

TWO GOLD HOARDS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

By W. A. SEABY

IN Ulster, hoards of gold coins are comparatively rare and none has been traced earlier than the seventeenth century.¹ Indeed it can safely be stated that since gold coinage was not struck in, or for, Ireland, except during the period of the Great Rebellion when a limited number of pistoles was issued as money of necessity in Dublin during 1642-3,² payment in this metal was never common until trade had markedly expanded in the larger towns and cities during the Hanoverian period. Shortage of English silver coinage in the reign of George III may well have brought about the general employment here of guineas and half-guineas in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Thus the traditional and evasive 'crock of gold' had perhaps more than a fanciful significance in Irish rural life. Anyone who could save up enough 'against a rainy day' was in a good position to bargain with his neighbour, do business on credit, and take over a lease of land or property, even though his bullion reserve might never actually have changed hands during his lifetime. If things went against him he could always emigrate and start again in a new country.

The two hoards listed below are evidence of just this form of economy; each from its size, spread of dates, and method of deposit, probably represents the savings of one or, at most, two generations. The condition of the gold is such that the coins appear to have been put away singly or a few at a time; some of the earlier pieces being in as good or even better state than those of later dates. It is unlikely that this would have been the case had the hoards been assembled rapidly from coins in general circulation.

I. TULLYNEWBANE, Glenavy, Co. Antrim, 1954

On Easter Monday, 19 April 1954, Mr. George S. McClure was carrying out reconstruction work on an old partly demolished cottage, adjacent to his present residence at Tullynewbane, when he found thirty-two gold coins on the top of a cupboard. This press, which was built into the wall at the foot

¹ Amongst finds of gold coins in Ulster known to the writer are: angel of Henry VII, i.m. pansy (1495-1504), dug up behind the walls of Carrickfergus in 1608, now in Belfast Museum collection, ex Rev. Snowden Cupples and R. Johnson-Smith collections; a gold pistole, Inchiquin money, found near Belfast about 1840, ex Carruthers collection (*Ulster Journ. Archaeol.* i (1853), 164); nine gold coins, almost as perfect as when coined, of Charles II and James II (1679-88), discovered in Sept. 1849 by a workman, employed in the improvement of the Newry Canal, Co. Down, who sold them to a jeweller in Newry for a sovereign each (*Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, iii (pub. 1856), 372); eleven gold coins of Charles I, James II, William III, Anne, George I, and John V of Portugal (1706-50), found at Abbey-side, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, in 1852; a tea-cup filled with French and Spanish gold coins discovered in the thatch of an old house near Newtownards, Co. Down, in 1820 (*U.J.A.* i (1853), 166-7). Other more enigmatic finds are not given here.

² G. Coffey, *Catalogue of the Irish Coins in the Roy. Irish Acad.*, part ii, Anglo-Irish (Dublin, 1895), 91; H. A. Grueber, *Handbook of Coins of Great Britain and Ireland in the B.M.* (1899), 235. Dr. William O'Sullivan with further evidence thinks that these pistoles may have been issued about 1646.

of the stairs, reached to the level of the roof so that the coins may have fallen out of the thatch. The owner of the cottage had lived there from birth to 1951, and it had been in his family's possession since 1870. Previous to this date the house had been owned by Hugh Edgar, who died in 1872 aged 67 years.

The coins were handed to the police on 12 May 1954 and an inquest on the find was held at Crumlin courthouse by the local coroner, Dr. H. Baird, on 25 May. The jury found that the hoard consisted of twenty-eight gold guineas and four half-guineas, that the coins were discovered by Mr. McClure and that the owner was unknown. Thereafter the Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance took possession of the pieces as treasure trove.¹ The coins having been valued by the Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, an ex-gratia payment of £120 was made to McClure: and the hoard was placed on public exhibition at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery in August 1954.

Two other hoards of eighteenth-century English gold pieces which have turned up in Ireland may be cited. One reported by Carruthers, also to the value of thirty guineas of George III, was discovered at Castle Connel, Co. Limerick, in 1848.² A more recent example was that found during digging operations on the farm of Mr. H. Arnold, Beechvale, Crumlin, Co. Antrim, in 1937. Here there were eleven guineas, five dating between 1772 and 1781, and six of 'spade' type 1787 to 1791, which places this deposit close in date to the Tullynewbane hoard.³

The '98 Rebellion might appear to be the most obvious cause for non-recovery of the two Ulster hoards were it not that the breaks in the sequence of the coins are more consistent with the beginning of the French Revolutionary War in 1792 after which date thousands went into military or naval service, never to return to their homes. It is worth noting that three of the Tullynewbane coins were bent: one spade guinea of 1794 and two half-guineas of 1788 and 1789. These had almost certainly been used as love tokens, a practice much in vogue in the eighteenth century.

GOLD

BRITAIN

George III (1760–1820). Guineas

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|------|---|----|
| 1–3 | Third head by Richard Yeo. Ornate shield of royal arms, crowned, 1766, v.f. (1); as last, 1772, f. (1); 1773, f. but scratched on obverse (1) | 3 |
| 4–18 | Fourth head by Thomas Pingo. <i>Rev.</i> as no. 1. 1775, e.f. (2); v.f. (3); f. (1); 1777, v.f. to f. (1); 1781, f. to v.f. (1); fault in die of 1, f. (1); 1782, almost v.f. (1); f. (1); 1785, v.f. (2); v.f. to f. (1); 1786, e.f. (1) | 15 |

¹ Reported in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 May 1954; details of the inquest in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 May 1954. Mr. McClure, through his solicitor, contested the Crown's claim to the coins but he did not take the matter to Court.

² *Ulster Journ. Archaeol.* i (1853), 165.

³ Recorded in the files of the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance, Law Courts, Belfast, where four of the guineas are now housed. The other coins were returned to the owner, Mr. H. Arnold, who was paid £8 for the guineas retained by the Ministry. Dr. T. S. Agnew informs me of another hoard of 'spade guineas' said to have been found in an outhouse at Harrybrook, Tandagree, Co. Armagh, possibly about the beginning of the present century, but I have been unable to discover anything about it.