

COIN PEDIGREES REVISITED : THE OXFORD CROWN

HUGH PAGAN

A note contributed to the *Numismatic Chronicle* by the nineteenth-century coin collector John Brodribb Bergne (1800-1873) addresses the issue of how many specimens were then known of the famous 1644 Oxford crown with a view of the city of Oxford below the equestrian figure of Charles I on the coins' obverse¹. Bergne was able to list a total of ten examples of this coin of which the whereabouts was then known to him, and one further example which he suspected might be the same coin as one recorded elsewhere in his list.

Bergne was a good judge both of coins and of their probable numismatic significance, and the paragraph in his note in which he delivers his assessment of this 1644 Oxford crown is worth quoting here, in that he correctly concludes that it was intended for ordinary circulation and had also accurately observed that none of the extant specimens that he had seen had "the whole of the outer legend fully struck up", a characteristic identified by modern scholarship as evidence that the coins had been struck using a rocker press.

The paragraph reads as follows:

It is difficult to account for the great rarity of this coin. The workmanship and general appearance are indeed so superior to those of other coins of the period, that it would probably have been hoarded, like the medieval crown of her present Majesty. It does not, however, bear the look of a pattern piece; and it was in all probability intended for ordinary circulation. It is somewhat singular that no specimen, so far as my observation has extended, has the whole of the outer legend fully struck up. About ten or eleven specimens are known.

The list of these ten or eleven specimens that follows records both their then ownership and their back histories, as far as these were known to Bergne. Bergne does not quote a source for the information that he provides about the coins' back histories, and it was only very recently that the present writer realised that Bergne's list is of a similar character to that provided in an autograph letter dated 20 December 1805, written in the third person by Thomas Dimsdale (1758-1823), partner in a London banking firm and an eminent coin collector of an older generation. The letter was written by Dimsdale to Lieut.-Col. William Durrant (1779-1846), himself a keen collector in the British series, and is bound up in Durrant's annotated copy of the collected works of Thomas Snelling, which is currently in the present writer's possession².

The letter is of some interest in the history of the methodology of British numismatics, for it is an early example of a collector listing coin by coin, with their provenances, the examples known to him of two rarities in the early modern series. It

¹ J.B.Bergne, 'Coin Pedigrees – No.2', NC 17 (1854-5), 20-24.

² For Durrant, discovered after his death to have been a serial thief at the viewings of coin auction sales, but not explicitly identified as such until modern times, see now the entry in H.E.Manville *Biographical Dictionary of British and Irish Numismatics*, 2009, 84.

is also the only surviving letter on a numismatic topic written by Thomas Dimsdale of which I am aware. As will be seen, the information given by Dimsdale differs in one respect from that given by Bergne, and where the two of them differ it seems more likely that Dimsdale's information is correct, in that he was writing some half a century closer to the dates of the coin transactions involved.

The letter reads as follows :

Mr.Dimsdale's Compl's. to Mr.Durrant, and returns him the two Catalogues of coins he has been so good as to lend him, with his thanks for the use of them.

Mr.Dimsdale takes this opportunity of sending Mr.Durrant the best Account he has been able to obtain of the several Oxford Crowns with that City under the Horse, & in whose possession they now are.

No.1 Mr. Roberts bought it of Mr.Rebello, who purchased it of Mr.Tyssen, and was bought by him at Mr.Tutet's Sale for £32.11- Mr Tyssen having obtained a more perfect one of Mr.Hodsoll, occasioned him to part with the one he had purchased at Mr.Tutet's Sale to Mr.Rebello³.

[This is Bergne's coin 3. Bergne records that the coin is "in good condition"; repeats the Tutet-Tyssen-Rebello provenance; identifies Mr.Roberts as Barré C.Roberts ; notes that Roberts's collection was purchased by the British Museum ; that this coin was sold to Miss Banks at the British Museum Duplicates sale, 1811, for £20.10 ; and that it was bequeathed by Miss Banks to the Royal Mint]

2 Mr.Durrant, purchased at Mr.Tyssen's Sale for £14.14. Mr.Tyssen purchased it of Mr.Hodsoll, and is the one before mentioned – Mr.Hodsoll had it of Mr.White for £31-10-

[This is Bergne's coin no.5. Bergne describes the coin as "fine"; repeats the Tyssen-Hodsoll provenance, but claims, presumably incorrectly, that Hodsoll had purchased the coin at the Bartlett sale in 1787 (see Dimsdale's coin no.6 below), and goes on to record that the coin was purchased at the Durrant sale, 1847, by Rev.Edward John Shepherd. Dimsdale's statement that the present coin was in fact acquired from "Mr.White" for £31-10 ties in with a final paragraph in Bergne's note in which Bergne notes that "a specimen occurs in a sale, March 26, 1776, of coins stated to belong to a "Gentleman in Norfolk", but said in a MS note in some copies to have really been the property of the notorious John White, of Newgate Street. It sold for £31:10"]

3 Dr.Hunter's Museum⁴

[Not listed by Bergne and seemingly a ghost]

³ Here Durrant adds a note "now Miss Banks".

⁴ This line crossed through by Dimsdale (see the end of Dimsdale's letter for the fact that Dimsdale's listing of a Hunter specimen was merely a guess on his part).

4 T.Dimsdale, purchased at Mr.Barker's Sale; This piece was bought by Mr.Young for Mr.Barker at Mr.Dummer's Sale for £21-10

[This is Bergne's no.6. Bergne repeats the Dummer-Barker provenance, notes that "the field has been tooled" and adds that the coin was purchased at the Dimsdale sale, 1824, by W.Simonds Higgs; was purchased at the Higgs sale, 1830, by Thomas Thomas; and was purchased at the Thomas sale, 1844, by John Alfred Wigan]

5. The Bodleian Collection, Oxford, presented by Brown Willis, Esqr-

[This is Bergne's no.2. Bergne records "said to be in fine condition" and repeats the Willis provenance]

No.6 Mr.Austin, purchased by Mr.Thane at Mr.Bartlett's Sale for £25.10

[This is Bergne's no.4. Bergne does not give the Bartlett provenance, which, as noted above, he assigns to the Durrant-Tyssen-Hodsoll specimen. Bergne records that the present coin was the specimen in Robert Austen's collection, purchased for the Bank of England by Act of Parliament in 1812]

7. Mr.R.Dimsdale bought of Mr.Young worn

[This is presumably Bergne's no.9, "in indifferent condition", recorded by him as a second specimen belonging to Thomas Dimsdale, purchased at the Dimsdale sale, 1824 by the collector Jones Long. Bergne notes that at the Jones Long sale, 1842, the coin was purchased by John Alfred Wigan, but that on obtaining the ex Thomas specimen (Dimsdale's coin no.4 above), Wigan sold the present coin to Rev.Edward John Shepherd, who then sold it on to Sir Henry Russell, Bart., at whose sale in 1850 it was purchased by Jonathan Rashleigh]

8. In the possession of a Lady, a Friend of Dr.Disney –

[This is Bergne's possible no.11. Bergne suggests that this may be the same specimen as his coin no.8 (see below), and records that the Dr.Disney concerned was "Hollis' Executor", i.e. Rev. John Disney DD (1746-1816), the Unitarian minister who inherited the accumulated estates of Thomas Hollis (1720-1774) and of Thomas Brand Hollis (1719-1804)]

9. The British Museum. Bought by the Revd.Mr.Southgate for £24.15 at the Sale of Mr.Brown, Shipton Mallett; for whom it was purchased by Mr.Snelling at Mr.Grainger's Sale for £11.16-

[This is Bergne's no.1. Bergne records "fine" and repeats the Grainger-Browne-Southgate provenance]

The Oxford Pennies

No.1 – Mr.Roberts-, extremely fine, of Mr.Bootle who bought it at Mr.Thomas Selby's Sale the 8th December 1755-

Lot 18- Charles 1. Silver 20/ piece oxon with the Copartment, and the one penny piece oxon, extremely rare - - No.2 - £7.10 Bootle

2. T.Dimsdale, worn, Bought at Mr.Barker's Sale, who it is supposd had it of Mr.Mathew S.Ayres

Mr.Durrant will observe no mention is made of one of the Oxford Crowns being in possession of the King; altho' that is most likely the case ; and that one is inserted as being in the H.Museum of Dr.Hunter, which is supposed to be correct

December 20th 1805

It is proper to add that the three specimens of the Oxford crown "with that City under the horse" that were not known to Dimsdale but which were known to Bergne were those which were in 1854 in the possession of Rev.John Ward, Rector of Wath, Yorkshire, "in middling condition", apparently "long in his family" (Bergne no.10); in the possession of Lord Hastings, "said to be in good condition" and supposedly "presented by Charles I to Major-General Sir Jacob Astley", Lord Hastings's ancestor (Bergne no.7); and in the possession of William Brice, "fine" and "purchased by him in 1853, having newly turned up" (Bergne no.8).

I have not pursued the subsequent histories of the coins involved, for that is a matter for scholars and coin dealers with specific knowledge of the Civil War issues of the Oxford mint, as is indeed the subsequent fate of the two Oxford pennies recorded by Dimsdale. It would be good to have input from knowledgeable specialists on this point, and it would also be good to know how many further examples of these coins might have come on the market since 1854. Comments of any kind are welcome !

