THE WINGATE SALE 1875

LORD STEWARTBY

OF the thirty-four surviving letters written by Edward Burns in 1875 to R.W. Cochran-Patrick, the last nine (26–34) are almost entirely devoted to the sale of James Wingate’s celebrated collection of Scottish coins, which took place on 29–30 November and 1 December 1875. These letters, now in the possession of Hunter of Hunterston, Cochran-Patrick’s great-grandson, are reproduced in full hereafter from transcripts made by the late Lieut.-Col. J.K.R. Murray.1 They give a fascinating and perhaps unique insight into the background to the sale of a major collection at auction more than a century ago.

A sympathetic obituary notice2 was contributed to the Numismatic Chronicle by John Gray (of whom Burns held an exceptionally low opinion):

The death of Mr. James Wingate, F.S.A.Scot., at the comparatively early age of fifty, took place on the 20th May, 1877. Well known as a marine insurance broker, of the firm of Messrs. Wingate, Birrell & Co., of Glasgow, he was in his counting-house, at the helm of affairs, on Wednesday, 16th May, and on the following Sunday morning he expired at his residence of Linnhouse, Hamilton, cut down by an acute attack of pleurisy.

Mr. Wingate was a man of singularly generous impulse, and in all his dealings guided by a sense of honour almost chivalrous in its integrity. Though these and other kindly features in his character will not readily be forgotten by any of his acquaintances, it is chiefly as the man of science that his name will be remembered beyond the circle of immediate friendship, associated as it must ever be with the numismatic history of his native country. The scientific bent of his mind evinced itself in his earlier years by researches into both the entomological and conchological fauna of the West of Scotland, his collections in both of which departments he presented ten years ago to the Andersonian Museum. In his maturer years he engaged with characteristic enthusiasm in forming a collection of Scottish coins, and with what magnificent results his “Illustrations of the Coinage of Scotland,” published in 1868, abundantly shows. During these halcyon years—a period, as he used to remark, the happiest of his life—he had the good fortune to witness the dispersion of some of the finest existing cabinets of Scottish coins, including that of Mr. Lindsay, whose work on the subject had rescued the study from the neglect into which it had fallen ever since the days of old Cardonnel. Of these advantages Mr. Wingate was not slow in availing himself, and no expense was spared to secure examples necessary towards making his collection not only the most complete, but the best as to the quality of the specimens in existence. No sooner, however, had he attained to the position of possessor of the finest cabinet of Scottish coins, and had published the results to the numismatic world in his beautiful volume above mentioned, than he resolved to part with it;—the purpose he had in view in forming it had been attained, and the pleasure in so doing was over. The collection was accordingly advertised for sale and dispersed by public auction in November, 1875, by Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, in their rooms, Wellington Street, Strand, London, the sale occupying three days.

To Mr. Wingate the dispersion of his collection was a source of unalloyed pleasure. He felt it had served its day in his hands, and, as he used to remark, was now doing a similar service to others. Along with it, but all too soon, the active mind which formed it has gone from our midst, and the busy hands are at rest.

Wingate’s Illustrations is a splendid volume in which most of his earlier Scottish coins, and a representative selection of the later, are figured and described—indeed, a nineteenth century precursor of the modern Sylloge. In his Preface the author wrote:

Wingate, Syllogee, Hart. (1861–1953) and Major-Gen. Orde Wingate of the Chindits (1903–44) were descended (Burke’s Peerage, 1970, pp. 2858–9). Sir Reginald’s father Andrew (1813–62) was educated at Glasgow University and lived in Renfrewshire, and his grandfather Andrew (1778–1860) is described as ‘merchant in Glasgow’.

1 For further comments on this correspondence see I. Stewart, ‘Edward Burns’, BNJ 57 (1987), 89–98. Col Murray and I were most grateful to Hunter of Hunterston for permission to publish them.

2 NC 1877, Proc. pp. 15–16. Although I have not been able to establish the connection, it seems likely that James Wingate belonged to the distinguished family from which Sir Reginald
The compiling of the following pages, and the drawing of the Plates attached to this volume, are the results of many pleasant hours of recreation, after days spent amidst the cares and anxieties of an active business life. The Author feels he cannot too strongly recommend men engaged in commercial pursuits to devote a portion of their spare evening hours to some specific study, scientific or otherwise – to a hobby in fact; they will find that it schools one to forget the ever-recurring worries of mercantile life, and by diverting the thoughts into a different channel, it gives strength and tone to the mind.

Wingate expressed ‘his best thanks to Mr. John Gray, Glasgow, for his kind advice and assistance’, and it seems that Gray had acted as his agent in compiling the collection. This role he also performed for Thomas Coats of Ferguslie, the major bidder at Wingate’s sale, and the owner, ultimately, of an even richer collection than Wingate’s. The Ferguslie collection, however, was later presented intact to the National Museum and Wingate’s was undoubtedly the finest collection of Scottish coins to be offered for sale in the nineteenth century, rivalled for size, range and quality in the twentieth only by those of J.G. Murdoch and R.C. Lockett. The auctioneers, Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge, were entirely justified in writing in a preface to the sale catalogue:

‘It is not too much to say, that so far as Scottish Coins are concerned this is the most important Collection ever disposed of in this House. Besides numerous examples acquired in detail or incidentally procured, it contains the most valuable Coins of the Scottish portion of almost all the cabinets sold, either privately or by public sale, during the last ten years. Collectors interested in Scottish Numismatics will easily recognise contributions from the Lindsay, Foster, and Bergne Collections, as well as the Christmas, Hay Newton, and others of older date. Neither pains nor expense have been spared in procuring the finest examples possible – inferior ones being at once turned out whenever an opportunity occurred of supplying their place by better.’

During the summer of 1875 Burns had been staying at Paisley with Thomas Coats (1809–83), cataloguing his collection of Scottish coins. Mention of the proposed dispersal of Wingate’s collection by Burns first occurs in a letter he wrote to Cochran-Patrick (no. 23) on 21st August 1875 from Paisley, presumably in response to information from the latter contained in two recent letters which Burns acknowledges:

‘Very sorry to know that Mr. Wingate is breaking up his collection, but I thought that the experience of the Museum sales might have shown him that the place for disposing of a first class collection of Scotch coins was in Edinburgh. The buyers, with the exception of Mr. Pollexfen (for Mr. Ford is of no account in a sale) are in Scotland, and it is quite a different thing seeing the coins for themselves, & being subjected personally to all the glamour of a sale, to sending of commissions to London dealers. But why should not you & Mr. Coats make an effort to buy up the coins between you by private bargain. I think that if Gray made a valuation on the one hand, say for Mr. Wingate, & myself on the other for the purchasers that we would come pretty near their current sale value, and thus this great collection would be preserved to the West of Scotland. Mr. Coats in still at Arran, & I may not have the opportunity of seeing him for a few days, but I think it might be worth your while to communicate with both him & Mr. Wingate.’

By the end of September Burns was back in Edinburgh. In a letter dated 30th (no. 24) he asked Cochran-Patrick to ‘inform me when the Wingate sale comes off. Mr. Carfrae said that the catalogue was completed’, and on 4th October (no. 25) he wrote:

‘Mr. Coats asked me to give him a list of the pieces that it would be most desirable for him to go in for at the Wingate sale & also to give him some idea of the limits that he ought to set. This need not hinder any arrangements that he & you may make. I propose putting a special mark on such lots as may not probably turn up again for many years, if ever in his life-time. It is quite possible if the sale comes off in a few weeks that I may arrange my visit to London for the time when it takes place.’

From this time onwards the negotiations of those interested in Wingate’s coins became increasingly complicated. Coats, already in his mid-sixties, was anxious to enrich his collection with many rare items which he might never have a further opportunity to obtain. Perhaps he already had in mind the project of engaging Burns to write a book on Scottish
coins, based on his own collection, which he aimed to make as complete as possible for the purpose. Cochran-Patrick (1842–97), at half the age of Coats, was well advanced in the preparation of his book on the Records of the Coinage of Scotland (1876), and was the best scholar among the active collectors of the time.

His collection was on a lesser scale than that of Coats, but he had high hopes, not fulfilled as it turned out, of adding significantly to it from Wingate's sale. Most of the correspondence is concerned with the efforts of Burns to effect an arrangement between Coats and Cochran-Patrick, which would enable each of them to get some of the pieces they most wanted without forcing up the prices against each other, despite the involvement of John Gray as Coats's agent.

In spite of all the efforts of Burns on his behalf only seven Wingate lots can be identified as having been bought by Cochran-Patrick (all of them through Gray):

- 22 Alexander II (C.P. lot 137), £10. 10s.
- 26 Alexander III, Lanark (C.P. 142), £4. 4s.
- 32 Alexander III, Glasgow (C.P. 148), £10. 10s.
- 33 Alexander III, – (C.P. 147), £10. 5s.
- 194 James IV, silver penny (C.P. 229), £5.
- 249 Francis and Mary, half-testoon 1558 (C.P. 248), £2.
- 323 James VI, half-rider 1601 (Murray 19 ex Hird 107, bought by him from Lady Kennedy Cochran-Patrick on 31 Dec. 1935), £7. 15s.

The prices realised at this period for long voided-cross sterlings of Alexander III of the rarer mints, then very difficult to obtain, were much higher than those in the first half of the twentieth century, because of the discovery of more than 2,000 examples of this coinage in the great Brussels hoard of 1908. No Glasgow coin in the Lockett sales of 1956 and 1960 reached double figures.

Other notable collectors whose names feature in the letters are Samuel Addington, a London cloth merchant, who bid furiously for the rarest coins and paid more than half the price of the whole sale for only 43 out of 379 Scottish lots; Robert Carfrae, a leading figure in the Society of Antiquaries and curator of its museum; the Revd J.H. Pollexfen (1818–99), a Yorkshire vicar whom Burns regarded highly; Thomas Mackenzie (1831–1916), who had a long career as a sheriff in the north of Scotland but was clearly not well thought of by Burns; and John Kermack Ford (d. 1884), of Southsea, many coins from whose collection were noted by Burns in The Coinage of Scotland. Of these collectors only Addington and Pollexfen bid at the sale in their own names, Pollexfen obtaining a Stirling penny of Alexander III (44), a James IV groat with numeral III (197), a gold 22s. piece of 1553 (270) and a saltire plack of James VI (336).

Most of the coins were bought by Gray, and most of these for Coats. London dealers who each bought a number of lots were Jessop, Lincoln and Webster. J.J. Jessop was trading from 1A Pall Mall Place by 1871; he was dead by 20 December 1877, when his stock was sold at Sotheby's. The firm of W.S. Lincoln & Son, founded by 1850, was established at no. 462 (later renumbered 69) New Oxford Street by 1863 and remained there until about 1930. In

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1 The Cochran-Patrick collection was sold by Sotheby, 30–1 March 1936, although two coins are known to have been bought by Hird before the sale, and others may have been. One, Hird 107 (see the note on Wingate lot 323 below), was a 1601 half-rider, the other, Hird 100, a 1593 hat-piece. Although Oxford had a specimen of the latter (Christ Church collection), which could have led Hird to exclude it from his gift to the Ashmolean in 1953, the same explanation would not apply to the 1601 half-rider.
2 Sale Sotheby, 26–8 June 1900.
3 Some of Mackenzie's coins were sold by T. Chapman & Son, 11 Hanover Street, Edinburgh, 14–15 March 1883; his final collection by Sotheby, 21–2 February 1921.
4 Sale Sotheby, 12 June 1884.
5 I am indebted to Mr Hugh Pagan for much of the information in this and the following paragraph.
1875 it was headed by Frederick W. Lincoln (d. 1909), who was responsible for making the firm a force in the numismatic world. William Webster (d. 1885), of 17 Great Russell Street, was the nephew and professional successor of the dealer William Till, and was perhaps the leading London dealer in the third quarter of the nineteenth century (after his death his son W.J. Webster continued the business for a while but then went to work for Spink).

Four other names occur as buyers, all of relatively minor lots: Allan (324), Gillespie (57), Thomson (302 and 341) and Watson (179, 191, 230, 331 and 368). Thomson has not been identified, but Watson could well be the Edinburgh collector Dr Thomas Watson, whose assistance was acknowledged by Lindsay in 1859 and 1868. Henry Harrison Allan, of Leadenhall Street, was an active collector in the 1860s, when he bought many English coins from the collection of the Revd Prof. Henry Christmas (Sotheby, 1–6 Feb. 1864); the 1601 gold sword-and-sceptre piece and its half that he bought from Wingate were in lot 333 of his own sale at Sotheby’s, 7–10 July 1908. W.J. Gillespie, who bought early David II pennies at the Wingate sale, lived at Foxrock and then Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, and had a distinguished collection of Irish coins which were sold through Spink’s *Numismatic Circular* between December 1899 and June 1900.

The really fancy prices, however, were due to Addington. As letter 34 explains, he was chased up, on the lots that he most wanted, to exceptional figures, although not without considerable anxiety on the part of Gray in case he found himself landed with such expensive pieces. Addington’s collection was in due course (c. 1883) bought by A.B. Richardson, from whom it was in turn (c. 1895) bought by J.G. Murdoch, and it is instructive to compare the prices paid for Wingate’s coins by Addington in 1875 with what they fetched at the Murdoch sale in 1903. Wingate’s excessively rare Roman-lettered groat of James IV (lot 201) was bought by Addington for £61, but made only £22 10s. at Murdoch (151). The 1553 gold 4s. piece of Mary, with cinquefoils instead of I G beside the shield (lot 269) went to Addington for £105 but fetched £36 at Murdoch (204). ‘The finest example’ known of the very rare silver 40s. piece of James VI, 1582, made £35 10s. at Murdoch (253) after £85 at Wingate (292); in 1956, as Lockett lot 376, it went for the then astonishing price of £400. But Addington’s most costly purchases were Wingate’s two-thirds and one-third gold lion nobles of James VI (lots 312–3) for which he paid £201 and £205, against £40 and £100 realised in 1903 (Murdoch 273–4). Lockett’s two-thirds lion noble (lot 348) fetched £220 in 1956, after £120 at the Bruun sale (917) in 1925. A good example of the way Addington was bid up on less dramatic pieces was lot 315, the gold hat piece of James VI, 1592, for which he paid £40 and £100 realised in 1903 (Murdoch 273–4). Lockett’s two-thirds lion noble (lot 348) fetched £220 in 1956, after £120 at the Bruun sale (917) in 1925. A good example of the way Addington was bid up on less dramatic pieces was lot 315, the gold hat piece of James VI, 1592, for which he paid £35 against 9 guineas and 7 guineas respectively for the similar pieces of 1591 and 1593 in lots 314 and 316.

That Wingate disposed of coins prior to his sale is stated in the catalogue, but occasionally these appear not to have been strictly duplicates – e.g. his 1586 lion noble, pl. 34, no. 7 in his *Illustrations*, which was not in the sale (later Cochran-Patrick 68 and Lockett 916). Conversely, there are quite a few coins in the 1875 sale which were not figured in the *Illustrations* presumably because they were acquired after it was completed in 1868. Notable examples are the David II halfpenny (58), the light lion of Robert III (105, ‘Half St. Andrew’), the Roxburgh groat (141) and gold half-lion (149) of James II, and the 1581 8s. piece of James VI (291).

The Burns letters may be left to tell their own story of the build-up to the sale, and of its dramatic first day, which fetched £1049 14s. for the first 149 lots down to James II. On day two lots 150–305 (James III – James VI silver) made £1140 10s.; and on the third and final day the Scottish lots 306–79 (from James VI gold, billon and copper) made £831 16s. 6d., and the Roman and Greek coins, cabinets and books (lots 380–464) a further £241 13s. 6d., for a grand total of £3263 14s.

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* Murdoch’s Scottish coins, of exceptional quality but less extensive than Wingate’s in silver and base metal, were sold by Sotheby on 11–13 May 1903 and 16 Dec. 1904 (residue).
Dear Sir,

I leave for London to-morrow morning, so that I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you this time. The end of November, at which time you think the Wingate sale will come off is rather too late for enjoying one's self. I saw Mr. Carfrae to-day. He wonders what the James IV ½ unicorn, Roman letters will bring at Wingate's sale, for which £42 was paid at the last Museum sale, & of which you got a superior specimen for £19 at the former sale. Evidently he does not mean to run it up again.9 As for Mr. Coats, I think you will be able to arrange readily enough with him on the give & take principle. He must have some of the prouest lots. I am to mark his catalogue for him. There is no need why you should pay ruinous prices for anything. I should be prepared for likely lots to suggest very liberal limits, but I think you will prefer doing as little on the carte blanche system as you possibly can, after your experience of our two Museum sales. If the London dealers are allowed (i.e. where they try the running up system) to find that they are only saddling themselves with unsaleable stock, i.e. prices considered, they will soon draw in their horns. I have no interest in the matter, for it is doubtful if I shall buy a single lot. I wonder however how the Davids will be described. I offered to give Mr. Gray a complete list of the readings of Mr. Wingate's coins of David I, if he would let me know the numbers (written by me on the wrappers & of which I had forgotten to take an inventory) but I never received from him a reply. No dependence is to be placed on Mr. Wingate's own readings. The coin with annulets in the quarters has not a single letter indicating Roxburgh to be the mint.10 I should have been glad to have rendered this service to Mr. Wingate.

I am Dear Sir Yours very truly E. Burns

Brighton, 13 Preston St 29th October 1875

Dear Sir,

I got your favor of the 23d, only at dinner time to-day. It had gone to London, & then was forwarded to me here. I shall be glad to attend to your interests at the Wingate sale. Had I been Gray, acting in the position he does to Wingate, I should have left all the commissions to others. You must know that at a sale like Wingate's, where the auctioneers are not acquainted with the value of the property, they have to reply upon the party getting up the sale to direct them at what prices to start the lots. This I know from the best of all authorities, personal experience. When my little sale took place some years ago at Sotheby's11 I was pressed to give them what I considered the values of the different lots, so that they might put them at something like an approximate price. I know that Chapman does the same when he has out-of-the-way sales on hand, & I suspect Dowell does so likewise. And it is really necessary that the auctioneer, if he is to dispose of the property in hand to advantage, should have some idea of the prices that the respective lots ought to bring. Now either indirectly through Wingate, or directly through himself, which is the more probable thing, Gray will have the doing of this at this sale. But with commissions for many of the most important lots, & knowing what he can give for them, how is it possible for Gray to ignore the knowledge in giving probable values to the auctioneers? The man who could do the right thing in these circumstances would require to be a very different person than John Gray, and I should say very few men of strict honour would like to be in the position.

I have given Mr. Coats very excellent & disinterested advice in regard to this sale. I have told him plainly that he will have to pay for his lots high or low prices just as he sets about the purchase of them, that if he lets Gray run a muck for anything & everything, he will have to pay prices far in excess of what has ever yet been paid for many of the lots. My advice to him has been to drop many lots, which it might be desirable enough for him to have, not competing for them at all, but letting them find their own level, telling him that the cheaper he is likely to get his own lots, also that for special lots, he should go on the give and take system, and I am very sure that if Mr. Coats is left to himself he will act liberally to other collectors. When I return to Edinburgh, I am to give him an idea what he ought to go in for, with some idea of the values of the lots, in order that Gray may not get his favorite carte blanche system, forcing the lots up to ruinous prices, or at least to prices far beyond former precedent, as at the Lindsay & the two Edinburgh Museum sales, where this system was adopted. It was fine sport to Carfrae running up the lots at the Museum sale in Edinburgh, for he knew that Gray would hold on, & if he had not known this he would not have run them up, but allowed them to find their natural level. It was all the

9 Lot 205, bought by Gray for £12.
10 Lot 8, catalogued as Roxburgh, but shown by Burns (1, p. 29, fig. 27) to be of Carlisle.
more singular that Carfrae should have put on the steam so tremendously, for of all men, he is the one that has
declared most about the prices of Scotch coins, & is always saying that he at least will not pay extravagant
prices, which at the Edinburgh sales in question he certainly did not, for you will find by looking at the priced sale
catalogues that he played a perfectly safe game in rushing up all the rare lots. But at a London sale, there are
always half a dozen Carfraes in the field when a go-in-at-any-price bidder makes his appearance. I will be in
Edinburgh very soon now, but it would be nothing for me to run through to London again at the Wingate sale if
you think I can serve you. Meantime I think you should send to my address in London

5 Evershott St
Oakley Square, Camden Town

a list of all the lots you want. I shall have to tell Mr. Coats what it is desirable that he should go in for, but in return
for this, & for keeping him right as regards limits, which he himself asked me to do, I shall desire him to forgo
most of these lots. If I act for you, I shall consider you as my client & do the very best I can for you. If you think
that your interests can be best served by my arranging with Mr. Coats for you, & letting Gray buy the lots, I shall
put myself out of the question, & still do the best for you in my power. Unfortunately Mr. Coats seems to think
Gray a Simon Pure, and it was not for me to say anything against him, but if Mr. Coats were to get the candid
opinion of any London dealer about Gray, or of some in Brighton, for I find that he is known even here, or of that
queer fellow Mackenzie, the west country dealer, or of Mr. Sim, or even of Mr. Carfrae, or of Mr. Pollexfen, or of
Mr. Veitch of the Bank of Scotland (what an actionable letter I am writing, but I can rely on you) Mr. Coats would
have a very different opinion of him. He is dreadfully dirty. He has never from first to last mentioned a word to me
about the Wingate sale, nor has he mentioned me once in the catalogue, altho' a number of Wingate's rare coins
were got through me, principally at my sale, and as I told you, I offered to give him the readings of all Wingate's
Davids, but for his own reasons, he never responded. With such a man as this, I cannot get on. Conciliation is lost
on such a SKUNK.

I return to London on Tuesday, where I shall be for a week - on leaving which, propose paying a visit for a day
or so on the road, & to be in Edinburgh about a fortnight from this date.

I am Dear Sir Yours very truly E. Burns

5th Nov. 1875

5 Evershott St
Oakley Square Camden Town

Dear Sir,

I hope to be in Edinburgh by Monday night, or failing that, Tuesday evening.

I had a commission from Mr. Coats to pick him up anything very good I might see in London - in selecting
which I have confined myself entirely to English coins with the exception of a Half Shekel. I propose taking these
out to Mr. Coats on some day between the 14th and 20th inst, according as may be most convenient for Mr. Coats
to receive me, and I could then propose an arrangement with him in respect to the lots you want; but you will have
to compound with him for some of the crack lots. My opinion is that you should carefully go over the Wingate
catalogue and mark every lot that it would be desirable you should have, and placing an additional mark against
those you would be willing to surrender to Mr. Coats, in the event of Mr. C. making a corresponding surrender of
lots to you. This would afford a satisfactory basis on which to operate, the more liberal you can be to Mr. C. the
more easy will it be for me to negotiate with him. He is fully aware that there are many lots at this sale which may
never again occur in his lifetime; but I have also set before him that he will have to pay fearful prices for what he
gets if he does not make some friendly arrangements, & show consideration generally to the interests & feelings of
other parties. But Mr. C. is not so wild about coins, neither is he so bound up in the almighty dollar, as to override
ruthlessly all friendly considerations for other collectors at this or any other sale. Besides he does not go in for
Scotch alone. If you could manage to see him, perhaps when I come thro', of the date of which I shall advise you
on my hearing from Mr. C. it would be all the better. He knows that I am quite as anxious that he should have a
first class collection as Gray can be, & that I would not propose any arrangement prejudicial to his interests.

Poor Johnston is dead and buried. W.H. Johnston, F.R.N.S. 1864; his coins were sold by Sotheby on 3-6 and 8 May 1876. Burns refers to two of them (II, p. 538).
again to do some further business with him on my return. I bought from him a first class crown (Scotch silver) 1st coinage of Charles I and a gold coronation medal (Scotch) of Charles II. These were the only two pieces I got from him. From another party I got a crown (Scotch-silver) of Briot's 2nd coinage of Charles I (very much superior to any I have seen for several years) & five early pennies, most of which I think you have.

I am Dear Sir Yours truly E. Burns

P.S. I leave my wife here as a pledge for my return to attend the Wingate sale. I took my present trip to the South solely for her benefit, as she had had no summer jaunt, owing to my engagement at Paisley.

E.B.

30 3 London St
15th November 1875

Dear Sir,

I received yours this morning, on my return from London, which I left last night at 8.30 p.m. reaching Edinburgh at 6 AM.

If Mr. C. has been giving Mr. G. a carte blanche commission for the W. sale, it is right in the teeth of all the advice I have been giving him. I am just now preparing for Mr. Coats, according to the instructions I received from him when I was at Paisley an estimate of the probable values of all the lots at the sale, and there are so many rare lots that they run into very stiff figures. When he gets this, I think he will find that he is likely to get enough at the W. sale without requiring to outbid everybody. I made him aware also when at Paisley that you were desirous to make an arrangement with him regarding the rarer lots, which with due allowance for the interests of either party would answer very well. I made no overtures to buy for Mr. C. but on the contrary said that as Gray had always acted for him it would be as well to give his commissions to him. Possibly Mr. Coats might refer me to Gray; and if he did so, this would be a very great point gained. I don't want anything to do with Gray, but once Mr. Coats threw the onus on Gray's shoulders, you could come down upon Gray with excellent effect & make him surrender a quantum of the rare lots to you. These lots I fear it would be requisite to let Gray get for you, which would materially lessen my commissions, but I could place these (such as you give to me) in Lincoln's hands, which would completely blind the other bidders, Gray included, as to whom the lots were purchased for, so that there would be no special running of you up for these lots. And you could make sure of Lincoln not allowing any of the other parties, for whom he might be buying, getting the lots you want by taking care to make your limits large enough. If, say, the probable value of a lot was £5, it is not likely that Lincoln would have commissions much above that figure. For such a lot, then, by giving £8 or so for your limits, you would have the pass of the £5, or £5. 10 commissions, and might get the lot for £5. 15 or £6. While on the other hand, nobody could wrest the lot from you by going beyond your limits. I think I could manage this for you very nicely. Nobody need ever know that the lots are bought for you. Say that Mr. Coats surrendered a dozen or so of pet lots to you, you would surrender a similar number of specified lots to him; but for all the rest of the lots you would be quite free to bid or not as you choose, without informing Gray, or G., or anyone. This seems to me to present for you a very clear course of action. Please give me your opinion of it, and I shall delay giving Mr. Coats his list for a day or so till I hear from you. It is probable that Mr. Coats, if he acts on my suggestions, confining himself to a certain number of lots, may not show Gray the list I am preparing for him at all, but reverse it for his own guidance.

I shall not forget you with respect to my recent purchases.

I am Dear Sir Yours very truly E. Burns

30 3 London St
15th November 1875

Dear Sir,

I have had an interview with Mr. Carfrae today. The lots he would like of those in your list are 149, 274, 363. He did not see your list, but went over the catalogue with me. Gray is to act for him. A very clear proof that Mr. G. must have taken it very much upon himself to speak to Mr. Coats in respect to the arrangement proposed by you. Indeed I am not sure G. is not acting for Mr. Pollexfen also, because I know that Mr. E. applied to Mr. Sim for
Gray’s address. Mr. Carfrae said distinctly that he saw that Gray’s game was to rush up the coins fearfully. He is estimating the Robert II St. Andrew, lot 80, at £15, and the VICIT VERITAS 1556 penny at £10!! At the S.S.A. sale, a fine Robert II St. Andrew sold for £2.10 & a very fine VICIT VERITAS 1556 penny for 14/-. Mr. Carfrae will not play into his hands. His game is very plain. He wants someone, such as Mr. Coats, to give him unlimited commissions to rush the coins up, & others such as yourself to bid against him. At an early period of our correspondence respecting this sale, & all through, I have informed you that when I was at Paisley, Mr. Coats on several occasions spoke to me about working up a list of probable values of the different lots for him. This did not look as if he meant to place himself unreservedly in Gray’s hands. I have made up a rough estimate of the values of the different lots, which I propose extending for him. This will not affect the chances of yourself or any other collector obtaining lots at something like reasonable prices. On the contrary, you may be certain that if Mr. C. does not avail himself of some such guide, based on the real values of the coins, he will give Gray carte blanche, & nobody will get anything save at such prices as G. chooses to allow them. I had this in view (the checkmating of Gray) from the first, as you will see by reference to my former letters. So far as my own interests are concerned, the higher coins go, the greater chances do they present to me. But a forced rush up of this description cannot lead to permanent results of a satisfactory character. Now if you would allow me to deal with Mr. Coats in my own way, I have much hope that I would bring all right.

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There ought to be no reserve in telling him that you are indignant at the manner in which you have been treated, &

Now if you would allow me to deal with Mr. Coats in my own way, I have much hope that I would bring all right.

I am Dear Sir Yours very truly E. Burns

P.S. I did not mention to Mr. Carfrae what you told me, viz that Mr. Gray had stated that Mr. Coats would make no arrangement with you for any of the lots. Indeed when Mr. Carfrae first spoke of your feeling in this matter, I gave him no hint that I knew anything about it. All that he knows is what he learned from yourself when you were here.

E.B.

31 3 London St.
16th November 1875

Dear Sir,

The enclosed is the list that Mr. Carfrae is going to send to Gray, but he will not forward it till you write me regarding it. The lots marked with a cross are those he would particularly like to have, but if you very particularly wish any of them, please to tell me, for I think Mr. Carfrae will score them out to oblige you. Even in the case of such as we might give up to Mr. Carfrae, we can strike in at the bidding if the coin goes above his limits. In the case of any of the lots in Mr. Carfrae’s list, which have not a cross prefixed he will be glad to delete any of them you wish to have deleted from the list; or what is the same, to mark them at much lower limits, so as not to come into competition with you. He fancies Gray just as much as I do, & said that had he known I was going up that he would have given me his order. I understand Mr. Carfrae to say that Gray had also written to Mr. Simpson of Dundee for his order. You have thorough good cause for feeling indignant, & I most particularly desire that you

13 Burns adds in a postscript ‘Since writing this I have ascertained that Mr. Pollexfen only wanted Gray to get him a copy of Wingate’s book’.

14 These two coins actually sold for £5. 5s. and 15s. (lot 278). The St. Andrews are now attributed to Robert III.

15 G.B. Simpson, F.S.A. Scot., F.R.N.S., of Broughty Ferry, near Dundee. His coins, catalogued by Burns, were sold during his lifetime by Chapman, Edinburgh, on 5–7 Dec. 1882 and 19–20 Feb. 1885.
THE WINGATE SALE 1875

Dear Sir,

I called upon Mr. Coats yesterday by appointment and was with him a considerable time, not reaching this till about 10 at night. He is dead set upon the coins. I fought your game in the way you suggested but it was no go. He only gave a quiet laugh when I mentioned the dark horse. He stated, moreover, that he thought Mr. Wingate would like to have his coins disposed of to a party who lived sufficiently near him to give Mr. W. the opportunity of seeing his old friends again when he felt so disposed. In these circumstances, I should have gone away & nothing would have been done. But I did what Nelson did at Copenhagen, disobeyed orders, & gained to a certain extent, i.e. so far as it can possibly be gained, your battle. The result is that you are to confer with Gray & myself as to the lots to be compounded for. Mr. Coats wishes me to see Gray to arrange about lots for him. I said that I would start for Glasgow by the 10 A M train on Monday, so that I shall be at Gray's shortly after 11.30. Mr. Coats is to write to Mr. Gray telling him that I am coming through. My proposition is that you should take the opportunity of meeting us. These are the only circumstances under which I could have really assisted you. Gray had received a carte blanche commission & in return had engaged to act only for Mr. Coats (as per letter of his shown to me, but this is for your own private information). Consequently Gray's hands were tied, and any lots he might, as between yourselves, have engaged to secure for you, could have been given only on the sly, not at all a pleasant way. Mr. Coats said that it had been his particular wish all along that I should act in concert with Gray in getting for him every coin at this sale that it would be desirable for him to have. Under reservation that he would allow you some of the rarities, altho' they will not be so many as you could have wished, I have engaged to do so. I have not seen Gray at all yet, or had the slightest communication with him. All this is by Mr. Coats' wish. I should advise, however, that Gray should buy the compounded lots for you, which will make him the more ready to deal with you. I doubt if you will get many other good lots at the sale, otherwise than such as are thus arranged for, but there is no harm in trying. It will suit your interest in several ways to make up a list of these, and let Mr. Lincoln execute them. I had arranged with him before I left London that he should be my buyer for such orders as I might get at this sale. He is a thoroughly honest man, & has such a large connection, buying for so many clients that Gray could not possibly tell for whom he was buying. But I engage not in the slightest way to mention to any one that any orders of yours are put into Lincoln's hands. Hoping to see you on Monday. I am Dear Sir, Yours very truly.

E. Burns

32

3 London St, Edinburgh

20 November 1875

Dear Sir,

I think the arrangement made at Gray's today will meet your views. I had far more bother in effecting it than I had anticipated. My proposition to Gray was that you & Mr. C should both take a certain number of rare lots, on the give & take principle, and then fight as you chose for the rest, which I thought a happy way of meeting Gray's evident fancy for a little healthy opposition, & still securing you a share of the better lots, without incurring the deadly opposition of Mr. Coats. Gray said he thought the matter had been finally settled & that there was no good in re-opening it. Whereupon, I ventured to hope that Mr. Gray's arrangements were not like the laws of the ancient Medes & Persians, once made, unchangeable, & I asked point blank if Mr. C had gone back in the arrangement made with me on Friday. Friend Gray could not say that Mr. C had, & then of his own accord made the proposition that he should secure the coins at the sale, & then a friendly division of them could be made between you & Mr. C afterwards, which proposal I snapped at directly. Don't forget me when the final division is made. My personal arrangement with G, was that while he should have his regular commission on Mr. C's purchases, I should have a commission, also say 5 percent, (which Mr. C wont grudge) for my share, over and above Gray's charge. I don't think you will object to the same on your share of the coins. I have fought two pitched battles for you, and, as I hope & believe, have secured for you the certainty of some of the more excellent coins, & this without more running up for the lots than would naturally ensue upon the outside opposition, incidental to so great a sale. And if
the lots run high, you will always have the consolation of knowing that your own collection is very much enhanced in value. I propose leaving for London by the 10 A.M. train on Thursday so as to come up fresh for the examination of the coins on Friday. My address, while in London, will be McEwan’s Hotel, Salisbury Square, Fleet Street – just beside the Temple church. I shall be glad to hear from you before I go. You said you were going abroad, I think; not, I hope, on account of your son’s health. You make wonderfully good use of your time abroad, judging by what you shewed me. If you bring with you your gold coronation medal, Scotch, of Chas II, we shall compare it with mine, the chasing of which seems to be very much superior to yours. I have put mine into my purse to be at hand.

I am Dear Sir Yours very truly E. Burns

34 McEwan’s Hotel,
Salisbury Square,
Fleet St.
London
30th November 1875

Dear Sir,

I was engaged till late last night, otherwise I should have written you a few lines about the sale. The sum total of yesterday’s lots came to about £1050. Very much of the success of the sale was owing to Addington, who would have everything he set his heart upon. We allowed him to get the Bruce farthing for £42 (Gray was quaking all thro’ lest this lot should land upon him). The David II halfpenny 1st coinage we let Addington have for £35. He was favored also with the Robt III ½ St. Andrew lot 104 at £51. We had to give up these & some other lots to him for we were quite ashamed at the thought of running them any further. When Gray & I came to the sale on Monday morning, we had prepared what we thought a very nice front line for meeting the enemy with, but after a few of the rarer lots came up, I saw that we would have no chance if we did not form a new front, which we did, feeling quite up to the occasion, & got a fair proportion of the lots. Mr. Gray is setting aside for you all that fall within your limits, but these are not many. What you have got, however, is very cheap. We shall have a stiff fight today. Webster got (for you I hope) the William the Lion 1st coinage lots very cheap. I could not get Gray quite up to the mark for these. Indeed I had to pull him by the cuff of the neck all thro’ the sale. We had changed places somehow in a most miraculous manner. He was the timid confederate, & I the go-ahead. But what a humiliating spectacle we would have made of ourselves had we allowed every crack lot to go past us. Kindly excuse haste & believe me

Dear Sir Yours very truly

E. Burns