

### 3. THE GLENLUCE AND RHONESTON HOARDS OF FIFTEENTH-CENTURY COINS

WITHIN five years of each other, two comparable hoards buried in the late fifteenth century have been discovered in Scotland. They throw much new light on the coinage of the period, and are unlike any other recorded hoards in that they consist largely of billon pennies, with a few placks, Scottish groats and old English silver coins. The first was found by Mr and Mrs E. M. Jope near Glenluce in Wigtownshire in July 1956,<sup>1</sup> and the second in January 1961 by Mr Peter Mason during road-widening work on the A76, seven miles NW. of Dumfries, between Rhoneston Bridge and Rhoneston Burn farm buildings (NX 912857), close to the river Nith.

<sup>1</sup> A full report of the Glenluce hoard is published in the *British Numismatic Journal*, xxix (1959), p. 362 and of the site and other finds in *Medieval Archaeology*, III. No account of the Rhoneston hoard has hitherto appeared.

*Composition of the Hoards*

The contents of the two hoards are as follows:

ENGLISH SILVER	Glenluce	Rhoneston
Edward III, 1351-60 coinage		
London groat		1
London halfgroat	1	
Henry IV (1399-1413)		
London groat, light coinage	1	
Henry V (1413-22)		
London groat		1
London penny		1
Henry VI (1422-61)		
Calais groat		1
Calais halfgroat		1
York penny		1
Edward IV, 1st reign (1461-70)		
London groat, light coinage		1
 SCOTTISH (All Edinburgh mint, unless stated)		
<i>Silver</i>		
James II (1437-60)		
2nd coinage groats		2
James III (1460-88)		
group II groats	6	
group II halfgroats	3	
group III groats		2
group IV groats		2
group VI groat	1	
<i>Billon</i>		
James III		
first issue placks	2	4
James II		
second coinage (after 1451) pennies:		
Edinburgh	8	10
Perth	1	2
James III		
pennies class A	11	13
class B	1	
class C	45	34
class D	2	4
James IV		
first issue pennies class I	13	
class II	12	
Uncertain pennies		
(including counterfeits)	4	3
<i>Copper</i>		
James III		
black farthing	1	
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	112	83

Both hoards are similarly composed, with a high proportion of billon pennies of James II and III, and an admixture of larger coins – a few placks and some English and Scottish silver groats and halves. There are, however, important differences of emphasis, apart from the fact that the Glenluce coins include 25 early pennies of James IV, and cannot therefore have been buried much, if at all, before 1495; the Rhoneston coins end with billon pennies of the last class of James III and were most probably buried within a year or two of his death (1488).

Each hoard includes English silver coins substantially older than any of the native issues. A large amount of the old sixpenny groats of James I and II had no doubt been melted for the great recoinage of 1451. Some, however, certainly remained in circulation, as is evidenced by the Perth hoard which contained 112, as against 214 of the post-1451 twelvepenny groats of James II and III.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat worn and clipped, the old groats served conveniently as the half of the new, actual halfgroats struck during the period 1451–84 being of great rarity (only 12 were in the Perth hoard). There were no pre-1451 Scottish groats in the Glenluce and Rhoneston hoards, but an odd example would not have been unexpected.

The two English coins from Glenluce were an early Edward III halfgroat and a groat of Henry IV, 100 and 50 years older respectively than the bulk of the coins in the hoard. They had been clipped down to approximately the weights of the Scottish halfgroat and groat of 1451–84. Edward III's halfgroats seem to have had a remarkably long currency in Scotland on this basis. In the Perth hoard, deposited towards 1500, they accounted for no less than 83 out of 257 English silver coins; other hoards emphasise the long survival of Edward III's silver coins in Scotland, and that the English coins, even if later, are generally much older than the Scottish.

Rhoneston's silver content bears this out. The English groats (4), halfgroat (1) and pennies (2) are fairly evenly spread over the half century before *c.* 1465, with one old groat of Edward III's 1351 coinage. Of the six Scottish groats, none are earlier than 1451, two belong to the recoinage of that year (which continued into the reign of James III) and the remaining four to the later 1470's and early 1480's. The ten Scottish silver coins from Glenluce are likewise far more recent than the English, all being from the 1470's and 1480's.

But although the Scottish silver coins are more recent, they are significantly earlier than the latest coins in both hoards. Glenluce, buried perhaps within five years of the end of the century, contained only one post-1484 fourteenpenny groat, and Rhoneston buried about 1490 contained none. There is thus at least a five-year gap in each case between the last groat and the latest billon pennies. All the Scottish silver coins (and the Edward IV groat from Rhoneston) are in fine condition, hardly worn at all, whereas the poor state of some of the later pennies must be due in some measure to wear as well as bad striking. It is impossible to reconstruct the circumstances under which the two hoards were compiled, buried and lost, but their composition does give us some clues. In each case the owner appears to have put aside current Scottish and old English silver coin some years before the eventual date of loss. Some of the billon pennies may have been withdrawn from circulation at the same time, since they are often in quite as good condition as the later; but under ordinary circumstances, it would be easier to put aside one groat than several pennies, and in the event of demonetisation, more satisfactory to own good heavy silver coin than smaller base money whose nominal value might be in excess of its intrinsic. The bulk of each hoard (numerically by coins) is substantially later

<sup>1</sup> *Num. Chron.*, 1921, 294 ff.; *P.S.A.S.*, LV (1920–21), 278 ff.

on average than the bulk by value, and it is likely that each contains a cash element added at the time of final concealment to the existing savings element. Perhaps, in a time of emergency, each owner added to his hoard such small change as he had about him.

This would explain why the Glenluce and Rhoneston hoards had only one post-1484 groat between them, as against a preponderance of late pennies. The contrast is more remarkable in view of the relative commonness of the last type (VI) of James III's groats, that with the three-quarter facing portrait, which probably ran from 1485 to 1489. Mint accounts (albeit incomplete), the number of surviving specimens and (more important) the number of dies involved suggest that these portrait groats were the largest single issue of James III. If any groats were to hand at Rhoneston towards 1490 or at Glenluce in the mid-1490's there was perhaps an odds-on chance of their being the last type of James III. This itself is enough to prove that there are different strata within the hoards and that the coins are not a representative section of the currency at any particular time.

It is surprising that the Glenluce hoard contained even one black farthing: copper coins of the fifteenth century are by no means common, for the natural reason that base small change is not the most suitable vehicle for savings. We do in fact know from chronicles and mint accounts of the substantial quantity of base money which circulated in Scotland during the second half of the century. But until the excavations at Crosraguel Abbey, Ayrshire, in 1919, the copper coinage had survived in the form of less than a dozen black farthings.<sup>1</sup>

The billon pennies from Glenluce and Rhoneston are not quite so dramatic a discovery as this: but they quite double our knowledge of the billon *minuta pecunia* of the time. They give us a new conception of the volume of small currency in Scotland, though the evidence is slightly ambiguous. On the one hand, so many new varieties turned up at Glenluce, that it appeared that we had known only a tiny fraction of the coinage, and that even then our knowledge must be incomplete in a way we could not assess. But Rhoneston gives a hint of limit; it, again, offers a number of new varieties, but it also produces further examples of coins which were unique before, often only known from Glenluce. Further, there are a number of die-identities in the Rhoneston hoard, which can hardly have reached their place of burial directly from the mint unseparated, since they show different degrees of wear. For instance, of nine coins of class A, struck up to twenty years before the date of burial, there are probably two pairs of die-identities, and two of the other five coins share an obverse die; of eight coins of Class Ci (early to middle 1470's), three are from one obverse die, and two from another, and one later class C obverse die was responsible for no less than five Rhoneston coins and one from Glenluce. So it is unlikely that a new hoard would extend our ideas as much as these two have recently; once the stage is reached where newly discovered coins tend to duplicate known examples, then it is reasonable to assume that our knowledge of the series is proportionately as complete as the frequency of this duplication. Conversely, the more unique and unusual coins that appear, the greater are the gaps in our knowledge which they represent. On this telling, we certainly have an incomplete picture of these billon issues but less so than the Glenluce hoard alone might have postulated.

#### *Classification of the pennies*

Generally speaking, the billon pennies serve to clarify the known pattern, amplifying and confirming the general scheme of classes as presented in the writer's *The Scottish*

<sup>1</sup> *Num. Chron.*, 1919, 269 ff.; *P.S.A.S.*, LIV (1919-20), 20 ff.

*Coinage.* One small group of coins, represented in both hoards, does, however, pose new problems, and will be dealt with last.

The first issue of James II's 1451 coinage is known from only one obverse die. A penny in Glenluce (15) combines this die with a previously unknown reverse type having a crown in one quarter. This reverse die is now known from a second coin in the Rhoneston hoard, with a normal obverse. This chain of links is a useful guide to the sequence of the earliest pennies.

There appear to be three distinct varieties of the second issue pennies, corresponding with the groats – with an annulet, a saltire or nothing between the groups of pellets on the reverse. The annulet penny came to light in the Glenluce hoard and a second specimen is now recorded.<sup>1</sup> Plain pennies are the most common, but there were two undoubted saltire pennies in Rhoneston, both of which have small saltires (or fleurs-de-lys) beside the bust. Rare mules are recorded both ways between the saltire and plain issues; one, with the saltire obverse, was in Rhoneston.

The mints of this series of pennies previously known were Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Roxburgh. Glenluce produced the first known Perth penny, whose obverse die was also used at Edinburgh; two more Perth pennies, one from the same but the other from different reverse dies from the Glenluce specimen, come from Rhoneston, suggesting that the issue may not have been very small. Pennies are still unknown of Stirling, the other mint in this coinage, but there is no reason why they should not exist.

James III's earliest groat coinage was not started for several years after his accession, late in the 1460's. Several of the associated early pennies (class A) were found in both hoards, including the two known varieties, with saltires (Aii) or nothing (Aiii) between the pellets on the reverse. Glenluce threw up a new variety (Ai) with saltires by the bust, and another (Aiv) which came to light in Rhoneston – two specimens probably from the same pair of dies – has annulets between the pellets, a feature of several of the groats. More important than either of these new varieties is a Glenluce penny, with a characteristic James III class A obverse coupled with a reverse of James II's 1451 coinage (the crown initial mark establishes this beyond doubt). This coin demonstrates the probability, postulated on other grounds, that the 1451 coinage continued uninterrupted after James II's death in 1460 until c. 1467 when James III's new groats were introduced.

A problem is raised by the fact that only one penny of the type with ornamental reverse (class B) corresponding to the base thistle-head and mullet (group II) groats was found at Glenluce, and none at Rhoneston. The bust is very like that on later class C coins (towards 1484) and in view of the great rarity of this type of penny, and of the neat form of cross on the reverse with small clipped trefoils in the angles, it seems possible that it may have been struck, not with the bulk of the base group II groats early in the 1470's, but soon before 1484. It has recently been shown that at this time a new variety of the group II base groats was struck (if, indeed their issue had not been continuous through the 1470's alongside the fine silver groats of tweldepence), having a new neat form of cross and small slipped trefoils as on the unicorns which were issued immediately after 1484.<sup>2</sup> There was also a short-lived issue of placks about this time, withdrawn in 1485 in order to provide silver for the new groat coinage. Perhaps the class B pennies are in fact late, just pre-1484, and, like the placks, were nipped in the bud by the new coinage in that year. This would explain their rarity, the similarity of their portrait with that on late class C pennies, and

<sup>1</sup> In the writer's collection, ex R. C. Lockett sale, part IX, lot 854; different dies from the Glenluce specimen.

<sup>2</sup> *B.N.F.*, xxviii (1957), p. 323; *Num. Chron.*, 6 ser., xvi (1956), p. 306.

the affinities of their reverse type with the ornamentation of coins struck just before and after 1484.

Class C covers the pennies issued alongside the group III and the group IV groats. Both hoards contained large runs of these coins and on the basis of the Glenluce coins it was possible to work out a system of sub-classes within class C, according to details of bust, crown and inscriptions, which has some claim to being chronological.

Glenluce and Rhoneston were buried at a time which should make them particularly authoritative for the post-1484 billon coinage, of which little was known. The bushy-haired bust was previously known on only four coins of class D, associated with the three-quarter face portrait groats (group VI - c. 1485-9). Glenluce contained two, and Rhoneston four more. It appears that the ten coins come from only four obverse dies, and there are at least two pairs of reverse die-identities. In other words, the great rarity of the type is not due solely to the scarcity of hoards of the period, but partly indicates a limited original issue.

These class D pennies are the latest in the Rhoneston hoard, but Glenluce contained a fine run of early James IV pennies. Of these the earlier class has annulets beside the bust and as stops, corresponding to the early groats of James IV with annulet stops. Two pennies of this class in Glenluce have an annulet also within the groups of pellets in two quarters of the reverse, and have been labelled class Ia; they are perhaps the earliest, in that the feature of annulets between the pellets is found on the last pennies of James III (class D). One penny of the normal annulet issue (class Ib) has the crown shown with nine fleurs (i.e. the back fleurs visible between the front) - a feature of the James IV groats of the next issue.

This new issue of groats, which has saltire stops (type II), was only placed after type I on negative evidence; but an important mule penny from Glenluce with annulets on the obverse (class I) and saltires on the reverse (class II) connects the billon pennies of the two issues and thus, implicitly, the companion silver groats as well. The class II pennies, with which the Glenluce coins come to an end, may be divided into an earlier group with larger letters as on class I, and a newly recognised variety with small lettering which perhaps foreshadows that of the second issue pennies, first struck in the later 1490's, after the deposit of Glenluce.

In the publication of the Glenluce hoard, it was suggested that some pennies, resembling James III class A, which had special characteristics including large hollow-sided lettering, might represent a hitherto unidentified companion billon issue to the earliest groats of the heavy coinage after 1484 (group V). Four comparable coins were discovered at Rhoneston, and provide fuller material with which to review the problem. One of the Rhoneston coins has the royal titles repeated on the reverse, a phenomenon very occasionally found on early James II groats but not otherwise known on any Scottish penny. In spite of this and other unusual features, the Rhoneston coins do have strong affinities with class A, and in the absence of positive evidence associating them with the later period, it seems safer to consider them as varieties of that class.<sup>1</sup>

One of the great difficulties in considering the position of these pennies is inherent in the whole series: there is no direct relationship between the silver groats and billon pennies. There are many points of contact - letter forms, styles of bust, spelling, ornamentation - but there are equally tantalising discrepancies, where pennies have features common to

<sup>1</sup> They are so listed in the summary of contents of the two hoards at the head of this paper. The case will be more fully discussed in the notes accompanying the catalogue of the Rhoneston coins to be published in the *British Numismatic Journal*.

more than one groat issue. Billon money, so far as engravers and coiners were concerned, was a chore, and it cannot always be assumed that the same men were employed on each; a die-sinker might graduate from billon pennies to silver groats. Consequently, a small personal idiosyncrasy of die-sinking might occur on coins of different denomination which were not exactly contemporaneous. Two possible examples of this may be seen in the early pennies and groats of James IV. Class I pennies and type I groats are sprinkled with annulets, and similarly class II and type II with saltires; basically, here is an exact correspondence between pennies and groats. But, as we have seen, the nine-point crown is a characteristic feature of the saltire groats, whereas its rare appearance on billon pennies is in the annulet issue only. Perhaps a more emphatically personal idiosyncrasy is the misspelling of *Dei* as *Die*. It is found on a number of late James III groats (group VI), and on pennies of James IV – but not the earliest James IV pennies (almost invariably on class II, but very rarely on class I).

There is another reason why billon and silver coins do not correspond as neatly as a numismatist would wish for his classification. In the later fifteenth century, it appears that the Scottish mint concentrated on silver coinage, or on billon, but not on both in any quantity at the same time. Thus, one of the largest issues of groats was the last group (VI) of James III, *c.* 1485–9, which is plentiful today and was struck from a considerable number of dies. But the corresponding billon pennies (D) are about the rarest of all (ten coins known from only four obverse dies). At this time the mint seems to have been concentrating on the new fourteenpenny groats initiated in the 1484 recoinage, for conversion into which the recent issue of placks had been withdrawn from circulation in 1485. There was ample small change in circulation in the form of pre-1484 billon pence (especially class C). After 1489, silver was presumably forthcoming to the mint in decreasing amounts; the two types of James IV's early fourteenpenny groats are of the highest rarity today, and it is unlikely that more than a few dies were used; billon pennies, on the other hand, as represented by the twenty-five examples of James IV out of a total of ninety-three pennies altogether in the Glenluce hoard, were struck on a considerable scale. This alternate emphasis on the striking of silver and billon, according to the availability of bullion, is by no means a peculiarity of the Edinburgh mint. A similar habit has been noticed in the case of the mints of the Burgundian Netherlands at the same period,<sup>1</sup> not, as in Scotland, as a probability based on surviving coins, but as a matter of coinage policy, clearly documented in the fully preserved mint accounts of those states.

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<sup>1</sup> By Mr P. Spufford who has been kind enough to allow me to read portions of his unfinished study on Coinage and Currency in the Low Countries at this period.