I. DISCOVERY AND SITE

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Discovery

The Colchester hoard of Short Cross pennies found in 1902 is well known as one of the largest medieval hoards found in Britain. It was discovered when the foundations for the Westminster Bank were dug, and when the site to the west (nos. 21–3 High Street) came to be rebuilt my prediction that a further hoard would be discovered, though it was received, and indeed uttered, with gentle cynicism, was not entirely irrational.

The site was occupied by a timber-framed building of which one beam (now in the Colchester Museum) was dated 1597, and it had, as so often in Colchester, been refronted in the early eighteenth century. It was formerly the offices of the Essex County Standard and more recently of G. M. Stanford & Son, house agents.

Since the new building was to be built from ground level only and the site was very restricted, excavation was not possible, but the Director of Excavations for the Colchester Excavation Committee, Miss B. R. K. Dunnett (now Mrs. R. Niblett), established good relations with the new owners, Boots the Chemists, and the builders Henry Everett & Son of Colchester, and various Roman levels were duly noted in the stanchion holes.

At this point the original decision to site the escalator at the rear of the new building was altered, and as the building was already begun the hole for the machinery had to be dug by hand. That led directly to the discovery of the hoard.

On Thursday 13 February 1969, I received a telephone call at 2.40 p.m. from the foreman, Mr. G. Mead, saying that a large number of coins had just been found. I called for the Assistant Curator (Mr. D. G. Davies) and Miss Dunnett and we ran up the High Street to the site. By the time we arrived the lead canister containing the coins had been removed to the foreman's hut. We explained to the workmen the law of treasure trove and promptly got in touch with the police. The hoard was taken to the police station where it was hastily rinsed in the sink in the cells.

The next few days were spent by all the Museum staff in counting the coins and making a preliminary assessment of their date, assisted by Mr. M. R. Hull, my predecessor, and by Mr. T. J. Robertson, who was then listing the Museum's collection of coins.

An inquest was held on Wednesday 12 March and the Coroner, Mr. Peter Benham, was able to include in the jury descendants of those who had sat in 1902. The verdict was treasure trove, and that the finders were Mr. R. Munson and Mr. G. Purvis. The canister

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1 Essex County Standard, 12 July 1902; The Sphere, 19 July 1902, p. 75; H. A. Grueber, 'A Find of Silver Coins at Colchester', NC 19.
3 Archaeologically this initial wash was a mistake; as the following account will show, it would have been useful to have removed the coins in sequence.
was handed over to a representative of Boots the Chemists, who subsequently very generously presented it to the Colchester Museum.¹

Site

In the eighteenth century three Norman stone buildings still stood within a few yards of each other in Colchester’s High Street. The Old Moot Hall on the north side was a building of c. 1130–50, to judge from the archway of which a drawing survives.² Near it to the west was another hall with a vaulted undercroft demolished in 1886,³ and opposite, and more relevant to our discussion, was yet another similar structure, which stood on the western corner of Pelham’s Lane. It was illustrated by Morant and was demolished c. 1730.⁴ A spouted jar and a cooking-pot of eleventh-century date were found on this site when it again came to be rebuilt in 1935.⁵

The significance of Colchester I was discussed by Mr. G. Rickword in an interesting paper,⁶ in which he suggested that the Morant house had been the residence of the Constable of the Castle, an office which was in the king’s gift and was frequently held by officials of national distinction. He went still further and attributed the deposition of the hoard to Hubert de Burgh. Though the quotation of documents in this paper can be

¹ Acc. No. 126, 1971. Height 23 cm., diameter 27 cm. Lead, in the form of a cylinder with folded joint and base, the lid separate.
² In the Public Library, Colchester.
³ Photographs in Colchester and Essex Museum.
⁴ P. Morant, *The History and Antiquities of... Colchester*, bk. II, p. 10. The illustration is in the copy owned by the Royal Institution; see *Essex Review*, lviii, p. 94.