saxon numismatics—a commentary on the sceptical aftermath of the by then justly discredited school which had flourished at the beginning of this century—and the only positive result of the examination would seem to have been that one coin disintegrated completely in the post. The three survivors have remained in the security of Mr. Gordon Williams’s cabinet, and it was not until this year that at Mr. C. E. Blunt’s suggestion I wrote to the owner and obtained his, in the circumstances, peculiarly generous permission to make a new study of the coins in the light of recent research into the coinage of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The condition of the coins is extremely brittle, and this more than bears out the men’s statement that they were able to extract intact from the rouleau no more than a handful of the component coins. To some extent this brittleness may be attributed to corrosion, which seems to have been unusually heavy, but the age-embrittlement of silver even in most favourable conditions is a subject to which increasing attention has been given in recent years. In the case of the Laugharne coins further deterioration has now been arrested and the coins made perfectly safe to handle by mounting them in clear ‘perspex’ discs, a technique evolved in the British Museum’s Research Laboratory and carried out by Mr. K. A. Howes. The three coins may be described as follows:

EADGAR

‘Reform’ Type (Brooke 6 = B.M.C. VI = Hildebrand C. 2 = Hawkins 200)
A HOARD OF PENNIES OF EADGAR FROM LAUGHRARNE

Mint of Chester
Moneyer Mælswrth or Mælswan

Obv. +EAD̄ARR̄L NEL̄OX Rev. +M̄ĒLS̄V̄B̄ON OLĒĒ
Nine fragments

Die-axis 270°

Hild.—but cf. Lockett 2754 (from diff. dies)

Mint of Lincoln
Moneyer Leoving or Leofing

Obv. +EA GARĒ+AN̄ELō Rev. +LEVIN̄EM−OLIN̄ COL
Two fragments

Die-axis 0°

Hild.—but cf. unpublished coin in Sir Francis Hill collection (from diff. dies)

Thompson (Inventory, p. 29) has normalized slightly later spellings Leovig as Leofwig, but the omission of ‘N’ is well attested on coins of this period, and the evidence of the new coin—and of the Hill specimen—must be decisive. In any case the deuterotheme -wig is not common in the Danelaw whereas -inc or -ing occurs frequently. Reluctantly, therefore, Leofwig must be deleted from the canon of late tenth-century moneyers of Lincoln, and the coins hitherto attributed to him given to Leofing (Le(o)vi(n)g).

Uncertain Mint
Moneyer Beorht . .

Obv. +EAD̄Ē ŌX Rev. +BFIRHTI
One fragment

Die-axis 270°

The identification of the mint is at present impossible. Moneyers with the prototheme Beorht- (Byrht-, Briht-), &c. are known for B.M.C. type VI of Eadgar at Malmesbury (Byrhtferth) and Wareham (Byrhtric). In the case of the new coin, however, the first letter of the deuterotheme would seem to be ‘M’ or ‘N’ (-mar or -noth?). The prevalence of metathesis in the case of Beorht-names on coins of precisely this period makes the more valuable this clear illustration of an engraver hesitating between the alternative spellings.

It is true that the three coins here published represent in all probability no more than 5 per cent. of the hoard as concealed, but the comparative rarity of coins of B.M.C. type VI of Eadgar makes it likely that the hoard was in fact composed of coins of this issue only. In the 1914 Chester find, for example, a hoard almost certainly concealed in haste on the occasion of the ravaging of Wirral during the winter of 979/980, the First Small Cross coins were divided as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King/Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eadgar</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward the Martyr</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Æthelræd II</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not pretended that these figures reflect accurately the numbers of coins of this type issued in the names of each of the three kings—and here the Scandinavian hoards provide a most welcome control—but it should be clear that the Laugharne find is not very likely to have been assembled more than a few months at most after the issue of coins in the name of Eadgar had ceased. For practical purposes, then, we may regard the winter of 975/6 as a terminus ante quem for the putting together, if not the concealment, of the find. In the
same way, the absence of the ‘pre-reform’ coins of Eadgar may suggest that the coins had been amassed from an English source after the period of grace that must necessarily have accompanied a recoinage on the scale of that of Michaelmas 973, and on the present evidence a date of deposit c. 975 ± 1 might seem not unreasonable.

Finds of Anglo-Saxon coins from Wales are exceptionally rare. The Inventory seems to list five hoards, but one of these—that from Anglesey—proves on investigation to spring from a garbled description of a single find, while the find from Drwsdangoed is that from Penarth Fawr masquerading under another name.1 We are left then with a tiny find of three ninth-century pennies, only one of them English, from Penard, the scarcely more substantial early tenth-century find from Bangor, and the only slightly larger hoard of pennies of Cnut from Drwsdangoed. The first two finds at least seem to be connected with the onslaughts of the Vikings, while the third may well be associated with only less predatory activities of the Ostmen. To these three hoards a fourth has recently been added, a ‘pre-reform’ Eadgar hoard of uncertain size found c. 1845 at Bangor,2 and more recently still a fifth, an Æthelraed Helmet hoard from Penrice in Gower,3 so that the 1959 total now stands at six, and in addition to the penny of Eadgar—pace Thompson a silver coin—from Anglesey there are pennies of Burgred, Ethelstan, and Harthacnut found at Caerleon, on the dunes at Laugharne and at Caerwent respectively.4 It will be noticed that all six of these hoards and all four of the single-finds are from within five miles of the shore, and in fact they may be said to belong to a wider grouping which is not characteristically Welsh. That coins of Eadgar figure in three of the nine finds may also serve as a hint at the extent of the depredations which England could have expected had Eadgar been a weak king.

As is well known, however, Eadgar type VI coins are notably rare in hoards of the wider grouping, to which allusion has already been made, and it has been suggested that there was a prejudice against portrait coins as such among the Ostmen the commercial implications of which Eadgar sought to avert by a parallel issue of coins of B.M.C. type II. Consequently I am inclined to believe that the Laugharne coins may not have come to Carmarthenshire through an Ostmannic intermediary, though the occasion of the deposit doubtless reflects the activities of the ‘traders’ of Waterford and Dublin. The tentative suggestion that I would like to put forward is that the Laugharne coins derive from a payment made by some English authority, presumably the Crown, on the occasion of the general submission of the Welsh which is exemplified by the royal progress on the Dee. As part of this consolidation of English supremacy there must have been a number of payments to individuals and to religious houses, and I feel that it may not be altogether coincidental that the Eadgar hoard from Bangor, albeit deposited some years earlier,

1 The exact find-spot is known, Drwsdangoed is a farm ¼ mile west-south-west of Chiviolog station and ½ mile north-east of Penarth Fawr—letter from Mr. Wilfrid Hemp, F.S.A. to Mr. C. E. Blunt, F.S.A.
2 Spink’s Numismatic Circular, Apr. 1959, p. 76.
and that from Laugharne are from the immediate vicinity of the church. The
same seems to be true, incidentally, of one of the single finds, that from Caer-
went, 'Found within the (Roman) city walls.'

Since the whole weight of the numismatic evidence must be that coins did not
circulate among the Welsh—and there is for this failure to obtain currency an
exact Irish parallel—and since there is no reason to think that there was Eng-
lish intervention in Wales on any scale in the years immediately following
Eadgar's death—it may be necessary to put forward a few years the presumpt-
tive terminus ante quem of the Laugharne find. Even so, it is unlikely that the
occasion of the deposit is to be found more than a decade after the introduc-
tion of B.M.C. type VI of Eadgar. The Laugharne hoard, therefore, may be re-
duced to modified Inventory format as follows:

LAUGHARNE, churchyard, Carmarthenshire, c. 1930
c. 60 AR Anglo-Saxon pennies (3 described). Deposit: c. 975 (or a little later?)
Kings of England, Eadgar, B.M.C. (A) type vi—Chester: Mælsuthon, 1. Lincoln:

There is some reason to think that the coins, which were found in a finger-
sized rouleau, were all of the one type.

Coins of B.M.C. type VI of Eadgar occur but rarely in finds from the
British Isles. None are recorded in hoards from Ireland and Man, and only
one in a find from Scotland. Fair quantities were present in the 1914 Pember-
ton's Parlour hoard from Chester and in an unpublished eighteenth-century
find from the Lincoln area, but both these hoards seem to have included
coins of both of Eadgar's sons. It is clear, therefore, that the composition
of the Laugharne hoard is quite exceptional, and the numismatist will do well to
ponder the circumstance that all three of the coins that happen to have sur-
vived are from dies unrecorded in B. E. Hildebrand's Anglosachsiska Mynt. 
More and more one realizes that Eadgar's 'Reform' coinage which we know
today as B.M.C. type VI was on a scale that might seem belied by the com-
paratively sketchy representation of these coins in modern cabinets, and there
is further food for thought in the circumstance that the coins of the Chester
moneyer Mælsuthon and the Lincoln moneyer Leving should be from dies
other than those already known.