

A NEW PRE-REFORM COIN-TYPE OF EDGAR

RORY NAISMITH

ONE of the chief difficulties in assessing the coinage of England for much of the tenth century is that the corpus of relevant coin-hoards is weighted towards the northern part of the country, and to areas beyond its borders (Ireland and Scotland) which were also dominated by products of northern and western mints. The range of types, moneyers and even mints associated with the southern part of England at this time remains poorly known in comparison. Single-finds uncovered by metal-detector users have begun to redress the balance, however, by bringing to light new and sometimes surprising coins.

The specimen illustrated and described below (Fig. 1) is one of the more significant new tenth-century coins to have recently come to light by this means.



Fig 1. Pre-reform penny of Edgar found at Headley, Surrey

Obv. E[Λ] / DE / [Λ]R / R[EX] distributed in the arms of a voided cross, with an annulet in central compartment and fleurs de lys in outer angles.

Rev. [...]ÐELM[...]O SCEFT around inner circle containing small cross pattée flanked by Λ and W with macrons above.

Weight: 1.00 g (chipped, and gilded on obverse). Die-axis: 180°. Found at Headley, Surrey, in October 2014 (EMC 2014.0296; PAS SUR-8F4A0C).

Gilding is apparent on the obverse, indicating that the coin was adapted to serve an ornamental purpose. No obvious evidence of mounting survives, though this could have been lost along with fragments from both the top and bottom of the coin. Later coin brooches of the eleventh century tended to display the reverse rather than the obverse, possibly based on the attractions of the various cruciform designs utilised at the time.¹ The treatment of this coin could represent a similar interest, here leading to the display of an unusual cruciform obverse design. The inscription on the surviving portion of the coin is sufficient to identify the obverse legend as a dispersed form of EADGAR REX (king north of the Thames 957; king of the English 959–75), while the reverse inscription names the moneyer and mint. The latter is immediately apparent: SCEFT, for Shaftesbury, Dorset, as seen on other coins of the period.² The former is more problematic, as only four letters ([...]ÐELM) of the moneyer's name survive. Until further specimens come to light, the best one can do is note that a moneyer named Æthelmær issued coins in Æthelred II's (978–1016) *First Hand* type at Shaftesbury, probably in the early 980s;³ his name would be compatible with the portion of inscription on the new fragment. It is also worth noting that the preposition which separates the moneyer's name and mint-name has a macron over the second (and sole surviving) letter, while most other dies of the period placed the macron above and between the two letters.

The designs on both faces of the new penny (though remarkable) conform in general with the earlier coinage of Edgar's reign. Similarities with the *Bust Crowned* coinage include the absence of an 'ethnic' determiner (ANG[lorum] or similar) after the royal title, while both the

¹ Leahy 2006, 281.

² Jonsson 1987, 159.

³ BEH 3326.

Bust Crowned and *Circumscription* types used a circumscription legend on the reverse which often included the mint-name. Together, these features point to the coin being from southern England in the period between 959 and the major reorganization of the currency in the early 970s.

The reverse is in some respects less unusual. Its basic layout reflects other mint-signed issues of Edgar's pre-reform coinage, although the addition of an alpha and omega (Greek letters representing the beginning and end of the alphabet, used as a metaphor for Christ in Revelation)⁴ has no exact parallel among extant coins of Edgar or his immediate predecessors. That said, other letters had been placed in the field of various tenth-century coin-types (though more often on the obverse than reverse),⁵ and the alpha and omega motif had a long history in Christian art from across Europe. There is no doubt that its religious significance would have been immediately apparent to tenth-century coin-users. In a numismatic context, alpha and omega had appeared on English coins in the late eighth and ninth centuries, and would also be placed on several coin-types under Edgar's son Æthelred II, including the *Hand* types of the 980s and the *Agnus Dei* type of 1009. Placement of an alpha and omega on the reverse of this type thus fits into an established tradition, yet still presents a new departure for the mid-tenth century.

The distribution of the king's name in a cross, as on the obverse of this coin, has no precedent in the tenth century. The likely model is the *Geometric-Quatrefoil* coin-type of Alfred the Great (871–99), now known from a single surviving specimen, which displays the king's name in very similar fashion, and also replicates the fleurs de lys in the angles of the cross, and its central annulet.⁶ This penny of Alfred – probably struck in London c.875 – differs from all others of the reign in its extremely high weight (1.78 g in the case of the surviving example), possibly indicating a temporary move towards the prevailing Carolingian weight standard of c.1.75 g.⁷



Fig. 2. Penny of Alfred of Geometric-Quatrefoil type (Assheton loan, British Museum).

Other coin-types of Edgar's reign drew inspiration from the issues of Alfred, Edward the Elder (899–924) and Æthelstan (924–39).⁸ Alfred's *London Monogram* type was resurrected at London for an issue of halfpennies,⁹ and another halfpenny from the southeast midlands drew on the ornamental types of Edward's reign (including two isolated letters of the original moneyer's name);¹⁰ Æthelstan's coinage provided models for the larger-scale innovations of Edgar's reign, including the widespread revival of the *Circumscription* and *Bust Crowned* types, while the *Reform* type from the last years of

the reign may have been influenced by the design of pennies of Æthelstan from Winchester.¹¹ These historicizing coinages were not unique to the reign of Edgar: moneyers under his predecessors had also made recourse to early-tenth-century issues, such as the ornamental types of Edward for halfpennies made in the west midlands.¹² Yet this tendency manifested itself more frequently and widely under Edgar, spreading to the south as well as the midlands, and during his reign historically-inspired coin-types were sometimes enacted on a national scale. The coin discussed here thus fits very well into a broader context of appeals to earlier English history during Edgar's reign, in which coinage served an important and diverse role.¹³

⁴ Naismith 2012, 70–1.

⁵ For example, an s on some pennies of Æthelstan from Chester (*SCBI* 1, 576) and very often an m or s on some coins of Eadred (^{CTCE} 101–88).

⁶ The coin, which was found in the famous Cuerdale hoard of 1840, is part of the Assheton collection, on deposit in the British Museum. It is no. 1 in Blackburn and Keynes 1998.

⁷ Blackburn 1998, 106 and 112.

⁸ *CTCE*, pp. 203–4.

⁹ *SCBI* 34, 1172/*CTCE* 394.

¹⁰ *SCBI* 34, 389/*CTCE* 389.

¹¹ Naismith 2014, 81.

¹² *CTCE*, pp. 202–5.

¹³ Naismith 2014, 80–3.

This significant new coin adds an intriguing piece to the jigsaw puzzle of southern English coinage in the tenth century. It further illuminates the resurrection of older types in a series of issues large and small during the reign of Edgar. The application of gilding might indicate that its unusual appearance was noted by at least one tenth-century user, though without further evidence the scale and nature of the type must remain unclear.

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THE BOULTON PARCEL OF COINS OF THE QUATREFOIL TYPE OF CNUT

HUGH PAGAN

ON 1–2 April 1912 the Sotheby firm offered as the first 209 lots of a 354-lot sale of coins and medals a property described as having belonged to 'the late Matthew Piers Watt Boulton, Esq. of Tew Park, Enstone (sold by order of the Trustees)'. As is immediately clear from the catalogue, the coins and medals then being offered derived from an inherited collection, rich in the issues of the Soho mint, which had evidently passed from Matthew Boulton (1728–1809), via his son Matthew Robinson Boulton (1770–1842), to their eventual heir, Matthew Boulton's grandson, Matthew Piers Watt Boulton (1820–94). The only coins in the collection that predated the reign of Edward VI (1547–53) were those contained in lots 7–9 of the sale, described in the catalogue as follows :

- 7 Anglo-Saxon Pennies of Canute (*Rud.*23,8), of Chester (4) and London (12) mints; Aethelred II, London Penny (*Rud.*22,6), and a Hiberno-Danish Penny, *all fine and sound* 18
- 8 Canute Pennies, of same reference, of the Cambridge (+ORNST.MO.GRA), Maldon (+AELPINE I MAELDVNE), Oxford (+EDELIC.ON.OXSE), Shrewsbury (+PVLFRED.ON.ZCCOB), Southampton (+LEOFNAD.MO.HAM), Stamford (+GODELEOF.M.O.ST), and Wallingford (+COLEMAN.ON.PELI) and +MAN.ON.PELINGA) mints, and a few cut Halfpence (8), *all fine and rare mints* 16
- 9 Canute Pennies, of similar type, of the Bedford, Chester, Hastings, London and York mints, &., including a few illegible pieces, *all holed, cracked or fractured* 36

Lots 7 and 8 were purchased by Feuarent, the Parisian coin dealers with a branch in London, managed for them at that time by William Talbot Ready; while lot 9 was purchased by Lincoln, the London-based coin dealing firm of W.S. Lincoln & Co., then headed by Frederick William Lincoln. It seems that the only one of these coins that has retained its

Boulton provenance is one of the cut halfpence in lot 8, a coin of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type of Chester, moneyer Leofa, now in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester (*SCBI* 4, 210).

The three lots contained between them, on the reasonable assumption that all 36 of the coins of Cnut in lot 9, described as being of 'similar type', were in fact of the same type as the coins of Cnut offered in lots 7 and 8, sixty-eight coins of the *Quatrefoil* type of Cnut, one coin presumably of Æthelred II's *Last Small Cross* type, rather than of his *First Small Cross* type and one Hiberno-Norse coin. It is self-evident that coins of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type in such quantity, unaccompanied by any potentially related coins other than the two offered in lot 7, must have come from a coin hoard, and that this hoard must have been discovered at some date before M.P.W. Boulton's death in 1894.

The only pre-1894 hoard from the British Isles that is certainly known to have been composed predominantly of coins of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type is one found at an uncertain date towards the beginning of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, amply evidenced in coin collections formed after that time. The hoard in question was one in which there was particularly good representation of coins of this type struck at Chester and London, together with a meaningful number of coins of the type by Gloucester moneyers, and scholars have taken the view since the late 1950s that the hoard in question was one containing 'more than half a peck of Saxon coins' found at Kingsholm, on the northern outskirts of Gloucester, at some point not long before 1785. The hypothesis seems a very reasonable one, although the content of the Kingsholm hoard is not specifically described in any contemporary source, and the conjectural reconstruction of the hoard offered by Dolley and Metcalf has in most respects stood the test of time.¹

It is clearly possible that the Boulton parcel derives from the same hoard, but this cannot quite be taken for granted, for it is noticeable that among the 'fine and sound' coins offered in lot 7 of the Sotheby sale coins of London outnumber coins of Chester by twelve to four, while in Dolley and Metcalf's conjectural reconstruction, based on the 110 coins of this type without known conflicting provenances which were acquired by the British Museum prior to 1838, nearly all in similarly whole and pleasing condition, coins of Chester are slightly more numerous than those of London. Additionally, there is no obvious evidence which would explain why a parcel from a hoard found at Kingsholm would have found its way into the possession of Matthew Boulton or into the possession of his son or grandson, since none of them lived particularly close to Gloucester, and none of them, at least on the evidence of the Sotheby catalogue, took any interest in coins of pre-Tudor date.

It has crossed the present writer's mind that the parcel might instead derive from a hoard found at Stafford in December 1800, supposedly comprising between 'two and three hundred silver coins' attributed to 'Æthelred II, Cnut and Harthacnut', but from which no surviving coins have as yet been located.² If the hoard had in reality contained coins of Harthacnut, seldom found in hoards discovered in the British Isles and of very considerable rarity in English collections until the 1830s, these would, one would imagine, have found their way into the hands of contemporary collectors. The fact that this does not seem to have happened prompts the suggestion that they may in reality have been misread coins of Cnut, especially as no mention is made of coins of Harold I, which would be expected to have been present in a hoard ending with coins of Harthacnut.³ It may also be worth observing both that Stafford is some fifteen miles closer than Gloucester to Matthew Boulton's place of business and residence in Birmingham, and that Stafford is only some thirteen miles from Lichfield, the home town of Matthew Boulton's father-in-law, Luke Robinson.⁴ For all that, the origin of the

¹ Dolley and Metcalf, 1958–9; Fitzwilliam Museum Checklist of Coin Hoards from the British Isles, c. 450–1180 (<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/coins/projects/hoards/>), no. 206.

² Lindsay 1842, 121; Fitzwilliam Museum Checklist of Coin Hoards, no. 224.

³ Dr Paul Robinson has previously drawn attention to the possibility that three coins of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type of the Shrewsbury mint that belonged in the early nineteenth century to the Coventry antiquary Thomas Sharp may have derived from the Stafford hoard, but he was not able on the evidence then available to decide whether the hoard was a multi-type hoard deposited around 1040 or was a one-type hoard deposited in the early years of the reign of Cnut (Robinson 1969, 22–4).

⁴ Reade 1939, 95–111, where there is a particularly well-documented account of Boulton's Robinson relatives. Boulton's father, Matthew Boulton senior (1700–1759), was also a native of Lichfield but had moved to Birmingham as a young man. I am grateful to Dr Stewart Lyon for pointing out to me Boulton's connections with Lichfield.

Boulton parcel remains undetermined, and the aim of the present note is the limited one of putting its existence on record.

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FLEET’S STATISTICAL METHODS AND THE THREE TUNS AT HOLBORN BRIDGE

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IN 2000 R.J. Fleet proposed statistical methods for expanding initials on London seventeenth-century tokens that lack the full names of their issuers.¹ His sources for the names were the Vintners’ Company apprenticeship records 15211/1-2 and 15212/1-2 (Freedom admissions).² Subsequently, Cliff Webb abstracted and indexed the Vintners’ apprenticeship registers for publication by the Society of Genealogists.³ We can comment neither on Fleet’s methods, nor on any assumptions he incorporated, and our remarks below are confined to his identification of issuers. Fleet used the abbreviation ‘W’ for the London chapter of Williamson 1889–91, a usage maintained here.⁴ He also used ‘W’ silently for additions to Williamson from Dickinson 1986 (numbers with a capital letter suffix).⁵ In this note tokens are given a reference to our Norweb catalogue Part VII (2007), except in one case absent from the Norweb Collection.⁶

Fleet 1/W 1731/Norweb 7257

[mullet] · AT · THE · GLOBE · IN · around a Globe
 [mullet] LITTLE · EAST · CHEAPE around · R · | I · A

Attributed by Fleet to John Rose and his wife Alice, fl. 1661–74, on which we commented: ‘Attribution ... unsafe because style suggests a date no later than 1649 OS’.⁷ In particular, the token lacks inner circles, as do Williamson’s London 91, 210, 730, 1418, 2162, and 3304, all dated 1648, and London 1510 dated 1649. Moreover, Fleet 1 has a pellet on the obverse between the mullet initial mark and the start of the legend, an early characteristic which occurs (for example) on W 143 = Norweb 6526, dated 1650. A more plausible attribution (if he was there so long) would be to John Rowell, with twelve hearths in Little Eastcheap South in 1666.⁸ John Rowell bound Vintner apprentices in 1671 and 1674.

Fleet 2/W 243/Norweb 6579

[mullet] AT · THE · ACORNE · IN around an Acorn slipped
 [mullet] BISHOP · GATE · STREETE around · M · | I · K

Fleet attributed this to Joseph Moore, married to Catherine, fl. 1659–63, on which we commented: ‘For supposed attribution to Joseph Moore see Dickinson forthcoming’.⁹ The obverse of Norweb 6579 was no later than 1650 OS, judging from the letter R. During that year a replacement R punch came into use, as on Norweb 6580. That R punch was in turn replaced by another during 1655 OS, i.e. about four years before Moore attained his freedom.

¹ Fleet 2000.

² Guildhall Library 2010, 159.

³ Webb 2006.

⁴ Williamson 1889–91.

⁵ Dickinson 1986.

⁶ Thompson and Dickinson 2007.

⁷ Thompson and Dickinson 2007, Pl. 35, no. 7257a.

⁸ Davies *et al.* 2014, 903.

⁹ Thompson and Dickinson 2007, Pl. 7, no. 6579.

Fleet 3/W 3116A/Norweb 7744

[mullet] THE · 3 · TVNNES · TAVERN around Three Wine Tuns, two and one

[mullet] IN · THAMES · STREETE around · P · | W · M

Attributed by Fleet to William Page, free 1659, married to Mary, fl. 1659–63, but we commented ‘Attribution to William Page is unsafe’, for the letter punches, M and R in particular, point to production in 1649 or 1650 OS.¹⁰

Fleet 4/W1426A/I1417 [recte 1418]

[rosette] THOMAS · HVSSEY · AT · Y^E · THREE around the Vintners’ arms: *A chevron between three wine tuns*

[rosette] AT · HOLBVRN · BRIDGE · VINTNER around HIS|HALFE|PENY|I668 [a rule beneath each line except the last]

W1426A is not in Norweb, but is illustrated by Sharman 2011 as number [11]: arms ‘with a scrolled hanging bracket on the top’.¹¹

Fleet familiarly called this issuer TOM HUSSEY, and associated him, despite the absence of the chevron of the Vintners’ arms (on which the tuns are placed two and one), with:

[mullet] · AT · THE · 3 · TVNS · AT · around Three Wine Tuns one and two

: HOLBORNE · BRIDGE · 1648 around · H · | T · M

W1417 [recte 1418]; Norweb 7119.

We assume that Fleet intended his numbers to relate to the supposed issuer, although this is not explained. Indeed, his cataloguing methods are as obscure to us as are his statistical methods. If he relied solely on Dickinson 1986 he would not have known that W1426A is dated 1668.

Fleet 5/W1419/I1435A

[mullet] · AT · THE · 3 · TVNS · AT · around Three Wine Tuns one and two

[rosette] HOLBORNE · BRIDGE around · M · | T · E

Study of the letter punches, confirmed from the British Museum specimen, indicates that this dates from the period 1653 to 1657 OS.

Fleet assumed (and it is possible) that T. M. was the issuer of the following (W1435A):

THOMAS MASON AT around Three Wine Tuns

HOLBORNE BRIDGE around M | T S

Fleet 5/W1419 (=Norweb 7120), reverse M|T E, is from the same obverse die as Fleet 4/W1418 (=Norweb 7119), on which the reverse reads H|T M. This die-link shows that it would have been issued by a Vintner who succeeded to ownership of that die, and to the keeping of that establishment. A candidate with the right initials is indeed Thomas Mason, who issued another token at Holborn Bridge, although his then wife bore the initial S (W1435A, Norweb —).¹² Fleet 4–5 are the cause and occasion of this note, for the site of the Three Tuns at Holborn Bridge has been excavated by MOLA: Museum of London Archaeology, generating a news report in *The Times* and a joint paper on glass bottle seals from excavations in London.¹³ That paper illustrates as Fig. 8 (p. 145) a Museum of London specimen of W1418 = Norweb 7119, and names the issuers as Thomas and Margaret Helmsley (fl. 1648–55).¹⁴ Thomas Helmsley [*sic*], evidently the same man, was apprenticed a Vintner in 1639, and on gaining his freedom bound five apprentices in the years 1648–9, including a probable relative Richard Helmsley, son of Thomas Helmsley of Warbleton, Sussex. This identification of the issuers gives the *coup de grâce* to all of Fleet’s possible attributions (except Thomas Mason for Fleet 5/W1419) and, it may be suggested, to his purported statistical methods. The references to ‘Dickinson forthcoming’ are now (in part) superseded.

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¹⁰ Thompson and Dickinson 2007, Pl. 55, no. 7744.

¹¹ Sharman 2011 (numbering of illustrations supplied by the authors).

¹² Gilbert 1927, no. 146.

¹³ Malvern 2011; Jeffries and Major 2015.

¹⁴ We have not discovered the source of these names.

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'STAMPED ALL OVER THE KING'S HEAD': DEFACED COINS AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

THOMAS HOCKENHULL

Introduction

THE penny in Fig. 1 featured in the British Museum's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* book and radio series. 'This suffragette coin', writes Neil MacGregor, 'stands for all those who fought for the right to vote. It is a British penny with King Edward VII in elegant profile, but his image has been defaced in what was then a criminal act. Stamped all over the king's head in crude capitals are the words VOTES FOR WOMEN.'¹ Yet the object, a defaced 1903 penny, remains somewhat enigmatic: it was donated to the British Museum in 1991 but its longer history is undocumented.² No study has yet explored how and when the coin was defaced, how many others exist, and who was responsible. This article aims to address some of these questions, constructing an object 'biography' of these coins from documentary evidence and by comparing the British Museum's example with those that are in private collections.³ It is only by studying these objects as a corpus, I suggest, that both their purpose and their effectiveness can be measured as instruments of 'Mass Production, Mass Persuasion',⁴ within the broader material culture of the suffragette movement.

Production

A handful of press reports attest to the coins, commencing with an article in *The Globe*, Thursday 23 October 1913, reproduced here in full:

An unusual method of defacing the coinage has just come to light. Anarchists throughout England have lately adopted a novel propaganda; coins passing through their hands are stamped with the words "Vive L'Anarchie" before being placed in circulation again. It is said that militant suffragists have expressed themselves in favour of adopting a similar scheme. Presumably they are aware that defacing coins of the realm is an offence.⁵



Fig 1. 1903 defaced penny (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Acknowledgements I wish to thank Ben Alsop, Anita Anand, Elizabeth Crawford, Michael Crosby, Kenneth Florey, Charles Dobie, Timothy Millet, Gavin Scott, Howard and Frances Simmons and Simon Singh for their assistance, and for granting permission to reproduce a number of the images featured in this article.

¹ MacGregor 2010, 610, object 95.

² BM 1991,0733.1. The donor, listed as 'Mrs R. Johnson', has not been traced.

³ Kopytoff 1986, 66.

⁴ MacGregor 2010, 593.

⁵ Anon. 1913a; see also Anon. 1913b–h.

The story was widely reprinted, but none of the reports definitively states that the suffragettes proceeded with the proposed scheme, and there are no references to the coins in contemporary suffrage journals or sales catalogues of suffragette memorabilia.⁶ Indeed, the only other surviving evidence is in the form of the coins themselves.

Including the British Museum's example, the sample under examination here totals ten coins (listed in the Appendix, p. 244), of which six are illustrated in this article. One of these is reported to have been found by metal detector near Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, in the mid-1980s (Fig. 2).⁷ In consideration of the reasons given in the final section of this article, a number of other coins were discounted as evidence.

Assuming that the coins were all defaced at roughly the same time, circumstantial evidence suggests a likely date between 1913, the date of the latest host coin (Fig. 2) and when the aforementioned press reports appeared, and the outbreak of war in August 1914. During the First World War the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and most other suffragette organisations agreed to suspend militant acts.⁸ Suffragette militarism and direct action intensified in 1913–14, which was triggered in part by the government's dismissal of the Franchise Bill, which came before (and was rejected by) the House of Commons in the winter session of 1912–13, and by the arrests and imprisonment of Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the WSPU.⁹ Such militarism included bombings and arson attacks, and reached a tragic climax when, in June 1913, Emily Wilding Davison ran out in front of the king's horse at the Epsom Derby, with fatal consequences. In March 1914, Diego Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* was slashed by Mary Richardson at the National Gallery, and in May the British Museum was also targeted.¹⁰

Upon examination, the coins were all found to have been defaced by the same ten separate alphabet stamps, of the same type as those used for jewellery engraving and nametags. Distinctive features of the lettering, common to all, include an angle on the arm of the letter 'T' and a weak left-hand stem on the letter 'M'. The same punch was used for the repeated letters 'E' and 'O', the latter having an uncommonly narrow bowl. This last aberration was possibly caused by the engraver mistakenly using a numeral '0' (zero) punch.¹¹ The use of only a single set of punches is likely to have restricted the act of engraving to one person at a time, because the repeated use of the letters 'O' (three times), and 'E' (twice), would have otherwise necessitated the sharing and swapping of punches, complicating and hindering production.

To further understand the time and effort required for a lone individual to deface these coins, I carried out a basic experiment using modern sans serif alphabet stamps to deface a group of late-Victorian and Edwardian pennies (Fig. 3). I discovered that defacing the penny while it was placed on an iron anvil caused damage to its reverse, which was avoidable if the coins were placed on a block of wood. I also found that if a 2.5 lb lump hammer was used, and if the punch was hit only once to the required depth, it distorted the flan of the coin. Hammering it flat again failed to fully rectify the distortion and caused further damage to the coin, which is not visible on the pennies I examined. Instead, optimal results were obtained by lightly striking each punch four or five times with a 1 lb hammer, ensuring that the punch did not slip and



Fig. 2. 1913 defaced penny (Courtesy Michael Crosby).

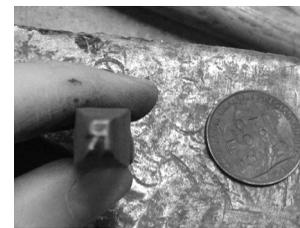


Fig. 3. Defacing coins using letter punches (© Trustees of the British Museum).

⁶ Florey 2013, 86.

⁷ Anon. 2011; Michael Crosby, pers. comm., 16 Feb. 2014, by email. For more documentation details see Appendix. In some instances evidence is anecdotal.

⁸ See Purvis 1998, 169; MacGregor 2010, 625.

⁹ Bearman 2005, 365, 374.

¹⁰ Glass display cases were smashed by a suffragette wielding a meat cleaver in the Oriental galleries. See Alsop 2014, 52–53.

¹¹ See Perfect and Rookledge 1983, 58, type 166, for a comparative typeface.

cause a double-strike. MacGregor suggested that defacing the coins ‘would have taken considerable force’,¹² but this test instead indicates that the process required delicacy and patience. Further care had to be taken to ensure that the punches were used in the correct order, a challenge that eluded the original perpetrator on at least one occasion. On a 1905 penny (Fig. 4), for example, the ‘O’ in ‘VOTES’ is struck over the faint outline of the letter ‘T’, while on a 1912 penny (Fig. 5) the ‘N’ in ‘WOMEN’ has been punched upside-down. Although the process was not physically demanding, I found it to be slow and repetitive, requiring at least a couple of minutes to deface each coin.



Fig. 4. 1905 defaced penny
(© Timothy Millett Ltd).



Fig. 5. 1912 defaced penny (Courtesy Gavin Scott).

From the given sample it is difficult to estimate how many coins were originally defaced, but the lack of technical sophistication would have been a major inhibiting factor. Furthermore, the illegality of the campaign would have made it difficult to release large numbers of ‘Votes for Women’ coins into circulation. Similar challenges are recorded regarding coins defaced with anarchist slogans. *The Straits Times*, for example, stated that, ‘in some cases traders have refused to accept coins thus defaced as legal tender’.¹³ Such difficulties might be contrasted with the comparably sophisticated Pears’ Soap and Borwick’s Baking Powder campaigns of the 1850s–1880s, which used multiple entire word punches, rather than one set of individual letter punches, to legally deface several tons of foreign coins.¹⁴

The question of who was responsible for defacing the coins is the most difficult to answer. Press reports used the broad term ‘militant suffragists’, and it is well documented that organisations such as the WSPU had a large number of paid staff, some of whom ‘received retainers of £1 5s. or £1 10s. per week for duties that were never specified’.¹⁵ Yet the above discussion concerning the production of the defaced coins has shown that any person with access to a set of basic engraving tools, and an abundance of free time, could have been responsible. Ultimately, any direct link between the perpetrator and suffragette organisations such as the WSPU or, indeed, any of the fifty-three listed in the ‘Suffrage Directory’ in 1914,¹⁶ is purely speculative.

Purpose

According to MacGregor, the establishment ‘was stunned by the vision of highly respectable women deliberately committing criminal acts’.¹⁷ The simple act of defacing a coin, which served as an advertisement for the suffragette cause, seems slight in comparison with more serious acts of sedition such as arson and property destruction. Nevertheless, it communicated the same ideological protest against male authority figures perceived to be obstructing the freedom of women. The Rievaulx Abbey example (Fig. 2) is pierced, presumably having

¹² MacGregor 2010, 623.

¹³ Anon. 1913g; see also Anon. 1913h.

¹⁴ Mitchiner 2007, 2753. Pears alone imported 250,000 coins in the years 1884 and 1885. The practice was outlawed in 1887 and the cost of withdrawing them from circulation was at the time estimated to have been more than £7,000. See Anon. 1888.

¹⁵ Bearman 2005, 384.

¹⁶ Cowman 1998, 79.

¹⁷ MacGregor 2010, 622.

been suspended on a loop to be worn either as a pendant or on a watch chain.¹⁸ Its purpose, comparable to other suffragette jewellery, was to 'declare the wearer's allegiance to the cause of votes for women.'¹⁹

As Flood and Grindon point out, currency 'is a highly controlled symbol of state and tampering with it is a small but powerful act of subversion.'²⁰ MacGregor, meanwhile, refers to the defacement as an 'attack on the authority of a state that excluded women from political life'.²¹ Parallels can be found between defacing coins and the damage to John Singer Sargent's portrait of Henry James at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition in May 1914, caused by a suffragette, Evelyn Wood. This bold decision to attack the painting has been likened to iconoclasm, 'by association cutting a familiar public figure rather than merely the canvas of a painting'.²²

Commenting on the British Museum's 'Votes for Women' coin, the artist Felicity Powell suggests that the perpetrator deliberately targeted the head of the king on the obverse, rather than the reverse showing Britannia:

This particular coin makes full use of the fact that coins have two sides, not visible at once, and on the other side there's an image of Britannia, which hasn't been defaced. An image of a woman standing there, very strongly, symbolizing nationhood. There's a real potential for shock value, real subversion, when you see what's on the other side.²³

Lending weight to Powell's view is the fact that, while coins of Edward VII and George V (Figs. 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6) have their obverses defaced, those of Victoria have their reverses defaced (Fig. 7). Powell's assertion that the perpetrator made a conscious decision whether to deface the portrait of the monarch, on the grounds of gender, appears to be confirmed: '[i]t literally is defacement', says Powell, 'right across the king'.²⁴ According to the *Poverty Bay Herald* coins defaced with anarchist slogans in 1913 also targeted the king's profile,²⁵ and Britain's constitutional monarchy was certainly no stranger to suffragette activism in 1913–14. In July 1913 suffragettes planted a number of bombs to 'welcome' the king and queen during their visit to Lancashire. On 21 May 1914 an attempt to present George V with a petition ended in a pitched battle between suffragettes and the police outside Buckingham Palace.²⁶



Fig. 6. 1908 defaced penny (Courtesy Gavin Scott).



Fig. 7. 1897 defaced penny (Courtesy Gavin Scott).

Post-1914 historiography

The final section of this article examines the subsequent historiography of the coins. Within numismatics the coins do not appear to have been widely discussed until the 1980s, when Scott and others referenced them in society lectures.²⁷ They had not previously featured in his book

¹⁸ Anon. 1913f, refers to the practice as if it were fairly commonplace.

¹⁹ Goring 2002, 85. Suffragette jewellery was often homemade.

²⁰ Flood and Grindon 2014, 95.

²¹ MacGregor 2010, 622.

²² Mohamed 2013, 120.

²³ Quoted in MacGregor 2010, 622.

²⁴ Quoted in MacGregor 2010, 623.

²⁵ Anon. 1913h.

²⁶ Bearman 2005, 374–6.

²⁷ G. Scott, 'More about counter-marks', unpublished talk to Kingston Numismatic Society, 15 Nov. 1987; G. Scott, pers. comm., 15 July 2014, by email.

on the subject.²⁸ However, there is no record of their existence in works on suffrage history and material culture prior to Florey's 2013 book, *Womens' Suffrage Memorabilia*. They do not feature at all, for example, in Crawford's otherwise comprehensive survey of suffragette material culture,²⁹ described by deVries as 'indispensable for suffrage researchers'.³⁰ Writing about the coins, Florey states the following:

Counterstamps with the message of "Votes for Women" are known in both America and England. Because they were generally hand-punched, the lettering is often crude and off center. The message could appear on any denomination of coin, but generally larger size coins were preferred in order to make the slogan "Votes for Women" more distinct ... Counterstamps technically involved defacing official coinage, and, while the practice was common enough for merchants, it could have led to criminal prosecution for suffrage supporters, particularly in England, where suffragist activities were generally under intense scrutiny.³¹

The belated inclusion of the coins in suffragette historiography requires further examination. Arguably, this is a direct result of the British Museum's attempts to introduce its 'Votes for Women' penny to a broader audience.

In the mid-2000s, Catherine Eagleton, who joined the Department of Coins and Medals in 2004,³² realised that the coin could be used to engage visitors with the wider history of universal suffrage, as she observes:

When I started working at the British Museum, I had a good look at the objects in the part of the collection that I look after. One in particular caught my eye: the Suffragette penny. It is stored in a cabinet with lots of other coins that have been re-engraved or have had messages stamped on them; everything from adverts for soap powder to messages of love. More interesting to me, though, were the coins that were marked with political messages, like this one.³³

In 2009 Eagleton suggested the inclusion of the 'Votes for Women' coin in a major touring exhibition, *Treasures of the World's Cultures*, and it was displayed at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, Canada.³⁴ Upon its return to the British Museum in 2010 the object was included in MacGregor's aforementioned *A History of the World in 100 Objects* book and radio series, which was hugely successful, achieving more than 19 million podcast downloads by March 2011, nearly half of which were from outside the UK.³⁵ The 'Votes for Women' coin was a particularly popular inclusion, and a 2015 article in *The Times* about the major successes of MacGregor's tenure as director, specifically selected it as a highlight of the *A History of the World* series, because it shows how 'MacGregor brought out the significance in the tiniest of objects'.³⁶ In 2012 the coin went on permanent display in the museum's new Citi Money Gallery,³⁷ and it was used as the lead image on the advertising poster (Fig. 8), displayed on the London Underground and along the front railings of the museum on Great Russell Street. The success of *A History of the World*, and the coin's subsequent display history, has undoubtedly turned it into one of the defining objects in the museum's modern collections.

An inadvertent consequence of the British Museum's attempts to introduce the coin to a wider audience appears to be the creation of a market for counterfeits. The proliferation of spurious suffragette material culture is already well-documented, the implication being that a suffragette connection increases any object's collectability and that it commands a higher

²⁸ Scott 1975.

²⁹ Crawford 2000.

³⁰ deVries 2006, 145.

³¹ Florey 2013, 86–7. Contrary to Florey's assertion, I have been unable to find evidence that 'Votes for Women' overstamps appeared on US coinage.

³² Cook 2011, 86.

³³ Eagleton 2010.

³⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1233535&partId=1> [accessed 26 Jan. 2015].

³⁵ Trustees of the British Museum 2011, 35. According to British Museum Directorate, pers. comm., 7 Jan. 2014, by email, the series had reached 35 million downloads worldwide by November 2013. The book and series won the 2011 Art Fund Prize for the British Museum. It was described by the Prize Committee as a 'groundbreaking and enormously successful project exploring world history through the British Museum's unparalleled collection'. See Trustees of the British Museum 2011, 51; Brown 2011.

³⁶ Campbell-Johnston 2015. This echoes Orna-Ornstein's earlier comment that the coin 'allow[s] us to tell the big stories'. See Orna-Ornstein 2011, 67.

³⁷ Room 68, case 18, officially opened by Sir Mervyn King in June 2012. See Davies 2012.



Fig. 8. Citi Money Gallery poster (© Trustees of the British Museum).

for the defacing of more than 150 Victorian and Edwardian pennies with the 'Votes for Women' slogan.⁴⁴ The project's stated aim was to distribute the replica coins among its backers and to donate the remainder to educational institutes. Nevertheless, with the passage of time these copies also have the potential to be erroneously identified as contemporary examples.

price.³⁸ As Florey notes, 'Votes for Women' coins are an easy target for counterfeiters since counter stamps are 'easily reproduced today on early coins'.³⁹ Collectors and historians, he further warns, 'need to ensure that items they procure are authentic period examples and not modern counterfeited pieces'.⁴⁰ Two such suspicious examples are included in this study, for illustrative purposes (Figs. 9 and 10). Both were purchased online but neither had verifiable provenance prior to 2013.⁴¹ The coins appear to have been defaced more recently: one of the host coins is dated 1916 and appears to have been chemically cleaned (Fig. 9), while the typeface of the lettering in both instances is sans serif, which was uncommon before the 1920s. Indeed, the earliest sans serif typeface to be widely used was designed by Edward Johnston for the London Underground in 1915,⁴² and it wasn't until 1927 that designers, including Paul Renner and Eric Gill, popularised it by introducing similar versions.⁴³

Spurious lettering aside, there are further instances of coins being defaced, apparently in homage to the British Museum's 'Votes for Women' penny. Notably, in 2012 the online crowd funding platform Kickstarter successfully raised \$562.00



Fig. 9. 1916 defaced penny (Courtesy Anita Anand).



Fig. 10. 1902 defaced penny (Courtesy Anita Anand).

³⁸ See Crawford 2013 and Goring 2002, 97.

³⁹ Florey 2013, 86.

⁴⁰ Florey 2013, 86.

⁴¹ Simon Singh, pers. comm., 22 Dec. 2013, by email.

⁴² Maclean 1980, 64.

⁴³ *Futura and Gill sans*, respectively. See Kibbee 1948, 218f; Cribb and Cribb 2011, 87.

⁴⁴ Retrieved from <www.kickstarter.com/projects/30434006/votes-for-women-penny-2012> [accessed 9 Jan. 2015]. In another instance modern fifty pence coins were defaced with the phrase 'EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN'. Donating an example to the British Museum, the perpetrator claimed inspiration from the *A History of the World* series. See BM 2015,4007.1.

Conclusion

The evidence presented here suggests that the ‘Votes for Women’ coins, or at least those that can be relatively securely attributed to an early date, were defaced by the same set of alphabet punches and, by inference, the same hand, in the years 1913–14. Symbolically, the practice of defacing a coin represented the same ideological protest against the laws of the country as other acts of suffragette militarism. Yet their potential impact as circulating instruments of propaganda was limited by the unsophisticated and inefficient way in which they were produced. The study has suggested that comparatively few were made, and that the campaign was sustained over a relatively brief period. Instead, ‘Votes for Women’ coins owe their current prominence within suffragette material culture to institutional intervention which, although well-intentioned, has inadvertently stimulated the production of forgeries. Despite their recent inclusion in the suffragette historiography, therefore, these coins were, for the best part of a century, of peripheral relevance to the story of how women gained the vote.

APPENDIX

‘Votes for Women’ coins defaced with the same punches as the example in the British Museum

<i>Description of host coin</i>	<i>Position of over-stamp</i>	<i>Documentation details</i>	<i>Fig.</i>
1889 half-crown (Victoria)	reverse	G. Scott, ‘More about counter-marks’, Kingston Numismatic Society, 15 Nov. 1987; G. Scott, pers. comm., 15 July 2014, by email.	–
1889 penny (Victoria)	reverse	Image only seen by the author. Provenance unknown.	–
1897 penny (Victoria)	reverse	G. Scott, pers. comm., 15 July 2014, by email; purchased Seaby Coins, London, 9 Nov. 1985.	Fig. 7
1903 penny (Edward VII)	obverse	British Museum, BM 1991,0733.1.	Fig. 1
1905 penny (Edward VII)	obverse	Timothy Millett Ltd 2002, 40.	Fig. 4
1907 penny (Edward VII)	obverse	C. Dobie, pers. comm, 3 Dec. 2014, by email; G. Scott, pers. comm., 15 July 2014, by email.	–
1908 penny (Edward VII)	obverse	G. Scott, pers. comm, 16 Apr. 2015, by email; purchased 17 Feb. 2002.	Fig. 6
1912 penny (George V)	obverse	G. Scott, pers. comm., 15 July 2014, by email; purchased Coin Galleries, London, 18 June 1980.	Fig. 5
1912 penny (George V)	obverse	Michael Shaw, pers. comm., 30 Oct. 2015, by email; purchased at an antiques store, Bristol, 2003.	–
1913 penny (George V)	obverse	Anon. 2011; Michael Crosby, pers. comm., 16 Feb. 2014, by email; found at Rievaulx Abbey, 1980s.	Fig. 2

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- Anon., 1913c. *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 Oct., 7, col. c.
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