

THE KILKENNY WEST, CO.WESTMEATH, HOARD OF COINS OF EADGAR

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In his *A View of the Coinage of the Heptarchy*, published in Cork in 1842, John Lindsay recorded the discovery of a hoard of coins of Eadgar (959-975) in the following terms¹ :

A few years since a large parcel of Anglo-Saxon coins, together with several silver ingots in the form of rings, each of the weight of three ounces, were found in the west of County Kilkenny ; about sixty of the coins, all of Edgar, and with one exception without heads, came into the possession of Colonel Stretton, C.B., Athlone.

The identity of this Col.Stretton is established by Lindsay's mention in the preface to his book of "Col.Sempronius Stretton, C.B.", to whom "this work is greatly indebted, and I have to thank him for numerous notices, and drawings of rare and unpublished Anglo-Saxon coins, particularly those of Anlaf and Eadgar".

No further attention was to be paid to this hoard by numismatists until the appearance in *NC* 1959 of a well-researched article by Michael Dolley and Joan Martin², in which the authors demonstrated that Col. Sempronius Stretton (1781-1842) was the elder of the two sons of William Stretton (1755-1828), a prosperous builder and architect domiciled at Lenton Priory, Nottinghamshire, and that the coins of Eadgar that Sempronius Stretton had acquired from this Irish coin hoard were to be identified among the Anglo-Saxon coins from 'the cabinet of the late William Stretton, Esq., Lenton Priory, Nottinghamshire', sold at auction by the Sotheby firm in March 1855.

What had happened is that although Sempronius Stretton had inherited Lenton Priory from his father in 1828, Lenton Priory and its contents had passed on Sempronius Stretton's death in 1842, without issue, into the possession of his younger brother Lieut.-Col. Severus William Lynam Stretton (1793-1884), and that it had been Severus Stretton, who had never moved into Lenton Priory³ and who was by the 1850s resident in Hampshire, who had consigned the family coin collection for sale at Sotheby's. The family coin collection was a large one numerically, the bulk of which had obviously been put together by William Stretton, and it is wholly understandable that additions to the collection made by Sempronius Stretton should not have been signalled as such by Sotheby's cataloguer.

Dolley and Martin concluded that the balance of evidence pointed to the Eadgar hoard having been discovered c.1823 when Sempronius Stretton had been second in

¹ J. Lindsay, *A View of the Coinage of the Heptarchy*, Cork, 1842, 125.

² R.H.M.Dolley & J.S.Martin, 'New light on a tenth-century find from the west of the County Kilkenny', *NC* 1959, 175-82.

³ G.C.Robertson, ed., *The Stretton Manuscripts ; being Notes on the History of Nottinghamshire, by William Stretton, (of Lenton Priory), died 1828*, Nottingham, 1910, x. Sempronius Stretton himself had only been living at Lenton Priory intermittently, and it is likely that Lenton Priory had been let to tenants before being sold by the Stretton family later in the century.

command of the 40th Regiment of Foot, then stationed at Athlone, although they accepted the possibility that the hoard might have been found as late as the mid 1830s.

As to where the hoard might have been found, Dolley and Martin were content to leave unexplored and unquestioned Lindsay's statement that the hoard was found "in the west of County Kilkenny", and it was left to John Sheehan, the leading present-day expert on Viking-age metalwork from Ireland, to present in 2005 a very plausible case that the hoard was not found in the western part of County Kilkenny but in the barony and civil parish of Kilkenny West, co. Westmeath⁴.

The most compelling evidence for this is that Kilkenny West is only some 7 kilometers (4 1/2 miles) north-east of Athlone, where Sempronius Stretton was stationed between 1822 and 1824, and the theory that the coin hoard was found at Kilkenny West, rather than at an undetermined site in the west of Co. Kilkenny, gets indirect but persuasive support from the fact that Sempronius Stretton's second wife, Anne Handcock, whom he married in 1830, was the youngest daughter of Richard Handcock, 2nd Baron Castlemaine (in the Irish peerage), who was both the biggest landowner in the Athlone area, and the owner of much of the land in this particular barony and civil parish.

Although Sempronius Stretton's marriage to Lord Castlemaine's daughter did not take place until 1830, Sempronius Stretton would almost certainly have made the acquaintance of the Handcock family while he was stationed at Athlone, already a widower, in the early 1820s, and whether he acquired the Eadgar coins then or at a subsequent date before or after his second marriage, it is obvious that any friendship or other association between himself and the Handcock family would have facilitated the acquisition process.

An error by Lindsay in interpreting the fact reported to him that the hoard was found at Kilkenny West as a statement that the hoard was found in 'the west of County Kilkenny' is readily understandable, given that it is unlikely, as Sheehan observes, that Lindsay, "a Cork City gentleman", "would have been familiar with the local geography of Co. Westmeath, a county that lay some 220 km [136 miles] to the north"⁵.

The present note has two primary purposes. The first is to draw the attention of the numismatic community to John Sheehan's reassignment of the Eadgar hoard's find spot from Co. Kilkenny to Co. Westmeath. The second is to provide an updated listing of the coins of Eadgar and of other tenth-century Anglo-Saxon rulers offered in the 1855 Stretton sale. This has not been done since the listing of the relevant coins by Dolley and Martin in their 1959 paper, and although the picture of the likely structure of the Eadgar hoard involved does not greatly differ from that then offered, some of the detail of their listing can be improved, and advances in our understanding of the coinages of the period enable more definite attributions of some of the coins to particular locations and regions.

⁴ J. Sheehan, 'Colonel Sempronius Stretton and the reprovenancing of a Viking-age hoard', in J. Sheehan & D. O'Corrain, eds., *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West: Papers from the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress, 18-27 Aug. 2005*, Dublin, 2010, 380-9

⁵ Sheehan, *op.cit.*, 383.

In interpreting the evidence of the Stretton auction catalogue for the content of the Eadgar hoard, the most obvious clue not followed through by Dolley and Martin was that two of the relevant lots offered in the sale, lots 415 and 416, accounting between them for sixteen coins of Eadgar, are recorded in named copies of the sale catalogue as having been knocked down to the well-known coin collector Jonathan Rashleigh (1820-1905)⁶. Dolley and Martin had themselves been able to suggest that two of the coins of Eadgar offered in the Stretton sale subsequently passed through the 1909 Rashleigh sale⁷, but it can be worked out that at least fourteen and perhaps all sixteen of the coins in these two lots reappeared in the 1909 Rashleigh sale, and this enables a greater degree of precision about the identity and fate of the coins concerned. The remaining lots in the sale that contained coins of Eadgar, lots 410, 412, 413, 414, 417, and 418, were all purchased by the London coin dealer George Eastwood, and potential association of the coins in these lots with coins that have passed through subsequent collections is significantly more difficult, although suggestions have been made in this regard in a small number of instances.

Here, then, is a revised listing of the relevant coins involved. Dolley and Martin gave a summary list of the coins considered by them to have derived from the Eadgar hoard in the text of their paper proper, and devoted an appendix to a list of coins offered in the Stretton sale struck for earlier tenth-century Anglo-Saxon and Viking issuers. I have followed their example by devoting separate lists to the coins of Eadgar and to the coins of earlier date. Although the Stretton auction catalogue does not in general specify the types of the coins, it does provide transcriptions of the reverse inscriptions of the majority of them, and from these the likely types of the coins can be worked out.

The type classification adopted is that set out by Blunt, Stewart, and Lyon in their *Coinage in Tenth-Century England*⁸. Where the minting place or regional location of the moneymen involved is not stated on the coins themselves, but can reasonably be deduced from the coins' type and stylistic character, the suggested minting place or regional location is given in brackets.

Further remarks at the end of this note will discuss in the light of these lists the Eadgar hoard's probable date of deposit, and the issue, raised long ago by Dolley and Martin⁹, as to whether the hoard, despite Lindsay's clear statement that it only contained coins of Eadgar, might also have contained coins of earlier rulers.

Coins assignable to Kilkenny West hoard

EADGAR (59 coins, plus fragments¹⁰)

⁶ Rashleigh also purchased lots 407 and 408 in the Stretton sale, each containing a coin of the Viking ruler Anlaf Sihtricsson by the York moneyer Rathulf, and lot 409, a St. Peter coin of *Sword and Hammer/Cross* type.

⁷ Dolley and Martin, *op.cit.*, 179.

⁸ C.E. Blunt, B.H.I.H. Stewart, and C.S.S. Lyon, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England from Edward the Elder to Edgar's Reform*, London, 1989.

⁹ Dolley and Martin, *op.cit.*, 180-1.

¹⁰ On Dolley and Martin's arithmetic, the number of coins of Eadgar offered in the Stretton sale was 57, plus fragments, but they seem not to have taken account of the fact that lot 416 must have contained two undescribed coins of this reign, taking the overall total of coins of Eadgar to 59, plus fragments.

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (20 coins)

(North East Midlands : 17 coins) Adelaver/Adelger (2 specimens, Stretton 414, first and third coins), Aden (Stretton 416, eighth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 280, first coin = Watters (1917) 62 or 63), Albutic (2 specimens, Stretton 413, fourth coin, and Stretton 418, third coin), Andreas (Stretton 417, seventh coin¹¹), Asfrithr (Stretton 413, ninth coin), Cnapa (Stretton 417, sixth coin), Copman (Stretton 413, eighth coin), ‘Dodun’ (sic, moneyer otherwise unrecorded, but coin presumably of this type and region) (Stretton 417, first coin), Farthein (Stretton 413, sixth coin), Haculf (Stretton 417, second coin), Hunred (Stretton 414, fourth coin), Ive (Stretton 416, first coin = Rashleigh (1909) 280, second coin = Watters (1917) 62), Manna (Stretton 414, second coin), Manner (Stretton 418, second coin¹²), Wiferth (Stretton 413, tenth coin)

(York : 3 coins) Aesculf (Stretton 413, first coin), Durand (Stretton 414, eighth coin), Heriger (Stretton 417, third coin)

Horizontal Rosette 1 type (2 coins)

(Central Midlands : 1 coin), Aethered (Stretton 414, sixth coin)

(Derby : 1 coin) Ingelri (Stretton 413, third coin)

Horizontal Rosette 2 type (7 coins)

(Chester : 7 coins) Aelfred (Stretton 414, seventh coin), Aelfsige (3 specimens, Stretton 414, fifth coin, Stretton 415, second coin = Rashleigh (1909) 277 = Day = Gardner = Grosvenor Museum, Chester (SCBI 64, 526), and Stretton 417, fourth coin), Frithuric (1 specimen, Stretton 413, second coin), Thurmod (2 specimens, Stretton 413, seventh coin, and Stretton 416, second coin = Rashleigh (1909) 279, third coin)

Horizontal Rosette 3 type (with abbreviated name of minting place) (7 coins)

Chester : 5 coins, Aethelm (Stretton 416, fifth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 272, second coin), Deorlaf (Stretton 416, sixth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 272, first coin), Durand (Stretton 415, fourth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 273, first coin = Carlyon-Britton (1916) 1035 = Gardner = Grosvenor Museum, Chester, SCBI 5, 82), Eadmund (Stretton 416, seventh coin = Rashleigh (1909) 271, second coin), Flodger (Stretton 415, third coin¹³ = Rashleigh (1909) 271, third coin, or 272, third coin)

This total is satisfyingly close to the 60 coin total given by Lindsay for Sempronius Stretton’s parcel from the hoard.

¹¹ This is perhaps the specimen of this reign and type now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (MEC 8, 1672, ex A.W.Young ex Carlyon-Britton (1916) 1023).

¹² This is perhaps the specimen of this reign and type now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (SCBI 9, 399, ex Glendining 6 April 1954, lot 144).

¹³ Lot 415 in the Stretton sale is recorded as having contained eight coins, but only six of these are described. What seems likely is that the two undescribed coins were by the same moneyers as those that were described. This would enable Stretton provenances to be assigned to both of the two coins of *Horizontal Rosette 3* type by the moneyer Flodger in the 1909 Rashleigh sale. The remaining undescribed coin in the lot, by a similar argument, is likely to have been a coin of the same type by the moneyer Deorlaf, in this instance spelled DEERLAF, which was Rashleigh (1909) 271, first coin.

Derby : 1 coin, Grim (Stretton 415, fifth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 273, first coin = Carlyon-Britton (1916) 1037¹⁴)

Tamworth : 1 coin, Monna (Stretton 415, sixth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 275, first coin)

Circumscription Cross type (4 coins)

Malmesbury : 1 coin, Wulfric (Stretton 416, fourth coin = Rashleigh (1909) 274 = Carlyon-Britton (1913) 453 = Drabble (1943) 854 = Elmore Jones (1971) 568 = Blunt = Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MEC 8, 1718)

Wilton : 1 coin, Eadstan (Stretton 416, third coin = Rashleigh (1909) 275, second coin = Lockett (1955) 625)

(York : 2 coins) Durand (Stretton 414, eighth coin), Fastolf (Stretton 415, first coin = Rashleigh (1909) 278, second or third coin)

Circumscription Rosette type (2 coins)

(Chester : 2 coins), Aelfsige (Stretton 413, fifth coin¹⁵), Frithuric (Stretton 417, fifth coin)

Bust Crowned type (1 coin)

(Northampton : 1 coin), Mantat (Stretton 412, first coin, “broken” = Carlyon-Britton (not in sales) = Wheeler (not in sale, but coin EH5 in the B.A.Seaby list of coins from Wheeler’s collection, February 1931) = Ryan (1952) 795 = Lyon (*SCBI* 68, 749)

Unidentified types (16 coins, plus fragments)

“6 others, one struck at Leicester” (Stretton 412, second coin – seventh coin, the coin identified as having been struck at Leicester most probably being a coin of *Circumscription Cross* type with a Chester mint signature) ; “others” (Stretton 414, ninth and tenth coins, no descriptions) ; (no description) (Stretton 415, seventh and eighth coins : lot said to contain eight coins, of which two are undescribed¹⁶) ; “others” (Stretton 418, fourth coin - ninth coin, no descriptions) ; “Eadgar, various fragments” (Stretton 410, final item)

¹⁴ This may be the specimen of this reign, type and moneyer now in the British Museum (*SCBI* 34, 1228, ex T.G.Barnett). Marion Archibald suggested in *SCBI* 34 that this coin might be ex Murchison (1866) 288, and a Murchison provenance is not incompatible with the coin having previously been in the Stretton sale.

¹⁵ The Stretton catalogue records this coin’s reverse inscription as AELFSIGE MONE. This enables its identification as the coin from Sempronius Stretton’s collection described by Richard Sainthill, *An Olla Podrida ; or, Scraps, Numismatic, Antiquarian, and Literary*, vol.i, London, 1844, 182, where its full inscriptions are given as (obverse) +EADGAR REX TO D (reverse) +AELFSIGE MONEX.

¹⁶ For these see n.6 above.

Other coins in Stretton sale struck for Anglo-Saxon and Viking issuers between 899 and 959

EADWEARD THE ELDER (3 coins)

*Unidentified types (3 coins)*¹⁷

“3, one reading retrograde” (Stretton 410, first – third coin)

AETHELSTAN (3 coins)

Circumscription Cross type (2 coins)

Winchester : 1 coin, Eadstan (Stretton 410, fifth coin)

York : 1 coin, Regnald (Stretton 411¹⁸, second coin)

Circumscription Rosette type (1 coin)

Chester : 1 coin, Paul (Stretton 410, fourth coin)

EADMUND (2 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (1 coin)

(London ? : 1 coin), Aelfwald (Stretton 411, third coin)

Unidentified type (1 coin)

“Eadmund, broken” (Stretton 410, fourth coin)

EADRED (8 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (3 coins)

(North-East Midlands : 3 coins), Hunred (2 specimens, Stretton 417, eleventh coin, and Stretton 418, thirteenth coin), Theodmaer (Stretton 417, twelfth coin)

Horizontal Rosette 1 type (4 coins)

(Derby : 4 coins) Boiga (Stretton 418, tenth coin), Dudeman (Stretton 417, twelfth coin), Grim (Stretton 418, twelfth coin), Wulfgar (Stretton 418, thirteenth coin)

Horizontal Rosette 2 type (1 coin)

(Chester : 1 coin), Sunu (Stretton 417, fourteenth coin¹⁹)

¹⁷ These coins are likely to have been of *Horizontal Two-Line* reverse design, but the evidence is insufficient to determine which precise type of this character they will have belonged to.

¹⁸ Lot 411, the only relevant lot in the Stretton sale not purchased by Rashleigh or Eastwood, was purchased by the London coin dealer William Webster.

EADWIG (3 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (1 coin)

(Midlands : 1 coin), Boiga (Stretton 411, fourth coin)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type, North-East 1 variety, large lettering

(North-East Midlands : 1 coin), Eaenolf (Stretton 410, seventh coin)

Horizontal Rosette 3 type (1 coin)

(Chester : 1 coin), Frithuric (Stretton 411, fifth coin)

ST.PETER COINAGE (1 coin)

Sword and Hammer/Cross type, pellets and crescents in angles of cross

York : 1 coin (Stretton 409)²⁰

ANLAF SIHTRICSSON (2 coins)

Circumscription Cross type (1 coin)

Rathulf (Stretton 407, second coin, “unfortunately broken” = Rashleigh (1909) 181, second coin = L.A.Lawrence = British Museum, *SCBI* 34, 1274)

Flower type (1 coin)

Rathulf (Stretton 408 = Rashleigh (1909) 175 = Bruun = Copenhagen, *SCBI* 4, 634)

Although the date assigned to the deposit of the Eadgar hoard by Dolley and Martin was “after 970”²¹, subsequently amended to c.975 in Dolley’s overall listing of hoards

¹⁹ This could well be the coin of this reign and type now in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow (*SCBI* 2, 657), ex Thomas Coats (died 1883 : collection formed c.1871 – c.1882).

²⁰ The cataloguer of the Stretton sale described this coin as being “as Lindsay, pl.ii, n.34”, a St.Peter coin of *Sword and Hammer/Cross* type, and named copies of the Stretton catalogue identify the purchaser of lot 409, presumably correctly, as Rashleigh. A comparable coin, differing from the coin illustrated by Lindsay in some minor details only, appears as lot 190 in the 1909 Rashleigh sale (and is now, via Bruun, at Copenhagen, *SCBI* 4, 586), and is the only coin of this particular type that features in that sale, but the coin in question is mentioned and illustrated in an article on the Anglo-Saxon and Viking coinages of Northumbria contributed by Jonathan Rashleigh to *NC* 1869 (J.Rashleigh, ‘Remarks on the coins of the Anglo-Saxon and Danish kings of Northumbria’, *NC* 1869, 54-105), and he states there, at p.99, that it was “found together, I believe, in Derbyshire” with another St.Peter coin of *Sword* type. This points to the conclusion that if Rashleigh purchased lot 409 at the Stretton sale he will have discarded it at some later date as a duplicate, and it is relevant in this context that in the next sentence on p. 99 he states that “one of this type of St.Peter’s money was also found with a coin of Anlaf II”, where the reference could well be to Stretton 409 and to the coin of Anlaf Sihtricsson that was the second coin in Stretton 407.

²¹ Dolley and Martin, op.cit., 181, n.3.

from the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods²², this dating was coloured by Dolley's view that the deposit in Ireland of a clutch of hoards ending with coins of Eadgar might potentially have been "occasioned by the successes of the native Irish which culminated in the Battle of Tara in 980"²³.

Mark Blackburn and I, in our updated version of Dolley's hoard listing²⁴, took the view that it was not particularly probable that hoards, such as the present one, that ended with coins of Eadgar struck before Eadgar's reform of the coinage in c.973, would have been deposited as late as c.975, even in Ireland where the effects of Eadgar's coinage reform would have been more indirect. The deposit date of c.970 which we assigned to this hoard and to other hoards of comparable content reflected our considered view that hoards, like the present one, that contained coins of Eadgar of *Horizontal Rosette 3* type, a type struck in some quantity by moneyers at Chester, Derby, and Tamworth that was absent from the well-known Chester (1950) hoard, deposited c.965, must have been deposited somewhat later than the mid 960s, but it seemed prudent to suggest a date of deposit for hoards of this nature just a little before the end date of Eadgar's pre-reform coinage, and that remains my view today.

A final matter for consideration is whether what we should now describe as the Kilkenny West hoard was wholly composed of coins of Eadgar, as stated by Lindsay. As Dolley and Martin recorded, other hoards deposited in Ireland during Eadgar's reign customarily contain a scatter of coins struck in the names of earlier Anglo-Saxon and Viking issuers, and the Kilkenny West hoard would be unusual if it were to have been a one-reign hoard. Their conclusion was that "the probability must be that some of the later coins" offered in the Stretton sale – they will have had particularly in mind those of Eadred and Eadwig – "also are from the Kilkenny hoard"²⁵.

That remains a definite possibility, and maybe evidence will emerge at some future date to determine the issue one way or the other. What however is apparent is that the Kilkenny West hoard was, on any view, overwhelmingly composed of coins of Eadgar struck in the 960s, and Dolley and Martin's recognition of this led them to posit a separate "nameless find", from which Sempronius Stretton might have obtained, among other coins, his two pennies of Anlaf Sihtricsson, struck in the later 940s or early 950s. Here again future evidence may be decisive.

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²² R.H.M. Dolley, *The Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum (SCBI 8)*, London, 1966, 47-54, hoard no.116 at p.51.

²³ Dolley and Martin, loc.cit.

²⁴ M.Blackburn and H.Pagan, 'A revised check list of coin hoards from the British Isles, c.500-1100', in M.Blackburn, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History, Essays in Memory of Michael Dolley*, Leicester, 1986, 291-313, hoard no.170 at p.297.

²⁵ Dolley and Martin, loc.cit.