

II.

A HOARD OF COINS FOUND AT PERTH. BY GEORGE
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On 2nd August 1920 some workmen, who were excavating for the foundations of a new picture-house at the corner of North St. John's Place and King Edward Street, Perth, turned up with their spades a heavy lump, which had every appearance of being solid. On closer scrutiny it was seen to consist of a mass of coins adhering to one another firmly. Unfortunately, instead of at once reporting the matter to the proper authorities, the finders broke up their prize into several parts and divided the spoil. Subsequent endeavour to dispose of individual specimens to local jewellers and dealers in antiques resulted in the police being informed. In the end practically the whole of the coins are believed to have been surrendered as treasure-trove to the King's Remembrancer, who forwarded them to the National Museum for examination and report. An unusually large proportion were selected for the Society's cabinet. The rest were, of course, returned to the finders, along with ample compensation for those that had been retained.

Mr T. M'Laren, Burgh Surveyor, Perth, to whose kindness I am indebted for a full and careful account of the circumstances, tells me that when he visited the spot a few days after the discovery, he could find no trace of a receptacle among the debris, and that the men concerned assured him that they had noticed none. Probably, therefore, the money had been contained in a bag of canvas or leather, which had rotted away completely in the course of centuries. He adds that the precise *locus* was "near the north side of the new building site, and immediately to the east of the Guild Hall Close, 18 inches below the surface." The site was long known as the "Little College Yard," as is proved by excerpts from the rental book of King James VI. Hospital, which Mr M'Laren was good enough to send me. The hoard lay under a house which was being demolished, and the walls of this were so close to the place of concealment that, when they were being erected, the treasure must have escaped detection by the narrowest of margins.

The coins appear to have been in a deplorable state when they reached the Museum. I cannot speak of this from personal knowledge. But Sir Charles Oman, the President of the Royal Numismatic Society, who saw them almost immediately after their arrival, was inclined to take anything but a sanguine view of their future. In a letter to me

he wrote: "The general condition of the silver is dreadful. Many specimens are so corroded that they may break up when cleaned and separated. Others have one side eaten into in holes, though the other side is good. The job of treating them will be a delicate and interesting one. I fear it may end in half of the whole being sent to the melter to become bullion." I have thought it right to quote the passage in full because it will serve to throw into proper relief the skill and patience that were brought to bear upon a very difficult task. After the hoard had passed through the expert hands of our Assistant Keeper, Mr A. J. H. Edwards, it revealed itself as one of the most interesting fifteenth-century deposits of which there is any record in Scotland. The coins that had not been worn by circulation were, for the most part, in a state that would have made them a credit to any cabinet, while every one of the 1128 specimens could be identified with virtual certainty. The total was made up of 18 pieces of gold, 611 of silver, and 499 of billon. There were, besides, a couple of billon fragments so small that they had to be set aside as hopeless. Rumour has it that some of the gold that had been in the lump escaped the vigilance of the Procurator-Fiscal. That, however, is quite doubtful. Diligent private inquiry has failed to confirm the report. It may, therefore be assumed that the following summary of the hoard is reasonably complete:—

SCOTTISH GOLD.

James III.

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Riders | 2 |
| Half-rider | 1 |
| Unicorns | 14 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 17 |

FOREIGN GOLD.

Maximilian and Philip the Fair of Burgundy.

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Noble de Bourgogne | 1 |
|------------------------------|---|

ENGLISH SILVER.

Edward III.

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Groats | 17 |
| Half-groats | 83 |

Richard II.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Half-groat | 1 |
|----------------------|---|

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|---|---|---|------------|-----|
| | <i>Henry V.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 6 |
| Half-groats | . | . | . | . | . | 6 |
| | <i>Henry VI.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 44 |
| Half-groats | . | . | . | . | . | 91 |
| Pennies | . | . | . | . | . | 3 |
| | <i>Edward IV.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 3 |
| Half-groats | . | . | . | . | . | 2 |
| | | | | | <u>256</u> | |
| | SCOTTISH SILVER. | | | | | |
| | <i>Alexander III.</i> | | | | | |
| Penny | . | . | . | . | . | 1 |
| | <i>Robert III.</i> | | | | | |
| Groat | . | . | . | . | . | 1 |
| Half-groat. | . | . | . | . | . | 1 |
| | <i>James I.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 84 |
| | <i>James II.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 189 |
| Half-groats | . | . | . | . | . | 12 |
| | <i>James III.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 56 |
| Half-groats | . | . | . | . | . | 5 |
| | <i>James IV.</i> | | | | | |
| Groats | . | . | . | . | . | 6 |
| | | | | | <u>355</u> | |
| | BILLON. | | | | | |
| | <i>James III.</i> | | | | | |
| Placks | . | . | . | . | . | 436 |
| Half-placks | . | . | . | . | . | 63 |
| | | | | | <u>499</u> | |

A glance at the foregoing list immediately suggests that the hoard must have been concealed not long after the accession of James IV. in 1488. He is the latest king represented, and his coins are relatively very few in number. The inference as to the *terminus post quem* is confirmed by the *Noble de Bourgogne*. It was one of a new series of coins issued in the Low Countries during the minority of Philip the Fair, pursuant to a decree promulgated by his father Maximilian of Austria on 13th March 1487, after the latter had become 'King of the Romans.' This particular specimen was apparently minted at Malines, and is actually dated 1488. The occurrence of a foreign gold piece is in no way surprising. And the evidence which the hoard provides as to the extent to which English silver money was current in Scotland under the earlier Stewarts is in accordance with expectation. The proportion may appear to be large; but it is, as a matter of fact, very much smaller than is usually found in deposits of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries. There the ratio which the English coins bear to the native is seldom less than thirty to one. Here it is slightly below 42 per cent. But even here the result is curiously different, if the different denominations are looked at separately. Only about 15 per cent. of the groats were minted south of the Border, but less than 10 per cent. of the half-groats are Scottish.

I have published a detailed analysis of the find in the *Numismatic Chronicle*.¹ It is, therefore, unnecessary to do more now than draw attention to such of the broader inferences as are of general interest. The examination of the gold revealed no novelties, except a new combination of dies among the Riders. The English silver was, as a rule, in poor condition. The coins of Edward III., more especially, were much worn through circulation, and were usually so badly clipped that minute variations in inscription, stops, and the like were difficult to decipher with accuracy. One cannot wonder at this, if one remembers that these particular specimens must have been passing from hand to hand for more than a hundred years before they were hidden away. Of the 44 groats of Henry VI. no fewer than 36 had been minted at Calais. The figures for the half-groats were even more remarkable—85 out of 91. Calais was, of course, at that time in English possession, sending two members to the Parliament in London. The new statistics furnish fresh proof that, for silver at all events, it was Henry's principal mint.

For our Society the Scottish silver was naturally more important. The penny of Alexander III. was notable only for its survival. Its condition was very much what might have been expected after two

¹ 5th Series, vol. i. pp. 294 ff.

centuries of wear and tear. The remaining silver pieces were all either groats (336) or half-groats (18). The earlier among them were much rubbed. But the selection which it was possible to make from the whole constitutes a highly important addition to the Society's cabinet. The National Museum now possesses a very representative series of fifteenth-century silver. Besides a number of unpublished minor varieties, the new accessions include the first-known specimen of a half-groat of James III. from the mint at Perth, and the second-known specimen of a silver half-groat from the mint at Aberdeen, the first one to be found having been acquired by the Society some years ago. The 499 pieces of billon call for notice too. No such extensive hoard of this exact period has, so far as I am aware, been recorded before. Placks and half-placks alike belonged to Burns's first variety—that is, they had a cross *fourchée*, instead of a crown, on either side of the arms of Scotland on the obverse. Hitherto such placks have been far from common, while the half-placks are described by Burns as being "extremely rare."

From the numismatic point of view the importance of the discovery lies mainly in the negative evidence it supplies. Thanks partly to the large number of pieces contained in the hoard, and partly to the precision with which the date of its concealment can be fixed, inferences of some moment can be drawn from certain conspicuous absences. It is not too much to say that two or three vexed questions may be regarded as finally settled. Thus, there has long been a difference of opinion as to the proper attribution of the placks and half-placks of the second variety—those with a crown on each side of the arms of Scotland on the obverse. Cardonnel gave them to James II., Lindsay to James III. Burns believed that their issue began under James III., but that most of them were struck by his successor. The fact that there was not a single example among the 499 pieces from Perth, although these were not buried until after 1488, shows conclusively that Burns might have gone further. Henceforward the first variety must be associated with James III. and the second with James IV. This is a real step in advance.

And there is more to be learned in the same way from the silver. The groats of James IV. are so few in number that they afford a somewhat narrow basis for conclusions, although it is at least certain that the varieties with QRA and IIII must have been among the first which this King struck, as all the specimens in the find belonged to one or the other. It is different with the groats of James III. These are fairly numerous (56), and we are accordingly entitled to assume that here we are confronted by a really representative series. Consequently, when we find no examples of the three-quarter-face groats with thistle-heads and mullets alternately in the quarters of the cross on the reverse, we

cannot but feel that Burns (who has been followed by Richardson in his *Catalogue* of our own coins) was wrong in his attribution of these pieces to James III. His arguments for identifying them with the "new alayt grot" of the Act of Parliament of 6th May 1471, are ingenious.¹ They have not, however, been universally accepted, and the fresh evidence from the Perth hoard seems to justify us in setting them altogether aside. Unless and until further light comes from finds or otherwise, it will be well to revert to the traditional view of the thistle-head and mullet pieces, and to regard them as the first-coinage groats of James V.

Two other sets of groats are in somewhat similar case. The first is the group on the obverse of which is a facing head of the King with open crown, while the reverse has a crown and a fleur-de-lis in each of the two opposite quarters of the cross, and three pellets, with an annulet between, in each of the other two quarters. Burns² assigns these to James III., and considers that they must have been struck pursuant to the instruction contained in the Act of Parliament of 24th February 1483-4. Their absence from the present find appears to make it certain that they are later than 1488, and so not earlier than James IV. As, however, they are at the best somewhat rare, it might conceivably be maintained that this absence was accidental. When we come to the second set, there is no room for such an explanation. The groats showing on the obverse a bust of the King three-quarter-face towards left, wearing surcoat and armour and having a double-arched crown, are probably the commonest in the whole fifteenth-century series. Burns, while admitting that some of them were probably minted under James IV., argues that the greater number must have been issued by his father.³ But, if this had been so, they would certainly have been represented among the coins from Perth, whereas, in point of fact, not a single example occurs. James III. must, therefore, be ruled out. *A fortiori* James II., who had his advocates among the earlier writers on Scottish coins, is also impossible. Lindsay's attribution to James IV. may be said to hold the field.

If, however, Lindsay's classification is sound, the line of reasoning by which he reached it is wholly unsatisfactory. An Act of 14th January 1488-89 directed that there should be struck a new fourteenpenny groat which was "to haue prent sic as the xiiijd grote that now is, except that the visage sall stand eywyn in the new groit." Lindsay insists that the phraseology of the Act "proves beyond question that the three-quarter-face coins must have been the coinage to which it applied, for

¹ *Coinage of Scotland*, ii. pp. 112 f.

² *Op. cit.*, ii. pp. 130 f.

³ *Op. cit.*, ii. pp. 126 ff.

the direction 'that the King's visage shall standing eyeing' cannot possibly apply to any other coins which could have been struck under that Act, and we may now consider this point as completely set at rest, and all doubt and difficulty nearly removed from the coins of James IV., hitherto the subject of so much perplexity."¹ Burns emphatically dissents, expressing surprise "that any one in the least acquainted with the old Scottish language, or with old Scottish pronunciation, should have mistaken 'eywyn' for 'eyeing' as has been done by Lindsay." At the same time, he too makes appeal to the words of the statute.² Interpreting "eywyn" in a sense exactly contrary to that which Lindsay had given it, he looks upon the direction of the Act as indicating clearly "that the visage did not stand even, or presenting the full face on the fourteenpenny groats as last struck. And this proves beyond a doubt that the fourteenpenny groats of the previous coinage were the three-quarter-face groats with the imperial crown, these being the only coins of that denomination struck in the proportion of ten to the ounce, in which the visage did not stand 'eywyn' or even."

Burns's criticism of Lindsay is unquestionably sound, and his own reading of the statute is less obviously open to objection. Yet the non-appearance in the Perth find of any specimens of the three-quarter-face group justifies Lindsay on the main issue of attribution, and non-suits Burns. The apparent contradiction made it desirable to seek expert advice on the linguistic point involved. I accordingly put the two views before Professor Craigie, without giving him any hint of the trend of the numismatic evidence. I reproduce his interesting reply. "It is quite certain that *eywyn* does not mean 'eyeing.' (Apart from the impossible spelling, the verb *eye* is not recorded till about a century after 1488.) The meaning is clearly 'even' (for which *eywyn* is quite a natural Scottish spelling). I think it possible that this could have the sense in which Burns took it, *i.e.* looking straight forward; we still say *even forrit*, but I cannot produce any other example of *even* by itself in the sense of 'full face on.' Is it not possible, however, that there may be yet another explanation? 'Stand even' would naturally be contrasted with standing askew or off the straight. Is there any indication that on some of the groats the 'visage' is not at the proper angle in relation to the inscription or whatever else there may be on either side of the coin? This explanation would agree best with the direction that the *prent* was to be the same as in the minting groat. If the face had been altered from three-quarters to full, the difference would perhaps have been expressed more clearly."

Dr George Neilson, whom I also consulted, made quite independently

¹ *View of the Coinage of Scotland*, p. 36.

² *Coinage of Scotland*, ii. p. 128.

the same suggestion as Professor Craigie. Careful observation along these lines may one day throw light on the true meaning of "eywyn." Meanwhile the word does not help us. Burns's interpretation might have been accepted if the conclusion to which it led him had been confirmed by the composition of the Perth hoard. Without this support it carries no weight whatever. On the other hand, the absence of any admixture of three-quarter-face groats does more than suggest that they, like the thistle-head and mullet pieces and the crown and fleur-de-lis group, should be catalogued, not under James III., but under one of his successors. Incidentally this may involve a slightly later date for the Croraguel pennies than that which I originally proposed for them.¹