A Second Canterbury Gold Shilling of Eadbald of Kent

A new and unique find that augments the corpus of rare coins of this monarch.

Tony Abramson

Bede tells us that Eadbald succeeded to the throne on the death of his father Æthelberht in 616. Given that Æthelberht's wife, Queen Bertha, was of Christian descent, he had welcomed the Augustinian mission into his court in 597. But Eadbald soon affronted the Church by committing, as Bede wrote (II, 5): 'such fornication as the Apostle Paul mentioned as being unheard of even among the heathen, in that he took his father's [second] wife as his own.'

The first known specimen of the Kentish gold shilling attributed to Eadbald (616-40) was found in the Crondall hoard (Gold Coins of Anglo-Saxon England (*GCASE*) 390). Even with the advantage of metal-detecting, the latest find (EMC 2023.0159, fig. 1) brings the corpus to only ten specimens (*GCASE* 400-430). Despite the attentions of leading numismatists over the last 190 years, it is only relatively recently that the obverse legend has been securely attributed.

It was first associated with Eadbald of Kent by Gustave, vicomte de Ponton d'Amécourt (1872, 78-9) and confirmed by Mark Blackburn (1998, 2-4) and Gareth Williams (1998, 137−40) and put beyond doubt by Philip Shaw (2008, 98-101).[1] Shaw also recognised the likelihood that ecclesiastics were 'of some importance in coin production in Eadbald's day.'[2] Roman emissaries such as Mellitus and Paulinus would certainly have had far greater familiarity with the economic and symbolic functions of coinage than Eadbald of Kent and his brother-in-law Edwin of Northumbria.[3]

The reverse legends continue to be the object of discussion (Abramson, 2019) but the corpus divides, in accordance with these legends, into three groups: those associated with specific mints - London and Canterbury – and those attributable to Mellitus, previously Bishop of London (*c*.604-*c*.617), who had returned from exile by 619 and was elevated to the see of Canterbury succeeding Laurence. Mellitus died in 624. The reverse in all cases has a central motif of a *globus cruciger*. Other than the Canterbury issue, the legends, always clockwise, are assumed to read from 180° or thereabouts. The vertical stokes at the end of the legend are, plausibly, titular.

The first and last of these groups share an obverse die displaying a diademed bust, right, with prominent features, loose wreath ties, braided hair and jewelled drapery. A small cross floats before the lips with a larger Latin cross, in the manner associated with Constantine's dream vision at Milvian Bridge, to the right. The legend starts around 270°. Clearly, the issue post-dates Eadbald's conversion to Christianity *c*.618.[4] The Christian symbolism shows that Eadbald, as Bede informs us (II, 6), had repented his apostacy. The obverse associated with Canterbury has less ornate drapery and no crosses before the bust. The simplified inscription commences, with an initial cross, at 0°.

[1] See also *MEC*8, 52-3.
[2] Shaw (2008, 99).
[3] Perhaps this also initiated the practice of separate regal and episcopal emissions in York and Canterbury.
[4] Bede (II,6)

Figure 1: A new find of the Canterbury issue of Eadbald of Kent, EMC 2023.0159

A second specimen of the Canterbury issue (*cf GCASE* 410) was recently found by metal detection on a site that has also produced early Saxon silver artefacts.[5] The vestigial letters before the diademed bust, right. are difficult to discern but may be read as [NV?]AL[D / REG] or alternatively, REG. The drapery is not visible on this rather shallow profile obverse. The inscription on the reverse is more deeply incised, reading +DORO[VERNI?]S, around a cross pattée on a globe in a beaded inner circle. This central cross is misaligned with the initial cross pattée.

I am grateful to the finder, Terry R, for sharing the images and information and permitting publication. The new find was by metal detection in late 2022. It weighs 1.29g, exactly what would be expected of this issue. Significantly, it was found near Canterbury.

The flat obverse of the new specimen bears only vestigial lettering but, given the positioning of the two characters that are visible, is not a die duplicate of EMC 2001.1003 (fig. 2). The reverse also differs, ending in S rather than M. The styles of the crosses vary between the two specimens. The new coin is therefore, unique and will be catalogued at *GCASE* 415

Any doubts surrounding the attribution of the type to Canterbury were dispelled by Mark Blackburn in a characteristically incisive article (2006), discussing the first found specimen from Goodnestone (fig. 2), housed at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Mark did ponder why London is named as a mint, when Canterbury is a more obvious site for a Kentish mint. He also discussed the curious M suffix to the mint name on the reverse of the Goodnestone coin, as this would be an abbreviation for *monetarius* or *moneta*. This occurs on many

[5] I am grateful to Guido Cornelissens for assistance in identifying this coin.

Merovingian coins but conventionally following the name of a moneyer not a mint. The new Canterbury specimen is without this suffix.

Figure 2: EMC 2001. 1003, *MEC* 8, no. 3. The Goodnestone specimen

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