

A Newly Discovered Cut Halfpenny Struck for Henry of Anjou, and some Observations on Die Variants for Mack's type 253

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1.1 Introduction

Though one might perhaps surmise on first thought that only coins of Stephen and Matilda could be encountered pertaining to the so-called 'Anarchy' of England (c. 1135-1154), this statement could not be farther from the truth. It is only in recent years that the sheer complexity of this period in numismatic history has been truly revealed. In particular, many regional variants, 'irregular' issues and baronial coinages have been greatly enriched by new discoveries, primarily via the means of metal detected stray finds or hoards.

The coin discussed in this short note represents an important new addition to the corpus of known Angevin coinage, specifically that thought to be struck in the name of Henry of Anjou. In addition to bringing attention to this previously un-recognised find, the author suggests a refinement to the current typology for this series based on the presence of clear die-groups.

1.2 Coins struck in the name of Henry of Anjou, similarities with baronial issues, mints

It was Mack's¹ seminal work on coinage struck during the Anarchy that set out for the first time in detail Henry of Anjou's coins, in addition to placing them concurrent with the historical narrative². Following the retreat of Matilda from Oxford Castle and her 'handover' of the war to Robert of Gloucester, it appears that coins began to be struck in her son Henry's name. Although a number were evidently produced, they are rare survivors today - those extant being often slightly base and badly struck. From the appearance of these types in comparison to official issues struck for Stephen, it appears that coins in Henry's name were struck from c. 1142 right up to about 1149 or 1150, with few pieces during the 1150s. Production apparently was re-initiated on Henry's return to England in 1153, where he decisively defeated Stephen in battle and later that year ratified the Treaty of Westminster - ensuring his succession.

It should come as no surprise given the Angevin party's main bases of power in Gloucester and Bristol that the vast majority of Henry's coins (where the mint can be identified) originate from the West of England. Mack's work identifies securely pieces attributable to Bristol, Hereford, Malmesbury and Gloucester - with Cirencester, Sherborne and Ilchester indirectly inferred as other mints probably striking in his name³.

The present note concerns pieces ascribed to Mack's type 3, assigned a total of seven different numbers in his catalogue so as to encompass all the variants. The type is perhaps best described as a hybrid, combining the obverse of Stephen's type I with the reverse copying Henry I's type XV. Based on the frequently blundered reverse legends and crude style, it seems that these were dies engraved from

¹ Mack, R, P. 1966. Stephen and the Anarchy: 1135-1154. *British Numismatic Journal* no. 35, pp. 38-112.

² Mack, R, P. 1966, pp. 88-89.

³ Mack, 1966, pp. 89-92.

prototypes as opposed to being actual dies of Henry I's last type put back into use. This same reverse design is visible on coins struck for several of the southwestern 'baronial' issuers – namely Earls William and Robert of Gloucester as well as Patrick of Salisbury.

1.3 The new find, context of discovery, description

In February 2020 the author was contacted by a numismatic acquaintance, Mr J Mayer, regarding an unidentified cut halfpenny that had come into his possession. Having provided photographs of the find, it was realised very quickly that this was an issue of Henry of Anjou. In due course, Mr Mayer was able to helpfully ascertain some information regarding its provenance, namely that it had been discovered some time ago by a metal detectorist in the Climping area of West Sussex. Though the coin is somewhat worn and rather chipped, it is nonetheless identifiable and able to be assigned to Mack's type 3, specifically no. 253 in his catalogue⁴. Within the standard work of J J North⁵, it is as no. 940/2. Once the Fitzwilliam Museum re-opens following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the coin will be recorded via the EMC. Its description is as follows:

Henry of Anjou, cut halfpenny, c. 1142-1149. Obverse: crude profile bust right wearing rounded cap or diadem, sceptre in front. Inscription illegible. Reverse: quadrilateral with fleur at each corner set atop cross fleury, single pellet in each angle (as Henry I type XV). Inscription: [...]V/O?[....]



Fig. 1: The newly discovered cut halfpenny struck for Henry of Anjou, discovered 'Near Climping'. Photos courtesy J Mayer, adapted by A Bliss.

1.4 Mack 253, other examples, die links

Encompassed within Mack's type 3 (demonstrating a reverse of/inspired by Henry I's type XV) are three broad groups: coins where the bust wears a crown with fleur shaped ornaments as with Stephen's type I (cat. 247-250)⁶, coins where the bust wears an un-ornamented square crown or cap (cat. 250-

⁴ Mack, 1966, p. 91.

⁵ North, J, J. 1963. *English Hammered Coinage: Vol. I. Early Anglo-Saxon-Henry III, c. AD 650-1272*, p. 159.

⁶ Mack, 1966, p. 90.

252/North 940/1)⁷ and coins where the bust wears an un-ornamented rounded cap or diadem (253/North 940/2)⁸. It is with the last group that this note is primarily concerned.

In his catalogue, Mack listed a total of four coins attributable to this type, catalogued as no. 253. Of these four coins, one (253c) is in fact a die-link with his no. 248 (thus omitted from this discussion as a different type entirely), and two of the three remaining are illustrated in his work⁹. No image of 253d was available to the author at time of writing. In addition to these published examples there are seven coins recorded on the EMC which correspond to the general sub-type, giving a total of around ten fully-published coins known. The newly-discovered example from Climping can be directly die-linked with two of the pieces recorded on the EMC: nos. 2007.0034 and 2014.0280, all three struck from the same die-pair. Of the remaining seven coins only one other distinct die group can be observed, consisting EMC nos. 1030.0804, 2011.0172, Mack cat nos. 253a and Mack 253b. EMC 1200.0227 and EMC 2005.003 are (as we shall see) of the same variety but apparently struck from different die-pairs, the other remaining coin (EMC 2009.0241) is from the perspective of die-linking completely unique.

1.5 Observing and extrapolating upon new die varieties in Mack 253

Viewing the ten currently known coins of Mack 253 in their totality clearly demonstrates the presence of distinct varieties within the present corpus. Broadly, three groups can be distinguished – divided based on the following features: appearance of bust, appearance of diadem, appearance of hair and appearance of sceptre. A suggested division of these die variants is suggested below:

Group 1: ‘coins with elongated portraits’-this group (3 coins) demonstrate rather coarsely rendered, portraits, appearing almost as if drawn by a child (Fig. 2). The mouth consists an annulet set atop a vertical stalk, the sceptre terminates in a fleur (with a pellet at the midpoint of the shaft), the diadem is perfectly horizontal with a solid line demarcating its front, and the hair sweeps down from the top of the scalp with a prominent curve to the left. Traces of a jewelled mantle are visible, which takes the form of pelleted line within two sweeping curved lines.



⁷ Mack, 1966, p. 91.

⁸ Mack, 1966, p. 91.

⁹ Mack, 1966, pl. X., 253a-b.

Fig. 2: Full penny struck for Henry of Anjou, Mack 253/North 940/2. EMC 2014.0280 - found Chesham, Buckinghamshire, 2014. Auctioned by Spink in 2014, but unsold. Author's group 1. Current whereabouts unknown. Image courtesy Spink.

Group 2: 'coins with squat portraits and fleur-headed sceptres'-this group (4 coins) demonstrate rather squat portraits with thick lips and a single pellet forming the chin (Fig. 3). As with group 1, a row of pellets set between two curving lines denotes the collar of a jewelled mantle. The sceptre is, as with group 1, fleur-headed (though in this variant there is no pellet visible on the shaft) – a pellet set between it and the bust at its base possibly intended to render a crude depiction of a hand. In contrast to group 1, the diadem is now curved with two small pellets marking its front, the hair rendered more simply by means of oblique strokes aligned to the right.



Figure 3: Full penny struck for Henry of Anjou, Mack 253/North 940/2. EMC 2011.0172, found Martin Parish, Hampshire, 2011. Current whereabouts unknown. Author's group 2. Photos adapted from EMC by A Bliss.

Group 3: 'coins with squat portraits and pelleted sceptres'-this group (2 coins) demonstrate portraits very similar to group 2 (and thus probably closely related), though the lips are even thicker and the single pellet forming the chin is much enlarged (Fig. 4). Appearance of the jewelled mantle is much the same as groups 1 and 2, though the curved line at the top is doubled in this die variant. The sceptre shaft (demonstrating four separate pellets) was presumably intended to be topped with a trefoil of pellets, though the frontmost of these was apparently not rendered properly during die cutting and is thus absent. The diadem is again curved much akin to group 2 with two small pellets at its front edge, as is the hair – which again is rendered by the means of oblique lines angled to the right.



Figure 4: Full penny struck for Henry of Anjou. EMC 1200.0227, discovery date and findspot unknown. Author's group 3. Images courtesy EMC, adapted by A Bliss.

The one remaining coin left over (EMC 2009.0241) is perhaps best considered related to group 3 until (or indeed, if) further examples emerge. Demonstrating a squat portrait with a single pellet forming the chin (Fig. 5), the diadem is curved but solid at its front edge, the sceptre demonstrating multiple pellets along its shaft as again observable in group 3, but terminating (uniquely) in three very large annulets.



Figure 5: Full penny struck for Henry of Anjou. EMC 2009.0241, found 2009, 'South Oxfordshire'. Not grouped by author. Images courtesy EMC, adapted by A Bliss.

1.6 Conclusions

The author hopes that the above demonstrates the current presence of at least 4 differing die groups within the broader context of Mack 253/North 940.2, with further division an ever-present possibility given the potential emergence of new discoveries. At present, these divisions are solely based on the physical appearance of coin designs, given the dearth of information concerning mints and moneyers in this notoriously poorly-struck series. Indeed, it may well be the case that each 'group' reflects the output of a different mint utilising locally-made dies, though the latter will only be evidenced through emergence of coins with legible reverse legends.

