OF late years (to misquote Charlotte Bronte), an abundant shower of hypotheses has fallen upon the west Midlands: they lie very thick at Bidford-on-Avon. The numerous sceattas and early pennies found there have acquired a quite specific commercial explanation. The total number of finds from Bidford and its immediate vicinity currently stands at 55 sceattas (including one Merovingian denier) and 12 pennies (including one Carolingian denier). They were there, so the hypothesis goes, because of the transportation of salt from Droitwich, *en route* to the Thames and eventually by boat as far as London. We shall try to show that that interpretation is unacceptable. What is distressing is that ideas which began, quite properly, as hypotheses should have hardened by dint of mere repetition into certainty, and become, in some minds, unquestioned fact.

Modern Bidford lies some fifteen miles south-east of Droitwich, just to the west of where the Icknield Way crossed the River Avon by means of a ford. And at the centre of modern Bidford a lesser Roman road, Ryknield Street, crossed the Avon. Excavations by Hirst found traces of a crossing on the northern edge of the river immediately to the west of Bidford bridge, where there was a causeway ‘of Roman or later’ date, made of lias slabs and gravel.1 The salt trade from Droitwich to London could, in the eighth and ninth centuries, have made use of these ancient routeways. Whether it in fact did so is not open to proof. The presence of a very large early cemetery attests to the long history of the place, before the arrival of Anglo-Saxon coins.2 But the recovery at Bidford of more than fifty sceattas, plus eleven early pennies (all of which are catalogued in this article), marks it out as one of the most prolific and now one of the best-recorded ‘productive sites’, anywhere in England. Even if there had been many fewer finds, it would be unusual and would attract our attention, because it is so far towards the west. Single finds of sceattas are relatively much more plentiful in the eastern and southern counties of England, and they thin out westwards. In the west Midlands the scatter of finds is extremely thin. There is nowhere else where more than two or three sceattas have been found. Bidford’s isolated monetary importance led Maddicott to ask, in 2005, whether it derived from the salt trade.3 This tentative suggestion has been acclaimed by archaeologists. Indeed, a recent article has as its title, ‘A productive site at Bidford on Avon, Warwickshire: salt, communication and trade in Anglo-Saxon England’.4 The (unspoken) unpackaging of the idea that trade in salt explains the sceattas from Bidford would be that the salt was bought and sold there – rather than at Droitwich itself, where the brine springs lay, but where no sceattas have been found.

Now, one should resist the temptation to grade productive sites in importance simply according to the total number of sceattas that have been found, because so much may depend on modern circumstances, such as detectorists having chanced to find the site, its accessibility, and the intensity or persistence of searching.5 There may, for all we can say to the contrary, be an undiscovered productive site at Droitwich. Nevertheless, Bidford is a major site. From a scientific point of view it has the great merit that virtually all the metal-detecting there has been conducted by one individual (R.J.L.) throughout, since 1987. All the finds have been

---

1 Webster and Cherry 1980, 233 (reporting on work by S. Hirst).
2 Humphries *et al.* 1923; Wise and Seaby 1995; Ford 1996.
3 Maddicott 2005. See also Hooke 1981.
4 Naylor and Richards 2010.
5 The classic case is Fordwich, near Canterbury. Two fields, one on either side of the village, yielded coins. After a few years they ceased to be accessible, because of set-aside and tree-planting. Had it been otherwise, Fordwich would probably have produced a large range of sceattas.

faithfully reported. We can therefore confidently treat them as a random sample of what was accidentally lost. It is the proportions of the different types, rather than the total, which constitutes the more secure evidence – although a large sample is of course helpful in lessening the quirks of statistical variation.

Della Hooke set the charter evidence for the Droitwich salt industry in context, and Maddicott in his recent paper in *Anglo-Saxon England* has given us a wide-ranging survey of Droitwich’s salt production and trade specifically in the period of the sceattas, demonstrating from charter evidence the participation of the kings of Mercia in the industry. Of particular interest is a charter of 716 × 717 by which King Æthelbald acquired from the church of Worcester six furnaces, etc. at Upwich in exchange for others at Lootwic and Coolbeorg on the other side of the River Salwarpe. It was a highly lucrative and large-scale industry, for salt was an essential commodity for preserving butter and cheese, fish, and meat. The annual production of salt at Droitwich has been conservatively estimated at about 1,300 tons. The rewards were shared by various monasteries, which were granted part of the productive capacity. Eleven monasteries are known to have been founded in Worcestershire by c. 720, and at least twenty-nine by 800. The salt was distributed to many destinations. From Droitwich a network of salt-ways radiated to all points of the compass, not just towards the south-east and eventually London. These saltways of the early middle ages have been mapped by Hooke.

Maddicott offered sceatta finds as part of the evidence suggestive of trade between Droitwich and London. ‘The pattern of coin finds from the south-west Midlands’, he wrote, ‘is suggestive of a London connection. Of the eighth-century coins discovered in the region, one type predominates: the Series L sceattas in the so-called “Hwiccian” style... One place in particular [Bidford] stands out for its possible commercial significance’. ‘Predominates’ is perhaps misleading as it stands. He is able to cite five widely-scattered single finds of the ‘Hwiccian’ coins from Chedworth, Shakenoak, Badsey, Sedgeberrow, and Alvechurch. One of us (D.M.M.) suggested in 1976 that coins in this style were actually minted in Hwiccia, mentioning also a find from Portishead on the Bristol Channel coast. Since then, however, two if not three specimens have been published from a productive site near Royston, another find near Cambridge, and two from Ford, near Old Sarum. Among other finds of ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas, three from the middle Thames valley help to confirm the London connection. They are from Eynsham Abbey (Coin Register 1990, 189), Didcot (CR 2008, 154), and Upton (CR 1992, 237) – all in Oxfordshire. A pair of published maps showing their frequency in the currency regionally throughout southern England by regression analysis now need up-dating, but the rest of Series L still looks quite different. It is the contrast that is of key interest. Might the ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas have been carried to London in the course of trade, and dispersed again from there, e.g. to Royston? Their region of minting remains debatable.

The ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas are late in date, somewhere around 740, and it is true that for a few years at that time they predominate in the west Midlands. The finds there may lead us to ask ourselves whether they imply a balance-of-payments transfer of coinage from London to Droitwich – which then stimulated a money economy in the local region? And because of the productive site, are we to suppose that the buying and selling of the salt took place at Bidford? But they make up only about ten per cent of the single finds of sceattas from that wide region (four out of just forty-one finds listed by Naylor), and only eight per cent at Bidford, where two of the four recorded specimens are, in fact, from the near-by habitation site of Marcliffe, a mile to the south, on the other side of the river, not from Bidford itself (see Map 1, p. 35). If Bidford had been the centre of monetary diffusion for thirty or so miles around, should it

---

6 S 102 (trans. Whitelock 1979, no. 64); see the map in Hooke 1981, 130.
8 Maddicott 2005, 45f.
10 Grinsell 1970 (Portishead).
11 Blackburn and Bonser 1986, 74, where the new assessment is fully discussed; Metcalf 1994, 406–9.
12 Metcalf 2003, Maps 3 and 4, at pp. 44 and 46.
13 See below, catalogue nos. 51–4.
not show the higher proportion of the two (eight per cent v. ten per cent)? That was what happened with Series D and E (discussed below).

Moreover, earlier sceatta types believed to have been minted in London (in particular the preceding varieties in Series L) are absent, both at Bidford and in the west Midlands, other than a Type 23e from Temple Guiting, Glos.

Two or three decades earlier than primary-phase sceattas, sceattas of Series D and E minted in the Netherlands are conspicuously plentiful at Bidford (17 out of 30, or 57 per cent), and plentiful also in the west Midlands generally (among the 41 single finds mentioned above, 9 out of 21, or 43 per cent). Does Maddicott’s suggestion that merchants from the Rhine mouths region or from Friesland would come all the way to Bidford to buy salt sound likely?14 Surely they could have bought salt nearer to home, with lower transport costs? Again, a note of caution is needed, to say that the Netherlands coins circulated freely in London and the south-east, and that their arrival at Bidford could, so far as the argument goes, have been in the hands of English merchants. Just because a coin was of foreign origin does not necessarily imply that it had been carried directly from abroad, and spent by a foreigner. If, however, the proportion of the foreign coins at Bidford greatly exceeds the corresponding proportion at London, one is on firmer ground. Regression analysis has been used to map the frequency of primary-phase porcupines regionally throughout England, and similar information is available for Series D.15 In short, the percentage for London is in the low twenties, and for east Kent it is roughly 40 per cent, against 57 per cent at Bidford. As regards London, that looks statistically clear-cut, and we can indeed say that foreign merchants came direct to Bidford, in the primary-phase period, and spent a lot of money there. But was salt what they were buying?

We turn next to a more elaborate and less well-founded hypothesis – Ossa piled on Pelion. Naylor writes, ‘As mentioned above, this site has been convincingly (sic) associated with the trade in Droitwich salt, one of the region’s most important industries, with the atypical coin loss patterns at Bidford interpreted as being related to serious flooding at the brine springs in the eighth century as shown by the excavations at Upwich’.16 The ‘atypical coin loss patterns’, referring to an above average ratio of primary-phase to secondary-phase sceattas, as compared with sites further east, is a factoid. Naylor and Richards have published a histogram with two columns showing the chronological distribution of the Bidford finds, with the first column, 42 per cent, from the years 680–710, and only 10 per cent from 710 to 740.17 Corresponding updated figures, from the catalogue below, would be 46 and 38 per cent, much less of a decline. Further, the suggested dates for the two columns are almost certainly misleading. The early part of the English primary phase (Series A and BI) is unrepresented at Bidford. And Series D, Type 2c, for example, is necessarily later than Series C, which it imitates. Most of the specimens of Series D and E are of later sub-varieties within those series. The date of transition between primary and secondary sceattas has recently been advanced by up to a decade, to c.720, by reference to the Netherlands evidence and the death of King Radbod.18 Moreover, the dates refer to dates of minting, not of loss. In short, it seems doubtful whether more than one or two of the catalogued coins from Bidford were lost before 710.

More puzzling is the proposed connection with flooding at Droitwich. Hurst and Hemingway, the excavators, discuss and illustrate the thick alluvial deposit caused by (annual?) flooding at Upwich.19 As may be imagined, they found very little that was dateable within the alluvium (radiocarbon dates of 442–598 and 542–607), but judged that the beginning and end of the episode could be dated, in so far as the alluvium sealed hearths (radiocarbon date 600–660)

14 Maddicott 2005, 46.
15 Metcalf 2003, map at p. 42, for the primary-phase porcupines. For Series D, see the map, Fig. 7.4, at p. 186 in Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009. Single finds of Series D plus primary E are in the ratio 84:100 in the south east, and 58:100 in the (south-) western Midlands.
16 Naylor 2011, 297.
17 Naylor and Richards 2010, 196.
18 See Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009, Chapter 8.2, ‘Attaching political significance to the “porcupine” design: the date of transition from Series D to E in Friesland’, 279–84.
and, at the other end of the phase, a wooden trackway was later constructed above the allu-
vium (radiocarbon date 686–788). The date brackets are, as usual with radiocarbon, wide. Re-
fracting this information to the primary/secondary phase transition at Bidford is not in any
way decisive, or even helpful.

A further over-interpretation on the part of Naylor is his ‘fact (sic) that this pattern [i.e. the
42%/10% decline] is replicated across the western Midlands, which would suggest that coin
loss in the area did decline in step with flooding at Droitwich’.20 Leaving aside what has just
been said in the preceding paragraph, the underlying idea would seem to be that the salt
industry dominated the monetary affairs of the west Midlands.

At the time of the Domesday Survey and in later centuries there is good documentary evi-
dence to the effect that salt was carried along well-known ‘saltways’, towards the head of
navigation on the Thames, at Lechlade or Bampton.21 It may have been so already in the
eighth century, although that would seem to rest only on conjecture. The sheer weight and
volume of hundreds of tons of salt produced annually made river transport the obvious eco-
nomic choice, where possible.22 One is tempted to remark that this well-evidenced traffi c at the
time of the Domesday Survey has left few if any coin fi nds e.g. of Edward the Confessor or
William I at Bidford.

The exceptionally high proportion of Netherlands sceattas in the primary phase is the sali-
ent fact (and it really is a fact) about the Bidford site. There are a couple of other districts in
England which show a similar phenomenon, and which have been inelegantly described as
‘hot spots’. One of them is at crossings of the upper Thames in the district of Oxford,
Abingdon, and Dorchester. (Note that there is also a cluster of ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas here, men-
tioned above.) Regression analysis shows dramatically that the concentration of Netherlands
sceattas here is in an otherwise almost empty region.23 The other is a productive site near
Sledmere on the Yorkshire Wolds, where the percentage is again just over fi fty.24 What these
three ‘hot spots’ have in common is not salt, but (to anticipate), possibly sheep. Elsewhere in
eastern and southern England the proportions are more moderate, but in aggregate they rep-
resent very substantial monetary transfers from the Netherlands to England, without corre-
sponding counterfl ows of English coins to the Netherlands – a balance-of-payments transfer.
What was its scale? We now have statistical estimates of the numbers of dies employed for
Series D and E, something like 3,750 dies in the primary phase alone, with an expectation that
a hundred dies could produce something like a million coins. But that does not answer the
question, because some of the production of those dies was exported to England, and some
stayed at home. The best procedure is to measure the foreign coins in the English currency pro
rata against English series of sceattas, which were not signifi cantly depleted by export, and for
which a die-corpus is available.25 For the moment, let us just say that many millions of foreign
sceattas were spent in England and that, although Bidford’s share cannot be separated out, it
is likely to have been substantial. Wool was a highly-priced commodity, and the export of
English wool to the Continent is a familiar theme in the economic history of both the early
and later middle ages.

It is time to offer an alternative hypothesis for the Bidford site. Finberg, writing long ago
about Saxon settlement in the Cotswolds, in his Gloucestershire Studies,26 noted that Gloucester
Abbey in the fi rst half of the eighth century was actively engaged in sheep-farming, and had
flocks of sheep on the Cotswold hill-pastures. Mercian bishops and abbesses, he judged, drew
an important part of their revenues from the traffi c in wool. In 743/5 the bishop of Worcester
was freed from payment of toll on two ships at London: this has been taken to imply a com-

---

20 Naylor 2010, 297.
21 Maddicott 2005, 49f.
22 Maddicott 2005.
23 Metcalf 2003, Map 2.
25 Metcalf forthcoming.
26 Finberg 1957, 12–14.
mercial interest.\footnote{27} Again, however, sceatta finds from Gloucester and Worcester and their immediate vicinities are few, and no productive sites have been discovered there. That led us to wonder whether the merchants who came up the Thames valley to buy the wool had to overshoot the mark, so to speak, going beyond the Cotswolds, because the wool belonged to an institution located down in the vale, beyond the Cotswold edge. The abbess of Gloucester’s wool was no doubt delivered to Gloucester by the shepherds, and it would be there, for practical reasons, that the shearing took place. Much the easiest way for a fleece to be carried from the Cotswolds down to Gloucester was on a sheep’s back. We then went on to wonder whether a similar explanation might apply to the Bidford productive site. Could the present-day parish church be on the site of an eighth-century monastery or convent? Because Mercian written sources from the eighth century mostly perished in the course of the Viking assaults, it is not far-fetched to think that that might have been the case. The discovery, again by one of us, of a very high-quality gold manuscript pointer (now in the Warwickshire Museum) at the productive site offers some encouragement.

This alternative hypothesis, of the export of English wool to the Netherlands, already in the first half of the eighth century, makes better sense of the high proportion of sceattas of Series D and E at Bidford, and also at other productive sites, including the Yorkshire Wolds, where merchants might have visited a known annual fair. So far as Bidford is concerned, there is no more possibility of converting hypothesis into fact than there was with the presumed buying and selling of salt. This raises interesting general questions of how students can discern true perspectives of the social and economic history of the early middle ages, from which no overall statistics and very little quantifiable evidence survives, other than coinage. Charter evidence can be satisfyingly detailed, but it is episodic: one cannot be certain that the conditions it describes can safely be generalized. Perhaps one should recognize that the broad historical perspectives are always going to be provisional, based only on probability, and that a hypothesis may hold the field until a better one is offered. But what makes one hypothesis better than another? One should look for coherence within the interpretation of the particular site, and also coherence with the broader picture of the circulation of sceattas in southern England. Bidford in the years c.710–c.850 shows similar characteristics to numerous other productive sites, and it seems that the hey-day of the sceatta currency was an episode driven by foreign trade. Salt does not account for the exceptionally high proportion of primary sceattas of Netherlands origin, apparently imported direct to Bidford. It is these foreign coins which dominate the evidence. That is the fatal weakness of the ‘salt hypothesis’. The link with London, manifested by the ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas, is a postscript. Another part of Naylor’s ideas is when he turns to the incipient monetization of the west Midlands, and remarks that ‘Without salt, coin perhaps became of little use and either no longer reached the region in any quantity or else did not remain as coined silver for long’.\footnote{28} One would wish, however, to look at the evidence of the 41 coins that have been listed in much more detail, before concurring. To say that a sceat is of such or such a type is not enough. Without studying photographs, one cannot know whether the sub-type matches up with what has been found at Bidford, or even whether the coin is imitative.

In any case, the west Midlands is a very extensive region, and the finds from that region as a whole are a secondary aspect of the evidence, which do not at this stage reinforce Naylor’s view of the monetary significance of either Droitwich salt, or of the Bidford productive site. It has been suggested above that there could, for all we can say, have been an undiscovered productive site at or near Droitwich. One could add that there are, however, no single finds clustered in the vicinity of Droitwich, such as might be considered as reflecting a monetary spin-off from the undiscovered centre. From Worcester there is a primary-phase porcupine (\textit{SCBI 17 Midland Museums}, 65) and a specimen of Type J, 37 (Coin Register 1990, 185). But there is absolutely no link between the ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas and Droitwich. As the evidence...
stands, the distribution-pattern of single finds of ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas (see Map 1) is strictly south-of-Avon, with one cluster in the Oxford region, and another in what was once Winchcombeshire. There is an outlying find, again decidedly southerly, at Portishead on the Bristol Channel. Thus, ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas are not scattered throughout the west Midlands: their distribution-pattern is concentrated on the Oxford/upper Thames region – and on Hwiccia. Winchcombe was the early power-base of the Hwiccian rulers.29 The church at Winchcombe was doubtless founded by the Hwiccian royal house, and its reputation as a royal mausoleum persisted beyond the sceatta period.30 The River Avon was the northern frontier of Winchcombeshire at its greatest extent. Bidford was just on the other side of the river, but if there were a political aspect to the distribution, it might give added interest to the finds from nearby Marlcliff.

Also, the picture of trade at a productive site may have been complex: salt and wool are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In particular, the ‘Hwiccian’ sceattas of Series L may reflect some new commercial initiative on the part of Londoners. One could speculate that they had, until the 740s, obtained their salt from East Anglia, for example, and only then turned to another source of supply. Some such hypothesis seems necessary to account for the absence of the earlier types of Series L.

**Bidford: a cluster of sites with differing chronologies**

Bidford is special because the quality of detailed recording of the finds demonstrates that there was a cluster of four or five near-by localities, clearly separated from each other and spread over a distance of a mile or so, with different histories of coin loss.

At Bidford, some of the various localities were in use concurrently, but the evidence is statistically strong that they did not all have the same date-range. When the productive site came to life, in c.710 × 720, there was little enough coinage in use in south Warwickshire. The two main productive sites, which we label A and B, lie north of the river and east of the Icknield Way. They are half a mile or more east of the modern parish church. The evidence is clear that both began to be used commercially at the same date. There is no evidence of habitation at either. Site A, consisting principally of one large field today, continued strongly into the early secondary phase of sceattas, whereas coin losses at Site B, which at its closest point is only a hundred yards or so away, ended right at the beginning of the secondary phase if not sooner. Even allowing for a mismatch between the modern field boundaries and the situation in the eighth century, there can be no reasonable doubt about the significance of the overall contrast.

As the record stands, there is even a contrast between sites A and B as regards the finds from the Netherlands, of Series D and primary E. Site B has 9 : 1, whereas Site A has 1 : 2. That looks clear enough, but we are reluctant to give the contrast any monetary significance in the primary phase, since we have no evidence nor any reason to believe that D and E were carried to England separately from each other. To occur differentially at Bidford, they would have had to be sorted out by users in England, and there is virtually no comparable evidence. The only explanation that comes to mind is that the primary-phase porcupines from Site A, and after all there are just a couple of them, were lost during the secondary phase (see Table 1 below).

Tower Hill Farm lies immediately south of the Stratford Road, close to Site A. Marlcliff, about a mile south of Bidford, lies south of the river and west of the Icknield Way. Finds of sceattas from Marlcliff have been recorded from two adjacent sites, to the east and west respectively of the lane leading to Bickmarsh.31 The finds all lie within a short distance of each other, and could be thought of as originally a single cluster. Nevertheless, it seems that the finds catalogued below as coming from Marlcliff Lane East and Marlcliff Lane West again have a different chronological range from each other. Marlcliff Lane West has yielded sceattas of the

---

29 Bassett 1989.
31 Wise and Seaby 1995, give a grid reference of SP 099 501 for the upper field, south.
mid- and late secondary phase, and even a scarce tertiary porcupine. The other place where a mid-secondary phase sceat has been found is the Grafton Lane site, essentially part of Bidford A (the field where sceatta losses continue later than on Site B). Here, a good number of early pennies were also found, usually in a fragmentary state of preservation. Early pennies, of the period of Offa and a little later, were found, well-scattered over an area of about 500 yards, i.e. definitely single finds. Wise and Seaby spoke in 1990 of four pennies (now in the Warwickshire Museum), as coming from ‘a small area on either side of the Stratford Road’, i.e. close to Bidford A. In their 1995 paper, mentioned above, they gave details of these early pennies plus two others, one in the British Museum and one in private possession, and they insisted that all these were stray losses, not a scattered hoard. The ratio of finds of pennies to sceattas, at 12 to 50, is higher than at most productive sites. Nevertheless Bidford conforms generally with various other productive sites in the east and south of England, where it is usual to see that losses of sceattas come to an end, followed by a gap in the third quarter of

---

32 Grafton Lane runs north from the Stratford road, and then turns to the north-east. Wise and Seaby 1995 gave a grid reference of SP107 258.

33 This was in a typescript which unfortunately did not see the light of day, and which was superseded by their 1995 paper.

34 For a general survey of some thirty-four productive sites, see Blackburn 2003.
the eighth century, followed by a resumption of monetary activity in the fourth quarter, under Offa, or sometimes even later, in the early ninth century. To that extent, Bidford conforms with and forms part of a widespread pattern of trading activity with international ramifications. Overall, the losses of sceattas at Bidford dwindle rather earlier than at most sites, i.e. at about the end of the primary phase. There is then a renewed spike of activity late in the secondary phase, reflected by sceattas of Series L. They help us to see that the much more numerous earlier losses are also a compact episode, flourishing for perhaps not much more than ten or fifteen years. The gap between losses of sceattas and early pennies is perhaps longer than average. But the resumption is perfectly well attested.

The coins of Series L at Bidford are late in date in the secondary phase, and are in the so-called ‘Hwiccian’ style. Although they are only a few, they are of wider interest as adding to the find-evidence from within or close to the sub-kingdom of the Hwicce. They again point to the importance of the trade-route of the Thames valley, in the late secondary phase. It was originally suggested that coins in this style were Hwiccian in origin, but the discovery of specimens in the Hampshire basin and elsewhere cast doubt on the idea. It now seems on the whole more likely that they were minted at London: at a time when southern England was sinking into a deep monetary recession, the dwindling supplies of silver are more likely to have been available in London than in the Cotswold region.

There are also just a few recorded finds of sceattas from Alcester (the Roman Alauna), Kinwarton (about three miles north from Bidford), and Oversley (about a mile from Kinwarton), where the use of money may have been partly a spin-off from the main focus of activity, but perhaps something separate, as regards Series F. Part of the explanation may be that a few scattered finds pre-date the rise to prominence of the productive site (as seems to have been the case in the Isle of Wight).

It may help to tabulate the finds from the various fields, in order to bring out the contrasts. Table 1 is based on the catalogue, below.

We hope that our exploration of the topography within the ‘productive site’ will encourage the more detailed recording of finds within productive sites, by other searchers. The authorities in the Isle of Wight, for example, are setting the pace, using GPS technology to record the find-spots of sceattas and early pennies from a productive site to the nearest metre. Who knows what insights will emerge, but an obvious gain is to establish whether or not, after the severe monetary recession of the third quarter of the eighth century, the early pennies came from the self-same site as the sceattas.

When did the productive site rise to importance? The Aston Rowant hoard

At Sledmere, in the Yorkshire Wolds, it was unambiguously foreign money, Series D and E, that initiated the exchange economy, and something similar may be true for Bidford. We suggest c.710 × 720 as the date when this trade began. It seems that the earliest losses of English sceattas from Bidford are probably those of Series C, introduced in the south-east when Series A came to an end. Series B, which is generally so plentiful in England, is virtually absent from Bidford. Series C characterizes the initial monetary starting-point or horizon, when sceattas began to accumulate in Warwickshire in any quantity. Series D, Type 2c imitates the obverse of the English Series C, and is necessarily later than the beginning of that series. The Bidford finds will run later still, because the sub-varieties of Type 2c have been classified into a chronological sequence, of which the full range is represented.

We can perhaps catch a glimpse of what that money on its way up the Thames valley towards the Cotswolds looked like, in the Aston Rowant hoard. The hoard, found in Oxfordshire,
was dominated by Series D, and contained a mixture of English and foreign sceattas in very much the same proportions as have been found at Bidford, in so far as one can judge from a sample of 50 – little or no A or BI, some BII, some R1–2, F, a good showing of C, and of primary E, and a preponderance of D. The hoard has traditionally been dated to c.710, but it has recently been argued, starting from the chronology of the deniers of the bishops of Paris, that it may be five or more years later than that. Although this is fanciful, the hoard could even have been a sum of money on its way to Bidford, so close is the match with the currency at the productive site(s). One small but significant difference between the hoard and the site-finds is that the latter include a few contemporary copies, possibly sub-standard, which the owner of the hoard knew enough to reject.

Intermediate in date between the primary-phase sceattas and those of Series L, there are five of Series J and G, of early secondary date. They raise intriguing but difficult questions about the direction from which they reached the Bidford area. Series J and G are not characteristic of the currency of London and the south-east. Could the trading links of Bidford have switched, for a short period, to the north-east of England? In default of a convincing political context, it seems an implausible idea. The whole question of imitation in Series J and G, and the widespread distribution of the types through many English regions, remain problematic and uncertain. We would not wish to offer any firm opinion, except to say that the types are known at Domburg, and that a Netherlands source would make the most economic sense. This is a question for future research. As things stand, all five specimens are from the longer-running site referred to as Bidford A.

Trade reaching Bidford from other directions?

Intermediate in date between the primary-phase sceattas and those of Series L, there are five of Series J and G, of early secondary date. They raise intriguing but difficult questions about the direction from which they reached the Bidford area. Series J and G are not characteristic of the currency of London and the south-east. Could the trading links of Bidford have switched, for a short period, to the north-east of England? In default of a convincing political context, it seems an implausible idea. The whole question of imitation in Series J and G, and the widespread distribution of the types through many English regions, remain problematic and uncertain. We would not wish to offer any firm opinion, except to say that the types are known at Domburg, and that a Netherlands source would make the most economic sense. This is a question for future research. As things stand, all five specimens are from the longer-running site referred to as Bidford A.

The recent find of a second specimen of Series F at Oversley (compare the first at Alcester), hints at the arrival of sceattas into the district in the primary phase from another direction. Could this have been before the productive site was up and running? Against that, the new specimen appears to belong late in Series F – unless our classification of Series F is chronologically back-to-front: varieties c) and d) are heavier, even if their style strikes one as simpler.

Early pennies

There was a lull in the third quarter of the eighth century, during an economic recession which affected most of southern England, and then a resumption of trading, reflected by a number of broad silver pennies of King Offa and his successors, in particular Coenwulf. Coins minted as far away as East Anglia reached Bidford (nos. 62–6 below). Several of the finds are broken fragments. It is not clear whether the damage is secondary, i.e. caused after the coins were lost. Most of them are from the site designated Bidford A. As that site is the source of most of the secondary-phase sceattas, other than a couple of specimens in ‘Hwiccian’ style, it would seem that knowledge (or ownership?) of the site survived the economic downturn.

CATALOGUE

The finds are listed as nearly as possible in their chronological order, in the hope of making their historical implications clearer. Their great merit is that they provide a complete, unselective record of what has been found at Bidford-on-Avon, during a quarter of a century’s searching. R.J.L. showed the early finds to Mr W.A. Seaby, and subsequently showed the majority to D.M.M. one by one, year in and year out, as he found them. Descriptions of the types have been kept to a minimum. The classification of the sceattas of Series D and E follows that worked out in the monographs by W. Op den Velde and D.M. Metcalf, published as Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003 and 2009–10. For other series, see Metcalf 1993–4. For the broad pennies of Offa, see Chick 2010, and for later pennies, Naismith 2011. wnr = weight not recorded. CR = Coin Register. Most of the coins are illustrated (1.5 × actual size) on Pls. 1–2.

1. English primary-phase sceattas

1. Series A.
   1.04 g. October 1998.
   Site: Bidford S. (‘From a new site, ‘Bidford S’, west of Bidford B; see also no. 19 below.)
   Although the style is, at first glance, accomplished, on closer inspection the row of dots representing hair, which should be either a straight line (A1, A2) or L-shaped (A3), is curved. The eye-brow curves around the eye, the two dots for the lips are small, and the chin is globular and large. The rev. die is much as it should be, except that the letters in the standard are large.

2. Series B. Type BII.
   1.18 g. November 2003.
   Site: Bidford A.
   The head is in acceptable style, except that it lacks the usual prominent rounded chin. On the rev., the cross is equal-limbed, and the crosslet is weakly struck. Traces of the characteristic AVAV legend on both sides.

3. Type BII.
   0.93 g. (broken). August 2004.
   Site: Bidford B.
   The coin is struck off-centre. The double row of dots representing the diadem has dots that are small and closely packed (unlike the dots of the circular borders). No central jewel to the diadem. The central part of the legend reads VATAA. The rev. is in good style, reading VAVAV. Early BII?

4. Series C. Type C1.
   Site: Marlcliff Lane, East, i.e. on the eastern side of Bickmarsh Lane, some 25 m from the lane boundary, nevertheless only 50–75 m away from two other sceattas.
   A good, early example. On the obv., the head is round, with a small annulet below the final rune. Possibly the same die as Rigold 1960, Hoard VI, 4 (Southend-on-Sea). The rev. die is likewise very similar. Cf. no. 5 below.

5. Type C1.
   0.80 g. (broken). January 2006.
   Site: Bidford B.
   A die-duplicate of no. 4.
6. Type C2.
Site: Bidford B.

7. Type C2.
Site: Bidford B.

8. A/C imitation.
1.22 g. February 1993.
Site: Bidford A.
On the **obv.**, the hair-line is rounded, the nose is long and straight, and there is a confused group of bold dots including two for the mouth. No proper truncation is visible. On the **rev.**, the letters T, T are aligned diagonally, and there is a squarish pellet in place of the central annulet.
Wise and Seaby 1995, no. 5. CR 1992, 212 (‘in the Stratford Road area, SP 107503’).

0.98 g. May 1996.
Site: Bidford B.
No letter T visible before the runes, and no sign of the legend ITAT.
See Metcalf 2007, 59, no. 12a (Variety 3).

10. Type 1–2.
Site: Bidford B.
Possibly Variety 11, but the crucial details are not available, because the coin is broken. (Metcalf 2007, –).

1.17 g. March 2003.
Site: Alcester, opposite Bridge End.

12. VERNVS, ?imitation.
Site: Bidford B.

13. R1–2Æthelræd, imitation.
[wnr]. August 2010.
Site: Bidford B.
The **obv.** is a good copy of Type R1, except that the runes are blundered, and the neck is more like that seen on Type R3. The nose in particular copies R1 carefully. The letter A behind the head has a pellet within it, and the left-hand limb is a dotted line. The **rev.** is so convincing that one has to ask oneself whether this coin could be an early, experimental product of the Æthelræd workshop. Against that, note that the first rune I, which is tall, has a pellet at the top (marking the 12 o’clock position) and runs straight through as a single line into the opposing half of the inscription. Early secondary phase?

2. Netherlands sceattas of Series D and E

**Series D**
The so-called ‘continental runic’ sceattas, Rigold Series D, were minted in Frisian territory, e.g. at or near Wijnaldum in Friesland. They were exported to England primarily, however, through Domburg. Type 8 is apparently the earlier of the two types. Type 2c, which is much more plentiful, necessarily post-dates the introduction of Series C, whose **obv.** it copies. It seems that Series D came to an end in c.720, following the death of King Radbod, i.e. it is confined to the primary phase. Type 2c is plentiful in the Aston Rowant hoard, right up to the final Sub-variety 4c.
A corpus of Series D has been published as Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003. It includes all but the more recent of the Warwickshire finds.

1.16 g. May 2003.
Site: Bidford B (Grafton Lane).
Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, no. 98.

15. Series D, Type 2c, Sub-variety 1b.
1.17 g. March 1999.
Site: Bidford B (Grafton Lane).
From the same **obv.** die as two specimens from Domburg and one from Bakkum (Noord Holland). That strongly suggests a continental origin, but the coin could nevertheless be imitative, as there are irregularities of style. The alloy appears very coppery, but this may well just be a surface phenomenon. Cf. Metcalf 1993–94, 161. Metcalf and Op den Velde 2003, no. 252.
16. Type 2c, probably Sub-variety 2e.
1.21 g. 1999
Site: Bidford B (Grafton Lane)
Obv. weakly struck, rev. in sharp and high relief. Feet of runes visible. The patterning of the rev. pseudo-inscription is irregular.

17. Type 2c, Sub-variety 2f.
Site: Bidford A (Grafton Lane, sheep pen), SP 1070 5258, 'close to where the pennies were found in April 1991'.
From the same obv. die as a specimen from Biddenham, Bd, and from the same dies as Metcalf 1993–4, no. 166, ex Aston Rowant.

18. Type 2c, Sub-variety 3a.
1.16 g. November 2004.
Site: Bidford B.

19. Type 2c, Sub-variety 3e.
Site: Bidford B ('From a new site, 'Bidford S', west of Bidford B').
From the same obv. die as two specimens from Wijnaldum (Friesland). Rev. with large cross, not pommée.

20. Type 2c, Sub-variety 3 (3a or 3g?).
Site: Bidford B (Grafton Lane).
Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, no. 1109.

21. Type 2c, Sub-variety 4b.
1.10 g. June 1999.
Site: Bidford B (Grafton Lane).
Light chestnut-brown patina gives the appearance of a cuppy alloy. Cf. no. 15 above, also from Grafton Lane.

22. Type 2c, Sub-variety 4.
1.03 g. May 2010.
Site: Bidford B.
The obv. lightly struck, the rev. very deeply struck.
Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, –.

23. Type 2c, copy with curving radiate crown (Sub-variety 2d).
1.04 g. October 1998.
Site: Bidford B ('From the usual, easterly site'.)
Six specimens are known from the same obv. die, of which two are in the Remmerden hoard and one in Aston Rowant. The remaining two specimens are from the Netherlands, where all six will certainly have originated. The group is discussed in Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, 14.

Series E
During the primary phase, ‘porcupine’ sceattas were minted in the Big Rivers region of the lower Rhine and Maas rivers, concurrently with Series D in Friesland. In the secondary phase, porcupines were minted in both north and south. They were exported to England already mingled together, chiefly via Domburg. A corpus of Series E is in press (Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10). With a couple of early exceptions it includes all but the most recent of the Warwickshire finds.

Primary phase

24. VICO, Variety 2.
1.09 g. August 1984.
Site: Alcester, one km east of Alcester church, in a field opposite the Cherry Trees motel, SP 10155735, from where an (earlier) Anglo-Saxon belt-plate was also recovered (Seaby 1986, 47).

1.20 g. June 1994.
Site: Bidford A.
From the same dies as a find from Bledlow, Bk, and from the same obv. die as a find from Barham, Sf.
   1.08 g. May 1990. Not illustrated.
   Site: Bidford, ‘in the same area as the pennies’.
   From the same rev. die as another English find, Gillis, July 2007.

27. Variety G3.
   Site: Kinwarton, SP 100518.

   0.72 g (very worn). May 1987.
   Site: Marlcliff East, immediately to the SW of a Romano-British settlement in the upper field. See Hingley, Pickin and Seaby 1987, 41–2.

   1.15 g. March 1998.
   Site: Bidford A.

30. Variety D.
    Site: Bidford B.
   Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, –.

Secondary phase
   1.01 g. March 2003.
   Site: Alcester, same site as no. 24 above.
   The flan is reduced and ovoid in shape, but there is no sign of clipping.

32. Sub-variety c.
   Site: Bidford A.

33. Sub-variety d.
   0.85 g (chipped). March 1999.
   Site: Bidford, Tower Hill (from where there is another coin catalogued as being of the same sub-variety, although not closely similar in style; see no. 34).
   The coin has suffered some flaking away, but its layered appearance should probably not be interpreted as plating, since the interior seems to be of as good silver as the outer layers.

34. Sub-variety d.
   0.80 g. September 1999.
   Site: Bidford, Tower Hill (as no. 33).
   The obverse imitates, quite carefully, the design of Variety G of the primary porcupines.

35. Sub-variety e.
   0.94 g. November 1995.
   Site: Bidford, Tower Hill, SP 111521.

36. Sub-variety e?
   1.13 g. October 1997.
   Site: Alcester (‘From the same site as [no. 24 above], with no other sceattas from the site in all the intervening years.’).
   Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, –.

37. Sub-variety h.
   1.17 g. 1996/7. (Found by Mr G. Ross.)

38. Sub-variety k.

39. Sub-variety k.
   1.17 g. December 1993.
   Site: Bidford A.
   The obv. is laterally reversed. The rev. is of the ‘mixed grill’ category. (Originally described as an E/D ‘mule’.)
Tertiary phase
40. Variety F (late variant?).
   0.88 g. June 1987.
   Site: Marlcliff West (found on the west side of the lane, nevertheless less than 100 m. from no 28).
   From the same obv. die as Metcalf 1993–4, no. 257, and the same rev. die as Op den Velde and Klaasen
   2004, no. 955.

3. Secondary phase, mainly English types
The coins are grouped, in approximate chronological order, namely sub-primary phase varieties, then Series J and
G, followed by one coin of Series O and one (Danish) sceatta of Series X. Finally, there are four fairly late examples
from Series L.
41–2. R/C2 ‘mules’.
   1.20 g, 1.14 g. August 2004.
   Site: Bidford B
   Matt chestnut brown patina. In August 2004 Mr Laight found two die-duplicate ‘mules’, three weeks
   apart, and only a couple of hundred yards from each other. Even more remarkably, two more specimens
   from the same dies were found, separately, at Kingston Deverill, eighty miles away (CR 2002, 76). A fifth
duplicate, which in a sense validates these four, comes from the Woodham Walter hoard, Essex. The coins
   are discussed, in context, in Metcalf 2007, 67–9. As they have outward-facing runes, the earliest possible
   prototype is Type R3, and the ‘mules’ are therefore certainly from the secondary phase.
43. Type BIV.
   1.12 g. December 2003.
   Site: Oversley (c.1 mile from Alcester). Described at the time of finding as ‘from a field where many Roman
   and medieval coins have been found, but nothing Anglo-Saxon hitherto’. See now the Postscript, below, for
   a Series F from Oversley.
   The obverse of this very scarce type, which lacks a legend, seems to be copied from Series J rather than
   from BI or BII, and the coin is therefore of secondary date. (But the serpent’s jaws, visible on the rev. at 3 and
   9 o’clock (!), hark back to Series B.) The rev. has a small, equal-armed cross centrally, with an annulet below
   as well as to each side. A similar find from Friesland hints at a continental origin. Morel-Fatio 1890, 326
   (Gentilhomme 1938, no. 64) is from the same stable: note the pellets in front of the forehead. On the Bidford
   specimen, traces of the rev. pseudo-inscription are visible. On the obverse, the outer border is interrupted by
44. Series J, Type 37.
   0.97 g. September 1996.
   Site: Bidford A.
   The style of Type 37, as between official coins and copies, is notoriously difficult to judge, but this specimen
   looks of very good quality. See Metcalf 1993–4, p. 351.
45. Series J, Type 72.
   0.85 g. August 1994.
   Site: Bidford A. (It was noted at the time that the find-spot was about 500 yards from a porcupine, G2, found
   at the same site a couple of months previously.)
   The style is similar to that of two specimens in the Brussels cabinet (Metcalf 1993–4, p. 355) and, less
   exactly, to four finds from Domburg (32–5). Presumably of continental origin.
46. Series J, Type 36.
   Site: Bidford A.
   The style corresponds well with that of the York (Fishergate) and Hamwic finds. The coin, which is well
   struck and fresh, would seem to be English (Metcalf 1993–4, 361–2).
47. Series G.
   Site: Bidford A.
   The style seems acceptable, except perhaps for the row of dots in the rev. margin. Flan of irregular
   shape.
48. Series G.
   0.83 g. November 2002.
   Site: Bidford A.
   In good style, with characteristic almond-shaped eye, and rounded drapery. The lips, however, are
   represented by simple pellets.
49. Series O, Type 40.
   1.03 g. June 1989.
   Site: Marlcliff, West of lane.
   Entirely regular in style. Weathered, with some wear.
50. Series X.
0.82 g. November 2003.
Site: Bidford A.
The style of die-cutting is close enough to that of the main series. The crosses to either side of the facing head are incomplete, i.e. the horizontal stroke is omitted. The secret-mark is unrecorded. It consists of an L-shape, without terminal pellet, attached to the back of the monster rather than to its chin. The alloy is not noticeably debased. Possibly imitative?

51. Series L, Type 15.
0.97 g. July 1988.
Site: Marlcliff, West of lane. (Stated at the time to have come from quite close to no. 40, found the year before.)
Worn and obscure, but in ‘Hwiccian’ style. The rev. is apparently similar to BMC, no. 91 and the Badsey find (see Wight 1944 and Metcalf 1976, pl. 12, 9–10), while the obverse, with cross before the face, has rounded or boat-shaped drapery of the bust, and a diamond of four dots at the foot of the cross.
CR 1988, 129.

52. Series L, cf. Type 20/18, in ‘Hwiccian’ style.
0.76 g. April 1991.
Site: Bidford A (Grafton Lane, sheep pen).
Wise and Seaby 1995, no. 8. See the note in CR 1988, no. 188.

53. Series L, Type 15, in ‘Hwiccian’ style.
1.06 g. June 1993.
Site: Found by Mr Les Phillips at SP 109524.
Possible confusion with Wise and Seaby 1995, no. 7?

54. Series L, Type 15, in ‘Hwiccian’ style.
1.01 g. June 1996.
Site: Marlcliff, West (‘the first sceat from the site since 1989’).
Obv. with alternating linear and dotted drapery, in V-shape. Triple diadem-ties.

4. Merovingian denier?

Substantial numbers of Merovingian deniers have been found throughout England. See the list in Metcalf 2009, 30–1.

55. Marseille?
Obv: A-monogram, flanked by R, B.
Rev: Cross-croslets and saltire, with central annulet.
Prou 1892, 1613–14.
Bidford A.
Other English finds from Kent and from Watton, Nf. (both now in Abramson colln) and from Oxborough, Nf. (EMC 1999.0143). This variety, which is related to the English Series W, is illustrated and discussed in Metcalf 2005, 14–15. With four finds on record, one has to ask oneself whether this could be, after all, an English variety, although the identity of style with Prou’s specimens is not in doubt.

5. Early pennies
Eleven early pennies (not illustrated) have been found at Bidford. Most have come from the site about 1 km east from the centre of the village, on either side of the Stratford road. Some of the early finds were published in Wise and Seaby 1995, 64.

Site: Bidford.

57. Offa, moneyer Eōba (Canterbury, heavy coinage).
1.34 g. November 1988.
Found by Mr Les Phillips.
CR 1988, 149. Chick 2010 227a (illus.).

1.13 g. May 1991.
Site: the same general area, east of the village.

59. Archbishop Æthelheard (793–805) with Coenwulf, king of Mercia (796–821).
1.17 g (chipped). October 1988.
Site: ‘east of the village’.
60. Coenwulf, portrait/cross and wedges type, moneyer Sæberht, c.805–c.810.
Site: ‘east of the village’.

61. Baldred, king of Kent (c.823–25), moneyer Diormod.
1.03 g. September 1997.
Site: ‘east of the village’.

62. Eadwald, king of East Anglia (796–c.798), moneyer Eadnoth.
0.34 g (two frags.). April 1986.

63. Eadwald, moneyer Eadnoth.
0.45 g (frag.)

64. Eadwald, Circumscription type, moneyer Eadnoth.
1.28 g, crumpled. April 1991.
Site: ‘east of the village’.

65. Coenwulf, moneyer Wihtæd (East Anglian mint).
Site: Found at the top of B5 quarry in the base of plough soil during excavation on the cemetery site by Miss Sue Hirst.

1.64 g (?)(chipped). April 1994.
Site: Found by Mr G. Ross.

POSTSCRIPT
Since the typescript was submitted, four further finds have been made. They are, briefly:
(1) A Series F from Oversley. Its rev. is clearly of Variety c, while the obverse is in a dotted style, e.g. the nose and eye-socket are dotted rather than linear. This is a rare variant. One would wish to keep open the possibility that the current classification is back-to-front, varieties c and d (which are heavier) being earlier than a and b. If that were so, the Oversley find might perhaps pre-date the productive site.
(3) The central part of a Carolingian ‘temple’ type denier. By good fortune the initial cross on the obverse has survived, and one can see that the ruler’s name begins with L (rather than HL as seen on coins of Louis (Hludovics). Apparently a coin of Lothar. From Bidford.

REFERENCES


Rigold, S.E., 1960. ‘The two primary series of sceattas’, BNJ 30, 6–53.


PLATE 1

LAIGHT AND METCALF: FIFTY SCEATTAS (1)