

## THE DATE OF THE MEDIEVAL COIN-HOARD FROM TOM A'BHURAICH IN ABERDEENSHIRE

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ON p. 172 of *P.S.A.S.*, LXX (1935-6) there is reproduced from the *New Statistical Account* (Vol. XII, p. 546) the following passage which concerns several hundred coins found with two finger-rings in 1822 at Tom Fuarach, *recte* Tom a'Bhuraich (N.G.R. NO 309092), near Strathdon in Aberdeenshire:

One of the rings is gold, with a small dark sapphire. A ring precisely similar was discovered, 16th July 1829, with other relics, in the coffin of a bishop of Chichester, in the Cathedral of that city. The date of the tomb is A.D. 1146. The other was a broken iron gilt ring, with a pale sapphire, and is very similar to many Arabian and Indian rings. The coins are nearly all of Henry III of England. Some of them are of William the Lion of Scotland, and two of them of King John. A portion of them was divided into halves and others into quarters. Those of Henry III have on the obverse the King's head, full-faced and crowned, holding the sceptre with a cross pattée: reverse, a cross with a small cross in each quarter. They all have the names of the towns where they were coined, and of the mint-masters, such as SIMUN ON + CANT. (Canterbury). The coins of William have the King's head in profile on the obverse, holding the sceptre with a cross. Reverse, a cross with a star in each quarter. Those of King John are stamped with a triangle on both sides. The effigy on the obverse is within the triangle. They are much defaced.

A century later this remarkably lucid account, the work of the Rev. R. Meiklejohn, was the subject of the following commentary<sup>1</sup> by Sir George Macdonald:

The account of the coin find is all right. In those days and for long afterwards, English coins provided by far the larger part of the currency of Scotland. The proportion in hoards is usually somewhere about 30:1. The halving and quartering is quite in order.

Meagre as the details are, they are sufficient to make it possible to say something about the date. Richard I, John and (until 1247) Henry III, all used on their pennies the inscription HENRICVS REX simply. As ANGLIE TERCII did not make its appearance until the long-cross series began (in the year I have named), I take it these must have been long-cross pennies. Without TERCII or III it is highly improbable that the finders would have ascribed them to the third Henry. But long-cross pennies *with a sceptre* were not struck until 1250. The moneyer's name, however, proves that short-cross pennies were present also. Simon of Canterbury figures as mint-master in 1199 under King John, and he continued to strike short-cross pennies under Henry III till 1242. You may take it, I think, that the deposit belongs to the third quarter of the thirteenth century or possibly the fourth.

The coins of John must have been half-pennies. He put his own name (IOHANNES) on that denomination. These half-pennies are exceedingly rare.

On p. 137 of the recent *Inventory of British Coin-Hoards* published by the Royal Numismatic Society, Mr J. D. A. Thompson has generally followed Sir George Macdonald's interpretation of Meiklejohn's account, and his 1956 reconstruction of the evidence runs as follows:

361. TOM FUARAICH, Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1822. NW. side of mountain at a height of 1600 ft.

R. English, Irish and Scottish, with I *N* and I iron-gilt finger ring. Deposit: c. 1260.

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXX (1935-6), 173.

ENGLAND: John ? Short-cross penny – Canterbury: Simon, 1. Henry III.

Long-cross pennies? An unspecified number. IRELAND: John, halfpennies of Dublin?: 'Triangle' type, 2. SCOTLAND: William the Lion. An unspecified number of sterlings.

Sir George Macdonald in *PSAS*, lxx (1936), pp. 172 ff.

Disposition: 2 coins in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh. The rest of the coins – of which there are believed to have been a large number – had all disappeared by 1936.

Omitted from the *Inventory* are references both to Meiklejohn's original account and to *P.S.A.S.*, v (1862-4), p. 31. This last would have suggested that the coins acquired by the National Museum of Antiquities were a penny of William the Lion and another of Henry III (?), while further enquiry would have elicited the information that the coins in question cannot now be identified in the Museum trays, if indeed they are still in the collection. We may note, too, that the William the Lion penny is described as 'found in a cairn in Strathdon' while there attaches to the English coin the description 'found with many others in a cairn at the Mill of Garochy (*recte* Garchory)'. In *B.N.F.*, xxx, i (1960), p. 118, Dr D. M. Metcalf records only the former, and seems not to associate it with the hoard from Tom a'Bhuraich, while Mr Thompson considers the Mill of Garchory hoard (*Inventory*, 169) quite distinct from that from Tom a'Bhuraich, though, as will appear, the Ordnance Survey Name Book of 1867 virtually precludes a second 'Henry III' hoard from the same mountain.

The suggestion of this note is that both Sir George Macdonald and Mr Thompson were in error when they argued that the Henry III coins were of long-cross type, and also that the John coins were half-pennies. An obvious *terminus post quem* of 1199 is furnished, of course, by these very same Irish coins of John – Mr Thompson certainly has improved upon Sir George Macdonald by recognising the 'triangle' coins as Anglo-Irish – but any date for the concealment of the hoard which is as late as the third quarter of the thirteenth century, let alone the fourth quarter, seems to the present writer to run counter to every scrap of the evidence on the basis of which these identifications were made.

The first point to be observed is that it is quite exceptional for one and the same hoard to contain both short-cross and long-cross coins in any quantity. Particularly suggestive in this context is the Bantry hoard from the extreme SW. of Ireland (*Inventory*, 33). Here there were present as many as six hundred English sterlings of the long-cross issue, but not, it would seem, a single English coin belonging to the short-cross type, and this despite the fact that the latest acceptable dating for the deposit, or rather non-recovery, of the hoard would link it with the rout of the Normans at Callann near Kenmare in 1261, not fifteen years after the great English recoinage of 1247.<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, one should seek to propound a hoard containing in quantity both long-cross and short-cross coins of England, the onus of proof would seem to lie with the postulator, and the more so since the only examples with more than the odd one or two short-cross survivors – cf. the Hornchurch find (*Inventory*, 193) – are from the Continent, the best attested examples being the Norrbys find

<sup>1</sup> *Num. Chron.*, 1958, 118-21; *N. Munster Ant. Journ.*, VIII: 4 (1961), 166.

from Sweden,<sup>1</sup> the Hildesheim and Flensburg hoards from Germany,<sup>2</sup> and the great Brussels hoard.<sup>3</sup> Even as regards the Scottish element in thirteenth-century finds it is remarkable how little overlap there is between the short-cross and long-cross series. Indeed, were one to rely on the *Inventory* alone, the tally from these islands would appear to be a solitary penny with the name of William the Lion found with early – i.e. double-cross – long-cross pennies of Alexander III at Bantry, and another which happened to occur with late – i.e. single-cross – long-cross pennies of Alexander III and his successors in the fourteenth-century hoard from Montrave.<sup>4</sup> However, even on the basis of Lindsay's long superseded *Coinage of Scotland* (p. 271) this meagre total can be somewhat supplemented. At Bantry it is clear that there were present other coins of William the Lion – the majority of them no doubt posthumous – and an inexplicable omission from the *Inventory*, the more so because it figures prominently in Burns' *Coinage of Scotland*,<sup>5</sup> is the hoard which came to light in Co. Clare c. 1834. This consisted of a dozen or so William the Lion short-cross pennies, most if not all of them posthumous and of the moneyer Hue Walter, and several dozen early, i.e. double-cross, long-cross pennies of Alexander III. The further elucidation of this hoard, however, is something that must be reserved for another occasion, and here it may suffice to say that this Irish find is perhaps the only hoard ever to have been published which evidences any substantial overlapping of the Scottish short-cross and long-cross series. In his 1958 paper on the Brussels hoard already cited, Mr B. H. I. H. Stewart does not mention Scottish pieces earlier than the long-cross coins of Alexander III, though neither of us would discount the possibility that there was present the odd short-cross coin of Alexander II, while in the Hildesheim find there was only one Scottish coin and in the Norrbys find none.

By analogy, then, it is unlikely in the extreme that the Tom a' Bhuraich find of 1822 would have contained quantities of English short-cross and long-cross coins in combination, and it is difficult to believe that the penny by the moneyer Simon of Canterbury, a coin which can only be of short-cross type, was unrepresentative of a very substantial parcel at the very least of the English coins which predominated in the find in question. Had, too, English long-cross coins been present in the find in any number, it seems unlikely that they would not have been accompanied by some examples at least of the relatively prolific long-cross coinage of Alexander III. Granted that the English issue began three years before the Scottish, Strathdon is in Scotland and quite remote from London, and in itself the absence of the long-cross pennies of Alexander would be almost decisive that the Tom a' Bhuraich hoard was concealed before and not after 1250. There is the further point that the English coins are described as with sceptre, a feature proper to the short-cross coinage but not added to the long-cross type until 1250, so that the absence of the Scottish pieces of that year would appear even more inexplicable. Already, then, the datings proposed by Sir George Macdonald and by Mr Thompson may be thought to be suspect, and

<sup>1</sup> *B.N.J.*, xxvii, iii (1954), 359–61.

<sup>2</sup> *Hamb. Beitr. z. Num.*, II (1948), 16–48 and *Berliner Münzblätter*, IX (1927–9), 127–30, 142–7, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *B.N.J.*, IX (1912), 170; xxix, I (1958), 91, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Inventory*, 272, but the date of deposit cannot be as early as 1356, if only because of the presence in quantity of David II groats first coined in 1357.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I, p. 103.

especially the suggestion that the hoard could belong 'possibly to the fourth' quarter of the thirteenth century.

The essence of Sir George Macdonald's plea for the presence in the Tom a' Bhuraich find of English pennies of the long-cross issue is the contention that 'without TERC I or III it is highly improbable that the finders would have ascribed them to the third Henry'. Is this really the case? In 1822 there was remarkably little agreement among English numismatists concerning the regnal attribution of the different types of English penny with an obverse legend HENRICVS REX, and certainly there is no reason to suppose that Meiklejohn was familiar with these controversies. Nor is it likely that a confessed non-numismatist would have appreciated that there are no English coins of Richard I where the name of the son replaces that of the father. Even today the intelligent layman is perplexed that the same legend HENRICVS REX should occur unchanged throughout an issue which extends from late in the reign of Henry II until well into the reign of Henry III.

Let us imagine for a moment, then, that we are in the position of an intelligent and educated Scottish minister of the early nineteenth century, a minister, too, who can be shown to be as observant as shrewd. A large number of coins are brought to his notice which are clearly medieval in date. The great majority are of one type and may be inferred to have the obverse legend HENRICVS REX. A few, patently Scottish, have the name of a King William, and two have the name of a King John. Baliol's English contemporary was an Edward, and so the John must surely be the English King John who came to the throne in 1199 and died in 1216, his reign coinciding very neatly with the last years of William the Lion in Scotland. There remain the very numerous pennies of an English King Henry. If they are given to Henry II who died in 1189, the 'taper' of the hoard is wrong, the latest coins being much the fewer. Moreover, there has to be explained the total absence of coins with the name of the Richard who succeeded Henry II in 1189 and was followed by John almost a whole decade later. If, on the other hand, these English pennies are attributed to Henry III, the whole balance of the hoard becomes much more plausible, and the 'English' coins now belong to two consecutive reigns - Meiklejohn, we must remember, did not distinguish the John coins as Irish.

Thus an observer as intelligent as Meiklejohn might well have arrived at the Henry III attribution without the assistance of any TERC I or III in the legends, and there is in fact one positive piece of evidence that the English coins were of short-cross type which both Sir George Macdonald and Mr Thompson have chosen quite arbitrarily to ignore. In his account of the English coins with obverse legend HENRICVS REX, Meiklejohn has stated quite explicitly that the reverse type was 'a cross with a small cross in each quarter'. Of short-cross pennies this description is as true as it is inappropriate in the case of long-cross pennies where the ornaments in the angles are not crosses pommées but trefoils of pellets. We have, then, irrefutable evidence that the English coins were of short-cross type, inasmuch as the presence of John coins must militate against the possibility that they could have been of 'Tealby' type for all Meiklejohn's reference to a cross pattée sceptre, and even Sir George Macdonald and Mr Thompson have been constrained to admit that it was to this

class that there must have belonged the penny with reverse legend SIMUN ON CANT which Meiklejohn cited as characteristic. Against this positive testimony of our prime authority the suggestion that the coins could not have been attributed to Henry III unless some read TERCII or III is one that cannot carry very much weight, and especially since it has now been shown that the Henry III attribution could perfectly well have been arrived at on quite other grounds. Essentially, therefore, the 1822 coin-hoard from Tom a'Bhuraich must rank as a short-cross find, and the date of deposit placed before instead of after the middle of the thirteenth century.

There remains the problem of how the Tom a'Bhuraich Find should be dated within the limits of the English short-cross coinage, which extended from 1180 until 1247. A most useful *terminus post quem* is here afforded by the Irish coins of John which are described by Meiklejohn as of 'triangle' type. Sir George Macdonald identified them as 'half-pennies', and was followed in this by Mr Thompson, but there seems no warrant for this distinction in Meiklejohn's account which does not differentiate the John coins on the grounds of size. Moreover, even in Ireland the John penny is as common as the halfpenny is rare – in the *c.* 1857 Newry hoard (*Inventory*, 288), for example, Mr Thompson himself has recorded 290 'triangle' pennies as against only two 'triangle' half-pennies. To the best of the present writer's knowledge, the date of the first issue of John's 'triangle' pence has not been the subject of detailed investigation, but in another paper the suggestion will be made that the testimony of Roger of Wendover for a date *c.* 1210 is in conflict with that of contemporary documents and of the coins themselves, and it will be argued that the Dublin mint began striking 'triangle' pennies as its contribution to the great English recoinage of 1205. Obviously, too, a few years must be allowed at the very least for the Irish coins to reach Aberdeenshire, and on this telling a dating *c.* 1210 would seem the earliest plausible for the deposit of the coin-hoard from Tom a'Bhuraich.

This leaves us with a bracket for the hoard's concealment amounting to some forty years, and the question is whether or not it is possible to attain any greater precision than the *c.* 1230  $\pm$  20 which is thereby implied. There are several factors that have to be taken into consideration, and we may begin with the apparent absence of Scottish coins of Alexander II who ruled from 1214 until 1249. At first sight this may seem to suggest that the Tom a'Bhuraich hoard was concealed not very much later than 1215. It must be observed, however, that all coins of Alexander II are, to quote Mr Stewart, 'of extreme rarity'. We are told by Meiklejohn, too, that the type of the pennies in the name of William the Lion was 'a cross with a star in each quarter', i.e. the coins belong to his last coinage, and, again to quote Mr Stewart, 'there was a very long overlap from William's reign during which coins in his name continued to be issued'. It is suggested by the same authority, moreover, that this overlap could have amounted to some thirty years or more, i.e. that the coins with Alexander's name should be placed as late as *c.* 1245. Even if thirty years were to be cut back to the twenty that is less than the bare minimum,<sup>1</sup> it is clear that the Tom a'Bhuraich hoard could be placed at least as late as *c.* 1235 without the absence of coins of Alexander II affording the least cause for suspicion.

<sup>1</sup> cf. *B.N.J.*, xxvii, ii (1954), 276–80.

There are, moreover, two further clues which quite independently would favour a dating late rather than early within the bracket *c.* 1210-*c.* 1250. The first is the form of the legend on the reverse of the short-cross penny by the Canterbury moneyer Simon. This rather suggests that the coin may have been of Lawrence Class VII, i.e. was struck after *c.* 1220 and perhaps as late as *c.* 1235. The other is that the Irish coins are described as 'much defaced' which in the context would surely imply that they had been in circulation for a considerable number of years. The balance of the evidence, then, would suggest that the Tom a'Bhuraich hoard from Strathdon should be dated *c.* 1240  $\pm$  10 rather than *c.* 1220  $\pm$  10, and it is interesting to note that this new chronology would associate the hoard with an already well-attested grouping which has a distinct 'northern' bias.

In a recent paper<sup>1</sup> it has been claimed that quite a number of the *Inventory* datings of short-cross finds from Great Britain and Ireland are open to objection. It is argued, too, that the following hoards should be dated within the general bracket *c.* 1230-*c.* 1250:

*From Southern England*

COLCHESTER, Essex. (*Inventory*, 94)

*From Northern England*

HICKLETON, Yorkshire. (*Inventory*, 189)

ECCLES, Lancashire. (*Inventory*, 152)

TADDINGTON, Derbyshire. (*Inventory*, -)

*From Ireland*

KILMAINE, Co. Mayo. (*Inventory*, 216)

'DUBLIN'. (*Inventory*, 135)

*From Scotland*

TREE, Hebrides. (*Inventory*, 358)

To these should be added two more inexplicable omissions from the *Inventory*, the Clifton or Swinton hoard from Lancashire which Mr R. A. G. Carson published in detail in 1947,<sup>2</sup> and the apparently very similar 1881 hoard from Keith in Banffshire.<sup>3</sup> Also to be taken into consideration are a substantial hoard from York Minster (*Inventory*, 390) which Mr Thompson, admittedly following P. W. P. Carlyon-Britton, has confused with the minor Norman find from Monkgate, and which Dr Michael Metcalf<sup>4</sup>, misled by old accounts, has recorded as being of long-cross type, and yet another though smaller Yorkshire hoard of which some details exist in the archives of the Yorkshire Museum. If we add to these the hoard from Tom a'Bhuraich, the tally of 'late' short-cross hoards from Great Britain and Ireland is twelve, three of them from Scotland, six from Northern England, two from Ireland and one from Southern England, an 'unbalance' in favour of the northern half of these islands which is in remarkable contrast with the picture presented by the nine

<sup>1</sup> *B.N.J.*, xxix, ii (1959), 297-321.

<sup>2</sup> *Num. Chron.*, 1947, 80-82.

<sup>3</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, xvi (1881-2), 431-43; cf. *Brit. Num. Journ.*, xxx, i (1960), 95.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 101.

'early' hoards which are identifiable as such.<sup>1</sup> On this evidence, too, one might even be tempted to suggest that there could be a *prima facie* case for dating 'late' two more short-cross hoards from Scotland of which the composition is uncertain, those from Lewinshope in Selkirkshire (*Inventory*, 232) and New Luce in Wigtownshire (*Inventory*, 285), but the question of these finds from the Lowlands is one that may be thought to be best deferred until another occasion.

At this point it is necessary to digress a little to consider one piece of new evidence which Mr A. L. F. Rivet has been kind enough to bring to the writer's notice. This is the Name Book of the original Ordnance Survey of 1867 (Aberdeenshire Book No. 81, p. 168) where there occurs the following entry:

Silver Coins found here A.D. 1822.

*Authorities:* Mr Alister McHardy, Gamekeeper, Newe.

Mr James Simpson, Shinnach.

Mr James Dunbar, Ord and Belneaden.

*Description:* About the year 1821-22 while workmen were employed building a stone dyke here and collecting stone from a Craig or cairn adjoining, they discovered a great number of silver coins and a gold and a silver rings [*sic*]. The number of coins found cannot be ascertained but they were very numerous and found at subsequent periods. The date or reign of the coins cannot distinctly be made out but appears to be those of Edward I [*sic*]. The inscription as near as can be made out is E.D.W.R. A.N.G.L. D.N.S. The reverse bears a St George's cross and twelve roundlets, probably Bezants, three in each quarter where the cross intersects, surrounded by the inscription C.I.V.I.T.A.S. The size of some of them were nearly as large as a shilling and others as sixpence.

There is appended a sketch of one reverse which is nearly enough that of a penny of Edward I except that *Civitas* – incorrectly rendered CIVITIAS – occupies the whole of the circumference, while the cross of the main type is not carried beyond the inner circle.

There can be little doubt that the Ordnance Surveyors were shown one or two pennies of Edward I struck between 1279 and 1302, and that these were associated by their informants with the hoard discovered in 1822. On the other hand to the numismatist at least it will be clear that the coin or coins produced in 1867 could not possibly have come from the hoard which Meiklejohn had described in the *New Statistical Account*. In the first place it should be observed that the men consulted were recalling something that had happened forty-five years earlier, in their youth if not before they were born. If, too, the coins still in their possession had been at all numerous, it seems almost inconceivable that the obverse legend would not have been restored in full, and virtually impossible that at least one deuterotheme in the reverse legend should not have been recognised as the name of London. In other words, it is most unlikely that the Surveyors saw more than one or two coins, and those very probably in a wretched condition. Even more significantly we are told in as many words that the men reported that coins had come from the place 'at subsequent periods'. Now, the penny of Edward I and II is perhaps the medieval coin that is most commonly met with in Scotland, both in hoards and as a single-find. In the

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the hoards from London, Aston (Cheshire), Sudbourne, Newry, Teston, Charlton and 'Doncaster' discussed in *B.N.J.*, loc. cit., together with a newly reported find from Crowle in Worcestershire (cf. *Ashmolean Museum Report of the Visitors*, 1962, 77).

*Inventory* alone there will be found recorded no fewer than forty-four hoards from Scotland where the 'Edward penny' is present in quantity, and in no case do the Scottish coins which accompany it include pieces earlier than the post-1250 single-cross sterlings of Alexander III. Nor is there once recorded as present an Irish coin earlier than the post-1279 penny of Edward I, nor an English coin anterior to the post-1247 long-cross penny of Henry III. If, too, one were to suppose that the 1822 find from Tom a'Bhuraich really did span the better part of a century so as to include English pennies of Edward I, one would still have to explain (a) why none were in the very substantial parcel seen by Meiklejohn, (b) why the Scottish element in the find stopped short of the relatively common penny of Alexander III, and (c) why the latest coins in the find were in poor condition and so pitifully few in number compared with other issues in the hoard which must have been struck close on a century before its concealment and yet were sharp enough to be read quite correctly by Meiklejohn. To pile improbability upon improbability is the antithesis of scholarship, and the odd Edward pennies shown to the Ordnance Surveyors may safely be dismissed as single-finds from the locality or even as strays from a fourteenth-century hoard concealed on the same tract of mountainside.

It only remains to suggest an acceptable wording for the Tom a'Bhuraich entry in any future edition of the *Inventory*, and perhaps the revision should run something as follows:

361 TOM A'BHURAICH, Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1822.

Several hundred  $\mathcal{R}$  English, Scottish and Irish pennies, with *A'* and iron-gilt finger-rings.

Deposit: c. 1240.

ENGLAND: Short-cross pennies (Henry II- Henry III? - including 1 (class vii?) Canterbury, Simun), bulk of hoard. IRELAND: John, 'triangle' pennies (Dublin?), 2. SCOTLAND: William the Lion, third (mainly posthumous) coinage pennies, a number.

R. Meiklejohn in *New Statistical Account*, XII, p. 546. W. D. Simpson and Sir George Macdonald in *PSAS*, lxx (1935-36), pp. 172 & 173 (cf. also *PSAS*, v (1862-64), p. 31), R. H. M. Dolley in *PSAS*, xcvi (1961-62), pp. 241-8.

The hoard which included cut half-pennies and farthings came to light under a cairn of stones on the NW. slopes of the mountain. An uncertain penny of Henry III (?) and another of William the Lion were presented in 1863 to the National Museum of Antiquities at Edinburgh. In 1867 the Ordnance Surveyors were shown the odd Edward I penny wrongly associated with the hoard, and in the 1956 edition of the *Inventory* the find was included twice, under the names Garochy - *recte* Garchory - and Tom Fuarach.