THE BENE’T STREET, CAMBRIDGE, HOARD OF GOLD AND SILVER COINS OF ELIZABETH I, JAMES I AND CHARLES I

MARTIN ALLEN AND C. STEPHEN BRIGGS

In recent years the digitization of newspaper archives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has made available a major new source of information on finds of coins and other archaeological artefacts in Britain and Ireland. Since 2005 one of the authors (CSB) has put together a large collection of information from this source, including over 1,350 coin hoards found in the British Isles. The collection of this information has enabled the publication of forty-three newsprint accounts of post-Roman Yorkshire hoards, thirty-five of them previously unknown in the numismatic literature. This resource of neglected information also includes the seventeenth-century hoard found in Bene’t Street, Cambridge, in 1825, discussed here. In addition to the newspaper accounts of the discovery and disposal of this hoard, which are transcribed in the Appendix, there is much useful information in the archives of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and a copy of an auction catalogue for the sale of the hoard survives in Cambridge University Library.

The newspaper accounts of the discovery and disposal of the Bene’t Street hoard in 1825–27 consist of four short articles, each of which was reprinted by at least one newspaper other than its original source (as was common practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and an advertisement for the auction of the hoard. The earliest account of the discovery, which seems to have first appeared in The Derby Mercury on 8 June 1825, stated that about 200 gold coins and 3,000–4,000 silver coins had been found in two pots under the foundation of a house in Cambridge. On 10 June The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal added the information that the house was in Bene’t Street, next to the Eagle (which is now one of the most well-known public houses in Cambridge). A much longer article first published in The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal on 11 February 1826 is considerably more informative about the discovery, and it provides an account of the subsequent Coroner’s inquest. We learn that the hoard was found by William Smith and Stephen Woodcock in the cellar of the house, during its demolition, on 3 June 1825. A ‘considerable scramble took place among the workmen’, but Mr J. Howell, the building contractor for Corpus Christi College (who owned the house and the Eagle next door) managed to secure 195 gold coins and 3,510 silver coins. These were divided between Mr Balls, on behalf of Mr Howell, and the Bursar of the College, and all of the coins were eventually deposited in Mortlocks Bank in Cambridge. At the inquest the hoard was claimed by the Corporation of Cambridge and by the Treasury on behalf of the Crown, and it was redeposited in Mortlocks Bank pending a decision by the Court of King’s Bench. An article published in The Ipswich Journal and The Northampton Chronicle on 24 November 1827 reveals that the Crown eventually secured possession of the hoard, but

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank Dr Elisabeth Leedham Green for her very generous provision of material from the archives of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Dr Lucilla Burn for bringing the auction catalogue of the Bene’t Street hoard to the attention of Martin Allen, and Dr Gary Oddie for information on John Chaplyn (see n.23). Photographs for illustration have been supplied by Dr Leedham Green (Fig. 2) and Andrew Woods (Fig. 1).

1 Briggs 2012.
2 The Bene’t Street hoard is not included in the corpus of English and Welsh hoards of 1625–60 in Besly 1987, 75–115. It is K114 in Besley and Briggs 2013, this volume.
3 Anon. 1827 [in ‘Tracts Relating to Cambridge’, Cambridge University Library, cam.c.500.27.]
4 Briggs 2012, 278.
5 Appendix, no. 1.
6 Appendix, no. 2. The Eagle is perhaps best known for the graffiti of Second World War bomber crews on a bar ceiling, and as the place where Francis Crick and James Watson announced their discovery of the structure of DNA to fellow lunchtime drinkers in 1953.
7 Appendix, no. 3.

that this was relinquished to Corpus Christi College in return for the payment of fees said to amount to £122.8 This article refers to an impending auction of the coins, and an advertisement placed in The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal and The Huntingdon, Bedford and Peterborough Gazette informed readers that the auction would take place in the Large Room in Trinity Street, Cambridge, on 27 November 1827.9

In 1831 John Lamb, who was the Master of Corpus Christi College from 1822 to 1850, published an account of the discovery and disposal of the hoard which deserves to be quoted in full:10

During the building of the College [viz. New Court], a tenement was added on to the west of the Eagle Inn, and the whole new pointed with Ketton-stone. A curious circumstance occurred in digging the foundations of this new part. The workmen found about a foot below the surface of an old cellar, two earthenware jars, containing coins; one between four and five thousand pieces of silver, of all sizes from a farthing to a crown, none of later date than the reign of Charles I: the other about two hundred pieces of gold of the same period. The finding of this treasure occasioned much dispute among the different claimants. The workmen who discovered it, the master mason, the corporation, and the College, each put up a claim, and until the matter could be settled, the prize was sealed up and deposited in the bank. The solicitor of the treasury put an end to all disputes by seizing it for the crown, as "treasure trove". It was finally given, by the Lords of the treasury, to the College, upon their paying the expenses, and making certain allowances to the mason and workmen. The coins were sold by auction in small lots, in November 1827. Not even any probable conjecture could be formed respecting the individual who secreted them in this place.

The building ‘new pointed with Ketton-stone’ referred to by Lamb still exists today, as no. 9 Bene’t Street (see Fig. 1). Lamb provides further useful information in a footnote.11 The College received £192 11s. 2d. from the sale of the hoard, after auction expenses. According to Lamb, it paid £83 16s. 2d. to the Treasury, £20 to the Master mason (Mr Howell), and £5 each to the two labourers who found the hoard (William Smith and Stephen Woodcock), leaving only £78 15s. 0d. for the College. There are some slight discrepancies between these figures and those provided by the College’s records, which show that it agreed to pay expenses of £113 13s. 4d. to the Treasury on 17 October 1827, and that its net profit from the sale of the coins was £78 14s. 2d.12 The £113 13s. 4d. paid to the Treasury (which was reported as £122 in the press) must have included the payments of £20 to Mr Howell and £5 each to the two finders of the hoard.

The auction catalogue of the sale of the coins in Cambridge on 27 November 1827 is unfortunately rather perfunctory in its descriptions of the coins, which are shown in Table 1.13 The descriptions are effectively limited to the reigns represented in the hoard (Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I) and the denominations, with silver below the sixpence simply described as ‘smaller coins’ (in lots 1–47). The press reports of 24 November 1827 say that the silver extended down to halfpennies, but the auction catalogue does not allow us to verify this.14 Nevertheless, there is much that can be learned about the composition of the hoard from the catalogue. Table 2 uses the auction descriptions to summarize the hoard by denomination and period.

The earliest gold coins in the hoard are the two Sword and Sceptre pieces of James I as James VI of Scotland, issued between 1601 and 1604, which are described as ‘Scotch’ pieces in the auction catalogue and as ‘sceptre pieces of King James’ in the press reports of 24 November 1827.15 The Sword and Sceptre piece of £6 Scots was made current for 10s. English in 1603 (raised to 11s. in 1611), and it has been found in six other English and Welsh hoards, from

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8 Appendix, no. 4.
9 Appendix, no. 5.
10 Lamb 1831, 266–7.
11 Lamb 1831, 267 n. ‘m’.
12 Corpus Christi College Cambridge Archives, Chapter Book 6, 1824–53, CCCC: 01/C/6, p. 53; Audit Book, 1823–44, CCCC: 02/B/10, p. 66.
13 Anon. 1827.
14 Appendix, no. 4. Lamb 1831, 267, says that the silver was ‘of all sizes from a farthing to a crown’, but there is no mention of silver crowns in the auction catalogue and the inclusion of silver farthings is unlikely as they were last issued in 1551–53 (Withers and Withers 2004, 37).
15 Appendix, no. 4.
Botley, Horncastle, Long Crendon, Lytham St Annes, Pembroke College (Cambridge) and Tregwynt. The catalogue lists twenty-nine gold coins probably or certainly of James I’s second English coinage (1604–19) and four of his third coinage (1619–25). The fact that 101 (51.8%) of the 195 gold coins in the auction are coins of Charles I (1625–49), and the complete absence


Lots 142–70 included a total of 29 ‘Sceptre’ coins, which were probably unites of James I’s second English coinage (1604–19), but it is possible that they included one or more units his tenth Scottish coinage (1609–25). The Pembroke College hoard included one of these Scottish units with twenty English unites of the second coinage.
of any coins from the Commonwealth (1649–60), clearly suggests that the hoard was deposited during the reign of Charles I, but it is difficult to be more specific without any descriptions of the coins beyond reign and denomination.

During the reign of Charles I Corpus Christi College owned the Eagle (then known as the Eagle and Child) and the two adjoining houses on Bene’t Street, in one of which (no. 9 Bene’t Street) the hoard was buried. The College had been given the Eagle and Child in 1519, and it had owned the two neighbouring properties since at least 1515. A plan of the three properties on Bene’t Street in a lease of 1826 (Fig. 2) shows the street at the bottom, with no. 9 (labelled ‘late Ashby’) on the street frontage to the left, the Eagle (‘late Ventris’ and adjoining buildings) in the centre of the frontage, and no. 5 Bene’t Street (‘late Ives’) to the right. Two leases of the Eagle and Child and the adjoining properties in the time of Charles I, dated 14 March 1637 and 12 April 1641, name the tenant of no. 9 as John Ball, Chandler, but in a lease of 6 November 1662 the tenant is John Chaplyn, chandler. There seem to be no surviving leases between 1641 and 1662 further to clarify the occupation of no. 9 Bene’t Street, but it is probably safe to assume that it was a chandler’s shop. The second of the two chandlers, John Chaplyn, paid a tax on two hearths in St Bene’t’s parish in 1662 and 1664, which probably relates to no. 9 Bene’t Street, and in 1664 he was also one of the four occupiers of another property in the parish, as a tenant of John Gomer. He was the issuer of two farthing tokens, one dated 1667 and the other undated (see Fig. 3). Chaplyn died in 1693 and it is perhaps unlikely that he would have allowed the hoard to remain undisturbed in his cellar until then if he had known of its existence. It is possible, however, that John Ball (the tenant of no. 9 in 1637 and 1641) may have had some connection with the hoard.

The total of number of gold coins in the auction (195) corresponds to that given in the press reports on the inquest, but the total for silver (3,443) is 67 short of the inquest figure (3,510), which may suggest that some of the silver coins were officially or unofficially extracted from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Reign(s)</th>
<th>Denomination(s)</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Lot nos. of issue</th>
<th>No. of coins</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>James VI of Scotland</td>
<td>Sword and Sceptre piece</td>
<td>1601–4</td>
<td>130–1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>(I of England)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>James I</td>
<td>Unite</td>
<td>1604–19</td>
<td>142–70</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Double-crown</td>
<td>1604–19</td>
<td>73–129</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crown</td>
<td>1604–19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Halfcrown</td>
<td>1604–19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Laurel</td>
<td>1619–25</td>
<td>138–41</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Unite</td>
<td>1625–49</td>
<td>132–7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crown</td>
<td>1625–49</td>
<td>67–72</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Halfcrown</td>
<td>1601–49</td>
<td>1–51</td>
<td>157</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth I, James I and</td>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>1559–1649</td>
<td>1–51</td>
<td>604</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles I</td>
<td>Sixpence</td>
<td>1561–1649</td>
<td>1–47</td>
<td>282</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Groat to halfpenny</td>
<td>1559–1649</td>
<td>1–47</td>
<td>2,350</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>1559–1649</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
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<td>3,638</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(195 gold + 3,443 silver)</td>
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18 Corpus Christi College Cambridge Archives, Cambridge, St Bene’t’s (St Benedict’s) parish, CCCC: 09/18/161, 09/18/163 (formerly CCCC: XVIII, 161, 163).
19 Corpus Christi College Cambridge Archives, Cambridge, St Bene’t’s (St Benedict’s) parish, CCCC: 09/18/231.2 (formerly CCCC: XVIII, 231.2).
20 Corpus Christi College Cambridge Archives, Lease Book, 1632–81, CCCC: 09/01/14, ff. 54–54v., 238–9.
21 Evans and Rose 2000, 29–30. The other three occupiers of the property owned by John Gomer were Humphrey Calie, Solomon Pitis and John Lamkin.
23 The register of St Bene’t’s Church, Cambridge, records the burial of John Chaplyn on 17 November 1693 (information from Dr Gary Oddie based upon the unpublished research of David Wratten).
the hoard between inquest and sale. The numbers of coins lost to the record during the initial scramble when the hoard was discovered must remain a matter of speculation. The gold coins in the sale had a face value in the reign of Charles I of £120 15s. 3d., and the silver (not including unspecified denominations less than sixpence) was worth £56 17s. 6d., with a total of £177

24 Appendix, no. 3.
12s. 9d. (+ small silver), which is not far short of the Coroner’s valuation of £200 3s. 5½d. (£130 3s. 0d. gold + £70 0s. 5½d. silver). The College only received about £192 after auction costs, which may indicate that the auction prices were close to the face values and bullion values of the coins.25

APPENDIX: NEWSPAPER SOURCES

1. The Derby Mercury, 8 June 1825; repeated with minor variations in The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 9 June 1825; The Stamford Mercury, 10 June 1825; The Northampton Mercury, 11 June 1825; The Hereford Journal, 15 June 1825; The Coventry Herald, 17 June 1825; The Sussex Advertiser, 20 June 1825; The Worcester Journal, 23 June 1825; and The Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 20 June 1825:

About 200 pieces of gold, and between 3 and 4000 pieces of silver have been discovered in two pots beneath the foundation of a house at Cambridge. They are chiefly of the reign of James I. and are supposed to have been buried during the Parliamentary war.

2. The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 10 June 1825; repeated in The Bury and Norwich Post, 15 June 1825:

As the workmen were lately digging for the foundation of a dwelling-house in Bene't Street, adjoining the Eagle, they discovered an earthen vessel, containing a considerable quantity of silver coins, principally of the reigns of James I and Charles I; and soon afterwards a great number of gold coins were found near the same spot. It is conjectured they were buried during the time of Oliver Cromwell.

3. The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 10 February 1826; repeated in The Morning Chronicle, 11 February 1826; The Sussex Advertiser, 13 February 1826; The Morning Post, 15 February 1826; The Bury and Norwich Post, 15 February 1826; The Stamford Mercury, 17 February 1826; The Oxford Journal, 18 February 1826; and The Hereford Journal, 22 February 1826:

An inquiry of a rather novel nature was held on Saturday last [10 February 1826], at the Eagle Inn, Cambridge, before Mr. Chevell, one of the Coroners for this town, not upon a mutilated or mangled body, which in general form the disagreeable duties of Coroners’ Inquests, but on view of a large quantity of gold and silver coins of the ancient Kings of this realm, the sight of which was much more pleasant to the respectable Jury summoned on this occasion, than the exhibition of a corpse of a fellow-creature. In the month of June last, as some workmen were employed in pulling down a house adjoining the Eagle Inn, they discovered, in digging up the bottom of the cellar, a quantity of silver coins, and after a further search of two hours, a jug containing a quantity of gold coins was also found. Considerable scramble took place among the workmen, but Mr. Howell, the contractor of the building for Corpus Christi College, interfered, and succeeded in securing it. A question now arose to whom this treasure belonged. The Bursar of the College took possession of part of it, and Mr. Balls, for Mr. Howell, another part; and eventually the whole was deposited in the names of the Bursar and Mr. Balls, in the bank of Messrs. Mortlocks, till it could be decided to whom it of right belonged. The Lords of the Treasury, a few days ago, applied to the Coroner to hold an Inquest; and after going through all the evidence, the Jury, without hesitation, found their verdict upon the points directed to their consideration by the Coroner, who desired them to leave out of their minds any question of right as to whom the treasure belonged, as that would be for the decision of a Jury in a superior Court, “That on the 3d of June last, 195 pieces of gold coin, of the value of 130l. 3s., and 3,510 pieces of silver coin, of the value of 70l. 5½d. were found by William Smith and Stephen Woodcock, labourers in the employment of J. Howell, bricklayer, hidden in the ground under the site of an ancient house or building situate in Benett-st. in the said town, which were of ancient time hidden as aforesaid, & the owners thereof cannot be known.” – As soon as the verdict was returned, the Coroner, by virtue of his office, seized the treasure in the name of his Majesty. Mr. White, the Town Clerk, attended and served a

25 Lamb 1831, 267 n. ‘m’, states that the College received £192 11s. 2d., but the College accounts (see n.11) imply a total of £192 7s. 6d. (a net profit of £78 14s. 2d. + £113 13s. 4d. paid to the Treasury).

26 A much abbreviated version of this account appeared in The Hampshire Chronicle, 20 February 1826.
notice upon the Coroner, on behalf of the Corporation, who claimed it as grantees of the Crown, and the Solicitor to the Treasury also made a demand of it, but the Coroner refused to part with it till it is ascertained who is legally entitled to it, and the same was accordingly re-deposited in Messrs. Mortlocks' bank, to await this decision. – The Coroner has been served with a writ of certiorari by the Lords of the Treasury, to return his inquisition to the Court of King's Bench.

4. The London Standard, 21 November 1827; The Morning Chronicle, 22 November 1827; The Ipswich Journal, 24 November 1827; The Norfolk Chronicle, 24 November 1827; The Northampton Chronicle, 24 November 1827; The Hampshire Chronicle, 26 November 1827; and The Hereford Journal, 28 November 1827:

The gold and silver coins found some time ago when taking down one of the old houses, the property and now part of the site of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, are to be sold in lots, by an auction, during the next week. They were found in two earthen pots, the one full of silver the other full of gold coins, and had evidently been in currency; the first pot contained shillings, sixpences and minor coins, even to silver halfpennies; the other contained gold, whole, half, and quarter sovereigns, and sceptre pieces of King James; the whole consists of more than 500 pieces. It is supposed to have been concealed about the time of Oliver Cromwell. Many claimants arose, upon the discovery of this treasure, among them the Corporation of Cambridge, the Lord of the Manor, the College, and the Crown; upon investigation the right proved to be in the Crown, who gave it up to the College; for this favour 122£. were paid for fees.

5. The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 16 and 23 November 1827; and The Huntingdon, Bedford and Peterborough Gazette, 17 and 24 November 1827:

COINS – TREASURE TROVE, CAMBRIDGE

To be SOLD by AUCTION, By ELLIOT SMITH,
At the Large Room in Trinity Street, on TUESDAY the 27th of November, 1827, exactly at One;
The whole of the rare, valuable, and scarce GOLD and SILVER COINS found on the taking down of an Ancient House in Bene't Street, Cambridge, a short time since. – The Gold Coins are of the Reigns of James I. and Charles I.; and consist of Sceptres, Broads, Units, Double-Crowns, Crowns, and Half-Crowns. The Silver Coins are of the Reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles I.; and consist of Half-Crowns, Shillings, Sixpences, and smaller denomination.

Most of them are in unusual fine preservation.
Catalogues may be had at No. 16, Lower Holborn, London; and of ELLIOT SMITH, Cambridge.

REFERENCES

Anon., 1827. A Catalogue of the whole of the rare, valuable and scarce Gold and Silver coins, found in the taking down of an Ancient House in Benet Street, Cambridge, a short time since; which will be sold by auction, by Elliot Smith, at the Large Room in Trinity Street, on Tuesday the 27th of November, 1827, Exactly at One (Cambridge).
Lamb, J., 1831. Masters' History of the College of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin Mary in the University of Cambridge, with additional matter and a continuation to the present time by John Lamb, D.D., Master of the College. (London).
Searle, W.G., 1871. The Coins, Tokens and Medals of the Town, County and University of Cambridge (Cambridge).