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Edward Hawkins ESQ., F.R.S., V.P. Soc. Ant

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NOTICES OF THE MINT AT SHREWSBURY.

By EDWARD HAWKINS. Esq., F.R.S., V.P. Soc. Ant.¹

WHEN a society of professed antiquaries pay a special visit to a town of so much celebrity as Shrewsbury, it may reasonably be expected that its members would endeavour to learn or to impart all that may be known respecting the history and antiquities of this ancient and interesting town. Among other objects which invite our attention is the mint which was established here at a very early period. For its elucidation so much has been already done by Ruding in his "Annals of the Coinage of Britain," and so much more by Messrs. Owen and Blakeway in their "History of Shrewsbury," which may be considered as an excellent model of a local history, that little remains to be said. Of the state of the Mint under the Heptarchy, and the earlier monarchs, there is very little information to be derived from records. Almost all we know is obtained from the coins themselves, and from them we learn that coins were struck at Shrewsbury by Ethelred, who commenced his reign A.D. 866, and we find upon his coins the names of four different moneyers. So that at this early period we may be assured that this mint was in extensive operation.

Of the fourteen monarchs who intervened between Ethelred and the conquest, we find coins of so many, that it may be reasonably concluded that the mint here continued in operation with little or no interruption during the reigns of them all, though upon the coins of some of them the name of Shrewsbury has not yet been discovered.

Although it appears, from records still existing, that in the time of the Confessor there were three moneyers established at Shrewsbury, yet in Domesday book no mention is made of a mint, and we might be led to suppose that no mint existed in this town when that document was com-

¹ Communicated at the Annual Meeting in Shrewsbury, August, 1855.

piled. It is nevertheless certain that the mint still continued to be worked here, as we find the name of the town upon coins both of the Conqueror and his son, and also of the three first Henries. After this time the name of Shrewsbury does not appear upon any of the coins of the realm, nor is there any evidence that a mint was afterwards established here again, before 1642.

In order to ascertain, or, rather to form a probable conjecture respecting the denomination or type of the pieces struck at this time, and in this town, it will be necessary to trace for a few years previous the history of the mints of King Charles I.

In the year 1637, Thomas Bushell, who was lessee of the royal mines in Cardiganshire, memorialised the king, stating that he incurred much inconvenience and expense in sending his silver, the produce of his mines, to London to be coined into money, and petitioned that he might be allowed to establish a mint in the Castle of Aberystwith, in the neighbourhood of the mines. In consequence of this petition the mint was established in that castle, and Thomas Bushell was appointed master of the said mint, and was authorised to strike half-crowns, shillings, half-shillings, groats, three-pences, half-groats, pennies, and halfpennies. It was ordered that all pieces coined at this mint should be stamped with the Prince of Wales's plume of feathers on both sides. This mint continued in operation till about the month of September 1642, when the whole establishment, the workmen and their tools, were removed to Shrewsbury, and in this town it remained till nearly the end of December that same year.

It appears from a letter from Sir Edward Nicholas, dated 21st December, 1642, that orders had *then* been received to remove the mint to Oxford, and on Tuesday, January 3, carts, to the number of twelve or more, arrived in that city laden with Prince Rupert's goods, and with the mint from Shrewsbury. In this town then of Shrewsbury the mint was in operation only about three months; from some part of September to about the end of December 1642. On the 19th September, the king made his memorable speech and declaration at Wellington, in which he said, "I will, to the utmost of my power, defend and maintain the true reformed *protestant religion* established in the Church of England. I desire to govern by all the known *laws of the land*, that the

liberty and property of the subject may be by them preserved with the same care as my own just rights. I promise to maintain the just rights, privileges and *freedom of parliament*." Upon coins dated 1642, and subsequent years, the reverse bears the inscription RELIG. PROT. LEG. ANG. LIBER. PARL., that is: The Protestant religion, the laws of England, the liberty of Parliament. Now Messrs. Owen and Blakeway remark that "Mr. Bushell (for the device seems to have been his own) thus not unhappily burlesquing the declaration of parliament, by stating the king to levy war against them in defence of their liberties, as they had taken up arms against him under pretence of defending his royal person." By comparing, however, the inscription upon the coins with the king's declaration at Wellington, it will be seen that the inscription is no burlesque of Bushell, but most seriously intended to convey to every place where the coin circulated, and to every person who possessed a piece of money, the three great principles upon which the king declared his firm determination to govern the kingdom. The king's declaration and the inscription on the coin are identical.

As this declaration was made on the 19th September, 1642, it may fairly be concluded that the coins asserting the same principles were struck very much about the same time, and consequently we may expect to find this inscription upon coins struck at Shrewsbury. It is quite certain that the mint was removed from this town about the last day of December this same year, and consequently no coins can have been struck here which bear any other date than 1642. Messrs. Owen and Blakeway observe, "All Charles's pieces with the Prince's feathers, the above reverse, and the date 1642, can have been struck no where but at Shrewsbury." While these gentlemen were penning this paragraph they unfortunately forgot that the year was not at that time calculated to terminate with the 31st December, but with the 25th March, and that consequently coins struck during the first three months of the year, which we call 1643, would bear the date 1642, exactly as those struck during what we call the last three months of the year 1642; and as the mint was established at Oxford, 3 January, 1642-3, the date upon the coins does not determine the claim of either place to coins dated 1642. We must look then for some other clue to guide us in appropriating to Shrewsbury its proper coins.

There is not any distinctive mint-mark, nor any letters which distinguish the Shrewsbury coins. Chester coins have the city arms, the wheatsheaf; Worcester coins have the pears; Exeter, Oxford, Bristol, York have the initials or names, but Shrewsbury nothing. Still there are peculiarities about some of the coins of this period which furnish grounds for reasonable conjecture. From Aberystwith the mint moved to Shrewsbury, and Aberystwith coins have their distinguishing mark, viz., the Prince's plume, as ordered by the indenture which established that mint, and the open book which was Bushell's private mark. Now there is in the British Museum a half-crown which bears the feathers upon the obverse, and the horse is somewhat of the Aberystwith form. The reverse of this coin has the declaration, inscription, and the date 1642; it cannot, therefore, be unreasonable to assign this coin to Shrewsbury. The same reasoning applies in a somewhat greater degree to a shilling in the same collection, the reverse of which has the date 1642, the declaration, inscription, and the feathers.

This argument, however plausible, is not absolutely irresistible, for the sixpences and groats have the Aberystwith obverse with the plume and book, with the declaration type, and with the dates 1643 and 1644, and also with the letters ox for Oxford; so that we have convincing proof that upon some coins the Aberystwith marks were continued not only immediately, but for some years, after the mint had been removed from that place.

We have, however, some further evidence to adduce respecting Shrewsbury coins which will, to a certain extent, confirm the appropriation of certain coins to Shrewsbury made by Messrs. Owen and Blakeway, but upon other grounds.

In the year 1664, Bushell, in a letter addressed to the Lord Treasurer Ashley, says, "I procured such quantities of plate from persons of quality at Shrewsbury, for the more magnificence of his Majesties present service in that expedition, as the sight of it stopt the present meeting of the souldery, when the adverse part had plotted a division for want of pay.

"And in order to their further content, I procured two daies before Edehill Battle, of his late Majesty at Wodverhampton, a gracious gift of his affection; to each colonel the

medal of a 20s. piece in silver, all other officers, ten or five, and every private souldier half-a-crown, with this motto on the reverse cross :

Exurgat Deus dissipentur inimici
Relig. protest : Leg.
Aug : Libert. Parliament.

which pleased every regiment so much, coming from his Majesty's bounty (of blessed memory), as if they had received their whole arrears from their paymaster-general."

The battle of Edgehill was fought in October, 1642, at which time the mint was at Shrewsbury, and had been there ever since the adoption of the declaration type which appears upon these coins. It is quite certain, therefore, that some of the pound, half-pound, crown, and half-crown pieces, with the declaration type and the date 1642, were struck at Shrewsbury. We are not allowed to go so far as to state that all such pieces of this date were struck there, as we have already seen that Oxford has equal claims to that date. And there are some remarkable peculiarities on some of these pieces which prove that they must have been struck in that city.

There is a pound piece dated 1643, which could not have been struck at Shrewsbury ; it was, however, struck from the same dies as a piece dated 1642, the figure 3 having been stamp't in the die over the 2, so that both figures are apparent upon the coin. This die may have been used at Shrewsbury, but it was clearly afterwards used at Oxford.

Some of the half-pound pieces dated 1643, are used with the same obverse as some of those with the date 1642.

Such is also the case with some of the crown pieces, where the same obverse occurs upon pieces with reverses of different dates.

Soon after the mint was established at Shrewsbury, a different artist from the one who had engraved the dies at Aberystwith was probably employed, for the style, character, and workmanship of the figure of the king on horseback is conspicuously unlike what had previously appeared upon any of the king's coins. This peculiar figure occurs upon coins dated 1642, 3, 4, 5, 6, and consequently increases our difficulty of identifying the coins with any particular place. The mint was removed from Shrewsbury to Oxford in 1642,

according to the calendar of those times, consequently both those places have equal claims to coins so dated. In 1643, part of the mint was removed to Bristol, and the Bristol coins have the same peculiar horse, consequently this city and Oxford have equal claims to coins dated 1643. In the latter part of this year these two cities stamp their initials on their coins, and Oxford employing a different artist, adopted a different character of horse.

All then that we have been able to ascertain is, that some of the pound, half-pound, crown, and half-crown pieces dated 1642, were struck at Shrewsbury, but which of them we have not any means of ascertaining.

I fear, then, that we have arrived at the conclusion of a chapter in which nothing is concluded.