CONTINENTAL COINS IN  
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND  
PETER SPUFFORD

It has for long been vaguely known that at intervals English medieval currency was  
diluted to a greater or lesser extent by the circulation of foreign pieces. I hope in this  
and a subsequent paper to demonstrate the occasions and extent of this dilution from  
a combination of numismatic and record sources.

England, being so largely surrounded by sea, was in rather a different position from  
other European states in having a traditionally homogeneous currency dating back to  
the tenth century, whereas kingdoms and principalities with long landward frontiers  
found it impossible, up to the nineteenth century, to prevent foreign coin surging across  
all their frontiers and making up a large proportion of their circulating medium.  
England's sole landward frontier, towards Scotland, was quite impossible to keep  
against an influx of coin, and in consequence Scots coin formed an ineradicable element  
in English currency. I shall not attempt to say anything more about Scots money than  
that it constantly infiltrated into England and despite efforts to keep it out was always  
present in small, but irritating quantities.

In the first half of the fourteenth century considerable quantities of imitative sterlings,  
principally from the Low Countries, broke through the barriers so long and so zealously  
held against them, and for the first time for many centuries England suffered from an  
influx of coin from outside the British Isles on any considerable scale. In the third  
quarter of the fourteenth century Edward III succeeded in transforming the English  
coinage by his prolific issues of groats and nobles, which at the same time went far  
towards overwhelming and absorbing the intrusive continental sterlings. By the death of  
Edward III the uniformity of the currency was only seriously disturbed by Scots money,  
which was a continual plague, and by the diminishing number of continental sterlings  
 surviving from the earlier part of the century. In this paper I shall attempt to survey the  
evidence relating to two further threats to this restored purity of currency, the Flemish  
noble and the Venetian soldino. In its sequel I shall survey the evidence relating to the  
Burgundian double patard. In the compilation of the two papers I have incurred num-

erous debts of gratitude, as will be obvious from the footnotes, but I should like to single  
out for particular thanks Mr. Michael Dolley of Queen's University, Belfast, for his  
continual aid. Without the numerous references to stray finds, which he was able to  
provide whilst at the British Museum, these papers would have lost much of their  
cogency. I should be very pleased to hear of any further stray finds.

The evidence provided by hoards must always be handled with great caution,  
especially in estimating the composition of the currency. It may be assumed that extraneous elements in the currency will in general be less well represented in hoards than in the currency as a whole, on account of the natural reluctance of the hoarder to keep  
rather than spend coins of doubtful value. This principle obviously applies primarily to  
savings hoards, but is partially vitiated in cases of emergency hoards of ready cash,  

1 See above, p. 86, for the suggestion that this homogeneity dates from the very introduction of the penny  
coinage in the late eighth century.
which will be more representative of the currency in circulation. The principle must also be modified in the case of particular foreign coins which may have received official recognition and hence circulated as a regular and accepted part of the currency, for the appearance of such pieces in hoards will therefore be much more nearly in proportion to their place in circulation. In general any foreign pieces present in hoards will have been present in rather greater relative quantities in circulation. The contents of hoards can thus be used as a crude guide to the minimum quantities of foreign coin in circulation.

IMITATIVE STERLINGS

Hoards deposited between 1360 and 1435 reveal the continued circulation of old continental sterlings, imitative of Edwardian pennies.\(^1\) The quantities involved in the hoards are very slight and suggest that the numbers present in the currency were not very considerable; although the hoards also suggest a very lengthy and persistent survival in circulation of these pieces. The Durham no. 2 hoard,\(^2\) deposited about 1360, contained 8 continental sterlings among 538 pieces—just over 1 per cent, of the total. The Beaumont, Cumberland, hoard,\(^3\) also deposited about 1360, contained 20 sterlings among the 2,090 pieces described—just under 1 per cent. The Durham no. 1 hoard,\(^4\) from about 1377 to 1380, contained 1 Luxembourg sterling among 219 pieces, and the Balcombe, Sussex, hoard,\(^5\) from about 1380, contained 3 continental sterlings among 743 pieces. In the hoard from Skipton, Yorkshire,\(^6\) deposited after 1399, there were 3 continental sterlings amongst 373 pieces. Two fifteenth-century hoards illustrate the length of time for which these sterlings circulated. That from Terrington St. Clements, Norfolk,\(^7\) deposited after 1425, contained 2 continental sterlings amongst 189 pieces, whilst in the Hampshire no. 2 hoard,\(^8\) deposited about 1435, amongst the 127 pieces recorded, there was 1 continental sterling, a denier of Robert of Béthune, Count of Flanders 1305–22, which was therefore at least 110 years old at the time of the laying down of the hoard. No later hoards yet found in England have contained continental sterlings, so one may conclude that their circulation was at last coming to an end about the year 1435.

That there were a few other foreign pieces in circulation in the second half of the fourteenth century is indicated by the discovery of three French gros à l’étoiles of John I in the moat of Great Totham Hall in Essex,\(^9\) and by a number of single finds. In 1962, during excavations at Northolt, Middlesex, a groat of William V, count of Holland 1346–59, was discovered,\(^10\) Brabangon gold pieces of Johanna and Wenceslas (1355–83) have been found in both Cornwall and Sussex,\(^11\) and a Venetian grosso turned up in

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\(^1\) For a description of these pieces see J. Chautard, *imitations des monnaies au type esterlin* (Nancy, 1872).

\(^2\) Inventory 149. Hoard references, where possible, will be by the number given to the hoard in J. D. A. Thompson, *inventory of British Coin Hoards 600–1500* (London, 1956).

\(^3\) Inventory 148.

\(^4\) Inventory 148.

\(^5\) Inventory 331.

\(^6\) Inventory 183.

\(^7\) Inventory 177.

\(^8\) Inventory 149.

\(^9\) Inventory 22.

\(^10\) Inventory 353.

\(^11\) Inventory 353.

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A Double Mouton, minted 1366, A. de Witte, *Histoire Monétaire du Brabant* (Antwerp, 1896), no. 389, was found on Kenmare Sands in Cornwall by a holidaymaker in the summer of 1960. I am indebted to the Royal Institution of Cornwall for this information. Mention of its discovery was made in *Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin* (Nov. 1960), p. 454, and it was later advertised for sale by Messrs. B. A. Seaby & Co., *Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin* (May 1961), G. 669 and illustration. A Pieter, minted in the latter part of the reign of Johanna and Wenceslas, de Witte, op. cit., no. 390, was found in Sussex and presented to the British Museum by a Mrs. Dixon of Worthing in July 1856. A Mouton of Johanna and Wenceslas, de Witte, op. cit., no. 387, presented to the British Museum in Oct. 1908 may also have been a stray find.
Glamorgan in the eighteenth century. Single stray finds cannot do more than suggest that such pieces circulated; they give no indication of the quantities in which they circulated, or of what part they played in the currency.

It is interesting to observe that none of the huge ransom of John I of France seems to have circulated in England. This was paid in instalments over the years 1360 to 1370. Much of it was minted at once, hence the large gold production of the Tower mint in 1361 and 1362. Some was retained in the Tower in its original form and was listed as such in 1364. This was largely in French coin, 'Standeres', 'Rideres', 'Motons', and 'Escutz vieuz', but there was also a certain amount in coin from Italy and the Netherlands, 'Mailles de florens', and 'Motons de Flandres et de Brabant'. This also was presumably reminted before being spent and so put into circulation; no pieces have found their way into hoards at any rate. Further instalments were paid over to English agents at Bruges, and were presumably the origin of the large amounts of gold minted at the newly opened Calais mint in 1363, 1365, 1366, and 1367.

The stray foreign coin in circulation does not seem to represent large official or commercial payments but either coin which had reached England before safeguards were reimposed or else small parcels of coin brought in by way of commerce which had escaped these safeguards.

The origins of the stray pieces involved, a botdrager of Holland, a double mouton and a pieter of Brabant, point to commerce with England's principal overseas market—the Low Countries. It was partially to intercept such coin that a mint and an exchange were opened at Calais, in succession to those at Canterbury which had hitherto attempted to collect coin brought from the Low Countries through the Channel ports. It was obviously from the Low Countries that trouble was anticipated. In 1381, when Parliament asked for advice on the coinage from the officers of the mints and the exchanges, two of them, Richard Leye and Richard Aylesbury, suggested that since new money had been made in Flanders, proclamation should be made against its circulation in England. It is not clear what this new money was, since the most recent overt change in the Flemish coinage had been in 1373 when Louis de Male had introduced a new écu and the botdrager. There had, however, been a recent concealed change, for from 30 January 1380 onwards these pieces began to be debased, although without any change in types. Parliament at any rate did not take the threat very seriously, for no mention of Flemish coin occurs in the resultant statute, and neither écus nor Flemish botdragers have yet been found in this country. Nevertheless, when trouble did in fact come, it was indeed from this quarter.

**FLEMISH NOBLES**

The random entry of gold from the Low Countries into England was considerably augmented in the last decade of the century when a new piece made a much more
considerable incursion into English currency. This was the imitative noble issued by Philip the Bold as Count of Flanders, which was slightly lower in both fineness and weight than its English prototype. Its circulation may be illustrated from hoards. The Nottingham (Long Row) hoard contained one noble of Philip the Bold in conjunction with eighteen English nobles and an English half-noble. The deposition of this hoard has been dated 'post 1388' owing to the presence of the Flemish noble. The hoard from near Westbury, Wiltshire, deposited between 1390 and 1400, contained four nobles of Philip the Bold along with twenty-eight English nobles. In July 1955 a stray quarter-noble of Philip the Bold was found at Dodford, near Weedon, Northants.

Already in 1392 proclamation was being made against gold money of the coinage of Flanders and Brabant... as by report of great number of credible persons it is newly come to the King's ears that natives and aliens are bringing into the realm divers such gold money much resembling English money but of less weight and value therewith buying and selling as if it were of the English coinage, which it is not, and making other payments to the deception and damage of the King and people.

It was now commanded, under penalties, that no one should in future pay or receive gold money of either Flanders or Brabant, but should ‘bring it to the King’s bullion in the Tower of London there to be converted wholly into the King’s coin’. The proclamation, seems to have had little long-term effect, as the hoards bear witness.

By the opening of the fifteenth century the numbers of Flemish nobles in circulation had become so considerable that in the parliament of January–March 1401 the Commons were in a position to point out that despite the ordinance requiring all foreign gold to be reminted at Calais before it was brought into England:

Nounobstant, les Marchauntz preignent en paiement par delea Nobles de Flaundres, & les portent en Engleterre, queux current icy si pleintinouses que homme ne prendra la somme de c s. que ne serra iii ou iiii tielx Nobles de Flaundres et chescun pece est pire & plus feble que le Noble Engleys par ii d.

The two hoards suggest a proportion of five Flemish among fifty-one nobles, and the parliamentary petition three or four among fifteen. If the hoard evidence is to be regarded as an underestimate, and the parliamentary petition as a politic exaggeration, one

1 The issue of nobles in Flanders was under an Ordinance of Philip the Bold dated 1 Oct. 1388. They were to be of 233-carat gold, and 315 were to be struck from the mark Troy. This implies a weight of 7.729 gm. The English noble, as issued from 1351 to 1412, was of nominally 24-carat gold, and was intended to weigh 7.776 gm. Nobles were also issued in the Low Countries at Fauquemont, and by Walmer, Count of St. Pol and Ligny (1371–1415) from the mint at Elincourt. L. Deschamps de Pâs, ‘Essai sur l'Histoire Monétaire des Comtes de Flandre de la Maison de Bourgogne’, Revue Numismatique, N.S. vi (1861), p. 117; H. E. Ives, ‘Foreign Imitations of the English Noble’, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, xiii (New York, 1941), pp. 8–9; A. Engel and R. Serrure, Traité de numismatique du Moyen Age, iii (Paris, 1905), pp. 1078–9 and 1096.


3 Inventory 375.

4 British Numismatic Journal, xxviii (1955–7), pp. 201–2 and Pl. XV. 2. The piece, which weighed only 1.52 gm., is now in the British Museum.

5 Writs to sheriffs of all counties, 28 Dec. 1392, Calendar of Close Rolls, Richard II, ii, p. 110. I was led to this reference, as to many others in this article, through R. Ruding’s Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain, 3rd ed. (London, 1840). My debt to Ruding’s work is out of all proportion to the few occasions on which I shall refer to it directly. By ‘Brabant’ the framers of the writs presumably meant the county of St. Pol. Additional reference to this action against the Flemish Nobles is provided by the payment of £4. 13s. 4d., entered on the Issue Roll, on 14 Dec. 1392 for wages and expenses to ‘divers messengers and couriers, sent to all the counties of England with writs of the great seal, directed to the sheriffs, to prohibit the receipt of nobles into the currency of England, made from the coinage of the Duke of Burgundy, on account of the less value thereof in comparison with the English Nobles’. Issues of the Exchequer, ed. F. Devon (London, 1837).

6 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iii, p. 470. The Flemish nobles were in fact intrinsically worth only 1d. less than the English.
may nevertheless conclude that 10–20 per cent. of the gold coin circulating was Flemish. In the circumstances the Commons petitioned that: ‘Proclamation soit fait parmy le Roialme, que nul Or ou Argent, sinon desouz la coigne d'engleterre, courge deinz le Roialme apres le fest de Seint Michel, sur peine de forfaiture.’ The king replied that he would order proclamation that all Flemish coin should be exported or brought to the mint by Christmas. He also agreed to reinforce the obligation to cause all incoming coin to pass through the mint at Calais, and finally gave teeth to the proclamation by ordering that ‘bone & convenable serche soit fait, si bien a Caleys come decea le Meer, en cheseun Porte, & aillours sur l'apporte del Monoie’. The royal action in instituting searches would seem on this occasion to have been effective, even perhaps too effective in one instance. On 6 June 1401 John van Loveyn, a merchant of Ghent, was on the ‘Gravesend bote’ to buy butter and cheese in Essex, when the searcher of the port of London came on board between Billingsgate and the Tower of London, and searching him found in his possession a Flemish half-noble and a Holland gulden. Not only were these seized from him, but also all his other money, fifty-five English nobles and fifty groats, with which he had intended to make his purchases. John van Loveyn petitioned the king for restitution as the searcher would seem to have exceeded his mandate in seizing all the money. On 5 July 1401 the searcher was ordered to restore the seized money.

Whether or not it was a consequence of the royal policy of proclamation, search and seizure or of the cessation of minting nobles in Flanders in 1404 is not clear, but for perhaps a decade and a half Flemish nobles played no further part in the English currency.

There was a slight resurgence of them from 1416 when John the Fearless followed his father’s example and began to mint in imitation of the lighter nobles issued by Henry IV since 1412. On 5 April 1417 proclamation was ordered against the new invasion:

No man to receive for any payment nobles of Flanders, commonly called ‘Burgoigne nobles’, but that those who have them shall bring them to the king’s change to be coined anew, as the King is informed that such nobles are newly wrought of less value and price than the nobles of the coin of England, and are day by day current and received in payment between his lieges of the realm, to his prejudice, in contempt of him, to the damage and deception of his lieges.

The prohibition was backed up by the penalty of forfeiture, and all sheriffs throughout England and the Chancellor of the County Palatine of Lancaster were charged with the proclamation of this prohibition.

None of these later Flemish nobles appears in hoards. During the next few years the gold–silver ratio, which had previously been lower than in England, rose in the Low Countries, and, in consequence, the bimetallic flow was

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1 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iii, p. 470.
2 Idem. According to Ruding, op. cit. i, p. 250, this was followed up by statute in identical terms. He quoted from the 1577 edition of the statutes, but it does not appear in Statutes of the Realm.
3 Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, i, p. 359.
4 From 1412 to 1464 the English noble was of nominally 24-carat gold and weighed 6.998 gm. The issue of nobles by Philip the Bold had ceased in 1404, but was briefly revived by John the Fearless in 1409 and 1410. The imitation of the lighter noble was ordered on 6 Dec. 1416. They were to be of 23½-carat gold and thirty-six were to be struck from the mark troy, i.e. they were to weigh 6.799 gm. Their issue continued to 1418. Philip the Good also issued nobles in his turn, in 1425–6, 1427–8, and 1428–33. Deschamps de Pas, art. cit., Revue Numismatique, n.s., vi (1861) and vii (1862).
5 Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry V, i, p. 427.
6 It is not clear whether the noble found in the hoard deposited about 1430 at Horsted Keynes, Sussex, was an official Flemish issue or a fraudulent imitation, Numismatic Chronicle, 5th ser., ix (1929), pp. 288–9.
reversed. Gold now flowed from England to the Low Countries, whilst silver flowed back. In 1423 and 1429 the English Parliament had cause to complain, not that Flemish nobles were circulating in England but that too many English nobles were circulating in Flanders. Similarly the production of the Calais mint changed from a predominantly gold issue to a predominantly silver issue. The threat of Flemish gold circulating in England vanished for so long as the English gold–silver ratio remained below that in the Low Countries.

VENETIAN SOLDINI OR 'GALYHALPENS'

England's two principal exportable commodities in the early fifteenth century were wool and cloth, the latter soon ousting the former from first place in English exports. The export of wool from England was, with a few exceptions, a monopoly in the hands of the Company of the Staple at Calais. The principal exceptions to this exclusive control were the Hansards who were permitted to export wool from their Steelyard in London, and the Venetian and other Italian merchants who were permitted to export wool direct to Italy from London, Sandwich, and Southampton.

The Venetian fleet of galleys set out for the north every year as soon as the weather was fit for seagoing in May, and divided in the Channel. Some ships went to Flanders and the remainder spent the summer anchored in the port of London. In late August, or early September, the two halves of the fleet made a rendezvous at Sandwich before returning to Venice in time to avoid the autumn storms. By the opening of the fifteenth century the arrival of the galleys had become a regular and important feature of English commercial life.

The vigilance and efficiency of the Calais mint was, however, of little use in intercepting Italian coin from this source, and during the first two decades of the fifteenth century quite a number of small Venetian soldini managed to evade the rigorous rules preventing the import of foreign coin into England. The soldini were about the size of the contemporary English halfpenny, but of a considerably worse alloy. From their mode of arrival these soldini became known in England as galyhalpens (Galley Halfpence).

The popularity of galyhalpens in England, for they appear to have been popular, sprang from the acute shortage of small change. It was a shortage that the framers of mint regulations repeatedly but vainly tried to ameliorate by stipulating that a large proportion of the silver minted should be in low denominations. Without a copper coinage, and with a dearth of halfpence and farthings, it became difficult to carry on the business of everyday life, in which prices involving the half of a farthing were not unknown. In similar circumstances in the seventeenth century tradesmen's tokens flourished. In the early fifteenth century the soldini met this very real need for small change.

Quite a number of galyhalpens were found in the Highbury hoard, of which twelve

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1 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iv, pp. 252 and 360.
2 Corpus Nummorum Italicorum, vii (1915). For soldini of Andrea Contarini (Doge, 1368-82) see pp. 94–102, of Antonio Venier (1382-1400) see pp. 106–12, of Michele Steno (1400-13) see pp. 113–18, and for those of Tomaso Mocenigo (1414-23) see pp. 118–23.
4 Inventory 245. But for fuller information see J. F. Neck, 'Silver Coinage of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI', Numismatic Chronicle, N.S. xi (1871), pp. 93–152. Since no absolute chronology has yet been established for the coins of Henry V it is not possible to deduce the date of deposition of this hoard which appears to have consisted very largely of pence and halfpence of the early issues of Henry V. There do not seem to have been any pieces later than Brooke's type C, although these were very numerous.
are now in the British Museum,¹ and at least one other in the possession of Mr. H. W. Ponder of Melbourne.² Stray finds of *galyhalpens* occur quite frequently. Since 1959 examples have been found at Northampton,³ and Newport, Isle of Wight,⁴ Eye, Suffolk,⁵ Hethersett, near Norwich,⁶ and in Somerset.⁷

*Galyhalpens* seem to have been first brought to London with the galley-fleet in June 1400. The Council at Westminster took alarming notice of the fact that, without leave or licence to do so, certain Venetian merchants were then using Venetian coin in payment. They sent James Billyngford, clerk of the crown, to discover the views of the king, who was on his way to Scotland. The earliest document referring to the circulation of *galyhalpens* in England is Henry IV's reply on 14 June from Clipstone in Nottinghamshire. He instructed the Council to see that the laws against the circulation of foreign coin should be brought into force, although the Venetians themselves were to be gently handled.⁸ The Council on 29 June wrote to the sheriffs of London, explaining that the king had been informed that ‘a mony of silver halfpence of Venice is newly brought to the city of London and is accepted and passes commonly current among the lieges thereof, three or four of which are hardly worth one sterling'. The sheriffs were directed to proclaim against them and to seize any that they came across.⁹ A writ in similar terms was sent to the sheriffs of London on 30 June in the following year, in which the *galyhalpens* were again described as ‘newly’ imported. The 1401 galleys had presumably just arrived. Similar writs were sent to the mayor and bailiffs of Sandwich, at which the galleys would be calling later in the summer, and also to the mayor and bailiffs of Dover.¹⁰

The Commons in the parliament of 1402 made a general issue out of the whole problem of small change. They pointed out the difficulties arising for the poor from lack of halfpennies and farthings, because none had been recently minted, and showed that it was this lack of small change which compelled people in all parts of the country to use ‘La Monnoie d’estrange Terres, come Maill’ d’Escoce, & autres apellezz Galey-Halpenys, & es aucuns parties Demy-deniers coupes: . . . & es ascuns lieuz diverses signes de Plombe’. The Commons thus saw *galyhalpens* not as an evil in themselves, but merely as one among several false remedies for a much greater evil—the general lack of small change. The king in replying said that he would in future order a third of silver minted to be coined into halfpennies and farthings.¹¹

For perhaps a decade and a half *galyhalpens* continued to be part of the English currency, despite attempts to compel the minting of more English halfpennies and farthings and despite a continuous history of proclamation against, and seizure of, the

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¹ In July 1869 the British Museum acquired fifteen pieces from this hoard from H.M. Treasury under the Treasure Trove Laws. Apart from two English and one Scots piece these consisted of one *soldino* of Andrea Contarini marked with the letter F, five *soldini*, of Antonio Venier, and six of Michele Steno, one marked with D and star, two with F and star, two with P and star, and one with M and star.
² Together with a number of other pieces from the hoard. Correspondence with the British Museum, summer 1961. I am indebted to Mr. Michael Dolley for this information. A further twenty pieces, of Andrea Contarini and Antonio Venier, may have formed part of this, or some other hoard; they were brought into the Ashmolean Museum for identification in Apr. 1958 in the form of a necklace.
³ *Soldino* of Michele Steno, now in the City Museum, Northampton.
⁴ Brought into the British Museum for identification.
⁵ *Soldino* of Tomaso Mocenigo.
⁶ *Soldino* of Antonio Venier, found in the churchyard, and now in the Castle Museum, Norwich.
⁷ Identified through the Somerset County Museum, Taunton. For information about these five pieces I am indebted to Mr. Michael Dolley.
⁸ Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council, i, pp. 120-1.
⁹ Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, i, pp. 195.
¹⁰ Ibid., Henry IV, i, p. 409.
¹¹ Rotuli Parliamentorum, iii, p. 498.
galyhalpens themselves. The Foreign Account Rolls of the Exchequer give some idea of
the scope of the efforts at seizure and of their success, or rather lack of it.

Every year from 1400 to 1415 the sheriffs of London rendered account to the Ex-
chequer of small parcels of galyhalpens which they had seized. From 1402 to 1416, or
later, the mayor and bailiffs of Sandwich likewise rendered account of their smaller
seizures, and in 1401 and 1403 the mayor and bailiffs of Dover did the same.

The scale of seizures was not impressive. During the visit of the galleys in 1400,
between receipt of the royal writ of 29 June and Michaelmas, when their term of office
ended, the sheriffs of London seized only 90 galyhalpens. In the next year their successors
were even less successful, seizing only 43 soldini. In subsequent years seizures in London
were rather greater. In 1403 no less than 476 were taken, but what this means in terms
of the quantities coming with the galleys is not clear. It cannot be determined how much
the numbers seized are a measure of the size of import and how much they reflect the
vigilance of the sheriffs' officers.

Provincial seizures were naturally on a much smaller scale. Between 30 June 1401,
when the order to seize was first sent to them, and the following Michaelmas the mayor
and bailiffs of Dover only seized thirty-five obolis de partibus venicie. Between Michael-
mas 1402 and Michaelmas 1403 they were even more unsuccessful, they only seized
seven galyhalpens. Since Dover was not a direct port of call for the galleys, while Sand-
wich was, one might expect the scale of operations at the latter to be larger. In fact it
proved not to be appreciably greater. The writ empowering the mayor and bailiff of
Sandwich to seize was expedited from the Exchequer by the King's Remembrancer on
12 July 1402. By the end of November they had seized forty-nine galyhalpens, and this
was a larger number than in any of the subsequent years, in which seizures ranged from
twelve to forty-five soldini. The object of these seizures was preventive, but a little
profit to the Crown did result from the forfeitures but so little as to be ludicrous. The
Barons of the Exchequer were not consistent in their estimates of the value of the parcels
of galyhalpens brought to them. They sometimes reckoned them as worth as much as
half a penny, but more usually worked on the supposition that their value was rather
nearer a third of a penny. This compares with the writ of 1400 which stated that "three

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1 The figures are taken from the Exchequer series
of enrolled Foreign Accounts in the Public Record
Office, London.

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<th>Reference</th>
<th>Period</th>
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<td>E. 364/49</td>
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<td>E. 364/53</td>
<td>30 Nov. 1415-Mich. 1420</td>
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Although most accounts, both in London and at
Sandwich and Dover, cover a period of twelve months,
I have assumed that the actual seizures probably took
place mainly in the summer months whilst the galleys
were in port.

2 P.R.O., E. 364/36.  3 P.R.O., E. 364/43.

4 The figures are again taken from the Exchequer
series of enrolled Foreign Accounts in the Public
Record Office, London.

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<td>35</td>
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<td>1402</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>6s. 10½d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1402</td>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1403</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>13s. 4d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or four are hardly worth one sterling’. The general public was not so grossly cheated if it took them for halfpennies.

The seized *galyhalpens* can be traced one stage further. After passing from the civic authorities in the ports to the Exchequer and from the Exchequer to the King’s Exchange, they ended up in the mint. During the period Michaelmas 1413 to Michaelmas 1417 the bullion received by the mint included: ‘127 silver halpennies called “Galeyhalpenys” weighing altogether 1½ oz. delivered by the sheriff of London to the King’s Exchequer as forfeit to the King and given to the Warden to coin into money, and coined, no mintage being charged thereon’.1

In their somewhat ineffective efforts to prevent the circulation of *galyhalpens* the authorities were goaded on by the Commons, who in the parliament of 1410, on the grounds that ‘les Galihalpens courgent communement en la Roiaume pur paiement, en grand’ disceit de la commune poeple’, petitioned for a statute against them.2 The king granted their request and it was enacted that they should cease to be current within two months on pain of forfeiture.3 Statute had as little effect as ordinance and proclamation.

A more logical approach to the problem was to tackle it at its source. In 1408, on 28 June, a peremptory writ was sent directly to the masters of the two Venetian galleys recently arrived in the port of London. It was a ‘strict order to sell or pay or suffer to be paid no money called “galyhalfpenys” by them brought into the realm, for merchandise, victuals or other property whatsoever, under pain of forfeiting the same, but to keep that money in their own hands until further order’.4 It was a step in the right direction, if the Venetians had co-operated.

By 1414 the *galyhalpens* had circulated for at least fourteen years, they had been proclaimed against and seized for fourteen years, they had been legislated against for four years, and for six years the co-operation of the masters of the galleys had been asked. It could still be said, however, that ‘such merchants and others coming with their galleys were used to bring their said money with them and expose it for sale, doing their traffic therewith’.5

Force and diplomacy were brought into action.

By way of force a directive was sent to William Crowmere, mayor and escheator of the city of London, and to the searcher of the port of London, empowering and ordering them to search not only Englishmen but also ‘upon the entry of merchants and others of Venice within the port of London, to cause search to be made whether any money of Venice called “galeyhalpens” is brought in their galleys’. The directive was sent on 26 June and the arrival of the 1414 fleet was presumably then imminent. If the forcible search of the galleys were to reveal any *galyhalpens*, the owners were to be permitted to do nothing with it but take it to the Tower Mint to be coined.6

Forcible search of the galleys in the port of London was backed up by diplomatic pressure on the Venetian Senate. The latter was to such good effect that in their decree of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Port</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Stirling value</th>
<th>Approximate number to the penny</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1s. 4d.</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7d.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1406</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3s. 4d.</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>1410</td>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4d.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1413</td>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10d.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iii, p. 640.
3 Statutes of the Realm, ii, p. 163.
4 Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, i, p. 333.
5 Ibid., Henry V, i, p. 132.
6 Ibid., Henry V, i, p. 131.
8 February 1416, for fitting out four galleys for the Flanders and London voyage, the Senate ordained that it was forbidden to take Venetian halfpence to London by the London galleys. Anyone doing so was to be punished; and neither the vice-captain, the masters, nor any other might intercede for such offender. The captain was bound, before dismissing the London galleys off Portus Camera, to proclaim this Act on board them.1

Meanwhile the Commons had grown savage in their demands. In Parliament in November 1415 they pointed out that the Statute of 1410 had been of no effect and asked that it should be enforced and that new legislation be enacted so that 'les ditz Galyhalfpens & le money appelle Seskyn, & Dodekyn, soient de tout oustez, & ne courgent en apres'. They asked that proclamation be made throughout England, in town and county, that all who had 'Galihalfpens, Seskyns, ou Dodekyns' should take them before Easter to the King's Exchanges where they were to be defaced and sent to be minted. If any persons were found after Easter 1416 attempting to bring such pieces into England they were to be treated as felons and all their property, in lands or goods, was to be confiscated to the Crown. If any persons were found after Easter attempting to use such pieces as currency they were to be heavily fined. A penalty of five pounds was demanded for each offence, half to go to the Crown and half to the informer. They asked that the whole machinery of justice, from manorial and borough courts with view of frankpledge upwards, should be used to root out these pieces, Justices of the Peace being given special authority to enforce the law in such cases.2 The king agreed to these demands, a new statute followed3 and writs were sent out, such as that directed to the Sheriffs of London requiring them to take steps to secure the due observance of the statute, forbidding the use of galithalfpens and money called 'Seskyn' and 'Dodekyn' as currency in England.4 I have yet, however, to find any record of proceedings before Justices of the Peace.

The other pieces mentioned in the petition, statute and writ, Zeskins and Duitkins, have not been found in England. The former was the six-mite, or quarter-groat, piece of Flanders and the latter the denier of Holland. They would seem, from the lack of other references, to have come into the country only in very small quantities but, like the galithalfpens, to have alleviated the lack of small change, for the former was worth approximately a farthing and the latter half a farthing.

It is difficult to comprehend the violence of the Commons' antipathy to galithalfpens. The evidence of one hoard, of five stray finds, and of seizures in London of 43 to 476 pieces and at Sandwich and Dover of from 7 to 49 pieces in a year, does not suggest a menace to the currency on a scale to warrant so strong a reaction as to make import or use into a felony. One must conclude either that the scale of import was much greater than the evidence would lead one to suppose,5 or that coinage was so touchy a subject that any infringement of the currency laws was an irritant out of all proportion to its magnitude.

1 Calendar of State Papers, Venice, i (1864), p. 57, no. 209.
2 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iv, p. p. 69.
3 Statutes of the Realm, ii, p. 191.
5 It might with some justification be objected (a) that one would not expect such pieces to appear in hoards; (b) that very many stray finds may have gone unrecognized, or may not have reached my notice, whilst there is a very widespread location of those few strays known-Suffolk, Norfolk, Northants, Somerset, and the Isle of Wight; (c) that my figures for seizures only reflect the notorious inefficiency of the medieval guarding of 'ports ponts et passages'.
It is not clear whether it was the Statute of 1415, or the decree of the Venetian Senate, that brought the import and circulation of these pieces to an end. It is clear, however, that their import and circulation ceased. There were no seizures in London after 1415, and between 30 November 1415 and 29 September 1420 only nine galyhalpens were seized at Sandwich.\(^1\) None of the pieces found can be dated with certainty later than this. No further complaints were made of their circulation, and indeed, when the Commons petitioned in the 1423–4 parliament against the circulation of Blankes, they implied not only that the currency of galyhalpens had ceased but that the measures taken against them were, by their efficiency, a model for those to be employed in dealing with the Blankes.

Although galyhalpens had ceased to be a problem by 1423–4 and do not appear to have caused any further difficulties during the fifteenth century, there was a brief resurgence of them in the early sixteenth century.

During the fifteenth century the Venetian galleys had changed their ports of call from London and Sandwich to Southampton,\(^2\) and in consequence it is at the latter port that the first reference to the new wave of galyhalpens occurs. There had been no fleets of galleys between 1509 and 1518, and the renewal of the problem began with the fleet of 1519. In the Book of Fines of Southampton for the Mayoralty of Nicholas Dey, Michaelmas 1518 to Michaelmas 1519, there is recorded a payment of twenty pence ‘to John harte for rydynge to my lord of Wyntchern to wete yff the gallye halpensse schold goo’.\(^3\) If their circulation was of dubious legality in 1519, it was soon made clear that their circulation was forbidden. At Coventry the manuscript Annals contain the entry ‘1519 John Bond, mayor, the same year gallye half-penyes were disannul’d’.\(^4\) This refers to a year of office commencing on 25 January 1520 N.S. It was only on 10 November 1520 that Antonio Surian, the Venetian Ambassador, wrote to the Signory that in England the Government was intent on framing regulations and statutes against aliens and had issued a proclamation for the presentation at the mint of all Venetian pence (soldi), which would be received and their value given down to a certain period, after which a penalty was to be levied on those who uttered them. These regulations, enacted by the king, were, in his opinion, very detrimental to the French and Flemish merchants, and he related that according to English report the Venetian pence were apparently of base silver.\(^5\)

The import of galyhalpens may well have ceased in 1520 or 1521 for the few which have been found are soldini of Leonardo Loredan, Doge from 1501 to 1521.\(^6\) Their circulation did not come to an end quite so rapidly, although it must have been helped by the activities of such men as the churchwardens who in 1521–2 ‘Resaved for ij vnces of galy-halpenys sold this yere viiij iij’\(^7\). These galyhalpens were presumably sold for melting down, although whether at the mint according to the proclamation or by a silversmith is not indicated. Stow, born in 1525, records, ‘in my youth I haue scene

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\(^1\) P.R.O., E. 364/53.
\(^2\) For details of the change and the reasons for it see Alwyn A. Ruddock, *Italian Merchants and Shipping in Southampton 1270–1600* (Southampton, 1951).
\(^3\) I am indebted to Mr. B. C. Jones, formerly Archivist of Southampton, for this information.
\(^4\) As quoted by Ruding, op. cit., i, p. 302.
\(^7\) Query by Cornub., in *Notes and Queries*, 4th Ser., ii (1868), p. 344.
them passe currant, but with some difficulty, for that the english halfepence were then, though not so broade, somewhat thicker and stronger'.

In the late 1530's there were still a few in circulation, for in the Maidstone, Kent, hoard, deposited about 1538, there were three Venetian soldini of Loredan amongst five gold and 498 silver pieces. A stray soldino of the same Doge was found at Harrow Weald in July 1960, although it is of course impossible to say when it was lost. Somewhat later is a marcello of Andrea Gritti, Doge 1523–39, found in a garden at North Cerney, near Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Although not a galyhalpeny it presumably came by galley.

Apart from this resurgence in the sixteenth century, the import, and apparently circulation, of galyhalpens was effectively suppressed between 1415 and 1423–4. There remained, however, the problem of the circulation of blankes with which the 1423–4 petition was concerned. In this comprehensive term there were included the whole range of coins, of about the size of a groat but only half silver, which were issued in many parts of Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as blances in France, or as witten, weisspfennig, or albus in the Empire.

In 1423–4 the Commons, having pointed out that 'la moneye appelle Blankes, qe n’est mye argent, & est fait de metall q n’est de null value, courge communemun pur paientment entre gentz dount le Roialme d’Engleterre, a grant domage de la commune poeple’, petitioned that proclamation be made against them and that the Statute of 1415 against galyhalpens be applied in all its rigour to those who tried to pass Blankes after 24 June 1424. The petition was granted and became statute.

The pieces aimed at by this legislation are represented by two stray finds of single coins in recent years, and perhaps by a small hoard found in a garden at Headington, near Oxford. In the excavations at The More, Rickmansworth, Herts., 1952–5, a real of John I, King of Portugal 1383–1333, was found and in the spring of 1958, in an allotment at Sittingbourne in Kent, there was found a schilling of the Teutonic Knights, of Paul I of Russdorf, Grand-master 1422–41. The small hoard from Headington consisted of two double groats of Philip the Bold, as count of Flanders, and one of John IV, Duke of Brabant 1415–27. They were probably lost in the 1420's.

The blankes do not seem to have been a persistent curse. There are only these few

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1 John Stow, A Survey of London, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1908), i, pp. 132–3. Stow's acquaintance with the galyhalpens was so slight that he thought that that they were Genoese rather than Venetian in origin.
3 Information from the British Museum on a piece submitted for identification by Clarissa Webb as having been found at Elm End Cottage, College Hill Road, Harrow Weald. There is a remote possibility that this may have been a piece of Pietro Lando, Doge 1539–45, rather than Loredan.
4 I am indebted to Mr. Michael Dolley for this information.
5 Rotuli Parliamentorum, iv, p. 255.
7 The Archaeological Journal, cxvi (1959), p. 185. The coin is now in the British Museum.
9 Discovered 17 Aug. 1958 by P. Stevens in the garden of 67 Deene Road, Headington, in a leather bag which fell to pieces almost immediately. The coins are now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and a brief mention of their discovery appears in the Report of the Visitors (Ashmolean Museum, 1958), p. 34. The double gros au lion assis of Philip the Bold, 1388–1404 issue, weighed 3·9 and 3·63 gm. respectively. See L. Deschamps de Pas, art. cit., p. 138, no. 18. The tuin, or thuiu, of John IV was of the 1418–19 issue, of the Vroenhof, Maastricht, mint. It weighed 2·37 gm. See A. de Witte, Histoire monetaire des . . . ducs de Brabant, i (Antwerp, 1894), pp. 197–8, no. 444.
isolated finds, and no further complaints about them or evidence of action against them.
It must be assumed that they were a very evanescent menace.

The suppression of the import of *galyhalpens*, the vanishing of *Blankes* and the final
disappearance from circulation about 1435 of imitative continental sterlings restored
a standard of purity to the English currency that had been lacking since the end of the
twelfth century, but the restoration of which had been strenuously sought after by King
and Commons alike since the reign of Edward III.