

## AN ORNAMENTAL NON-PORTRAIT PENNY IN THE NAME OF KING ALFRED

STEWART LYON

IN October 2014 an ornamental coin naming King Alfred, without a portrait, and reported to have been found near Swindon, was notified to the Fitzwilliam Museum's Corpus of Early Medieval Coin Finds by the finder (EMC 2014.0278). Photographic images were supplied (Fig. 1) but no weight, and as its diameter was said to be about 15 mm it was assumed to be a round halfpenny. Most unfortunately it was published as such in the *Coin Register* 2015.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1. Ornamental non-portrait penny of Alfred

Scaled photographic images have now been provided which show that the coin's actual diameter is approximately 21 mm, and the weight has been given as 1.64 g, so it is clearly a penny. The die-axis is 0° as can be seen from the relative positioning of the chipped edge. At the centre of the obverse design is a circled globular cross with a pellet at the centre and in each angle, and the circumscribed inscription is divided into four segments by inverted triangles aligned with the ends of the globular cross.

Each triangle contains a pellet of the same size as those in the angles of the cross. This design has some similarities with the reverses of two types of Offa's coinage (Chick 103 and 237), although the central crosses are quite different.<sup>2</sup>

The divided obverse inscription reads as follows:

ÆL· FR<sup>x</sup> ÆD RE

with no space for the king's title to include an ethnic. As Rory Naismith has observed,<sup>3</sup> the rendering of the second vowel of the king's name as *Æ* is abnormal, the only other example having been noted on the unique specimen of the *Geometric-Quatrefoil* type.<sup>4</sup> The reverse inscription is in two lines:

EEVVLF  
WONETΛ

with *W* ligated and a scattering of pellets in the field, including three trefoils.

When the coin was first reported it was perceived to be a product of the Danelaw, but further consideration suggests otherwise. The moneyer, Ecwulf, had earlier minted for Burgred,<sup>5</sup> and is known for Alfred in the *Two-Line* type: Blackburn classified him as one of its moneyers who used die-cutting styles other than Canterbury, London, Winchester or West Mercian.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen from *SCBI* 26. no. 50 and *BMC* 289–302, the spelling of his name is inconsistent and some of the obverse inscriptions are irregular. He was one of those moneyers who bridged the obverse transition from *Four Segments* to *Three Segments*, and there are resemblances between his versions of the latter and some of those used by the 'Winchester' moneyer Wulfred. The weight of his specimens in *BMC* cannot be faulted: they range from 23.0 to 24.9 grains (1.49–1.61 g). Only *BMC* 297, with an irregularly ordered obverse inscription in four segments, has the moneyer's name fully laid out as *EEVVLF* on the top line of the reverse, followed by *MONE ∴* on the second line, and this probably indicates that the four-segments ornamental penny, if authentic, dates from the same period.

The special obverse die could have been supplied from London or Winchester to a moneyer who had a reverse die made locally, wherever in Wessex or Mercia 'local' was, and it occurs to this writer that he could have been a person of unusual importance. Minting other than in Wessex seems to have dried up before the end of Alfred's reign,<sup>7</sup> and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

<sup>1</sup> *BNJ* 85 (2015), 313, no. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Chick 2010, 107–8, 157.

<sup>3</sup> *Pers. comm.*

<sup>4</sup> Blackburn and Keynes 1998, 129–30 and pl. 7, 1,

<sup>5</sup> MacKay 2015, 227, V5.140.

<sup>6</sup> Blackburn 1998, 110, Table 2.

<sup>7</sup> The earliest coins of Edward the Elder from southern England are by *Three Segments* moneyers of Alfred.

catalogues *s.a.* 896 a list of dignitaries who, it seems, died from some kind of plague in the previous three years. One was Ecgwulf, the king's marshal. In the attestations of a charter issued by Alfred at Epsom in 882, an Ecgwulf, possibly the same person, was ranked second in a list of fourteen *ministri* who witnessed it in addition to the king himself, the archbishop, one other bishop and eight ealdormen.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-five years ago it was noted by Ian Stewart (Lord Stewartby) that *ministri* named Buga and Dudig were among the witnesses to a charter of Edward the Elder dated 901, and the question was raised as to whether they could have been the West Mercian moneyers of those names who minted for Alfred and Edward (and who happen to have shared an early portrait obverse die of Edward).<sup>9</sup> We do not know how far up the ladder a man could or would want to have the responsibilities of a moneyer in order to profit from the minting process, but Ec[g]wulf is a rare name for a moneyer; it is not recorded for Edward the Elder, nor for any ruler other than Burgred and Alfred in the indexed volumes 1–40 of *SCBI*, and it does not feature at all in the late Anglo-Saxon coinage as indexed by Jonsson and van der Meer.<sup>10</sup> Although that is an insufficient reason to identify Alfred's moneyer with his marshal of the same name, the fact that he was given such an intricate obverse design suggests that the possibility cannot be ruled out.

There remains a need to check the coin's composition to establish its authenticity, though it is hard to see who would have had the knowledge of the series to create it with this combination of designs.

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## A FRENCH FIND OF A PAXS PENNY

N.J. MAYHEW

A PAXS penny of William I or II, probably from the Chester mint, moneyer Ælfsi, has been found in excavations at the church of Saint Pierre de Thoan, Calvados, France (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The coin was found in the foundations of the north wall, and appears to have been deliberately deposited at the time of construction of this part of the church. The whole site is of very great

<sup>8</sup> The charter (Sawyer 345) granted land in Somerset to another *minister* named Athelstan. I am very grateful to Professor Keynes for giving me some years ago a copy of his ring-bound *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c.670–1066* (Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Cambridge University, 1998) from which the information about its witnesses has been gleaned.

<sup>9</sup> *CTCE*, 35 n.44.

<sup>10</sup> Jonsson and van der Meer 1990, 123–6.

<sup>1</sup> Delahaye 2015 (online at <<http://vieilleeglisedethaon.free.fr>>). See also Delahaye and Niel 2004, 4–5, for an earlier notice of this coin. For an archaeological discussion of the history of the whole site, see Delahaye 2005 (p. 62 for the coin find). The excavations were directed by François Delahaye (INRAP) in collaboration with Cécile Niel, laboratoire d'anthropologie (CRAHM, CNRS-Université de Caen). The coin was initially identified by Jacqueline Pilet-Lemiere, laboratoire numismatique (CRAHM, CNRS-Université de Caen), though understandably enough the coin was mistakenly attributed to the Leicester mint. (It is worth noting that the currently accepted mint attributions of a number of English mints in this period are sometimes more conventional than objectively demonstrable.)