

AN EARLY REFERENCE TO A CAROLI FORTUNA RESURGAM SCARBOROUGH SIEGE PIECE

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Scarborough, the Yorkshire town and seaport dominated by its imposing medieval castle, was initially held during the English Civil War by its governor Sir Hugh Cholmley (1600-1657) for Parliament, but Cholmley changed sides in March 1643 and from that point onwards he held Scarborough for Charles I. By February 1645 tentative surrender negotiations between Cholmley and parliamentary commanders had come to nothing, and Scarborough came under significant attack. The town and the port area were occupied by parliamentary troops on 18 February, and Cholmley and his garrison retreated into the castle, which they successfully defended during a five-month siege that followed, ending with Cholmley's surrender on 25 July.

Two primary varieties of siege piece, a “two towers” type and a “broaken castle” type have traditionally been supposed to have been struck for currency use by the Scarborough garrison within this period, and the discovery early in the twentieth century of a previously overlooked memoir of the siege written by Cholmley himself¹ provided reliable contemporary evidence both for their issue and for the fact that they were struck to provide pay for Cholmley's garrison. Cholmley states in this memoir that “the Governor [by which he means himself] made use of the plaite which belonged to some persons here hee had particular interest in, which was cut in pieces, and passed currant according to there severall weights”, and this is borne out by surviving specimens of both types, the weights of those of the “two towers” type being particularly close to the theoretical weight of their intended denomination². Cholmley goes on to say that “some of them had the stampe of a broaken castle with this inscription Caroli fortuna resurgam”, and this usefully evidences a further category of siege piece with a different stamped image of a “broaken castle”, surrounded by the engraved inscription *Caroli fortuna resurgam*.

Interpretation of the Scarborough siege piece series has however been bedeviled by the existence of significant quantities of later forgeries, and it is also not at all clear what currency function the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* pieces might have had, since they exist both in an octagonal oblong form and in a circular form, and in neither case carry any mark of value, although, as Edward Besly has observed, “most of the weights” of surviving specimens “correspond to coins of 1s 3d or 1s 4d”³.

¹ C.H.Firth, ‘Sir Hugh Cholmley's narrative of the siege of Scarborough, 1644-5’, *English Historical Review* 32, 1917, 568-87, at p.584. Edward Besly, to whom the present writer is grateful for having read and commented on this note, has also kindly supplied the writer with the precise text of Cholmley's remarks as reported by Firth.

² Edward Besly has noted that the weights of the different denominations of the “two towers” type were “adjusted with great precision” (E.Besly, ‘Metrology of the Civil War coinages’, *BNJ* 61, 1992, 57-75, at p.74, where this is demonstrated by a useful graph recording the weights of surviving specimens both of the “two towers” and of the “broaken castle” types).

³ E.Besly, loc.cit., at p.75.

In a well-researched note in the Spink firm's *Numismatic Circular* for 1982⁴, the late Harry Manville offered what has since been generally accepted as the most likely interpretation of the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* issue, and the relevant passage in his note is worth quoting in full :

“If the Caroli Fortuna pieces were issued during the siege of Scarborough, it appears most unlikely that they would have circulated at the same time as the extensive, roughly-cut series showing values. Conceivably the octagonal and round pieces (why two shapes, by the way ?) could have been issued first, caused difficulties by not having denominations, and been superseded by other types with denominations. A far more likely explanation for the non-denominational type, however, is that after the siege a castle was punched onto conveniently sized pieces of silver, in a rough imitation of the genuine pieces, and the motto added by hand in remembrance. There would be no need for denominations on such souvenirs”.

Although what Manville suggests sounds sensible enough, it should be borne in mind that Cholmley's own memoir indicates that “broaken castle” pieces with the inscription *Caroli fortuna resurgam* were produced during the duration of the siege, and it is to be observed that Edward Besly, noting that “contemporary examples are attested by Cholmley's narrative”, contents himself with the statement that the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* pieces “are not certainly part of the siege coinage”.⁵

It seems desirable in this context to draw attention to a passage in a manuscript in the Dean and Chapter Library, Durham, MS Hunter 134, which does not appear to have been noticed up to this point by those interested in the coinages of the Civil War period. The manuscript in question, transcribed in full as part of a thesis of 1973 by David F.Jones submitted for a BPhil degree at the University of St.Andrews⁶, is a journal of travels in France and Italy in 1647-8 by the exiled Royalist clergyman Isaac Basire (1607-1676), who was acting at the time as a travelling tutor, supervising four young Englishmen on the initial stages of an intended Grand Tour on the European continent. Basire and his pupils had left England on 21 June 1647, and during the opening months of their tour the entries in the journal were kept not by Basire but by the pupils themselves, with the result that in the entry cited below the “I” referred to is one of the pupils and “Monr.de Preaumont”, referred to in the third person, is Basire himself⁷.

The journal records that the Basire party arrived at Aix en Provence (Bouches du Rhône), the historic capital of the Provence region, on 28 March 1647/8, spending that night there, and that during their brief stay at Aix they saw the city's principal sights. The relevant passages in the journal entry for 28 March⁸ read thus :

⁴ H.E.Manville, “‘Caroli fortuna resurgam’ siege pieces”, *NCirc* Sep 1982, 229-31.

⁵ Besly, loc.cit., at p.74.

⁶ D.F.Jones, *An itinerary of Fraunce and Italy in the years 1647 and 1648 : by Isaac Basire*. The full text of the thesis is viewable on the internet via the St.Andrews Research Repository.

⁷ Basire was of French Protestant ancestry, and his full name was Isaac Basire de Preaumont. He had dropped the de Preaumont part of his surname when he had come to live in England in the late 1620s, but had found it convenient to adopt it again on a temporary basis while travelling through France twenty years later.

⁸ Hunter MS 134, ff.59-63.

“The Citty [of Aix-en-Provence] hath very many many [sic] stately buildings, and many markes of Antiquity, as tombs, inscriptions & columns, but above all the Cabinet of Monr. Bourville is to be admired for rarities, some of wch I have thought good to mention, as followeth,”

[A long description of these follows : they included natural history items, swords, miscellaneous antiquities, and numismatic items, including 200 otherwise undescribed “medals of gold”]

“To adde something to the Curious old Gentleman’s store, There Monr. de preaumont bestowed a square silver peice of Coine, stamped at the siege of Scarborough. The Castle on the one side, & Caroli fortuna Resurgam about it, for wch the old Gentleman was exceedingly thankfull.”

The entry for 28 March ends there, and the travellers left Aix on the following day.

It is relevant here that Basire and his pupils had left England in June 1647, so the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* piece that Basire gave away to this elderly French collector will have been created before that date. Additionally, the explicit statement in the journal entry that the piece was “stamped at the siege of Scarborough” is very likely to record Basire’s own belief that the piece had been struck during the siege. This tallies with what Cholmley himself chose to record, and was indeed something that Basire would have been in a good position to know, since up until his departure from England he had been beneficed in the north-east of England, as Rector of Eggescliffe in County Durham, and he would also have had access to reliable news sources in the mid 1640s, both as a member of the Durham Cathedral chapter and during a period of attendance at Charles I’s court at Oxford.

If the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* pieces were indeed manufactured during the siege, it may nonetheless be the case that they had something of an intended souvenir character, for sieges lasting five months would have incorporated long periods during which nothing much would have happened, and it can be visualised that during the latter stages of the siege it might have occurred to Cholmley to keep busy the idle hands of a member of his garrison by giving him the task of hand-engraving the *Caroli fortuna resurgam* inscription on to blanks stamped with a ‘broaken castle’ image, with a view to perpetuating group memory of the siege among those other garrison members (maybe officers only ?) to whom *Caroli fortuna resurgam* pieces might be given.

One final point worth making is that the journal entry refers to the siege piece as being “square”. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the writer of the entry was referring here to one of the oblong *Caroli fortuna resurgam* pieces, and, whether this is so or not, it is clear that the piece involved was not round.