

Bedwyn to (or from?) Watchet: A Remarkable Instance of Die Alteration on a Penny of Edward the Confessor

David Guest

With comments by

Stewart Lyon

In the BNJ of 1974 Mark Blackburn published a detailed study and corpus of coins of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman mint of Watchet in Somerset.¹ Number 32 in Blackburn's corpus is a Radiate Small Cross type of Edward the Confessor struck by the well-attested moneyer Godcild:

Obv. +EDPERD REX A, radiate bust left. *Rev.* +GODCILD ON PECED, small cross.

Only one specimen was known to Blackburn for this type, a coin in the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm. Blackburn noted this coin had been given to Bedford by Hildebrand in his monumental catalogue of 1881 and was reattributed to Watchet by G. van der Meer in 1961.² The moneyer Godcild is not known at Bedford and only strikes at Watchet.

Since Blackburn published his corpus one further die duplicate of the Radiate Small Cross type has been recorded: SCBI 51 Estonian Collections, no. 1031.³ However the authors of this volume apparently followed Hildebrand in giving the mint to Bedford erroneously.



Fig. 1

Recently I was able to acquire a die duplicate of Blackburn 32 (fig. 1). With the coin was a ticket in the hand of the late Michael Sharp giving the mint as Watchet.



Fig. 2

Inspection of the reverse legend revealed that the letters forming the mint signature PECED are curiously rendered (fig. 2). It is apparent that the letters P, C, the second E and D were cut into the die over other letters and that prior to alteration the die had read GODCILD ON BEDPI. The re-cutting of the letters in the mint name probably explains why Hildebrand gave the specimen in Stockholm to Bedford.

It is evident that the reverse die had originally been prepared for use at the mint of Bedwyn. Bedwyn (BEEDE, BEDEI, BEDEP, BEDEPINDE) in Wiltshire is not however known for the Radiate Small Cross type and the mint only opens in the subsequent Trefoil Quadrilateral type. The mint continued to operate for the remainder of the reign and was the preserve of a single moneyer named Cild.

This highly unusual coin poses intriguing questions about the organisation of the late Anglo-Saxon coinage and the supply of dies. Was the anticipated opening of a mint at Bedwyn under the charge of the moneyer Godcild postponed and, for reasons of economy, an already prepared reverse die altered for use at Watchet where the same Godcild was already striking? For the reign of the Confessor Godcild, as noted above, is only known to strike at Watchet and Cild is only known to strike at Bedwyn. Were these two distinctively named moneyers members of the same family operating the farm of two mints located at a considerable distance apart?

I am aware of one other example of an altered mint name on a late Anglo-Saxon coin. In the sale of the collection of the late Lord Stewartby there was a Radiate Small Cross type Penny of Wallingford (PELIN) altered from Reading (REDN), moneyer Brihtric.⁴ Antony Freeman had published this coin in the Numismatic Circular in 1984 proposing the mint to be Reading altered from Wallingford. The cataloguer of the Stewartby collection however gave good reasons to describe the mint as Wallingford altered from Reading. If we accept this reading then Reading, like Bedwyn, opens in the subsequent Trefoil Quadrilateral type.⁵ What factors could have influenced the decision to delay the opening of these two mints for the issue of the Radiate Small Cross type when dies were already in production?

David Guest

5th May 2020

Comments on 'Bedwyn to Watchet: A Remarkable Instance of Die Alteration on a Penny of Edward the Confessor' by David Guest

This relates to a problematic reverse die of Edward's *Radiate Small Cross* type, the second of his reign, cut for a moneyer Godcild. He is known as the sole moneyer of the north-west Somerset town of Watchet, from the time of his appointment c. 1020 as successor to Hunewine during Cnut's *Quatrefoil* issue, up to and including Edward's *Pointed Helmet* issue of c. 1053-5. No minting at Watchet is known, so far, from then until the *Sword* type of William I some twenty years later; minting finally ceasing there in Stephen's reign

During the final years of Godcild's activity for Edward, a new minting place opened in Wiltshire at (Great) Bedwyn, near the eastern border with Berkshire, with a sole moneyer intriguingly named Cild. He is known from the *Trefoil-Quadrilateral* issue (which succeeded *Radiate Small Cross*), continuing beyond Godcild's known activity at Watchet as far as the first issue of William I.

Whether the events in Somerset and Wiltshire were in any way connected is unknown, but the possibility is raised by the die alteration now perceived by David Guest and visible on three duplicate specimens, one of which - a recent discovery - is in his own collection. The inscription begins clearly enough as +GODCILD ON..... but the next letter resembles a twin-looped B, perhaps formed by adding a comma-shaped spur below the loop of a P. The next letter is certainly E, but the one after that can be interpreted differently according to the way in which the individual images were photographed: it can look like D, but on the clearest and cleanest images (BEH 12, illustrated by Blackburn in *BNJ* 74 Pl. IV, 31 and more recently as *SCBI* 54:621) it best resembles a square C. On

the *BNJ* image, this is followed by what seems to be an E, its foot smudged into an inner circle which gives the appearance of having been reinforced at this point; but on the *SCBI* image, and also on the specimen which David Guest has acquired, the letter looks more like an I followed by a small L. Finally there is a large D, the foot of which is also smudged into the inner circle.

At some stage in the die's usage there was evidently a need for the minting place to be clarified, if not actually amended. David Guest proposes that the die was originally prepared for use by Godcild at a new mint at Bedwyn (BEDEPINE), and subsequently modified when he resumed work back at Watchet. To achieve this result, the initial B would need to have been altered to P; the E left alone; the D broken in the middle to convert it to C; and the remainder tooled to enable it to suffice as the final ED. However, any attempted conversion of B to P was evidently unsuccessful, and although it cannot be denied that alteration was made to the penultimate and perhaps also the first letter of the original signature at some stage in the life of the die, was it to convert it **to** PECED, as Guest argues, or **from** PECED? Has the structure of the new specimen been examined to show the detail of the re-engraving?

The possibility that the die was originally issued to Godcild for use at Watchet, then altered for use at Bedwyn, would explain the presence of BE at the head of the visible mint description. As discussed above, the third letter is best interpreted as C and the final letter is certainly a D, but its predecessor may have been converted from E to IL. In that case the mint description could be read as BECILD, in other words as a contraction, in the small space available, of 'minted at Bedwyn by the moneyer Cild'. This squares with Guest's suggestion that Godcild might have had family reasons for being involved in the establishment of a mint at distant Bedwyn, and with a moneyer named Cild, ahead of Edward's next substantive issue (*Trefoil-Quadrilateral*). Whether he actually took the die to Bedwyn, and back again for further use at Watchet, is at best a subject for speculation.

Stewart Lyon 9th June 2020

¹ BNJ 44, pp. 13-38 https://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1974_BNJ_44_4.pdf

² 'Some Corrections to and Comments on B. E. Hildebrand's Catalogue', *Anglo-Saxon Coins* (ed. Dolley), 1961, pp.169-87. See also SCBI 54 (Stockholm pt. V), no. 621

³ <https://emc.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/full-record/10511031>

⁴ Lord Stewartby Collection, part I (Spink 234, 22 March 2016) lot 276

⁵ SCBI 54 (Stockholm pt. V), no. 834 is incorrectly described as a Radiate Small Cross / Trefoil Quadrilateral mule of Reading. It is clearly a regular Trefoil Quadrilateral issue. <https://emc.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/full-record/10540834>