

## A FORGOTTEN COIN AUCTION AT CARLISLE IN 1870

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An advertisement in the *Carlisle Patriot* newspaper, 26 August 1870, announced that the local Carlisle auctioneer, C.P.Hardy, had been instructed by the executors of the late Miss Cust, Abbey Street, Carlisle, to sell by auction the whole of her effects<sup>1</sup>. "Miss Cust" was Elizabeth Cust (1811-1870), the only surviving child of Richard Cust (1754-1844), who after a career in business as a stationer in Parliament Street, Westminster, had returned to his native Cumberland in the first decade of the nineteenth century, purchasing the house in Abbey Street in 1814. Richard Cust had been a man of wide interests, and, as the advertisement announces, the contents of the house included, in addition to paintings, drawings, and a library of books, the 'ornithological, mineralogical, geological, conchological and numismatic museum' which Cust had put together during his long life.

By 13 October 1870 the auctioneer was in a position to state, in a further advertisement carried in local newspapers, that 'the collection of Grecian, Roman, and British coins, is most extensive and valuable'. It was arranged that the sale of Miss Cust's effects would commence on Monday 14 November 1870, with advance viewing on 12 November, and in the issue of the *Carlisle Patriot* for 11 November their reporter, who had had sight of the catalogue for the sale, wrote about the Cust collections in enthusiastic terms. I quote here what the reporter had to say about the coins :

*But the coins ! On the first page we are taken back upwards of a thousand years, and introduced to the sole monarchs of England, prior to the Anglo-Saxon era; then to the Anglo-Saxon monarchs, and so through the various reigns in which there was any new coinage to the time of our beloved Queen Victoria. On the tenth day we are associated with Greeks and Romans, who lived more than 2000 years ago, and on the eleventh day we commune numismatically with every country in Europe.*

There are indications here that this was a serious coin collection, and it is pertinent to note that Richard Cust, despite his great age at the time, had been elected as an original member of the Numismatic Society of London on its foundation in 1836, remaining a member until his resignation in January 1843.

Although no copy of the catalogue was known to Harry Manville when he compiled the auction sale volume of his *Encyclopaedia of British Numismatics*<sup>2</sup>, it so happens that the *Carlisle Patriot*, in its issue for Friday 25 November 1870, carries what must be one of the fullest reports of the results of the British part of an out-of-London coin auction to appear in the mid nineteenth century newspaper press. It comprises a paragraph of text and a very extensive accompanying list of individual coin lots with prices and purchaser's names. Here is the paragraph of text, printed under the heading 'GREAT SALE OF COINS'.

*On Tuesday the sale of Miss Cust's splendid collection of Coins commenced, and was continued on Wednesday and yesterday. It will be resumed to-day (Friday) and tomorrow.*

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations from newspapers given below, as well as the references to newspaper articles, are taken from the British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>2</sup> It would be excellent if a copy of the catalogue could be located.

*On Monday a rare variety of medals, and some fossils and other geological varieties will be offered; and on Tuesday this extensive sale will be brought to a close by the disposal of other geological and mineral specimens, and of some curious antiquities, &c. The coins comprised specimens of the currencies of nearly every age and nation which had a currency, and they were in excellent condition. The competition was animated, and the prices realized were often in advance of those named in the tariff of the numismatist. The purchasers were chiefly Mr Jessop of London, Mr Gray of Glasgow, Mr Nash of London, Mr Martin, Mr Eggleston of Dewsbury, Mr Tritschler of Carlisle, and Mr Mortimer (surgeon) of Carlisle, all of whom were understood to be buying on commission. The highest credit is due to Mr Hardy for the masterly manner in which the catalogue was prepared; it must have cost an infinity of labour, and as to its accuracy the experts round the table declared they had seen nothing like it out of London. We give a pretty full list of the purchases [which follows].*

It is impracticable to reproduce the list of the individual coin lots, for this is too long for the parameters of the present note. It is enough to say here that the lots listed are those offered on the Tuesday and Wednesday of the second week of the Cust sale, days on which only coins belonging to the British series down to the end of the seventeenth century seem to have featured. They thus start with lots offering eight Celtic gold coins and conclude with lots offering gold and silver coins of William and Mary. Cust had evidently aimed at making a comprehensive collection in the British series as a whole, and, although the details of the coins given in the list are not specific enough to show whether he possessed any notable rarities, he clearly had respectable holdings of coins of the successive Anglo-Saxon, Norman, Plantagenet, Tudor and Stuart monarchs.

In the Anglo-Saxon series, which ranged chronologically from coins of Aethelwulf of Wessex to coins of Harold II, the list gives prices and names of buyers for 34 lots, containing between them 37 coins, and of these lots 14 were purchased by Jessop, 9 by Eggleston, 5 by Nash, 3 by Mortimer, 2 by Gray and 1 by Tritschler. Of these buyers, Tritschler and Mortimer were, as the report in the *Carlisle Patriot* records, locally based, and would presumably have been buying on commission for clients who were also locally based.

Of the other buyers of these lots, all signalled out for mention as significant purchasers at the sale as a whole, John Gray (died 1879), a coin dealer based in Glasgow, will be familiar to specialists as a major supplier of coins to Thomas Coats (1809-1883), whose collection in the Scottish series is now part of the holdings of the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, and whose collection in the Anglo-Saxon, English, Greek and Roman series is now in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.

That leaves Jessop, Eggleston, and Nash, none of whose names normally crop up in the history of our subject. I have not been able to identify "Mr Nash of London", but something can usefully be said both about Jessop and about Eggleston. As regards Jessop, Manville has a brief entry in his biographical volume recording that J.J.Jessop was a dealer in antique silver from premises in Regent Street, London, and that his stock of Greek, Roman, English and other coins and medals was sold in a Sotheby sale of 20 December 1877. Jessop, shown by this to have dealt in coins as well as in silver, was then described as "deceased", and he can reasonably be identified as Julius James Jessop, whose death at the age of 32 on 20 June 1877 was recorded in London newspapers as having happened at Kingston, Jamaica, "where he had gone for the benefit of his health". This Julius Jessop is recorded in the 1871 Census

as living unmarried with his parents at 16 Elgin Road, Kensington Park (now Elgin Crescent, London W11). Although Jessop may have died young, it says much for his enterprise that when only in his mid twenties he should have been the only clearly identifiable London coin dealer to have travelled all the way to Carlisle to attend the Cust sale, and that he should have played a major role in the auction room when he got there.

As regards Eggleston, no individual of this name is recorded by Manville and his name was new to me, but it has long been a puzzle how it happened that James Verity (1845-1910), resident at Earlsheaton, Dewsbury, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, became a major figure in the coin trade during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, and it turns out that William Houghton Eggleston (1827-1886), a businessman from Dewsbury, was James Verity's original employer. Eggleston's primary trading operation was as a linen draper, but provincial English newspapers in 1870-2 carry advertisements for him as a coin dealer, of which this, from the *Preston Pilot* newspaper, 1 February 1871, is a specimen :

OLD COINS. - For sale in Gold, Silver, and Copper, early British, Saxon, English, Roman, &c. Lists free. Apply to W.H.Eggleston, Dewsbury, Coins bought or exchanged.

James Verity, shown in the 1881 Census as a 35-year old draper's assistant living with Eggleston and his family at Eggleston's business premises, had been working alongside Eggleston in the coin trade as well as in the drapery business since at least the beginning of the 1870s<sup>3</sup>, and his importance in their coin dealing operation is shown by the fact that he, rather than Eggleston, was elected a member of the Numismatic Society of London as early as April 1874. He and Eggleston were still working together in the coin trade in March 1883, when they jointly displayed at the Dewsbury Infirmary Bazaar and Exhibition 'a splendid series of coins and medals ... looked upon as the most complete in the provinces, and ... the result of 14 years searching' (*Dewsbury Chronicle and West Riding Advertiser*, 31 March 1883). It would appear from this that their official or unofficial dealing partnership had begun about 1869, and it seems that it might have been ended only by Eggleston's death, for James Verity, "numismatist", acted as one of the executors of Eggleston's will.



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<sup>3</sup> Verity had been inserting advertisements in the newspaper press more or less identically worded to those inserted by Eggleston, but mentioning his name and not that of Eggleston, from March 1870 onwards.