

SWEDISH PLATEMONEY FROM ENGLAND

by David Sherlock

Copper coins in Sweden were first minted in the second quarter of the 17th century, in the reign of Gustavus Adolphus, 1611 – 1632 (Stiernstedt 1863–4). Unlike other copper small change which had appeared throughout western Europe in the late 16th and early 17th centuries which were small and thin tokens, these were large thick coins of low denomination but made of virtually pure copper, comparable with the later 'cartwheel' pennies of England and others elsewhere of around 1800. Sweden had abundant supplies of native copper and this was increasingly used for coinage¹ in the hundred years following Gustavus Adolphus as silver became scarce, which was mainly the result of the high cost of Sweden's wars against Russia. In 1644, in the reign of Christina, an entirely different sort of copper coin was produced. This was a large rectangular coin known as a *plåtmynt* ('platemoney'), reckoned not as a fraction of a silver coin but stamped with a silver daler equivalent and consequently weighing several pounds. At the crisis of the 'Great Northern War' token dalers and half-dalers in copper were also issued. The introduction of paper money in 1715 was a further symptom of the declining economic prosperity of the country.

Swedish platemoney ranks as one of the curiosities of numismatics. The largest example was also the first. It measured approximately 24ins × 14ins, weighed 44lb and was minted in 1644 as the equivalent of ten silver dalers (one daler was then worth very approximately five English shillings). High denominations of platemoney are rare now but two-daler pieces about 8ins square and weighing about 4lb are quite common in coin collections. Much less common are examples from known provenances in England. A recent hoard of thirty-four pieces from an 18th-century wreck in the Thames (Tingström 1978) prompts a survey of other early Swedish copper coins from England. The list of finds in the table is not claimed to be exhaustive and is mainly the result of research in eastern England.

The piece illustrated in Pl. IIIb is a typical example of Swedish platemoney. It measures $8\frac{3}{4}$ ins × $9\frac{3}{4}$ ins and is just under $\frac{1}{4}$ in thick. It weighs 4lb 3oz. The reverse side is rough, showing that it was cast in a wet sand mould roughly smoothed with strokes of the fingers whose impressions are still visible on the reverse side. In each corner there is an identical stamp, so placed presumably to prevent the metal being clipped. Looking something like coins themselves, the stamps bear in the centre the year 1711 beneath a crown around which is the legend CAROLUS XII D.G. SVE. GOT. WAN. REX, 'Charles XII [1697 – 1718] by the grace of God King of the Swedes, Goths and Vandals'. In the approximate centre is another stamp, *2 Daler Sölffmynt*, 'two dalers silver money'. Beneath these words are arrows in saltire, originally a royal badge.

This coin, now in the possession of Mr H. G. Rope of Orford, was found early this century with two others. One, thought to be a one-daler piece which belonged to Major J. Steuart Gratton of Orford, was sold in about 1977 to Messrs Spinks and cannot now be traced. The third is in the possession of Orford Town Trust and has a label which reads 'Weight 4lbs 3ozs. The largest coin on earth. Found on Orfordness Beach in 1913. This and two others privately owned were all found together and were probably from the wreck of a Swedish sailing ship'. Actually it weighs 2lb 13oz, the weight given being that of Mr Rope's coin. The corner stamps, two of which have been struck with such force that they have pressed the corners out of shape, bear the monogram of Charles XII and the year 1716. There are two stamps roughly in the centre, one square, reading '2 Daler', the other with a lion rampant in a shield. There are no other references or publications concerning the finding of these three pieces of platemoney which must have been lost some time between 1716 and 1913.

EARLY SWEDISH COPPER COINS WITH ENGLISH PROVENANCES

No.	Owner/Present Location	Provenance	Date Found	Date of Coin	Denomination	Weight	Notes
1-34	National Maritime Museum	Mouth of Thames, from a wreck	1975	1716-1742	2 daler Sölffmynt	3lb 4oz average	Published in <i>Mynt Kontakt</i> Feb. 1978.
35	H. G. Rope, Orford	Orfordness Beach, Suffolk, from a wreck	1913	1711	2 daler Sölffmynt	4lb 3oz	Label on No. 36 says 3 were found together. Presumably these three.
36	Orford Town Trust	Orfordness Beach, Suffolk, from a wreck	1913	1716	2 daler Sölffmynt	2lb 13oz	
37	Unknown, sold to Spinks, 1977	Orfordness Beach, Suffolk, from a wreck	1913	?	1 daler?	?	
38	Ipswich Museum	'From a wreck off Felixstowe'	ante 1923	1712	2 daler	3lb 12oz	'Washed up with others'
39	Ipswich Museum	Unknown	?	1711	2 daler	4lb 8oz	Could be collector's import.
40	Ipswich Museum	Unknown	?	1742	½ daler	?	
41	Unknown	Unknown	ante 1888	1727	2 daler	3lb 3¼oz	<i>Soc. Ant. Proc.</i> XII, 223
42	Unknown	Carminow Barton, Cornwall	ante 1866	1684	1 ore	?	<i>Arch. Jour.</i> XXIII, 236
43	Unknown	Bovey Tracey, Devon, from a burial	1815	1645	1 ore	?	<i>Gent. Mag.</i> 1860, 236 'Found with some others'
44	Museum of London	Trigg Lane Excavations	1975	1645	1 ore	1½oz	Ex. inf. S.E. Rigold

Another piece of platemoney now in Ipswich Museum is recorded as having come 'from a wreck off Felixstowe, washed up with others'. It was acquired by the museum in 1923 'from the collection of the late Mr Crisp of Playford Hall', and again there are no other references to this particular wreck. It is the same as Mr Rope's platemoney but dated 1712.

It is doubtful whether these cumbersome coins can ever have been used as currency in the normal way. They were not regarded as coins in a contemporary treatise on Swedish numismatics (Brenner 1691). But they were indeed true coins, of their own intrinsic value and in no way tokens. They were not struck to meet the need for small change like other copper coinage, but to remedy the scarcity of silver whose *sölffmynt* they represented. Excepting ingots of gold or silver (for example Roman silver stamped ingots of about a Roman pound, or Spanish American gold and silver ingots struck with coin types) there had been nothing quite like platemoney in Europe since Iron Age iron currency bars or Roman bronze *aes grave*. They may well have been struck at the copper mines rather than at a mint; and it has been suggested they were used to pay the miners who were doubtless forced to spend them where they worked at a rate of exchange dictated by the state-controlled mining areas. They cannot have travelled far in the hands (or pockets!) of ordinary people but they did nevertheless play an important part in Swedish economic history up to the beginning of the 19th century.

This extra-monetary importance stems from the time when copper platemoney acquired a metal value greater than its face value. Following a rise of 50 per cent in the price of copper in 1718 some pieces were countermarked with higher values. A recent study of 18th-century finds from Finland (then Swedish territory) (Crawford 1979) shows that platemoney was being hoarded in the second quarter of that century. In 1743 the export of platemoney was forbidden and in 1745 the export of platemoney to Finland was forbidden. At the same time we know that the Swedish National Bank was buying and stock-piling it. By 1766 its supply of copper coins was 'most of what remained in the country' and the bank began to sell its platemoney abroad to obtain silver in exchange. Between 1776 and 1800 nearly one and a half tons of them were exported, some privately with export licences which were issued by the bank.² After 1800 the official export of copper platemoney ceased.

The platemoney from the Thames wreck was found with pottery of *c.* 1780 – 1825. The ship cannot have been wrecked before 1749, the date of the latest coin, but some period between 1780 and 1800, the peak period of platemoney export, is the most likely date-range for the deposition. The main problem is the fact that the pottery is English, not Swedish. We know nothing about the ship's nationality, point of departure or destination.

The Orfordness platemoney find has a known date range of 1711 – 1716, but we know nothing about the wreck itself. A wreck contemporary with the coins is possible, especially since we know that the lighthouse at Orfordness in the decades around 1700 was working poorly and there were complaints about English shipwrecks there (Welch 1959). But for economic-historical reasons, the export dates 1776 – 1800 are again more likely. There is nothing at all known about the Felixstowe wreck, except that it must date between 1712 and 1923. There is only one other piece of platemoney recorded in England. This is a two-daler piece dated 1727 and stamped FRS for *Fredricus Rex Svecorum* (1720 – 1751). It was exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1888. Its provenance is not stated but it is perhaps more likely at that date to have been found in England than to have been imported as a coin collector's piece.

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Maritime Museum for information on the platemoney from the Thames wreck. For future research it is worth recording that Norwich Castle Museum, Great Yarmouth Maritime Museum, Colchester Castle Museum, the Museum of London and the British Museum have no platemoney from known English provenances.

Notes

- ¹ It was also exported to England and used for Charles II's halfpennies and farthings of 1672.
² But they do not seem to have been exported to Britain. The 400 tons of copper bullion used in Matthew Boulton's 'cartwheel' twopence and penny coinage of 1797 came from his mines in Anglesea and Cornwall.

References

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