THE ANGLO-IRISH COINAGE OF EDWARD III

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It is now nearly a quarter of a century since the late Raymond Carlyon-Britton in a characteristically brief note in this Journal recorded the existence in his cabinet of a hitherto unpublished Edwardian halfpenny of the Dublin Mint. On grounds of style alone Carlyon-Britton attributed the coin to Edward III and, linking it to the debased London sterling issue, dated it to 1335–43.

In 1951 the Carlyon-Britton coin, which is now in the Ulster Museum and is listed in that museum’s first Sylloge volume as no. 579, was assumed to be unique. Some ten years ago, however, a second Dublin halfpenny of similar type was discovered by Dr. E. J. Harris and was illustrated in his useful introduction to the Anglo-Irish Medieval Series in Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin. It is described below and illustrated again through the kindness of Dr. Harris (Pl. X, b).

The two halfpennies are struck from different obverse and reverse dies but clearly show the characteristics that persuaded Carlyon-Britton to associate his coin with the 10-ounce fine coinage of 1335–43. Their basic pattern is that of the Anglo-Irish Edwardian sterling which had probably last been minted not later than 1302 but the bust, style of lettering (closed 0s and 2s), and stars in their legends point plausibly to an issue analogous to the ‘debased’ London issue of Edward III.

(a) Ulster Museum Collection: SCBI Belfast No. 579

Obv. Star EDW/TVD/SPRX
Large oval pellet below bust

Rev. GIVI/TAS Star/DVBI/INIG
Wt: 9.4 grains (0.610 grammes)
(Pl. X, a)

(b) E. J. Harris Collection

Obv. Star EDW/TVD/SPRX
Large oval pellet below bust

Rev. GIVI/... Star/DVBI/INIG...
Wt: 8.5 grains (0.550 grammes)
(Pl. X, b)

Recently the possibility of a third coin being a partner to the two halfpennies has occurred independently to both the writer and to Dr. E. J. Harris. This coin, a farthing, is illustrated as No. 4267A on page 30 of Seaby’s Standard Catalogue, Part 3—Coins and Tokens of Ireland where it is listed as a Group I coin of Edward I (c. 1279–84).

Unfortunately the writer has been unable to examine the coin itself which is in the collection of the National Museum of Ireland but a study of the photograph in Seaby’s

2 See Addendum, p. 50.
Catalogue and of one kindly supplied by Mr. John Teahan of the National Museum suggests that the coin might be dated over half a century later. It possesses certain characteristics, in particular a closed ‘O’ in its exiguous reverse legend, which would link it to the ‘debased’ coinage of 1335-43 and Dr. Harris has pointed out that the diameter of the inner circle on its reverse is 7 mm. + like that on English ‘debased’ issue coins and so about 1 mm. more than that on any Edward I farthings. It is to be admitted, nevertheless, that it faithfully copies the form of bust on two halfpennies in the Ulster Museum which no one has doubted to be late halfpennies of Edward I (c. 1295-1302) (cf. Ulster Museum Sylloge, pl. xiv, nos. 561 and 562; Michael Dolley, Anglo-Irish Medieval Coins, p. 13) and it could equally well relate to this period. Mr. W. A. Seaby has handled the actual coin and is satisfied that it is not badly damaged as the photograph would suggest but rather that it is ‘as struck’ on a pyriform flan. It is particularly unfortunate that what might be the all-critical evidence of a star is missing from both obverse and reverse because of the deficient flan. For the time being an open mind must obviously be kept on any attribution to Edward III rather than to Edward I.

(c) National Museum of Ireland Collection: See also Seaby’s Standard Catalogue, Part 3—Coins and Tokens of Ireland, p. 30, no. 4267A

Obv. /7TRDV/.R.
Large pellet below bust
Rev. GIVI/.../.../INI(e)
Wt: 3-4 grains (0:220 grammes) but badly chipped or mis-shapen
(Pl. X, c)

This is about as far as the purely numismatic evidence will take us. But the coins can be tied in to a much closer dating by a cursory examination of even that documentary evidence which is most readily accessible.

By 1302 Edward I’s Irish mints seem to have closed their doors for the last time and there is no hint, either numismatic or documentary, that any more coinage was struck in the lordship for a generation and more. Alexander Normanni of Lucca, now in association with the Frescobaldi, had been reappointed master of the Dublin mint for the recoinage of 1300 but such documents as are now available to us would suggest that within a year—by 29 June 1301—his work had been completed and on 23 August 1302 he was finally acquitted of his sureties in respect of his mastership ‘wherein he has

1 The weights in grains have been obtained from weights recorded in grammes by means of the table in G. F. Hill, Grains and Grammes (London 1920). The present writer is indebted to Mr. W. A. Seaby and Dr. E. J. Harris for their comments and to the latter for permission to illustrate his coin from a photograph by Mr. P. F. Purvey; to the Director of the Ulster Museum, Mr. Alan Warhurst, for permission to illustrate the halfpenny in the Ulster Museum collection, and also to Mr. J. D. Bateson, Research Assistant in Numismatics in that museum; and finally to Mr. John Teahan, Keeper of the Art and Industrial Division of the National Museum of Ireland for permission to illustrate the farthing in that museum.

2 Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland: 1293-1301, no. 740. See also Charles Johnson (edit.), The De Moneta of Nicholas Oresme and English Mint Documents (London, 1956), pp. 63-4, and M. D. O’Sullivan, Italian Merchant Bankers in Ireland in the Thirteenth Century (Dublin, 1962), p. 97. Alexander Normanni had been active as master of the Irish mints at various times since 1281 (Calendar of Fine Rolls: 1272-1307, p. 141) and throughout seems to have acquitted himself with some discretion, originally associated as he was with his confreres the Ricardi of Lucca and latterly with the Frescobaldi of Florence.
borne himself well and faithfully. A satisfactory pyx trial was held at the conclusion of the recoinage but it was not to be for over another year that John de Sandale, warden of the London mint, was finally paid off for the wages of the foreign workmen characteristically hired for the recoinage. After this the documents say no more and while it is always a dangerous practice to draw positive conclusions from negative evidence, and nowhere more so than in medieval Ireland, it is not without significance that the contemporary hoards, if not the output of the Irish Exchequer, point to a cessation of minting at about this time.

James Simon, it is true, tells us that a new sterling coinage was begun in 1304 but this was an uncharacteristic slip probably originated by Sir John Davies and compounded by Sir James Ware, no doubt arising from a confusion of the times when Alexander Normanni had held the mastership of the Dublin mint. Simon, quoting Walter Harris’s English rendition of Ware’s *De Hibernia & Antiquitatibus euis Disquisitiones* and relying for his dating on Davies’s calendaring of the *Red Book of the Irish Exchequer*, relates that

About this time [1300], the circulation of so much defaced and mixed money being stopped, four new furnaces were erected in the Mint of Dublin, to supply the great demand for good money; and Alexander Norman de Luic was constituted master of the coiners. Four years after [1304], ‘William de Wymundham, controller of the King’s exchange in England, by command from the bishop of Bath and Wells, the King’s treasurer, sent to Sir William de Essenden treasurer of Ireland, twenty four stamps for coining money there, viz. three piles with six crosses for pennies; three piles with six crosses for half-pennies, and two piles with four crosses for farthings. And these be sent by John le Minor, Thomas Dowle, and John de Shordich, clerks, Members of the Company of Minters at London, to be by them used in the coinage of money.’

Simon does not appear to have been familiar with the original Latin edition (1654) of Ware’s work but at this point—if not elsewhere—Harris’s translation, and indeed the first and anonymous English translation of 1705, are fairly faithful renderings of the Latin.

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1 *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward I: 1301-1307*, p. 58. The Exchange apparently continued for some time because on the same day 20 marks a year from its receipts were granted to Thosalamus [Pape of Lucca].


3 On 26 Nov. 1303 a writ of *Allocate* was issued to the barons of the Exchequer for allowing John de Sandale, warden of the London mint £12 which he had paid to ‘Jakeminus Pynolet, moneyer, and his 3 associates, workmen . . . came from foreign parts, to maintain the exchanges in England and Ireland’, and £75 paid to ‘Philipuchius del Beck and 24 associates going from London to Ireland to coin money, each of them taking 60s. under an agreement that if by bad weather they were delayed beyond 21 days, Philipuchius and each of the 24 associates should receive 10d. a day’. C.D.I.: 1302-1307, no. 272. One cannot tell, of course, how long before 26 Nov. 1303 Sandale had paid the mint workers their due but it is likely to have been some time before his reimbursement was approved.


However, a study of the activities of three of the officials named shows us that the entry in the Red Book of the Irish Exchequer, so unhappily lost to us in the destruction of the Irish records on 3 June 1922, must relate to a period some ten years earlier than 1304 and the introduction of a coinage not later than the summer of 1295.

William of Wimundham, for example, was not warden of the London mint in 1304 but held that appointment after the death of Gregory de Rokesley on 13 July 1291 until 2 December 1296. William of East Dean took over the Irish treasurership on 9 June 1292, following the interregnum after the scandal and inquiry relating to his predecessor Nicholas de Clere, and occupied the office until Michaelmas 1300. William March, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1293–1302), Treasurer of England since 1290, was dismissed from office on 16 August 1295. The entry in the Red Book must, therefore, have been concerned with the start of a new coinage some time between 9 June 1292 and 16 August 1295. This would be in accord with the arrangement of Edward I’s Anglo-Irish coinages postulated by Professor Dolley and relates to his Fourth or Fifth Coinage. No doubt further research among the documents could refine its date more precisely.

The earliest clear evidence of any serious intention to coin in Ireland after 1302 does not come for some years after the accession of Edward III (1327). In 1336, following the introduction of the debased coinage of halfpennies and farthings in England a year earlier, the Council seems to have thought seriously about a resumption of Anglo-Irish coinage and to have taken the first positive steps towards it. On 2 May the Irish treasurer, John de Ellerker, was instructed to make the necessary arrangements for miners, refiners, coiners, and other workers, whom it was planned to send to Ireland, to search out ‘a silver mine in those parts and to make money there’. The following day John de Windsor, warden of the London mint, was ordered to have twelve pairs of dies made for halfpennies and a similar number for farthings and sent to Ellerker so that ‘money of halfpennies and farthings shall be made at the Dublin Mint for the King and his people of these parts’. It is not without significance that the coins were to be of the same standard as those currently being produced in London, that is 10 ounce fine. On 4 May a further instruction was issued, this time to the Sheriff of Devon and ‘Keeper of the King’s Mine in that country’ that two miners and two refiners together with the requisite instruments should be sent to Ireland to operate the new mines. It seems, however, that all this activity came to nothing. For some reason—local

1304 (ut e libro rubro Scaccarii Dublinae intelligimus) Magister Gulielmus de Wimundham custos Cambiorum Domini Regis in Anglia, de praecepto venerabilis patris Bathoniensis & Wellensis episcopi, Thesaurarii eiusdem Domini Regis, missit Domino Gulielmo de Essenden, Thesaurario in Hibernia, 24 pecias cuneorum, pro moneta ibi facienda viz. tres pilas cum sex cruceilis pro denariis, tres pilas cum sex cruceilis, pro obolis, & duas pilas cum quatuor cruceilis, pro ferlingis, per Johannem le Minor, Thomam Dowle & Johannem de Shordich clericos, de societate operariorum & monetariorum London, per eosdem, ad monetam praedictam operandam & monetandam.*

hostility and suspicion coupled no doubt with difficulties in procuring sufficient silver following the recoinages of Edward I and the exhaustion of the island's treasure for the general purposes of the Crown—the plan did not go through. A month later, on 2 June 1336, the Council was complaining that unless 'the communities of the cities, boroughs, towns and other people... give their counsel and aid the scheme would not be effectually begun and prosperously carried on'.

Thereafter there was silence and one must assume that the new project was not effectually begun. It was, indeed, not for another two years, after Edward III had laid claim to the Crown of France and needed the maximum revenue from Ireland, that more was heard of it. On 29 June 1338 an order was issued by the King to John Rees, the treasurer appointed to Ireland the previous year in the wake of a royal purge of the Colony's administration, to make provision for 'the work of the miners, refiners, stampers and other workmen, whom the King is sending to Ireland to seek for silver mines there and make money there, as was agreed by the King and his Council'. Simultaneously, instructions were issued to John de Flete, the current warden of the London mint, to have eight pairs of dies for sterlings to be made and similarly for halfpence and farthings and John Rees was told that the coins should be struck at Dublin. John de Flete carried out his instructions, and on 25 March 1339 special arrangements were made for the dies to be taken to Ireland 'in a bag under the Chancellor's Seal' by Peter de Okeburn. The dies duly arrived and minting operations began at Dublin under the supervision of the Irish treasurer acting also, rather surprisingly in view of his status, as warden of the mint. The Dublin mint was, however, a comparatively short-lived affair. Already by June 1339 the Council was changing its attitude to the circulation of 'Turneys' which only three months earlier it had proscribed outright. On 2 June an instruction was issued that 'Turneys' might be accepted as currency 'until the King shall have caused other money to be made'. The studied vagueness over any timetable for a new coinage less than ten weeks after the dispatch of dies to Ireland, and the hint of more than a purely temporary toleration of inferior continental coin suggest that some review of the Mint was taking place and that a suspension of operation was contemplated. In November 1340 Rees was required to surrender his dies to the English treasurer but it is patent from the order that the Dublin mint had already been closed, probably for some time. When the actual closure took place is not known but it is tempting to date it not later than 12 August 1339 when Rees gave up the office of Treasurer of Ireland and presumably also his subsidiary post of warden of the mint, no doubt yet another victim of the repeated shake-ups of both the English and Irish administrations in the stresses of the French War.

1 Ibid., p. 679. In 1311 Edward II promised that the revenues of Ireland would henceforth be expended within the lordship but it was a pledge that was soon to be rendered nugatory. Cf. Lydon, op. cit., pp. 40 and 49.
4 Ibid., p. 225.
5 15 Nov. 1340, Ibid., p. 567. Rees is addressed as 'late the treasurer of Ireland and keeper of the exchange [sic] lately established at Dublin' and he is instructed to return to the English exchequer 'all the stamps, whether used or not, delivered to him for making money in Ireland and which he brought with him from that land to England'.
6 For the date on which Rees surrendered the treasurership, vide Richardson and Sayles, op. cit. p. 102. On the King's attitude towards his English and Irish ministers and officials during this period, vide A. J. Otway-Ruthwen, *A History of Medieval Ireland* (London, 1968), p. 257. John Rees had been appointed treasurer under John de Charlton when the latter had been made Justiciar in the previous purge of July 1337. Charlton, however, remained in office for less than a year because he in his turn was dismissed in May 1338.
On the basis of the documents under review one can reasonably postulate that a
coinage was struck by Edward III at Dublin under John Rees from some time after
25 March 1339 until some date probably not later than 12 August 1339. It was intended
to have been a coinage of pence, halfpence, and farthings, and we are led to believe
that the dies for all three denominations were made available for the new mint. Already
in England, as we have seen above, halfpence and farthings of 10 ounce fine silver had
been declared legal tender, except for the payment of the King's taxes, up to any amount.
Pennies, which were not covered by the debasement provisions and could only be
struck of standard silver would have been coined at a loss and were no longer pro-
duced. Bearing in mind that the earlier mandate of 1336 to John de Windsor had speci-
ﬁed only halfpennies and farthings on the current London standard we may suppose that
pennies were not struck in Dublin in 1339 and that what was struck was on the 10 ounce
fine silver standard.

We have already seen how on purely numismatic grounds there is a reasonable case
to be made for associating Carlyon-Britton's halfpenny and its companion halfpenny
and farthing with the debased London halfpennies of 1335-43. From the evidence of
the documents cited it seems equally reasonable to narrow this dating with some degree
of assurance to 1339. That the coinage the Dublin halfpennies and farthings comprised
was perfunctory in the extreme can be gauged, not only from its limited life and the
remarkable rarity of the pieces that exist today, but also can be inferred from the order
recalling John Rees's dies in 1340 where there is more than a suggestion that part of
the consignment had not been used. But the evidence we have is both too deﬁcient and
indistinct to allow of any quantiﬁcation of the issue.

Again, why the Dublin mint was of such short duration can only be hinted at.
Professor Dolley has demonstrated how in the thirteenth century the function of the
Anglo-Irish coinage was not primarily to serve the needs of the colony but rather
to be siphoned of for the general requirements of the Crown as a supplement to the
output of the English mints. No doubt in part this again was the reason for the opening
of the Dublin mint in 1338 at the start of the campaigns in France but the economic
situation was certainly not favourable to any coinage in quantity; the lordship's silver
reserves were exhausted and the island virtually bankrupt, and the monetary policy
that the Crown adopted was such that the traditional system served little purpose.
Furthermore, changes in the Irish administration and the consequent uncertainty of
ofﬁce cannot have assured the Dublin mint any really practicable existence. It must
be remembered too that the new coinage seems in practice to have been restricted to
halfpennies and farthings although the possibility of pennies turning up one day cannot
be ruled out. Fractional coins had been traditionally more acceptable as currency for
the colony than the exportable penny and the concern expressed by the Crown on more
than one occasion about the shortage of sterling in the colony may be more real than

1 C.C.R. Edward III 1339-1341 p. 59.
3 Cf. Michael Dolley, Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins (London, 1972), and the other publications by this
author cited therein. The shortage of sterling in Ireland is acknowledged in the order of 12 June 1339
concerning the circulation of "Turneys"—"... although the King forbade the currency of that money
["Turneys"], he has learned from the community of that land that great damage is done to the King and
the men of the land by that prohibition, through lack of money of sterling" (C.C.R., Edward III: 1339-1341,
p. 225), and three years earlier in the Council's com-
plaint to the communities over their apparent lack of
support for the proposed new coinage of 1336. The
somewhat querulous tone of both documents should
not be altogether overlooked, however.
apparent. So much silver had been taken out of Ireland over the years that there were insufficient reserves to draw upon for the new coinage. As far as the needs of the native population were concerned it seems likely that 'Turneys' served the purposes of the island's internal economy, so far as it was based on currency, more effectively than the issues of the royal mints. It was not to be for another 120 years that the Crown, under the influence of its Irish parliaments, began fully to appreciate the colony's internal monetary needs and to meet them with a dual standard currency.

Addendum

While this paper was in the press halfpenny (b) was acquired by Spink and Son and subsequently sold by them to a Dublin collector in December 1976. See N.Circ. Dec. 1976, p. 476, and Pl. 10477A.