

THE 1861 LOWER DUNSFORTH HOARD

HUGH PAGAN

The existence of a hoard of coins of *Lunette* type found in the village of Lower Dunsforth, North Yorkshire, struck in the names of Burgred of Mercia (852-874), Aethelred I of Wessex (865-871), and Alfred of Wessex (871-899), has long been known from the listing in *Spink's Numismatic Circular* for March-April 1924, p.153, of fifteen coins from the hoard, under the heading 'A few Anglo-Saxon coins from a find when pulling down Dunsforth Church in 1860'.

Six of the coins listed in *NCirc* passed into the possession of Cdr. Richard Paston Mack (1901-1974), four of them by purchase from Spink in 1924, and two of them, initially acquired from Spink by Rev.Douglas Gilbert Matthews (1883-1974), by a subsequent transaction between Mack and Matthews. The illustrations of these coins which were eventually to appear in *SCBI* 20, the volume in the *SCBI* series recording Mack's collection of Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norman coins, were to be a useful addition to knowledge, since the coins had not originally been illustrated.

No further progress was made in elucidating the content of the hoard until Dr Mark Blackburn discovered in the early 2000s a contemporary newspaper report that was enlightening on the hoard's date of discovery, find spot and size. Although he did not live to publish a promised paper based on this new information, a paragraph in a published article of his dating from 2004 recorded the hoard's precise find spot, stated that it contained 'some 30 coins', and suggested that in addition to the coins of *Lunette* type of Burgred, Aethelred I, and Alfred, it may perhaps also have contained 'the odd coin of Aethelberht of Wessex and of Ceolwulf II of Mercia'¹. On this basis he suggested a date of deposit for the hoard of 'probably c.873/5'.

I have now independently discovered, via the British Newspaper Archive, what are in fact two separate contemporary mentions of the hoard in the *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle*, the local newspaper for the Boroughbridge area of North Yorkshire of which Lower Dunsforth is part.

The first, in the newspaper's issue for 23 March 1861, reads as follows :

*A small hoard of coins, apparently (from a broken specimen shewn us) of the Saxon period, has been turned up near the new church at Low Dunsforth, Boroughbridge*².

¹ M.Blackburn, 'The Coinage of Scandinavian York', in R.A.Hall (and others, ed.), *Aspects of Anglo-Scandinavian York*, York, 2004, 325-49 (at p.347). This paper was reprinted in M.Blackburn, *Viking Coinage and Currency in the British Isles*, London, 2011, 281-307.

² Sharp-eyed readers will note that in the century and a half since this hoard's discovery the village's name has transitioned from Low Dunsforth to Lower Dunsforth.

The second, which is the one that Blackburn focused on, occurs as part of a lengthy report in the issue for 5 October 1861 of the consecration ceremonies for the new church of St.Mary, Lower Dunsforth, and this reads :

In digging the sunk fence between the church and school yards, a rouleau was found containing 30 very perfect silver pennies of Alfred the Great; and Burgred, Ceolwulf, and Atheberht (Kings of Mercia) all about the date of 870, A.D.

Before proceeding further with a discussion of the hoard's content, it is appropriate to note that building operations on the site in 1860-1 commenced with the demolition of an existing small medieval church, comprising nave, chancel, and bell cote, and incorporating an arch with Romanesque detailing, transferred to the replacement building, that showed that some of the church's fabric dated back to the Norman period. The previous church had stood within a 'chapel garth', an enclosure comprising one and a half acres, and this area was now utilised as a site for a new church, a burial ground, a new school building, and a school yard. Since it would not have been until a late stage in the construction process that a fence would have been erected to divide the churchyard from the newly created yard attached to the school, we can be confident that the hoard would have been discovered shortly before 23 March 1861, the date of the initial report of its discovery, rather than while the old church was being demolished during 1860.

As regards the hoard itself, the presence of a semi-colon after 'Alfred the Great' in the newspaper report of 5 October 1861 gives rise to some doubt as to whether the hoard contained 30 pennies of Alfred and an unspecified additional number of coins of other rulers, or whether the stated total of 30 coins applies to the size of the hoard as a whole. Blackburn's summary covered both possibilities by describing the hoard as containing 'some 30 coins', but my own inclination is to disregard the punctuation and to assume that the total number of coins in the hoard, so far as was known to the reporter, was exactly 30³.

A rather more challenging element in the report is the stated presence in the hoard, alongside the coins of *Lunette* type, of coins of 'Ceolwulf' and 'Atheberht'. It is certainly entirely possible that the hoard might have contained a coin or coins of Aethelberht of Wessex (858-866), which would have been of *Open Cross* type, but the presence in the hoard of a coin or coins of Ceolwulf II of Mercia (874 -c.879) is more difficult to credit.

Although coins of Ceolwulf II are now well known from their appearance in quantity in the 2015 Watlington hoard from Oxfordshire, and were presumably also numerous in the as yet unrecovered portion of the 2015 'Herefordshire' hoard⁴, Mark Blackburn and Simon Keynes were only able to locate and publish twelve coins of Ceolwulf's reign in their 1998 corpus of coins of the *Cross and Lozenge* type and of related types struck during the second half of the 870s by Alfred, Ceolwulf II, and Archbishop

³ It seems unlikely that a newspaper reporter in 1861 would have attached much importance to the precise punctuation of his copy text, and the semi-colon concerned may indeed, for all we know, have been an insertion by a compositor.

⁴ The small number of recovered coins from this hoard includes coins of Ceolwulf II both of *Two Emperors* type and of *Cross and Lozenge* type.

Aethelred of Canterbury⁵. Of these twelve, as many as eleven have provenances incompatible with their having derived from the Lower Dunsforth hoard. The remaining coin, of *Cross and Lozenge* type and oddly enough also acquired by Cdr. Mack, *SCBI* 20, 638, has a provenance that only goes back to the Bruun sale, Sotheby 18 May 1925, lot 35, and it would be a bold step indeed to claim a Lower Dunsforth hoard provenance for it.

That leaves the possibility that a coin or coins of Ceolwulf II of Mercia did form part of the hoard, and for whatever reason never passed into the coin trade or into general numismatic knowledge, but that seems difficult to credit, bearing in mind that even in 1861 Ceolwulf's coins were recognised as very great rarities and to be of meaningful financial value. I have turned over in my mind other feasible interpretations of the reporter's statement that the hoard included a coin or coins of 'Ceolvolf', and an alternative identification of 'Ceolvolf' as Ceolwulf I of Mercia (821-823) has no great attraction. A better idea might be that the coin or coins concerned will have been a misread or damaged coin or coins of Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury (833-870) of *Lunette* type, on which the archbishop's portrait bust is shown in profile, as on the coins of his regal contemporaries⁶, for this identification has the advantage that Ceolnoth's name, 6EOLNO5 on the coins, has a second letter O in the same place in the inscription as the unexpected second letter O in 'Ceolvolf' (Ceolwulf's name is universally spelled with a letter U (or rather V) in this position on his known coins).

All this is mere speculation in the absence of more decisive evidence as to the composition of the Lower Dunsforth hoard, but it is proper to indicate the difficulty involved in accepting the presence in the hoard of a coin of Ceolwulf II of Mercia.

Turning to the coins listed in *NCirc* and definitely to be associated with the hoard, here is a list of them by present-day classification, with references to the admirably full listings of known coins of the reigns of Aethelred I and of Alfred compiled by Adrian Lyons and William MacKay, and to the equally full listing of coins of Burgred compiled by William MacKay on his own⁷.

It will be seen that four of the six coins of Alfred are certain or likely to have been of *Lunette* type A, the type struck for him in the opening years of his reign, and that only one of the coins of Alfred is particularly likely to have been of *Lunette* type B, a type absent from the Croydon hoard, deposited early in the reign, but represented in other hoards deposited from c.873 onwards. This is the reason why a date of deposit of c.873/4 for this hoard currently seems to me reasonable, and a date of deposit for the hoard in any year after that would not be especially plausible unless the hoard did contain a coin of Ceolwulf II.

Burgred (6 coins)

⁵ M.A.S. Blackburn and S.D. Keynes, 'A corpus of the Cross-and-Lozenge and related coinages of Alfred, Ceolwulf II and Archbishop Aethelred', in M.A.S. Blackburn and D.N. Dumville, eds., *Kings, Currency and Alliances, History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, Woodbridge, 1998, 105-23.

⁶ William MacKay has kindly allowed me to say that this is a conclusion that he has reached independently.

⁷ A.W. Lyons and W.A. MacKay, 'The coinage of Aethelred I (865-871)', *BNJ* 77, 2007, 71-118; A. Lyons and W. MacKay, 'The Lunettes coinage of Alfred the Great', *BNJ* 78, 2008, 38-110; W.A. MacKay, 'The coinage of Burgred of Mercia (852-874)', *BNJ* 85, 2015, 101-237.

Lunette type C

Framric. Obv. .+BVRGRED REX M (with contraction mark over M) Rev. +FRAMRI/6 MON/ETA *NCirc* Oct 1989, 5344 (= *NCirc* Mar 1983, 1036) ex Mack (*SCBI* 20, 627) ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28867 (EF). 1.34g. MacKay H4.2. London style dies.

Lunette type A

Dealinc. Obv. BVRGRED REX- Rev. DEALIN6/ø:MONø/ø:ETA:ø
NCirc Dec 1982, 8742 ex Mack (*SCBI* 20, 611) ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28866 (VF). 0.98g. MacKay V5.72. London style dies.
Osmund. Obv. BVRGRED REX- Rev. OçMhND/ø:MON:/ø:ETA:ø
NCirc Dec 1985, 8645 ex Mack (*SCBI* 20, 621) ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28870 (VF). 1.28g. MacKay V5.203. London style dies.
Wulfred. Moneyer's name VVLFRED, no further details, but evidently a coin of *Lunette* type A, the only type for which this moneyer is recorded. *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28871 (VF). Not listed by MacKay since information insufficient, but cf. MacKay V5.231-4. The coin will have been struck from London style dies.

Lunette type uncertain

Heawulf. Moneyer's name HEAVVLF, no further details. *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28869 (VF). Not listed by MacKay since information insufficient. Heawulf is recorded for coins of Burgred of *Lunette* types A, C and D, and it is not possible to attribute this coin to any of these types with certainty. The coin will have been struck from London style dies.

Hereferth. Obverse inscription ends REX Ó, with contraction mark over Ó
Moneyer's name HEREFER5, no further details. *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28868 (EF). Not listed by MacKay since information insufficient, but cf. MacKay H11.90-1 and V5.184-9. The coin is likely to have been either of *Lunette* type A or of *Lunette* type D. It will have been struck from London style dies.

Aethelred I (2 coins)

Lunette type A

Aethelred. Obv. +AE5ELRED/REX Rev. E5ELRED/MON/ETA
Mack (1975) 110 (= *SCBI* 20, 725) ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28872 (FDC). 1.34g. Lyons/Mackay Ae2.74. Canterbury style dies.
Herebeald. Reverse inscription HEREBEAL/D MON/ETA, no further details.
NCirc Mar-Apr 1924, 28873 ('has been broken'). Noted by Lyons/MacKay after their Ae2.75-6. Likely to have been struck from Canterbury style dies.

Aethelred I or Alfred (1 coin)

Lunette type A

Mann. Reverse inscription []ANN/[M]ON/ETA, no further details. *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28880 ('much broken'). Attributed in *NCirc* to Alfred, moneyer (D)ann, but reattributed by Lyons/MacKay 2008, 94, with a query, to Mann, a moneyer well recorded for coins of *Lunette* type A for Aethelred I, although not otherwise known for Alfred. The reattribution to Mann is likely to be correct, and I would suggest additionally that since the coin was 'much broken', it could well have been a misattributed coin of Aethelred I rather than one of Alfred. Likely to have been struck from Canterbury style dies.

Alfred (6 coins)

Lunette type A

Bosa Obv. +AELBRED/REX Rev. BOÇA/MON/ETA *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28874 (EF). Noted by Lyons/MacKay after their AfL 1-9. Not traced by Lyons/MacKay but evidently a coin of *Lunette* type A, the only type for which this moneyer is recorded. Likely to have been struck from Canterbury style dies.

Bureel Obv. +[AE]LFRED/REX Rev. BVREEL/MON/ETA *NCirc* Sep 1985, 5735 ex Mack (*SCBI* 20, 727) ex Matthews ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28876 ('considerably damaged'). 0.74g. (chipped). Lyons/MacKay AfL.2.8. London style dies.

Hebeca Obv. +AELBRED:/[REX] Rev. HEBE6[A]/MON/ETA Mack (1977) 82 (= *SCBI* 20, 728) ex Matthews ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28878 ('much damaged'). 0.79g (chipped). Lyons/MacKay AfL.1.59. Canterbury style dies.

Heremod Obv. +AELBRED/REX Rev. HEREMOD/øMONø/øETA:ø Dix Noonan Webb 16.iii.2005, 156 ex Stack (1999) 417 ex Mack (1975) 111 (= *SCBI* 20, 729) ex *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28879 (EF). 0.95g. Lyons/MacKay AfL.1.73. Canterbury style dies.

Lunette type B

Ethelmund. Reverse inscription ETELMVND MONETA, no further details. *NCirc* Mar 1924, 28875 (VF). The only coin of this moneyer currently known on which the moneyer's name is spelled ETELMVND is Ryan (1952) 712, purchased from the Seaby firm but with no further provenance, and this is of *Lunette* type B. The Ryan coin is listed by Lyons/MacKay as their AfL.1.39, with the suggestion that this is 'probably' from the Lower Dunsforth hoard, although the Ryan coin may alternatively be from the Hook Norton 1848 hoard⁸. Likely to have been struck from Canterbury style dies.

Lunette type uncertain

Dunn Moneyer's name DVNN, no further details. *NCirc* Mar-Apr 1924, 28877 (EF) (= *NCirc* Apr 1927, 66998). Noted by Lyons/MacKay after their AfL.1.17-24. Not traced by Lyons/MacKay. Most of the *Lunette* coins of this moneyer are of *Lunette* type A, but Dunn is also known from a coin of *Lunette* type B present in the Hook Norton hoard. Likely to have been struck from Canterbury style dies.

No container is mentioned either in the newspaper reports or in *Spink's Numismatic Circular*.

⁸ Pagan, forthcoming.

