A FOURTH FIND OF NINTH-CENTURY COINS
FROM IRELAND?

By MICHAEL DOLLEY

Attention has been drawn recently to the paucity of Viking-age coin-hoards from Ireland that can be shown to have been concealed before c. 900. The only discoveries of consequence would appear to be the c. 1874 find from Delgany in Co. Wicklow, the 1871 find from Mullaghboden in the adjacent Co. Kildare, and the much more shadowy 1849 find from Cushendall in Co. Antrim.\(^1\) A doubt even exists concerning the circumstances of the discovery of the first of these hoards, a very substantial parcel of early Anglo-Saxon pence, with just the one Papal coin, which appear to have been brought together somewhere about the year 830. The much smaller Mullaghboden hoard appears to have consisted entirely of Carolingian denarii, and has been linked with the movements of the Westfaldings after they had abandoned their base at Noirmoutiers, so that a date of concealment c. 847 would seem unlikely to be wide of the mark by more than a year or so. In the case of the find from Cushendall, no more than two coins may have been involved, and there would appear no good reason for us to date their loss much after the middle of the ninth century. The position as regards single-finds is just as exiguous, and it is interesting to recall scepticism voiced in more than one quarter concerning the alleged discovery in Ireland of a penny of Ceolwulf II, SCBI Hunter 381, this somewhat improbable provenance resting on no more secure a foundation than the caption of a plate put out, in at least two states, by the notorious White.\(^2\)

The purpose of this paper is to put on record a little group of six coins of Burgred (3), Æthelred I (1) and Ælfred (2) which the writer has been fortunate enough to come across in one of the cabinets of the National Museum of Ireland. The six coins in question probably derive from the Royal Irish Academy cabinet expropriated in 1886, and until now have been kept apart from the main Saxon portion of the consolidated collections. They are notably base, and in poor condition, and before scientific treatment cannot be illustrated satisfactorily by direct photography. However, the leading English authority on the issues in question,\(^3\) H. E. Pagan Esq., of Christ Church, Oxford, has been kind enough to agree with me the readings and identifications which are here offered, it having been possible to supply him with working casts kindly produced by S. E. Rees-Jones Esq., of the Conservation Laboratory of the Archaeology Department of the Queen’s University of Belfast, from my own rather amateurish impressions in plasticine. That the coins necessarily all derive from the one find need not be inferred, of course, from the common provenance, but seems strongly indicated by the uniform patination, and also by the fact that the six coins were struck within a very few years of one another. That they represent, too, a parcel from, if not the whole of, an unpublished find, and one that is presumptively Irish, may be thought to be suggested by the remarkable circumstance that we are afforded what seems an entirely new moneyer for Burgred, not to mention a moneyer completely unpublished for Ælfred.

\(^1\) SCBI BM H/N, p. 20 etc.
\(^2\) BNJ XXXII (1963), pp. 88–90.
\(^3\) Ibid. XXXIV (1965), pp. 11–27.
A list of the six coins is as follows:


   The coin is struck on the broad flan typical of Burgred’s coins put in issue before c. 871. The portrait is characteristically ‘horizontal’, and the cross-bars on the reverse are beaded. Unusual details include an ‘x’ formed of a Latin cross with a pellet in each angle, and the treatment of the drapery on the bust where five pellets are disposed in pairs on each shoulder with a single one on the breast. On the reverse the first ‘o’ in the legend is, exceptionally, square, but the second round though, again quite exceptionally, superscript. The serious chipping occurs on the reverse at the righthand margin, but there seems little doubt that the moneyer’s name is to be read **LEOFNALD**, the last two letters beginning the top line. A difficulty is that no name Leofnald seems known, and it is not easy to accept the existence of a deuterotheme -nald. The obvious contender for the distinction of having struck this coin would be Liafwald or Liofwald who is a Burgred moneyer. However, Mr. Pagan has argued cogently that this particular variety of North 425 belongs before c. 868, and even an anomalous coin such as the piece under consideration is probably to be dated late within that bracket but no later. The coins of Burgred of Liafwald/Liofwald, on the other hand, belong after 871, and significantly he is also a moneyer of Ceolwulf II. Moreover, Liafwald/Liofwald is not known to have used the spelling Leof-, a spelling, indeed, which seems new where ninth-century coins are concerned. All in all, then, there may seem much to be said for simply transliterating the name of the moneyer of the new coin in the National Museum, and employing inverted commas to indicate awareness of the very serious philological objections to the resulting form. The various minor anomalies of style coupled with the anomalous spelling of the moneyer’s name could mean that this coin is not a product of the regular mint, London, at which the great majority of Burgred’s coins were in fact struck, but for the present there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to make out a watertight case for the extant coins of Burgred emanating from more than one mint.

2. **BURGRED**, North 423, *BMC* var. a, unbroken lunettes, Tidhelm.

   Again the coin is struck on the broad flan that distinguishes Burgred’s coins issued before c. 871. The bust is typically ‘vertical’, the cross-bars on the reverse are beaded, and in other respects the coin is ordinary enough. It should be noted that coins of this common moneyer, cf. *SCBI* Copenhagen 77, appear in the *BMC* under Adhelm, presumably for Eadhelm, but this unhappy suggestion should have been prevented by the earlier publication of a coin in the Croydon hoard to be read **TIDEIHM**, for any spelling **ADEHELM** courts immediate suspicion. Curiously, too, italicized Tidehelm actually appears on p. 46 of the *BMC*. The mint may be assumed to be London.

3. **BURGRED**, North 423, *BMC* var. a, unbroken lunettes, Tidhelm.

   The coin is comparable in every way to the preceding piece, the variations being minimal. Instead of **BVRGREDREXM**, it appears to read **BVRGREDRE~X**, and on the reverse the cross-bars are plain, while ‘A’ is barred and ‘N’ not reversed. The cuprous patination is less marked, and the coin has a rather more pewterish appearance than its fellows. A feature is the ragged triangular perforation more or less at the centre of the flan. Once more the mint can be taken to be London.

4. **ÆTHELRED** i, North 622, *BMC* i, unbroken lunettes, Ethelred.

   The style of the coin is typical for the pence of this king, and divergent enough from that of contemporary coins of Burgred for us to assign the coins of the two brothers-in-law to
different mints. The cross-bars on the reverse are plain, and there is a general correspondence with \textit{BMC} 24–26. The moneyer Æthelred is not known to have struck for the Mercian king, but since he had struck for Æthelbearht, and, spelling his name now Æthelred, was to strike for Ælfric and for Archbishop Æthelred of Canterbury, seems certainly to be associated with the mint of Canterbury, and it is to Canterbury that this coin should almost certainly be assigned.

(5) Ælfric, North 625, \textit{BMC} i, unbroken lunettes, Bosa.

The coin is particularly badly chipped, but seems to be comparable in every way to \textit{BMC} 160 and \textit{SCBI} Hunter 561 (\textit{ex} Coats). It is struck on a notably smaller flan, and again the mint may be assumed to be Canterbury, partly because of style and partly because the moneyer is not known for either Burgred or Ceolwulf II. A date later than c. 874 seems unlikely.

(6) Ælfric, North 625, \textit{BMC} i, unbroken lunettes, Dealinc.

The obverse of the coin is rendered indistinct by corrosion, but sufficient can be seen for one to say with confidence that it is of ‘horizontal’ style, the lettering more than bearing out the little that can be observed concerning the portrait. In the same way, the style of the reverse is that which Mr. Pagan has observed to be particularly associated with coins of Burgred with a ‘vertical’ style of bust, the most obvious criterion being the group of three pellets in each of the corners of the lunettes, though the lettering also is distinctive. That the coin in consequence a ‘mule’ of two styles is not at all unexpected, though as it happens the only coin recorded in detail of Dealinc for Burgred is of ‘vertical’ style on both sides. In the mint shared by Burgred and Ælfric, London beyond all question, dies of the two schools seem inextricably linked, and even a chronological sequence cannot well be established, let alone sustained, though in the case of the coin in Dublin a date nearer 874 than 871 does seem likely. As already observed, no more than one coin of Burgred (\textit{BMC} 139) by this moneyer is available for inspection, though there was what appears to a second specimen inadequately described in the 1860 Dunsforth find, while Dealinc is known as a moneyer of Ceolwulf II (\textit{supra}, p. 32).

In the above parcel of six coins there is no coin which need be supposed to have been in currency more than a year or two at most before 868, and no coin likely to have been struck after 874, though one penny is unlikely to have been produced very much earlier. There is every likelihood, then, that the coins in fact derive from a single hoard concealed c. 875. The provenance must suggest Ireland, and there is one crumb of evidence which hints at Leinster, and possibly Wicklow. As Mr. Pagan has reminded me, Dr. C. B. Scott, a distinguished nineteenth-century headmaster of Westminster School, included a penny, apparently since stolen, of Burgred by the moneyer Dudwine, when listing coins from ‘finds in Wicklow and Meath’ which he presented to the school’s collection.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} XXXI (1962), pp. 11–26.} The other pieces in his listing are firmly associated with the early ninth-century hoard from Delgany and the mid-tenth-century hoard from Killyon Manor, and in 1962 it was natural to regard the missing Burgred as an interloper. However, now that there is reason to think that Burgred coins in fact may have been found in Ireland some years before 1886, Scott’s 1876 testimony may be considered to take on a new significance. Interestingly, Dudwine is a Burgred moneyer from precisely the period c. 870 which would be consistent with the little group of coins in
the National Museum. Scott, a man of Irish descent who knew his Ireland and was friendly with Sir John Evans, one of England’s greatest numismatists, is unlikely lightly to have claimed that his Burgred was from ‘finds in Wicklow and Meath’, and my own opinion inclines to the view that it came from an unrecorded hoard from Wicklow rather than Meath. It is only in the tenth century that we begin to have Viking coin-hoards from the Boyne basin, and in any event a Burgred would be much more likely to have passed unremarked in the rather heterogeneous company afforded by the parcel from Delgany, rather than in the tenth-century hoard where there is so much greater uniformity of type with the portrait coin very much the exception instead of the rule.

Provisionally, then, the little group of six coins in the National Museum of Ireland may be reckoned to represent part if not the whole of an otherwise unrecorded find from Ireland. If this hypothesis be accepted, possessors of interleaved copies of the Inventory of British Coin Hoards may perhaps find useful the following summary:—

IRELAND, unknown site (Leinster?), c. 1870 (?).

6 + (?) A R Anglo-Saxon pennies.

MERCIA: Burgred, BMC(A) type a—Tidhelm, 2; type c—‘Leofnald’, 1.

WESSEX: Æthelred I, BMC(A) type i—Æthelred, 1. Ælfred, BMC(A) type i Bosa, 1; Dealine, 1.


Disposition: the above six coins are in the National Museum of Ireland; a seventh (Burgred, BMC(A) type a or d—Dudwine) formerly in the cabinet at Westminster School may well have been from this find.

It only remains for me to thank Dr. William O’Sullivan, M.R.I.A., of the National Museum of Ireland, for every facility afforded for the study of the collections there, and for obtaining permission for me to publish this present note, and Mr. Hugh Pagan of Christ Church, Oxford, who was good enough to read a preliminary draft and to offer most valuable suggestions and comments. Naturally, though, responsibility for any and all of the opinions expressed attaches to neither of these gentlemen but to the author alone.