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On a Hoard of Half-Crowns of Charles I Deposited Early in 1645

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ON A HOARD OF HALF-CROWNS OF CHARLES I
DEPOSITED EARLY IN 1645.

A LECTURE.

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THE coin collector is comparatively seldom confronted with an intact hoard of ancient money, fresh from the under-ground or over-ground hiding-place where the coins have been lurking ; but I have been fortunate enough to inspect, before they were dispersed, several considerable masses of coins—for example, the St. Albans hoard of gold angels of the time from Edward IV to Henry VIII, two or three Gloucestershire finds of small Roman bronze of the Constantinian period, a lot of Æthelred II pennies from Sweden, which were once submitted to me at Berlin, the Corbridge Roman gold find of last year, and finally the curious little collection of which I am speaking to-night.

I have thought it well, therefore, to place on record for your benefit a detailed account of this hoard of half-crowns of Charles I, which passed under my eyes a few years ago, and to illustrate it by the exhibition of a few of the coins themselves, for I was so fortunate as to obtain a score of them for myself. The interest of the deposit, whose *provenance* (as I was told at the time) was from the South Midlands, was that from it there was a chance of drawing some useful and interesting deductions as to the character of the currency that was circulating early in 1645 in that region, and also as to the date at which some of the more obscure local issues came into existence.

The peculiarity of the find was that it consisted entirely of half-crowns, and amounted exactly to the round sum of £21, or 168 pieces. Hoards of Charles I coins are not uncommon, I have found records in the *Numismatic Chronicle* of the last

twenty years of three hoards much larger than this, and in each case running into four figures, at Oswestry, Worlinton and Crediton. But in all these cases the coins were of mixed denominations, crowns, half-crowns, shillings and sixpences all together, and made up no exact or particular sum. Moreover in every instance the pieces did not comprise specimens of the issues of Charles I alone, but included many coins of Elizabeth and James I, which were of course still circulating in immense quantities when the Civil War of the Great Rebellion was in progress. It is comparatively easy to understand that a man who wished to have a precise and exact sum of money by him should put it all up in pieces of the same denomination, and the half-crown is a sufficiently convenient coin of the kind. Twenty-one gold sovereigns would have been equally easy to collect, however, and much less bulky. So that we are driven to deduce either that the hider was a local man who did not want to attract attention by showing much gold, or else that he was intending to make some payment in which a half-crown was a convenient unit, while a sovereign or half-sovereign would have been too big. Such a sort of payment would have been the serving out of the weekly pay of soldiers, or of any large body of men collected for some non-military purpose.

But the really extraordinary thing is that the hider seems to have carefully excluded from his hoard all half-crowns save those of Charles I. By all rules there should have been a sprinkling of James I pieces and a few Elizabeths in his little collection. But these were entirely absent, and (what is still more curious) the list of Charles I coins is composed in immense majority of issues of that king's later years, only thirty-five pieces out of 168 belonging to the time before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642. The sequence of mint-marks, showing the dates of the pieces, was very curious. There was not a solitary piece of any of the first seven years of the reign of Charles I, the hoard commencing with a single half-crown with the mint-mark harp, that of the year 1632. From that year

onward we have a thin sequence of pieces of each issue down to 1641 (only thirty-five in all, as I said before). But for the years 1642-4, whose mint-marks were the triangle in circle, P in circle, and R in circle, we have no less than 104 pieces of the London mint, the issues of these three years forming five-eighths of the whole hoard. There was, on the other hand, not a single half-crown of the very common London issues of 1645 with the mint-marks eye and sun. This would have led one to deduce that the deposit had been made in 1644, before the eye and sun issues had begun to be struck. But another fact forced me to modify this conclusion. A certain proportion of the coins belonged not to the usual London mint, but to the more or less ephemeral royal mints of the Civil War, such as Oxford and Bristol. There were twenty-nine half-crowns of these local mints in all, and of them two were Oxford coins bearing the date 1645, and showing the earlier type of the issue of that year from our local mint in New Inn Hall, through which so much college silver passed in those eventful times.

Since we find these two coins of 1645 along with 166 belonging to the period before 1645, we are driven to the certain deduction that the hoard must have been deposited very early in that year, when coins from the Oxford mint had already begun to permeate through the South Midlands, though the London money had not yet reached the district. This explanation is all the more easy because there was, early in 1645, the sharpest political barrier between London and the regions which were still in the hands of King Charles. The London money would find its first vent into the eastern and southern counties, where the Parliament had complete control, and would take some time to penetrate into those parts of the realm which (like the West and the South-West Midlands) were cut off from London by the barrier of war. I think, then, that we may fix the deposit of the hoard very definitely to January or February, 1645, when King Charles was still in possession of the West and South, and when the fatal Battle of Naseby was still some months in the future.

If the coins had been hidden any later, there would certainly have been London pieces of 1645 among them.

I now give the exact list of the coins:—

TOWER MINT.

Year.	Mint-Mark.						No. of Pieces.
1632	..	Harp	..	..	..	..	1
1633	..	Portcullis	..	..	..	..	4
1634	..	Bell	..	..	..	..	2
1635	..	Crown	..	..	..	..	7
1636-8	..	Tun	..	..	..	..	6
1638	..	Anchor	..	..	..	..	1
1639	..	Triangle	..	..	..	..	7
1640	..	Star	..	..	..	..	7
1641-2	..	Triangle in circle	..	..	..	..	65
1643	..	P in circle	..	..	..	..	20
1644	..	R in circle	..	..	..	..	19
Total of Tower issues							139

SHREWSBURY MINT.

1642	..	No Mint-mark. Three small plumes in field (Hawkins, Type 3)	..	..	..	..	3
Total of Shrewsbury issues..							3

OXFORD MINT.

Dated							
1642	..	Three small plumes. No ox (Hawkins, Type 1)	..	..	..	..	5
1643	..	One large and two small plumes. No ox (Hawkins, Type 5)	..	..	..	..	2
1643	..	Three small plumes. ox (Hawkins, Type 8)	..	..	..	..	2
1643	..	One large, two small plumes. ox (Hawkins, Type 9)	..	..	..	..	2
1644	..	One large and two small plumes. ox (Hawkins, Type 16)	..	..	..	..	4

Year.		No. of Pieces.
1645	.. One large, two small plumes. (Hawkins, Type 21)	OX 1
1645	.. Three small plumes. (Hawkins, Type 23)	OX 1
	Total of Oxford issues ..	17

BRISTOL MINT.

1644	.. Three plumes. Monogram BR on both sides (Hawkins, Type 5) ..	2
1644	.. Three plumes. Monogram only on reverse (Hawkins, Type 4) ..	2
	Total of Bristol issues ..	4

WORCESTER MINT.

(No date)

1644	.. Mint-marks, one pear on obverse : three pears on reverse. H C below garniture (Hawkins, Type 1) ..	1
	Ditto, but no H C (not in Hawkins)	1
	Total of Worcester issues ..	2

WEYMOUTH MINT.

(No date)

1644	.. Mint-mark, Castle ? and W below horse on obverse	1
	[A very rare type, with reverse bearing inscription FLORENT CONCORDIA REGNA, instead of the usual CHRISTO AUSPICE REGNO ?] (Hawkins, <i>Uncertain Mints</i> , Type 19).	
	Total of Weymouth issues ..	1

YORK MINT.		No. of
Year.		Pieces.
No date	Mint-mark, lion passant and EBOR ..	1
		<hr/>
	Total of York issues ..	1
UNCERTAIN MINT.		
1644 ..	Mint-mark, plume. Like an Oxford coin in general style, but of very poor and coarse work. No OX below the declaration on reverse	1
		<hr/>
	Total of Uncertain Issue ..	1
		<hr/>
	General Total	168

There were numberless small varieties which I had not time to take down in detail during the short time that the hoard was before me. The oddest was on one of the "triangle in circle" coins, of the Tower issue of 1641, in which the king's name was spelt CROLUS.

As to condition, it was noticeable that the earlier half-crowns, those of 1632-8, were for the most part rounder and better struck than the later ones. They were far more worn, but had been in their time well-executed pieces. On the other hand, the great number of "triangle in circle" coins of 1641-2, which formed over a third of the whole hoard (65 pieces out of 168), were seldom round, and were nearly all badly struck: on but ten of them could the whole inscription be read, and either the rider's body or the horse's was usually wanting in part, through insufficient pressure by the die. They were very fresh in most cases, had seen practically no wear, but were eminently unpleasing, owing to the careless striking. The Tower coins of 1643-4 were still more discreditable; they were not in one case in ten in decent order, though they were fresh from the mint.

Among the Civil War coins of the local mints, the Shrewsbury, Bristol and Weymouth coins were both round

well struck, and well preserved. The Oxford ones, on the other hand, except those of 1642, were particularly ill-struck, on flans which had never been round, and had not received a sufficiently deep impression to bring out the details of the rider's dress or the horse's trappings on the obverse. Worst of all, however, for careless striking, were the two Worcester half-crowns, which were slightly bent, as if they had been passed through an ill-adjusted mill, and also impressed very deeply at the one side (where the king's head on the obverse and the crown over the shield on the reverse lay) and very slightly at the other, where the inscription was so poorly embossed as to be barely legible. I note with interest that the coin of this mint illustrated in the British Museum Catalogue of British Coins shows exactly these same faults. The coining machinery at Worcester must evidently have been worked by a very unskilled moneyer, who could not adjust his press.

The York half-crown was a neat, well-struck piece, but rather worn by use, in about the same condition, indeed, as the Tower mint pieces of 1635-8. I therefore conclude that it is quite true, as had been before guessed, that the York mint must have been operating long before the Civil War began as a regular royal institution. If it had been established in 1642, like the other ephemeral mints, this coin would have been as fresh and clean as the other issues of 1642-5 from Bristol, Oxford, or Shrewsbury. I can make no guess as to the *provenance* of the one half-crown which I have called "uncertain." It was a disgraceful piece of engraving, rudely copying Oxford types, but evidently not struck at that place, where the work was always far better than that shown on this ugly dumpy coin, of which a great part of the inscription was invisible, owing to the metal having failed to splay out sufficiently to catch the whole surface of the die.

It is worth while to note that the London coins struck by the Parliamentarians continue to preserve in exact resemblance the old types of Charles I, which had been struck in his earlier years—the mounted king on one side, the royal coat of arms

on the other. There is nothing to indicate that they were struck by subjects in rebellion against their sovereign ; indeed, the only thing to notice about them is that in 1643 the engraving and art of the issues falls off noticeably, the coins with the mint-marks (P) and (R) having a squat, dumpy man and horse, which contrast most unfavourably with the graceful figures of the " star " and " triangle in circle " issues, which were struck in 1640-1 before the Civil War began. A peculiar artistic infelicity seems to have presided over all the numismatic productions of the Parliamentarians, as was shown best of all when in 1649 they began to produce the " Commonwealth money," after the execution of Charles. Anything plainer and more banal than the two shields and the short English inscription on these pieces it is hard to recall to memory.

The art on the king's Civil War money had much more excuse for rudeness, since the Parliament had control over the chief mint and the majority of the old engravers, whilst the royalist mints in most places had to be improvised—some local die-sinker being told off to do his best, which was often very bad indeed. The best pieces of the royal mintage are those of Oxford and Shrewsbury, which had the advantage of a few workmen drawn from the Welsh mint of Aberystwyth, which was under Charles's power from the first. But the Bristol, Weymouth and Worcester pieces are particularly bad in the matter of art, especially those of Worcester, where the horse is twice too long in the body for the size of his legs.

The royal money has for the most part a complete break in its types, because Charles at his main mints ordered the old reverse device of the royal arms to be discontinued, and substituted for it a sort of advertisement in large letters written across the face of the coin, to the effect that he intended to preserve " the Protestant religion, the laws of England, and the liberties of Parliament," words taken from his solemn declaration at the outbreak of the Civil War, a declaration which got just about the amount of credence that

it deserved. All the Shrewsbury, Oxford and Bristol coins have this rather ugly and inartistic reverse; but the Worcester and Weymouth moneyers do not seem to have possessed the wish or the ability to produce this new type, but contented themselves with trying to copy the shield of arms on the old half-crowns that were circulating before the Civil War. The Weymouth moneyer, whose single coin appears in my list, made the odd mistake of not copying for the inscription one of the old half-crowns, with the legend CHRISTO AUSPICE REGNO, but the reverse of a gold sovereign, which has round the shield the words FLORENT CONCORDIA REGNA. This is a rare variety, as most of the Weymouth coins, during the short existence of the royal mint there, had the other and more correct inscription.
