

Some Dangerous Modern Forgeries of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Pence

A G Bliss

Introduction

Carefully monitoring online auction sites such as eBay, the author has from 2019-20 come across a number of modern fake Anglo-Saxon and Norman pence. These appear to have been produced in the same workshop (and possibly by the same individual), though the location of this apparent faking is uncertain. However, it is perhaps not insignificant that the eBay account(s) these coins are sold through were/are all located in the town of Chippenham, Wiltshire.

Attributes, selection of prototypes and diagnostic features

The pieces discussed in this note are apparently hand-struck or pressure-cast on flans of silver, using dies which may be 3D printed. However, they do not bear any marks to indicate to the beholder that they are replicas - nor do they display the deliberately fictitious/fanciful legends as with coins produced by modern moneyers. Their appearance on eBay with the description as 'hammered coin(s)' suggests that these pieces are clearly being deliberately offered to unwitting buyers through the online commercial market.

Virtually all of the coins belonging to this corpus of fakes are either copying later Anglo-Saxon or Norman pence. However, the author has also observed an Irish halfpenny of John which appears to originate from the same 'school'. Of the pieces copying English issues, Æthelred, Cnut, Edward the Confessor, William I and Henry I have all been observed. Interestingly (though with one exception) many of those produced appear to be 'one offs' based on the limited evidence available. Though some prototypes utilised are either extremely rare (see no. 1) or very scarce pieces (see nos. 8-10), forgeries of ordinary coins are also apparently produced alongside rarities.

One somewhat alarming feature of some examples viewed by the author concerns artificial toning or distressing – not only have some pieces been offered with pieces broken off or patinas that clearly derive from application of bleach, but full fake coins have been cut into halfpence and farthings in a further attempt to deceive collectors. However, when the cut edge is observed it is in at least one case all too clear that this is a recent modification with a pair of scissors than the usual chisel-cut which took place at the mint. Despite the latter, this artificial damaging of the coins enhances their 'authentic' appearance and obscures some of the features that enables them to be securely identified as modern concoctions.

Although these pieces are dangerous fakes to the untrained eye, there are features common to all examples which allow them to be distinguished. Firstly, the virtually perfect nature of the flans, with edges beaded overly-neatly. Second, the overall 'flatness' of the pieces – every feature on the dies

apparently mechanically engraved or 3D printed to exactly the same depth. Third, the inaccuracy of the letterforms - specifically, the letter 'E'. Fourth, the fairly incoherent nature of reverse legends detailing the mint and moneyer - implying that the die-cutter was themselves working from a prototype.

List of pieces

All the currently extant examples known to the author are pictured below in chronological order, with those lacking images described in the hope that images or similar pieces might emerge in the future. As many pieces are incomplete or taken directly from eBay listings, weights and diameters are not available.

1. 'Agnus Dei' type penny of Æthelred II, observed on eBay late 2019. No pictures currently extant. From memory, artificially distressed.
2. 'Helmet' type penny of Æthelred II, sold on eBay January 2020 by eBay account based in Chippenham, Wiltshire. Reverse: +EDELNOD M O LINC: - thus imitating an issue of Lincoln. Naturally distressed. Images taken from eBay.



3. 'Short cross' type penny of Cnut, purchased by a private collector and brought to the attention of the author in January 2020. Reverse: +NORVLF (?) ON STAN: - imitating issue of Stamford. Artificially toned, deliberately struck off-flan to suggest authenticity. Images courtesy P Boothman.



4. 'Expanding cross' cut halfpenny of Edward the Confessor, variant with annulets in two quarters of reverse. Observed by author being sold on eBay in August 2019. Reverse: +ELII[.....]ERI (?) copying uncertain mint and moneyer. Images taken from eBay.



5. 'Profile left/cross fleury' penny of William I. Brought to attention of author November 2019. Reverse: +PIIIFMÆR ON RV, copying an issue of the moneyer WULFMAER at Romney. Artificially distressed. Images courtesy B Seabrook.



6. 'Two sceptres' type of William I. Brought to attention of author November 2019. Reverse: +GODINC ON LVNDEI, imitating issue of London. Artificially distressed. Images courtesy B Seabrook.



7. 'Sword' type cut farthing of William I. Observed by author being sold on eBay in August 2019. Details uncertain and images not available.

8. 'Large profile/cross and annulets' penny of Henry I. Brought to author's attention by acquaintance and subsequently observed being sold on eBay in November 2019. Reverse: +SODRI[]PE:ON:C[.] (?) copying uncertain mint and moneyer. Artificially toned and distressed, note 'official' edge snick at 11 o'clock on reverse. Images taken from eBay.



9. 'Large profile/cross and annulets' penny of Henry I. Posted on British numismatic forum in autumn of 2019. Die duplicate of no. 8. Only obverse image available.



10. 'Large profile/cross and annulets' cut farthing of Henry I. Observed by author on eBay in August 2019 being sold by eBay account based in Chippenham, Wiltshire – purchased and re-sold by a second individual (evidently unknowing of its fake nature), subsequently passing into hands of author. Die duplicate of nos. 8-9.



Concluding thoughts

The author would be keen to hear from individuals who possess coins clearly produced by this 'school', or indeed consist die duplicates of those listed above.

