

# THE BRITISH MUSEUM'S COLLECTION OF ANGLO-SAXON COINS AS IT EXISTED IN THE MID 1790s

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A small quarto notebook in the British Library (British Library, Additional MS 18093) provides information, set out by the notebook's compiler, Rev. Rogers Ruding (1751-1820), author of *Annals of the Coinage of Britain and its Dependencies*, on no fewer than 356 Anglo-Saxon coins that were in the ownership of the British Museum at some date in the first half of the 1790s. Ruding's recording of the coins' issuers, types, minting places, and moneyers, and of their weights in grains, supplemented in many cases by his own drawings, is sufficiently accurate that the great majority of them can be identified with coins published by Charles Francis Keary and Herbert Appold Grueber in the two volumes of their catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon coins in the British Museum respectively published in 1887 and 1893<sup>1</sup>.

This existence of this notebook was unknown to Michael Dolley and Joan Strudwick (afterwards Martin) when they compiled their major article for *BNJ* recording what was known in the mid 1950s about the provenances of the Anglo-Saxon coins in the British Museum's collection<sup>2</sup>. By 1961 Joan Martin (as she by then was) had read through the notebook for the purposes of her contribution to the Stenton festschrift volume edited by Dolley<sup>3</sup>, but she chose to focus on the information provided by the notebook about the collection of some two hundred Anglo-Saxon coins put together by Rev. Richard Southgate (1729-1795), and did not mention that the notebook also provided similar information about the Anglo-Saxon coins contemporaneously held in the British Museum<sup>4</sup>.

When I was preparing my Presidential Address to the British Numismatic Society for 1985, in which I discussed the contribution made by Rogers Ruding to numismatic scholarship<sup>5</sup>, I found time to look at a few of the more important of the volumes of Ruding's papers held in the British Library. These included this particular notebook,

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<sup>1</sup> C.F.Keary (and H.A.Grueber), *A Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum, Anglo-Saxon Series*, London, 1887-93, 2 vols.

<sup>2</sup> R.H.M.Dolley & J.S.Strudwick, 'The provenances of the Anglo-Saxon coins recorded in the two volumes of the British Museum catalogue', *BNJ* 28, 1955-7, 26-56.

<sup>3</sup> J.S.Martin, 'Some remarks on eighteenth-century numismatists and manuscripts', in R.H.M.Dolley (ed), *Anglo-Saxon Coins, Studies presented to F.M.Stenton on the Occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday 17 May 1960*, London, 1961, 227-40.

<sup>4</sup> Southgate's collection of Anglo-Saxon coins was ultimately to pass to the British Museum, but did not do so until 1802 as an element in the larger collection of Anglo-Saxon coins formed by Samuel Tyssen. It should be recorded here, as this is likewise not mentioned by Joan Martin, that Ruding's notebook also lists, with carefully executed drawings, the Anglo-Saxon coins then held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and in a small number of lesser collections, and provides rather scrappier information, generally without drawings, about other Anglo-Saxon coins known to him, most notably those in the collection formed by Dr William Hunter (died 1783), preserved today in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.

<sup>5</sup> H.E.Pagan, 'Presidential Address 1985', *BNJ* 55, 1985, 211-9.

and I took the opportunity to copy the basic details provided about each coin in the British Museum and Southgate collections listed in it into a notebook of my own.

It remains the case, I believe, that no one with appropriate specialist knowledge other than Joan Martin, myself, and maybe Michael Dolley, has looked through this Ruding notebook during the sixty-five years or so since its existence first came to the attention of numismatic scholars<sup>6</sup>, and it seems appropriate to put on record now the substance of the evidence that the notebook provides as to which Anglo-Saxon coins were held in the British Museum collection at the date that Ruding made his listing of them.

It is necessary to begin by setting out the evidence for the date at which Ruding's listing was produced. The listing was certainly done subsequently to 24 April 1789, the date on which the Duke of Argyll presented to the British Museum a parcel from the Tíree hoard, deposited c.970, for the coins known to derive from this hoard feature in the notebook as belonging to the British Museum<sup>7</sup>. Since the British Museum coins, each identified as such by the letter **M**, are listed in the same continuous sequence in the notebook as coins identified as belonging to Southgate, identified by the letter **S**, Ruding's listing must have been made prior to July 1795, the month in which Southgate's Anglo-Saxon coins, following Southgate's death in January that year, were purchased *en bloc* by a younger collector, Samuel Tyssen (1756-1800), whose name is mentioned nowhere in the notebook. As it is known from other evidence that Ruding had ready access to Southgate's collection during Southgate's lifetime, it is reasonable to conjecture that Ruding's listing would have been done while Southgate was still alive, and therefore most probably before the end of 1794, and, for what this may be worth, the absence from Ruding's listing of two coins of Aethelred II, *BMC* 156 and *BMC* 366, which apparently came to the British Museum from the Samuel collection in 1793<sup>8</sup>, may mean that Ruding had made his listing before the accession to the British Museum's collection of the two coins concerned.

It is however enough for present purposes to treat Ruding's listing as evidence for the content of the Anglo-Saxon portion of the British Museum collection as it existed c.1795, and a c.1795 date will be used for it in what follows. One further point to note at the outset is that Ruding chose to omit from his listing of coins in the British Museum collection thrymsas, sceats, and all the coins issued in the names of Northumbrian kings and archbishops in the eighth and ninth centuries other than a coin of Eadberht (737-758), *BMC* 12 (= *SCBI* 63, 765), and a coin of a joint issue in the names of Eadberht and Archbishop Ecgbert of York (735-766), *BMC* 4 (= *SCBI* 63, 772), both of these included by Ruding on his erroneous assumption that they were coins of a contemporary king Eadberht ruling in Kent.

Although Ruding's notebook does not record provenances, Marion Archibald's meticulous listing in *BNJ* of the Anglo-Saxon coins in the collection made by Sir Robert Cotton (died 1631), transferred into the care of the British Museum in 1756,

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<sup>6</sup> I should however mention that I lent my summary of the notebook's content to Rory Naismith while he was preparing the text for *SCBI* 67, and that I had earlier provided Marion Archibald with some relevant information from the notebook for her research into Sir Robert Cotton's collection of Anglo-Saxon coins.

<sup>7</sup> For the Duke of Argyll's gift to the British Museum see Martin, *op.cit.*, 231-2.

<sup>8</sup> Dolley & Strudwick, *op.cit.*, 51.

shows that of the 356 British Museum coins recorded in Ruding's notebook, at least 109 can confidently be identified both as ex Cotton and in the British Museum's possession today<sup>9</sup>. Six further coins recorded by Ruding as being in the British Museum collection c.1795 and which are likely to be ex Cotton, are also probably still in the British Museum (Archibald nos. 37, 42, 73, 98, 150, 241). Regrettably, three further coins certainly ex Cotton (Archibald 39, 62, 80), and two coins probably ex Cotton (Archibald 41, 168), that were in the British Museum c.1795, seem to have gone missing or to have been discarded as duplicates by the time the two volumes of *BMC* were published in 1887-93<sup>10</sup>. To complete the arithmetic, four coins ex Cotton which are still in the British Museum today and which should have been in the British Museum c.1795 (Archibald 6, 84, 161, 187), are not recorded in Ruding's notebook<sup>11</sup>, while three more coins ex Cotton, which had been transferred to the British Museum in 1756 but which were no longer there by the time the *BMC* volumes were published (Archibald 77, 99, 126), may already have been missing from the British Museum by the time that Ruding was at work on his listing.

Allowing for these various factors, the true total of Anglo-Saxon coins in the British Museum's possession c.1795 will have been at least 360, and 124 of these will most probably have been ex Cotton. That leaves 236 coins recorded in Ruding's notebook that will have reached the British Museum from other sources.

The Duke of Argyll's 1789 gift of coins from the Tíree hoard to the British Museum accounts for 57 of these 236 : two of Eadmund, three of Eadred, two of Eadwig, and 50 of Eadgar, as identified in the British Museum trays by Joan Martin. Provenances for coins of Cnut in the British Museum recorded long ago by the antiquary Richard Gough show that seven coins of Cnut, and one *Arm and Sceptre* coin of Harthacnut on which the king's name is given as **CNVT**, which are recorded in Ruding's notebook and which are in the British Museum collection today, derive from the collection of Sir Hans Sloane (died 1753), while one further coin of Cnut similarly recorded in Ruding's notebook and still in the British Museum today is known to have derived from a collection bequeathed to the British Museum by Charles Maynard, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Maynard (died 1775)<sup>12</sup>.

Additionally Joan Martin recorded, on the basis of information in a surviving pocket-book kept by the numismatic scholar Charles Combe (1743-1817), that twenty coins

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<sup>9</sup> M.M.Archibald, 'Cotton's Anglo-Saxon coins in light of the Peiresc inventory of 1606', *BNJ* 76, 2006, 171-203.

<sup>10</sup> Of the coins ex Cotton supposed by Archibald to have gone missing from the British Museum, her no.37, a coin of Burgred, *Lunette A*, moneyer Berheah, is probably still there (*BMC* 156 = *SCBI* 67, 513), while her no.41, Burgred, *Lunette A*, moneyer Diga, and her no.168, Harold I, *Fleur-de-Lis*, Lincoln, Svartingr, believed by her to have remained in the British Museum, are likely to have been discarded after c.1795 and replaced by coins of the same type and moneyer.

<sup>11</sup> The first of these, a coin of Cuthred of Kent, Canterbury, *Tribrach* type, Eaba, is only a large fragment, and may have been omitted by Ruding on that ground. It is convenient to note here that Archibald's no.181, listed by her as a coin of Edward the Confessor's *Short Cross* type, is in reality a coin of *Radiate/Small Cross* type (but is nonetheless still to be identified as ex Cotton).

<sup>12</sup> The Sloane and Maynard provenances for coins of Cnut in the British Museum are provided by R.Gough, *A Catalogue of the Coins of Canute, King of Denmark and England, with Specimens*, London, 1777.

listed in *BMC* which were not ex Cotton, and for which no specific provenance is known, had already been in the British Museum collection before 1782<sup>13</sup>.

These deductions from the total of 236 coins should in theory reduce the total of Anglo-Saxon coins in the British Museum collection for which Ruding's notebook is the earliest source to a total of 150, but the arithmetic is not quite this straightforward.

A careful consideration of the twenty coins identified by Joan Martin as already being in the British Museum before 1782 reveals that two of them, respectively of Anlaf Sihtricsson, *Cross Moline/Cross*, moneyer Rathulf, *BMC* 1097 (= *SCBI* 34, 1256), and of Harold I, *Fleur de Lis*, Stamford, Godric, *BMC* 92, are coins that had either probably or certainly formed part of Cotton's collection (Archibald 73, 298).

Of the remaining eighteen, thirteen are certainly coins which feature in Ruding's notebook, and may be presumed to be the specimens that were already in the British Museum by 1782. More perplexingly, the five remaining coins, although apparently present in the British Museum collection in 1782, are not recorded as being there by Ruding. Although this may at first sight seem seriously damaging to the proposition that Ruding's notebook provides a roughly complete record of the Anglo-Saxon coins held in the British Museum c.1795, one of the coins involved, ostensibly of Aethelred II's *Long Cross* type, is in reality a Hiberno-Norse coin of Michael Dolley's Phase 1 (*BMC* 374 = *SCBI* 8, 40). Two more of the coins, both of Edward the Elder, respectively of *Two-line* type, moneyer Aethelwulf (*BMC* 9), and of "Rose" type, moneyer Wulfheard (*BMC* 113), are of the same type and moneyer as coins recorded in Ruding's notebook from specimens in other collections, and that would have been a good reason for Ruding not to have noted these British Museum specimens as well. That leaves just two of these coins, the first a coin of Berhtwulf, *Bust/Cross Crosslet*, moneyer Sigehæth (*BMC* 132 = *SCBI* 67, 313<sup>14</sup>) and the second a coin of Edward the Martyr, *Reform Small Cross*, Lympne, Wine (*BMC* 12), which might reasonably be expected to have been recorded by Ruding if they were present in the British Museum c.1795.

I have thought it necessary to be particular about this arithmetic because we are approaching what seem to be accurate totals for the number of Anglo-Saxon coins (other than thrymsas, sceats, and eighth and ninth century coins of Northumbria) held in the British Museum collection c.1795, and for the proportion of these for which Ruding's notebook is the earliest evidence for their presence in the British Museum.

It can be seen that the total number of such coins now stands at not less than 364, adding to the previous total of 360 four of the five coins recorded as being in the British Museum in Charles Combe's pocket book but not the Hiberno-Norse penny ; and that the number of these that are first recorded as being in the British Museum on the evidence of Ruding's notebook now stands at 137, deducting from the previous

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<sup>13</sup> Martin, *op.cit.*, 227-30.

<sup>14</sup> Although the provenance of this coin is recorded in *SCBI* 67 as "acq. before 1783 (C.Combe MS)", the catalogue entry for it also states "possibly Dorking hoard", presumably because of the coin's patination. The probability is that the coin described in the Combe pocket-book was discarded as a duplicate once a better specimen became available from the Dorking hoard after that hoard's discovery in 1817, although under an alternative scenario it might already have gone missing from the British Museum by the time that Ruding was entering details of the British Museum coins into his notebook.

total of 150 the thirteen coins shown by Combe's pocket book to have been in the British Museum by 1782, but not deducting the two Combe-recorded coins ex Cotton, already accounted for above, and not including in this calculation any of the further coins recorded in Combe's pocket book which are not recorded by Ruding.

Ruding's notebook thus provides earlier evidence than provided by any other source for the presence in the British Museum of well over a third of the Anglo-Saxon coins for the period Offa – Harold II held in the collection c.1795. This is a substantial proportion, and it is particularly helpful in that for nearly all those of these 137 coins which are still in the British Museum collection today – as we shall see, a fair number no longer are - all that was previously deducible about their provenances was that they must have been acquired prior to April 1837, the date at which accessions to the British Museum's coin collection began to be registered in a formal manner.

We can thus assign pre-c.1795 provenances to a meaningful number of Anglo-Saxon coins still held by the British Museum for which Dolley and Strudwick were only able to state that their acquisition date was "undated", by which they meant that the coins had entered the British Museum collection at some undetermined date before accessions began to be registered. This is significant for the history of the growth of the British Museum's Anglo-Saxon collection, in that it shows that all the coins concerned must have been acquired before the end of the eighteenth century, and thus before the recruitment in 1803 to the staff of the British Museum of Charles Combe's son, the keen young numismatic scholar Taylor Combe (1774-1826), soon to become the British Museum's first Keeper of Antiquities.

The evidence of Ruding's notebook also reveals that in c.1795 the British Museum collection held as many as 29 coins of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type, a larger total by some way than the British Museum's holdings at this date of any other type struck in the later Anglo-Saxon period. One of these, *BMC* 269, Ilchester, Oswig, is known to have been passed to the British Museum from the collection of Sir Hans Sloane, but none of the others have previously been known to have been in the collection as early as c.1795, and it seems very probable that most of these comprise a parcel from a hoard of coins of this type that was provisionally identified by Michael Dolley and Michael Metcalf as one discovered not long before 1785 at Kingsholm, Gloucester<sup>15</sup>. The British Museum was to acquire in 1802 a further 42 coins of this type from the collection of Samuel Tyssen, some of which had previously been owned by Southgate and others by the collector Edward Hodsoll (died 1794), and many of these had doubtless also derived from the same hoard. Dolley and Metcalf's reconstruction of the hoard as a whole, written without knowledge of the evidence provided by Ruding's notebook, was already able to point to the good representation in it of coins by Chester moneyers, and this can now be underlined by the fact that of the 28

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<sup>15</sup> R.H.M.Dolley & D.M.Metcalf, 'Cnut's Quatrefoil type in English cabinets of the eighteenth century', *BNJ* 29, 1958-9, 69-81. No specific evidence has since come to light that would confirm the Kingsholm location for this hoard, but the authors' suggestion is a plausible one and has been accepted by scholars generally. It should be noted here that although the British Museum was ultimately to receive a significant number of coins of Cnut's *Pointed Helmet* type from a hoard found at Caldale, Orkney, in 1774, most of these were not to reach the British Museum until the first and second decades of the nineteenth century (see for this R.Eaglen, 'Sarah Sophia Banks and her English hammered coins', *BNJ* 78, 2008, 200-15, at pp 210-1).

relevant coins listed by Ruding as being in the British Museum, as many as 18 are of Chester, the others being of Bath (2), Gloucester, Lewes (2), Lincoln, London (2), Nottingham and Winchester.

One final twist to the arithmetic results from the fact that by no means all of the coins shown by Ruding's notebook to have been in the British Museum collection c.1795 are still to be found in the British Museum today. As has already been noted, a small number of those which formed part of the Cotton collection and which were still in the collection c.1795 had left the collection by the time the two *BMC* volumes were published, either because they had gone missing, or, more probably, because they had been discarded as duplicates.

It is not surprising in the light of this that of the 137 coins first recorded as being in the British Museum c.1795 by Ruding's notebook, quite a number should also have left the collection before the publication of the *BMC* volumes. I have identified at least thirty of the coins in this category as likely to be no longer in the British Museum. This seems in nearly every instance to be because they had been replaced by better specimens between c.1795 and a date in the 1840s after when it seems to have ceased to be the practice of the British Museum authorities to discard inferior specimens when they acquired better specimens of the same type, minting place and moneyer.

This is not the place to explain the reasons why I believe that individual coins listed as being in the British Museum by Ruding are no longer there, but the principal grounds for supposing that coins listed by Ruding are not now in the collection are either that the only coin or coins of the same type, minting place and moneyer listed in *BMC* have secure post-c.1795 provenance or provenances, or that the weight for a coin as given by Ruding differs significantly from the weight of the specimen or specimens of the same type, minting place and moneyer listed in *BMC*.

I have in draft form a detailed list, available to interested specialists, of the 356 Anglo-Saxon coins identified in Ruding's notebook as being in the British Museum c.1795, and in this I have set out, coin by coin, the evidence for identifying them, or not identifying them, with coins that are listed in *BMC* and that in many cases have been listed more recently in those volumes in the *SCBI* series devoted to coins in the British Museum collection.



