

# LETTERS OF JOHN LINDSAY OF CORK REGARDING THE SCOTTISH COINAGE

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John Lindsay of Cork (1789-1870) was one of the nineteenth century's most prolific numismatic correspondents. A number of letters addressed to him have been published<sup>1</sup>, and acknowledgements of the many learned individuals with whom he communicated are recorded in his books. I am unaware of published letters *from* him rather than *to* him, and trust that the four examples now presented will add to an appreciation of the contribution of nineteenth century numismatists to Scottish numismatics.

The letters are inserted in two copies of Lindsay's *A View of the Coinage of Scotland*<sup>2</sup>, the first, a presentation copy to J. H. Burn<sup>3</sup>, and the second bearing the bookplate of J. Blackwood Greenshields<sup>4</sup>, these persons being the respective recipients of the letters. The first letter is addressed to Burn and the other three to Greenshields. The letters deal for the most part with Scottish numismatics, with some other topics included in letter 4.

Letter 1 is on plain paper, letters 2 and 4 on mourning stationery, and letter 3 on plain paper headed by a fine engraving of Queens College, Cork. All the letters are penned in easily deciphered cursive script, but lacking punctuation. I have added punctuation and italicised book titles for greater clarity. The contents of square brackets in letter 1. rectifies obvious omissions.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Shiel, 'Letters of numismatic interest addressed to John Lindsay of Cork', *BNJ* (1984) 54, 51-62, comprising twenty letters from the Rev. Joseph William Martin covering the period 1841 to 1849, and one letter from Aquilla Smith dated 1842. A letter from Thomas Benn of Belfast dated 1845 is included in C. S. Briggs and J. A. Graham-Campbell, 'A lost hoard of Viking-age silver from Magheralagan, County Down' *Ulster J. of Archeology* (1976) 39, 20.

<sup>2</sup> John Lindsay, *A View of the Coinage of Scotland*, Cork, 1845. A first *Supplement* was published in 1859, and a second in 1868.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Henry Burn (1793-1869) was a London bookseller and numismatist. His grangerised copy of Lindsay's book is the source of another publication:

<https://britnumsoc.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/0019-d-rampling-a-draft-of-warrant.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> John Blackwood Greenshields (1819-1895) Advocate of Kerse, Lesmahagow, authored *Annals of the Parish of Lesmahagow* (1864), a book replete with numismatic references. In the Preface to his Second Supplement, Lindsay thanks Greenshields for providing an impression of a Glasgow groat of Robert III, which Lindsay illustrates. This coin, and a similar but not identical coin in the Cochran-Patrick sale (1936) lot 189D, are thought to be eighteenth century fabrications. See: Ian Stewart, 'Scottish Mints' in R. A. G. Carson (Ed.), *Mints, Dies and Currency* (1971) p. 186.

1.

Maryville Blackrock  
Cork Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> 1845

My Dear Sir

I had the pleasure of receiving your kind letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> & am greatly obliged for the interesting tract on Scottish coins you were so kind as to present me with, & for the notices of Scottish coins. Some of the latter you will find given in my book; the others may be some time or other useful if I should at any time add a *Supplement* to my Scottish work. I feel very proud of the very favourable character you have given of us Irish Numismatists. My late work has indeed met with a very flattering reception & I have reason to be well pleased with the critique in the *Literary Gazette* & hope the reviewers will be as favourable to a work which embraces such a variety of difficult matter [&] must necessarily exhibit many errors, & of these I was able to rectify several in the progress of the work. The tinting [of] the coins after the colour of the metals is generally looked on as an improvement, but in this matter the engraver has not been sufficiently careful, some of the plates being tinted too high & a few, particularly the first gold plate, far too faintly, but the work is altogether the production of an Irish Provincial town & as such ought to meet with some indulgence.

I have, as you will perceive, received a great deal of information from my Scotch correspondents, & the *Inventare*<sup>5</sup> of the effects of James III is a most important document to numismatists & proves that one class of the Riders were struck by that prince.

I have looked at the coin bearing the uncertain letters **FRE** which is in my own cabinet & find the letters are most distinct. If the first letter could possibly be read **E**, I should almost be inclined to agree with you in opinion that the moneyer had forgot the letter **B**, but it is distinctly **F** & I think belongs to some uncertain mint. Your observation relative to the Advertisement is a just one, but on the principal that many readers are apt to look first, or at least at a very early period to the end of a Vol., it may perhaps as well be where it is. You are also right as to the proper name of the Atkinson being Acheson, but as these coins have been always called by the first name, I did not think of altering it. I will return your half sheet from the Scots Mag. which I am sorry you took out, for although it contains some matter interesting in itself, it does not properly fall into the subject of the Coinage.

I should be most happy to be acquainted with Mr Hobler<sup>6</sup> & to present him with a copy of my work which I will send over by the first opportunity, & this will probably soon occur as one of my sons, a student at the Temple, intends going over next week to eat his third term & I will send you by him a copy for Mr H. who is already well known to me as an eminent collector.

The Gold Piece of James VI with date 1576 to which you have directed my attention, must I think be the fine 20£ (Scotch) Piece noticed at p. 149 of my work & engraved in Pl. 15 No. 56. I remain my Dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

John Lindsay

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<sup>5</sup> Archaic rendition of 'Inventory'.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Hobler (1796–1869) was a respected solicitor and author. He was Secretary of the Numismatic Society of London (1838-40).

2.

Maryville Blackrock  
Cork April 8<sup>th</sup> 1862

Dear Sir

I had the pleasure of receiving your kind letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup>. I am much obliged for the impression of the Half-Noble.<sup>7</sup> The legend is curious but probably blundered. I purpose however making a note of it amongst my materials for the *Supplement* for which I have collected through the kindness of Mess<sup>rs</sup> Sim – Veitch – Gray & other collectors, a considerable number of drawings and notices.

I have received impressions of the silver penny of Mary<sup>8</sup> & have no reason to doubt its genuineness. It may possibly be a proof or pattern of the billon penny.

The suggestion you make as to the publishing plates of the Scottish coins from the accession of James VI to the throne of England is an important one & the subject was at one time a matter of doubt to me, but after deeply considering the matter I found that the cost of making drawings & engravings of these coins would be far greater in proportion than that of the earlier coins, whilst the necessity for publishing them was far less, for Ruding has given admirable plates of them & those of Snelling & Cardonnel are sufficiently good. It would of course have made the work more complete but I must either have charged a much higher price for the work or my loss would have been much greater. I have however engraved 6 coins of this class in my work & 5 more in my *Supplement*, & purpose in any future one giving any hitherto unpublished that may occur.<sup>9</sup>

I shall feel obliged for impressions or notices of any unpublished Scottish coins you may meet with & remain Dear Sir,  
faithfully yours,

John Lindsay

3.

Maryville Blackrock  
Cork April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1862

My Dear Sir

Your kind letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> duly reached me & I am much obliged for the various enclosures contained in it. The penny of Alex. III of which you have sent me an impression is similar to No. 22 of my *Supplement* which is in the Advocates Museum, but not engraved. There is no

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<sup>7</sup> A quarter-merk of James VI. Lindsay does not include the coin in his *Second Supplement*, presumably attributing its distinction to miss-striking and therefore unworthy of notice.

<sup>8</sup> Lindsay omits any mention of this coin in his *Second Supplement*, nor am I aware of it being noticed elsewhere. It seems unlikely that surface enrichment of a billon coin could have imparted a silvery appearance as “Mary pennies ... would not have contained enough silver to produce a white metal...”. (K. Eremin and J. Tate, ‘Analytic Investigation of Scottish billon coins of the period 1538-1594’ in N. M. McQ. Holmes, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* 58, p. 26-27)

<sup>9</sup> Lindsay may have been relieved of the financial burden of illustrating his book as he commissioned his daughter to draw many of the coins. Her original drawings for the *Second Supplement* are pasted into a copy of this 1868 publication bearing Lindsay’s hand written compliments to the Rev. J. H. Pollexfen.

doubt but the moneyers of the Middle Ages had often peculiar marks to distinguish their individual work, & it is very likely the great variety of stars and mullets were some of those distinctions. Your idea of their denoting the year of the King's reign is an ingenious one but I should think their being maker's marks far more likely.

I think I got the extract from Cleland<sup>10</sup> from Mr Sim<sup>11</sup> but I am glad of yours as I may have mislaid the former.

The errors you notice relative to the mullets of 5 & 6 points p. 206 & the new Double Crown & Britain Crown<sup>12</sup> are very glaring & I wonder how they escaped my notice when making out the list of errata but I will notice them in my next *Supplement*.

As to your observation relative to Feb. 1605 old style, I think you will find that the year at that time commenced with the 25<sup>th</sup> of March so that our March 24<sup>th</sup> 1606 would have been then in 1605. My observation did not relate to the change of the 11 days made in 1752.<sup>13</sup>

I enclose impressions of my penny of Alex. III struck at Lanark. The work is rude & the coin is in poor condition, but I have no doubt but the legend is **WIL...ON LA**.

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition of Ruding is nearly as useful as the 4<sup>th</sup> except to one who studies the stycas of which there are numerous additional plates. I remain my dear Sir,  
faithfully yours,

John Lindsay

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4.

Maryville Blackrock  
Cork June 3rd 1862

My dear Sir

Your kind letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> ult. & its enclosures duly reached me, & I would have sooner replied to it but for many matters of an urgent nature which required immediate attention.

Your penny of Alexander does not seem to present anything remarkable except the **I** at the end which may possibly be intended for **L**.

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<sup>10</sup> Lindsay is probably referring to James Cleland's *Annals of Glasgow* (1829) where it is stated "A Mint-House was erected in the Drygate-Street, in the time of John Stuart, Earl of Carrick, afterwards Robert III where coins were struck; on one side of the coin was represented the King's crest crowned, but without a sceptre, with the motto *Robertus Dei Gratia Rex Scotorum*, and on the other, on an inner circle, *Villa de Glasgow*, and on the outer circle, *Dominus Protector*." p. 4 (see footnote 4)

<sup>11</sup> George Sim was the dedicatee of Lindsay's *Second Supplement*.

<sup>12</sup> Penultimate line on p. 206 should read "one of five and three of six points". Lindsay mistakenly gives ET instead of an ampersand in the obverse legend of the Charles I Double crown and Britain crown. (p. 170) Neither error is noticed in the *Second Supplement*.

<sup>13</sup> 1752 began on 1 January. To align the calendar in use in England to that on the continent, the Gregorian calendar was adopted, and the calendar was advanced by 11 days: Wednesday 2 September 1752 was followed by Thursday 14 September 1752. The year 1752 was thus a short year (355 days) as well. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar\\_\(New\\_Style\)\\_Act\\_1750](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar_(New_Style)_Act_1750)

The rude type which is so common on coins found in the Channel Islands may be either British or Gallic, the great mass of the coins being in my opinion totally incapable of any satisfactory classification. Mess<sup>rs</sup>. Evans, Akerman & others have indeed made some progress towards it, principally by noting the localities in which hoards of the coins have been found, but the subject is still in its infancy. I had at one time thought of taking the matter in hands but found that I could not satisfy myself & had a still worse chance of satisfying others.

The coins of Eadgar without head are extremely common, particularly in Ireland, & Fastolf one of the commonest moneyers. Of all the numerous Saxon coins found in Ireland those of Eadgar are by far the most so, but very few Heptarchic coins have been found here.

Your observations relative to the old style requiring that I sh<sup>d</sup>. produce authority for my view of the matter, I consulted Sir Harris Nicholas' *Chronology of History* & found p. 34 that The Julian or old style was changed from Dec<sup>r</sup>. 31<sup>st</sup>. 1751 & from that year ordered to be reckoned from the 1<sup>st</sup>. of January instead of 25<sup>th</sup> of March, & at p. 40 – In Scotland the change was ordered to be made in 1599 but the old style continued to be used until altered in 1752 by Statute of George II. Even your own quotation from *Bells Scottish Law Dictionary* I think bears me out for it says that from Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>. 1751 the 1<sup>st</sup>. Jan. & not 25<sup>th</sup>. March shall be reckoned the 1<sup>st</sup>. day of the year.

I agree with you that no very important additions to the Scottish coinage can be expected, but when we consider the great interest now taken in Scottish coins & that every month produces some new discovery, we may well hope for materials for 2 or 3 plates & notices of rare varieties to be added to the lists. I have indeed this very morning received impressions of a farthing of Robert I lately dug up near Doncaster.

I think your conjecture that **FRE** may be intended for Dumfries not improbable & will make a note of it; the word **ON** before it proves clearly that it must be a mint. I remain my D<sup>r</sup>. Sir, very faithfully yours,

John Lindsay

