Henry III Long Cross Pennies – Analysis of the Use of the Letter "H" for "N"

Robert Page

Throughout the Henry III long cross series one often sees the capital letter "H" often used for an "N". This usage is not consistent, in that many coins have a mixture of "H" and "N" in their reverse legends. I have looked at two London moneyers, Nicole and Henri, as both have an N in their name and both moneyers were active over much of the long cross coinage period. Additionally, I have analysed Nicole at Canterbury and the smaller dataset for Ion at the Bury mint.

The combination of moneyer and London mint name on the reverse gives three examples of letter N/H to examine – normally in the 1st, 3rd and 4th quadrants. For example, NIC/OLE/ONL/VND I record as NNN, and HIC/OLE/OHL/VHD as HHH. Mixtures of "H" and "N" on the same coin are recorded as MIX. The data shown in this research note is based on coins in the Brussels Hoard as documented by Churchill and Thomas (2012)[1]. Unfortunately, the document for the Colchester Hoard coins[2] does not distinguish between the use of H or N, and so the Colchester data could not be used.

NUMBER OF DATA POINTS		
London	Nicole	6,158
	Henri	5,490
Canterbury	Nicole	4,760
Bury	Ion	708
	Total:	17,116

"HHH" on a class 2b2 coin   "MIX" on a class 5b2   "NNN" on a class 4a

Details of the production method for the long cross dies are largely unknown. We do know that the dies were prepared in London (except perhaps for some of the class 5d coins) but we do not know how many die-makers were involved through the voided long cross series. Furthermore, we do not know if individual die-makers made both obverses and reverses, or even whether they prepared the whole of a die rather than some people specialising in the lettering and others in the bust. When you consider apprentices and "newhires" likely being also involved, then it is probable that there was some variation in who did what. Another key unknown is whether die-makers were assigned to producing dies for particular mints rather than working on whatever was needed next by any of the mints. All of these uncertainties need to be considered when trying to interpret the analysis presented here. Firstly, I look at the variation through the series for Nicole, and then do the same for Henri. Nicole coins of

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[1] Churchill R and Thomas B 2012. The Brussels Hoard of 1908: The Long Cross Coinage of Henry III.
[2] Archibald MM and Cook BJ. 2001. British Museum Occasional Paper No. 87. The Colchester Hoard 1969.

Canterbury and Ion of Bury have also been analysed. Examination of the plots allows various conclusions to be drawn.
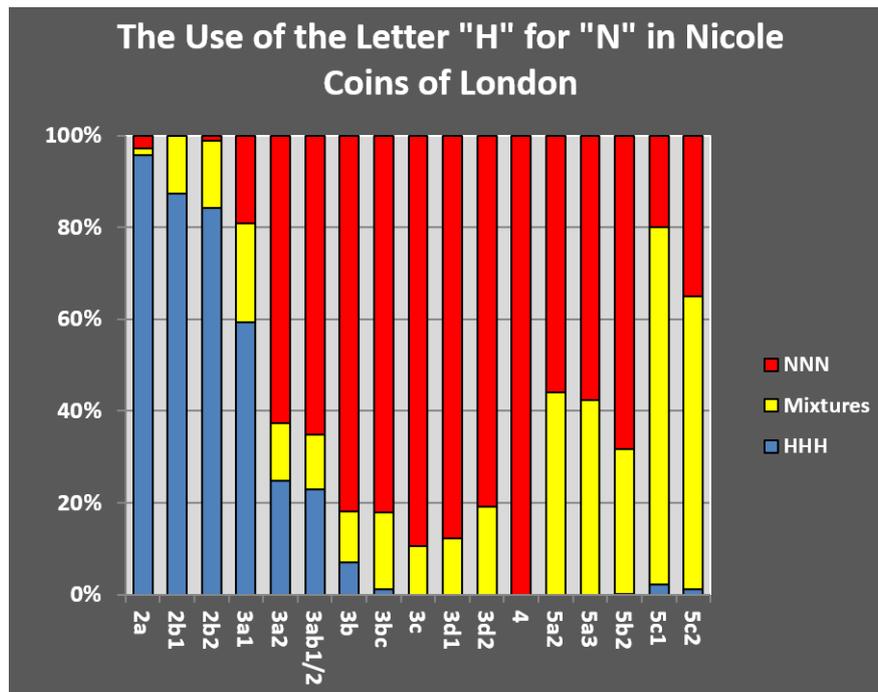

Fig.1. Nicole at London.

One can look at the relative proportions of combinations in order to determine any trends through time. For Nicole, I have examined the data from Class 2 through to class 5c2, omitting some classes with a small sample size. The last issue by Nicole was 5c2, and the last coins issued under his control may have been issued when he was ailing and perhaps not in a position to pay as close attention to supervision as he had in the past. The resultant graph for Nicole at London is shown above, and observations are as follows:

(a) For class 2 coins, HHH predominates and NNN is scarce; mixed combinations are also scarce and particularly so for class 2a. (b) The class 3 coins show a high proportion of NNN, progressively increasing throughout class 3 until the proportion reaches 100% in class 4. (c) Class 3a2 coins appear to fit correctly into the sequence – the class having been introduced by Churchill and Thomas (2012) and being placed by them between the old class 3a and 3ab, despite the general appearance of most perhaps suggesting more affinity with class 3c[3]. (d) The HHH combination is absent for class 3c thru' 5a coins looked at in this analysis. (e) Class 5 is dominated by NNN, but has quite a high proportion of mixed combinations, in the order of 40% for 5a/5b but significantly higher for class 5c coins. The

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[3] Sub-class 3a2 was introduced by Churchill and Thomas (2012) for pennies with initial mark ("im") 3* having thin sharp rays and with a vertical axis orientation. Churchill and Thomas themselves noted that the coins having im 3* included coins of class 3a appearance, coins of class 3c appearance and a further group of coins whose bust appearance differs from other class 3 sub-classes. Regardless of the bust appearance, Churchill and Thomas gave enough significance to the use of im 3* to assign all three bust types to their new sub-class 3a2, which they placed chronologically behind the old class 3a, now known as 3a1, and class 3ab.

change in the ratio of NNN to MIX at the beginning of class 5 may mark a change in the make-up in the group of working die-makers.

Having looked at Nicole, I turned my attention to Henri, to see if the same observations hold true.
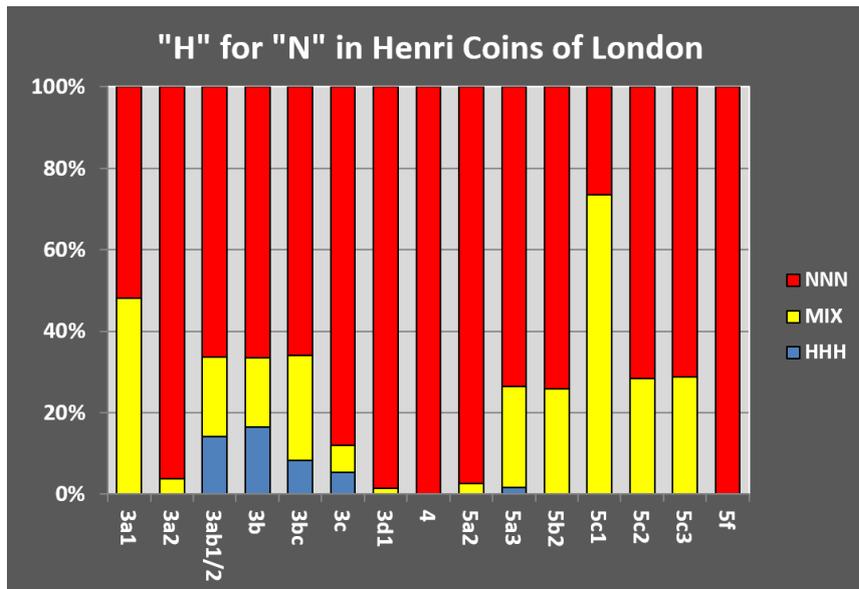

Fig.2. Henri of London.

A similar graph was constructed for Henri of London coins.

Observations are as follows:

- NNN predominates throughout the classes shown, except 5c1

- Other than for 3a2, the NNN fraction increases through class 3.

- 3a2 would seem to fit in better between 3c and 3d1 – in contrast to the observation from the Nicole data.

- Class 4 has 100% NNN – but the sample size is small.

- The 3d1 to 5a period, a period of higher quality die cutting in general, sees the highest proportion of NNN coins.

- Class 5 through 5c3 has about 25-30% mixed combinations, except 5c1 which has almost 75% mixed.

- Class 5f has 100% NNN

- The HHH combination is seen, as a low fraction, in classes 3ab1 to 3c, with a few also seen in 5a3.

Observations from Both Nicole and Henri of London: Henri did not start issuing coins until class 3 so we only have the evidence from Nicole for the letter usage for class 2 pennies, and we see that the HHH combination was prevalent then, with it reducing significantly from class 3a onwards. The fact that the use of HHH reduces from class 2 through class 3, and is eliminated by class 4, suggests that HHH was recognised as a less correct way to letter the coins, resulting in not only the elimination of HHH but also mixed combinations by class 4. The number of class 4 samples is limited, and one may yet turn up with a legend other than NNN. When the attention to detail dropped off, after classes 4 and 5a, we see the usage of mixed combinations, and even the occasional use of HHH coming back.

Looking at the different proportions of HHH for Nicole and Henri at London one conclusion could be that in general there were different die-makers preparing dies for the various different moneyers.

Canterbury: To test the observations from London, I have below plotted the data for Nicole of Canterbury...

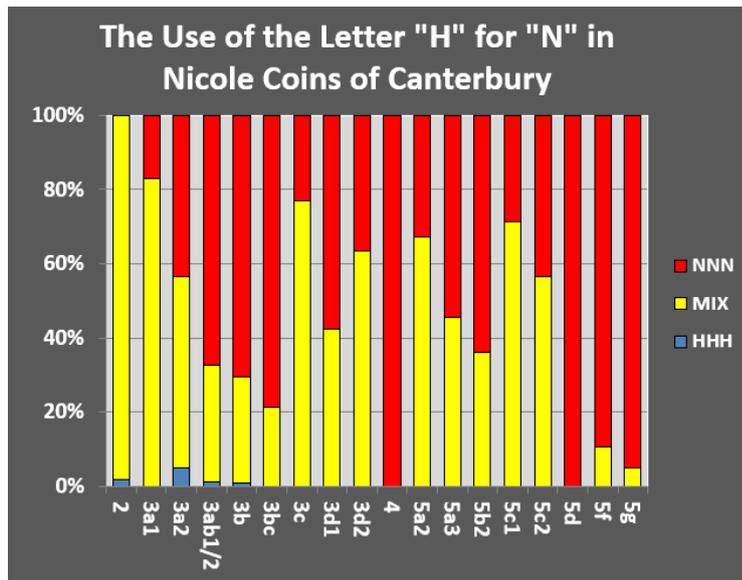**The Use of the Letter "H" for "N" in Nicole Coins of Canterbury**

Fig.3. Nicole of Canterbury.

Observations are that (a) HHH coins are very scarce compared to NNN and mixtures; and are only seen in class 2 and early class 3. (b) The Proportion of NNN pennies in general increases from class 1 to 3bc, then decreases for classes 3c to 5c2, with the exception of class 4 which is, however, comprised of a smaller and statistically less significant number of coins. (c) Ignoring the low number of HHH coins, class 3a2 seems to fall on trend, but could equally well fit in either side of class 3c, but when we consider the HHH coins it seems that 3a2 may be correctly placed chronologically. (d) The near 100% occurrence of NNN in classes 3d1 and 5a2 of Henri of London are not mirrored by the coins of Canterbury. (e) In the latter part of class 3 there are noticeably more mixed combinations in use than at London. (f) The increase of mixed combinations from 5a/5b to 5c here at Canterbury is also seen with the Nicole coins of London.

The different overall pattern at Canterbury may suggest that different die-makers produced the Canterbury dies. Ignoring the few HHH coins for the moment, the NNN and MIX coins are present through to class 5c2 in almost equal proportions – maybe suggesting two different die-makers at work on the Canterbury dies. NNN is dominant from 5d onwards. The pattern suggests a change in some or all of the die-makers preparing Canterbury dies from class 5d onwards.

Having looked at London and Canterbury, where there are a statistically robust number of samples for most classes, I turned my attention to one of the other mints to see if the observations would hold true for a mint with a lesser number of coins. I examined the statistics for the coins viewed by Eaglen from the Bury mint, as documented in Churchill and Thomas (2012). The resultant graph is as follows:
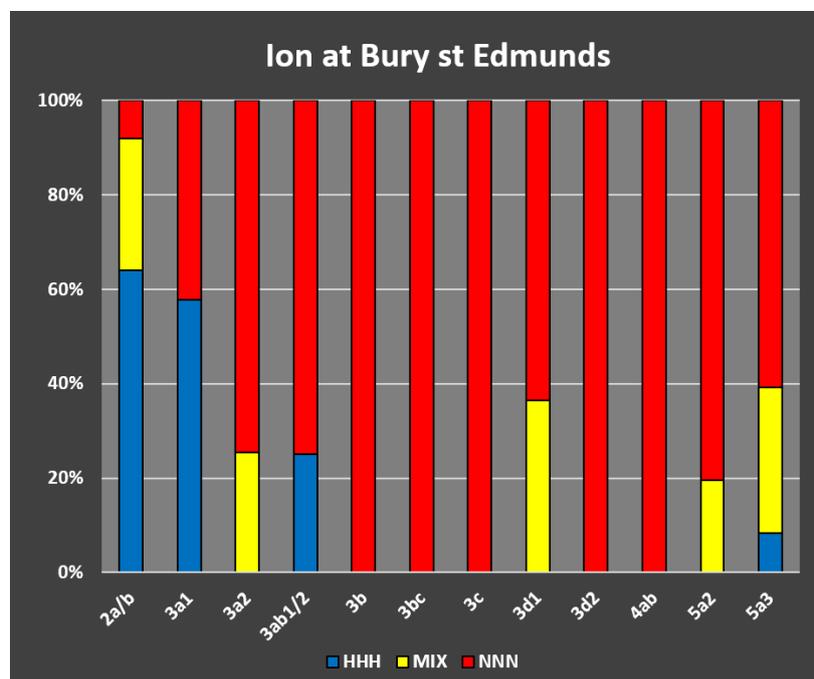

Ion at Bury st Edmunds

Fig.4. Ion at Bury.

Henry III reverses from Bury occur in two main legend variations: ION/ONS/EIN/TED or ION/ONS/EDM/VND – however both types have three quadrants with the letter N – represented by either an "N" or an "H".

The sample sizes are smaller at Bury, so the results for classes where there are less than 20-

30 samples are not as reliable – classes with less than 20 coins are 2a, 2b1, 2b2, and 4ab. Samples for the three class 2 sub-classes have been combined, as have 3ab1 and 3ab2. Looking at class 2 as a whole we see all three types are present, but that HHH disappears after 3ab and makes a minor comeback with the last coins of Ion in 5a3. 3a2 appears anomalous, and the 3a2 pattern would fit in better between 3c and 3d1 – as seen for Henri of London, but not Nicole. The same predominance of NNN is seen for the second half of class 3, except for the re-emergence of a significant fraction of mixed combinations for 3d1.

As the dies were probably all cut by the same group of people in London, it may be valid to combine the above four data sets to better see the big picture. The resultant graph appears below, but keep in mind that all classes are not represented at all the mints.
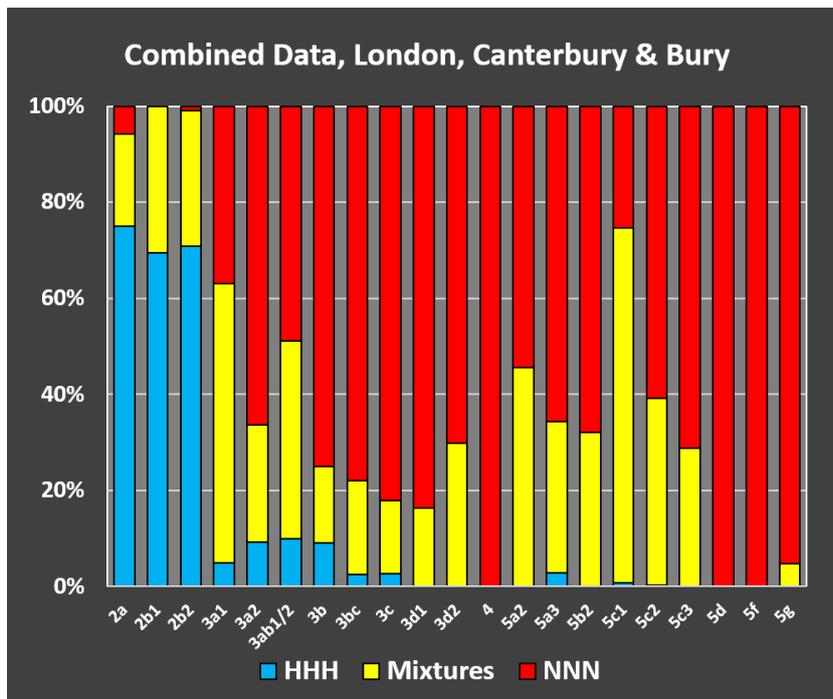

Fig.5. Combined data for Nicole and Henri at London, Nicole at Canterbury, Ion at Bury.

Looking at both the individual data sets as well as the combined data set, we can deduce that NNN was regarded as the correct usage, but that mixtures of H and N were considered acceptable for much of the long cross period, except during the brief class 4 period when we see the highest quality of die preparation.

At the beginning of Class 2 of the voided long cross series it seems that HHH was the widely accepted usage. This changed abruptly at the beginning of class 3, with the fraction of NNN coins generally increasing through class 3, with 3ab2 being a notable exception. This abrupt change of HHH usage at the class 2/class 3 transition may have been due to an influx of new die cutters to cope with the needed production volume.

On fig.5 the pattern for class 3a2 seems to fit almost correctly in sequence, though the high proportion of mixed combinations of class 3ab is anomalous. On this chart the pattern suggests that class 3a2 might perhaps fit better chronologically after class 3ab, though one should probably not draw such conclusions from the combined data chart, it being better to consider the charts for individual mints.

The HHH coins had almost disappeared by class 5, though a scarce few are seen. The fraction of mixed H/N coins is generally higher for class 5 than class 3, perhaps indicating a relaxation of the standards that had been achieved by Class 4 time, possibly related to some of the die-cutters needed for the provincial phase being "let go".

It is hard to understand why a mixture of H and N should be used on the same coin, if all the legend was completed by the same die cutter. On coins with three letter H/Ns on the reverse there are eight

possible combinations – could these different combinations have perhaps been signatures of different die cutters? This is doubtful given the wide variation in the proportion of mixed to non-mixed combinations. The reasoning behind the mixed usage remains a mystery, and currently appears random.

Not only does this small study tell us a little about how the die-maker's work might have been organised, but it also highlights some rarer coins that collectors may wish to look out for:

LONDON

Nicole: Class 2 NNN. Class 2a MIX. HHH from class 3b or later. Class 4 with HHH or

Henri: MIX from classes 3a2, 3c, 3d1, 5a2, 5f

CANTERBURY

Nicole: Any HHH (all classes). MIX from classes 5f and 5g. Class 2 NNN.

BURY

Ion (John): HHH and/or MIX in classes 3b, 3bc, 3c, 3d2, 4ab.   MIX in classes 3a1, 3ab1 & 3ab2 and HHH in classes 3a2, 3d1, 5a2, 5a3.

I would welcome feedback on this note and encourage readers to comment via the blog facility, and would also be interested in hearing if any of the rarer types are located in reader's collections or elsewhere.