

A new Ipswich reverse die in the Last Small Cross issue of Æthelred II

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Introduction

The Anglo-Saxon settlement of *Gippeswic* in Suffolk (modern Ipswich) appears as a named mint on coinage from the reform issue of Eadgar onwards (c. 973-975). However, it is only from the reign of Æthelred II onwards that production of coins seems to have been ramped up at this mint. One Ipswich moneyer who is apparently present from Æthelred's 'Benediction Hand' issue of c. 991 onwards (also striking the CRUX, Long-Cross, Helmet and Last Small Cross types) is the moneyer Leofsige. Significantly, Leofsige is also known from coins of Cnut's first type (Quatrefoil) - struck c. 1017-1023. Unless these reflect several different moneyers of the same name operating sequentially at the same mint, which is somewhat unlikely, the aforementioned observations suggest Leofsige's involvement in minting activity at Ipswich for an extended period of time. His tenure at the mint may have lasted up to thirty years, if the current dating for the types is correct (Sadler 2010, 95).

The Last Small Cross issue at Ipswich

Although Leofsige is known in five of the various types struck for Æthelred II, the vast majority of his output comes from just two issues – the CRUX pence of c. 997-1003 and Last Small Cross pieces of c. 1009-1017. It is the latter type that this note is primarily concerned with.

In the course of his definitive research on coins of the Ipswich mint, John Sadler successfully traced a total of 25 Last Small Cross pennies attributable to Leofsige, struck from at least 5 obverse and 6 reverse dies (*ibid*). While the obverse dies are largely distinguished by differing portrait styles, their counterpart reverses vary mainly in respect of letterforms as well as the presence or absence of pellet stops within the reverse legend itself. These serve to break up the reverse legend and/or separate the moneyer's name from the mint signature. However, there are some more unusual *minutiae* evident, such as on reverse die 5 (*ibid.*, 116, figs. 264-268). This die is at present unique for Leofsige's coins in that its reverse legend terminates with a distinct, wedge-shaped stop.

The readings of the 6 reverse dies published by Sadler are listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1-reverse die readings for Leofsige in the Last Small Cross issue, adapted from Sadler (2010)

Sadler die number	Reverse legend
1	+LEOFZIGE M ON GIPE (normal 'O')
2	+LEOFZIGE MΩ ON GIPZ
3	+LEOFZIGE MΩ ON GIPSI
4	+LEOFZIGE M ON GIPE (pelleted 'O')
5	+LEOFZIGE M OH.GIPE'
6	+LEO.FSIGE M.ON GIPE.

Subsequent finds

The intervening 13 years between publication of Sadler's work and this note have thrown up only three new finds of this type/moneyer/mint combination that supplement his original die study (including the subject of this note). A coin from dies 3/3 was found in 2009 at Carlton Colville, Suffolk (PAS¹ SF-6A7243/EMC² 2009.0020). In addition to this, in 2013 a 'bust right' variant of the Last Small Cross issue (North 1994, 111, no. 780) was found at Barking, Suffolk (EMC 2013.0387). Although the 'bust right' variant was not previously known for Ipswich and its dies are not listed by Sadler, it falls outside the scope of this note as a variant of the standard Last Small Cross issue.

¹ Portable Antiquities Scheme

² Early Medieval Corpus

The newly recognised reverse die

In April of 2023, a new Last Small Cross penny of Ipswich emerged (Fig. 1) which adds a seventh reverse die to the six previously listed by Sadler for this moneyer/type combination. The exact circumstances of this find are uncertain, except that it was made a few years ago by a metal detectorist in Suffolk. It was subsequently acquired by a collector who recognised its academic importance, images of it being made available to the author for study.

This newly recognised coin has been struck by Sadler's obverse die 1, which is usually utilised in combination with reverse die 1. However, the reading of the die utilised on this new find differs substantially. It can be read as: +LEOFZIGE M ON G.IPE, the pellet stop on this example distinctively separating the first and second letters of the mint signature. This is a feature unparalleled on all the other currently known reverse dies of Leofsige.



Fig. 1: the newly recognised Last Small Cross penny with an unlisted reverse die. Images courtesy J Mayer, adapted A G Bliss

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Bibliography

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