LATE MEDIEVAL COINAGE (1279–1485)

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Introduction

This is a review of the advance of knowledge in a particular sector of studies that comes within the purview of the British Numismatic Society, since its formation in 1903. It refers to important publications made during the past century but does not attempt to mention everything that has been published. For that information bibliographies should be consulted such as The Contents of the British Numismatic Journal, Volumes 1 to 66 (London, 1998), the indexes of the Numismatic Chronicle (NC), and The Cumulative Index to Spink's Numismatic Circular, Volumes 1 to 100 (NCirc). Many works mentioned in this review which contain useful bibliographies are marked with an asterisk (*)

The first steps towards a detailed analytical study of the later medieval coinages of Great Britain had, of course, already been taken long before the Society was formed in 1903. The work of Snelling, Ruding, Hawkins and Kenyon had laid a foundation that was built on during the nineteenth century by many others writing in the Numismatic Chronicle and elsewhere. In modern times useful works of general reference have appeared which are of the greatest value in making quick and universally recognised identifications. For a general view of the operations of the mint and of the documentation under which coinages were made in England and Ireland in the period under review A New History of the Royal Mint is highly recommended. Two excellent accounts of the economic factors acting on the coinage in the period are given in Munro's book Wool, Cloth, and Gold and in Spufford's splendid new book Power and profit, the merchant in medieval Europe. For a view of the relationships between medieval currencies Spufford's Handbook of Medieval Exchange is an important reference and has a authoritative introduction. Hoards are very often recorded briefly in Coin Hoards in advance of being more fully written up in one of the academic journals.

This review is arranged, at least so far as the English section is concerned, on the basis of periods in which standards of weight and fineness were, generally, maintained. The plan adopted is to mention works of general reference, then to give a brief summary of the development of the...

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1 This review excludes the coinages of Scotland and Ireland, which are dealt with elsewhere in this volume.
2 Available, price £10, from the Hon. Secretary, The British Numismatic Society, c/o The Warburg Institute, Bedford Square, London WC1H 0AB.
7 P. Spufford, Power and profit, the merchant in medieval Europe (London, 2002).
9 Coin Hoards appeared as separate volumes from 1975 (vol. 1) to 1985 (vol. 7). After a final issue in 1994 (vol. 8, Greek hoards only) it was incorporated into NC (from 1994).
10 In the period from 1279 to 1485 fineness of English coinage was constant at 23 ct 3/4 gr. (0.995) for gold and 11 oz 2 dwt (0.925) for silver. Exceptions to these are that (1) the fineness is just stated to be 'fine gold' in the indentures of 1345, 1344 and 1346, and (2) the fineness of silver coin was reduced for the farthings in 1279 only to approximately 9 oz silver (in fact, 0.765) to allow the coins to be made larger while still containing the same amount of silver, and (3) in 1335 silver was reduced to 10 oz fine (0.833) for the coinages (halfpence and farthings) issued under the indenture which applied from that date to 1343.
The Broad Picture

The past century, and particularly the latter part of it, has seen a growing awareness of the position that coinage holds in the broad sweep of history. Coins are now seen for what they are, not just as beautiful and interesting things to collect, but as utilitarian objects which were created as a consequence of, and are thus evidence for, important economic, historical and cultural events. In 1279, the time when men were tied to the land and exchanged services for the material means of living was already receding into the past, and a money economy was appearing. This trend was to be accelerated when the Black Death greatly reduced the population in the middle of the fourteenth century and the maintenance of large armies during the Hundred Years War called for cash payments. Labour’s bargaining power and mobility was much increased in consequence. The start of the period covered in this chapter saw coinage made of fine silver in few denominations that was convenient for merchants to use for wholesale trade and for the king to collect his taxes. By 1485 coinage was struck in gold, silver and, in many countries, of base metal, and had become the usual medium of exchange for everyone and for almost all purposes.11

England

The period 1279 to 1335

This period was marked by the introduction of coins employing improved production techniques.12 The coinage in was in sterling silver (0.925) at 22.2 grains (1.439 g) to the penny. Groat of four pence were introduced for the first time but were, apparently, not struck regularly after the first few years. Halfpence and farthings, although they had been struck spasmodically before, now became a regular part of the coinage. Mints were set up throughout the country to convert old coins to new.

The year 1887 saw the publication of the third edition of Edward Hawkins’s Silver Coins of England, which retained the old classification of Edwardian pennies into those reading EDW (Edward I, 1272–1307) and those reading EDWA, EDWAR and EDWARD (Edward II, 1307–27), and which looked back to Snelling and Ruding. In that same year was published Edward Burns’s analysis of the Edwardian pennies in the Montrave hoard, dividing them into fifty varieties.13 Burns’s classification, which was published in his book The Coinage of Scotland, was a great advance and is essentially correct, but was not much noticed by English numismatists of the day and was apparently not considered easy to use. In any case, it was ignored by Sir George Macdonald when he evolved a less adequate classification, based on Hawkins, to help him deal with the Lochmaben hoard.14 When, eight years later, he published the Blackhills and Mellendean

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11 The same period saw the introduction of improved methods of accounting, such as double entry bookkeeping, so that more complex financial affairs could be controlled. Documentary credits in the form of bills of exchange and letters of credit had also been introduced by Italian bankers who often had branches in other European trading cities, but these were of fairly limited, though increasing, use.
12 The first surviving indenture is dated 1279, see Challis, A New History of the Royal Mint*, as in n. 5, 699. For the new techniques used see D. Sellwood, ‘Alterations in Mint Technology for the Edwardian Penny’ in D.M. Metcalf and W.A. Oddy (editors), Metallurgy in Numismatics, I (London, 1980).
13 This hoard is revisited by G.L.V. Tatler and B.H.H. Stewart in BNJ 31 (1962), 80–7, who redefine the hoard in terms of the Fox classification as modified up to that date.
hoards,\textsuperscript{15} he acknowledged the omission and evolved a further classification, this time based on the Burns system.\textsuperscript{16}

By this time the system of classification evolved by the brothers H.B. Earle Fox (Pl. 3b) and Shirley Fox, which divided the coinage into fifteen main classes, was being elucidated in \textit{BNJ},\textsuperscript{17} and it is this system which is the foundation of that which is in general use today. A summary of this classification was published in NC in 1917\textsuperscript{18} by Shirley Fox in which classes 3d and 3e were inadvertently transposed, which led to confusion particularly in respect of the publication of the Boyton hoard by D.F. Allen (Pl. 5a).\textsuperscript{19} This was corrected by Whitton in \textit{BNJ} 24 (1941–4), p. 53.

An important contribution to the Fox classification was the work of Crump and Johnson at the Public Record Office in extracting from the Pipe and Foreign Rolls records of bullion coined in the three reigns.\textsuperscript{20} The work was done about 1900, although it was not published in its entirety for another thirteen years, but in the interim it was made available to the Fox brothers while they were working on their paper and extracts from it are included by them. This immensely valuable publication is substantially complete for the mints of London and Canterbury and partially complete for the provincial mints. Later Johnson was to edit the \textit{De Moneta} of Nicholas Oresme,\textsuperscript{21} a fascinating contemporary account, probably written in 1279, on the purpose and use of money, the methods of making it and the public duty of those responsible for it.

Few changes were proposed to the Fox brothers’ classification until the 1950s,\textsuperscript{22} when Tatler established the distinction between classes 2a and 2b,\textsuperscript{23} and this has recently been followed up by M. Allen.\textsuperscript{24} This was followed by various notes by Elmore Jones (Pl. 6a),\textsuperscript{25} North (Pl. 9d),\textsuperscript{26} Greenhalgh\textsuperscript{27} and others\textsuperscript{28} refining the Fox classification and describing newly discovered varieties. Several papers were written dealing with different aspects of the ecclesiastical mint of Durham.\textsuperscript{29}

Aspects of the Edwardian penny series have been dealt with and elaborated in many hoard reports, of which Burns’s description of the Montrave hoard, already referred to, was an important beginning. It would take up too much space to list these all here but some of the more recent and important are Boyton,\textsuperscript{30} Broughton,\textsuperscript{31} Skegby,\textsuperscript{32} Borscar,\textsuperscript{33} Aberdeen, St Nicholas Street,\textsuperscript{34} Loch Doon,\textsuperscript{35} Renfrew,\textsuperscript{36} Coventry,\textsuperscript{37} and Aberdour.\textsuperscript{38} There are many others. It is noteworthy that

\textsuperscript{15} G. Macdonald, 'Two hoards of Edward pennies recently found in Scotland', NC 13 (1913), 57–118.
\textsuperscript{16} His work was sufficiently detailed to allow Stewart and North to attempt to reclassify the three hoards in terms of the Fox system in \textit{BNJ} 1990, 179–204.
\textsuperscript{17} In ‘Numismatic History of the reigns of Edward I, II, and III’ \textit{BNJ} 6 (1909), 197–212; 7 (1910), 91–142; 8 (1911), 137–48; 9 (1912), 181–205; 10 (1913), 95–123.
\textsuperscript{19} D.F. Allen, 'The Boyton find of coins of Edward I and II', NC 16 (1936), 115–55.
\textsuperscript{21} Nelson’s Medieval Texts (London, 1956).
\textsuperscript{22} Lawrence had published a possible proof in 1923. L.A. Lawrence, 'On a new type of penny of Edward I', NC 3 (1923), 56–9.
\textsuperscript{23} 'A note on the transition between types I and II of the pennies of Edward I' \textit{BNJ} 28 (1955–7), 288–93.
\textsuperscript{24} The chronology of Edward I class 2' \textit{BNJ} 66 (1996), 123–4.
\textsuperscript{26} J.J. North,'An unpublished earthing of Edward I', \textit{BNJ} 52 (1982), 242–3.
\textsuperscript{28} Papers on this subject by the authors named and others are very numerous and may be found in \textit{BNJ}, \textit{NC}, \textit{Spink’s Numismatic Circular} (1892 to date), and \textit{Scoby’s Bulletin} (1947 to 1990).
\textsuperscript{30} D.F. Allen, (The Boyton Hoard, \textit{NC} 3 (1913), 115–55.
\textsuperscript{33} I. Stewart, 'Edwardian sterlings in the 1900 Borscar (Closeburn) find', \textit{BNJ} 47 (1977), 92–101.
\textsuperscript{34} N.J. Mayhew, 'The Aberdeen, St Nicholas Street, hoards of 1983 and 1984' \textit{BNJ} 58 (1988), 40–68.
many hoards of this period were found in Scotland, no doubt because of the disturbed political situation there in the first half of the fourteenth century.

The work of Crump and Johnson in studying the documentation of the period as it related to coinage was followed up by Mate, who published an important contribution containing much new information in 1972. A major step forward was taken with the publication of the North collection as volume 39 in the Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles series in 1989. This work, which embodies not only North’s own very considerable studies of the series, includes contributions from other students including Stewart (Pl. 6d) on the classifications that preceded the Fox system, Wood on the understanding of the extensive Fox class 10, Woodhead (Pl. 7d) on the early coinages of Edward III (1327–77), North himself on the mint of Berwick upon Tweed, and Mayhew on sterling imitations. This brought together in one volume much of the modern thinking on the coinage from 1279 to 1343 and has resulted in a considerable extension and redefinition of the Fox classification.

The English captured Berwick from the Scots in 1296 and held it until 1318. It had been a Scottish mint and the English soon commenced to strike coins there. However, with one brief exception, these were never part of the regular coinage struck from dies made in London. Dies were made locally and thus the series required separate treatment. This was given to it by Blunt (Pl. 4d) in 1931 in NC, who established a separate classification. Subsequently, Wood has worked on the series, publishing a die analysis in BNJ and, as already said, there is a useful chapter on the subject by North in SCBI 39.

The period 1335–43

There was a period of large output in the early years of the fourteenth century. This was followed after the first two decades by a decline in production, evidently due to shortage of silver, and the coinage already in circulation had to supply most of needs of the country. This coinage declined progressively in weight through wear and adverse selection. In what was evidently an attempt to meet needs for small change an issue of halfpence and farthings of reduced weight and fineness was introduced in 1335. These were described in the Fox paper and an attempt to classify them was made by Woodhead. Paul and Bente Withers have recently published a small book based on the Rogers collection, one of a series, which contains an interesting and new approach to these coins.

An important hoard for this period came to light in 1988 at Stanwix in Cumberland. This had (and still has) yet to be published in full at the time Woodhead wrote his paper in SCBI 39 but at that date was known to contain approximately 2,700 coins, of which 260 were halfpence and farthings of the 1335 issue.

The period 1343–51

In December 1343 a completely new coinage was launched which provided for gold as well as silver. The gold was to be in the form of coins of the value of two florins of Florence and valued at 6s. (the double Leopard), of one florin valued at 3s. (the Leopard), and of half a florin valued at 1s. 6d. (the Helm). The reason for linking this coinage to the florin was that those were the gold coins

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41 NC 11 (1931), 28–52
44 Struck under a commission of 6 July 1335, see Challis, as in n. 5, 700.
most encountered in England at the time. Silver pence, halfpence and farthings were re-introduced at the old sterling standards of the 1279 coinage.47

The florin gold coinage was quickly discontinued, mainly because of the very high seigneurage charged,48 and in July 1344 was replaced by a gold coinage based on the noble valued at 6s. 8d., that is to say half a mark, and its fractions. There was some difficulty arriving at the correct gold content for a noble. The original 1344 weight was reduced in 1346 and again in 1351.49 There are recent descriptions of the florin gold and of the early noble issues in Potter50 and in Woodhead's introduction to the Schneider collection.51

The silver coinage of this period, which was slightly reduced in weight to 20.3 grains to the penny in 1344, to 20.15 in 1345 and 20.0 grains in 1346, and generally known as the florin coinage, was first described in detail by Fox.52 An important and enigmatic aspect of this coinage from the Durham mint was explored by Elmore Jones some forty years ago.53 Recent work on the halfpence and farthings has lately been published by P. and B. Withers.54

The period 1351–1412

This long period included the second half of the reign of Edward III (1327–77), the reign of Richard II (1377–99) and much of the reign of Henry IV (1399–1413). The noble was set at 120 grains and the penny at 18 grains, the groat made a reappearance and was, until 1485 and after, a regular element of the English coinage series together with the fractions of the penny.

The gold and silver coinages of Edward III were dealt with very comprehensively and generally successfully by Lawrence in a series of papers in NC in 1926, 1929, 1932 and 1933. These were brought together in a single volume, with additions, and were republished in 1936.55 Subsequently Whitton published five pages of additions and amendments in 1944 to this and to Brooke's paper on Henry V in NC.56 A fresh view was taken of the gold coinage by Potter in the 1960s.57 This paper has some interesting insights but is rather difficult to use. An interesting development at this period was the opening, in 1363, of a mint in Calais to strike coins of English type and English standards. The town had fallen to the English in 1347 and small quantities of coin of French type had been struck there in the name of Edward III shortly after. The wool staple was transferred from Bruges to Calais in the spring of 1363 and the mint was established to convert into English coin the important amounts of bullion received in exchange for wool.58 Other valuable references for this period are Mitchell's catalogue for the sale of the Doubleday collection,59 and the Edward III section of the Schneider collection.60

The coinage of Richard II is essentially a continuation of that of Edward III. The coinage of this reign was dealt with as a whole by Walters in 1904.61 Subsequently, the silver coinage was

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47 For a summary of the indenture see Challis, as in n. 5, 700–1.
48 Probably not because of the weight because a 1343 leopard of 6s. weighed 108 gr which is exactly proportionate to a noble of 6s. 8d. weighing 120 gr, the weight it was reduced to in 1351!
49 See Challis, as in n. 5, 701–3.
52 J. Shirley-Fox, 'The pennies and halfpennies of 1344–51', NC 8 (1928), 16–46.
60 Woodhead, as in n. 51.
analysed by Potter\textsuperscript{62} and Purvey\textsuperscript{63} and Webb Ware, who is studying the whole coinage of this reign, read a paper on the gold to a meeting of the British Numismatic Society in 1992. His work has yet to be published but it was used with his approval by Woodhead in describing the Schneider collection, which is particularly strong in this reign (it incorporates many coins from the specialised collection formed by Mr. H.H.S. Mygind).\textsuperscript{64} Crump and Johnson’s paper on bullion coined had extended up to 1377, and an extension beyond that date and up to 1550 was published by Stokes in 1929.\textsuperscript{65}

The coinage of Henry IV’s reign is generally scarce because the values placed on gold and silver by the English mint had out of line with those on the Continent, meaning that less and less bullion was brought to the mint. The Calais mint closed in 1404 and heavy gold coinage may have petered out at London by 1408.\textsuperscript{66} This led inevitably to a revaluation, effectively achieved by reducing the weights of both gold and silver coins. There is an unsigned and undated indenture attributable to 1409 that suggests that an intermediate reduction (noble 112.5 grains, penny 16.1 grains) may have been intended at that date; however, no coins have been found that correspond with it.\textsuperscript{67} The light coinage was apparently introduced at Easter 1412\textsuperscript{68} and confirmed retrospectively by an indenture dated 1413. This reduced the weight of the noble, previously 120 grains, to 108 grains and the penny, previously 18 grains, to 15 grains.\textsuperscript{69}

Walters again wrote a general review of Henry IV’s coinage, both heavy and light,\textsuperscript{70} and Potter has written on the silver coins.\textsuperscript{71} The best work on the heavy gold coinage is Blunt’s 1944 paper\textsuperscript{72} taken with the subsequent additions in his 1967 paper.\textsuperscript{73}

The period 1412–65

The light coins of Henry IV and the coins of Henry V (1413–22) form a virtually seamless series up to the reopening of the Calais mint and the introduction of the annulet coinage in the last months of Henry V’s reign. Although Walters also wrote on this reign, his work is superseded by that of Brooke, both in \textit{BNJ}\textsuperscript{74} and subsequently revised by him in \textit{English Coins.}\textsuperscript{75}

The very large annulet coinage fell mostly into Henry VI’s first reign (1422–61) and was followed by a sequence of issues identified by the well defined use of identifying marks; rosettes, mascles, pinecones, leaves etc. They were described by Whitton in a very important series of papers in \textit{BNJ.}\textsuperscript{76} The large output that followed the devaluation of 1412 was followed by a slow reduction as the value placed in England on gold and silver fell behind that available from other competitors for these metals on the Continent. The mint at Calais ceased to operate about 1440, no doubt because of the transfer of the Duke of Burgundy’s alliance to France, the renewal of hostilities between England and France, and the reversal of English interests in France.\textsuperscript{77}

By 1461 output was decreasing and in the first years of Edward IV’s first reign (1461–70) had fallen to very small levels, particularly that of gold. The coinages of Edward IV’s first reign,
Henry VI's second reign (1470–71), and Edward IV's second reign (1471–83) were dealt with comprehensively by Blunt and Whitton in their 1948 paper. They dealt with Henry VI's second reign (1470–71), and Edward IV's second reign (1471—83) were dealt with comprehensively by Blunt and Whitton in their 1948 paper. Important recent hoards for this period are the Fishpool hoard,79 which was deposited c.1464 and contained 1,237 coins, all gold, and the Reigate hoard,80 deposited c.1460, and containing 6,466 silver and 125 gold coins.

The period 1465–85

Predictably enough, the events described above led to devaluation set out in an indenture dated 1465, this time by introducing a new denomination, the rose-noble or ryal which was valued at 10s. 6d. and weighed 120 grains (the same as the pre-1411 noble of 6s. 8d.), and, presumably because the need still existed for a coin worth 6s. 8d., introducing the angel weighing 80 grains. In the silver the penny was reduced in weight from 15 grains to 12 grains.

The paper already referred to, by Blunt and Whitton,81 covers this period up to the death of Edward IV. The short period of the reigns of Edward V (1483) and Richard III (1483–5) has received a lot of attention from many distinguished numismatists including, amongst others, Arnold, Blunt, Stewart, Whitton, and Winstanley. The most recent work has been done by Webb Ware,83 and was described by him in a paper to the British Numismatic Society in 1987 which has yet to be published. However, his conclusions are published insofar as they relate to the gold coinage, with his permission, by Woodhead in SCBI 47.84

Sterling imitations

English pennies of the time of Edward I were extensively imitated on the Continent, mainly by countries having trading relationships with England. The reasons for their existence were the high and consistent standards of the English coinage and the hope that those accepting the imitations would accord them the same respect and value. Imitations had first appeared in the English short-cross period (1180–1247) and continued throughout the long-cross period (1247–79). However, sterlings imitating the pence introduced in 1279 appeared quite early in the 1280s, and proliferated much more widely than had been the case with previous imitations. They were, finally, to peter out in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. At the start, many were of good weight and fineness, and frank as to acknowledging the issuing authority. Later they tended to be lighter that their English counterparts and ambiguous as to their origin. Their descriptions are, of course, included in the numerous studies of the large number of national coinages of the states that issued them. They were first described as a series by the French author, Chautard, in his Imitations des Monnaies au Type Esterlin frappées en Europe pendant le XIIIe et le XIVe Siècle. More recently the series has been studied by Mayhew, and his book Sterling Imitations of Edwardian Type contains the latest thinking on the subject. The economic significance of sterlings in the context of international trade has been recently considered by Huffman.

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80 Webb, as in n. 78.
82 T. Woodhead, as in n. 51.
83 For example coins of Luxembourg of John the Blind read EWANES REX thus giving a superficial similarity to sterlings reading Edward.
84 Nancy, 1871.
85 London, 1883.
Sterling imitations usually form a small proportion of most hoards of English pennies deposited between the thirteenth and late fourteenth centuries. There seems to be only one adequately documented hoard exclusively consisting of sterlings.  

**Imitation rose nobles**

Just as English pennies were imitated for their quality and reliability, so the English nobles of Henry VI and the rose nobles of Edward IV were imitated, mainly in the Low Countries. Most of these imitations and particularly those of Edward IV appear to have been made in the later sixteenth century in the Low Countries and so fall into the scope of the next chapter, although a few may be earlier. However, by far the majority are fairly close copies of the fifteenth-century prototype and are thus mentioned here. References are Ives and Thompson. The Schneider collection contained many of these imitations and previous work has been consolidated and updated by Woodhead. The Serooskerke hoard included a number of specimens which were described by Van Gelder.  

**Anglo-Gallic coins**

The so-called Anglo-Gallic coinage falls into two parts, the coinage of Aquitaine (mainly, but including a few other territories such as Poitou, Issoudun in Berry, Ponthieu, and Bergerac) which can be viewed as part of the French feudal series, and the coinage of Henry V and VI that was struck in France when they were de facto rulers of at least part of that country, and is thus regal. The coinage is essentially French in character (though, as an exception to this, sterlings were struck in Aquitaine) and its weights and standards owe more to the fluctuations that took place in France than to the (comparatively) stable situation in England. The Anglo-Gallic series had been studied in the eighteenth century by Ducarel and in the nineteenth by General Ainslie, Hawkins, Poey d’Avant, Caron and others. Also in this period de Sauley explored the documentary sources and made an attempt to correlate the coins with these. The first modern review of the whole series was by Hewlett. This has recently been largely superseded by Elias’s book.  

Recent studies of special importance dealing with particular aspects of the series include those by Beresford-Jones, Capra, Elias and Rechenbach. There are many more and there is a useful and full bibliography in Elias’s book. A small hoard of Edward III and Black Prince gold coins was discovered at Branne in 1876 and was published by Snow. A more significant hoard which contained many salutes of Henry VI deposited c.1452 was found in 1968 at the abbey of La Lucerne d’Outre Mer in the department of Manche. These coins were dispersed in a series of
Vinchen auctions in 1969 and 1970. It is understood that, although the hoard has never been published, some details are held in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Conclusion

Having attempted this review I feel very aware of its inadequacy. To attempt to cover every contribution to the subject would be to produce a new bibliography, which is far from the readable introduction which I was asked to write. Yet there are so many studies of real value which it has not been possible to mention. What I earnestly ask anyone who reads this and wants to progress is to look, not only at the publications I have mentioned, but, particularly, at the references their writers have used and to follow those up, too.