

## THE MEOPHAM HOARD OF FOURTEENTH-CENTURY GOLD COINS

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On 11th February, 1973, while clearing tree-stumps from his garden at no. 4 Cheyne Walk, Meopham, Kent, N.G.R. TQ 64546569, Mr. J. Arlett unearthed three gold coins of Edward III (nos. 2\*, 5 and 12 in the list). The coins were together without trace of container and close to an old hedge-line. A careful search of the immediate area failed to reveal any further coins or evidence of any ancient structure. At an inquest held at Chatham on 23rd March, 1973, conducted by Mr. W. Jervaise Harris, Coroner for North Kent, the coins were declared treasure trove and taken to the British Museum for examination and record, after which they were returned to the finder.

During the latter part of 1975, Mr. Connolly heard several rumours of coins being found in the Whitehill area of Meopham, and bearing this and Mr. Arlett's discovery in mind, he started a systematic search of the west bank of Whitehill proceeding in a southerly direction. This proved to be extremely difficult as the bank was overgrown and very steep. The initial search was unproductive until, in early April 1976, further information indicated that coins had been found much lower down the hill. On 9th April, 1976, Mr. Connolly discovered a small hoard of seven gold coins 59 yds. north of the Meopham Green-Brimstone footpath, N.G.R. TQ 64606531, buried at a depth of 6 in. and 11 ft. from the edge of the Meopham-Harvel road. Subsequent examination of the site revealed two more coins, 2 ft. from the road at a depth of 1½ in. and in line with the first find. On 16th April, 1976, a single gold coin was recovered from the roadside bank 2 ft. below the second find. An exhaustive search of the area produced one further coin on 29th July, 1976. This coin was found at a depth of 11 in., 4 ft. from the road and 20 yds. south of the original discovery. A detailed search of the whole area, together with research into local records, revealed no evidence of either buildings or occupation. At an inquest held at Dartford on 1st June, 1976, again conducted by Mr. W. Jervaise Harris, the first ten coins were declared treasure trove and handed to the British Museum. The eleventh coin, found after the inquest took place, was reported to the Coroner who decided that as this coin was obviously part of the same hoard, another inquest was

unnecessary. Two of the coins (nos. 9\* and 14\* on the list) were retained for the National Collection by the British Museum which rewarded the finder with the market value. As the local museums were not in a position to raise the necessary funds to acquire the remainder, the rest of the coins were returned to the finder.

The fourteen gold coins from the hoard are listed in detail at the end of this paper and those marked by an asterisk are illustrated on Pl. I. A full photographic record of the find was made before the coins were dispersed and may be consulted in the British Museum.

Although the coins were discovered over a wide area, their date and condition makes it virtually certain that only one hoard is involved. Natural soil movement on a steep site over the centuries together with agricultural activity and, more recently, building operations, have dispersed the original deposit. As it stands at present, the hoard comprises eight nobles, three half-nobles and one quarter-noble of Edward III along with one noble and one quarter-noble of Richard II. The proportion of lower denominations to nobles, five to nine, is some indication that the complete cache was of fairly modest size since in large hoards the sub-multiples are generally much less strongly represented. The failure of the intensive search of the area to reveal any more coins also supports this view but, on the other hand, no trace of a container has ever been found and, if the group of seven coins is exempted, no obvious nucleus of the hoard has been discovered. It seems impossible to be sure, therefore, that the major part of the original deposit has, even now, been recovered. A few strays are almost certainly missing.

The earliest coin present is the Edward III quarter-noble of Pre-Treaty series B struck in 1351 very shortly after the inception of the regular series of gold coins in that same year.<sup>1</sup> The latest coin is the Richard II noble whose letter fount places its issue towards the end of the reign, *c.* 1395–9. The earlier coins are relatively more worn than the later ones and this suggests that the hoard was not built up from savings over a long period but had been withdrawn from currency immediately before deposition. The high individual value of medieval gold coins – 6/8 to the noble at a time when 4*d.* a day was a reasonable

<sup>1</sup> The regular series of Edward III's gold coinage began in 1351 and is subdivided into three main periods on the basis of the form of the king's title used on the obverse of the coins. During the Pre-Treaty Coinage, which covers the period of hostilities up to the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, Edward is described as King of England and France and Lord of Ireland. During the Treaty Coinage, which was struck from shortly after Brétigny until war broke out again in 1369, the French title is omitted and Edward is styled King of England, Lord of Ireland and (Duke of) Aquitaine. During the Post-Treaty period, which lasted from the resumption of hostilities in 1369 until the end of the reign in 1377, the French title is re-adopted and Edward's titles become King of England and France, Lord of Ireland and (Duke of) Aquitaine.

wage – ensured that they saw less active circulation than the contemporary silver and so the nobles of the Treaty period present exhibit little real sign of wear some thirty to forty years after they were issued. As is usual with lower denominations, the half-nobles are comparatively more worn than the nobles after the same length of time in circulation. Three of the coins, nobles nos. 2\* and 8 and quarter-noble no. 5, have been severely clipped and their weights of 101.4 gr., 108.2 gr. and 23.3 gr. respectively are well below the standard issue weights of their denominations, 120 gr. for the noble and 30 gr. for the quarter-noble. The other coins conform to the weight pattern normally found in hoards of the period and, although none of them achieve the official standard, all are within the usual currency limits.

Two of the coins merit individual notice. The Edward III half-noble no. 9\* belongs to the group of coins struck just after the ratification of the Treaty of Brétigny and known as the Transitional Treaty series. This coinage is characterized by very careless workmanship and by the frequency of spelling and other errors in the legends. The half-nobles are known as the ‘cursing half-nobles’ because of the unfortunate omission of the ‘NE’ from the quotation from Psalm vi, 1, used as the reverse legend which therefore reads, ‘O Lord rebuke me in Thine indignation’. ‘ARGUAS’ is also misspelt ‘ARGUTS’. The obverse die of this particular example has two ropes to the stern of the ship instead of the three more often found on this issue. The Richard II noble no. 14\* is a mule struck from a rusty obverse die with plain-cross initial mark at the start of the legend paired with a new reverse die of the following variety with cross-pattée initial mark. The British Museum collection already included a quarter-noble struck from this same obverse die when it was in unblemished condition paired with a reverse of the same variety with plain-cross initial mark. Another clear instance of the combination of a rusted obverse die with a fresh reverse die is the Edward III Calais noble no. 7.\* Such coins occur because the obverse die occupied the lower position during the minting process and so outlasted the upper–reverse–die, which received the hammer-blows directly. Since coinage was an intermittent operation except at periods of maximum demand, used but still-serviceable dies could be set aside to be re-employed after an interval. Unless such dies were carefully greased, the damp conditions prevailing in the Thames-side mint at the Tower of London and in the sea-port of Calais caused the iron to develop rust fairly quickly. When coining resumed, the rust was brushed off, leaving pits in the die which show up in relief on the finished coins.

Most of the coins in the hoard belong to the common issues produced during the period of high output in the 1350s and 1360s when

the profits of war and still thriving trade brought gold to the mints. Reduced output at the end of Edward III's reign and still further decline under Richard II and in the earlier part of the reign of Henry IV meant that the earlier issues of Edward III continued to dominate the gold in circulation. Thus eleven out of the fourteen coins in the hoard were struck at least thirty years before its probable date of deposition. The archaeological implication of this preponderance of much earlier coins among the silver as well as the gold in circulation is often given insufficient weight in assessing the evidence of isolated site finds. The *terminus post quem* for the deposition of the hoard is 1395 but since the coins of Henry IV struck before 1412 are very rare, their absence may be merely coincidental. It is possible, therefore, that the hoard could have been buried up to fifteen years after the date of issue of the latest coin it contains. The *terminus ante quem* is provided by the order to reduce the issue weight of the coinage which was proclaimed in December 1411. Thereafter, large quantities of gold coins were struck for Henry IV and the coins from earlier periods which were still in circulation are found to be systematically cut down to conform to the new weight standard of 108 grains to the noble. Since neither of these two features is present in the Meopham hoard the limiting dates for its deposition are 1395 and 1411.

There is unfortunately no evidence on which to base any discussion of the reason for the hoard's deposition and non-recovery. The presence of Calais coins in these proportions is normal in an English hoard of the period and the face-value of the hoard at £3 13s. 4d., although it did represent a substantial sum at the end of the fourteenth century, is not sufficiently large to require some nationally- or even locally-important event to explain its occurrence. One of the wealthier residents of the district or a merchant passing through could easily have had such a sum as part of his working capital and his reasons for burying it and for failing to come back and recover it may well have been entirely individual and personal.

## LIST OF COINS

(Coins marked by an asterisk are illustrated on Pl. I)

## EDWARD III

*Pre-Treaty Coinage, 1351-60*

## 1. Noble

London mint, series E, 1354-5.

Obv.: E/DWARD DEI GRA REX ANGL 7 FRANC DHY/B

Annulet stops; ropes: 3/1.

PLATE I



2



9



6



7



10



13



14



THE MEOPHAM HOARD OF FOURTEENTH-CENTURY GOLD COINS

Rev.: + IHC AUTEM TRANCIENS P MEDIUM ILLORUM  
IBAT Annulet stops; lis in first quarter; small E in centre of  
reverse.

Wt.: 7.69 gm. = 118.6 gr.

\*2. Noble

London mint, series E, 1354–5.

Obv.: E/DWARD DEI GRA REX ANGL 7 FRANC D (HY)B  
Annulet stops; ropes: 3/3.

Rev.: + IHC AUTEM TRANCIENS P MEDIUM ILLORUM  
IBAT Annulet stops; lis in third quarter; small E in centre of  
reverse.

Wt.: 6.57 gm. = 101.4 gr.

3. Noble

London mint, series G, 1356–60, sub-group g.

Obv.: E/DWARD DEI GRA REX ANGL 7 FRANC DHY/B  
Saltire stops; ropes: 3/2.

Rev.: + IHE AUTEM TRANCIENS P MEDIUM ILLORUM  
YBAT Saltire stops; double saltire before P; lis in first quarter;  
pellet on either side of top lis.

Wt.: 7.63 gm. = 117.7 gr.

4. Noble

London mint, series G, 1356–60, sub-group g.

Obv.: E/DWARD DEI GRA REX ANGL 7 FR (illegible)  
Saltire stops; ropes: 3/1.

Rev.: (illegible)M TRANCIENS P MEDIUM ILLORUM  
(illegible) Saltire stops; no extra lis; pellet at either side of top  
lis (this detail confirmed from die-duplicate in the British  
Museum, E4353).

Wt.: 7.59 gm. = 117.1 gr.

5. Quarter noble

London mint, series B, 1351.

Obv.: + EDWAR R ANGL 7 FRANC D HYBER Annulet  
stops; pellet below shield.

Rev.: + EXALTABITUR IN GLORIA A Annulet stops.

Wt.: 1.51 gm. = 23.3 gr.

*Treaty Coinage, 1360-69*

- \*6. Noble  
Calais mint, 1363-9, sub-group a.  
Obv.: ED/WARD DEI GRA REX ANGL DNS HYB Z AQ/T  
Double saltire stops; no flag at stern of ship; ropes: 3/2.  
Rev.: + IHC AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIU ILLORUM  
IBAT Double saltire stops; C in centre of reverse.  
Wt.: 7.64 gm. = 117.9 gr.
- \*7. Noble  
Calais mint, 1363-9, sub-group b.  
Obv.: ED/WARD DEI GRA REX ANGL DNS HYB Z  
AQ/T Double saltire stops; flag at stern of ship; ropes: 3/2.  
Rev.: + IHC AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIU ILLORUM  
IBAT Double saltire stops; C in centre of reverse.  
Wt.: 7.66 gm. = 118.2 gr.
8. Noble  
Calais mint, 1363-9, sub-group d.  
Obv.: ED/WARD DEI GRA ANGL DNS HYB Z AQ/T  
Double saltire stops; quatrefoil before E; flag at stern of ship;  
ropes: 3/2.  
Rev.: + IHC AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIU ILLORUM  
IBAT Double saltire stops; C in centre of reverse.  
Wt.: 7.01 gm. = 108.2 gr.
- \*9. Half noble  
London mint, Transitional series, 1360-3.  
Obv.: (illegible) DI GRA RE/X ANG Saltire stops; ropes: 2/3.  
Rev.: + DOMINE IN FURORE TUO ARGUTS ME Saltire  
stops; lis in first quarter; large E in centre of reverse.  
Wt.: 3.67 gm. = 56.6 gr.
- \*10. Half-noble  
London mint, 1363-9, sub-group a.  
Obv.: ED/WARD DEI G REX ANGL D HYB Z AQ/T Double  
saltire stops; saltire before E.  
Rev.: + DOMINE NE IN FURORE TUO ARGUAS ME  
Double saltire stops.  
Wt.: 3.83 gm. = 59.1 gr.

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11. Half-noble

London mint, 1363–9, sub-group a.

Obv.: ED/WARD DEI G REX ANGL D HYB Z AQ/T Double saltire stops; saltire before E.

Rev.: + DOMINE NE IN FURORE TUO ARGUAS ME Double saltire stops.

Wt.: 3.70 gm. = 57.1 gr.

*Post-Treaty Coinage, 1369–77*

12. Noble

Calais mint, 1369–77.

Obv.: EDW/ARD DI GRA REX ANGL 7 FRANC DNS HIB 7 AQUIT Saltire stops; flag at stern of ship.

Rev.: + IH'C AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIUM ILLORUM IBAT Double saltire stops; pellet at either side of top and bottom lis.

Wt.: 7.69 gm. = 118.6 gr.

RICHARD II

\*13. Noble

London mint, type III lettering, c1395–9 (dating of sub-groups of Richard II is uncertain).

Obv.: RIC/ARD DEI G REX ANGL Z F DNS HIB Double saltire stops; trefoil by shield; escallop on rudder.

Rev.: IHC AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIU ILLORUM IBAT Double saltire stops; no initial cross.

Wt.: 7.64 gm. + 117.9 gr.

\*14. Quarter-noble

London mint, type I lettering, mid 1380s (dating of sub-groups of Richard II is uncertain).

Obv.: + RICARD DI GRA REX ANG Double saltire stops; nothing above shield; ropes: 3/2; plain-cross initial mark.

Rev.: + EXALTABITUR IN GLORIA Double saltire stops; lis in centre of reverse.

Wt.: 1.89 gm. = 29.1 gr.

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