

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, CHESTER, HOARD OF 1862

By R. P. MACK

I HAVE recently acquired a small parcel of Saxon coins from the St. John's Church, Chester, Hoard of 1862. In an article in the *Chester Archaeological and Historical Society's Journal* of 1864 Mr. Thomas Hughes describes how this hoard was discovered on March 4th 1862 by workmen excavating for a new vestibule outside the west end of St. John's Church, Chester. He states that the workmen came across a series of cruciform slabs lying side by side and forming the original floor of the nave. Whilst displacing the ancient interments beneath, the men discovered a mass of broken stones, under which, at a depth of nearly 16 feet from the surface lay a heap of coins¹. There were probably about 40 originally but many appear to have been broken by rough handling and being taken for Nuremberg tokens little importance was attached to the find. Eventually 'not more than 20 at the most' could be traced and these in many different hands. Five were secured by the Rev. W. B. Marsden, vicar of the parish. Hughes states that with the help of a Mr. John Peacock 10 of the more important coins were collected from various holders for exhibition before the Chester Archaeological Society and that Peacock also 'ingeniously framed them between two sheets of glass'. I have in my possession the glass and cardboard but with holes cut for 16 coins and an inscription in Peacock's handwriting as follows:—

'Found outside the West End of St. John's Church, Chester, March 4th 1862. Supposed to be the original coins from under the foundation stone of the Saxon Building which existed prior to the erection of the present Norman structure'.

Unfortunately Peacock glued the coins to the glass and many had glue still adhering to them. This has now been skilfully removed by Mr. Howes of the British Museum and the coins cleaned but it is thought that one or two may have suffered damage when they were originally taken off the glass. Peacock also drew 17 of the coins to illustrate Hughes's paper and these appear on 3 plates in the Society's *Journal*.

In the present parcel 3 of the 17 coins illustrated in Hughes's paper are missing but there is one additional coin, the WLFSGE building type of Edward the Elder, No. 7 below.

It was originally intended that this parcel of coins should go to the Chester Museum and there is a letter in Mr. Blunt's possession dated June 10th 1866 from Thomas Hughes to Jonathan Rashleigh in which Hughes, who was one of the Corresponding Secretaries of the Society, states that the coins were to be transferred to the Chester Archaeological Society immediately on the completion and opening of the new Museum. In a torn portion of another letter in Hughes's handwriting, also in Mr. Blunt's possession, he says 'the coin you name, with one or two others of the St. John's find, although destined to belong to the local Society has, owing to the decease of the former possessor and the non-arrangement of his affairs, not yet been handed over to us.' This letter is also presumably to Jonathan Rashleigh but it is not known to whom it refers.

The coins never reached the Chester Museum and they have lain in obscurity for about a century, until June 1966, when they were sold to a London dealer from whom I was fortunate

¹ See also *Gentlemen's Magazine* Vol. ccxiii p. 58 (July 1862) where the depth of 16 feet is confirmed. I am indebted to Miss M. M. Archibald for kindly looking up this reference for me.

enough to obtain them. It appears that at some time after their discovery this parcel of coins was collected together from various sources and it had remained in the same family ever since, until sold to the London dealer by a descendant who unfortunately could produce no further information concerning the hoard, nor did she know anything about the three missing coins.

The hoard is included in J. D. A. Thompson's *Inventory of Coin Hoards* as No. 83 but Thompson is wrong in saying the coins were 'probably now in the Chester Museum'. Also the 'one half-penny' by moneyer VVLFSGE is in fact a fragment of a penny.

Of the 15 coins comprising the parcel, 6 are of Edward the Elder, 6 of St. Peter of York, 1 St. Edmund Memorial Coinage and 2 uncertain coins, temp. Edward the Elder and presumably struck at York. These last two, one of which is broken, have much in common with *BMC* (A) Type II of Edward the Elder with three crosses between the 2 lines of the obverse legend. Three crosses between lines of obverse legend do not occur on any coin of St. Peter struck at York although 2 crosses and one pellet are known, *vide* No. 11 below. The obverse lettering, which is unintelligible, is not unlike that on the reverse of many of the portrait type of Edward the Elder, mostly from the Vatican hoard (See *BNJ* 1964, pp. 25-26, Nos. 455-62 and 466-69) but in style more closely resembles the lettering on the St. Peter coins of York.

Rashleigh, in his remarks on the coins of the Anglo-Saxon kings of Northumberland¹ attributes these 2 coins to Neil who, he says, is supposed to have reigned in Northumbria after the death of Alwald, c. 910-914, assuming the last letter of the first line of the obverse legend, which is in fact an ill-formed I, to be an L, thus making the reading ILEIL. But Rashleigh had not seen the coins and based his attribution on Peacock's sketch in the *Chester Archaeological Journal* where the last letter of the first line of the obverse legend is shown as an L. The attribution of these coins to the nebulous Neil, based as it is on an ill-formed I, must be discounted. From the style of lettering it seems probable that they were struck at York sometime during the reign of Edward the Elder.

The St. Edmund Memorial coin in the parcel is of light weight and has every appearance of being a late one. It was probably struck c. 905. The absence of any sword type of St. Peter, *BMC* (A) Type I, which is generally assumed to be the last type and struck sometime after about 920², would indicate that the hoard was buried before this type was in circulation. Edward the Elder came to the throne about 900 and died in 925. The date of issue of his *BMC* (A) Type 2 is not certain but probably continued throughout most of the reign. The date of the building and hand coins is uncertain. It seems probable that the date of deposit of this hoard was c. 920.

Although no mint name appears on any of the known coins of the building, flower and hand types of Edward the Elder, it has generally been thought that these types were the product of the Chester mint. That 2 building and 1 hand type are included in the surviving coins of this hoard tends to confirm this.

In the following list I have included all the recorded coins from the hoard, including the 3 illustrated by Hughes in the *Chester Archaeological Journal* and now missing from this parcel. Hughes' numbers in brackets follow my number. All fifteen coins in my possession are illustrated on pl. I.

My thanks are due to Mr. Blunt for all the help and advice he has given me over this short paper.

¹ *NCNS* IX, pp. 77-8.

² *Num. Chron.* 1957, pp. 123 ff.

EDWARD THE ELDER

BMC(A) Type II

- (1) (H.2) *Obv.* +EADVVEA (RD)REX
Rev. ()ADVOLD $\overline{\text{HO}}$ 19.4 grains (broken).

Originally acquired by the Rev. W. B. Marsden. Further reduced in size since Hughes's illustration.

- (2) (H.5) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD REX
Rev. DIORA MONE 21.7 grains.

Originally acquired by the Rev. W. B. Marsden.

- (3) (H.7) *Obv.* +EAD(VVEARD RE)X
Rev. VVLFS(I)GE $\overline{\text{MO}}$ — grains (broken).

The whereabouts of this coin is not known.

BMC(A) Type V

- (4) (H.1) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD REX
Rev. CVTFFERI — grains.

Illustrated on page 85 of *BMC*. This coin cannot now be traced.

BMC(A) Type VI

- (5) (H.6) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD IE(X) Partly retrograde.
Rev. TD-IDIEN(rev. bar)EI 11.9 grains.

Originally acquired by the Rev. W. B. Marsden and then in 3 pieces. Now only the centre portion remains. Illustrated on page 85 of *BMC*. The moneyer's name is quite uncertain. The only other recorded specimen of this type is in the B.M. ex P. W. Carlyon-Britton, lot 955.

BMC(A) Type XI

- (6) (H.3) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD REX
Rev. EADRED M◇ 19.7 grains.

A new variety of this type with the hand pointing upwards. A new moneyer for the type.

BMC(A) Type XII

- (7) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD REX
Rev. VVLFSIGE 20.2 grains

A new reverse die for the type. Not included in Hughes's original list.

- (8) (H.4) *Obv.* +EADVVEARD REX
Rev. PALTER EO 22.8 grains

Three other specimens are known of this moneyer for the type, two in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh and the coin in B.M. ex Rashleigh, lot 240. One of the Edinburgh coins and the B.M. specimen are from the same dies as this.

ST. EDMUND MEMORIAL COINAGE

- (9) (H.8) *Obv.* +SCEAD
Rev. +CIPICE (partly retrograde) 16.5 grains.

This is a late issue of the St. Edmund coinage.

COINAGE OF ST. PETER AT YORK

BMC(A) Type V

- (10) (H.12) *Obv.* SCPETRM Object resembling a key above; 3 pellets between lines, 1 below.
Rev. +EB -O- RAC & 16.5 grains (slightly chipped).

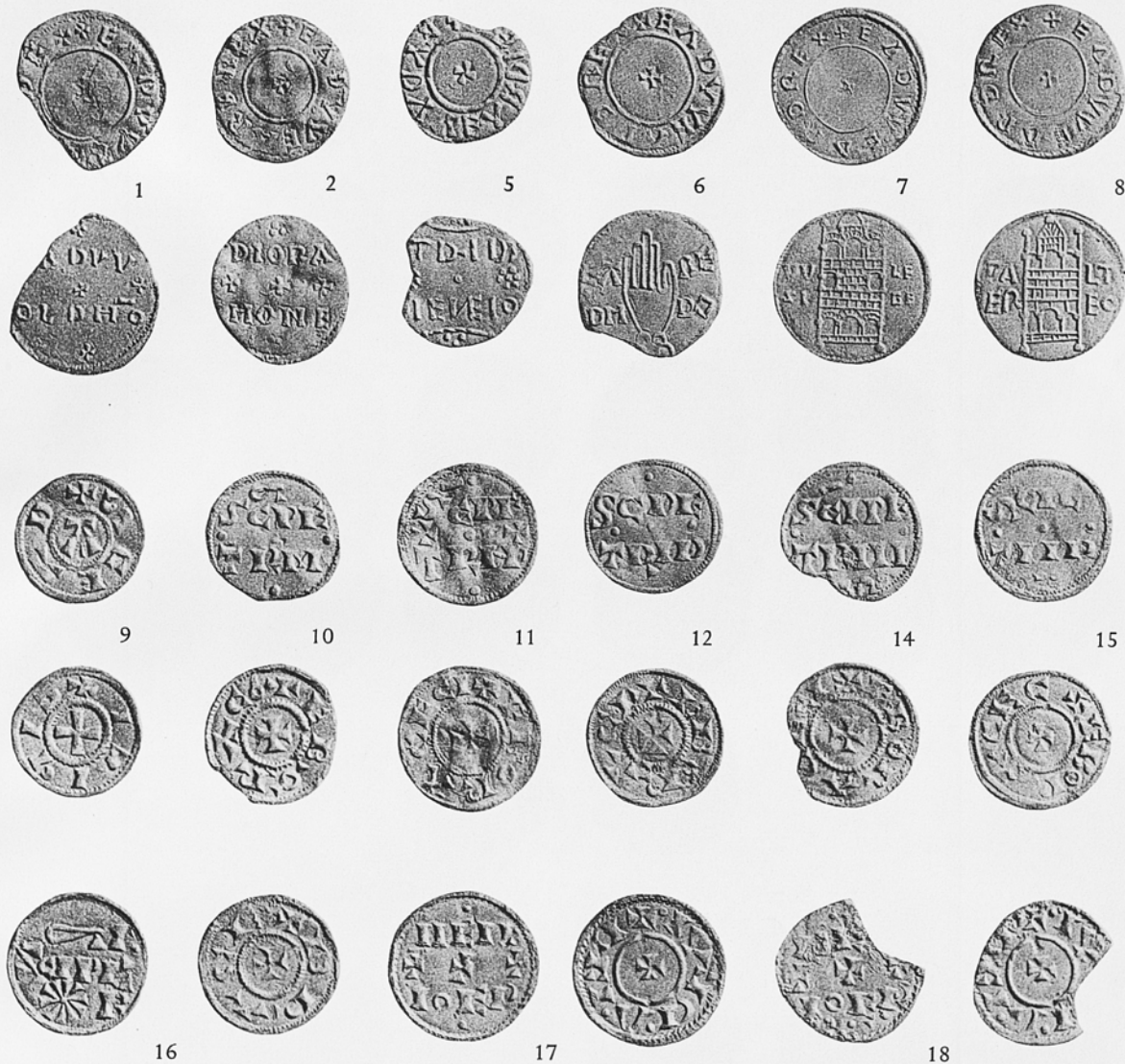
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|------|--------|-------------|----------------|--|
| (11) | (H.14) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCPETRNP(lig.) | Line and pellet above, 2 crosses and pellet between lines, 1 pellet below. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +EBORACECI | 17.6 grains |
| (12) | (H.9) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCPETRIP | One pellet above and 3 pellets between lines. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +EBORACI | 14.2 grains. |
| (13) | (H.10) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCIPITRIMO | Line and pellet above, 3 pellets between lines, 1 pellet below. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | EBOLACICO | - grains. |
- The whereabouts of this coin is not known.
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|------|--------|-------------|------------|--|
| (14) | (H.11) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCIPETRIII | Line and pellet above, 3 pellets between lines, s below. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +EBORACECI | 17.3 grains (chipped) |
| (15) | (H.16) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCIETHIP | 3 pellets between lines, 1 below. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +EBORACEC | 15.7 grains. |
| (16) | (H.15) | <i>Obv.</i> | SCIPLT | Object resembling a key and 1 above, star composed of 10 wedges with pellet in centre and R below. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +BRACE | 16.1 grains. |

An unrecorded variety.

Temp. Edward the Elder, York mint.

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|------|--------|-------------|---------------|--|
| (17) | (H.17) | <i>Obv.</i> | HEIHIOEP | Pellet above and below, 3 crosses between lines. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +DCI.V.DCAI. | 19.3 grains. |
| (18) | (H.13) | <i>Obv.</i> | HE(H)IOEP | Pellet above and below, 3 crosses between lines. |
| | | <i>Rev.</i> | +DCI.V.D(C)AI | 12.2 grains (fragment). |

From the same reverse die as No. 17 above. These two coins appear to be the only recorded examples of this variety.



THE CHESTER (1862) HOARD



