

# Henry III – Long Cross Penny – A Challenging Piece

## - A striker's foible or just an undetected error?

Ian M. Heavisides and Robert Page

You may have recently seen the famous Henry III two penny piece come up for sale again with a well-known London dealer, see fig.1. This coin has been described by Churchill and Thomas in their book on the Brussels Hoard<sup>1</sup>, and in 1944 by D.F. Allen in the BNJ<sup>2</sup>. The unique silver piece weighs 2.83 grams - double that of an ordinary silver penny of that era, and has a diameter of 22.3 mm, compared to the usual 18-20 mm seen on pennies. It has traces of having been previously mounted, possibly to wear as jewellery and includes contemporary gilding on the reverse. As the coin advert says..." *believed to have been struck ... as a pattern or test piece which was struck from ordinary penny dies of the time and not from specially prepared dies. There was no documentary authority for such a coin, and nothing else aside from its weight and slightly larger diameter would have distinguished it from an ordinary penny during the era*". Allen suggested that it could have been especially struck for use as a brooch.

This short article presents another coin that also seems to be highly unusual. The coin in question appears to be a penny and is illustrated in fig.2. This coin was purchased as part of a large collection and could have passed back into numismatic circulation dismissed as an "unfortunate" piece. However, we believe it is worth a second look, and the purpose of this article is to solicit suggestions as to what it might represent.

As can be seen it is a coin of Bury St Edmunds identified by Robin Eaglen as 3c dies Qq (286) and as class 3d2, Bur 36, by Thomas and Churchill, the triple colon being the main feature to make identification easy. This was sufficient to merit a closer inspection. The coin appears to be at least near full size and, although having some flatness, appears to have only moderate wear BUT the weight is now only 0.57 g. In other words, this coin is only about 40% of the weight of a normal penny.

Closely observed the flan was extraordinarily thin. In fact on the best struck area of the coin the two dies had met creating a series of fine holes at the lowest points, (highest points of the dies). There has been some wear and a little leeching, so clearly some weight loss but hardly explaining a 60% loss in weight. A coin in roughly the same condition was weighed and the result was 1.45g. Next a cut halfpenny in GF, leached and slightly clipped was also weighed and the result 0.53g. the inference is clear; this coin was struck at, or very near to, the weight of half a penny, i.e about 0.72 gm., and has subsequently lost a little weight through wear and leaching when buried. It has been suggested that perhaps the metal is base and was over flattened. This has yet to be checked but let us remind ourselves of life in a mint. The coins were trimmed of any excess silver and then weighed carefully. Remember the punishments for producing light weight coins was ferocious. How is it possible then that this coin evaded weighing unless it was struck with the full knowledge of all parties?

---

<sup>1</sup> The Brussels Hoard of 1908; the Long Cross Coinage of Henry III. Churchill, Ron & Thomas, Bob. Baldwin's, 2012

<sup>2</sup> D. F. Allen, 'The "twopence" of Henry III in the Drabble sale', 24 (1941-44), 55

Although the triple colon makes this an unusual coin, the mint of Bury seems an unlikely source of a trial issue; why not London or Canterbury? So far it seems to be a unique coin and an enigma defying explanation unless a reader can provide a plausible explanation.



Fig.1 The two-pence piece of Willem of Canterbury



Fig.2 – ION/ONS/EDM/VND, class 3d2 – very lightweight.