

THE CHESTER MINT

BY WILLIAM GEDDES, M.A., LL.M., F.R.A.S., F.R.N.S.

CHESTER has been very much in the numismatic news lately. The Saxon hoard discovered there in 1950⁽¹⁾ and the recent acquisition for the City of the late Dr. Willoughby Gardner's great collection of Saxon and Norman coins of local mintage⁽²⁾ have made Chester a focal point of interest. Recognition of that fact was given by the holding of the annual National Numismatic Congress in Chester in 1955.

In Anglo-Saxon and Norman times Chester had a mint in operation for a more or less continuous period of about two hundred and fifty years, commencing at least as early as Athelstan (925-939) and ending some time in the reign of Henry II. A mint was opened temporarily on four subsequent and widely separated occasions, each owing to special causes, namely in the reigns of Edward I (twice), Charles I and William III.

So far as we know, there was no official mint at Chester in Roman times; in fact Britain itself has little local numismatic history during the occupation. The rebel emperors Carausius and Allectus opened and maintained mints at London and at a place designated by the letter C, which is usually considered to refer to Colchester, but these mints were short-lived, and there is certainly no suggestion that Chester ever had an official Roman mint.⁽³⁾ But Chester was for long the station of the famous twentieth legion, *Valeria Victrix*. During excavations carried out by Professor Newstead in the city between 1924 and 1926 certain barbarous imitations of Roman denarii were found; these are believed to have been minted unofficially in order to supply the troops with money,⁽⁴⁾ and the place of discovery is as likely as, perhaps more likely than, any other to have been the place of manufacture. Long after the departure of the Romans and the entry of the Germanic tribes, it was remembered that Deva had been a permanent military station, and "Legeceaster" or "legion-camp" was the name given to the city. This name will demand our attention hereafter.

I. THE SAXON AND NORMAN MINT

After the departure of the Romans in the early part of the fifth century the currency in Britain fell to pieces. For the two following

⁽¹⁾ See Appendix I.

⁽²⁾ See Appendix II.

⁽³⁾ Mattingly, *Roman Coins*, pp. 117-120.

⁽⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 118; Mattingly & Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 59.

centuries the natives had to make do as best they could with the Roman coins still in circulation, eked out by tiny bronze coins of local striking.⁽⁵⁾ The first general native coinage commenced at some time after 650, and consisted of small silver pieces called *sceats*, of about the size of our modern silver threepenny-bits, but thicker. The emission of these *sceats* appears to have been general in the various kingdoms of the Heptarchy until about 800. In Northumbria the issue continued well on into the ninth century, but in the degenerate form of *stycas*, small coins consisting for the most part of copper.

There is no reason to attribute to Chester any of the *sceats* or *stycas*. Not only was Cheshire an outlying district from the point of view of both Mercia and Northumbria, and therefore unlikely to contain a mint; worse still, the *sceats* normally do not have any intelligible writing upon them, while the *stycas*, though giving the names of kings and moneyers, do not give the names of any mint towns; and, worst of all, Ethelfrith of Northumbria had in 613 taken and perhaps sacked Chester,⁽⁶⁾ and for long the city remained waste, so was not likely to be a mint town. It is only when the name of the mint comes to be inscribed on the coins that we can definitely state that a particular town is striking.

Before the middle of the eighth century it had been the exception rather than the rule to put the monarch's name upon the coinage, the Northumbrian currency being the chief exception. But then there was a great step forward. King Ethelbert II of Kent issued a silver penny,⁽⁷⁾ a denomination destined to form the basis of English currency for many centuries, and surviving to this day in the annual Maundy Money. In 757 Offa became king of Mercia and soon began to imitate the Kentish example and issue silver pennies of his own. He conquered Kent in 774 and used the Canterbury mint for his Mercian issue. With Offa what had been exceptional became regular: the penny with the royal name upon it soon supplanted the *sceat*, not only in Mercia, but in Wessex and East Anglia also. For some time longer the *styca* continued to be issued in the north, until the Danes conquered that area about 867, whereupon they also began to issue the silver penny. The practice of placing the name of the moneyer on the reverse side of the coins ran fairly parallel to that of placing the name of the king on the obverse side: the Northumbrian *styca* set the precedent, and with the penny the practice became general.

The third development was the placing of the name of the *mint-town* on the coins. The name *Canterbury* had occasionally appeared before Alfred's time, as had *London*, but these examples were exceptional. Alfred was a pioneer in this respect; under him there was what Professor Oman describes as an "outbreak", in all parts of

⁽⁵⁾ Mattingly, *Roman Coins*, p. 267.

⁽⁶⁾ Oman, *England before the Norman Conquest*, p. 252; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 77.

⁽⁷⁾ Seaby, *Numismatic Bulletin* for 1949, p. 116.

England subject to his rule, of the practice of naming the place of origin. Canterbury, London, Winchester, Exeter, Gloucester and Oxford all appear.⁽⁸⁾ It is a remarkable and, to use Oman's word again, "exasperating" thing that Alfred's son Edward the Elder did not continue this admirable practice.⁽⁹⁾ Edward reconquered much of the Midlands from the Danes, and in all probability took great personal interest in his coinage, for there were novel and interesting designs on some of the issues. Having so much of England under his control, he could easily open new mints. Yet he reverted to the old system of anonymity of mint-towns old and new, and it is very seldom that the name of a town appears. But, working backwards from his son Athelstan, who had a great number of mints working and for much of his reign placed the names of the towns on the reverses,⁽¹⁰⁾ it is probable that a number of these were opened by Edward himself. To what extent he opened mints in the towns he won from the Danes or in the new burghs which he set up as fortresses at points of danger, we do not know, but we may well infer, as we shall see, that not all the mints operating under Athelstan were originated by him. One argument in favour of the opening of new mints by the father is the number of moneys signing coins in his reign—over a hundred; another is that the style and emblems of known Mercian coins of Athelstan were already present on coins of Edward; and a still stronger argument is that some of Athelstan's moneys identified with particular mints were already at work under Edward. We shall return to this topic.

So far as Chester is concerned, we have arrived at the critical point of time. In 893 (*i.e.* in Alfred's reign) Haesten the Dane seized what the *Saxon Chronicle* calls the "waste chester", which he repaired and whose walls he fortified.⁽¹¹⁾ The Mercians came up, however, and beset the town, with the result that next year the Danes quitted it. Some years later, in 907, Edward's illustrious sister Ethelfleda again repaired the town and re-peopled it,⁽¹²⁾ as a basis for operations against the Danes in the north-west generally, and in particular, no doubt, as a means of keeping a watchful eye on the recently established Norse settlements in Wirral and South Lancashire, whose place-names are to this day familiar to us in West Kirby, Frankby, Greasby, Pensby, Formby, Crosby and other towns.

The reign of Athelstan is a noteworthy one in our numismatic history. Like his grandfather and father, he did valiantly against the Danes, and signalised his commanding position by describing himself on many of his coins as *King of All Britain*.⁽¹³⁾ He passed an

⁽⁸⁾ Oman, *The Coinage of England*, p. 41.

⁽⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 54; Hawkins, *English Silver Coins*, p. 61.

⁽¹¹⁾ Oman, *England before the Norman Conquest*, p. 487; Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁽¹²⁾ Oman, *op. cit.*, p. 495; Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁽¹³⁾ Oman, *The Coinage of England*, p. 57.

important law at Grateley in 928, designed to give England an uniform currency, to control the moneyers, and to regulate the system of mints. The law appears to have put an end to the independent archiepiscopal types of design, by requiring that all issues should be of regal type; for this meant that in future, when a name or portrait appeared, it was to be that of the king, not of the prelate. Moneyers were not to work in secret places. The law then proceeded to deal with the matter of mint-towns. In those early days difficulties of communication and transport and the dangers inherent in carrying valuable commodities over large distances made it advisable that the monetary needs of a centre of population should be catered for in the vicinity, and the simplicity of coining apparatus rendered this possible; hence the liberality with which mints were allowed. And publicity value should not be overlooked. Athelstan's law specified a number of towns which might have more than one moneyer, (London 8, Canterbury 7, Winchester 6, Rochester 3, and several other towns in the south two each), and allowed Hastings and Chichester one each, and *every other burgh one*.

Chester was not mentioned by name in Athelstan's law, but in fact there were about thirty mints operating under that monarch, and Chester was one of them. There can be no possible doubt about that, for the name of the city explicitly appears on many of the coins. Furthermore—and this is the very remarkable thing—a reference to the list of Athelstan's Chester moneyers in Appendix III will show that during this comparatively short reign of fourteen years about thirty moneyers were working, which suggests that a large number—far more than London's eight—were at work at any given time. Chester may justly claim to have been the most prolific mint town in the whole country in the second quarter of the tenth century. How does this fit in with the Law of Grateley?

Several observations must first be made about the law itself. First, the list of mint-towns mentioned in the law only covers London, Kent and Wessex. Neither Mercian nor Northumbrian towns are mentioned. Yet coins were certainly struck in these two "kingdoms". Secondly, the fact that permission was given to have one moneyer in each unmentioned burgh does not force one to conclude that every such burgh availed itself of the right. Thirdly, the provision concerning one moneyer in each unnamed burgh may have been restrictive rather than permissive. Some burghs may have been employing more than one, and have been cut down to one. It is not at all clear why Hastings and Chichester were specifically mentioned, unless they were being cut down.

How, then, does one relate the case of Chester, with its abnormal number of moneyers under Athelstan, to this law? Various possibilities occur to a lawyer. Possibly the text of the law, as it has come down to us, is incomplete: it may have gone on to deal with Mercia and Northumbria. Possibly the law was not intended to cover those two kingdoms at all. Or, if it was meant to cover them, the king may later have decided, for reasons of commerce or adver-

tisement, that a much more liberal allowance of moneys should be accorded to northern Mercia in general, and to Chester in particular. The story as we have it is obviously incomplete, but the true explanation is a question which the present writer must leave to the historians. So far as he is aware, it has never been dealt with.

During the tenth century, two developments occurred. First, it became more and more usual to put the "portrait" of the king on the obverse side of his coins. Secondly, there were frequent changes



PLATE 1. PENNY OF EDGAR
(Moneyer Frothric)

of type. These changes were useful for more reasons than one: the various issues were a chronological index, and in addition the king derived a profit from the supplying of dies to the moneyers when the types were changed.

During the short reigns of Athelstan's two brothers, who successively followed him (Edmund 939-946 and Edred 946-955), and the still shorter reign of Edwig (955-959), there is for the most part a retrogression to the old practice of not naming the mints: the great majority of the coins of these three reigns merely state the name of the moneyer and only occasionally is the mint specified. If one excepts two doubtful cases under Edmund,⁽¹⁴⁾ the name of Chester does not appear during the whole of the three reigns, but why there was this substantial reversion to anonymity under Edmund, Edred and Edwig it is difficult to see. During these reigns the number of known moneyers at Chester appreciably diminished, and this fact suggests that the mint was no longer quite so predominant as it had been.

The reign of Edgar (959-975) apparently ran for some years with the same system of anonymity, but later on, if one may draw conclusions from his coins, he made some important rules as to the currency. First, he insisted that the royal portrait should appear on all the coins; secondly, that all mints should produce the same type; and thirdly, that the mint-towns should be named on all the coins. From this time forth, until well into the reign of Edward III four centuries later, the silver pennies all bore the names of the issuing mints, though the practice of naming the moneyers ceased somewhat earlier, namely, in the reign of Edward I.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Appendix III.

Reverting, in the meantime, to the interesting period of the first half of the tenth century, in an attempt to trace the origin of the Chester mint, it was mentioned above that the evidence from the names of moneyers is suggestive. Thus among the large number of moneyers under Athelstan who expressly state their mint to be Chester, there are quite a few, such as Abba, Beorard, Boiga, Eadmund, Oslac, Sigferth and Wulfstan, who were already working somewhere in Mercia in the previous reign of Edward the Elder.⁽¹⁵⁾

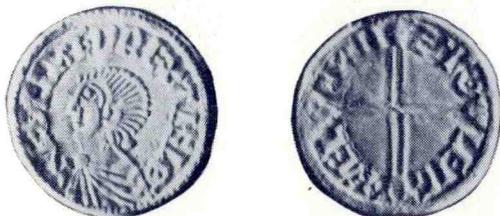


PLATE 2. PENNY OF ÆTHELRED II.
(Moneyer Aelfwine)

Similarly, of the names which under Athelstan are expressly identified with Chester, quite a number continue to appear, without mint names, under Edmund (Cnap, Frard, Maeldomen, Maerten, Megred, Oslac, Wulfgar and Wulfstan), and likewise, under Edred (Aelfwine, Frard, Maerten, Oslac, Wulfgar and Wulfstan).⁽¹⁶⁾ The same process can be continued under Edwig. It is therefore surely a fair conclusion that on probabilities there was a mint at Chester under Edward the Elder, and that it remained continuously in operation from then until the end of the Saxon era. Admittedly, unless the mint name is specifically given, the evidence is not logically conclusive, for there may have been two men of the same name coining at different mints; or even if the same man was working in two or more reigns, he may have been moved from one town to another. But, considering the number of names involved, it is submitted that the evidence is so significant and cumulative that the most likely conclusion is that Chester was open from Edward the Elder onwards. The problem does not arise after Edgar.

In the later pre-Conquest period the number of mints at work was larger than ever. Ethelred the Unready, Cnut, and the Confessor all had over sixty. *Domesday Book* informs us that in the time of Edward the Confessor there were at Chester seven moneyers, who paid £7 to the king and the earl, in addition to the "firm", when the

⁽¹⁵⁾ Mr. R. H. Dolley, one of our foremost authorities on the early English coinage, recently stated that there are now fifteen moneyers under Edward the Elder known to be connected with Chester.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See Appendix III.

money was changed. This statement no doubt means seven moneyers at one time, namely at the end of the Confessor's reign.

The Chester mint continued in active operation during the Norman period, and all four kings are represented. From the numismatic point of view, this period is merely a continuation of the Saxon one; William I found a better currency here than he had in Normandy, and



PLATE 3. PENNY OF CNUT
(Moneyer "Leowi")

he was content to leave it as it was, maintaining the same quality and style. The penny continued to be the only denomination, and it continued to be literally cut into halves and quarters for small change.⁽¹⁷⁾ There was no point in removing the Saxon and Danish moneyers, for they were of no political importance, and the pennies of the Norman Kings therefore continue to reveal moneyers of the old races; a study of Appendix III will fully bear this out. The number of mints continued to be very great—over sixty—and

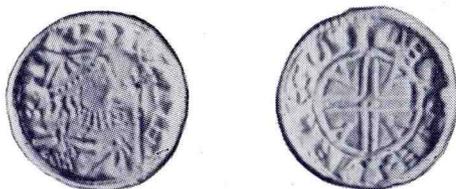


PLATE 4. PENNY OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR
(Moneyer Aelfsi)

the old system just went on in all material respects, including frequent changes of type: William I had eight types, William II five, Henry I fifteen—an average of a change every two and a half years. Stephen's reign is naturally anomalous owing to the anarchy.

Chester coins are known of a good many of the various types, but not of all. The Conqueror's first type ran until about 1070, but Chester was one of the last places in the country to be subdued, therefore there are no Chester coins of this first type. The city comes into the picture with the second type, and coins of the third,

⁽¹⁷⁾ Occasionally, under the Saxons, round halfpennies had been coined, but the practice lapsed before the beginning of the eleventh century.

fifth and eighth types also exist. Examples of the fourth, sixth and seventh types, so far as the writer is aware, are not known. On the other hand, the first four of Rufus's five types are known, the last one alone being unrepresented. Comparatively few of Henry's fifteen types are represented; the missing types probably cover periods when the earl of Chester was either a minor or absent.⁽¹⁸⁾

The reign of Stephen is exceptional, for, after the outbreak of civil war and general anarchy, there are not only some regular issues on



PLATE 5. PENNY OF WILLIAM I
(Moneyer Sunolf)

behalf of the king, but pseudo-regular issues on behalf of Matilda, and wholly irregular emanations from various barons. Confining ourselves to the immediate subject of this paper, however, all that need be said is that the Chester mint was open during the reign.

Chester was still open for a short time after the accession of Henry II, and produced coins of the first, or "Tealby", type. Then the mint was closed.

The old Saxon name for Chester was *LEGECEASTRE* or town of the Legion. This name in various abbreviated forms appeared on Saxon and Norman coins until the time of Henry I, when the more modern form of *CESTRIA* became usual. Early but isolated instances of the use of this new form occur in the fifth and eighth types of the Conqueror, but he and Rufus almost entirely used the old form. While the old name in its manifold abbreviations was in use it is not always easy to distinguish Chester coins from those of Leicester, whose ancient name was *LEGRACEASTRE*. Sometimes the attribution is fairly clear from the form of the abbreviation itself: thus such root forms as *LEGE*, *LECE*, *LEGEC* can fairly safely be attributed to Chester, while forms containing an *R* can equally safely be given to Leicester. But when there is nothing but *LEG* the matter is doubtful, and other means of identification are necessary. The name of the moneyer may help, if he is known to

⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus Hugh Lupus was absent in Normandy with Rufus in 1097. Again, when he died in 1101, he was succeeded by his son Richard, who was a minor for some years afterwards. The Chester types of Henry I suggest that the mint was open for a few years before and after 1120, after Richard had attained his majority and, when he perished in the White Ship in 1120, under his successor Ranulf I. This earl went to Normandy about 1123, so coinage ceases. After he was succeeded by his son Ranulf II, the last two types of the reign appear.

belong to a particular mint, and no doubt the expert can gather some information from style. But there is probably a residuum of cases where no certain attribution is possible.⁽¹⁹⁾

Internal evidence derived from a study of the coins themselves suggests that in the Norman period there was a reduction in the number of moneys at work in Chester at the same time. Whereas under the Confessor there were at least seven, the number probably dropped to about four before the end of the Conqueror's reign.

II THE MINT IN THE REIGN OF EDWARD I

With the commencement under Henry II, in or about 1180, of the long series of "short-cross pennies", the Chester mint fell, or perhaps had already fallen, into abeyance. The number of mints which



PLATE 6. PENNY OF EDWARD I
(Civitas Cestrie)

continued at work was much smaller than in Norman times, and Chester was among those which were closed down; its closure may in fact have taken place soon after the king's accession in 1154, for there are only two moneys known to have produced the early or "Tealby" type at Chester. It remained closed under Richard I, John and Henry III, and but for the exigencies of later isolated occasions might never have been re-opened: it was, in fact, after Henry II's time, never again one of the regular mints.

In 1278 the bad state of the currency was discussed in Parliament, clipping and ordinary wear and tear being the causes of complaint; and in consequence the king determined upon the calling in of the existing money and a great issue of new money, consisting chiefly of the penny as before, but supplemented by halfpence and farthings

⁽¹⁹⁾ In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Thorpe's edition, 1861), Chester is referred to as follows—Legaceastre and Legercvestre (A.D. 605); Legaceaster, Legcester and Liegecester, (894); Ligcester and Ligceaster (907); Leiceaster, Legeceaster and Laegeceaster (972–1016).

The late Godfrey Mathews, in an unpublished manuscript, collected some further references, viz., Legacaester (Bede); Legecestre (Henry of Huntingdon); Civitas de Cestre (*Domesday Book*).

During the tenth century, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Leicester appears variously as Ligeraceastre, Legraecastre, and the like.

to supply small change, instead of the ancient but extremely wasteful method of literally cutting pennies into halves and quarters. A groat or fourpenny piece was also for the first time issued, but was soon temporarily discontinued until the reign of Edward III.

Along with the new issue, a new system of mint organisation was put into force. Edward abolished the centuries-old system of independent moneyers operating in many of the chief towns of the realm, and instituted a new system under which the moneyers at whatever royal mints were open were to be subject to the supervision of a mint-master in London. He also aimed at keeping the number of mints down to a minimum.

The Tower mint alone produced the first emission of Edwardian pennies, but it soon became apparent that the work of creating the great new issue would necessitate more than one mint, so Canterbury, (royal) York and Bristol were brought into play in 1280, with a specified number of furnaces each. The ecclesiastical mints at York, Durham and Bury St. Edmunds continued to work independently as before.

Under this new system it was considered to be no longer necessary for the moneyers to place their individual names upon the coins, but to be sufficient to name the mint-town. Thus the Anglo-Norman formula of name of moneyer and name of mint (*e.g.* "GODMAN ON LUND") gave place to the mediaeval formula (*e.g.* "CIVITAS LONDON"). An old "poem" commemorates these happenings-

"Edward did smyte round peny, halfpeny, ferthing,
The croice passed the bounde of all throughout the ring.
The Kinges side salle be the hede and his name written,
The croice side, what cité it was in coynd and smytten."

As the work of recoinage proceeded, the newly-opened mints specified above were themselves found insufficient, and during 1280 Lincoln and Newcastle were opened. Early in 1281 Chester also was opened, and this must undoubtedly have been a boon to the north-west, which previously had had no mint and concomitant exchange nearer than York, Lincoln or Bristol. But this lease of life to Chester was a very short one, for it was the last to be opened and the first to be closed down, namely in the summer of 1281. Lincoln, Newcastle, Bristol and (royal) York were also all closed before the end of the same year.

Between 1282 and 1290 the few mints which remained produced less and less money, and from 1290 to 1298 there was a mere trickle. In consequence, at the end of the century another currency crisis developed. The causes this time were different; it was not clipping and wear that were now complained of; this time the complaints were about lack of money altogether. Not only had there been little new money coined for the best part of twenty years, but the issue of 1280-1 had itself largely disappeared abroad, on the principle of bad foreign money coming into the country and driving out good native money. The measures taken to deal with the situation were two: first, the foreign mongrels ("pollards", "crockards"

and the like) were called down in value and afterwards prohibited; secondly, another great coinage was put in hand. This meant that various mints had to be re-opened. All those which had been at work in 1280-1 were therefore re-opened, and a few additional ones also were opened, at Exeter, Hull and Berwick. As a result, Chester came into operation once more, the writ authorising this being issued in March 1300.

The amounts respectively struck at the provincial mints varied considerably. York, Bristol and Newcastle all struck over 10,000 lbs. weight while they were kept open, whereas Chester, which was only open between July and November 1300, struck a mere 1400 lbs. The amounts coined would naturally depend not only on the duration of the different mints but also on the relative amounts of silver brought in.

In the long and complicated list of issues of pennies of Edward I, the provincial issues of 1280-1 and 1300 fall within Groups III and IX.

III. CHARLES I

During the Great Civil War, when the king was not in possession of London, emergency mints were set up in various towns by the Royalists, as the fortunes of war permitted and convenience



PLATE 7. HALF-CROWN OF CHARLES I
(Mint-Mark: Three Garbs)

suggested. There were issues from York, Aberystwyth, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Bristol, Exeter and Chester.

In 1644, after Marston Moor, the king lost the mint at York; he was cut off from Oxford also. Cheshire being a loyal county, the king came hither in 1645. The need for an emergency mint and for a supply of silver in this part of the country would be pressing, and possibly such a mint was already being organised in the late months of 1644. However that may be, the corporation of the city passed a resolution on the 31 January 1645—"That as much of the

ancient plate of this City as will amount to the sum of £100 shall be forthwith converted into coin for the necessary use and defence of this City and towards payment of the City's debts". No doubt the citizens also made contributions. Obviously by January 1645 the mint was either installed or was about to be installed.

Chester had to endure a long siege soon afterwards. Lord Byron made a gallant defence for the Royalists, but early in February 1646 he had to surrender to the Parliamentarians under Sir William Brereton. The Chester Mint could therefore no longer continue.

The period involved is therefore somewhat over a year, roughly the year 1645. In those days the year ended in March, not in December. There are certainly a number of Chester coins dated 1644, which is not very surprising, as a good deal of the plate and bullion would be rushed through the mint before March 1645, during the early enthusiasm.

These Chester coins of the Civil War consist of half-crowns and threepences and can be distinguished by the mint-mark of the gerb or wheatsheaf, three on the half-crown and one on the threepence. Many of the half-crowns also bear the letters CHST or CEST below the feet of the king's horse, and a plume above the horse. There are two reverse types; one is the "Shield" type, with the usual words *Christo auspice regno*, and the other is the "Declaration" type, asserting the Protestant Religion, the Laws of England, and the Liberties of Parliament. All Charles's Chester coins are rare, and can hardly be regarded as part of the normal coinage of the realm.

IV. WILLIAM III

The last occasion on which Chester had a mint was in the reign of William III.

Between the Restoration in 1660 and the Revolution of 1688 the state of the currency was becoming worse and worse, until by the time of William and Mary it was deplorable. There were several reasons for this.

In the first place, the old hammered and the new milled coins were both circulating. Although since 1662 all new coins had been milled, the hammered ones of the earlier period had never been withdrawn; they were necessarily at least twenty years old, and many of them were considerably older than that.⁽²⁰⁾ Most of them were in anything but good condition; in addition to ordinary wear and tear, clipping was rife, for the thinness of the pieces of metal made the use of shears easy and profitable, even if dangerous. A silver piece of full weight was a rarity: so great had the evil become that pieces were no longer taken at their face value, but in every transaction there was a haggling as to how much the individual coins were in

⁽²⁰⁾ In a hoard of coins evidently buried in 1688, and found in 1923, out of 5,267 coins only 181 were milled.

fact worth; in other words, they were treated as bullion only.⁽²¹⁾ The milled guineas no longer automatically passed at their authorised value, but were usually exchanged for considerably more, often fetching as much as thirty shillings.⁽²²⁾

In the second place, as is usual, good money was driven out by bad. The milled coins never had a fair chance: they were hoarded in the expectation that they would appreciate in value; they were melted down for their intrinsic content; they were exported to France,



PLATE 8. HALF-CROWN OF WILLIAM III
(Note the letter C under bust)

Holland, and other countries, and there disposed of at a profit of some three half-pence per ounce of silver.⁽²³⁾

In the result, the bulk of the actual circulating currency consisted of the old hammered silver, which got worse and worse. Clipping was so prevalent that it used to be said by cynics that, though it might still be possible to say whose was the image, it could not be said what was the superscription. Several tests of weighing a random mass of coins were made, and the results proved to be alarming, for anything from 40% to upwards of 50% loss of weight was disclosed.⁽²⁴⁾ Macaulay has described the situation: "Over every counter there was wrangling from morning to night. The workman and his employer had a quarrel as regularly as the Saturday came round. On a fair-day or a market-day the clamours, the reproaches, the taunts, the curses were incessant, and it was well if no booth was overturned and no head broken. . . . Any man of

⁽²¹⁾ "Persons before they conclude in any bargains are necessitated first to settle the price or value of the very money they are to receive for their goods." Lowndes, *Essay for Amendment* (1695).

⁽²²⁾ Brooke, *English Coins*, p. 223.

⁽²³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁽²⁴⁾ In a 'test' at the Exchequer in the summer of 1695 572 bags of silver coins which ought to have amounted in the aggregate to 221,418 ounces, weighed only 113,771 ounces. Folkes testifies to having seen pieces lacking three fourths in weight, and to collections of pieces lacking over half.

plain understanding might have known that, when the State treats perfect coin and light coin as of equal value, the perfect coin will not drive the light coin out of circulation, but will itself be driven out. A clipped crown, on English ground, went as far in the payment of a tax or debt as a milled crown. . . . The politicians of that age, however, generally overlooked these very obvious considerations. They marvelled exceedingly that everybody should be so perverse as to use light money in preference to good money. In other words, they marvelled that nobody chose to pay twelve ounces of silver when ten would serve the turn. Fresh waggon-loads of choice money still came forth from the mill, and still they vanished as fast as they appeared. . . . The evil proceeded with constantly accelerating velocity. At length in the autumn of 1695 it could hardly be said that the country possessed, for practical purposes, any measure of the value of commodities. It was a mere chance whether what was called a shilling was really tenpence, or sixpence, or a groat".⁽²⁵⁾

Matters had got to such a pitch by the time of the death of Queen Mary that the government decided that something must be done; the question was, what? The criminal law could not be made much more stringent than it already was; clipping was a capital offence, and clippers were continually being hanged—and meeting with a certain amount of public sympathy, on the Gilbertian principle that when everybody's somebody then nobody's anybody. "The injury done by the whole body of clippers to the whole society was indeed immense, but each particular act of clipping was a trifle".⁽²⁶⁾ "It may well be doubted whether all the misery which had been inflicted on the English nation in a quarter of a century by bad Kings, bad Ministers, bad Parliaments, and bad Judges, was equal to the misery caused in a single year by bad crowns and bad shillings".⁽²⁷⁾

Different views were advanced as to what ought to be done. Some men advocated that nothing should be attempted until the war against Louis XIV was over, while others, including Montague, the chancellor of the exchequer, warned that matters were already so serious that further delay would be calamitous. Some men advocated a reduction in the weight of the proposed new coins, "that the new shilling should be worth only ninepence", while others urged the view—which ultimately prevailed—that the new coins should be made according to the established standards of weight and fineness, supporting their contention both by economic reasons and by ridicule: Louis of France was represented as expressing the utmost alarm "lest England should make herself the richest country in the world by the simple expedient of calling ninepence a shilling".⁽²⁸⁾ Flamsteed, the astronomer-royal, remarked that the point in issue was whether 5 was 6, or only 5. In the end it was decided that a

⁽²⁵⁾ Macaulay, *History of England*, Vol. V, p. 74. See also Holdsworth, *History of English Law*, Vol. VI, p. 324.

⁽²⁶⁾ Macaulay, *op cit.*, Vol. V, p. 76.

⁽²⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁽²⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4; Ruding, *Annals of the Coinage*, Vol. II, p. 41.

great recoinage should be put in hand forthwith, that the hammered money should be called in, and that the old standards should be maintained for the new issue of milled silver. But a third question arose: these operations would cost a large sum; who was to bear the loss, the individual holders of light coins, or the general public? The question was decided in favour of charging the community, as the fairer solution.⁽²⁹⁾

The steps by which, between 1694 and 1696, these decisions were put into operation were, shortly, as follows—

- (a) An act was passed which forbade dealing in silver money above its face value, imposed heavy penalties (including branding on the cheek) for trafficking in clippings or filings, and offered rewards for informing against clippers and counterfeiters.⁽³⁰⁾
- (b) A Committee of the Whole House passed a set of resolutions to the effect that the best way to end the mischiefs of clipping was to have a recoinage of all clipped money; that the loss should be borne by the public; that a day should be appointed after which no clipped crowns or half-crowns should pass in payment except to the Crown, and a further day after which they should not pass in any payment whatsoever; that all such crowns and half-crowns, as they came into His Majesty's receipt, should be recoined into milled money; that a day should be appointed after which *no* money clipped within the ring should pass in payment except to the Crown, and a further day after which no such money should pass in any payment whatsoever; that a day should be appointed for all persons to bring in their clipped money to be recoined into milled money, after which no recompense should be made for the same; and that a fund should be settled for supplying the deficiencies of the clipped money. A few days later a royal proclamation was made, specifying various dates to implement these resolutions.
- (c) An act was passed, requiring that all clipped money then in the Exchequer should be assayed and then melted down and delivered to the mint or mints, there to be refined when necessary and reduced to sterling standard and then to be recoined into milled money. The act also required that the royal authorities should receive clipped money, whether of sterling or of coarser standard, in all payments on account of the royal revenues at any time up till 4 May 1696 at the same rate of value as if such moneys had been unclipped or undiminished, and should not refuse any pieces of silver money by reason of their being of debased silver.⁽³¹⁾ It was also provided that not less than four mints should be set up in the provinces.⁽³²⁾
- (d) In December 1695 a resolution was passed that a sum not exceeding £1,200,000 should be raised for supplying the deficiencies of the clipped money, and a further resolution that towards raising such a sum a duty should be levied upon all dwellinghouses (except cottages) on a graduated scale, namely, 2/- per annum upon each house with under ten windows, 6/- per annum upon each house with from ten to nineteen windows, and 10/- per annum upon each house with twenty or more windows; and that these duties should be granted for seven years. An act was then passed to carry these resolutions into effect.⁽³³⁾
- (e) During the early months of 1696, by means of resolutions and then of a statute, the value of the guinea was gradually brought down to 22/-.⁽³⁴⁾

⁽²⁹⁾ Macaulay, p. 90; Ruding, p. 42.

⁽³⁰⁾ 6 & 7, William III, c. 17.

⁽³¹⁾ "The fourth of May, a date long remembered over the whole Kingdom and especially in the capital, was fixed as the day on which the government would cease to receive the clipped money in payment of taxes"—Macaulay, Vol. V, p. 92.

⁽³²⁾ 7 & 8, William III, c. 1.

⁽³³⁾ 7 & 8, William III, c. 18.

⁽³⁴⁾ 7 & 8, William III, c. 19.

- (f) In order to get in and demonetise all outstanding hammered money, it was enacted that all such money, clipped or unclipped, as should be brought in before July 1697 to any mint should be received at a fixed rate, that after 1 December 1696 no hammered money should be current in any payment whatsoever except by weight, and that all hammered money brought in should be recoined into milled money.⁽⁸⁵⁾
- (g) Apparently a large amount of hammered money remained outstanding, for it was found necessary to pass yet another act, declaring that after 10 January 1698 no hammered silver coin should be esteemed lawful coin of the realm, nor be current in any payment, either by weight or otherwise, but that any person might take it to the mint at the Tower or to any of the provincial mints before 1 March 1698 to be recoined.⁽⁸⁶⁾

Such being the legal machinery, it remains to see how the actual work proceeded. The Tower Mint, working at full pressure from the beginning of 1696, was considered not to be of sufficient capacity, and therefore five provincial mints were opened soon afterwards, under the statutory authority mentioned in paragraph (c) above. These local mints were at Bristol, Chester, Exeter, Norwich and York, so the country was well covered. For the last time Chester had a mint.

The issues of these provincial mints are identifiable by the initial letter of the mint town, B, C, E, N or Y, placed under the King's head. Chester issued half-crowns, shillings and sixpences. London alone issued crowns. The local mints were at work from the autumn of 1696 until various dates in the summer of 1698. But the year 1697 is the last date inscribed on any of their coins.⁽⁸⁷⁾ London continued, of course, after the provincial closures.

The following table quoted by Oman on page 342, gives details of the work done—

Mint	Date opened (1696)	Date closed (1698)	Amount coined
Tower ..	—	—	£
Bristol ..	September	September	5,091,121
Chester ..	October	June	455,628
Exeter ..	August	July	315,146
Norwich ..	September	April	456,617
York	September	April	257,424
			306,971
			6,882,907

The natural consequence of the statutory provision that the royal receivers must accept clipped money at its face value was that clippers had a period of time in which to make high festival. The Government had virtually invited them to work their will on the hammered coins for their own illicit profit, and they were not slow to accept the

⁽⁸⁵⁾ 8 & 9, William III, c.2.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ 9 William III, c. 2.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Oman, *The Coinage of England*, p. 341.

invitation. The shears must have been even busier during this period than in the preceding decades. Ruding remarks that the act might with the utmost propriety have been entitled "An Act for the encouragement of clippers and counterfeiters".⁽³⁸⁾

The total cost to the nation of the great recoinage of 1696/98 was more than twice the sum originally contemplated, and worked out at nearly £3,000,000. The paying of full face value for deficient coins no doubt accounted for much of this sum, but there were other contributing factors, namely, the buying of silver plate to provide extra metal,⁽³⁹⁾ the setting up of the branch mints and the hiring of extra labour.⁽⁴⁰⁾ As mentioned above, the cost was met by a graduated window-tax, which could be assessed by outdoor inspection, as contrasted with the old hearth tax, but which, like all other taxes, was unpopular, and was dubbed a tax on light and air, and which, like many other taxes, was stated at first to be intended to be merely temporary, but lasted, on and off, far longer than seven years.

The Trustees of the British Museum have kindly supplied the photograph of the Charles I coin. The other coins are in the author's collection, and photographs have been kindly taken by the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

APPENDIX I

The Chester coin hoard was unearthed in November 1950 while a cable was being relaid in Castle Esplanade. Many of the coins were at first taken by various workmen or given away to children as curios, and the task of recovering them must have been considerable; in addition, the ground could not at first be thoroughly explored owing to the presence of the live cable. A short account of the find was given in *The Antiquaries Journal* for January-April, 1953. A complete account, including a description of the coins, is given in the *British Numismatic Journal*, Vol. XXVII 1954, in an article by Mr. Blunt and Mr. Dolley. From this it appears that, so far as it has been saved, the hoard consists of 525 coins, including a few cut halfpence, round halfpence, and continental pieces. The bulk of the hoard, amounting to about 500 coins, consists of pennies of the reigns of Athelstan, Edmund, Edred, Edwig and Edgar. These have yielded some new types and the names of a number of hitherto unknown moneyers. The evidence points to a date about 970 *A.D.* It is stated by Mr. Dolley that the proportion of coins with named mints is about one in five. The mint-name of Chester appears on about twenty-five coins only, so the conclusion must be drawn that the hoard is a general one, and by no means a collection of Chester pieces.

⁽³⁸⁾ Ruding, *Annals*, Vol. II, p. 44.

⁽³⁹⁾ Oman, p. 341.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

APPENDIX II

The late Dr. Willoughby Gardner spent a long lifetime in getting together his magnificent collection of Chester coins, now fortunately acquired for the City. The collection consists of 652 coins, ranging from Edward the Elder to Edward I. About six hundred of these are of the Saxon era, the remaining fifty-odd being Norman or later. It is interesting to note that the collection contains thirty-nine specimens of Edward the Elder, but that none of these bear the name of Chester. Dr. Gardner evidently supported the theory that the Chester mint was opened in this reign, no doubt basing his attribution on names of moneyers, style, and general historical considerations. Unfortunately the article which numismatists were hoping he would write was never written.

APPENDIX III

CHESTER MONEYERS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON AND
NORMAN PERIODS⁽⁴¹⁾

EDWARD THE ELDER

(No mint-name, but suggested attribution)

Abba
Beorard
Boiga
Cudberht
Deormod
Eadmund
Eadwald
Oslac
Sigferth
Tiot
Walter
Wighard (or Wiard?)
Wulfgar
Wulfsig
Wulfstan

Also—
Buga?
Irfara?
Maeldomen?
Snel?

ATHELSTAN

(With mint-name, some also without)

Abba
Aelfwine
Beorard
Boiga
Boigalet
Cenapa
Cnath
Deorard
Deorulf
Eadmund
Eadulf (or Eadlaf?)
Efrard
Maeldomen
Maerten
Megred
Oslac
Osulf (or Oslaf)
Paul
Raenulf
Salc
Sigferth

⁽⁴¹⁾ I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. R. H. Dolley for some of the names in the lists of the first six reigns. Anyone desirous of studying this early period more fully should consult Mr. Dolley's valuable article in Volume 42 of the Journal of the Chester & North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society. As this article is numbered 'I' we may look forward with pleasure to further instalments from the same learned writer.

ATHELSTAN—*cont.*

Snel
Thurstan
Tidgar
Tiot
Wiard
Wulfgar
Wulfstan

Also—

Aethered?
Thorulf?

EDMUND

(*With mint-name, but genuineness
not above doubt*)

Baro
Ulf

(*Without mint name, but attribution
probable*)

Aelfwine
Cnapa
Durand
Frad
Maeldomen
Maerten
Megred
Oslac
Regnulf
Thurmod
Wulfgar
Wulfstan

Also—

Aelfstan?
Boiga?
Deorulf?
Eadmund?

EDRED

(*No mint-name, but attribution
probable*)

Aelfsige
Aelfwine
Aethered
Efrard
Eoroth
Frothric
Maerten
Oslac
Thurmod
Wulfgar
Wulfstan

Also—

Aelfstan?
Deorulf?
Eadmund?
Gilles?
Osulf?
Sigiferth?

EDWIG

(*No mint-name, but attribution
probable*)

Aelfsige
Efrard
Eoroth
Frotheric
Leofman
Thurmod
Wulfgar

Also—

Boiga?
Deorulf?
Eadmund?
Gillus?
Mann?

EDGAR

(*With mint-name*)

Aelfsige
Aelfstan
Aldewine
Boia
Boiga
Deorlaf
Duran
Eadmund
Eoroth
Ethelm or Aethelm
Flodgar
Frothric
Gillus
Maelsuthan
Maertin
Teothuc
Thurmod
Wulfgar

(*No mint-name, but attribution
probable*)

Leofman
Sigiferth?
Theorulf?
Thurand?

EDWARD THE MARTYR

No specimen is mentioned in the British Museum *Catalogue* nor is there one contained in the Willoughby-Gardner collection. But in Brooke's *English Coins*, one moneyer is given, namely

Boga

ETHELRED THE UNREADY

Aelfnoth
Aelfstan
Aelfwine
Aethelwine

ETHELRED—*cont.*

Alcsige
Boga
Deorlaf
Eadric
Eadwold
Elemod
Ethelnoth
Goda
Godwine
Gunleof
Leofa
Leofnoth
Leofwine
Riculf
Swegen
Thorald
Wullaf

Also—
Oscytel?
Othulf?
Sigewin?

CNU

Aelfnoth
Aelfsige
Aelfwine
Aetheric
Alcsige
Ciolnoth
Colbein
Croc
Godric
Godwine
Gunleof
Leofa
Leofic
Leofnoth
Leofsige
Leofwig
Leofwine
Lifinc
Macsuthan
Snell
Sweartinc
Swegen
Trotan
Wulnoth
Wulsie

Also—
Elewine?

HAROLD, SON OF CNU

Aelfsige
Aelfwine
Croc
Gillicrist
Leofnoth
Leofwig

Leofwine
Snell
Sweartinc
Swegen
Wulnoth

HARTHACNU

Aelfsige
Aelfstan
Gillicrist
Leofnoth
Leofwine
Snell

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Aelfgar
Aelfsige
Alcsige
Brintwine
Bruninc
Brunnusel
Colbrand
Coldegen
Dunninc
Dunstan
Elwine
Fargrim
Godric
Huscarl
Leofnoth
Leofwig
Leofwine
Snell
Sprot
Sweartcol
Thront
Wulfnoth

EARL HAROLD

Alcsige
Huscarl
Thront

WILLIAM I

Aelfsi or Ielfsi
Aelfward
Alcsi
Andrebod
Bruninc
Frithegist
Lifinc
Lifwine
Sunolf
Unnulf (Sunulf?)

WILLIAM II

Aelfwine
Lifinc
Lifnoth
Lifwine
Sunolf

HENRY I

Aelfwart
Ailmar
Ailric
Andreu
Chitel
Cristret
Gillemor
Levenod
Lifnoth
Ravenswart
Thurbern
Walter
Warmund

STEPHEN

Ailmar or Almer
Ravenswert
Thurbern
Walter

HENRY II

Andreu
Willem or Willelm