AN UNPUBLISHED PENNY OF WILLIAM I

F. ELMORE JONES

The penny of William I by the Worcester moneyer Leofric (Fig. 1) which Miss E. Pirie exhibited on behalf of Leeds City Museum at the Meeting on 22 October 1963 is of the variety of BMC type i with the bust facing to the right.

Brooke could find only one example of this variety, and that outside the National Collection, for inclusion in Norman Kings, viz. the coin that was lot 677 in the Carlyon-Britton sale in 1913 which is pl. ii. 9 in BMC, a coin of London by the moneyer Wulfwine.¹

Fig. 1

So far as I am aware no other specimen has since come to light although it would seem that Carlyon-Britton did in fact know of the existence of a second one, and a specimen of the Worcester mint by this same moneyer at that, but the coin cannot have been seen by Brooke and the only record of its existence is to be found in the introductory chapters (chapters iv and vi) of Carlyon-Britton’s ‘Numismatic History of the reigns of William I and II (BNJ ii, p. 134 and BNJ iii, p. 145) and in his 1913 sale catalogue. Unfortunately Carlyon-Britton’s corpus of the coins in his series of BNJ papers, arranged alphabetically under counties and mints, stops far short of Worcestershire and consequently no precise details of the coin to which reference is made in the introduction are recorded.²

¹ Also BNJ ii, pl. i. 7 and BNJ viii, pl. xxiii. 4 as well as being illustrated in the Carlyon-Britton and earlier sale catalogues.

² In point of fact the inference to be drawn from the entries under moneyers in BNJ iii. 145 (at foot of column 2) is that Carlyon-Britton knew of two coins of Worcester with the right-facing bust with different spellings of the moneyer’s name, viz. Lifric and Lufric. In the absence of knowledge of the readings nothing is certain but it is reasonable to assume that the entry under Lifric may well refer to this precise specimen, or a die duplicate, and that under Lufric to a coin, only partially legible, which Miss Pirie has found recorded in Spink & Son’s Numismatic Circular for November 1902.
In any case its present whereabouts are unknown (unless it is, in fact, the coin which is now in the Leeds Museum) as also is the present ownership of the unique London coin by the moneyer Wulfwine which was lot 677 in the Carlyon-Britton sale.

The readings of the Leeds Museum coin are:

\[\text{Obv.} \ + \text{PILLEMVR}\]
\[\text{Rev.} \ + \text{LIFRIC ON PIGERC}\]

The weight of 17.1 grains is somewhat below average but not appreciably so, the die axis is \(\downarrow\).

The coin was recently purchased for the museum from a private collection; it has no topographical provenance.

So far as the obverse dies are concerned both coins, the London and the Worcester, are clearly the work of the same hand. Both show variations in the treatment of the portrait to that of the substantive type of the issue (BMC i) with its standardized left-facing bust, but only the London coin has the appreciably larger bust of Carlyon-Britton’s description of the variety.

The bust on the Worcester coin is much the same size as that on the substantive type and its treatment is also similar but the treatment of the crown is different—the band is filled in with lines instead of pellets and the ‘set’ of the two fillets behind the king’s head is different and tends to alter the general appearance of the portrait.

In the inscription both dies have the same remarkable feature of a reversed letter ‘s’ on its back; the normal letter on its back is of frequent occurrence on late Saxon coins but I know of no such instance of the letter being reversed. The reversed letter in its ‘normal’ form is, however, found spasmodically throughout the reign of William I.

The presumption must be that these two coins are the earliest of the reign and possibly datable to the exact year 1066; also that Brooke himself regarded this variety as being an official variant of BMC type i and the writer sees no justification for altering its status to that of contemporary imitation simply because of the apparent differences in points of detail in the treatment of the portraits and peculiarities in epigraphy.

The writer regards the variety as comparable to the early transitional issues which are such a feature of the coins of Edward the Confessor from c. 1053 onwards.

There is an early transitional variety of the Confessor’s last type (BMC type xiv of which there is only one specimen recorded in the Catalogue) also of BMC type xi, a few coins of which have quite a different bust and crown to that of the substantive type and on which the inscription starts at 7 o’clock instead of 12 o’clock.

It is, however, in the transitional coins of BMC type vii, the type in which a bearded portrait is first introduced and which is datable to 1053-6, that this feature of early transitional issues is most apparent. These are, of course, the very rare coins of BMC type viib with their left-facing busts which formed the subject of the joint paper by Mr. Dolley and the writer in Num. Chron. 1960 (pp. 183-90 and Pl. XIV and XV). No less than three quite different styles of bust occur in this transitional type in addition to variations in the treatment of the reverse design. It is perhaps significant to note that the Worcester mint is responsible for two of the very rare coins of this type (of which possibly as few as the twenty-five specimens recorded in Num. Chron. (op. cit.) are known) and, more significant still, that Worcester is responsible for no less than five of
the ten recorded specimens of the even rarer transitional type *BMC* type xiv, a type which can hardly be given an earlier date than 1063.\(^1\)

Another significant factor from the point of view of whether the coins are official or otherwise is that the reverse die of the London coin is of completely ‘normal’ workmanship in every respect.\(^2\) It seems apparent that this is a die of the substantive (left-facing bust) type made after the design had been adopted as standard which must be a convincing argument in favour of the coins being an official issue.

This consideration hardly applies to the Worcester coin, the reverse die of which shows ‘hesitant’ work of a kind which it is not surprising to find on the earliest coins of the new type.

As to the inscription, the reversion to the earlier form of the Worcester mint-signature with G as the third letter, instead of the more usual H, is interesting but has no special significance; it recurs in William I type iv.

As to the spelling of the moneyer’s name Lifric, instead of the more usual Leofric or Liofric, is not at all uncommon elsewhere at this period but so far as I am aware it is only found at Worcester on this one coin.

Worcester is a rare mint in any reign and any type (apart from its completely anomalous position as being the predominant mint in Edward the Confessor *BMC* type xiv) and Leofric is quite a rare moneyer as is evidenced by his being represented in the National Collection by only three coins. These are Edward the Confessor *BMC* xi (Liofric), Harold II *BMC* i (Leofric), and William I *BMC* i (Liofric). To these I am able to add William I *BMC* ii (Leofric) from a coin in my own collection (Fig. 2) hitherto unpublished, which was also exhibited by Miss Pirie with the Leeds Museum coin which forms the subject of this note.

\(^1\) Cf. ‘An Unpublished Penny of Edward the Confessor’ by the writer—*Spink & Sons Numismatic Circular* April 1957, p. 157 where the ten coins are listed.

\(^2\) Cf. the reverse dies of *BNJ* viii, Pl. XXIII. 3 and 4 (the latter this coin) as evidence of this.