

SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

TWO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FINDS OF TUDOR COIN HOARDS FROM SUFFOLK

by MURRAY ANDREWS

Summary

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries local newspapers frequently reported on archaeological discoveries, many of which have gone unnoticed by later generations of scholars and antiquaries. This note provides a descriptive account of two such 'forgotten finds' unearthed in eighteenth-century Suffolk: both are coin hoards of the Tudor period, and were previously unknown to modern scholarship.¹

THE CROWN, LOWESTOFT, 1791
120 OR 121 GOLD COINS, *TERMINUS POST QUEM* 1485 OR 1509

ON 1 MAY 1791 a hoard of gold coins was found at Lowestoft. An initial account of the discovery, published in the *Norfolk Chronicle*, reads as follows:

Last Monday morning, a boy passing a heap of rubbish, laid upon a piece of waste ground some way from this town, which was brought from a house belonging to Mr S. Capon on Saturday, found a bag containing 121 gold coins, equal in weight to 70 guineas; many of the reign of an Edward, and Henry, some French, others Portugal. They were contained in a very curious leather bag, are perfectly clean and fresh. The boy carried them home, and his mother, ignorant of their value, gave them to the younger children to play with; upon the husband's return home in the evening, he supposing they were valuable, delivered them to the care of A. Arnold, Esq. in whose hands they now are. It is impossible to form any idea of any circumstance leading to an explanation – the house was formerly a public-house, has within a few years been new fronted, and is now undergoing a thorough repair.²

A second account of the find, printed in the *Leeds Intelligencer*, reads as follows:

Monday morning as three boys were playing near a heap of rubbish, at Lowestoft, one of them observed something amongst it which appeared like a piece or an old pair of leather breeches; he took it up, and finding it heavy, examined and found it was a bag, containing three others rather curiously made, in which were 120 pieces of gold coin, some of it foreign; likewise some Rose Noble of Edward the Third – The rubbish had been taken from an old house repairing in the neighbourhood.³

The present whereabouts of these coins is unclear. According to the *Norfolk Chronicle*, at least a portion were acquired by one 'A. Arnold, Esq.', presumably the Lowestoft surgeon Aldous Arnold (1738–1803). However, Arnold's will, proved at London on 27 January 1804, makes no reference to coins of any kind, and it is consequently unclear whether he sold them to another collector, passed them on to his heirs, or even had them melted down for their bullion value.⁴ No specimens with corresponding provenances have yet been identified in public or private collections, and until such material is discovered the trail must necessarily go cold.

Despite the lack of surviving coins, a plausible reconstruction of the hoard can be developed on the basis of the newspaper reports. These indicate that the hoard consisted of 120 or 121 English, French, and Portuguese gold coins, with a combined weight equivalent to seventy eighteenth-century guineas (588g); the English component included coins issued for kings named Edward and Henry, one of which was identified in the *Leeds Intelligencer* as a ‘Rose Noble of Edward the Third’. This last identification is flawed, but nonetheless significant: the term ‘rose noble’ was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe the English ryal, a broad gold denomination introduced by Edward IV in 1465 and subsequently issued during the reigns of Henry VII (1485–1509), Henry VIII (1509–47), Mary I (1553–8) and Elizabeth I (1558–1603).⁵ Comparative evidence from better-recorded coin hoards demonstrates that the only period in which Edwardian ryals are likely to have intermingled with gold coins of a king named Henry is during the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, and indeed this is precisely the period in which French and Portuguese gold coins — principally the *écu*, *crusado*, and *português* — first acquired a formal role in the English currency system.⁶ The newspaper descriptions, then, are entirely suggestive of a hoard of gold coins assembled in the early Tudor period, a conclusion in keeping with metrological evidence: 120 or 121 coins weighing 588g equates to an average of 4.86g or 4.9g per coin, which is at least broadly consistent with a hoard dominated by late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century fine gold denominations like the ryal (7.78g), angel (5.18g), george noble (4.61g), and angelet (2.59g).⁷

The newspaper reports indicate that the coins were found within a leather bag, apparently resembling ‘an old pair of leather breeches’. This depositional configuration has numerous late medieval and early Tudor parallels: analogous finds include the hoard of sixty-one gold and silver coins of Henry VII from Queen’s Head Yard, London, which had been concealed within a leather or textile container, and the hoard of early sixteenth-century gold and silver coins from Eglwys Brewis, Vale of Glamorgan, which had been hidden inside a hide bag or purse.⁸ These latter finds were both found during the maintenance and repair of old buildings, which seems also to have been true at Lowestoft: according to the *Norfolk Chronicle*, the bag containing the coins was found amongst building rubble generated during the remodelling of an old public house. The owner of this public house, one ‘S. Capon’, can be identified as Scrivener Capon (1733–99), proprietor of the Crown Inn at 150 High Street during the 1790s (NGR TM 5511 9382).⁹ Rebranded as the Crown Hotel during the tourism boom of the 1840s, the Crown was one of Lowestoft’s most important inns during the post-medieval period, and survives today as a Grade II listed building within the medieval town core.¹⁰ The hoard is therefore likely to represent a significant sum of money stashed away by a former resident or proprietor of the Crown Inn, although the exact scenario that occasioned its deposition is no longer known.

ST LAWRENCE’S CHURCHYARD, IPSWICH, 1787
UNCERTAIN NUMBER OF COINS, TPQ 1547

In June 1787 a hoard of coins was found at Ipswich. The sole account of the discovery, published in the *Norfolk Chronicle*, reads as follows:

Several coins of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. were found last week, in good preservation, in St. Lawrence’s church yard at Ipswich, by some workmen who were making a vault.¹¹

Despite its brevity, this note provides significant evidence for an otherwise unrecorded Tudor hoard. There is no *prima facie* reason to doubt the attributions of the coins to Henry VIII and Edward VI: both kings employed regnal ordinals and naturalistic portraiture on their

coinages, and are consequently unlikely to have been misidentified by an eighteenth-century observer.¹² As such, the accession of Edward VI in 1547 can be taken as a reliable *terminus post quem* for the hoard as a whole. Beyond this, however, the numismatic composition of the hoard is uncertain: no surviving coins have been traced in public or private collections, and in lieu of further information any reconstruction is necessarily speculative. With these caveats in mind, comparative evidence from better-recorded Tudor hoards suggests that the Ipswich find probably consisted of debased silver issues of the ‘Great Debasement’ (1544–51), potentially including shillings, groats, pence, or multiples or fractions thereof.¹³ The use of the term ‘several’ is suggestive of a small to mid-sized deposit: possible parallels can be identified among other ‘Great Debasement’ hoards, including those found at Five Ashes, East Sussex (seven coins), Nynehead, Somerset (thirty-five coins), and the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire (thirty-seven coins).¹⁴

The observation that the hoard was found by workmen ‘making a vault’ in St Lawrence’s churchyard is of considerable archaeological interest. Rebuilt in the mid-fifteenth century, St Lawrence’s is one of Ipswich’s twelve medieval town churches, and had a more or less continuous history of parochial service extending into the 1970s.¹⁵ Pennington’s 1778 map of Ipswich shows the eighteenth-century churchyard to have covered c.700m² of land around the church building (NGR TM 1639 4458), bounded on the north by houses on Tavern Street, on the east by the Fruit Market (now St Lawrence Street), on the south by houses on Butter Market, and the west by houses on Cook Row (now Dial Lane).¹⁶ These churchyard boundaries are more or less coterminous with those shown on Speed’s map of c.1610, and may well preserve boundaries formalised by the later Middle Ages.¹⁷ It is highly likely, then, that the hoard was buried within the bounds of the mid-sixteenth-century churchyard, a phenomenon with several late medieval and Tudor parallels. Particularly close analogues include a hoard of ‘Great Debasement’ silver coins buried at the edge of the churchyard at St Martin’s, New Romney, Kent, and a hoard of Elizabethan silver coins buried with a gold ring in the churchyard at St Laurence’s, Combe Longa, Oxfordshire.¹⁸ Like the Lowestoft find, the circumstances that led to the burial of the Ipswich hoard are tantalisingly enigmatic: it could plausibly represent a ‘safekeeping’ hoard buried on hallowed ground, a deliberate or accidental deposit interred with a corpse, or even an ‘accidental loss’ of a purse swept up in grave soil.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Thompson 1956; Brown and Dolley 1971; Allen 2012; Andrews 2019.
- 2 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 7 May 1791, 2.
- 3 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 17 May 1791, 3.
- 4 The National Archives, PROB 11/1403/243 (Arnold).
- 5 Snelling 1763, 8; Woodhead 1996.
- 6 Evidenced by the Henstridge (Soms.), Asthall (Oxon.), and Park Street (Herts.) hoards, among others, see Andrews 2019. On continental gold in Tudor England, see Kelleher 2007, 215–8.
- 7 Stewartby 2009, 468.
- 8 Andrews 2019, 182–3; Boon 1986, 124; Andrews 2020, 220–2.
- 9 Chapman 1866, 14.
- 10 Butcher 2008, 151. The listing entry (NHL 1279942) describes the Crown Hotel as a seventeenth-century building with mid-nineteenth-century alterations, but the newspaper evidence potentially redates these structural phases to earlier periods: the hoard hints at earlier origins for the building as a whole, while the ‘thorough repairs’ that occasioned its discovery in 1791 may well explain the later remodelling.
- 11 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 16 June 1787, 2.
- 12 Stewartby 2009, 519–32.
- 13 Fourteen other hoards buried in the reign of Edward VI are known from England and Wales, all but two

- of which consist entirely of debased silver coins, see Symons 1990; Cook 2001; Cook 2007; Abdy *et al.* 2012, 243, no. 154; Abdy *et al.* 2017, 270, no. 103.
- 14 Symons 1990.
 - 15 Pevsner and Radcliffe 1974, 291–2.
 - 16 British Library, Maps K.Top.39.21.1.
 - 17 British Library, Maps C.7.e.5.
 - 18 Lewis 1840; Diack 2006. For other late medieval and Tudor parallels, see Andrews 2019, 192–5.

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