

ANOTHER ROUND SHORT CROSS HALFPENNY

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IN the autumn of 1990 Mr. Smith found a round Short Cross halfpenny of Henry III (class VII, 0.56g), while prospecting with a metal detector on the Westbury Farm Road works, Milton Keynes. By agreement with the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, the coin was reported to the Buckinghamshire County Sites and Monuments Record (ref. MK644/31), and subsequently acquired by the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The coin is the second of its type to be published, the other having been reported by Peter Seaby¹ and acquired by the British Museum. Both coins are of the London mint, but the BM piece is by the moneyer Terri, while the Ashmolean coin is by Elis, reading: $\cup \in$ LISONLVNDE without stops (pl. 25).

As with the Terri halfpenny the crescent mintmark is clear enough, but the possible star or pellet above the crescent remains unclear. A newly discovered farthing, also by Terri, now in the BM (0.289g) definitely has crescent and pellet. The Oxford coin has four piercings around the edge, suggesting that it may have been sewn to a garment for decoration, and its weight is correspondingly lower. The obverse dies of the two halfpennies differ.

The documentary evidence relevant to this issue is quite plentiful. Elias the goldsmith of Worcester was first presented as moneyer by the mayor, sheriffs and citizens of London in 1216, and he is listed with Ilger the Goldsmith, Radulf de Frowic and Abel as sworn moneyers just after All Saints the same year.² Some kind of problem seems to have arisen between them, for in 1221 Ilger, Radulf and Abel refused to accept Elias as one of their number.³ The outcome of the dispute is unknown, though some accommodation must have been reached; Elias was still listed as a moneyer in 1222, and by then Abel had been replaced by Terri the Changer.⁴ It was in this same year, 1222, that a concerted effort was made to introduce round halfpennies and farthings and to end the circulation of cut halves and quarters. The writ to all sheriffs was issued on 21 February 1222 (n.s.) announcing that the King's council had resolved that fifteen days after Easter round halfpennies and farthings would be

current throughout England, and that from that day no other halfpence or farthings would be permitted.⁵ Eight dies for halfpence and farthings were issued to the moneyers at the beginning of Lent, and a further eight dies for pence, eight dies for halfpence, and eight dies for farthings were issued to the moneyers on Maundy Thursday.⁶

The administration required for the introduction of round halfpence was all in place, but the survival of so few halfpence and farthings suggests that relatively few round fractions were actually produced. Although the discovery of more may be anticipated, they will always be extremely rare compared with the pence. All the new fractions were to be struck at London, although in this year three times more silver was struck at Canterbury.⁷ Moreover, unless there was a specific requirement to strike a certain proportion of total output in fractions – and no such requirement is known – the moneyers themselves may be presumed to have favoured the production of pence. Moneyers were remunerated at a fixed rate per pound struck, and the extra work in making 480 halfpence or 960 farthings instead of 240 pence⁸ must have been a strong disincentive to the production of fractions. Indeed later in the middle ages the requirement to strike a fixed proportion of fractions was rarely honoured, even when the fractions attracted a higher rate of mintage.

The documents give no clue as to why round fractions may have been thought desirable. Although this may well have been a period of increasing monetization, and although there must often have been a need for halfpence and farthings at a time when for many a penny was about a full day's wage, these needs had customarily been met by the simple expedient of cutting pence as required. The call for round fractions probably came not so much from an increasing need for small change, but from concern by government about the quality of the circulating medium. Legitimate cutting of pence to produce fractions, perhaps in increasing numbers, must have encouraged illegitimate cutting and clipping for profit.

¹ *SCMB* (Sept 1989), pp. 199–200.

² LTR 2 H III, m.3 (PRO transcript, Round Room 7/47 p. 177) and m.5 (p. 193).

³ LTR 6 H III m.3(2)d, (p. 66).

⁴ LTR 6 H III m.3d (p. 34–5), m.4d (p. 43).

⁵ *Rot. Litt. Claus.* I (1833) p. 576.

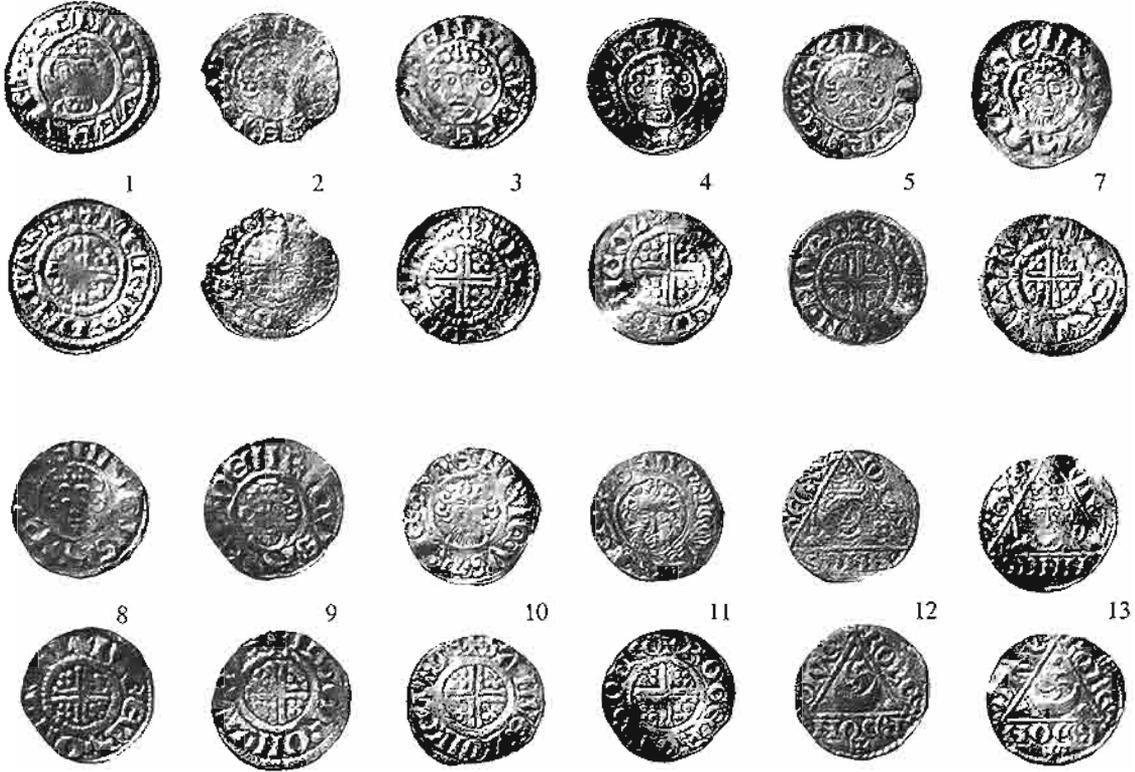
⁶ LTR 6 H III m.3d (pp. 34–5).

⁷ C.E. Blunt and J.D. Brand, 'Mint Output of Henry III', *BNJ* 39 (1970), 61–66, esp. table 2.

⁸ Actually there were probably 242d. struck to the pound weight at this date.



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SEABY: SHELLY HOARD