

THE COINAGE OF KING ALDFRITH OF NORTHUMBRIA (685–704) AND SOME CONTEMPORARY IMITATIONS

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THE rare coins attributed to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685–704) are generally considered to be the earliest sceattas which proclaim that they are royal coins. One side is given up to the name, +*Aldfridus*. This is conventionally described as the obverse, although it is likely that it was the upper die. Aldfrith's coins have been offered as an argument that the primary-phase sceattas in the south-east of England were also royal, even though they do not name a ruler. If Northumbria had a royal coinage at the end of the seventh century, on the very fringes of the area within which coinage was in use, it is implausible (so this argument goes) that the king of Kent, for example, would have been less active than Aldfrith in seeking to control and benefit from the coinage of his kingdom.¹ Although the legend, *Aldfridus*, does not add the word *rex*, it has never been doubted that this is the name of a king. Perhaps the question should be critically re-examined, given the parallel case of the runic porcupines reading *Æthilræd*, which were once confidently attributed to the contemporary ruler King Æthelred of Mercia (674–704). The concentration of finds of the *Æthilræd* coins in Kent, and their virtual absence in Mercian or Middle Anglian territory, argues against the attribution. The coins of Aldfrith, on the other hand, have been found north of the Humber, where they make up a much higher proportion of the primary phase coins than they do in other regions. Their dumpy fabric and good-quality silver alloy point to a primary date; and their absence from the Aston Rowant hoard of c.710 can perhaps be explained in terms of remoteness plus rarity. The issue is quite uniform and compact in its type and legend (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Sceattas of Aldfrith from Yorkshire (North Riding) and Farningham, cat. nos 19 and 13 respectively. Twice actual size.

The letter *Æ* is always chevron-barred and is capped by an exaggeratedly long serif; the *2* is always reversed; the *U* is generally square, with a foot, right; the *L* and the *F* sometimes hint at a familiarity with runes. The central boss is sometimes replaced (or supplemented) by a pellet; and the inner border is usually dotted, but sometimes linear. In general the details of the design are very closely adhered to. That might incline one to suppose that the issue was relatively short-lived. The horse-like creature with triple forked tail sometimes has a mane, but small variations in its style seem to have no intentional significance. The inspiration for the types was perhaps a Merovingian coin which had reached Northumbria, but of course there could have been a non-numismatic source for the iconography. The creature is reminiscent of the image of the devil, which appears on the deniers of Jublains (*Diablenas*), where it is a canting device.² It is very

¹ Metcalf 1994a, 13.

² Belfort 1892–5, nos 1736–7.

difficult to imagine, however, that the same meaning was intended in Northumbria. The number of years during which the type was minted is unknown. It would have been technically possible for the whole issue to have been produced within at most four or five years, and that period could in theory have been almost anywhere in Aldfrith's reign, which lasted just short of twenty years. (A relatively late date appears more likely.) On the other hand minting could have been low-volume and spread over a longer period.

In any case the coinage of Aldfrith stands in isolation chronologically. His predecessor (and half-brother) King Ecgrith (670–85) apparently issued the famous York pale gold thrymsas, on which Elizabeth Pirie has actually read the king's name in runes.³ Their alloy suggests that they would have to belong near the beginning of Ecgrith's reign. (Two coins given to Ecgrith in *BMC* are modern forgeries, to which the spurious provenance of a grave-find at Heworth, Co. Durham, was attached, perhaps as a hoax to deceive the incumbent of the parish, who took an interest in such matters.⁴) And it may be that after Aldfrith's reign there was a gap, when no sceattas were minted north of the Humber until c.740 – unless, of course, the main part of Series J belongs to York, as the writer has long maintained, without winning much concurrence. Eventually King Eadberht (737–58) minted sceattas with the royal name on one side and a mythical horse-like animal on the other, no doubt deliberately reminiscent of Aldfrith's coinage.

Bede passes a favourable judgement on Aldfrith, who restored the fortunes of the kingdom of Northumbria after the disastrous defeat and death of King Ecgrith at Nechtanesmere (near Forfar): 'Aldfrith succeeded Ecgrith in the throne, being a man most learned in scripture, said to be brother to the other, and son to King Oswy; he nobly retrieved the ruined state of the kingdom, though within narrower bounds.'⁵ This refers to Aldfrith's parentage and to his having originally trained as a monk. If the kingdom was in a ruined state in 685, the issuing of sceattas is perhaps unlikely to have begun very soon. Stenton follows Bede's assessment, remarking that 'the learning and scholarship of the Northumbrian monasteries in the age of Bede were made possible by the king's work in the critical years following the defeat at Nechtanesmere'.⁶ In effect we know virtually nothing personal about the events or developments of the reign. All we can say is that Aldfrith was soon embroiled in various disputes with Bishop Wilfrid, concerning endowments and the status of Ripon. But this tells us more about the difficult personality of the bishop than it does about the king. Wilfrid soon had to remove himself to Mercia.

Thus the new coinage of sceattas appears as a false dawn. Certainly Aldfrith's four successors – Osred, Cenred, Osric and Ceolwulf – did not mint sceattas bearing the royal name and the mythical animal. Elizabeth Pirie dismisses the four of them as politically inept.⁷

Her remark carries implications about political versus commercial reasons for minting, or (it would be better to say) the balance between the two. The king's personal interest and involvement in the project may be presumed, as he was literate, and given the novelty of the coins' design. And if two specimens were recovered in the excavations of Whitby Abbey, where his royal sister Ælfflæd was abbess (in succession to Hilda), we may well hesitate over the question whether the money was a royal gift,⁸ or whether it just happened to find its way to Whitby in the course of trade.⁹ To set up a royal mint in Deira is one thing; the extent to which it was thereafter patronised by the merchant community is another. How far the minting of silver was encouraged by the political stability of the kingdom, and how far it was in response to much wider developments and cyclical changes in the trade around the North Sea coasts, dominated by the Rhine mouths area, is difficult to assess when the date of issue of the sceattas is vague within a twenty-year period. It may be that the hiatus between the primary and secondary phases was more severe in the Humber estuary than it was in southern England, just because Deira was in some sense 'at the end of the

³ Pirie 1992.

⁴ Grierson and Blackburn 1986, 338.

⁵ Bede, *HE* iv, 26.

⁶ Stenton 1971, 89.

⁷ Pirie 1996, 25.

⁸ But the two specimens are not closely similar to each other.

⁹ The nature and quality of the finds from the excavations has prompted the comment that the abbey's inmates were living in some style: Campbell, John and Wormald 1982, 79.

line'.¹⁰ In order to reach a judgement, we should certainly take into account all the primary-phase sceattas found north of the Humber.

The first recorded coin of Aldfrith was sold in the Cuff sale in 1854. It was acquired by the British Museum, and in due course was included in Keary's catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon series. A second specimen, likewise without geographical provenance, has a long pedigree which takes it back to the C.W. Loscombe sale in 1855 and is now in Birmingham Museum.

By 1984 the tally of known specimens had risen to seven, which James Booth published as a mini-corpus.¹¹ Of these, two (already mentioned) were excavated at Whitby Abbey in the 1920s, and are now in the British Museum.¹² Two were metal detector finds from Redcliff, North Ferriby, on the northern shore of the Humber estuary, in 1979 and 1980 respectively.¹³ The remaining specimen was excavated far to the south, at Hamwic (the modern Southampton) in 1982.¹⁴ Booth recognized one obverse die which was used with three different reverses, and also a reverse die-link. That created the impression, albeit from a statistically very small sample, that Aldfrith's coinage was on a modest scale indeed – consonant with its rarity.

Patrick Finn, offering an Aldfrith for sale in 1998,¹⁵ wrote: 'The last time I offered this coin for sale was in SNC in December 1987 when, as a recent find, it was the eighth known specimen [and only the fourth, he might have added, not in a public collection] the asking price of £2000 reflected that rarity. There have been a few more on the market since, hence the realistic figure I now place on it [£975].' It seems to have escaped Finn's memory that he had offered another, in his *List 3* (1994), for £1,200. Nevertheless, his awareness of what had come onto the market is valuable information.

Meanwhile, a note of uncertainty was introduced into the attribution. It was suggested by Michael Dolley that the issue should be attributed to a King Aldfrith of Lindsey, who is mentioned in the king-list for that kingdom, and who apparently witnessed a charter of King Offa, issued between 772 and 786. This suggestion was taken into account by Stewart Lyon in his fundamental review of the Northumbrian series.¹⁶ The idea should now, however, be firmly rejected. The dumpy fabric, the weights, and more importantly the alloy compositions of the coins were quite strongly against a late eighth-century date. And the discovery of the Hamwic specimen was virtually conclusive: it was excavated in a charcoal layer within a building, dating from c.700–725. There is a dendrochronological date of c.710 from the planks lining a nearby well. Moreover Simon Keynes has expressed the opinion that the name Ealfrid in the witness-list of Offa's charter (S.1183), preserved in a fourteenth-century chartulary, is almost certainly a misreading for Ecgrif (Offa's son).¹⁷ As Peter Sawyer rightly comments: 'It is, therefore, uncertain when Aldfrith was king of Lindsey. The best that can be said is that it was before the genealogy [i.e. the king-list] was compiled.'¹⁸

Since Booth's mini-corpus of 1984, with its five provenanced specimens and two others, a further 13 provenances have come to light, plus several more specimens sold without provenance. With this increased volume of evidence, new geographical patterns are beginning to emerge (Fig. 2). There is a clear concentration in the eastern parts of Yorkshire, and in northern Lindsey, i.e. the southern coastlands of the Humber estuary. There is otherwise little from Lincolnshire or East Anglia, but there are several finds from the London area and one from Woodnesborough, Kent (close to the Wantsum Channel). This skipping over the East Midlands and East Anglia probably implies that the coins found in the south-east had been carried there on long journeys rather than passing from hand to hand gradually. Otherwise the proportions would be higher in Lincolnshire and would decline progressively with distance from the Humber.

¹⁰ Metcalf 1994b, 205–7.

¹¹ Booth 1984, 97.

¹² Excavations in the area immediately to the north of the later abbey church, 1920–8. See Allen 1943; Cramp 1976. The two specimens are illustrated in Booth 1984.

¹³ Pirie 1984. Miss Pirie records the circumstances in which the information passed into responsible hands.

¹⁴ Metcalf 1988, 51f. (no. 125) and pl. 7.

¹⁵ Patrick Finn *List 12* (1998), item no. 55.

¹⁶ Lyon 1955–8.

¹⁷ Sawyer 1998, 49.

¹⁸ Sawyer 1998, 49.

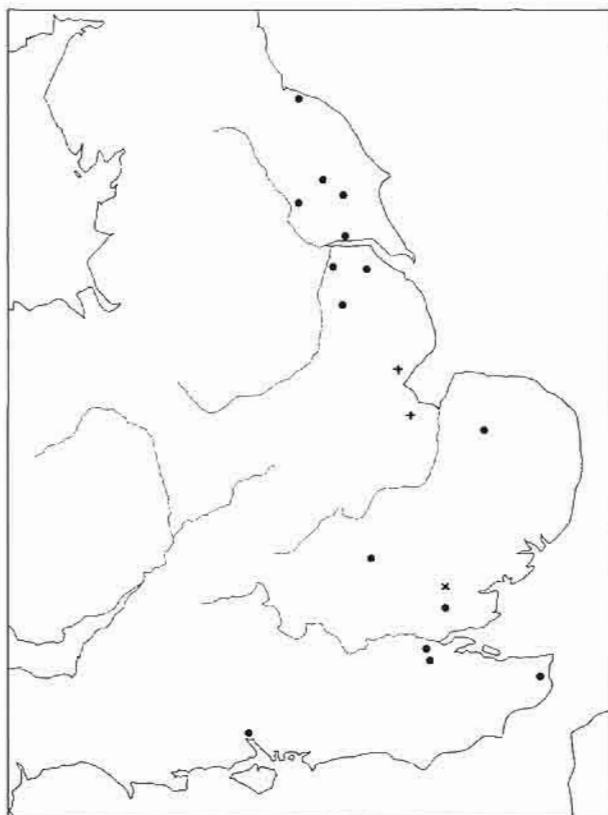


Fig. 2. Map of finds. Dots = coins of Aldfrith. Crosses = Aldfrith/Saroaldo imitations. x = Aldfrith/cross imitation.

Similarly, there are now coins of Eadberht, and plenty of well-attested finds of stycas from East Anglia and from the south-east, e.g. Caister on Sea, and Richborough, whereas before they were almost confined to territory north of the Humber.¹⁹ Stycas turn up quite frequently in the Netherlands, and even the odd coin of Eadberht has been reported from there.²⁰ Thus there is reasonably clear evidence that from the middle of the eighth century at least, Northumbrian coinage was being carried down England's east coast by the Frisian *marchands-navigateurs*, who ventured as far north as York (and probably Whitby).²¹ The map, Fig. 2, can be compared with a published map of the late Anglo-Saxon single finds of coins of the York mint, which illustrates an even wider dispersion south of the Humber.²²

If we group the provenances according to the 11 regions of England that have been used in previous analyses,²³ the percentages of coins of Aldfrith among all primary sceattas²⁴ from the regions are shown on the facing page (p. 151).

The figure which catches the eye in the regional tabulation is the 19 per cent north of the Humber. Not only is this well in excess of any other region (south of the Humber the average is 1.3 per cent), but also it is a large enough fraction of the currency of Yorkshire to suggest that Aldfrith's coins were functioning properly as money in the south-eastern part of his kingdom. The figure of 19 per cent is as useful to the monetary historian as any index one could think of. Because the stray finds of a type may be expected to be in proportion to their share in the regional currency, it bypasses any uncertainty arising from the under-use of Aldfrith's dies. Apart from the

¹⁹ Pirie 1986.

²⁰ Pirie 1986; and data kindly communicated by Dr W. Op den Velde.

²¹ Lebecq 1983.

²² Metcalf 1998, 55.

²³ For example in Metcalf 2004.

²⁴ Totals as in Metcalf 2004, 7.

	<i>All primaries</i>	<i>Aldfrith</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Provenances</i>
North of Humber	42	8	19	N. Ferriby (3), Whitby (2), Dunnington, Malton, North Riding Yorkshire
Lindsey	45	2	4	Brocklesby, (?)Flixborough
Norfolk	104	1	1	Bradenham
Suffolk	112	0	0	
Essex, north	35	0	0	
The South-east	190	4	2	Dartford, Farningham, Woodnesborough, (?)S. Essex
Sussex	11	0	0	
Wessex	41	1	2	Hamwic
Upper Thames	45	0	0	
Middle Anglia	91	1	1	Hitchin
Severn/Trent	77	1	1	South Yorkshire

usual problem of statistical margins of variation, the main hazard lies with the reputation, in years gone by, of some of the local detectorists for mendacity and unhelpfulness. Still, if any more Aldfriths were sold by them without provenance, that could only raise the percentage higher. Michael Bonser was careful to remark, apropos the sceattas from (?)Flixborough, that it was not even certain whether they were found north or south of the Humber.²⁵

The quadrilateral which lies between the Humber and the Vale of Pickering and between a north-south line a couple of miles west of York and the North Sea, i.e. roughly the old East Riding, is the region within the much larger kingdom of Northumbria where finds of sceattas are heavily concentrated and where, no doubt, a monetary economy was developed.²⁶ The discovery of a third specimen of Aldfrith's coinage at North Ferriby, where higher ground runs down to the coast, facilitating access to the quadrilateral, makes one wonder whether that place may not have been performing some or all of the functions of a *wic* – and even whether (as at Hamwic) it was not the location of the mint. There are no recorded finds of coins of Aldfrith from York (although Dunnington is nearby). York was doubtless the mint-place at a slightly later date. One thinks of the analogy of Winchester, which replaced Hamwic as the West Saxon mint-place early in the penny series. North Ferriby seems to be exclusively a primary-phase site for sceattas, whereas York has yielded almost no sceattas earlier than the secondary phase. The question where (within the quadrilateral) Aldfrith's coins were minted can therefore be considered to be open.

One should not over-interpret small numbers, by comparing North Ferriby with its hinterland. The relative quantities of finds are mainly a function of the intensity of searching on different sites. But it may be that monetary exchanges were still to some extent concentrated, in the primary phase, at the meeting-point, on the coast. In the time of Eadberht, the role of North Ferriby may have been taken over by South Newbald, itself not very far inland.

What proportion of Aldfrith's coinage was carried south, across the Humber? Unfortunately the numbers in the tabulation are, again, partly a function of the intensity of searching, and cannot safely be treated as an index of the scale of the regional currencies. One cannot say that, because eight specimens have been found north of the Humber and ten south of the Humber, therefore a good half of Aldfrith's coins were exported southwards. It may be so, more or less, but precision is certainly not possible using that argument.

One could indulge in the academic exercise of saying that if Aldfrith's coins, minted from *x* dies (see below) made up 19 per cent of the primary-phase currency north of the Humber, then 100 per cent was equivalent to the output of roughly 5*x* reverse dies; and that if half the output of the Aldfrith dies left the region, then one should halve the notional average die-output to, say, 5,000.

²⁵ Bonser 1997. Certainly from Flixborough we have a good series of sceatta finds from controlled excavations (with none of Aldfrith); and we know that the site was disgracefully plundered. The main practical problem is that the detectorists' finds, notable (as Mike Bonser remarks) for the exceptional condition of the coins, may very well include a substantial hoard, of which the composition is of course chronologically restricted, and not necessarily typical of Lindsey.

²⁶ Metcalf 2002.

Booth identified five non-singleton dies among six coins: three specimens from obverse die A, and two from reverse die d. The Hamwic find came too late for Booth to study its dies; the present writer, in publishing it, commented that the obverse was probably from die D. Even with such a small sample, this was enough to create the impression that Aldfrith's coinage was struck from only something like 8 obverse and 15 reverse dies. The result was and is, obviously, subject to revision, but the die-estimation, combined with the rarity of the type in 1984, suggested a small-scale issue – which was open to the historical interpretation that it was struck mainly for propaganda or symbolic reasons. Now that we have 26 specimens, more than 20 of which are well enough preserved for their dies to be checked, the picture looks very different. If Booth's specimens had been a random sample, and his die-links correctly observed, one would have expected an equally random sample of 20 specimens to include something like a dozen reverse non-singletons. In fact the new material adds only one clear duplicate. It seems desirable, therefore, to re-examine Booth's die-links. The inscriptional side of Aldfrith's coins (nominally the obverse) is easier to die-check than the animal side. Some idea of the variation in the letter-forms is given in Fig. 3. One prefers to base arguments on the numbers of reverse dies, but if the dies were used in a 1:1 ratio the answers should be much the same. In the reign of Eadberht, the animal was on the lower die (technically the obverse). In so far as one can be definite from half-tone photographs, Booth 2 (Ab) plainly has a different initial cross from his Aa, and the letter S is at a different angle. As regards nos 1 and 3 (Aa and Ac) the dies are certainly very similar, but prolonged examination makes it questionable whether they are the same. On no. 3 the right limb of the A trails outwards. As regards the reverses, Booth 4 and 5, one would be disposed to give the die-link the benefit of the doubt, although no. 5 has thicker legs and some of the angles seem to be slightly different. Heavier or lighter striking can make two die-duplicates look different. If one's perception is that the original total of dies was small, one will be a little bit more inclined in doubtful cases to decide in favour of identity.

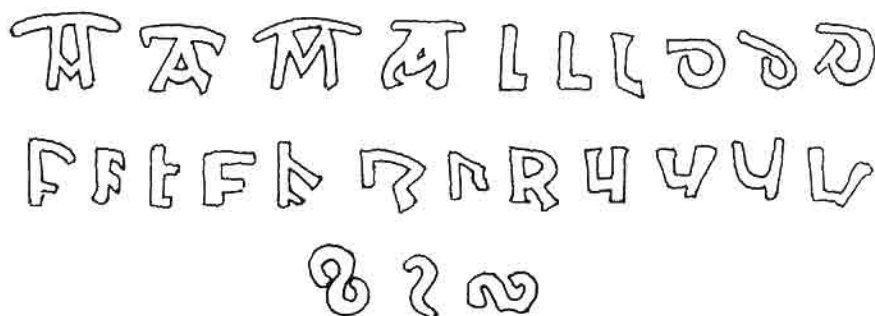


Fig. 3. Characteristic letter-forms on Aldfrith's sceattas.

Numismatists will have an instinctive awareness that a random sample of 20 specimens which yields very few die-duplicates implies that the original total of dies was considerably greater than 20. For the benefit of historians and archaeologists, one may briefly rehearse the framework of the argument. If there were, for example, just four non-singletons (i.e. specimens which are not the only representative of their die) among 20, or one-fifth, then the known dies will likewise represent about one-fifth of all the dies that were used – which takes us into the region of a hundred. Dies were quite high-tech in the late seventh century, and expensive to manufacture. Why make a hundred pairs, all with the same designs, in at most 20 years, unless they were needed? A pair of dies was technically capable of striking, on average, let us say 10,000 coins before it was discarded. If c.100 dies provided 19 per cent of the currency in the east Yorkshire quadrilateral, the total currency will have been roughly the equivalent of the output of c.500 dies. Even if half the output of the Aldfrith dies was exported, we should multiply 500 by 5,000, to reach a total of 2,500,000 sceattas, by the end of the primary phase. Even allowing for margins of statistical error, it is sufficiently clear that a monetary economy in the quadrilateral was amply

supplied with coinage. What happened in Aldfrith's reign was something quite new. Where all the silver came from is (as usual) a matter for speculation. The only possible clue is from those trace elements and minor constituents in the alloy which would survive cupellation in unchanged proportions. Gold is the most useful element from that point of view. The gold traces are high, but no higher (on the basis of only two exact chemical analyses of coins of Aldfrith) than those found in primary-phase sceattas minted in the Netherlands.

The silver content of the alloy as it would have been perceived at the time is best approximated by adding together the measured amounts of silver, gold, and lead. For the Hamwic find the result is 89 per cent, and for *BMC* 3, ex Cuff, it is 94.7 per cent.²⁷ Whether these two specimens are typical of the whole series, as regards their alloy, it is impossible to know. There might have been a deterioration towards the end of the issue. Subjack 99, for example, looks more weathered than good silver should. On the other hand, the alloy may well have been maintained at around 90 per cent throughout or almost throughout the issue.

The weights are, unfortunately, on record for only about half the known specimens. They suggest a standard in the region of 1.20–1.25 g, which is only slightly lower than for the primary sceattas in the south-east. If we group the coins into two groups, one with a rounded boss (with or without a superimposed central pellet) and the other (smaller) group without a boss but with a central pellet, it looks as if the coins of the second group may on average be lighter. This could well be a clue to the internal chronology of the issue, although more weights are needed to make the conclusion secure. Another variation is that the inner border is occasionally linear rather than dotted (Fig. 4). It may be, therefore, that in the late stages of the issue, both the alloy and the average weight of the coins deteriorated somewhat. If there should in the future be an opportunity for more high-quality chemical analyses, the specimens to select would include some from the second group, in order to test the hypothesis of decline. A failure to maintain an original high standard seems to be a characteristic feature of the early secondary phase in southern England.

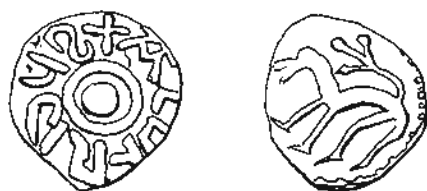


Fig. 4. Specimen with linear inner border. Abramson collection (cat. no. 26).

As regards variation in the artistic style of the coins, the writer is unable to detect any obvious progression. The animal's legs are sometimes sinuous, sometimes stiff as if it were wearing drainpipe trousers, and sometimes Thurberesque. One would definitely judge that more than one die-cutter was at work (cf. the bull-necked animal, Fig. 5), but as to their priority (if they were not concurrent) it would be rash to comment. On a few specimens the animal has a mane, and these tend to be stiff-legged. But there are no easy correlations of style or lettering.

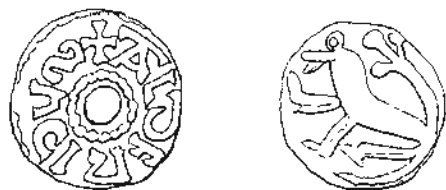


Fig. 5. Specimen with bull-necked animal and sophisticated lettering. From South Essex (cat. no. 12).

²⁷ For the Hamwic coin, see n. 14 above. Ag 86.39%, Au 1.90%, Pb 0.74%, Zn 0.31%, Sn not found. For *BMC* 3, see Archibald and Cowell 1988, 58 and 63: Ag 93.3%, Au 1.3%, Pb 0.1%, Zn 0.3%, Sn 0.2%. Note that the figure of 93.3% published in Cowell 1985, 47 refers to the same analysis (Ag only).

An internal chronology for Aldfrith's coins will remain of merely academic interest unless a hoard of them should turn up; in principle, one might then be able to say something about wastage rates. The age-range of the single finds from north and south of the Humber respectively would seem to be similar, i.e. there is no reason to suspect that dispersion southwards began only at a late date.

To sum up, our monetary understanding of Aldfrith's coinage, resting as it now does on a corpus of specimens which has quadrupled, and which now includes 18 provenances, has shifted since it was last written about in 1993.²⁸ The scale of the issue was significantly greater than had been supposed; and there is now a swathe of provenances from south of the Humber. The involvement of Aldfrith's coinage in a commercial context of east-coast trade reaching the Humber estuary is reasonably clear. The kingdom of Northumbria participated in the wider world of North-Sea trade, and its coinage was closely influenced by the weight- and alloy-standards that obtained in the south-east. Although thrymsas had been minted in the time of Ecgrith, apparently on a very small scale, the new situation developed, essentially, during Aldfrith's reign. Was Bede aware of the politics of monetization, one wonders? Probably not.

The evidence of die-estimation, which now shows that the number of dies originally used was considerable, puts a new complexion on the virtual absence of single finds of Aldfrith's coins from York and its vicinity. What had seemed merely an absence of evidence now begins to look more like negative evidence. There are very few primary-phase sceattas found at York, of whatever series. The hypothesis that Aldfrith's coins were minted on Humberside, probably at North Ferriby, deserves to be put into the debate. Series J, beginning at most ten years after Aldfrith's reign, offers a strong contrast. It is plentiful in and around York, and also more widely. That would seem to reflect a new stage in York's commercial importance. Plentiful stray finds of Series J in the Netherlands, and as far afield as Jutland, indicate a Frisian connection. York's southern *suburbium* of Fishergate seems to have been home to a Frisian colony. Taking into account the lack of a royal name and the completely different iconography and style – and then the reversion to an Aldfrithian style under Eadberht – perhaps one should contemplate the radical idea that Series J was minted by the Frisian merchant community, in the time of the undistinguished kings Osric and Ceolwulf. A lack of accountability might help to make sense of the prevalence of plated specimens on base metal cores in Series J. Some similar heretical thoughts have been emerging from a study of the distribution of stray finds of Series X (the Wodan/monsters) and their insular imitations in England.²⁹

Aldfrith's sceattas were even imitated south of the Humber. The horse-like animal with triple tail appears, laterally reversed, and paired with reverse dies which are almost certainly imitating the 'Saroaldo' type. As regards their date, no chemical analyses are yet available. The Saroaldo series is represented in the Aston Rowant hoard, apparently from its earliest dies, and a date of origin for the series only a year or at most a couple of years before the hoard's deposit has therefore been suggested. That would give a *terminus post quem* for the Aldfrith imitations, which could be very late primary, or even early secondary. (But that does not tell us when the Aldfrith series began.) Two specimens are known to the writer (Fig. 6). One, which was sold by Baldwins, was found at West Walton, Norfolk (very near Wisbech) in August 1990. The pseudo-legend imitates the distinctive letter delta seen on the Saroaldo coins. A second specimen was found near

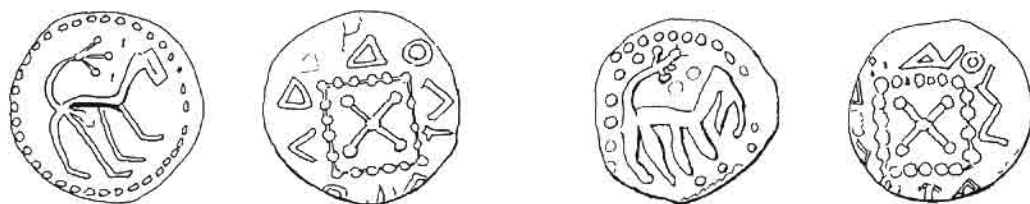


Fig. 6. Imitations from the Fen margins: West Walton and Boston.

²⁸ Metcalf 1994a, 117–19.

²⁹ Metcalf (forthcoming).

Boston, Lincolnshire in 2004. The proximity of these two finds from near the Wash is intriguing. They hint – although two swallows do not make a summer – that their origin might lie in west Norfolk or the Fen edges, where minting briefly reflected the politically fragmented character of Middle Anglia.

A third coin, Fig. 7, with a different reverse design, was found in Essex c.1994. It was apparently, but not absolutely certainly, part of a hoard of 20 or so primary sceattas, of Series B, C, D (2c), D (8Z), D (10) and primary E, found near one of the Roding villages, i.e. three or four miles north-west of Chelmsford.³⁰ The absence of Series A may give some indication of a relatively late date in the primary phase. The fourth coin, unprovenanced, is essentially identical with the third, but certainly from different dies.³¹



Fig. 7. Imitations from the Rodings hoard, and unprovenanced.

LIST OF SPECIMENS

These are described in detail, with a view to ruling out the possibility of die-identity. The writer has pored over the coins repeatedly, but is rather more confident about the obverses than about the reverses. Almost all the specimens in the list have been published with photographic illustration, six by Booth and many of the rest in the *Coin Register* (CR). Line-drawings have been provided above for a few unpublished specimens, traced from enlarged photographs x4, and then reduced to x2. The original seven specimens are followed by provenances in alphabetical order.

1. *North Ferriby*, 1979. 0.73 g (cleaned). Die-axis 3 o'clock. Booth 1984, no. 1. Dies Aa. *Illus.* Booth 1984, pl. 7, 1 and Pirie 1984, pl. 11, 15. *Obv.* Thin initial cross, lop-sided A with lop-sided chevron. L with foot sloping down, squareish Ds. F with short lower bar placed low down, rounded U with right limb shorter, seems to be attached to inner border. S with wider upper loop. Dotted inner border. Boss. *Rev.* Sinuous style. The first foot extends backwards behind the heel. Extremely similar to no. 2, but the angle of the lower fork of the tail seems to differ.

2. *North Ferriby*, 1980. 1.22 g. Die-axis 6 o'clock. Booth 1984, no. 2. Dies Ab. *Illus.* Booth 1984, pl. 7, 2 and Pirie 1984, pl. 11, 16 and A (enlargement). *Obv.* Bold initial cross. A with limbs more nearly vertical. L as on no. 1. Ds more rounded. F and R as on no. 1. Top of U neatly squared off. S appears to have vertical upper serif. Boldly dotted inner border. Central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal with mane. Thin feet at different angles.

3. *Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, accession no. 1993 C 468 (gift of Mr I.D. Finney); ex C.W. Loscombe (1855), lot 1045; E.W. Rashleigh (1909), 126; Lord Grantley (1943), 758; A.E. Bagnall; and Spink Coin Auction no. 1 (1978), lot 68. Booth 1984, no. 3. Dies Ac. *Obv.* Similar to no. 2, but right limb of A trails outwards. Right limb of U splayed outwards. Bold dotted inner border. Field rises towards (indistinct) central pellet. *Rev.* Very similar to no. 1, but longer-bodied animal, with the first leg and the body almost in a straight line. The upper part of the third leg is correspondingly long and straight. The first foot is angled (unlike nos 1 and 2). Cf. no. 25.

4. *BMC Northumbria 3*; ex Cuff (1854). 1.26 g. Booth 1984, no. 4. Dies Bd. *Obv.* Thin initial cross. A with large chevron. Foot of L is very short and turns up. F (upside-down?) with short bar at foot. R with long, curved top. Wide, shallow U. Dotted inner border. oval in shape. Field and pellet as no. 3. *Rev.* Sinuous animal. Fourth leg foreshortened. First foot extends backwards slightly. Beak-like jaws biting pellet? Same die as no. 5? Cf. no. 24.

5. *Whitby Abbey excavations, BM 1*, 1.18 g. Booth 1984, no. 5. Dies Cd. *Obv.* Large A (as no. 4) but angled differently. The first D has a large vertical serif. Rest of legend somewhat indistinct. Large dotted inner border. Rounded boss. *Rev.* Sinuous animal, similar to no. 4. First foot extends backwards. Outer dotted border argues for die-identity, whereas the shape of the space between the second and third legs argues against it. Same die as no. 4?

³⁰ I am indebted to the finder, Mr J. Fay, who informed me by letter, seeking identification, and supplied a photograph, and also to Joe Bispham for his good offices. He talked wisely to the finder, and persuaded him to be forthcoming about the circumstances of his discovery. But the Aldfrith copy was not specifically discussed at that stage.

³¹ I am indebted to the auctioneers, Dix, Noonan and Webb for information. They were unable to send a photograph of the reverse, hence there is only one image in Fig. 7, but they provided a careful sketch of the reverse.

6. *Whitby Abbey* excavations, *BM* 847. 1.07 g. Booth 1984, no. 6. Dies De. *Obv.* Obscure, but the A is distinctively wide-angled. Right-angled L. The arms of the F are angled upwards and are well separated. Central pellet? *Rev.* Distinctively short-limbed animal, rather angular. First foot at sharp angle.
7. *Hamwic* excavations, 1.23 g. Metcalf 1988, no. 125. *Obv.* Wide-angled A, very similar to no. 6. Right-angled L. The arms of the F are also right-angled, and close together. The second D is seriffed. The top of the right limb of the U is lower. Dotted inner border. Well-rounded boss. *Rev.* Sinuous animal. Indistinct.
8. *Brocklesby*, Lincolnshire, near. CR 1988, no. 138. 0.87 g. Very worn. Die-axis 20°. *Obv.* Wide-angled A. Square U with foot. *Rev.* Sinuous animal. Die-checking is very difficult.
9. *Dartford*, Kent. M/d find. July 2003 by Cullen Franklin. Weight not recorded. CR 2003, no. 127. *Obv.* Thin lettering. Wide-angled A. Right-angled L. F with well-spaced limbs of approximately equal length. Wide, flat-topped R. The limbs of the U are joined across the top. Thin dotted inner border. Boss with central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal, with tapering feet, of which the first and second are parallel with each other. Cf. no. 22.
10. *Dunnington*, East Riding Yorkshire (4 miles east of the centre of York). Weight not recorded. CR 2002, no. 142. M/d find, 6 October 2002, information courtesy of Tony Bardsley. *Obv.* Thin lettering. Wide A, bar of L attached part-way, F with small lower bar near the base. Wide, flat-topped R. Flat base of U slopes upwards. Dotted inner border. Field rises towards central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal, similar to no. 9. Upper fork of tail angles inwards. This coin is generally similar to no. 4.
11. *East or West Bradenham*, Norfolk. 1.23 g. 270°. M/d find, 1995, site 30636. CR 1995, no. 112. *Obv.* Narrow A with thin chevron. Right-angled L. Ds with very little tail. Tall, thin F with short lower bar. U with rounded base and unusual left-facing serifs. S with flattened lower loop. Dotted inner border. Well rounded boss. *Rev.* Sinuous, long-bodied animal, similar to no. 3, but lower fork of tail has large pellet. Half a dozen sceatta finds from Bradenham are all of the primary phase.
12. *Essex, south*. Weight not recorded. *Obv.* The chevron of the A is a curve rather than a V. The first D has a horizontal tail. Wide, flat-topped R. Compact second D. The left limb of the U slopes outwards. Recumbent S. Dotted inner border. Flattened boss. *Rev.* The thick, rounded back of the neck is distinctive. The first foot is held in front of the jaws. The third and fourth feet are parallel and more or less above each other. See Fig. 5. A fully-struck specimen, on which the detail of the lettering is exceptionally clear.
13. *Farningham*, Kent, near? Find-spot reported as (?) Darenth valley, found during excavation of pipe-line. Kent County Council, Portable Antiquities Scheme KENT-57F7E0. *Obv.* The initial cross is bolder than usual, but unseriffed. Wide-angled A. Right-angled L. F with long bars. The second D is apparently crossed (*th*). Square-bottomed U. Dotted inner border. Rounded boss and pellet. *Rev.* Animal with mane. Feet are narrow and rectangular. Border of bold, well-spaced pellets. See Fig. 1.
14. (?) *Flixborough*, Lincolnshire. Weight not recorded. No illustration. One of 97 sceattas (plus 15 stycas) listed by M.J. Bonser in 1997, from 'an unknown locality in the north of England': (Bonser 1997, 42 f.). One may now speculate that, had the site been north of the Humber, the proportion of coins of Aldfrith would have been appreciably higher. To be published by Mr Bonser.
15. *Hitchin*, Hertfordshire, c.1988. Information courtesy of Mr M.J. Bonser.
16. *Malton*, East Riding Yorkshire. 1986/1997. From a site near Malton ('Site 1'). A total of 16 sceattas includes 6 'porcupines', unspecified. It is not clear, therefore, how many other primary-phase sceattas there were as well as the one coin of Aldfrith – perhaps only two or three? Listed in Bonser 1997, 42.
17. *North Ferriby*, c.1985. Information courtesy of Mr M.J. Bonser.
18. *Woodnesborough, Kent* (on the outskirts of Sandwich, at the southern loop of the Wantsum Channel). 0.9 g. 180°. M/d find by Mr M. Hacking, October 1995. CR 1996, no. 126. Much of the detail is obscure. *Obv.* F with long arms, of equal length, and at right angles. Flat-topped R. V-shaped U. Linear inner border. Boss. *Rev.* Animal with thick, straight legs?
19. *Yorkshire, North Riding*, November 2003. (The North Riding could mean, for example, the Malton area, within the quadrilateral.) Information courtesy of finder, Mr Ian Postlethwaite. *Obv.* Small initial cross close beside tall, narrow A with long, curved serif above. L with short bar. F appears to have short bar at base. Wide, flat-topped R. Square-bottomed U. Large S. Dotted inner border. Small central boss. *Rev.* Animal with mane. Bold eye. Long upper jaw. 'Drain-pipe' legs, with clomping feet. This coin is generally similar in style to no. 5. See Fig. 1.
20. *Yorkshire, South*. M/d find, by 2003. 1.1 g. CR 2003 (*BNJ* 2004), no. 126. *Obv.* Narrow A with long, straight serif. L with foot sloping down. Distinctive F with bars sloping down, the upper bar not at the top. Small I. Square-bottomed U without foot. Recumbent S. Linear inner border. Rounded boss. *Rev.* Animal with unusually short legs. The first foot is raised in front of the jaws. The second and fourth feet are parallel with each other. This die is similar to no. 6. Abramson collection. Cf. no. 21.
21. *NCirc* 104 (1996), p. 13, item no. 119. 1.15 g. From the same dies as no. 20.

22. *Patrick Finn, List 3* (1994), item no. 29. Weight not recorded. *Obv.* Large, wide-angled A with straight serif above. Curved U. Inner border of well-separated dots. Boss with central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal. First foot at right angles to leg. The dies are similar in style to those of the Dartford find, no. 9.
23. *Patrick Finn, List 12* (1998), item no. 55. 17.6 gr = 1.14 g. This appears to be the same specimen as *NCirc* 95 (1987), item 7064 ('the 8th known specimen'), where, however, the weight is given as 1.33 g (high!). *Obv.* Clumsily seriffed initial cross. Distinctive A with left foot curved inwards. V-shaped U. Dotted inner border. Flattened boss. *Rev.* Animal with stiff legs and club-like feet. The forked tail has an unusually large terminal pellet.
24. *Patrick Finn, List 15* (1999), item no. 54. 17.3 gr = 1.12 g. *Obv.* Wide-angled A. I is right-angled. Wide, square-bottomed U. Dotted inner border. Field rises towards (indistinct) central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal. The die is similar in style to no. 4 (*BMC* 3).
25. *Subjack 99* (Vecchi auction 11, 5 June 1998, lot 99; ex Stacks sale 7.12.1994, lot 2312; said to be ex *NCirc* 1987). *Obv.* Wide-angled A. Right-angled L. F with seriffed lower arm. R with rounded loop. Curved U with long foot. Large dotted inner border. Central pellet. *Rev.* Sinuous animal with long back, small gape. The lower and upper forks of the tail branch off at different points. The die is similar to no. 3 above.
26. *Abramson collection*. *Obv.* Large initial cross. Wide-angled A. Squareish D. Lower bar of F slopes down. Rounded U. Upper loop of S is larger. Linear inner border. Rounded boss. *Rev.* Rather small, thinly-engraved animal, with thin legs and delicate feet. See Fig. 4.

Imitations

1. *West Walton*, Norfolk, August 1990. *Obv.* Animal with triple tail. Laterally reversed. Neat workmanship. *Rev.* Saltire in standard. Pseudo-legend, includes delta, unbarred A and O. See Fig. 6.
2. *Boston*, Lincolnshire, 2004. *Obv.* As no. 1, but the animal is clumsily drawn, particularly the head and jaws. *Rev.* As no. 1. *Abramson collection*. See Fig. 6.
3. *The Rodings hoard*, c.1994. *Obv.* Animal with triple tail, laterally reversed. Group of three pellets below neck. *Rev.* Cross potent, with pellet in each angle. Pseudo-legend, includes delta-like characters. See Fig. 7.
4. *Dix, Noonan, Webb* auction. No provenance. *Obv.* and *rev.* by the same hand as no. 3, but different dies. See Fig. 7.

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