

# The Find Spot for a Hampshire Hoard of Coins of Edward the Confessor and Harold II Untangled

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In a paper on ‘The coinage of Harold II’, submitted to *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage*, a volume of essays published in 1990 in honour of the great Swedish numismatist Bror Emil Hildebrand (1806-1884)<sup>1</sup>, I had necessarily to discuss a significant mid-nineteenth century hoard of coins of Edward the Confessor, Harold II, and William I, described in all relevant numismatic literature as having been found at or near Soberton, Hampshire.

The hoard comprised 78 coins of Edward the Confessor, all but one of his last type, *Pyramids*; 159 coins of Harold II, all of his only type, *PAX*; and 22 coins of William I, all of his first type, *Profile/Cross Fleury*. Its importance for the numismatic history of the period stems from the fact that it appears to have been the principal source of the surviving examples of an unexpectedly large issue of coins of *PAX* type by the three moneyers operating in Harold II’s reign at Wilton. As the coins in question, as well as being produced in part from dies of crude style, include a disproportionate number that are in some way mis-struck, it is likely, as I observed at the time, that ‘they might have been produced in haste or in unexpected quantity to meet a sudden demand for coin’.

Wilton, as well as being a royal estate throughout the later Anglo-Saxon period, was also the site of a famous nunnery patronised by the ladies of the West Saxon royal house. As Dr Gareth Williams has since pointed out, Wilton’s patroness at this very date was Queen Edith, Edward the Confessor’s widow and Harold II’s sister, and, as importantly, the fourth wealthiest landholder in the English kingdom in the year of the Norman Conquest. This has enabled Williams to suggest that the Wilton coins, or the bulk of them, might have been issued ‘not on Harold’s authority, but that of his sister, Queen Edith’ as an emergency production in the weeks between Harold II’s death at the battle of Hastings and Queen Edith’s submission to William the Conqueror at Winchester at some date before the end of November 1066<sup>2</sup>.

I use this to highlight the hoard’s potential evidential value not just for our subject but for the wider history of the period, but the purpose of the present note is the much more limited one of offering a solution to a conundrum which defeated me when I was writing on Harold II’s coinage in 1990.

What we know about the content of the hoard and the circumstances of its finding derives from remarks about it by Edward Hawkins (1780-1867), Keeper of the Department of Antiquities at the British Museum between 1826 and his retirement in 1860., and as such the member of the British Museum’s then staff who had primary responsibility for the museum’s holdings of coins and medals. At a meeting of the

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<sup>1</sup> H.E.Pagan, ‘The coinage of Harold II’, in K.Jonsson, ed., *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage in Memory of Bror Emil Hildebrand*, Stockholm, 1990, 177-205.

<sup>2</sup> G.Williams, ‘Was the last Anglo-Saxon king of England a queen ? A possible posthumous coinage of Harold II’. *The Yorkshire Numismatist* 4, 2012, 159-170.

Numismatic Society of London on 27 February 1851 Hawkins is recorded as having given ‘a short account of a hoard of coins recently discovered near Soberton, in Hampshire’<sup>3</sup>. The summary of Hawkins’s remarks printed in the Society’s published *Proceedings* gives the totals for each type represented in the hoard, as given above, and notes that the hoard proved the correctness of the theory that William I’s Profile/Cross Fleury type was ‘the earliest mintage of his reign’. The summary has nothing else to say about the hoard’s numismatic content, other than the fact that 113 of the coins had been purchased for the British Museum, but does record that the hoard also contained two gold rings, again purchased for the British Museum.

As it happens, Hawkins had made similar observations about the hoard at a meeting of the Archaeological Institute some three weeks earlier, on 7 February 1851, at which he had exhibited the two gold rings (but not the coins). A brief summary of what he had to say is printed in the *Archaeological Journal*<sup>4</sup>. This gives the same number of coins for each ruler as reported to the Numismatic Society of London, and although that is all that it has to say on the numismatic front, it adds the information that “the coins were found in a field near Wickham Lodge, Soberton, Hants, in a vessel of dingy red ware, which was immediately broken, or crumbled to pieces”.

When I was researching the coinage of Harold II for my 1990 paper I had noticed the reference to the hoard having been found “in a field near Wickham Lodge, Soberton”, and was distinctly puzzled by it, for Wickham Lodge, a Grade II\* listed building dating from the 1820s, is on the western outskirts of the village of Wickham, while the village of Soberton is as much as five miles away, more or less due north of Wickham. I took it upon myself in the circumstances to describe the hoard as ‘the so-called Soberton hoard’ and to record that ‘although the hoard seems to have been found within the borders of Soberton parish, it was at the most technically in Soberton, for the find spot was in a field near a house called Wickham Lodge, and consequently much nearer to the village of Wickham, to the south of Soberton, than to the actual village of Soberton’.

It turns out that my suggestion that the hoard was found ‘at the most technically in Soberton’ was, although I did not know that at the time, more or less the exact truth. *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales*, 1866, a source not easily accessible in 1990 but today readily viewable on the internet, records (at p.824) that the parish of Soberton then included the hamlets of Kingsmead, Newtown, and Southend, ‘the liberty of Wickham-lodge’, and the tything of East Hoe. Put simply, ‘the liberty of Wickham-lodge’ would have been in 1851 a detached portion of the parish of Soberton, and that provides an entirely straightforward explanation for Edward Hawkins’s statement, now seen to have been literally accurate, that the hoard was found ‘near Wickham Lodge, Soberton’. How long it was to remain a part of the parish of Soberton is uncertain, but the accounts of the villages of Soberton and Wickham in the *Victoria County History of Hampshire* make no reference to the existence of any detached portion of Soberton parish, and it is clear that Wickham Lodge has been for a century or more a component part of the parish of Wickham.

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<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the Numismatic Society of London, Session 1850-1*, 17 (customarily bound at the back of NC 13, 1851).

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeological Journal* viii, 1851, 100.

As the hoard would seem on the available evidence to have been found within what have now long been the recognised boundaries of the parish of Wickham, we must in the circumstances reconcile ourselves to the need to rename the Soberton hoard the Wickham hoard, and to the need to shift its find spot on the MCHBI site from Soberton to Wickham. It is strange to have to say goodbye to a hoard name so familiar to specialists in the later Anglo-Saxon and Norman coinages since the days of Michael Dolley, but numismatists should never be sentimental about such things.

It is appropriate to take this opportunity to draw the attention of readers of this blog to another necessary alteration to the roster of hoards deposited in the late 1060s. Dr Murray Andrews has rightly argued that it is likely on the balance of probabilities that the ‘Arundel Castle’ hoard, only evidenced by the description of lot 245 in the auction sale of the coin collection of the Marquis of Exeter (Christie 7-8 March 1899), comprising two coins of Edward the Confessor and one coin of Harold II, is the same hoard as a somewhat better evidenced hoard containing coins of the same reigns found at Offham, West Sussex, in 1796<sup>5</sup>. As he has pointed out, Offham, a hamlet in 1796, “lies just 1.7km northeast of Arundel Castle”, on land belonging to the Duke of Norfolk, the owner of Arundel Castle, and the hoard in question was most likely found during the landscaping for the Duke of Norfolk of Arundel Castle’s 1100 acre “Modern Park”, less than 500m from Offham, on which work had started in 1786 and was to continue to 1810.

A clinching argument leading to the same conclusion is that a contemporary report of a third hoard containing “about two hundred silver coins” of Edward the Confessor and Harold II, together with one defaced Roman brass coin and a silver disc brooch, said to have been found in 1789 at Oving, West Sussex, 4km east of Chichester, ends by stating that “these articles all came into the hands of the Duke of Norfolk”<sup>6</sup>. It seems wholly inconceivable that as many as three coin hoards of identical character should either have been found at locations belonging to the Dukes of Norfolk or should have passed into the possession of the Dukes of Norfolk, particularly as there is otherwise no obvious evidence for any of them taking an interest in numismatics, and I think that we can be certain in the circumstances that the ‘Arundel Castle’ hoard is a mirage and should be deleted from our lists.

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<sup>5</sup> M.Andrews, *Coin Hoarding in England and Wales, c.973-1544*, 2019, 54-6. The hoard was certainly found at Offham, West Sussex, rather than at Offham, East Sussex, as supposed by the late Lord Stewartby (I.Stewart, ‘The Sussex mints and their moneyers’, in P.Brandon, ed., *The South Saxons*, 1978, 89-137, 233-8, at p.89). See for this *SCBI* 9, 1102, a cut halfpenny of Harold II, acquired long ago by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, with the accompanying provenance ‘found at Offham in Arundel with others’).

<sup>6</sup> D.M.Metcalf, ‘Find records from Gough’s Camden’s Britannia’, *NC* 6<sup>th</sup> series, 17, 1957, 181-207 (at p.198).