

THE REPERCUSSIONS ON CHESTER'S PROSPERITY OF THE VIKING DESCENT ON CHESHIRE IN 980

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It is well known that under Æthelstan the Chester mint was one of the most important centres of coin-production in the whole of England. Coins of that reign by no fewer than twenty-seven moneyers have been recorded,¹ and this predominance² cannot altogether be explained by the circumstances that most—though not all—of the finds of English coins concealed in the second quarter of the tenth century come from places to the north and west of Chester, *i.e.* from the Scottish Isles and from Ireland.³ Under Eadgar, too, the Chester mint clearly remained one of the more significant in England. Again the majority of the coin-hoards have a north-western distribution,⁴ but even so the fact remains that *BMC* type II of Eadgar was struck by a score of moneyers, and this although the type would appear to have been struck for not more than a very few years,⁵ and may even have been a limited issue intended to meet the special needs of one given area.⁶ Under Edward the Martyr, on the other hand, the number of Chester moneyers of whom coins have survived is precisely three, but the numismatist is not inclined to attach very much significance to this paucity inasmuch as virtually all coins of this reign are so notably rare. It is a different story, however, when we come to the *First* and *Second Hand* types and to the *Benediction Hand* variety of Æthelræd II. While we would not pretend that we know anything like all that there is to be known about these issues which span a period of some twelve years, it is indisputable that the great Scandinavian coin-hoards give a reasonably adequate picture of the overall pattern of coin-production of England in the early part of a reign which saw the removal of coin from the country on altogether unparalleled a scale. The following figures have been drawn up on the

¹ Cf. *SCBI* Chester I, p. 34.

² In *English Coins*, London, 1932, Dr. G. C. Brooke recorded the names of twenty-five Æthelstan moneyers of Chester. His totals for London and Winchester are fourteen and seven respectively.

³ The following is a summary and provisional listing of those finds from Great Britain and Ireland which may be supposed to have been deposited between c. 925 and c. 950:—

S. and E. of Chester

- Bossal (*Inv.* 162)
- Cockburnspath (*Inv.* —)
- London (*Inv.* —)
- Morley St. Peter (*Inv.* —)
- Oxford (*Inv.* 300)
- Tywardreath (*Inv.* —)

N. and W. of Chester

- Bangor (*Inv.* 32)
- Scotby (*Inv.* 324)
- Glasnevin (*Inv.* 89)
- Glendalough (*Inv.* —)
- Co. Cork (*Inv.* —)

- Co. Dublin (*Inv.* 133)
- Co. Kildare (*Inv.* 205)
- Co. Tipperary (*Inv.* 356)
- Skaill (*Inv.* 322)
- Skye (*Inv.* 312)

It should further be remarked that the total of Æthelstan coins from hoards recorded in the upper column is far smaller than for the northern and western finds. Possibly, though, a more reliable index of relative production is afforded by the 1883 Forum hoard from Rome where Mr. C. E. Blunt's photographs reveal a total of 25 mint-signed coins of Æthelstan from the Chester mint as against 66 from London.

⁴ Cf. the map on p. 143 of *A/S Coins*, London, 1961.

⁵ It is absent, for example, from the 1950 Chester hoard (*Inv.* 86) which is usually dated c. 970 (but see *infra*, p. 000, n. 00). The Smarmore hoard (*Inv.* 333), however, seems conclusive evidence that the type in fact belongs very late in the reign.

⁶ *JRSAL*, 1961, pp. 17 and 18.

basis just of those coins which happened to be recorded by B. E. Hildebrand in the 1881 edition of his *Anglosachsiska Mynt*:—

	Moneyers recorded		
	First Hand	Second Hand	Benediction Hand
London	28	33	8
York	12	— ¹	—
Winchester	11	9	4
Lincoln	7	—	—
Canterbury	5	7	4
Chester	4	3	2

It will be seen at once that the Chester figures are quite astonishingly low for a mint which but a few years previously could boast a score of moneyers, and even this is not the whole story. One has only to glance at the pages of Hildebrand to appreciate that many of the London moneyers were using as many as three, four or even five obverse and reverse dies in a single type. Consequently the number of different varieties of *Hand* coins of London in the Stockholm Systematic Collection alone amounts to more than one hundred and fifty.

One may contrast this incomplete figure with the meagre total for Chester which we have been able to arrive at on the basis of all the *Hand* coins of the mint we have been able to trace in the public collections of England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. To this end we begin with a miniature *corpus* of the coins struck at the Chester mint during the first twelve years or so of the reign of Æthelræd II.

ABBREVIATIONS

BM	British Museum, London
GM	Grosvenor Museum, Chester
K	Royal Coin Cabinet, Copenhagen
L	City Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester.
O	University Coin Cabinet, Oslo
S	Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm
UM	Ulster Museum, Belfast.

FIRST HAND TYPE

(Michaelmas 979–Michaelmas 985?)

A. Variety with left-facing bust (Hild. B.1a = BMC ii)²

Moneyer Ælfstan

(1) *Obv.* + ÆDELREDREXANGL (NG lig). *Rev.* + ÆLFSTAN M^o O LEDEC

(a) S, Hild. 1492. [Pl. VIII, 1].

(b) BM, *ex* Sir Benjamin Chapman sale (Sotheby, 8 : xi : 1894) lot 22; *ex* 1841 Mullingar ('Marl Valley') Find³. [Pl. VIII, 2].

Moneyer Leomman (Leofman)

(2) *Obv.* FROM SAME DIE AS (1). *Rev.* + LEOMMAN M^o O LEDE

(a) BM, *ex* Sir Benjamin Chapman sale (Sotheby, 8 : xi : 1894) lot 22; *ex* 1841 Mullingar ('Marl Valley') Find. [Pl. VIII, 3].

¹ Hild. Æthelræd 697 is not of York, *cf.* A/S *Coins*, p. 173.

² These coins are still frequently described as mules which they are not. They are discussed in a paper on a parcel of coins from the Ipswich hoard (*Inv.* 199) which adds Lymne to the mints known for the variety, and further distinguishes quite separate N. W. and S. E. groupings.

³ The so-called 'Marl Valley' hoard (*Inv.* 265) deserves early republication if only for the rarities it contains. It may be noted that the Chapmans of Killua Castle were local magnates, while the name 'Marl Valley' should perhaps be dropped inasmuch as colleagues in the Ordnance Survey of Ireland have been unable to find the place-name on any map of the area.

- (3) *Obv.* + ÆDELRED REX ANGL. (NG lig.) *Rev.* FROM SAME DIE AS (2)
 (a) S, Hild. 1556 [Pl. VIII, 4]
 (b) BM, pres. E. Davies 1920; *ex* 1914 Chester find, published *NC*, 1920, p. 162,¹ no. 111. [Pl. VIII, 5].
 (c) 5] GM, pres. E. Davies 1955; *ex* 1914 Chester find, but omitted from *NC*, 1920; published *SCBI* Chester I, 109. [Pl. VIII, 6].

B. *Substantive type with right-facing bust* (Hild. B.I. = BMC iia).

Style 'A'—apparently 'early' and localized in N.W. England².

Moneyer Ælfstan

- (4) *Obv.* + ÆDELRED REXANEO (NE lig.) *Rev.* + ÆLFSTAN M^o LEGE (N reverse barred).
 (a) S, Hild. 1491. [Pl. VIII, 7].
 (b) BM, pres. E. Davies 1920; *ex* 1914 Chester find, published *NC*, 1920, p. 163, no. 114. [Pl. VIII, 8].
 (c) GM, pres. E. Davies 1955; *ex* 1914 Chester Find, published *NC*, 1920, p. 163, no. 115, and *SCBI* Chester I, 110, [Pl. VIII, 9].

Moneyer Leofmon (Leofman)

- (5) *Obv.* FROM SAME DIE AS (4). *Rev.* + LEOFMON M^o LEGEC
 (a) S, Hild. 1533. [Pl. VIII, 10].
 (b) K, *ex* Hess (Frankfurt) sale, 19 : x : 1891, lot 670; *ex* 1891 Lodejnoje Pole (Russia) Find³. [Pl. VIII, 11].

Mule between Styles 'A' and 'B'⁴.

Moneyer Elemod (Æthelmod?).

- (6) *Obv.* [—] XANGLOR (NG lig.) *Rev.* + ELEMED [—]
 (a) GM, pres. T. C. Hughes 1925; *ex* T. Hughes⁵; published *SCBI* Chester I, 112. [Pl. VIII, 12].

Style 'B'—apparently 'late' and also found in N.E. England⁶.

Moneyer Eadric.

- (7) *Obv.* FROM SAME DIE AS (6). *Rev.* + EADRIC M^o LEGC
 (a) K, *ex* 1864 Munkegaard Find (Denmark)⁷. [Pl. VIII, 13].
 (8) *Obv.* + ÆDELRED REX ANGLORX (NG lig.; ORX lig.). *Rev.* FROM SAME DIE AS (7)
 (a) S, Hild. 1506. [Pl. VIII, 14].
 (b) BM, purchased 1915; *ex* J. Pierpont Morgan and Sir John Evans collections, apparently from a Swedish find⁸. [Pl. VIII, 15].
 (c) GM, purchased 1952; *ex* Willoughby Gardner; *ex* W. L. Gantz; *ex* P. W. P. Carlyon-Britton sale (Sotheby, 17–21 : xi : 1913) lot 479; apparently *ex* H. O. O'Hagan sale (Sotheby, 16–20 : xii : 1907) as part of lot 362, *ex* Sir Benjamin Chapman sale (Sotheby, 8 : xi : 1894) lot 13 and 1841 Mullingar ('Marl Valley') Find; published *SCBI* Chester I, 111. [Pl. VIII, 16].
 (d) L, no provenance. [Pl. VIII, 17].

¹ *Inv.* 85—a few coins in the Grosvenor Museum from the E. Davies gift are certainly from the hoard but do not figure in Sir George Hill's excellent account.

² A forthcoming study of *First Hand* issue will suggest that dies were cut at a number of regional centres. No other mint, however, employs dies of this distinctive style which may well emanate from Chester itself.

³ Information kindly supplied by Dr. Georg Galster.

⁴ The obverse clearly belongs to style 'B' but the reverse to style 'A'—note particularly the elliptical treatment of the drapery at the cuff.

⁵ It is tempting to equate this fragment with a missing coin from the 1848 Kaldal hoard from Norway (*NNA*^o, 1955, p. 96, no. 15)—reference

kindly supplied by Konservator Kolbjorn Skaare—and the 19th century attitude to fragments was such that we can well imagine a broken coin thought to be a duplicate of Hild. 1511 (in 1st edn., 788) being sent to an interested English collector.

⁶ As well as at Chester this style of obverse is found at Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton, Nottingham, Shrewsbury, Stamford, Worcester and York.

⁷ Cf. *Berliner Blätter für Münzkunde*, 1886, pp. 31–40—again we owe the reference to the kindness of Dr. Galster.

⁸ The coin is 'pecked', cf. *BNJ*, XXVIII, i (1955), pp. 185–189, and Evans is known to have bought extensively of 'doubletters' from the Swedish hoards—cf. his 1886 gifts to the British Museum (*BNJ. vol. cit.*, pp. 52–54).

Moneyer Elemod (Æthelmod?).

(9) *Obv.* + ÆDELRED REXANGLO (NG lig.) *Rev.* + ELEMOM M^o LEGCE:

(a) S, Hild. 1511. [Pl. VIII, 18].

SECOND HAND TYPE

(Michaelmas 985 – Michaelmas 991?)

A. Regular dies (Hild. B.2 = *BMC* iid).

Moneyer Eadric.

(10) *Obv.* + ÆDELRÆD REX ANGLORX (NG lig.; ORX lig.) *Rev.* + EADRIC M^o LEGCE

(a) UM, pres. Canon Grainger 1891; conceivably a 'stray' from the 1841 Mullingar ('Marl Valley') Find¹. [Pl. VIII, 19].

Moneyer Elemod (Æthelmod?)

(11) *Obv.* FROM SAME DIE AS (10). *Rev.* + ELEMOM M^o LEGCE

(a) S, Hild. 1512. [Pl. VIII, 20].

B. Markedly irregular dies.

Moneyer Ælfstan.

(12) *Obv.* + ÆDELRÆDRE + ANGLOX. *Rev.* + ÆLFSTAN M^o LEGC:E

(a) S, Hild. 1493. [Pl. VIII, 21].

(b) 0, ex 1836 Arstad Find (Norway)². [Pl. VIII, 22].

BENEDICTION HAND VARIETY

(Summer 991?)

(Hild. B.3 = *BMC* iif)

Moneyer Ælfstan.

(13) *Obv.* + ÆDELRÆD REX ANGLOX (NG lig.) *Rev.* + ÆLFSTAN M^o LEG

(a) S, Hild. 1494. [Pl. VIII, 23].

Moneyer Wullaf.

(14) *Obv.* + ÆDELRÆD REX ANGLOX (NG lig.) *Rev.* + PVLLAF M^o LEGE

(a) S, Hild. 1573. [Pl. VIII, 24].

(b) GM, purchased 1952; ex Willoughby Gardner; ex Spink and Son; ex P. W. P. Carlyon-Britton sale (Sotheby, 17–21 : xi : 1913) lot 494; apparently from a Scandanavian (Swedish?) hoard³; published *SCBI* Chester I, 113. [Pl. VIII, 25].

N.B. Omitted from the above *corpus* is a fragmentary *Second Hand* coin in Oslo [Pl. VIII, 26]. The moneyer's name is entirely wanting, and the only letters that remain from the reverse legend are those of the copulative and the first two letters of the mint-signature, —M^oLE—. This could be for LEGCEstre, but we must not forget that in the *Second Hand* type the normal Leicester mint-signature appears also to begin LE—, for LEHERcestre (cf. Hild. 1585 and 1588). Nor can one be absolutely confident that the second letter of the mint-signature on the Oslo coin is not intended to be 'Æ', in which case the name of Lewes would be indicated. Unfortunately we have not been able to find the die-link which would clinch the matter. If it is absent in the case of the Leicester coins recorded in Hildebrand⁴ and of the Lewes coins listed by Mr. King⁵, it is no less wanting in respect of the undoubted Chester coins of Eadric and Elemod.

A word may be appropriate at this juncture on the ordering of the types which we have adopted, and especially as regards our breakdown of *First Hand* into three groups which we believe to mirror to some extent a valid chronological sequence. Critical here is the Pemberton's

¹ The bulk of the hoard undoubtedly passed to Chapman, but a small parcel is in the National Museum at Dublin, and we may suspect the same 1841 Mullingar provenance for the odd coin of *Hand* type in the Shearman collection now at Clongowes Wood College.

² Information once more kindly supplied by Mr.

Skaare.

³ Again the coin is 'pecked', cf. p. 000, no. 00 *supra*.

⁴ We are grateful to Fil. lic. fru Ulla Westermarck for confirmation of this.

⁵ Cf. *BNJ*, XXVIII, iii (1957) p. 519, nos. 21 and 22.

Parlour hoard from Chester which came to light in 1914¹. Clearly this find was deposited early in the currency of *First Hand*, if only because *Small Cross* outnumbered *First Hand* coins by rather more than ten to one.² The hoard contained four *First Hand* coins of Chester of only two of the three groups. In the Mullingar ('Marl Valley') hoard of 1841 from Ireland, on the other hand, there were present three *First Hand* coins of Chester, one of which belongs to the group which is not represented in the 1914 Chester find, and significantly the Irish hoard in question was deposited a whole quinquennium at least later, for it included a substantial proportion of *Second Hand* coins, though none of them was certainly of Chester³. It may be remarked, too, that the Chester coins which occur in the Scandinavian hoards belong predominantly to the *Second Hand* type and to the *Benediction Hand* variety, and this is what one might expect since Viking raids on England during the period in question were becoming progressively more intense, so that it is perhaps significant that of the *First Hand* issue no fewer than three of the surviving coins belong to the *prima facie* 'late' group which is absent from the 1914 Chester find.

From the above miniature *corpus* it emerges that we have from the public collections of Europe no more than twenty-five coins of the Chester mint struck between c. 979 and c. 991. Significantly these twenty-five coins are from no more than ten obverse and eleven reverse dies used in fourteen different combinations. That, too, there is no more than the odd *Hand* coin of Chester lurking in some private cabinet would seem to be guaranteed by the circumstance that for some seventy years the late Dr. Willoughby Gardner was keeping an eagle eye upon the sale-rooms of Europe in the hope of being able to acquire Chester coins for his unrivalled cabinet. Of *Hand* coins of Æthelræd II he was able to acquire precisely two! Yet if we turn to the Chester volume of the *Sylloge* we will find in the Grosvenor Museum alone a total of thirty coins indisputably of the Chester mint struck between c. 970 and c. 979, all but two of them from Dr. Gardner's cabinet, and one would not have to visit anything like all the public collections of Great Britain to bring this total to a round hundred.

In this connection it is instructive to cite the number of Chester moneyers who are known for the different substantive types of Æthelræd II and Cnut, each of which we may suppose to have been struck and current for a period of some six years.⁴ The figures in brackets indicate the total number of specimens of coins of the type in the Grosvenor Museum at Chester.

First Hand	4	(4)
Second Hand ⁵	4	(1)
Crux	6	(6)
Long Cross	9	(26)
Helmet	8	(7)
Last Small Cross	12	(25)
Quatrefoil	28	(62)
Pointed Helmet	16	(18)
Short Cross	10	(9)

Clearly the fortunes of the Chester mint in the early years of Æthelræd II were at their lowest ebb, and the numismatist who has the least interest in the history of England cannot fail to wonder whether or not there is some political event which could explain this dramatic slump from a 'production peak' in the last years of the reign of Eadgar.

¹ *Supra*, p. 00, no. 00.

² The proportion is not affected by the odd 'stray' now in the Grosvenor Museum *ex* E. Davies.

³ Since, however, the Belfast coin of Eadric, *supra*, p. 00, is 'unpecked' we strongly incline to the supposition that it derives ultimately from the

1841 Mullingar find.

⁴ Present thinking, however, is that the *Last Small Cross* type was current if not in issue for as much as eight years, *cf.* *BNJ*, XXX, ii (1961), p. 237.

⁵ Including the *Benediction Hand* variety.

The 1914 coin-hoard from Chester in itself might be thought to suggest some local crisis c. 980, and already it has been argued that there is a connection between its concealment and a Viking attack on Wirral in that year recorded in the so-called *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹ Nor is it impossible that a similar explanation should be sought for the non-recovery if not the concealment of the 1857 and 1950 coin-hoards from Chester,² the absence from them of coins of Type II of Eadgar³ and of the *First Small Cross* issue being explicable in much the same way as the absence of the *Pyramids* type of the Confessor and of coins of Harold II from the Sedlescombe hoard of 1876.⁴ In the case of the Sussex hoard there is a possibility at least that we are dealing with part of the bullion reserve of the Hastings mint, i.e. an agglomeration of obsolete coin not yet consigned to the crucible and removed on the approach of Duke William's army. In the same way there seems a distinct possibility that the Eastgate and Castle Esplanade coins represent quantities of demonetized coin officially held in reserve or even remaining in private possession a few years after the great reform, rather than money actually current at the time the hoards were concealed. However this may be, we would suggest that the most likely explanation of the apparent eclipse of the Chester mint in the early years of Æthelræd II is the devastation caused by a Viking (Hiberno-Norse?) descent upon Cheshire recorded s.a. 980 in the C manuscript of the *Chronicle* in the following terms:—

‘and the same year Cheshire was ravaged by a northern naval force.’⁵

It is nowhere explicitly stated that the city of Chester was sacked, and it might even be thought that the mention of the shire is suggestive that the defences of Chester itself were not overrun. However, the dramatic decrease in the mint-output of Chester may perhaps be thought an argument that the actual city succumbed, and the numismatist would further observe that of the four *First Hand* moneyers only Ælfstan is known to have struck coins in the two preceding reigns. Here we feel that there could be another pointer to the essential accuracy of our claim that the devastation of the Viking attack of 980 is reflected in the coinage of the Chester mint over the whole of the next decade. Indeed, it is not until the very last years of Æthelræd II and the early part of the reign of Cnut that the erstwhile premier mint in England enjoyed anything like its old importance, though even then it had to occupy fifth place behind London, York, Lincoln and Winchester.

It only remains for us to express our obligations to those of our friends and colleagues without whose ready help this note could never have been written. They include Miss M. M. Archibald of the British Museum, Mr. C. E. Blunt of Ramsbury, Dr. N. L. Rasmusson, Mr. L. O. Lagerqvist and Mrs. U. Westermarck of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Stockholm, Dr. G. Galster of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Copenhagen, Mr. K. Skaare of the University Coin Cabinet at Oslo, Mr. W. A. Seaby of the Ulster Museum at Belfast, Mr. J. Norwood of the City Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, and Mr. F. H. Thompson formerly of the Grosvenor Museum at Chester and now of Manchester University. To the authorities of the different cabinets we are also grateful for photographs and for permission to reproduce them. Nor should we neglect to thank numerous colleagues in other institutions and private collectors who confirmed that Chester coins of the types in question were absent from their respective cabinets.

¹ *A/S Coins*, p. 153.

² *Inv.* 84 and 86 respectively.

³ In the *Inventory* the suggestion is made that some of the Eadgar coins in the Eastgate hoard were of *BMC* type II but this is negated by an account surprisingly omitted from the bibliography, Turner's 1941 recension of Newstead's manuscript

listing the find (*BNJ*, XXIV, i (1941), pp. 47–49).

⁴ *Inv.* 327, cf. *A/S Coins*, p. 158.

⁵ D. Whitelock with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, London, 1961, p. 80, cf. C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, Oxford, 1892, p. 124.

