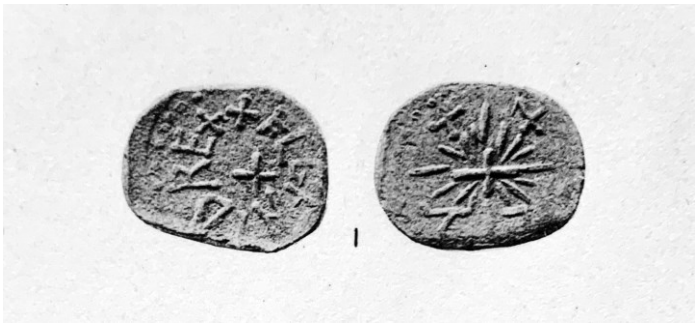
THE HEWORTH 1812 HOARD : A COLD CASE RECONSIDERED

HUGH PAGAN

Setting the Scene[1]

On 6 October 1813 the Rev. John Hodgson (1779-1845), joint Secretary of the then newly founded Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, exhibited at a meeting of that Society a coin which he attributed to the reign of Ecgfrith, King of Northumbria between 670 and 685 and which he presented to the Society on that day as one of the earliest accessions to its collection of antiquities[2].

The coin was copper, and it carried on its obverse a cross surrounded by the inscription +ECGFRID REX and on its reverse a cross converted into a sun by the prolongation of its limbs and the placing of lines in its angles, with the surrounding inscription +LVX (*Lux*, the Roman word for light) [**Fig.1**[3]]. Its size was roughly analogous to that of the extensive small penny coinage struck in the names of subsequent Northumbrian kings and archbishops, familiar to numismatists since the discovery of the very substantial Ripon hoard in 1695, and on its evidence the start of this coinage could be pushed back to a date measurably before the end of the seventh century.



It had been discovered, Hodgson said, with a few others of the same king and struck from the same dies, in the churchyard at Heworth, Co. Durham. Heworth, for those unfamiliar with the topography of the area, is a village in the very north of Co. Durham, just south of Gateshead, and is in fact included today in the Heworth and Pelaw ward of Gateshead Borough Council. What is also necessary to know, for this is relevant to what follows, is that the churchyard at Heworth had been under Hodgson's personal stewardship since his appointment as Perpetual Curate of Jarrow with Heworth in 1808, and that it was at Heworth, rather than at Jarrow, that Hodgson and his family resided[4].

No questions were raised about the authenticity of the coins in the hundred and forty years plus that elapsed between 1813 and the mid 1950s, but no further coins attributable to Ecgfrith other than those claimed to have been found in Heworth churchyard came to light during this period. In the light of this, and of other disturbing features about them, Stewart Lyon, in his magisterial review of the Northumbrian regal

[1] I am grateful to Rory Naismith for kindly reading, and commenting on, a draft of these remarks.
[2] A text of what Hodgson said on that occasion is printed *Archaeologia Aeliana* I, 1822, 124-5, under the title 'An account of a Saxon coin of Ecgfrith, King of Northumberland'.
[3] The specimen illustrated here is *SCBI* 63, 856 (= *BMC* Northumbria 1).
[4] The vicarage at Heworth, demolished in 1959, was just across the road from Heworth's extensive churchyard.

and archiepiscopal small penny coinage, raised initial doubts about them[5], and the likelihood that they were false or not coins of the historical Ecgfrith was noted a few years later by the editors of the *Sylloge of the Coinage of the British Isles* series[6].

In 1967 I came across the lengthy account of the discovery and content of the hoard given by Hodgson in a letter printed in the admirably full biography of him by his fellow North-country antiquary Rev.James Raine, published in 1857[7]. As the existence of this letter had not at that date been picked up by numismatists specialising in the Anglo-Saxon coinage, I prepared a draft article in which I brought together all that was known about the hoard, and in which I did my best to put together a conclusive case that the twenty-three die-duplicate coins identified by Hodgson as deriving from the hoard were indeed forgeries. The principal elements in my argument were the suspiciously modern-seeming intellectual character of the connection between cross, sun and light made by the reverse design and its accompanying inscription, and the improbability that a coinage in copper alloy would have been struck in the name of a Northumbrian ruler at a date when no other coinages were being struck in copper either in Britain or elsewhere in North-Western Europe.

It is not necessary to repeat today the arguments that I used at that date, for analyses by X-ray fluorescence carried out in November 1980 at the Department of Archaeological Sciences of the University of Bradford showed that the copper alloy from which the Ecgfrith coins were struck was effectively identical to that used for a halfpenny of George III dated 1775[8]. The relevant results were, for the George III halfpenny, Fe 0.59%; Cu, 99.16,%; Zn, nil; As, 0.25%; Pb, nil; Ag, nil; Sn, nil, and, for the specimen of the Ecgfrith coin used for analysis, Fe, 0.1%; Cu, 99.6%; Zn, nil; As, 0.3%; Pb, nil; Ag, nil; Sn, nil. This ruled out any possibility at all that the Ecgfrith coins were of seventh century date, and they have been omitted from all recent scholarly discussions of coins of this period.

It may nonetheless be of some value to explain how it was that my draft text did not get beyond typescript stage, both for the intrinsic interest of the circumstances which led to it remaining unpublished, and because my draft text grappled with significant issues in relation to the hoard – the motivation and possible identity of the individual

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[5] C.S.S.Lyon, 'A reappraisal of the sceatta and styca coinage of Northumbria', *BNJ* xxviii, 1955-7, 228-42 (at p.229). Lyon did not suggest at this reference that the coins were forgeries, but stated that 'no satisfactory home has been found for the Heworth coins … in the Northumbrian series'.

[6] G.Galster, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles, Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, National Museum, Copenhagen, Part 1, Ancient British and Anglo-Saxon Coins before Aethelred II*, London, 1964, catalogue entry for coin 178 (ill.on pl.VIII). The catalogue entry reads "The attribution of this copper coin is improbable and its authenticity doubtful", and an "editors' note" earlier in the volume, over the initials of Christopher Blunt and Michael Dolley, records that "the author [Dr Galster] specially wishes it to be recorded that the remarks above nos. 178 [a coin of Ecgfrith] and nos.184-199 [coins attributed by Dr Galster to the Northumbrian ruler Eardwulf] are to be attributed to the editors".

[7] J.Raine, *A memoir of the Rev.John Hodgson, M.A., F.R.S.L., F.S.A.N., Vicar of Hartburn and author of a History of Northumberland, &*, London, 1857, 2 vols.

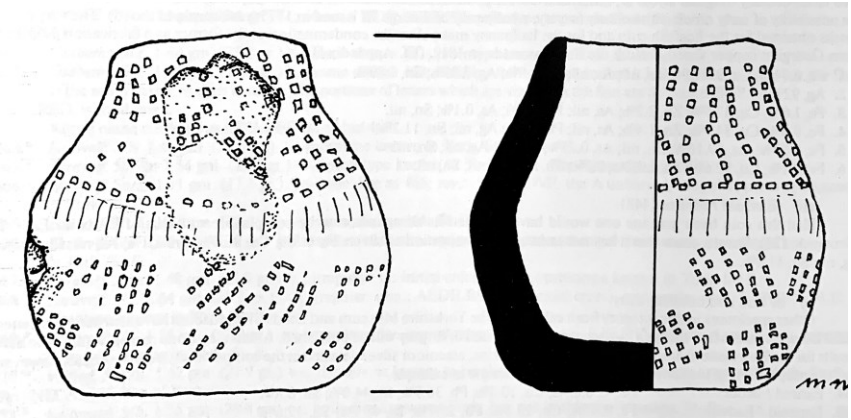
[8] E.J.E.Pirie, *Catalogue of the Early Northumbrian Coins in the Museum of Antiquities*, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, Newcastle upon Tyne 1982, 19. In a discussion earlier in that publication of the Heworth hoard and the Ecgfrith coins (pp.3-4), Pirie suggested that "it may be felt by some … that the Scottish verdict of 'Not Proven' should stand until such time as specimens are submitted to total analysis by some means other than surface X-ray excitation", but the similarity in metallic content between the halfpenny and the analysed Ecgfrith coin was such as to leave no doubt that the Ecgfrith coins were early nineteenth century concoctions.

responsible for depositing the coins in Heworth churchyard – which still remain unresolved.

Nowell Myres and the Dating of the Pot

To understand the position in which I found myself back in 1967, it is necessary to start from the fact that the coins were stated by Hodgson to have been found in "a small earthen vessel". Although this is referred to in the published record of what Hodgson said at the meeting on 6 October 1813 when he reported the hoard's discovery, it was not presented by him to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne until a subsequent meeting held on 6 July 1814. It is preserved today in Newcastle upon Tyne's Great North Museum, which now holds all the archaeological objects previously housed by the Society in its own Black Gate Museum, occupying the surviving mid-thirteenth century gatehouse of the city's medieval castle.

The vessel concerned [**Fig.2**[9]], is a small earthenware pot, measuring 66mm high, with respective diameters of 33mm and 51mm at top and bottom, with three zones of decorative indentations, mostly applied either with a large comb or with a circular patterned stamp. It had originally had a handle, but the handle is now missing. This pot, like the coins, had been regarded as being of unquestionable seventh-century date ever since its existence was first reported, and had continued to be regarded as such past the date at which doubts about the authenticity of the coins had first surfaced.



As it happened, the principal living authority at that time on Anglo-Saxon pottery of this date was (John) Nowell Linton Myres CBE FBA FSA (1902-1989), Bodley's Librarian at the University of Oxford between 1948 and 1965, and in the late 1960s still a Student of Christ Church, Oxford, as he had been since 1928[10]. Aside of his official role as Bodley's Librarian, carrying responsibility for the management of one of this country's premier institutional libraries, Myres was a central figure in British archaeology, both as an expert on his own specialist field, and in multifarious roles related to the advancement and governance of archaeology as a scholarly discipline. He had at this period already served as President of the Council for British Archaeology, was currently a member of the Ancient Monuments Board, and was soon to achieve the

[9] Reproduced from Pirie, op.cit., 20. See also **fig.3** later in this note.

[10] Students of Christ Church, Oxford, are members of the research and teaching staff of Christ Church who enjoy a status equivalent to that of Fellows at other colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, but who are designated Students, not Fellows, because they are the successors of the hundred Students explicitly provided for in Christ Church's foundation statutes. For Myres's career generally see the entry for him in *ODNB*, contributed by Arnold Taylor, a long-term friend and colleague who was to be his immediate successor as President of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

crowning distinction of being elected President of the Society of Antiquaries of London, his term of office in that role extending from 1970 to 1975.

I had sent copies of my draft typescript about the coins to a few numismatist friends and colleagues, including Christopher Blunt and Michael Dolley and others besides, and although they were in agreement with me that the coins were forgeries, it became clear that something would need to be said in any prospective re-publication of the hoard about the pot in which the coins were said to have been contained. Since I was myself at the time a Christ Church-based postgraduate, it was arranged that I should go round to Myres's rooms in the college and have a talk with him about the Heworth coins and pot. Myres was characteristically welcoming and helpful, and we got round the difficulty that I believed the coins to be forgeries, while Myres was himself convinced that the Heworth pot was an artefact of seventh-century date, by reaching a preliminary agreement that we should re-publish the hoard jointly, I discussing the coins and Myres the pot.

It did not automatically follow from the fact that the coins were forgeries that the pot was not of the date that Myres supposed, for the pot might have derived from a genuine archaeological level of the Anglo-Saxon period in Heworth churchyard and Hodgson might have jumped to an erroneous conclusion that it and the coins were associated. Another possibility might have been that the pot was indeed of seventh-century date but had been found elsewhere, and had been used by whoever planted the coins in the churchyard to add verisimilitude to the discovery[11].

Nonetheless the propositions that the coins were false but that the pot was nonetheless of seventh-century date were on the face of it self-contradictory, and it became clear to me on reflection that if Myres and I were to re-publish the hoard on the basis proposed, those who accepted Myres's arguments as to the date of the pot, coming as they did from a scholar of his very considerable prestige, were not likely to accept the case that I would be presenting for the coins to be regarded as forgeries. This would clearly not have been particularly good for my own scholarly reputation or indeed for the general standing of Anglo-Saxon numismatics as a scholarly discipline at that time.

Naming the Suspect

I would like to think that I would nonetheless have persevered with getting my draft text into a form in which it would have suitable for publication alongside remarks by Myres about the pot, although this may be imputing to me retrospectively a degree of moral courage that I did not at the time possess. Unfortunately, writing with the insouciance of youth (I was only twenty-three years old in 1967), I had also taken it upon on myself to suggest in the concluding pages of my typescript that the most likely individual to have perpetrated the numismatic fraud involved was Hodgson himself. I still believe that there are good grounds for suspecting this, for Hodgson possessed both ample opportunity to plant the coins in the churchyard attached to his own church, and

[11] This is a less likely hypothesis in that knowledge of the chronology of the Anglo-Saxon pottery series would have been minimal or even non-existent in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and it would have been an extraordinary stroke of luck for the individual concerned to have sourced a pot from another site that was of a character appropriate to have contained coins of a purported seventh-century date.

(in my view) a sufficient motive to do so, and I will return to this issue further on in the present discussion.

What I had failed initially to reckon with was that any published remarks imputing fraud to Hodgson, widely respected as a scholar in his own lifetime and whose memory has been cherished by subsequent generations of antiquaries as Northumberland's pioneer county historian, would be decidedly unwelcome to the antiquarian community both in north-eastern England and further afield. Once this potential difficulty had been identified, Christopher Blunt, with his customary kindness, made enquiries with J.D.Cowen[12] on my behalf as to the plausibility of any potential suggestion that Hodgson might have been involved in a fraudulent enterprise of this nature, and although I am unaware of what precisely passed between them, Cowen's verdict was emphatic that Hodgson was not likely to have been the perpetrator.

That was a verdict not lightly to be challenged, given the esteem in which Cowen was very properly held by his contemporaries in the antiquarian and scholarly community, and, faced with these problems on two separate fronts, I had, to my mind, little choice but to abandon any idea of converting my draft text into publishable form.

This was in retrospect a real shame, for I was to be proved correct on the essential point that the coins were forgeries, and my judgement that Hodgson was the obvious suspect was at least an arguable one. That judgement, it is proper to say, was not shared later on by Elizabeth Pirie, who in the course of her discussion of the purported Ecgfrith coins chose to lambast me for suggesting in my unpublished draft typescript that it was Hodgson who perpetrated the fraud[13].

An Unexpected Event

With the passage of time I became philosophic about the opportunity that I had missed to put into print the case for supposing that the Ecgfrith coins were false, and I was to be confirmed in my view that it would have been foolish for me to have collaborated with Myres in a joint publication devoted to the hoard by a somewhat startling discovery that I made on a casual visit to the Spink firm's numismatic book department at some point probably in the early 1980s.

This was the presence among their stock of an annotated copy of J.D.A. Thompson's *Inventory of British Coin Hoards A.D.600-1500* which had previously belonged to Gerald Clough Dunning FSA (1905-1978), who had spent his working career successively with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and as a London-based Inspector of Ancient Monuments, but whose primary area of scholarly expertise was in the classification of English medieval pottery. I immediately purchased the volume in question, for I had noticed on opening it that it contained, loosely inserted inside its front cover, an autograph letter, signed, written to Dunning by Myres and dated 14 July 1968. I reproduce the text of it here in its entirety:

Dear Gerald, Many thanks for your letter of 10 July and for giving me your excellent drawing of the little pot from Heworth, Gateshead that contained the stycas of Ecgfrith.

[12] John David Cowen MC TD FSA (1904-1981). He was at the time both President of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne and Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries of London.
[13] Pirie, op.cit., 4.

The numismatists are in a great tizzy about these coins which they believe bogus. But the discovery is unusually well-documented, and the pot I would say, from what continental parallels I know, exactly the right date. I hope you would agree with this. I think your reconstruction of the handle is OK; there are continental parallels to this too. The thing was obviously a little cream jug.

The latest idea was for a young numismatist called Pagan and I to republish it jointly, he debunking the coins, and I bunking the pot. The world can then judge how likely it is that Rev. J.Hodgson, a man of exemplary character, should have selected this exactly right pot as the container for his supposedly bogus coins. But I think Pagan may be having cold feet. Anyway very many thanks

Yours ever Nowell

It was clear to me on reading this letter that Myres and I, from our different perspectives, had both reached the conclusion that readers of any joint publication by the two of us would believe Myres and not me. What of course Myres did not know at the time was that the Ecgfrith coins were indeed to be proved to be, in his terminology, "bogus", and in that changed situation his arguments for the authenticity of the discovery fall almost wholly away. The best scenario that could be argued for, as I have indicated above, is that by some extraordinary chance a seventh-century pot found its way, whether in the Anglo-Saxon period or much more recently, to Heworth churchyard, and that this happened to be of exactly the right date to conform with the fictitious dating of the Ecgfrith coins. That is a proposition that would be a push for any scholar, however distinguished, to have to advance.

The dating of the pot was rightly addressed by Elizabeth Pirie in the aftermath of the analysis that showed the Ecgfrith coins were forgeries, and in an appendix to the same publication in which she discussed the Heworth hoard she set out the (inconclusive) results of archaeomagnetic examination of the pot by Miss N.Hammo Yassi of the Department of Geophysics at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, as well as providing a full physical description of the pot, accompanied by accurate outline drawings and a photograph[14]. She was however able to record that J.G.Hurst, who had by then succeeded Myres and Dunning as the primary person to consult on medieval pottery issues, was aware of a presumably not completely dissimilar "crude handmade pot" which had acted as the container for a coin hoard dating from as late as the fifteenth century[15].

Descriptions of the Discovery and Content of the Hoard

I leave the discussion of the pot there, for Anglo-Saxon pottery of the seventh century is not an area in which I have expertise, and I turn instead to a discussion of the numismatic content of the hoard and of the circumstances surrounding its reported discovery.

This is not a meaningless exercise, for although the hoard is not in reality a coin hoard of the Anglo-Saxon period, it is nonetheless clearly a coin hoard in virtue of the fact that it contained a measurable number of coin-shaped copper blanks impressed with designs and inscriptions intended to make them pass as coins, even if they were of early

[14] Pirie, op.cit., 19-21.
[15] Pirie, op.cit., 4.

nineteenth-century date rather than of the date that the inscriptions suggest. Although this hoard may or may not have been buried in Heworth churchyard in the circumstances which Hodgson reported, it is not the case that all hoards necessarily have to have authenticated find spots or find dates, and it would to my mind be proper to restore it to a place in our hoard listings under a new designation as a hoard of early nineteenth century forgeries of Anglo-Saxon coins.

As previously noticed, the primary source for our knowledge of the hoard is James Raine's biography of Hodgson, in which this passage appears[16] :

There had been found in the latter end of the year 1812 in Heworth Chapel yard, an earthen vessel containing a few coins of Egfrid King of Northumbria ; one of which together with the pot or vessel itself, Hodgson soon afterwards presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, accompanied with a few historical notices which were afterwards published in the Archaeol. Ael. vol.1, p.124, with engravings in illustration. The following letters prove that this discovery had excited considerable interest among numismatists. Mr.Carlisle's letter is in the style of collectors. Mr.Ruding[17] makes a modest request, and is content with an impression.

From Nicholas Carlisle Esq.[18]
March 4, 1815, Somerset Place, London

Sir,

Among the donations with which you have obliged the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, you mention a Saxon coin of Egfrid King of Northumberland. The rarity of this coin is not overlooked by those who are conversant in this subject; and I am directed by Mr.Combe[19], the Keeper of the Medals in the British Museum, to beg the favour of one to be deposited in that valuable and national collection; and, if your stock be not already exhausted, I should feel obliged by one or two more, which I think might be placed with respectability to yourself in other cabinets of the curious. In thus trespassing upon your kindness I must apologise for the liberty which I am taking; although I cannot but be sensible, from the elegance of your style, that liberality of sentiment is a predominate feature.

I have the honour –
Nicholas Carlisle

Rev.John Hodgson, etc.

To Nicholas Carlisle, Esq.
Heworth, near Gateshead, March 1815

I am very happy to have it in my power to gratify Mr.Combe with one of K.Egfrid's coins, and also to inclose one for the acceptance of the London Society of Antiquaries.

[16] Raine, op.cit., vol.1, 166-7.
[17] Rev.Rogers Ruding FSA (1751-1820), Vicar of Malden, Surrey, the well-known historian of the British coinage.
[18] Nicholas Carlisle (later Sir Nicholas Carlisle) KH FRS FSA MRIA (1771-1847), Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries of London, and Assistant Librarian, Royal Library.
[19] Taylor Combe FRS FSA (1774-1826), Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, British Museum. Combe had been in charge of the British Museum's collection of coins and medals since 1803.

I have added other two, which I will thank you to deposit in the cabinets of such liberal and well-informed gentlemen as you may think they will be most acceptable to.

These coins were dug up in the latter end of the year 1812, in making a grave on the line of the old wall which runs between the new and old burial ground of the chapel of Heworth, in the parish of Jarrow. [Here Raine omits a passage which he summarises as "further particulars of the place, with a drawing of the vessel in which the coins were found"]. I hoped that it would have awarded me more specimens than it has done. The whole of them, good and bad, amounted to 23, all of which I have disposed of in the following manner. One to the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle, one to Mr.Adamson of Newcastle[20], one to Mr.John Bell of Newcastle[21], one to Mr.Brumell of Newcastle[22], one to Mr.Murray[23], one to the British Museum, one to the London Society of Antiquaries, two to Nicholas Carlisle, Esq., two which were either lost or mislaid by my children after the discovery : one to myself. Eleven destroyed on account of being decayed and illegible. Though much corroded, the rust that covered them was not hard. When I took them out of my drawer, after the receipt of your letter, they had liquid drops of vitriol upon them. Those given to the Newcastle Antiquarian Society, and to Messrs.Bell and Adamson, are the best, for they were given the first, and before I had any suspicion that the rest would turn out so indifferently in cleaning.

I have had tempting offers for them; but they cost me nothing, and I could not do violence to my antiquarian feelings by making a traffic of them

I have the honour, etc.

J.H.

N.Carlisle Esq.

Raine goes on to provide the text of two letters by Rev.Rogers Ruding, author of the *Annals of the Coinage of Britain*, asking for details of the coins and for Hodgson's help in securing subscribers for the *Annals*. These however do not contain any further factual information about the hoard, and there is no object in reproducing them here.

The main features of Hodgson's account of the discovery and content of the hoard in his letter to Nicholas Carlisle are repeated by John Adamson, recipient of one of the coins and joint secretary with Hodgson of the Newcastle Antiquaries, in a series of letters to Sir Henry Ellis[24], Principal Librarian of the British Museum, who was anxious in the 1830s to obtain for his private collection some of the rarities in the Northumbrian series. A letter from Adamson to Ellis dated 23 October 1834 provides the most detailed statement of what Adamson knew about the hoard :

The coins were all of Ecgfrid and in a small earthen vessel – There were only 23 of which 10 were completely destroyed and totally defaced and two were lost by Mr.Hodgson's children – the distribution them as follows.

1 Antiq.Socs.Newcastle – which has been lost somehow improperly

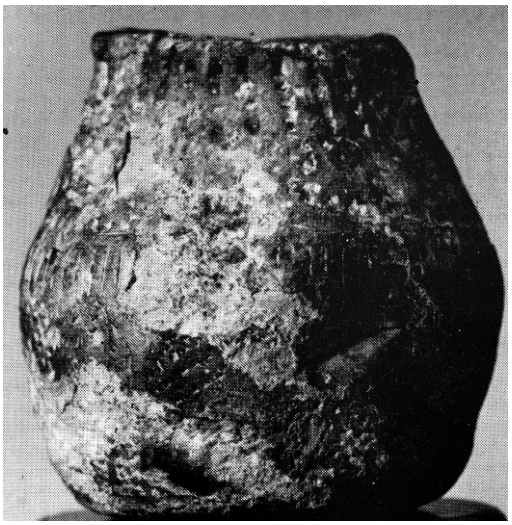
[20] John Adamson FSA (1787-1855), solicitor and Under-Sheriff of Newcastle upon Tyne. Adamson had been appointed joint secretary with Hodgson of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne on its foundation in 1813.
[21] John Bell (1783-1864), bookseller and land surveyor, Newcastle upon Tyne.
[22] John Brumell (c.1771-1850), solicitor, Newcastle upon Tyne, subsequently resident in London.
[23] John Murray MD (1768-1833), surgeon, Newcastle upon Tyne.
[24] Sir Henry Ellis KH FRS FSA (1777-1869), Principal Librarian of the British Museum, and Secretary, Society of Antiquaries of London.

1 The Kings collection
1 Mr. John Brummell now of London
1 Mr. John Bell – bookseller and virtuoso
1 Mr.Murray surgeon now dead – perhaps might be got
1 Mr.Hodgson kept
1 Mr.Adamson
1 Antiq.Socs.London
1 British Museum
1 Mr Brockett[25] sold in his sale to I think Brit Museum for £2-9-0
1 Col.Stephenson[26] of the Board of Works

Mr.Bell is from home but I dare say that his was disposed of when he was in difficulties[27]

Of some significance, too, are the remarks on the hoard that appear in the description of the parish of Jarrow in Surtees's *History and Antiquities of the County Palatinate of Durham[28]*. Robert Surtees[29] had not known Hodgson well in 1812, but they later became close friends, and when Surtees was engaged in 1818 in writing up the parish of Jarrow (including Heworth) for his *History*, he wrote to Hodgson asking for details additional to those given in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. These Hodgson obviously provided, for Surtees records :

*The little vessel in which these coins were discovered [**fig.3**[30]] was of red earthenware, and had two slight ornaments, formed of dots or pellets impressed by a stamp. It had been very imperfectly baked, and had imbibed much nitrate of potash, which effloresced on its sides. The coins were embedded in a black earth, which had an offensive ammoniacal smell. Some sort of building seems to have existed on the spot where they were found.*



One final scrap of information is recoverable from Adamson's publication in 1834 of the Hexham hoard of ninth-century Northumbrian small pennies. He says that the coins in the Hexham hoard which came from the bucket that contained them had in some cases become stuck together, but that "they have not become masses, as was the

[25] John Trotter Brockett (1788-1842), solicitor, Newcastle upon Tyne.
[26] Col.Benjamin Stephenson (later Major-Gen. Sir Benjamin Stephenson GCH) (1766-1839), Surveyor-General, Board of Works. It is divinable that of the "other two" coins of Ecgfrith sent by Hodgson to Nicholas Carlisle, one was presented by Carlisle to the Royal collection – he was employed in the Royal Library at that time - and the other was given by him to Col.Stephenson.
[27] Bell had gone bankrupt in 1817.
[28] R.Surtees, *History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*, vol.2 (Chester Ward), 1820, 66-93.
[29] Robert Surtees (1779-1834), Mainsforth Hall, co.Durham, landowner and county historian.
[30] Reproduced from Pirie, op.cit., plate 1.

case in some discoveries before made, and particularly at Heworth when the coins of Ecgfrith were found"[31].

Put together, these sources provide what is on the face of it a straightforward account of the circumstances of the discovery. Additionally, the listings of what happened to the coins after the discovery, separately provided by Hodgson and by Adamson, agree on the fact that the total number of coins involved was twenty-three, very minor discrepancies between the two listings being readily explicable by the fact that Adamson's listing dates from 1834 while Hodgson's listing dates from 1815.

Weighing the Evidence

How then can we reconcile the accepted narrative of the discovery with the fact that the coins themselves were modern forgeries ? There are two evident options. First, the statements made by Hodgson about the discovery itself, and about such other matters as the condition of the coins on and after discovery, are truthful statements by an innocent person. In that case what must have happened is that some as yet to be identified individual planted the forgeries, or arranged to have the forgeries planted, in an opened grave in Heworth churchyard, with the intention that they should pass into Hodgson's hands, and with the probable additional expectation that Hodgson would give publicity to the discovery of these previously unrecorded coins of a major Northumbrian king. Alternatively, the statements made by Hodgson represent less than the complete truth, in which case he is likely either to have been the perpetrator of this numismatic fraud or to have been working with a fellow perpetrator.

Neither option is particularly palatable, but identifying a crime involves postulating a criminal. It was also, in numismatic terms, a very unusual crime, for whoever committed it went to the trouble of producing not just one or two specimens of these coins but sufficient specimens to create an entire illusory hoard, and did so without apparently seeking or obtaining any monetary reward for doing so.

It is worth dwelling on the unusualness of the crime in a numismatic context, especially for a date so early as the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century[32]. It is certainly the case that many decades later there were criminal individuals sufficiently ambitious and with the necessary skills to be able to slip into the coin market forged coins in considerable quantity which, as they untruthfully asserted, had coin hoard provenances, and a prime example here, taken from the coinages of the

[31] J.Adamson, 'An account of the discovery at Hexham, in Northumberland, of a brass vessel, containing a number of the Anglo-Saxon coins called stycas', *Archaeologia* XXV, 1834, 279-310 (at p.284). This, taken together with Hodgson's reference to the "rust that covered them", suggests that the Ecgfrith forgeries were deposited in the churchyard in an artificially encrusted lump, similar to that created by the forger of the coins in the "Bolsena" hoard (see n.28 below).

[32] As Rory Naismith has reminded me, there had been notable incidences of high-profile forgeries executed within the antiquarian and educated community over the century preceding the discovery of the Heworth hoard, and some of these would certainly have been within the consciousness of whoever chose to commit this crime. Those affecting the coin world had chiefly involved the production of forged coins in ones, twos or very small quantities only, but in the historical field Charles Bertram (1723-1765) had produced a wholly invented text, *De Situ Britanniae*, providing itineraries of Britain in the Roman period, which William Stukeley had accepted as credible and of which Stukeley had produced a very widely read edition. Similarly, James Macpherson (1736-1796) had become a best-selling author from what purported to be translations into English of a corpus of poems in Gaelic, fictitiously claimed by him to have been composed in the heroic past by Ossian, son of Fingal.

European continent, is the so-called "Bolsena" hoard of papal *antiquiores*[33]. But I am not aware of any hoard other than the Heworth hoard in the British post-Roman series which is entirely made up of coins intended to deceive the collector, and I am doubtful if there is any obvious precedent for a coin hoard of this nature, in whatever series, that might have been known to an individual living and working in the north-east of England in 1812.

One other very relevant factor is that the parish of Jarrow, to which the church and village of Heworth belonged, was literally the only parish in Ecgfrith's former kingdom in which obvious and well-recorded physical evidence for Ecgfrith's rule over the Northumbrian kingdom remained in 1812 (and still remains today). Remarkably, the church of St.Paul's, Jarrow, retains, built into its north porch, a contemporary inscription recording the dedication of the church on 23 April "in the fifteenth year of King Ecgfrith and the fourth year of Ceolfrith abbot and under God's guidance founder of this same church"[34]. The choice of the churchyard at Heworth, within the same parish, as a place to plant coins purporting to be of King Ecgfrith must therefore have been a deliberate one, made in full knowledge of the existence of the dedicatory inscription[35].

We can thus see that the crime was of a one-off nature, embarked upon, so far as can be judged, without any expectation of financial gain, and carried through at a site which its perpetrator will have selected because of the historical and topographical plausibility of coins of this nature being found in this particular parish.

As to the identity of the perpetrator, it is clear that the individual who arranged for the manufacture of the forgeries must have had sufficient familiarity with the Northumbrian small penny series to be able to design forged coins which, notwithstanding the fact that they were struck in almost pure copper, the wrong metal to choose for coins of purported seventh-century date, conformed in most other respects to what a contemporary coin collector interested in the Northumbrian series might have expected to see. Although the discovery of the Ripon hoard of 1695 will by 1812 have become a distant memory, a similar hoard of Northumbrian small pennies had been discovered at Kirkoswald, Cumberland, in 1808, and coin collectors in Newcastle upon Tyne are likely to have been well aware of the required physical appearance for coins in this series[36].

Leaving aside Hodgson himself, just four individuals living and working in the Newcastle/Gateshead area at this date would seem to have possessed the required combination of coin knowledge and historical awareness to put in motion a fraud of this character. These were, in alphabetical order, John Adamson, John Bell, John Trotter

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[33] P.Grierson, 'Some modern forgeries of Carolingian coins', in H.Ingholt, ed., *Centennial Volume of the American Numismatic Society*, New York, 1955-8, 303-15 (at p.304, n.5).

[34] For the inscription see now E.Okasha, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions*, Cambridge, 1971, no.61.

[35] The appearance in Heworth churchyard of coins seeming to date from the reign of Ecgfrith had the incidental result that it enabled Hodgson to state in *Archaeologia Aeliana* that "the claim of this chapel [Heworth church], to be nearly contemporary with Jarrow, is, by this discovery, pretty strongly established" (Hodgson, op.cit., 125).

[36] Six coins from the Kirkoswald hoard were presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon Tyne in 1814 by Matthew Atkinson, a landowner with estates at Carr Hill, co.Durham, and Temple Sowerby, Westmorland (Pirie, op.cit., 1-3).

Brockett, and John Brumell. Of these John Bell was the only one engaged in trade, as a bookseller, the other three being solicitors, but it would be unfair to his memory to pick on him as a likely culprit just for that, and if involvement in trade is any reason to focus suspicion on him rather than on the others, that is effectively negated by the fact that the perpetrator did not seek any financial gain from the planting of the coins in Heworth churchyard.

The best case for the involvement of any of these individuals, or of any one else in the Newcastle/Gateshead antiquarian community at that time, in salting the Heworth grave with forged coins purporting to be of Ecgfrith is that this was no more than a prank, carried out for their own amusement. At this distance in time it is difficult to determine whether the purpose of such a prank would have been simply to make a fool of Hodgson, or whether – maybe more probably – the prank was a misjudged act of friendship, undertaken in order to boost Hodgson's status as an antiquary by enabling him to make a splash in the scholarly world by announcing the discovery of the previously unrecorded coinage of a major Northumbrian ruler.

If however it was merely a prank, it is hard to believe that the prankster involved would not subsequently have revealed that it had been just that, even if this was only in private conversation with Hodgson. The problem here is that Hodgson was to live to 1845 without taking any steps to correct the published record, while it is clear from the letter written by John Adamson to Sir Henry Ellis in 1834, transcribed above, that as late as 1834 Adamson at least was not worried about the accuracy of what had been put about on the subject of the Heworth hoard some twenty years earlier.

That brings me back, as it did in 1967, to the possibility that Hodgson himself had some involvement in this serious act of numismatic fraud. As he and his family lived just across the road from the church and churchyard at Heworth[37], he would obviously have possessed the opportunity to arrange for the planting of the forged coins in the churchyard at any time and at any location within the churchyard that might have seemed appropriate.

He would also not have been without motivation to do so, for his reputation as a county historian and as a major force in antiquarian studies in the north-east of England still lay ahead of him in 1812, and he had as yet no significant discovery to his name. If 1812 itself seems an unlikely year for him to have got involved in organising a fraud of this nature, as Elizabeth Pirie has pointed out[38], it is necessary to bear in mind that we only have his word for the fact that the coins were discovered "in the latter end of the year 1812", and that no one in local antiquarian circles seems to have been aware of the existence of the coins or pot until Hodgson delivered his remarks about the hoard to a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne in October 1813.

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[37] For the fact of Hodgson's residence at Heworth, rather than at Jarrow, see Raine, op.cit., vol.1, 61. The circumstance that he was living at Heworth would serve as an explanation why, if he was the perpetrator of the fraud, the coins were planted in Heworth churchyard rather than in the churchyard at Jarrow, which would have been the more obvious choice. Additionally, as Rory Naismith observes, knowledge of whereabouts in the churchyard to plant them so that they should be discovered in a timely fashion would have been something that Hodgson, more probably than any one else (except perhaps an immediate neighbour), would have possessed.

[38] Pirie, op.cit., 4. Hodgson had been heavily engaged between May and September 1812 in ministering to local residents in the aftermath of a major explosion at Felling Colliery, within his parish, in which over 100 men and boys had been killed.

Indeed, it was not until after the foundation meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne in January 1813 that Hodgson would have possessed a viable local platform from which to add to his scholarly prestige by announcing such a potentially exciting numismatic discovery, and it may be speculated that it was only at some point in the spring or summer of 1813 that he took it into his head to put in hand the manufacture of the forged coins (if of course that is what he did).

One final point worth making, which I did not make in my draft remarks in 1967, is that Hodgson could not have acted wholly on his own in this connection, for a competent workman on whose subsequent discretion he could rely would have to have been recruited to produce the forged coins. It is not at all evident to me how Hodgson would have gone about finding such an individual, and that suggests to me that if Hodgson was indeed involved in the Heworth numismatic fraud, the enterprise might well have been a collaborative one between Hodgson and some other as yet unidentified individual who was the person who actually commissioned the manufacture and striking of the copper blanks involved[39].

This would have had the distinct advantage, so far as Hodgson was concerned, that if his collaborator managed the hiring of the workman employed with appropriate discretion, the workman need never have known that Hodgson was in any way involved behind the scenes. It may be that it was this was the key factor that ensured that the Heworth hoard was not definitively exposed as a fraud until 1980.

[39] It is worth recording here that Marion Archibald concluded from an examination of the two specimens of these purported coins of Ecgfrith now held in the British Museum (SCBI 63, 856 and 857) that they were struck from dies set in collars (see for this Pirie, op.cit., 5, n.17).