

The coins

Veronica Smart and Mark A Hall

Medieval coin

Veronica Smart

The only medieval coin found during the excavation was recovered from Context 2489, a wattle fence in Midden 1.3. It is of silver, oxidised black, 19mm across at the greatest diameter. A large fragment is missing between 270° and 0° of the obverse and the edge generally is badly fragmented; the coin weighs 0.7018g or 10.8 grains. In spite of its poor condition the coin is clearly of the second issue of the second coinage of William the Lion (1165–1214). The inception of the second or ‘crescent and pellets’ coinage is generally dated by allowing ten years for the sparse but varied first coinage, to place it in the mid 1170s. This coinage began with a cross-potent sceptre-head on the obverse; the Perth coin has a cross-pommée sceptre and so belongs to the second emission which cannot be earlier than 1180 when a similar change in the design of the English coinage, which was usually imitated by the Scottish, took place. The whole ‘crescent and pellets’ coinage was brought to an end by the re-coinage recorded in the Chronicle of Melrose for 1195.

The moneyer whose name appears on the reverse is Raul Derlig but unfortunately the condition of the coin makes it impossible to tell whether it is mint-signed or not, and hence to date the coin more closely by the availability of certain mints to the Scottish crown. Although one can say with some certainty that the coin was issued between 1180 and 1195 it is difficult to say how long coins of this type remained in circulation, since hoards containing coins of William the Lion are not numerous. Pennies normally of William the Lion (though it is not always possible to tell of which type, and a posthumous coinage in William’s name continued to appear for about twenty years after his death) occur in hoards from England and Ireland as well as Scotland deposited up to c1260. They do not as a general rule appear in the larger and much more prolific Wars of Independence hoards from Scotland where the Scottish content is predominantly Alexander III, Baliol and Bruce. The hoard evidence suggests that William’s coinage had largely been superseded by the great recoinages of Alexander III shortly after the middle of the 13th century though curiously one coin of William the Lion appears amongst the 9,441 coins in the Montrave find for which a probable deposit date of c1375–80 has been given (Bateson and Stott 1990, 163).

1 (305) Coin Ag

Weight 0.7018g (10.8 grains); diameter 19mm

Penny of William I (the Lion), second issue of second coinage (c1180–95). Moneyer Raul Derlig. See also this Fascicule, Hall and Spencer, Cat No 12.

A4886; C2489–3; M1.3/M1.4a, WW2489; Phase III–IIIc; Rig VI
Illus 124

Post-medieval and modern coins

Mark A Hall

In addition to the medieval coin, three further coins, of post-medieval and modern date, were recovered but not reported on in the original archive report. For reference, a summary of all medieval coin finds, whether from hoards, stray finds, or archaeological excavations within the burgh of Perth, and from Elcho Nunnery, is shown in Appendix 2.

2 (1744) Coin Cu

A Scottish copper billon penny or two pence

Diameter 16.7mm; weight 0.55g

Heavily worn, corroded and clipped but its faint imagery suggests a penny or two pence (bodle) of James VI (1614 or 1623 issue).

A04–0033; X230M; C7000–7–10; U/S; Rigs VI–VIII

Not illustrated

3 (1688) Coin Cu

A Scottish copper two pence

Diameter 23.9mm, weight 6.42g

Very worn but sufficient of the thistle on the reverse survives to suggest it is a bodle or two pence of Charles II. Nothing else survives on the coin. c1663–1682. The original site notes indicated it may have been a bawbee (sixpence Scots).

A0733; L0262; C2001–3/4; U/S; Rigs V and VI

Not illustrated

4 (1911) Coin Cu

A British copper farthing of George IV

Diameter 21.5mm, weight 4.65g

The obverse bears George’s laureate bust facing right and the reverse bears Britannia facing left. In good condition, almost unworn. Issued in 1823.

A0054; C0001–5&A; U/S; Rig VII

Not illustrated



Illus 124 Silver coin A4886.

Mr Duncan's treasure from the site of the Old Parliament House in Perth

Veronica Smart

From the point of view of actual site-finds, the High Street excavation might seem to have been somewhat of a disappointment to the numismatist. However, the history of the site reveals that a large hoard of sterlings was concealed there, the circumstances of its discovery being as interesting as attempts to reconstruct it are difficult. The suggestion of secrecy about its recovery and almost complete destruction of the greater part of it are sufficient to account for the differing versions of what it contained.

The first announcement of, and our earliest source for the find, which was discovered shortly before 11 June 1812, appeared promptly in the *Perth Courier* for that date, and almost word for word in the *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser* of 19 June the same year.

'The Old Parliament House of this place which was lately purchased by Mr Duncan druggist has just been taken down to make room for a new house, which the proprietor means to build upon the site. On Saturday sennight, the workmen who were employed in digging a vault for the intended structure discovered a large quantity of silver coin about eighteen inches below the surface of the street. These had probably been deposited in a box but no vestige of it except a single hinge could be discovered. The coins themselves were in a state of oxidation and many of them adhering together in a lump. The whole weighed 5lbs 14oz. They seemed to be chiefly English and Scottish pennies of the 13th century. Mr Duncan has been very liberal in distributing specimens of this collection among his friends and has presented a few of the best to the Literary and Antiquarian Society. Among the latter is a coin of John Baliol.'

A somewhat different account of the discovery of the find appears in the records of the pharmaceutical firm Duncan Flockhart (now part of the Glaxo complex) which was formed by a partnership with an Edinburgh company in 1832. In 1946 there was published a history of the firm, celebrating the centenary of the exploitation of chloroform, which had greatly contributed to the firm's success. It describes how John Duncan had prospered in Perth by the innovation of dispensing in jars and bottles, unlike the screws of paper hitherto the practice:

'By now Duncan had been able to put past sufficient money to move to larger premises. In 1812 he built a large tenement just west of Parliament Close, High Street, and shortly afterwards bought a nearby shop. Before he moved in, some old buildings adjoining had to be pulled down. During these demolitions the observant John noticed a hollow sound each time a workman's pickaxe struck at a wall. At the end of the day in an old coat and apron, he investigated, there to find a heap of very old and well oxidised silver coins. During the night he smelted the coins, casting the silver into ingots in the workmen's sand. Next day a few

of the coins were found lying about and the rumour spread that a find had been made. When the Perth authorities became suspicious, Duncan admitted that he had found some old coins, but only suitable for melting down into teaspoons. When interest in the discovery had died down in the town, Duncan removed his secret ingots to the bank, where they served a useful purpose in swelling his balance.'

In the foreword to the volume, it is acknowledged that this part of the early history of the firm was drawn from the diary of a Mr Alexander Mackenzie, a late employee. Information from the firm is that his account was written originally in the 1920s, John Duncan himself having survived until 1870. Mackenzie's manuscript story is more colourful and circumstantial – for example 'Throughout the night he melted the coins in his furnace, putting a small scoopful at a time into an old pot in the centre of an iron plate'. But the facts recorded there are essentially those which appear in the History.

If the Town Council took any hand in the affair it was never minuted. It was not until the latter half of the century that Treasure Trove regulations were applied with anything like rigour, and it was quite normal for antiquaries to exchange coins from recently discovered finds. Whatever the reason for the discrepancies between the newspaper reports and the above anecdote, the latter provides a credible explanation for the disappearance of the bulk of the hoard.

It does not, however, add anything to the *Courier's* account of the contents of the find. For this we must go to the first published catalogue of the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society's collection, to which, as the *Courier* related, Duncan had presented several of the coins. In 1827 the Society ambitiously embarked on publishing its Transactions, but in the event only one volume ever appeared. This was largely retrospective and contained a catalogue of the Society's Museum with 'the names of the donors in such instances as they could be ascertained.' The preamble again refers to 'a large mass' of coins 'found by Mr Duncan in the foundations of the Parliament House in Perth' – found by himself, as recorded in the company history, and not by workmen as in the newspapers. 'A collection of silver coins, some of which are noticed in the following catalogue were presented on 23rd June 1812 by Mr Duncan'. Only two coins in the ensuing catalogue actually have Mr Duncan's name against them. One is a silver penny ascribed to Alexander I (which is impossible since he issued no coins). This is given the number 559 in the 1827 catalogue, and a coin in Perth Museum and Art Gallery (the heir to the Antiquarian Society's collections) has that number white-inked upon it. Several coins in the collection have white-ink numbers which coincide with numbers in the 1827 Catalogue, but this is not invariable. Until recently the inked coin 559 was kept in an envelope marked 'Alexander III?'. But it appears, though the king's name is all but illegible and the types are similar to Alexander's, to be a penny of John Baliol's first (rough issue) type without

mint-signature but REX SCOTORUM reverse legend. The variety of the reverse type has two mullets of five points and two of six, which is sometimes attributed to St Andrews by reason of its similarity to that city's mint-signed output, but if that method of identification was not being used at that time, it could be from Berwick mint.

The other coin in the catalogue for which Duncan is credited has the number 573 and is a penny of John Baliol. No coin at present in the museum has this number associated with it. There is only one other Baliol coin in the collection and its envelope is marked 'ex Melrose', but there is no mention of a Baliol coin in the MS catalogue of the Melrose donation, so this could possibly be Duncan's coin. No further information on accessions of this date has survived.

An account of the find has been published in D M Metcalf's inventory of Scottish finds, published in the symposium *Coinage in Medieval Scotland* (1977). The sources for the find quoted there are the New Statistical Account (NSA) for Perth of 1845 and Thomas Hay Marshall's *History of Perth* published four years later. The NSA gives the date of the find as 1818, associating it directly with the demolition of part of the Parliament House but confusing it with another wing demolished at a later date. It gives the contents as 'chiefly Bruce, Baliol and Alexander, all pennies except for a few halfpennies of Bruce'. This is the first time Bruce is mentioned, and since it seems probable that no coins were issued by him before 1320, this element, if correct, would considerably advance the date of the deposition of the hoard.

Thomas Hay Marshall, a wealthy Perth industrialist and one-time Provost, was in close contact with Perth antiquarians and in 1824 he donated the building which housed the collections and is now the Perth Museum and Art Gallery. In his *History*, the oxidised mass occurs again, but he asserts that 'on being heated, almost to fusion, in charcoal, a great number were recovered, and the legend quite distinct. Several were of Alexander of Scotland and Edward of England, but the great majority were Flemish, bearing the names of different Counts of Flanders; many also had the names of bishops, such as Episcopus Guido on the one side, and Moneta Montes on the other'.

The statement that the majority of the coins were Flemish is curious since there is no mention of Flemish coins in any of the other accounts. One reason for this could be that at hasty first sight, many Flemish sterlings are indistinguishable from their English counterparts, differing only, if at all, in their legends. It is possible that in the years between the find and Marshall's *History*, Marshall had the opportunity to see some of the coins which Duncan had distributed among his friends, or may have discovered that some of the coins given to the Museum were in fact Flemish rather than English. That some further attention had been paid to the Society's coins about this time is suggested by the publication in 1850 of a new catalogue of the library and coin collection (*LASP* 1850). In the new catalogue

the reference to Alexander I has disappeared and only one Scottish coin is mentioned as donated from Duncan's find, the Baliol penny. Three further coins are now annotated as donated by Duncan, all English sterlings of Edward I, two from the London mint and one from Durham. There are too many London pennies of Edward I in the present collection for any to be identified as Duncan's, whilst the two Durham pennies there cannot have this provenance, one entering the collection much later and the other being identified by Mr Mayhew of the Ashmolean Museum as Edward III, c1381.

With all the differing accounts, it is impossible to be certain about the contents and date of the hoard. There is a class of Scottish coin-hoard which contains mainly, and sometimes exclusively, continental sterlings. These seem to date to c1300 and are associated by Metcalf with the period, when having been demonetised in England, they may have been available at a discount and so were carried to Scotland for use there. Such an interpretation would account for the newspaper accounts that the coins belonged to the 13th century. The only coin which we *know* came from the hoard which can be fairly closely dated, is the John Baliol, which could be expected in a coin dated c1300. The NSA is the only source to mention Robert Bruce, whose coinage is very rare, none being struck until about 1320. Metcalf picks up the point that Hay Marshall refers to *different* Counts of Flanders which would suggest a date after 1305, unless Marshall was using the term Flanders generically for the Low Countries, or to cover those legends he could not make out.

The NSA is the least satisfactory of the sources. It gives the date of the find wrongly, and its designation of the contents as *chiefly* Bruces, Baliols and Alexanders is unconvincing. If the deposition of the hoard has to be brought into the 1340+ era, it would certainly have contained overwhelmingly more English coins than Scottish – in fact Metcalf gives only 2%–3% of the whole as the Scottish contribution to finds of this period. We have no way of knowing which classes of Edwardian pennies were present, and Metcalf has shown that the character of these war hoards continued largely unchanged until the 1360s. Mayhew has suggested (1975, 35) that a large group of hoards of this kind from Perthshire may be connected with the activities of Edward Baliol in the 1330s.

One can only say, therefore, that the find belonged either to the 'largely Flemish' group of c1300, or the Wars of Independence type of ?1330. It is just possible, though unlikely, that two finds are being described. The figure of 5lbs 14oz was probably determined by Duncan himself on his druggist's scales (though in view of his activities, this could be an underestimate). If it is veracious, taking the Edwardian standard of 240 pence to the pound weight, the find would have been in excess of 1400 coins.

In 1821 a Mr Ogilvie presented to the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society a groat of James I, a penny of Edward II, a Danish silver coin and 'another foreign

coin' found on the site of the Old Parliament House. This was probably the man of that name whom Duncan had taken into partnership in 1818, leaving him in charge of the Perth branch when he moved to Edinburgh. A Mr Ogilvie appears amongst the members of the Board of Management of the Society in its 1827 Transactions volume. The Edward II penny and possibly the unspecified types could possibly be strays from the 1812 hoard, in which case it would favour the later date.

A denarius of Tiberius is also recorded in the 1827 catalogue as having been found on the site, but no donor's name is given.

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