

An Unusual Long Cross Cut-Half of Henry III

Robert Page & Ian Heavisides

One of us (RP) recently came into the possession of an unusual cut half which we think warrants a brief note here. It is a metal detector find from the Cockfield area, south of Bury, which the finder, Bill Byford, kindly provided. Although slightly corroded and possibly slightly clipped, there is plenty of useful information clearly visible. The weight is a respectable 0.75 gm. From the reverse it appears to be an unremarkable coin of the moneyer WILLEM at the London mint; the reverse reading being WIL/___/___VND, and the reverse inner circle count being 8/___/8. Willem is William of Gloucester, who is believed to have become the main moneyer at the London mint in about the year 1253 soon after the death of Nicholas of St Albans¹. William's coins appear from class 5c2 onwards.



However, it is the obverse which caught our attention, owing to a number of unusual features:



Points to note are as follows:

(a) The inner circle of pellets continues over the top of the crown-band, and the side limbs of the central fleur have been curled over to encompass two pellets that are larger and more rounded than the others of the inner circle. It would appear that they are intended to be part of the fleur rather than a part of the inner ring. The central stalk of the fleur is tall and the side stems depart from it high up with the pellets suspended beneath. The top of the fleur has been clipped off on this coin or, perhaps, the coin was struck off-centre but it appears to have extended to the very edge of the coin. This style of central fleur is quite unusual.

¹ Ron Churchill & Bob Thomas, 'The Brussels Hoard of 1908. The Long Cross Coinage of Henry III', 2012.

(b) The top of the hand-held sceptre shows a similar design with a fleur type having side limbs encompassing pellets. Whilst not common, I have seen this style of sceptre head before, usually on class 5g pennies, an example of which is discussed and illustrated below.

(c) There appear to be four or five pellets under the crown-band – this is very unusual as four/five pellets are normally seen only on very early long cross coins, the norm for later coins being three.

In terms of which class this is, the oval eyes suggest class 5c; the shape of the letter R is difficult to be certain of, but it appears to have the wedge-shaped tail of Churchill and Thomas style R1, which would make the coin sub-class 5c2. Note that the very tall central stem of the fleur is more often found on coins of class 5a or 5b than on 5c.

The shape of central fleurs, or of sceptre heads, is generally not characteristic of different classes, but is instead more to do with the style of the individual worker who made the die.

Sub-class 5c3 is one of the few sub-classes distinguished by the shape of the central fleur, having a fleur which is very different to that of the Cockfield coin. On the right is a typical 5c3 central fleur on a 5c3/5d mule of Ion of Canterbury. The one feature that all these have in common is that the central stalk is short such that a line drawn across the tops of the side petals cuts through the central petal. In the case of the Cockfield coin this is patently not so. Some 5c2 coins have fleurs that also have a shorter stem but not short enough for the 5c3 test, and these are probably best described as 5c2*. They are often disjointed but, as we will show in a future article, this is more to do with the die sinkers' varying techniques.



The obverse enlargement shown on the right is a class 5g, Walter, London mint, and shows a similar sceptre head to the Cockfield coin, but class 5g coins are very different in that they are characterised by a low central fleur.



It is useful to look at a few class 5c coins for comparison. Several hundred examples have been examined in the search for something similar to the Cockfield coin, but no match found has been found. The obverses of some of the interesting coins we came across are illustrated below.



An example of a class 5c of Randolph of Bury. The side-limbs of the central fleur begin from low down on the stem of the fleur. Note the oval eyes, and the shape of the letter R which has a long tail with a pellet on the end. This style of R has recently been discussed in an article by Ian Heavisides²

² Ian Heavisides, "Die Sinkers Signatures on the Long Cross Coinage of Henry III", BNS Research Blog, August 2021 ([link](#))



A class 5c of Nicole at the London mint. The second R is clearly an example of R2, identifying this as sub-class 5c1. The central fleur shows side limbs over the pellets but do not curl down over them, and the side limbs begin at the base of the fleur. The height of the fleur is "normal" and not as high as with the Cockfield coin.



On the left is a typical 5c2 Willem of London, and it shows a fleur and sceptre head which look as if they are perhaps developing into the style exhibited by the subject cut half, though again the height of the central fleur is not as tall, and the side limbs commence from low down at the base of the fleur.

Next is a 5c1 with four pellets, one of which is irregularly placed, but demonstrating that it can happen. This coin displays a fairly tall central fleur with two pellets suspended from thin sidelimbs, which start at or near the base of the fleur. The sceptre head is of a more conventional nature, and unlike that of the Cockfield coin.



The next coin on the right is a Durham coin, and shows some similarities to the Cockfield specimen. It has the eyes of Class 5b, the letter X of 5b or 5c, and letter R of 5a or possibly 5c1. It also has the pellets suspended under crescents (although not as featured as the Cockfield coin) and a sceptre with a "halo" end. The coin serves to demonstrate a mix of features which can complicate class identification.



We briefly considered the possibility that the Cockfield coin could be a continental imitation but, having looked at many Henry III pennies, consider the coin to be a genuine English issue.

As mentioned earlier, Nicholas of St Albans, the “NICOLE” seen on many Henry III pennies, died in about 1253; his role as master of the mint is thought to have been temporarily taken by Henry Frowick until William of Gloucester took full command. With the arrival of a new man at the top, it is reasonable to assume that everyone in the mint would have been performing at their best for a while, including the die cutters. The style of the Cockfield coin is of a finer design and execution than many other class 5c2 pennies; we have examined 24 different obverse dies for William of class 5c2, plus in excess of 500 dies of Class 5 up to and including 5c3, and none is close. Why? The Cockfield die is neat and precise. The die cutter was doing his best; nothing sloppy and he was doing it for an important new moneyer. If the change of moneyers was as Churchill and Thomas suggested, then the mint workers were expecting the arrival of a skilled goldsmith, the king’s goldsmith and a person who ultimately would become the warden of the mint. This leads us to the conclusion that the coin was probably struck from one of the earliest dies produced after William of Gloucester arrived at the mint, perhaps even the first die.

In summary, the unusual and high central fleur of the Cockfield coin demonstrates that the extensive Henry III Long Cross series still holds some surprises. We would be pleased to hear from anyone that has a similar coin to the cut half described here, particularly a full penny. It is a scarce variety and collectors are advised to look out for an example.

Acknowledgements – With thanks to Bill Byford, the finder and provider of this interesting coin, and to Bob Thomas for casting his eye over the text and making some useful comments.

