

## A Rare “Cut Half” Rescued from a Leicestershire Field: Henry III, Class 1a – Continental Imitation

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A metal detecting find of a “cut half” from Leicestershire has been identified as a rare continental imitation of a Henry III long cross class 1a penny, originating from the German town of Blomberg in Westphalia. It is not surprising that this continental imitation has been found in Leicestershire as the county had flourishing cloth and wool industries in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and would have been involved in trade with the continent; both the import of woad and the export of finished cloth as well as wool.

The coin in question at first sight appears to be a Henry III class 1a cut halfpenny. Henry III’s long cross class 1a pennies were only issued over a short period from November 1247 and possibly into early 1248, and exclusively from the London mint. They are characterised by having an obverse legend of HENRICVS REX and a reverse legend of ANG/LIE/TER/CI’. Mules exist with class 1b pennies, and these 1a/1b mules show the 1b reverse legend of LIE/TER/CI’/LON ...or ...LOH, or ..LVN. No moneyer’s name is given on either the 1a or 1a/1b pennies, but their production was under a single moneyer, Nicholas of St Albans.

Class 1a coins have been described in a previous BNS Research Blog post by myself<sup>1</sup>, where they were sub-divided into 1a<sup>1</sup> and 1a<sup>2</sup> on the basis of whether or not there is a caul over the king’s head, with the caul coins probably being earlier than the non-caul versions.

The Leicestershire cut half is shown below right.

The obverse shows the star and crescent initial mark characteristic of a class 1 penny, and the preceding “REX” indicates class 1a. There is evidence of a caul over the king’s head on the left-hand side, so it is of class 1a<sup>1</sup> style in my nomenclature.

However, when we look at the reverse, instead of the expected portion of text from a class 1a or class 1a/1b mule, one sees RIC/[ ]/[ ]/NBE – which is completely unknown from English class 1a pennies, and is perhaps more reminiscent of a class 3 or later coin.

Also on the reverse, one can see a small pellet at the centre of the three large pellets in the two quadrants present. This is a feature of many early Henry III long cross pennies but is not normally seen on class 3 or later pennies. Clearly this is an unusual coin, and one must begin to suspect that it is of continental imitation.

Both the earlier short cross pennies as well as the long cross pennies of Henry III were imitated on the continent owing to the reputation of the high quality of the English coins in comparison to many coins issued in 13<sup>th</sup> century N.W. Europe. Extensive trade with England, and within the Hanseatic League, gave rise to an incentive to imitate the English coinage. Continental imitations have been described



<sup>1</sup> Page, R. Apr-2018, *Henry III Long Cross Pennies Class 1a*, British Numismatic Society Research Blog

in Chautard<sup>2</sup> and notably in a 1995 paper by North<sup>3</sup>, as well as in a number of German publications. Information on the continental imitations found in the Brussels Hoard has more recently been published by Churchill and Thomas.<sup>4</sup>

To explore a continental origin further, I have below shown two genuine English examples with the subject coin shown sandwiched between for comparison.



The lettering style of the subject coin is like that of the two English examples. The letter E shows no pellets on the crossbar in contrast to the English coins, however English class 1a pennies are quite variable and often show no such pellets.



Looking at the detail of the caul over the crown-band one sees that on the two English coins the caul lines radiate out from the top of the central fleur, however on the subject coin the two lines shown on the LH side do not radiate out.

In other respects the coin is a good imitation of the two English examples.



If the coin was English it would be unusual in that cut halves of class 1a are usually of the type without a caul.

*Picture credits: top coin courtesy of Bob Thomas, and lower coin courtesy of DNW, coin auction Sept 2014, Lot# 2307.*

Churchill and Thomas's study of coins from the Brussels Hoard included 3,750 continental imitations, of which only 11 were mules of class 1a style. Nine of the reverses have a legend of RON/ROI/DEL/VND and the other two RON/ROL/DEL/VND. North's catalogue only includes two coins of class 1a style: one having a reverse naming the Blomberg mint (BLO/M /NB /RG), and the second coin, with legend RON/ROL/DEL/VND, similar to those recorded by Churchill and Thomas. Note that a corrected version of North's catalogue was necessitated by a printing error and it was re-published in 1996<sup>5</sup>.

Fortunately, a match has been found with one published coin. It being from the description of the 1969 Colchester Hoard<sup>6</sup> of over 14,000 coins and which contained 32 continental imitations, just one of which appears to match the cut half described here. The Colchester hoard match is #5 in the continental imitations list, and is a full penny with the reverse legend reading BLO/ME/NBE/RIC for

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<sup>2</sup> J. Chautard, *Imitations des Monnaies au Type Esterlin frappées en Europe pendant le XIIIe et le XIVe siècle*, Nancy 1871

<sup>3</sup> J.J. North, *Some Imitations and Forgeries of the English and Irish Long Cross Pence of Henry III*, BNJ 65 (1995), pp 83-119, 4pls.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Churchill & Bob Thomas, *The Brussels Hoard of 1908. The Long Cross Coinage of Henry III*, A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> J.J. North, *Some Imitations and Forgeries of the English And Irish Long Cross Pence of Henry III: Corrected Catalogue*, BNJ-66 (1996), pp 117-22.

<sup>6</sup> Archibald M.M. Cook B.J., *English Medieval Coin Hoards: I Cross and Crosslets, Short Cross and Long Cross Hoards*, British Museum occasional paper number 87, 2001.

the Blomberg mint. This is a similar inscription to the Blomberg coin described by North with the legend BLO/ME/NBE/RG (North #1).



*The coin from the Colchester Hoard, © Trustees of the British Museum, compared to the Leicestershire cut half.*

A comparison of the details on the Leicestershire cut half with those of the Colchester coin suggests that the obverse, at least, may be a die duplicate. Blomberg was one of the mints of Lippe and the coin was probably struck for Bernard III, Count of Lippe, 1229-1265.

A summary of the coins of this type known to the author is shown in the table below. All the pennies have an obverse with the star and crescent initial mark, followed by HENRICVS REX, and having the five-petalled rose of Lippe inserted before REX.

	Ref.	Reverse	Weight gm	Current whereabouts
Chautard, 1871 book.	#416. Pl. XXVII-7.	BLO/ME/ <u>N</u> DE/RIC	Unk.	Unknown
Hornchurch Hoard <sup>7</sup> , Essex, 1938	Forgery C.	BLO/MEN/BER/GEN	1.32 gm	British Museum
North, 1995 BNJ paper.	# 1	BLO/ME/NBE/RG	1.19 gm	Unknown
Colchester Hoard #2, 1969	# 5	BLO/ME/NBE/RIC	1.31 gm	British Museum
Leicestershire Cut Half	---	..... /NBE/RIC	0.57 gm	Author's collection.

<sup>7</sup> Derek Allen, *Treasure Trove 1933-39*, BNJ, 1938, p.274-279

With Henry III class 1a being issued in late 1247 the earliest date for this coin is probably 1248. Part 1 of the 1969 Colchester hoard, before it was topped up with Bury St. Edmunds class 6 coins, has been dated to before the end of 1256. The Hornchurch hoard was deposited in 1260, or soon after, so does not help narrow down the range. The Brussels Hoard contains none of these particular Blomberg coins and was sealed about 1266/67, so again is of no help. We are left with a date range of 1248-56 for the minting of these imitative coins.

In conclusion, this metal detecting find from Leicestershire has been identified as a rare Westphalian imitation of a Henry III class 1a coin and which may have come to England in the purse of a continental buyer of wool or cloth.

