

A PIEDFORT LEAD TRIAL-PIECE OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

By R. H. M. DOLLEY

FEW rarities in the Anglo-Saxon series are so eloquent when rightly interpreted as the lead trial-pieces that would seem to have been used by the die-cutters, and few rarities can have received so little attention. Until recently only two examples were known, and both remained virtually unpublished, though both had been acquired by the British Museum in the course of the nineteenth century. In part this strange neglect must be ascribed to the fact that neither had passed through the sale-room, and in fairness to Keary and Grueber one hastens to add that they were not transferred to the Department of Coins and Medals until 1927. Their omission from Brooke's *English Coins* is doubtless to be explained by the author's reluctance to include new and possibly controversial paranumismatica before they had been made the subject of meticulous investigation. In the same way, Derek Allen no more than touched on the second of them in his masterly study of tenth-century Northumbrian pence.

The earlier of the two pieces was found in 1840 in St. Paul's Churchyard, and found its way into the collection of London antiquities formed by the eminent antiquary Charles Roach Smith. This is in itself a substantial guarantee of its authenticity and London provenance, as Roach Smith was no gullible dilettante but an archaeologist of rare distinction, and the soundness of his judgement in other matters can be gauged by a comparison of the entries in his catalogue with the objects themselves. The trial-piece in question (Pl. VI, 1) is quite fully described on page 107 of the privately printed catalogue of his collection (London, 1854), and is further illustrated there by a competent line-engraving. Considerably more of the types and legends was then apparent, especially as regards the obverse, but this need not occasion surprise in view of the notorious instability of leaden objects exposed to the atmosphere. On the other hand, it is just possible that the artist touched up his drawing on the basis of the evidence supplied by characteristic coins of the period, some of which were already represented in the Roach Smith collection. Sufficient, however, is common to the drawing and to the piece in the form that it survives today, for us to be certain that the British Museum specimen is that found in 1840.

It is a rectangular piece of lead with rounded corners measuring approximately 37 by 34 mm., and approximately 13 mm. thick. It now weighs 2515.31 gr. or 163.1 gm. Obverse and reverse bear the imprint of the dies of one of Alfred's portrait types (*B.M.C.* v, Brooke 5) which is closely associated with the Canterbury mint, though not perhaps as exclusively as Brooke would have had us believe. The size of the flan is such that a collar is precluded, and the fact that both

dies are inconsistently eccentric on the flan would seem to rule out the use of hinged dies, especially as no attempt has been made to secure regularity of die-axis. Considerable force was used in the striking with the result that the imprints of the die-faces are sufficiently incuse to reveal that the dies themselves were of square section with rounded corners, and that the faces were only slightly larger along each side than the diameter of the coin. This correspondence doubtless explains how it was that coins were so beautifully centred without the use of a collar—unless of course a collar was attached to the trussel after a satisfactory trial striking had been obtained.

Roach Smith gave the reading of the obverse die as +ÆLFRE DRE and there seems no reason to doubt his accuracy though few traces of legend can now be detected. The reverse he read as ÆΛL | DV. | LF? | Π?? This is by no means impossible, but the present writer feels that the position and size of such letters as can still be distinguished is more consonant with a reading + | Æ | ΛL | DV. | LF that is paralleled on coins of Diarmund and Torhtmund, though admittedly the addition of the MONETA is more characteristic of the class and is found on a coin of Eadulf from different dies.

The second of the known lead trial-pieces is associated with the Viking mint of York. In format it is completely different from that already described, being circular with a diameter of 20 mm. and a thickness of only 1 mm. It now weighs 58.8 gr. or 3.81 gm. It is illustrated on **Pl. VI, 2**, but reference should also be made to the plate accompanying Derek Allen's paper in the 1934-7 *Journal*. The two faces bear the imprint of reverse dies of the moneyers Aura and Rathulf, and the piece can be dated in consequence to the fourth or fifth decade of the tenth century, more probably the former. That it should be from two reverse dies is not perhaps without significance and may seem to suggest that such pieces are to be associated with the cutting of dies rather than with an individual moneyer's atelier. The provenance of the piece does not seem to be known beyond the fact that it was presented to the Museum in 1876 by Sir Wollaston Franks. It is well known, however, that Franks acquired at least one York antiquity of great importance through the offices of Canon Greenwell, a York antiquary, and, whatever view we may hold about the domicile of Eadulf, the new Saxon piece from Winchester, discussed below, and a comparable and unpublished Norman piece of the London mint were both found within the limits of the cities the names of which appear on them. York under Regnald and Anlaf Guthfrithsson certainly did not call on English centres for its dies, and in all the circumstances a York provenance for the trial-piece is to be assumed pending specific evidence to the contrary. It would be tempting to read into the double reverse the introduction at this early date of the collar attached to the pile which elsewhere we postulate as a feature of Saxon mint-practice from Eadgar to the Conquest. While it is true that the only freak striking of the later period from the Scandinavian hoards is likewise a double-reverse (**Pl. VI, 6**), the tenth century can produce a number

of double-obverse pieces as well (*supra*, p. 170). Such pieces are patently impossible where a collar forms part of the pile, and the parallel presence of double-reverse coins of the selfsame types is perhaps decisive against promiscuous attachment of a collar to pile or trussel.

The third trial-piece, illustrated (PI. VI, 3), was found in the summer of 1953 in excavations conducted by Miss Margret Bennet-Clark at Winchester. I am most grateful to her and to the Winchester City Library and Museum Committee for permission to publish a piece that throws much light on late Saxon mint organization and practice. It was found within a foot or so of the surface at No. 1, Middle Brook Street, at the intersection of St. George's Street, at a point where the medieval layers are within 2 or 3 inches of present ground level. It is approximately circular, some 23 mm. in diameter and 5 mm. thick, and presents in consequence a much more characteristic piedfort appearance than the York piece already discussed. By a curious chance it is in an almost perfect state of preservation, and it weighs 37.61 gm. which must approximate very closely to its original weight. The obverse bears the imprint of the obverse die of *B.M.C.* 1412 (PI. VI, 4), and the reverse that of the reverse die of *B.M.C.* 1406 (PI. VI, 5). Grueber had already suspected that the Winchester moneyers Æstan and Ertan were one and the same man, and this piece may seem to provide final corroboration. Æstan or Æthestan was a Winchester moneyer from late in the reign of Cnut until late in the reign of the Confessor, and he is perhaps to be identified with the Æstan who used the by-name Loc, though we cannot exclude the possibility that Æstan Loc was an ephemeral moneyer who used a by-name to avoid confusion with an established moneyer of the same name. The Æstan who struck under William I and II cannot have been either man, but was very probably a son or grandson of the Æstan of the trial-piece.

The fact that the diameter of the trial-piece is 2 mm. larger at most than the normal coin of the type need not occasion surprise. Examination of coins of the period shows that there was a tendency to strike on flans that were slightly too small for the collars, doubtless to avoid jamming in the collar, a serious matter when coins were being struck in large numbers. A trial striking in lead, however, was quite a different matter, and was probably carried out by quite different personnel. In the last resort, too, a jam could be cleared in a matter of seconds by holding the die over a fire and melting the lead out. What is significant is that the trial-piece has one of the four regular die-axes, in this case ←, of the coinage.

The purpose of lead trial-pieces must have been to test dies, and perhaps to record those issued. Lead piedfort trial-pieces obviated the danger of giving the engraver access to coinage blanks, and had the added advantage that they would not have damaged the dies being tested. Indeed, an imprint could be taken before the dies were annealed.

If, then, these lead pieces are to be associated with die-cutting

rather than striking, they may seem to provide some support for the theory that even after the reform of Eadgar dies continued to be cut in a number of centres. If we include the William II piece mentioned above, the pattern of find-spots and mints is as follows:

<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Mint</i>
London	Canterbury?
York?	York
Winchester	Winchester
London	London

The Alfred piece alone prevents a regular pattern falling nicely into place, but it must be remembered that we know very little about the coinage at that period. Undoubtedly Eadulf was at one time a Canterbury moneyer, but London had been the mint of Mercia, and the Eadulf piece is of a type that we know to have been struck by Ceolwulf II. Moreover, we know that the coinage of London improved greatly in style after Alfred's reoccupation of the city.

What is certain is that at least as late as the reign of Æthelræd II there are minor varieties that suggest provincial centres for the cutting of dies—the variety represented by Hildebrand Type Cb being numerically the most important though the same authority's Type Blc is at first sight even more striking. Finality will not be possible until the completion of preliminary work on the proposed Scandinavian Corpus, but already there are arguments to hand that support an identification of these centres with London, Canterbury, Winchester, Thetford, Chester, Lincoln, and York, with Chester perhaps falling out *c.* 990 and Canterbury and Thetford *c.* 1011. There is a remarkable concurrence between this list of seven names and the three or possibly four names associated both by mint and provenance with the lead piedforts.

It is generally agreed that centralization came with the Normans at latest. The Winchester piece is of particular significance because it rules out what had seemed to be the most likely of earlier possibilities, a date *c.* 1055 when Edward the Confessor revolutionized English numismatic iconography by adopting the naturalistic coin-portrait. Consequently, special attention will have to be given to Edward's latest types, for it would be a mistake to assume that no such major administrative reform could have occurred in the momentous decade immediately preceding the Norman Conquest.