

COINS COMMEMORATING THE REBUILDING OF YORK
MINSTER, A.D. 921-25.

BY W. J. ANDREW, F.S.A.

IN our *Journal*, vol. v, p. 365, I ventured to attribute the series of coins of both Edward the Elder and Athelstan, which bear an architectural design, to the rebuilding of York Minster. Since then, I have been able to compare more examples, with the result that the series seems to comprise in all about twenty examples, from twelve dies, representing three different views of the Minster.

The subject is of some importance because history is silent as to the date of this rebuilding, and if I am right our coins fill in the gap. The old Minster had been founded in wood by Paulinus in A.D. 627, completed in stone by King Oswald in 642, restored by Wilfrid II in 720, rebuilt by Archbishop Egbert about 750, and destroyed by Halfdan the pagan Dane when he sacked York, March 21st, 868. Its rebuilding was probably commenced by the Christian king Guthred, who reigned 883-894, for Ethelweard, the nearly contemporary chronicler, says that he was buried at York in the High Church.

But it was, and is, always customary to complete the Choir of a Cathedral before commencing the Nave, and temporarily to close it in at the Choir arch as a separate building. I think, therefore, that in 894 only the Choir was in course of reconstruction, and Guthred buried within it as its Refounder. Several Cathedrals, for example Beauvais, remain to-day in that unfinished condition, and during the disturbed period at York that followed the death of Guthred, such would probably be the condition of its Minster.

In 921 the Northumbrian kings Regnald and Sihtric submitted, and paid homage to Edward the Elder as their over-lord. Meanwhile York had issued its own Northumbrian money, both regal and ecclesiastical, and it is unlikely that any would be struck there in Edward the Elder's name before the submission of 921. Then we find a coinage issued in his name from the Archbishop of York's mint bearing the design of a very unusual and curious building. I refer to *British Museum Catalogue*, Plate VIII, 13 and 14, and *Ruding XVI*, 17-21, XXVIII, 2, and a technical examination of the structure will show that it is the west end of the Choir, temporarily closed in as a separate building, for the prominent feature is the "triple arches" which then usually separated Choir from Nave as, for instance, at St. Peter's-on-the-Wall. Its narrow proportions, too, suggest those of a Choir rather than of a Church, and the absence of windows confirms the temporary character of the walling. If this be so, then the Choir was all that stood at York until the reunion with England brought peace, and probably wealth, to both Church and State in A.D. 921.

Sihtric was a Christian king and it would be now that the Nave was added, and the Minster completed, for before the death of Edward the Elder, in 925, a coin was issued from the ecclesiastical mint at York bearing his name, *Brit. Mus. Cat.* VIII, 15, *Ruding XVI*, 22, which gives us a delightful little picture of the Minster from the west end, complete in every detail and showing both north and south aisles.

In 925, following his accession, Athelstan received the homage of Sihtric at Tamworth, and gave him his sister in marriage. This marriage would be formally celebrated at York, probably coupled with the Consecration of the new Minster, and the first marriage within its completed walls. The series of coins now issued in Athelstan's name, *Brit. Mus. Cat.* IX, 2, and X, 9, *Ruding XVII*, 17-18, and the illustration to my paper in vol. v, shows the east end of the Choir and may well commemorate this alliance before its Altar.