

New light on old coin hoards from the Aberdeen area

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SUMMARY

This paper endeavours to show how judicious use of contemporary newspaper reports can add to our knowledge of the remarkable number of medieval and post-medieval coin hoards from the Aberdeen area. It also attempts to make good the lack of detailed information on the vessels associated with some of these hoards.

INTRODUCTION

The finding of several medieval coin hoards in this area during the 19th century is both well known and widely reported (Thompson 1956; Fraser 1906; Metcalf 1977), but discrepancies in the various published accounts have led to a certain amount of confusion as to how many hoards were found and to the circumstances of their discovery (eg Wilson 1958; Thompson 1959; Mayhew 1975, 36). Later researchers have tended to use the works of G M Fraser (1906) and John Lindsay (1845; 1859; 1868) as main sources. Whilst both contain a fund of useful information they should be treated with caution: Lindsay has long been recognized as somewhat unreliable, while Fraser can be not only inaccurate but fanciful as well. The unearthing of two more hoards in 1983–4 during the construction of the St Nicholas Centre, off the Netherkirkgate, meant that a reconsideration of the earlier finds was long overdue (Mayhew, forthcoming).

For the purposes of this paper the authors have limited their comments to post-Roman coin hoards found within the boundaries of the present Aberdeen City District. Wherever possible the primary source of the contemporary discoveries has been located; extracts from these are given here at some length so that the reader can assess the quality of the original reports (in several of the newspaper accounts these were clearly written by a local specialist coin collector or antiquary rather than by a journalist).

THE HOARDS

EDWARDIAN HOARDS (illus 1 & 2)

1 St Nicholas St/Flourmill Brae, Aberdeen; 7/11/1807

‘As some workmen were employed in digging for the foundations of a new building near the Flour Mill, they found, at the depth of ten feet from the level of the street, a large wooden bason [sic] full of Silver Coins, some of them in a good state of preservation. They are mostly of the coinage of Edward

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I of England, and Alexander III of Scotland. . . . Those of Edward I are of two kinds, viz *Pennies*, about the size of a Sixpence of the present day; and *Groats*, proportionately larger. As the marks indicate, they have been coined at London, York and Canterbury. So ignorant were the persons who found them of their value, that they sold a great many of them to the bystanders at the rate of four for a penny; numbers were scattered among the labourers, but the greater part were sold to silversmiths¹.

2 St Nicholas St/Netherkirkgate, Aberdeen; 17/11/1807

'In our last [issue] we had to mention that a good number of Silver Coins, chiefly of the Edwards of England and Alexander of Scotland, had been found in the course of the street now opening from George's Street to Union Street [St Nicholas Street]. A second deposit of the same kind was found on Tuesday morning. The workmen in digging the site of Dyer's Hall, found an earthen jar, containing nearly 2,000 pieces of various reigns and values. They are for the most part Silver Pennies (Denarii) of Edward I, II and III – some of Alexander III of Scotland – and, it is said, some of Robert, whether I or II, we know not. Of those of Edward I, some are of the Dublin coinage, the King's head in a triangle, and having on the obverse, "CIVITAS DUBLINIE"; and some; in addition to the titles of *Rex Angliae* and *Dominus Hyberniae*, have *Dux Aquitaniae*. Many of the coins are of base metal, (the *nigra moneta*) but some are of very fine silver – and the greater part are in excellent preservation. . . . But a silver coin of Queen Elizabeth, bearing the date 1563'

was found amongst them.

'A boy employed in washing away the earth from some of the smaller pieces, found the coin in question, a *teston*, which he took for a common shilling².

A shorter notice about the same hoard had appeared earlier in the week in the *Aberdeen Journal*:

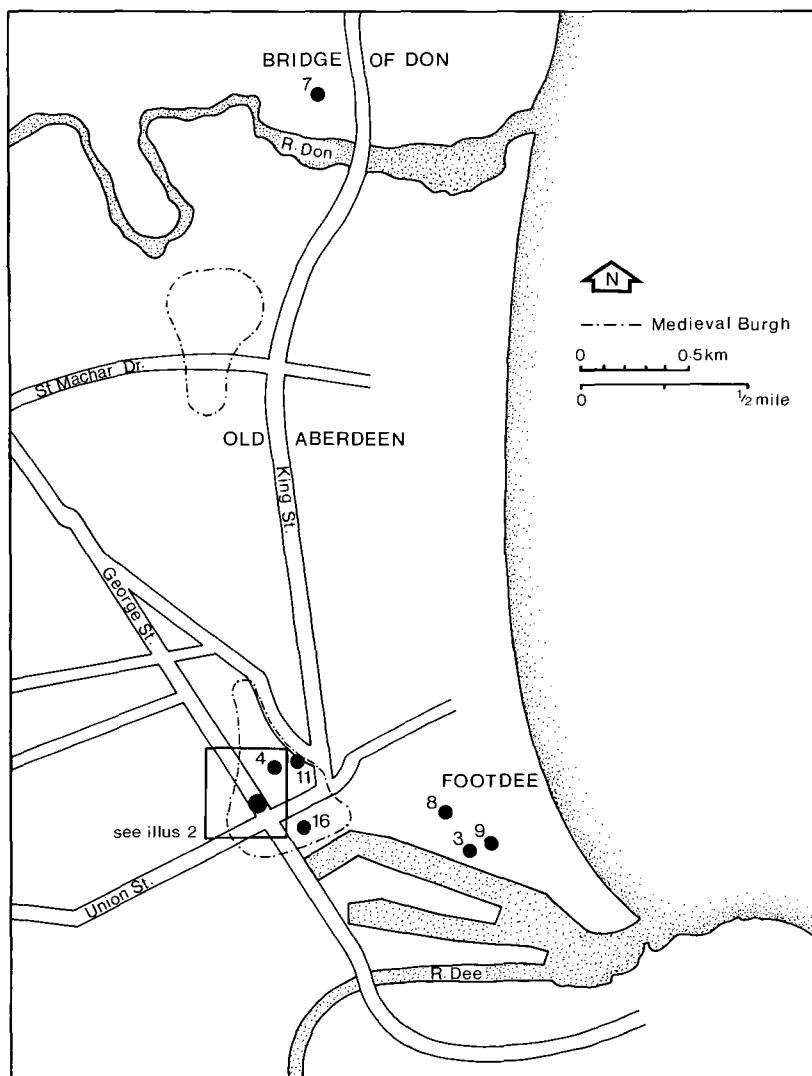
'Yesterday morning an Earthen jar containing about 1800 Silver Coins similar to those mentioned in our last [issue], was found by one of the labourers employed, in the neighbourhood of the late Dyer's Hall, who brought them up and lodged them in the Town House³.

3 Clarence Street, Footdee; August 1867

'In the course of last week, while the labourers employed by Messrs Duncan and Murray, contractors for the Footdee Sewerage works, were excavating the old sewer in Clarence Street, immediately behind the Northern Agricultural Company's premises, one of them turned out a jar containing a large number of ancient silver coins. It is impossible to state accurately the number of coins, as they seem to have got into inappropriate hands. Unfortunately the jar was accidentally broken by a workman's pick, and before either it, or the coins were observed, they were shovelled up and scattered about among the earth on the edge of the cutting, where many of them, it is believed, were lost. There is supposed to have been nearly a thousand of them altogether. The great mass of them were of the same description – as thin as an old sixpence, and only a little larger. They bear on the face a crowned head, encircled by the letters EDW. R. ANGL. DNS. HYB.+; the reverse is intersected by a cross, forming large spaces. In each of which is three stars, and around this design are the words – "Civitas, London". Where the jar was dug out, it seemed to have been embedded in a vein of blue clay, about seven feet from the surface, and within four feet of an old wall, the soil above it being sand. The jar was of red clay, about four or five inches in diameter, and about six or seven inches high. Another jar, of a smaller size, was found near the same spot, made of yellow clay. Unfortunately it was broken, but it appears to have had no lid or opening of any kind, and was like as may be a middling-sized turnip. It contained nothing. Most of the coins, we may state, were appropriated by the workmen, and the best of them have in consequence been lost sight of in this way. None of them, it would seem, know that the Government claims all such old coins as "treasure trove", for which they give to the finders the value of the metal in return⁴.

4 Ross's Court, Upperkirkgate, Aberdeen; 31/5/1886

Over 12 000 silver coins contained in a bronze pot were buried in a close on the north side of the Upperkirkgate. An initial report by a local journalist on this discovery appeared on Tuesday 1 June

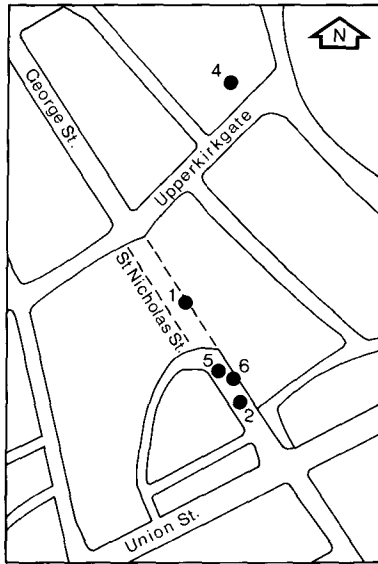


ILLUS 1 Coin hoards found within the City of Aberdeen

1886: a more detailed account by a 'correspondant who has carefully examined many of the coins', appeared the following day. This second report was clearly written by a numismatist, and contains quite detailed descriptions and identifications of the various mints; however, the tenor of the piece is rather spoilt by the fanciful ending:

'... an idea has been put forward that the treasure was brought north by some Aberdeen soldier who had fought at the battle of Bannockburn with the Bruce. He had wandered into the adverse camp after the flight of the English, and perhaps had stumbled across the treasure chest of the army. He had taken it with him to his northern home and had carefully buried it along with his own little hoard. But unkindly fate cut him off before he had time to enjoy the fruits of war'⁵.

This hoard has been the subject of an excellent detailed study by N J Mayhew, who has assigned to it a *terminus post quem* of 1331–5 (1975, 33–50)⁶.



ILLUS 2 The location of the Edwardian hoards found in the city centre (not to scale)

5 and 6 St Nicholas Street, Aberdeen; 30/11/1983 and 2/5/1984

Two hoards found 3.5 m apart during the construction of the St Nicholas Centre. Both were contained in pottery jugs; the first hoard consisted of approximately 4461 coins, the second of approximately 2550. The study of these coins has recently been completed and a full publication will follow (Mayhew, forthcoming).

LATE MEDIEVAL HOARDS (illus 1)

7 Balgownie Crescent, Bridge of Don; 20/11/1937

One hundred and ninety-seven coins in a pottery jug. The find circumstances are not clear, but traces of a building and a cobbled floor were found on the same site. The newspaper accounts claim that a silver plate and a silver statuette had been unearthed there earlier in the week (Kerr 1939; Thompson 1956, hoard 5 & pl 1a)⁷. Allen, in his publication of the hoard, suggested a date of c 1466 for its deposition (Allen 1940; Kerr 1939); however, Kerr, in his initial note on the discovery, suggested that it might have been a year or two later, and this has been corroborated by a recent study of the coins (see Discussion, below).

MEDIEVAL HOARDS OF UNCERTAIN DATE (illus 1 & 3)

8 Footdee; pre-1827

The account describing the discovery of hoard no 9 (see below) finishes with the statement that 'not many years ago a very large and far more valuable deposit of the same kind, was found at the opposite extremity of that village'⁸. Despite a search of the local newspapers for the period 1806–27 (when most of the redevelopment of Footdee was taking place), no further details of this hoard have yet been found.

9 Wellington Street, Footdee; 13/1/1827

'On Thursday last, whilst workmen were digging a common sewer in Wellington Street, Footdee, Waterloo Quay, about three or four feet under the surface, they turned up a quantity of gold and silver coins, so considerable as sufficient to fill a hat. In the scramble which this discovery immediately occasioned, the greater part of them were carried off by the workmen, and others who happened to be near the spot, so that only a few of the pieces could be examined, and these so defaced and corroded as to make it very difficult to determine whether they were British or Foreign. The greater part of them were silver, larger than a shilling; and in the opinion of some acquainted with ancient coins, who have inspected those now found and in the best preservation, they are English coins, among the first of the Edwards, while some few are said to be of a far more recent date. Part of the silver coins were of a smaller denomination, rather less than a sixpence, as were the few gold pieces. Both the latter were much worn and defaced, but seemed to correspond with the larger coins of the most early date. The treasure was found under some stones, seemingly placed for its security, and in the site of the lower part of the old fish-town of Footdee'⁹.

Lindsay states that 16 of these coins were sent to the Antiquarian Society (1845, 267)¹⁰.

10 Binghill, Peterculter; pre-1795

'A Mr Watson, advocate in Aberdeen who farmed the lot of Binghill or Bingle, supplied the following information:

In one of the plantations a Druid's temple was discovered which I inclosed. Near to it there is a large *tumulus*, or cairn, which, it is said, was once the burying place of the ancient family of Drum, my farm having been their family seat some centuries back. . . . In digging up the foundations of some walls, which were said to have been part of the mansion of that family, my workmen found near a handful of silver coins, about the same size of sixpences, inscribed *Davidus Rex*' (Withrington *et al* 1982, 643–4n).

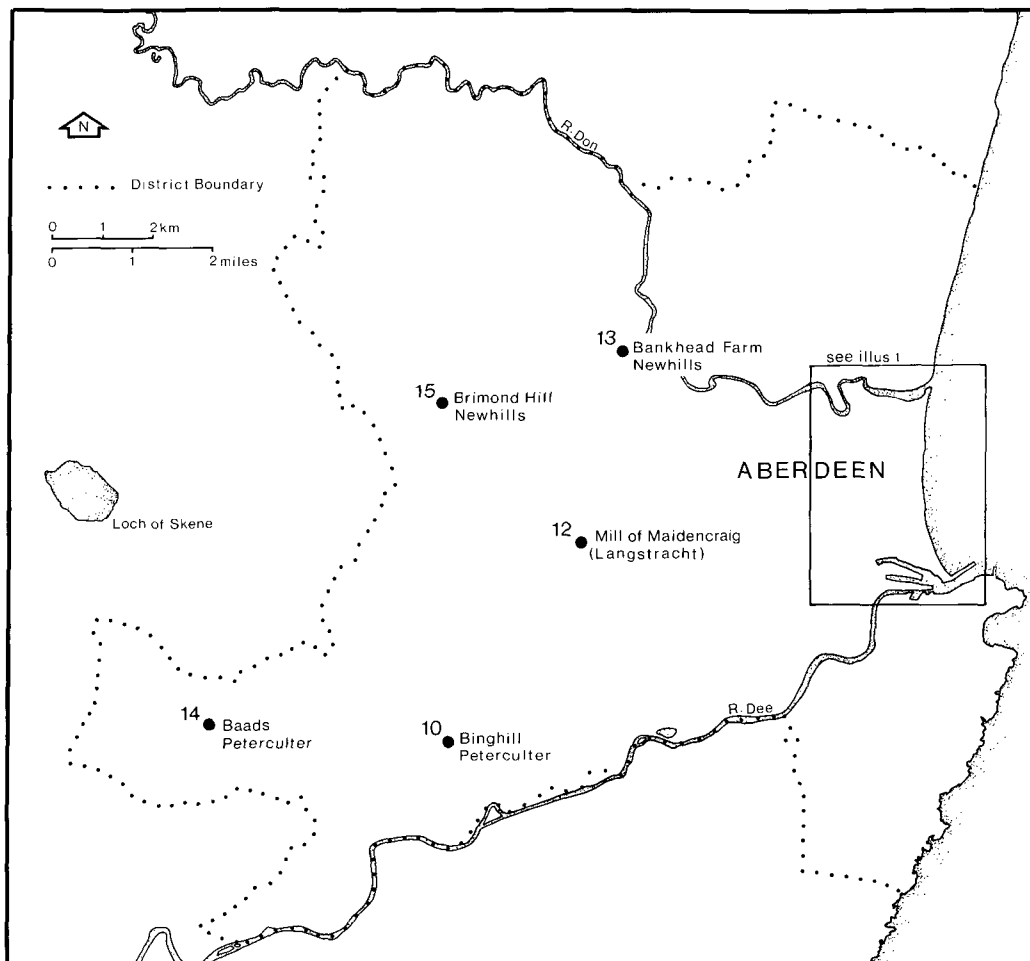
It is curious that the reporter gives the Latin form of the King's name which does not, in fact, appear on his coins. Perhaps Mr Watson's professional familiarity with the language caused him to remember the name in that form.

16TH-CENTURY HOARDS (illus 1 and 3)

11 Shoe Lane, Aberdeen; May 1847

'The other day, as some workmen were employed in digging the foundation for an enlargement of Messrs J Smith and Co, Iron Merchants, in Shoe Lane, they discovered a large number of small copper coins, which were buried some three feet below the surface. The coins had been put into three bags, one of canvas, and two of leather – very much corroded – and weighed, in whole, about 2 cwt. They are almost all of one kind, apparently what were called bodies – each weighing about one-sixth of a farthing of the present day. They belong to the earlier part of the unfortunate Mary's reign, bearing on one side, the letters FM, joined monogram-wise, surmounted by the crown; and on the other, a lion *ambulant*, also crowned. The letters are the initials of the Queen's christian name, and of her husband's, Francis, Dauphin of France. The *legends* are nearly illegible; but, on the one side, there seems to be DVIEN+ET. M.A.; D.G.R. SCOT.; and on the other, VICIT. VERITAS. One small silver coin has been discovered in the *pose*, bearing on one side, a shield with a co-quartering of the arms of Scotland and France; but the device on the other side, and the inscription are effaced'¹¹.

A few of the coins survive in the collections of the Marischal College Museum, and can be dated to the period 1558–60 (pers comm, Craig Barclay). Fraser's suggested date of 1559 for the deposition would seem to be based purely on the date of issue of these coins, and the possibly fortuitous location of the hoard within the presumed limits of the Franciscan friary (Fraser 1906, 330). He conservatively gives the number of coins as 'several thousands', but a cache of 2 cwt of lions or 'hardheads' would contain about 87 400 coins, and represent about £546.00 Scots. Obviously, any attempt to estimate the size of the hoard on the rough and ready estimate of its weight given above would be purely speculative; however, this calculation serves to underline the fact that this was clearly a very sizeable



ILLUS 3 Outlying coin hoards found within the District of Aberdeen

deposit of low denomination coinage. Perhaps a more instructive way of looking at this quantity is to realize that 2 cwt, or 16 stone of hardheads represents about 2.7% of the recorded output of these coins by the Scottish mint for the year 1558 (Cochran-Patrick 1876, cxxix).

It is also possible to compare this estimate of the size of the hoard with the known annual income of Friaries in Aberdeen for 1561. Unfortunately, that of the Franciscans is not recorded, but the minimum for the Trinitarians was £54.00, for the Carmelites (possibly) £96.00, and for the Dominicans £108.00. Thus, if the hoard had any connection with the Franciscan Friary (as suggested by Fraser), then it would seem to represent a very large share of their fortunes – almost the equivalent of five years' income of their wealthiest rivals in Aberdeen (Cowan & Easson 1976, 107, 116, 135).

In his account of the discovery of this hoard, Fraser mentions a hoard of similar date found at Normandykes in 1841 (1906, 330)¹². No other details of this hoard are known.

17TH-CENTURY HOARDS (illus 1–3)

12 Mill of Maidencraig, Lang Stracht, Aberdeen; 13/10/1858

‘On the 13th current, some labourers making excavations for a new mill dam at Den of Maidencraig, three miles from Aberdeen, on the Skene road, came upon a red earthenware vessel, containing a considerable number of old coins. Acting on the maxim that “the thing that’s found is free”, they broke the *pint pig*, and divided the contents. Some days after, however, the authorities got note of it, and the Fiscal for the county succeeded in recovering sixty-eight pieces, whereof the following is a list, made up from a hurried glance at them while they were in his possession:

- 21 Billon placks, coined about 1584
- 5 Hard heads of very course [*sic*] billon, about same date
- 1 Twopence piece, of pure copper, coined 1601
- 31 Bodles (copper), coined after the accession of James to the English throne
- The above are all Scotch
- 7 English silver coins of Elizabeth, groats, half-groats, and pennies – the date of one of these pennies, 1574
- 2 English sixpences, of James I, date 1605 and 1607
- 1 English half-groat same reign.

Three of the billon placks have the Mint name in full, “Oppidum Edinburgi”, and are of the highest degree of rarity. For the rest the discovery does not seem to be of great importance, numismatically or otherwise. Most of the coins are so defaced as to render it impossible to decipher the mint marks. . . . Could we conclude that all the coins have been recovered, we may infer that they constitute the hoard of a person in the lower ranks – that pure silver coin was very scarce among that class – and that silver coin, then current in Aberdeen, consisted mostly of pieces of the English coinage¹³.

Lindsay quotes a *Daily Scotsman* report of 1 November 1858 which in turn refers to the *Aberdeen Herald* and mentions ‘three billon placks dated 1584’. He comments that no coins bearing that date are known (Lindsay 1859, 54)¹⁴. However, the exact wording of the *Herald’s* report is ‘21 billon placks coined about 1584’, so that the coins in question would most probably have been the eightpenny placks or groats issued in 1583–90. Unfortunately, the *Herald* report-writer’s ‘hurried glance’ means that there are some inaccuracies in his list: there were no Scottish twopences coined in 1601, 1597 being the closest date; the writer loosely uses the term ‘bodle’ to refer to James VI’s post-union Scottish copper, but the coins would actually have been twopences; the Elizabethan silver coin bearing a date could not have been a penny as that denomination was undated, but if the date 1574 is correct, the coin may have been either a three halfpence or three farthings, both of which, though rare, were struck in that year.

13 Bankhead Farm, Parish of Newhills; August 1862

‘A few days ago a “pose” of ancient silver coins was discovered by Mr John Milne, Bankhead Farm, secreted underneath the paving of an old cowhouse. The coins are thirty-two in number, and chiefly of the reigns of Elizabeth and James VI, though they comprise also a Spanish dollar of 1634 and a few minor pieces, the superscriptions of which are illegible¹⁵.

14 Baads, Peterculter; c 1852

No details are known of the discovery of this hoard, but its contents were described as being ‘twenty-two foreign coins in silver, chiefly of the seventeenth century, of France, Austria, Saxony, Holland, Sweden, and three of Monaco; one French copper double tournois, 1639; one brass jetton of uncertain locality’ (Anon 1854, 73).

15 Brimmond Hill, Newhills; 9/8/1942

A hoard of 77 coins was found beneath a small boulder within 100 yards of the summit. It was made up as follows:

- 1 Silver Queen Mary groat (1553–4)
- 1 Silver Queen Mary bawbee (1542–58)
- 1 Silver Queen Elizabeth threepenny
- 3 James VI placks
- 2 Fragments of silver coins
- 4 Turners of James VI
- 14 Turners of Charles I (first issue)
- 46 Turners of Charles I (second issue)
- 2 Dutch doits
- 1 brass Nuremburg counter
- 2 unidentified.

As the latest dated coin was 1632, Cruickshank suggested a deposition date during the Covenanted Wars of 1639–46 (Cruickshank 1943, 191–2). His descriptions of the first two items in the list of the hoard's contents are rather confusing: the 'Queen Mary' of the first coin cannot have been Mary Queen of Scots since no silver groats were issued in her reign nor were any groats struck at all in 1553–4; the piece was almost certainly an English groat of Mary Tudor. The second coin would have been a bawbee of Mary of Scotland, but of billon rather than silver.

16 Provost Ross's House, 44 Shiprow, Aberdeen; pre-1886

'A curious collection of old coins and buttons was found in one of the rooms, where a stone had to be removed to allow of some repairs being made. The majority of the coins were Scottish twopenny pieces of the reign of Charles I' (Burr & Munro 1886, 5).

HOARDS OF MORE RECENT DATE

A number of deposits of counterfeit coinage, together with dies and blanks, were found around the Aberdeen area in the first quarter of the 19th century. This rise in the amount of forgery being practised is also reflected in the almost weekly complaints in the newspapers about the passing of 'base coins'¹⁶.

THE VESSELS (illus 4–9)

Seven of the 10 medieval hoards were contained in vessels of pottery, wood or copper alloy; but only two of the post-medieval hoards (*nos 11 and 12*) were found in any sort of container, the first of these was in three canvas and leather bags, the second in a pot. Unfortunately, the majority of these vessels have not survived.

Pottery jugs or jars were found with hoards 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 12; of these, only the vessels from hoards 5 to 7 are now available for study. In most of the other cases, the descriptions of the pots are uninformative: the main exception to this is that of an accessory vessel found with hoard 3. It is described as 'having had no lid or opening of any kind, and was like as may be a middling-sized turnip'. This was almost certainly a 'pirlie pig' or money-box (Fleming 1912, 348–56); as the vessel was broken on discovery, the slit in the body through which the coins were inserted, would easily have been overlooked. Complete medieval examples are known from Melrose Abbey (Cruden 1953, no 32) and St Andrews Cathedral (Cruden 1956, no 54). The vessel from the 17th-century hoard 12 may also have been a pirlie pig, though the term *pint pig* may have been used loosely to describe a jug; examples of locally-made post-medieval money boxes have been found in recent excavations on the Gallowgate, Aberdeen (Evans, forthcoming).

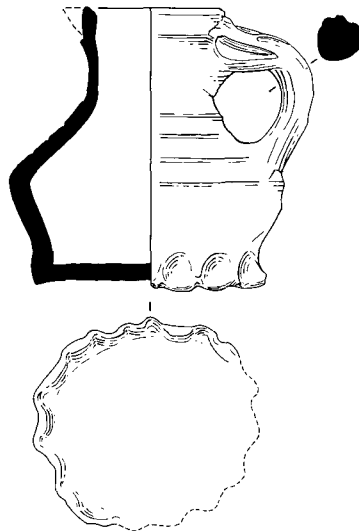
The three surviving pottery vessels are all locally-made jugs. The two pots from the recently found St Nicholas Centre hoards (5 and 6) will be published in due course with their contents, when it will be possible to provide a much closer date for them.

BRIDGE OF DON

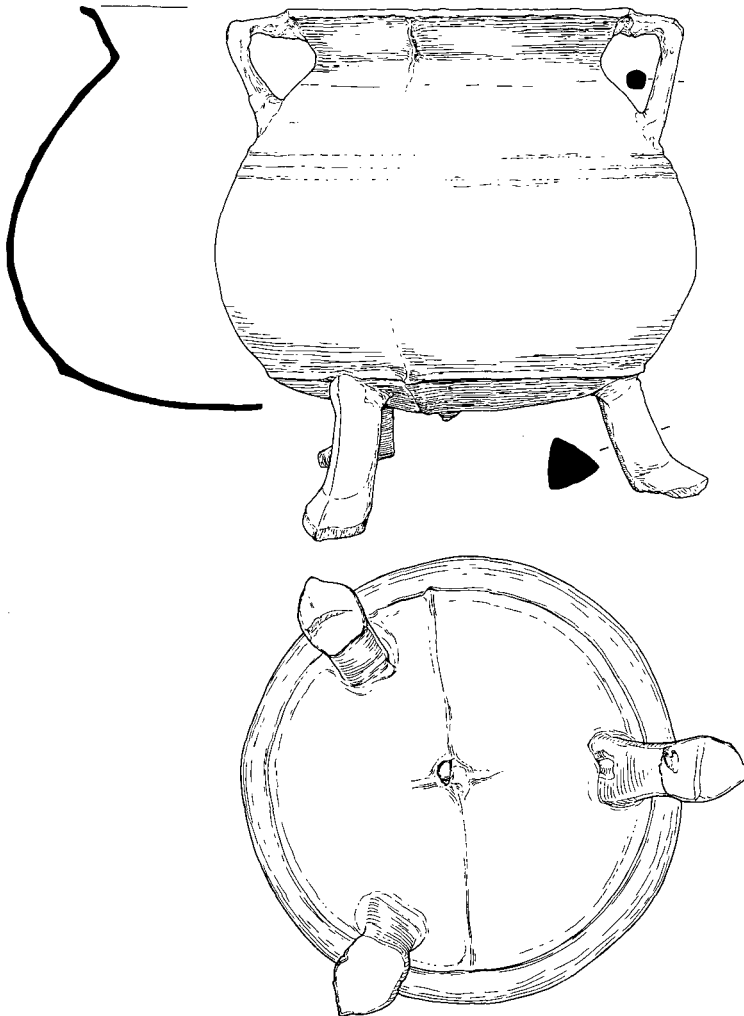
The remaining vessel is the small jug which held the Bridge of Don hoard (no 7: illus 4). Although illustrated and briefly described by Thompson (1956, pl Ia), this vessel has never been properly published and its significance has never been discussed. It is clearly a copy of a Northern European stoneware drinking-mug. Its affinities are closest to Beauvais stonewares, but these do not appear to have been reaching Scotland. The most likely form on which this imitation may have been based is that of the ubiquitous Raeren drinking-mugs, which are found in some numbers on Scottish sites, as they are elsewhere in Britain. If this is the case, the date of this hoard has important ramifications for the dating of these stonewares. This particular form is considered to be a type-fossil of the period 1485–1550, with the bulk of these vessels arriving on British sites in the first half of the 16th century (Hurst *et al* 1986, 194). Although stoneware production at Raeren is thought to have begun in c 1450, the early products of this industry are believed to have consisted of larger jug forms which are almost indistinguishable from those being made at Langerwehe, hence these are often referred to as Langerwehe/Raeren stonewares (*ibid*, 186). If the analogies of the Bridge of Don vessel with Raeren drinking-mugs are accepted, then its deposition date of c 1467 implies that fully developed Raeren drinking-mug forms were already being made as early as the mid-1460s and, more importantly, were arriving on the east coast of Scotland in sufficient numbers to warrant the form being imitated by a local potter.

Description (illus 4):

Wheel-thrown jug in a reddish-brown fabric with a grey core; reddish-buff surfaces; exterior dipped in a lead glaze, which has fired light and olive green. Applied thumbed foot-ring; flattened rod-shaped handle with three raised ridges; decorated with five lightly incised girth-grooves around the body.



ILLUS 4 Pottery jug from the Bridge of Don (hoard 7) (scale 1:3)



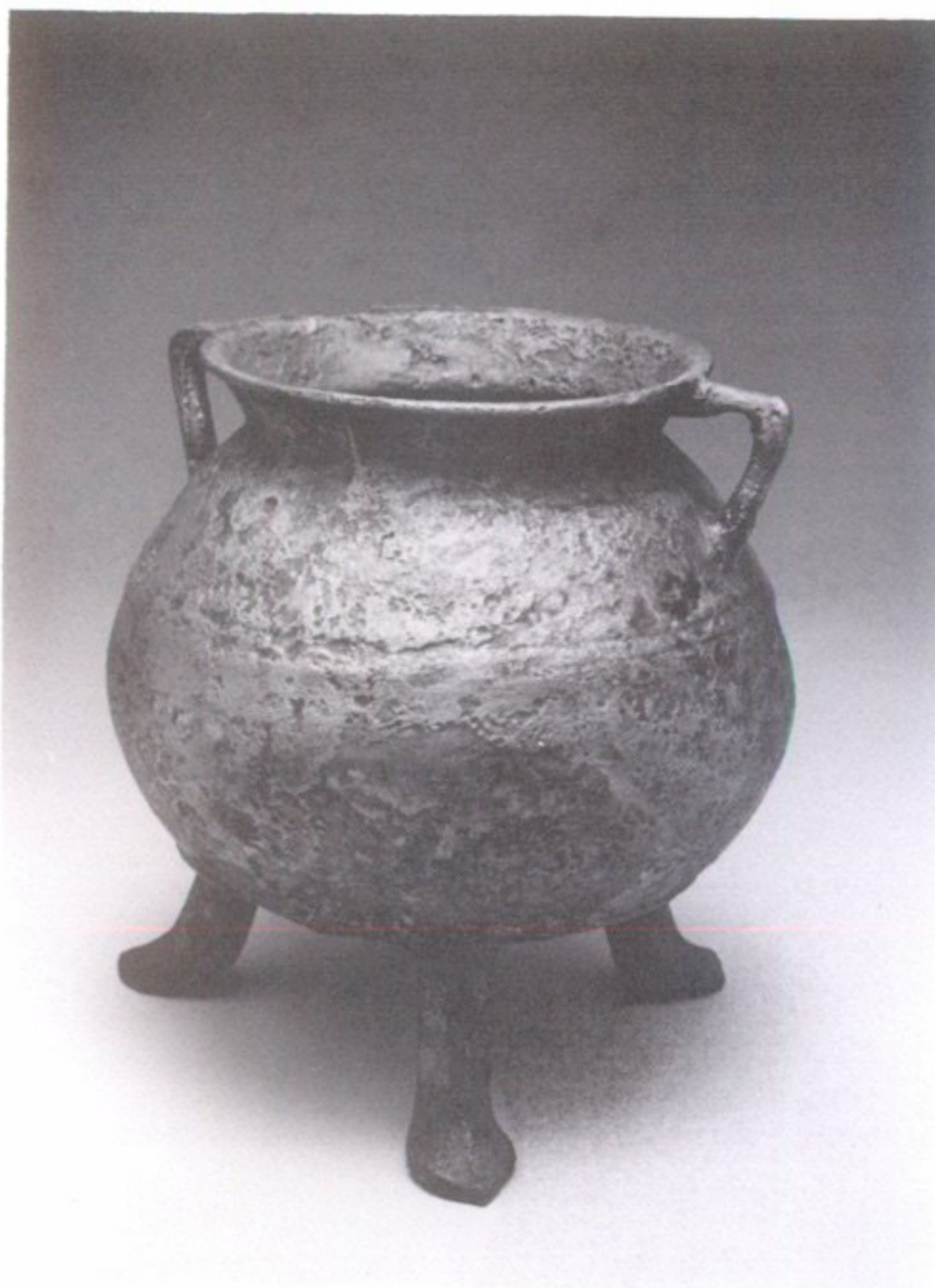
ILLUS 5 Copper alloy cauldron from Upperkirkgate (scale 1:4)

UPPER KIRKSGATE

The Upperkirkgate hoard (no 4) was found in a copper-alloy cauldron. Although photographs of it have appeared in a number of publications (Fraser 1906; Thompson 1956, pl Va), it has never been properly published.

Description (illus 5–9)

Globular copper-alloy cauldron with a capacity of about 7 litres. It stands 28 cm high, and has an aperture of 185 mm, and a maximum diameter of about 27 cm. It has a sharply everted rim, and a well-defined flange at its basal angle. The body of the vessel has been cast in a two-piece clay mould over a clay core; the vertical casting-seam lies at right-angles to the position of the vessel's handles, and the blob left by the casting-pipe can still be seen on its base (illus 7; cf Drescher 1968, pl 1, no 12 & pl 6). These casting-seams have been partially disguised as shallow vertical 'beads' or ribs; two lie on top of the seams, whilst another two have been placed at right angles, in line with the handles. The upper part of the vessel is also decorated with three shallow girth-grooves. The two triangular



ILLUS 6 The Upperkirkgate cauldron



ILLUS 7 The cauldron base, showing the casting blob and seams

handles (or 'ears') and the three cauldron feet were almost certainly cast in one piece with the body, by inserting false cores into the mould; all of the feet have pronounced casting-seams on their undersides (illus 8), and mould marks on the inner surfaces of the legs.

The vessel displays a number of peculiar characteristics which suggest that the mould from which it was cast was badly worn, and had been repaired: the groove which runs around the base just above the points where the legs are attached is most singular, yet its curvature is broken by the legs. Similarly, the girth grooves higher up the vessel, and the thinness of the top bar of the handle (illus 9), all suggest that the mould was very worn, and it seems reasonable to suggest that its base had been repaired after a breakage¹⁷.



ILLUS 8 The junction of one of the legs with the body, showing the mould faults



ILLUS 9 Lower junction of one of the handles, showing the wear on the mould

When found, the vessel was complete, except for 'a small hole on one side'; in the course of uncovering it, a 'workman's pick struck off one of the legs, which in separating, carried with it a portion of the adjoining metal'¹⁸. The cauldron has now been conserved and restored.

This vessel form is a utilitarian one which is found throughout north-west Europe, in pottery from the 12th century, and in metal from the 13th to the 15th centuries (London Museum 1940, fig 68; Haedeke 1970, 65–9 pls 48–52). Both the ceramic and metal variants formed part of the kitchen equipment of almost every household in North Germany and the Low Countries in this period, being used for boiling and stewing. The vessel could either be stood directly in an open fire, or be suspended above it by chains or pot-hooks inserted through the handles; both methods of use are shown in contemporary manuscript illustrations. In Britain the form was widely copied in metal, but is not often found in pottery before the later Middle Ages, and then only in certain parts of the country (cf Lewis 1978, 32)¹⁹. Closely dated examples in Scotland are scarce. An example with more drooping 'ears' was found with a 14th-century coin hoard from Langhope, Roxburghshire (Thompson 1956, no

229, pl 111c), whilst a more bag-shaped vessel found at Montraive, Fife, contained a hoard of c 1356 (*ibid*, no 272 pl IVa). Several fragments of clay moulds found recently in the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, show that copper-alloy cauldrons were being cast locally during the later 13th century (Spearman 1984, fiche 3: G12). A reportedly similar vessel to the Upperkirkgate cauldron was dredged out of Loch Kinord, Aberdeenshire, during the last century²⁰.

DISCUSSION

Aberdeen can now boast a total of no fewer than seven hoards which consist mainly or entirely of Edwardian sterlings: all were apparently of considerable size, and with but two exceptions, all were found close to the modern city centre (illus 2). The earliest to be discovered (nos 1 and 2) were both unearthed in the St Nicholas Street area within a few days of each other in November 1807. Contemporary newspaper accounts leave no room for doubt about the discovery dates, so that the 1810 date which was quoted for one of the hoards by Lindsay and followed by Thompson (1956, no 1) is simply wrong²¹. Although both the number and dates of discovery of these St Nicholas Street hoards has been questioned by earlier writers (eg Wilson 1958), some doubt remained until as recently as 1975 when J C Williams argued correctly that the two hoards were found in 1807²². Williams, however, did concur with Thompson's opinion that the two 1807 discoveries were merely part of one large hoard, despite the fact that they were buried in very different types of container.

The problem of whether these hoards form part of a larger deposit has recently been aggravated by the discovery of two more hoards in the same area. Like the earlier hoards, these were concealed in close proximity to each other (see illus 2). Prior to these recent discoveries, it had been generally thought that a date of c 1330 could be assigned to the deposition of the St Nicholas Street hoards (Wilson 1958); thus it was argued that these, together with the Upperkirkgate hoard (no 4) were concealed under the threat of invasion by the English army under Sir Thomas Roscelyn in 1336. Plausible though this theory is, N J Mayhew's analysis of the recently discovered hoards has revealed that the 1984 cache included three 'florin issue' pennies of Edward III, a type minted only in 1344–5 (Mayhew, forthcoming), so that this hoard at least cannot fit these circumstances. While no 'florin issue' coins were present in the 1983 hoard, if this too was really part of the same deposit as the 1984 find, then both of these recent discoveries would have to be detached from the events of 1336. Furthermore, the little that is known about the composition of the 1807 hoards indicates that the first of these (and possibly the second also) included groats, a denomination of which very few were minted under Edward I, but which appeared in larger numbers under Edward III after 1351. As the early hoards are now lost the problem will never be fully resolved, but in our present state of knowledge it seems safest to isolate the 1984 hoard as being definitely later than the events of 1336, and the first 1807 hoard as probably later, while cautiously retaining 1336 as the date of deposition of the remaining Edwardian hoards from the city centre²³. These, of course, include the famous Upperkirkgate hoard, which, with well over 12 000 coins, is certainly one of the largest of its type ever discovered in Britain²⁴.

Apart from the centre of the city, there is another area of Aberdeen which has been productive in coin hoards. This is Footdee which in medieval times was a separate community situated near the mouth of the River Dee. Two hoards (nos 3 and 9), and possibly a third (no 8), were found here in the 19th century; the largest of these (no 3) was formed almost certainly of Edwardian sterlings²⁵. The other definite hoard from this area (no 9) was probably later in date of deposition, and certainly more mixed in composition. The *Aberdeen Chronicle* report suggests that it consisted mainly of Edwardian groats and pennies, but refers enigmatically to coins of a later period and to 'gold pieces'. Such a mixed collection suggests a hoard of savings, rather than one deposited in response to an emergency.

Whatever the exact nature of the Footdee hoards, and whether they were two or three in number, it comes as no real surprise that they were found in that locality. The first church of St Clement in Footdee was dedicated in 1498, and it is reasonable to assume that a settlement was in existence there some considerable time before that. In other words, it is not necessary to suppose that the hoards must have been deposited by burgesses of Aberdeen, rather than by inhabitants of Footdee itself.

Approximately two miles further north, just beyond the medieval burgh of Old Aberdeen, is Bridge of Don. Like Footdee, this was an area of early settlement at a natural river crossing. In 1937 an unusual hoard (no 7), composed entirely of English and Scottish groats, was unearthed there during the excavation of the foundations of a large housing scheme. The latest coin in this hoard was an Edward IV piece, of July 1465–July 1466; hence, it can be stated with confidence that the date of deposition was c 1467, and certainly not much later²⁶. A contemporary account of its discovery attributed its concealment to a resident of Old Aberdeen who ‘crossed the Don one dark night’; however, the jug which contained the hoard was overlain by ‘cobbled paving’ and there were ‘traces of a hearth nearby’ (Kerr 1939). This suggests the more likely explanation that the money belonged to someone living nearby who concealed it within his own property.

Since consistency in the composition of 14th-century hoards throughout Britain is familiar to numismatists (Metcalf 1977, 13), any which do not conform to the general pattern are of interest, even when the information about them is scanty. One such hoard from Binghill Farm, Murtle, near Peterculter (no 10) consisted of what were obviously silver pennies of David (almost certainly David II)²⁷. Such an all-Scottish find of silver, though rare, is by no means unique. One may compare, for example, a probably similar hoard from Westruther, Borders, as well as two other finds from Grampian, at Cockmuir Hill, Kennethmont and Coull Castle, Tarland; both the latter seem to have been composed entirely of coins of Alexander III (Metcalf 1977, 26 & 42; however, none of these hoards is well attested).

In the post-medieval period the most significant find is the (apparently) huge hoard of billon *lions* or *hardheads* of Mary Queen of Scots, dating from 1558–60, discovered at Shoe Lane in 1847 (no 11). The site is close to the present Marischal College buildings, and probably lay within the grounds of the former Franciscan Friary. In this case the reason for concealment seemed obvious enough to earlier writers: the likelihood of confiscation of ecclesiastical property by the Reformers caused the Franciscans to bury the money within their own boundaries ‘against the dawning of a happier day for their church’ as Fraser so prosaically puts it (1906, 330). The fact that the coins are all of low-value billon is unremarkable because, good silver coin being generally unavailable, hoards of similar composition have been found elsewhere in Scotland (Metcalf 1977, 16). Nevertheless, an alternative explanation may be considered, namely that this hoard represents the stock-in-trade of a local counterfeiter who concealed it to avoid the drastic penalties which were in force at the time. A number of factors favour this second explanation. First, one might reasonably expect that, had the hoard been deposited by the friars themselves, valuables other than money would have been concealed in it; however, the only items which are recorded as having been found are coins. Second, as has already been noted, the hoard appears to be so large that it seems to represent several years’ income even for a fairly wealthy house. Third, it is known that a large number of *hardheads* are spurious, and it seems doubtful that even in a period of silver shortage, the Franciscans would have hoarded their income in the form of a vast quantity of worthless counterfeit coins (Stewart 1967, 88). In the context it is also worth noting that in 1556 certain individuals were arrested in Aberdeen for importing counterfeit money from Flanders while in the following year two others were ‘justified to the death for inbringing of false *hardheids*’ to Dundee, Perth and other places (Cochran-Patrick 1876, cxlii)²⁸.

About half a century after the Reformation a much smaller, but more varied, collection was

buried at Mill of Maidencraig, immediately to the west of the city (no 12). Metcalf cites its deposition date as 'after 1584' (Metcalf 1977, 53 no 246), but the reports in the *Aberdeen Herald* and the *Aberdeen Journal* at the time of its discovery mention coins bearing the dates 1605 and 1607, the *Herald* report stating that the coins in question were English sixpences of James I. Despite certain inaccuracies in this report which have already been noted, one may nonetheless tentatively suggest a *terminus post quem* of 1607 for the deposition of this hoard. The composition of the find is also of particular interest in as much as the total lack of Scottish silver referred to in connection with the Shoe Lane hoard continued until the end of the 16th century. The *Herald* correspondent was probably not too far wrong in his assumption that such silver that did exist in Aberdeen was English, but his reference to 'the hoard of a person in the lower ranks' is unnecessarily disparaging: the shortage of silver would have affected everyone.

Four other hoards concealed in the 17th century (nos 13–16) need to be considered. Three of these, like the Maidencraig hoard, lie within the present Aberdeen City District boundary but outwith the built-up area of the city; two of them provide evidence that there was still a shortage of Scottish silver towards the middle of the 17th century.

At Bankhead Farm in the parish of Newhills, the 32 silver coins which were unearthed in 1862 were all English, apart from one which was of Philip IV of Spain. This continental piece is significant, for a comparison with contemporary hoards from elsewhere in Scotland shows that, increasingly throughout the century, continental silver was being used to compensate for a lack of the indigenous product (Stevenson & Porteous 1972, 136–46). A more striking illustration of the same thing is provided by the hoard from the farm at Baads, near Peterculter, which was entirely comprised of foreign coins, all but two of the 22 pieces being silver (*ibid*, 138–9).

The third hoard of this group is from Brimmond Hill, west of Bucksburn. Although the site is very close to Bankhead Farm, the find is very different in composition. In this case, the bulk of the hoard was formed of base-metal coin, in particular, Scottish turners of Charles I. Nevertheless, it conforms to the same general pattern: while none of the foreign coins present was of silver, there was apparently no Scottish silver either, the nearest approximation being the bawbee of Mary which, although listed as silver, would actually have been billon and which in any case would have been almost 80 years old at the time of the deposition of the hoard in the early 1640s.

The concealment of this little group may be compared very speculatively with that of the Edwardian hoards from the city centre. On this occasion the threat was posed by the forces of Montrose in September 1644, when once again, as in 1336, Aberdeen was sacked and looted. As with the Edwardian hoards, one must, of course, beware of associating their 17th-century counterparts with a particular historical event, but it is nonetheless interesting to note that all three hoards were deposited close to the line of Montrose's route which took him eastwards into Aberdeen from the neighbourhood of Crathes, and out again to Kintore to the north-west (Buchan 1928, chapter vii).

Sadly, the fourth 17th-century hoard (no 16, the only one of the period from the centre of Aberdeen), is unlikely to have any such romantic associations. This random collection of 'coins and buttons' contained the familiar turners of Charles I, which occurred also in the hoard from Brimmond Hill and which appear frequently as stray finds.

It is hoped that the above comments will help to dispel some long-standing misconceptions about the discovery dates and contents of some of the Aberdeen hoards, whilst at the same time offering some alternative suggestions about why they were concealed in the first place. It is also hoped that the comments on the hoard containers will have given more detailed information than has hitherto been generally available on an important, but rather neglected aspect of the study of these hoards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Dr Donal Bateson, Dr David Caldwell, Mr Nicholas Mayhew and Mr Charles Murray for reading and commenting on an early draft of this paper, and for their assistance in drawing attention to certain hoards and publications. Mr Peter Stott of the Museum of London kindly furnished information on his reappraisal of the Bridge of Don hoard, in advance of its publication. Mr Craig Barclay of the Royal Mint Museum provided information about some of the post-medieval hoards. Messrs John Lewis and Roger Brownsword provided very useful detailed comments about the Upperkirkgate cauldron. Lastly, the authors wish to thank the National Museums of Scotland and Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums for permission to publish the Bridge of Don jug and the Upperkirkgate cauldron, respectively. The photographs are by Richard White, illustrations 3 and 4 were drawn by Clare Yarrington and illustration 5 by Jan Dunbar.

NOTES

- 1 *Aberdeen Chronicle*, Saturday 14 November, 1807; a shorter notice had already appeared that week in the *Aberdeen Journal* of Wednesday 11 November. Fraser 1906, 330–1. Lindsay (1845, 266) gives the year as 1810, and the day as the 11 November. These are Thompson hoards 1 and 2 (1956). Wilson pointed out that these were the same hoard (1958, 169); Thompson gave Lindsay the benefit of the doubt, and felt that the two 1807 hoards were ‘only sections of the same deposit’, and that the equation of the 1807 and ‘1810’ hoards was ‘open to question’ (1959, 280).
- 2 *Aberdeen Chronicle*, Saturday 21 November 1807; obviously, the Elizabethan coin referred to was intrusive and its presence in the hoard entirely fortuitous.
- 3 *Aberdeen Journal*, Wednesday 18 November, 1807; for some inexplicable reason, Fraser, who was aware of both accounts, chose to follow this shorter and less informative report written immediately after the discovery, rather than the more measured and authoritative piece in the *Chronicle* (Fraser 1906, 331).
- 4 *Aberdeen Journal*, 7 August, 1867.
- 5 *Aberdeen Journal*, Tuesday 1 June, 1886; this is Thompson hoard 4 (1956), and pl Va. Fraser 1906, 332–5, and pl.
- 6 This is by far the most authoritative account and gives a bibliography of the early notices of this hoard which appeared in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, the *Numis Chron* and *Scottish Notes and Queries*.
- 7 *Press and Journal*, Monday 22 November, 1937; *ibid*, Tuesday 23; photo of jugs and coins, *ibid*, Wednesday 24.
- 8 *Aberdeen Chronicle*, Saturday 13 January, 1827.
- 9 *Ibid*; an almost verbatim report appeared in the *Aberdeen Journal* on Wednesday 17 January, 1827. Summary in Fraser (1906, 331). Thompson 1956, hoard 3.
- 10 Lindsay 1845, 267; this cites the correct location, but the wrong date – ‘May 16th’.
- 11 *Aberdeen Journal*, Wednesday 5 May, 1847.
- 12 Certain other hoards of this period from Kincardine and Deeside have been omitted from this account because they lie to the south of the Aberdeen District boundary – eg Hillside, Portlethen, where a hoard was found in 1837 (pers comm, Craig Barclay).
- 13 *Aberdeen Herald*, 30 October, 1858.
- 14 *Daily Scotsman*, 1 November, 1858; *Aberdeen Journal*, Wednesday 27 October, 1858.
- 15 *Aberdeen Herald*, 9 August, 1862; *Numis Chron*, 2 (1862), 231.
- 16 Eg *Aberdeen Chronicle*, 18 April, 1807; *ibid*, 12 September, 1812; *ibid*, 13 January, 1821; *ibid*, 21 August, 1824.
- 17 The authors would like to thank Mr John Lewis for his detailed comments on the photographs of the casting, and Mr Roger Brownsword for his opinion on whether or not the legs and handle had been cast separately.
- 18 *Aberdeen Journal*, Wednesday 2 June, 1886.
- 19 The pottery forms tend to be restricted to the east coast of England, eg East Anglia.
- 20 *Aberdeen Journal*, Wednesday 2 June, 1886.

- 21 He later accepted that there were two hoards found in 1807, but still believed that another was discovered in 1810 (Thompson 1959).
- 22 Williams, J C, letter to the *Numismatic Circular* (1975). Williams relied for his information on contemporary reports to *The Times*, which in turn were based on the accounts published in the Aberdeen newspapers.
- 23 In support of retaining 1336 as a relevant date, it may be noted that the only other part of Scotland which can boast a similar concentration of 13th- and 14th-century hoards to Aberdeen is Dumfries and the Nith valley. This area was also the scene of military activity in the 1330s: see Metcalf 1977, 3 & 7 (distribution map).
- 24 Raven competently dismisses the notion that the hoard was the pay-chest of an army: '12,267 pence comes to £51 2s 3d . . . we know the wage rates for Edwardian armies, ranging from 8s a day for an earl and 2s for knights, to 4d a day for a mounted soldier and 2d for an ordinary footman. Thus our hoard so far from being the pay-chest of 20,000 men, would have provided only a month's wages for 200–220 footmen' (Raven 1973). See also Mayhew 1975, 36.
- 25 The hoard is listed in Dolley (1968), which in turn refers to Lindsay (1868). In this case it is the *Aberdeen Journal* which provides the only detailed information.
- 26 The authors are grateful to Mr Peter Stott of the Department of Medieval Antiquities, Museum of London for giving his opinion on this matter.
- 27 A hoard of David I is unlikely in view of the paucity of coinage from his reign: see Stewart 1977.
- 28 So widespread had the problem of forgery become in the mid 16th century that even the direst penalties failed to deter. Other measures such as the authorized destruction of false money and reduction in the value of the smaller coins had to be introduced: see Cochran-Patrick 1876, cxlii.

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*This paper is published with the aid of
a grant from Aberdeen Art Gallery
and Museums*