THE CLONCREEN BOG (CLONBULLOGE) FIND OF ELIZABETHAN COINS FROM THE CO. OFFALY

MICHAEL DOLLEY AND A. GUNSTONE

In early September 1968 a find of some sixty silver coins was made on the western side of Cloncreen Bog at a spot a few hundred yards in from the Clonbulloge–Rathvilla road at a point just over two and a half miles north-west of Clonbulloge Church and just before one comes to Esker Bridge. Clonbulloge is a small village some five and a half miles south of Edenderry, while the find-spot of the hoard is almost exactly that distance south-east by east of Daingean, formerly Philipstown and the intended ‘county town’ of the Marian shiring and plantation of Offaly, the old King’s County. The coins were apparently without container, and came to light in the course of Bord na Mona’s winning of the turf (*anglice* peat) which is on a very extensive scale. Many of the coins appear to have been dispersed without record, but one parcel was shown at the Birmingham City Museum in England, where the possessor was persuaded to induce the owner to report his find to the National Museum of Ireland. As a result, twenty-seven of the twenty-nine coins here listed have been acquired by the National Museum, and are published here by kind permission of the Keeper of the Art and Industrial Division, Mr. John Teahan, M.A. The photographs are by courtesy of Mr. W. A. Seaby and of the Director of the Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery. The latter were taken by Mr. W. E. Belsher. One amusing misunderstanding, and that not serious, was when an unattuned English ear transcribed an Irish speaker’s stuttering ‘Bord na Mona’ (The Bog Authority) as the name of a firm of ‘Boden & Warner’! Unfortunately it has not proved possible to trace the remaining thirty or so coins, but there is no reason at all to think that the twenty-nine coins here listed are other than a representative cross-section of the whole hoard.

The references N. and S. in the listing below are to J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, ii (London, 1960) and to P. Seaby (ed.), *Standard Catalogue of British Coins*, 7th edn. (London, 1968), while the division of Elizabeth’s coinages is that proposed in I. D. Brown’s definitive review ‘Some Notes on the Coinage of Elizabeth with Special Reference to her Hammered Silver’ (*BNJ* xxviii. iii (1957), pp. 568–603). In view of the unusual nature of the hoard and the crucial relevance of the condition of the coins to the problem of its date of concealment, all twenty-nine of the coins are illustrated by direct photographs on the accompanying plates (Pl. IV–V). None of the coins is Anglo-Irish, and not altogether surprisingly when the hoard is viewed against the pattern of other Elizabethan finds from the last decade of the sixteenth century. It is doubtful if any of the ‘white money’, coin no more than three or four ounces fine, had been issued after 1560 and before 1600, while the so-called ‘fine’ coinage of 1561—the vaunted coins in fact are no more than eight ounces fine—is only very occasionally on record as occurring in hoards.¹ The list of the surrendered portion of the hoard from Cloncreen Bog is, then, as follows:

ENGLAND

PHILIP AND MARY

1. **Shilling**: 1554, full titles and XII: N. 1967, S. 1893. 80·1 grains (Pl. IV. 1)

ELIZABETH

**Shillings**

2. *i.m.* cross-crosslet, ANG FRA HI and MEV 93·7 grains (Pl. IV. 2)
3. martlet, AN FR HI and MEV 91·8 (Pl. IV. 3)

**Sixth Coinage**: N. 2014, S. 1928

4. *i.m.* bell 92·8 grains (Pl. IV. 4)
5. AN 93·4 (Pl. IV. 5)
6. crescent 93·9 (Pl. IV. 6)
7. hand 96·5 (Pl. IV. 7)
8. key 92·4 (Pl. IV. 8)

**Sixpences**

Third Coinage: N. 1997, S. 1929

9. *i.m.* broad arrow head: 1565, ANG FRA HI 47·6 grains (Pl. IV. 9)
10. *i.m.* 1565, ANG FRA HI 46·3 (Pl. IV. 10)
11, 12. portcullis: 1566 45·5, 42·7 (Pl. IV. 11, 12)
13. crown: 1568 47·6 (Pl. V. 1)
14. 15. *i.m.* 1569 45·0, 43·6 (Pl. V. 2, 3)
16–18. castle: 1571 45·7, 45·0, (Pl. V. 4–6) 41·8

Fourth Coinage: N. 1997, S. 1929

19. *i.m.* ermine: 1572 48·8 grains (Pl. V. 7)
20. acorn: 1574 43·0 (Pl. V. 8)

Fifth Coinage: N. 1997, S. 1929

21. *i.m.* cross (plain): 1578 43·4 grains (Pl. V. 9)
22. long cross: 1581 48·2 (Pl. V. 10)

Sixth Coinage: N. 2015, S. 1932

23. *i.m.* hand: 1590 46·8 grains (Pl. V. 11)
24. tun: 1593 48·5 (Pl. V. 12)
25. woolpack: 15–5 50·7 (Pl. V. 13)
26. key: 1596 46·6 (Pl. V. 14)

**Threepence**

Fourth Coinage: N. 1998, S. 1936

27. *i.m.* ermine: 1572 21·4 grains (Pl. V. 15)

SPAIN

‘Ferdinand and Isabella’

**Pieces of Two Reales**

29. *Mint of Seville*: uncertain assayer 51·4 (Pl. V. 17)

Spanish students may like to have the metric equivalents of the weights of the last two coins, 2·81 g. and 3·33 g. respectively. The two coins not acquired by the National Museum of Ireland are Nos. 5 and 15.

Discussion of the new hoard must centre on two features, the probable date and occasion of its concealment and its inclusion of Spanish coins of this particular denomination. The latest of the coins surrendered are the key-marked shilling and sixpence, the latter dated 1596, both of which must have been struck at the Tower Mint between
February 1596 and an uncertain date very early in 1598. Both are fresh, and loss as early as the summer of 1597 would not appear inconsistent with their condition. It cannot well be coincidence that in the July of that year and at a point only a dozen miles to the north-west, at Tyrellspass in the same county, an English army was ambushed and cut to pieces among the bogs by the Irish under the command of Piers Lacy, one of the ablest of the lieutenants of Hugh O’Neill, and Richard Tyrell. This rout of Christopher Barnewall by the Old English was only one of three reverses which the English suffered that summer in attempting to execute a three-pronged attack upon Ulster, O’Neill himself pinning down the ailing Burgh near Blackwatertown while Hugh O’Donnell trounced Clifford before Ballyshannon, but in many ways it was the most spectacular as well as chronologically the first of the Irish victories. How precisely the coins came to Cloncreen Bog, though, must be a matter of speculation. Were they concealed by one of the English fugitives to cheat his pursuers, or were they part of the loot stripped from an English corpse and later concealed by an Irishman who feared to be identified by them as a participant in the action and its aftermath? Clearly we will never know, but the association of the hoard with the battle may seem to be something more than a possibility.

The two Spanish coins bear the names of the ‘Catholic Sovereigns’, i.e. Ferdinand and Isabella who died in 1504 and 1516 respectively. We are most courteously informed by the well-known Spanish professional numismatists X. and F. Calico of Barcelona that by Spanish students the pieces are deemed posthumous, an acceptable date for them being somewhere around 1520. Even so, they are by far the oldest coins in the hoard, and it is worth considering at this point a neglected passage in the second volume of R. Sainthill’s *Olla Podrida* (London, 1853). On p. 301 there is described a hoard from between Mallow and ‘Charleville’ (i.e. Rath Luirc) in the Co. Cork which is alleged to have contained about forty-five ounces of silver coins. The latest pieces were bell-marked shillings of James I of England, and Sainthill postulated concealment c. 1610. Some eight or nine ounces in the hoard were made up of ‘coins of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, of two sizes, weighing respectively about 46 grains and 23 grains, and a few billion coins of Henry the Fourth of France, dated 1593’. This would suggest a total of Spanish coins of the order of a hundred at least, beside which the two pieces from Cloncreen Bog may seem very small beer. On p. 302, however, the Cork antiquary goes on to remark that: ‘The immense quantity of silver coins of Ferdinand and Isabella met with in Ireland has been a wonder to me from my first boy-collecting days, more especially as there is then a gap down to Philip the Fourth, and his are usually the Low Country dollars, about 1654.’ He continues: ‘I never but once stumbled on a lot in which were the half and quarter pieces of eight of Ferdinand and Isabella, the same of “Carolus et Johanna Reges” (Charles the Fifth and his mother); and the piece of eight, its half, quarter, and eight [sic] of Philip the Second.’ One of Sainthill’s suggestions may be safely rejected, the theory that the two *reales* and *real* pieces of Ferdinand and Isabella represent a part of Katherine of Aragon’s dowry on the occasion of her marriage to Arthur, the elder brother of Henry VIII. On the other hand, he is very near the truth with his observation that in Irish finds there is a gap between such coins and those of Philip IV (1621–65). Treasure recently recovered from the Armada galleons excepted,

1 The find-spot was in fact near Doneraile and wide of Buttevant; cf. *NC* 1854, p. 96 where the weight of the whole hoard is given as 42 ounces instead of 45.
it is perfectly true that Spanish coins of Charles V and of Philip II are rarely found in Irish hoards, and in those which may be presumed to have been concealed during the reign of Elizabeth they are quite exceptional. One of the present writers (M. D.), too, has notes on a total of approximately seventy Irish coin-hoards believed to have been concealed between the accession of Henry VIII and the death of Elizabeth. Only in the case of the odd find, for example the scantily recorded 1922 hoard from Tullamore and the still unpublished 1943 hoard from Knockaboul in the Co. Limerick, is there the hint of a Spanish coin, and the new find from Cloncreen Bog would seem to be the earliest context in which the piece of two reales of Ferdinand and Isabella has been recorded. In other words, this particular denomination would seem to have come into Ireland with the Armada, and one may legitimately speculate on the reasons why this obsolescent if not obsolete coin from the first quarter of the century should have entered on a new lease of life.

To Mrs. Ann Round, M.A., B.Litt., we owe the valuable observation that towards the end of the century the Spanish military paymasters were scraping the barrel where their reserve of acceptable specie was concerned, and Sainthill's perception was characteristically acute when he remarked that there was a rough equivalence with English denominations, though we would substitute the sixpence and threepence of Elizabeth for his groat and half-groat of Henry VII. What is now needed is a full-scale examination of the incidence of pieces of two reales and one real in Irish finds. On the one hand there is the assertion of Richard Sainthill, a very respectable authority, that such coins were a feature of early nineteenth-century discoveries, and on the other the apparent absence of them from such finds as have been recorded in any detail. There is the odd specimen in Irish cabinets, for example in that of the Royal Irish Academy now housed in the National Museum of Ireland and in the old collections incorporated into that of the Ulster Museum, but one is left with the impression that Sainthill may have been exceptionally fortunate in the part of the country, Cork and its hinterland, where he passed his boyhood. It could well be that the piece of two reales enjoyed in those parts a much wider currency on account of Aguila's belated intervention, and in this case its occurrence at Cloncreen Bog would be of heightened interest inasmuch as the find's concealment seems to anticipate Kinsale by several years. One thing does seem certain, though, and that is that there was very little pre-Armada import of Spanish coin into Ireland, the Knockaboul hoard being quite exceptional with the presence here of the piece of eight reales of Philip II perhaps unprecedented.