A NEW COIN OF THE KENTISH REBEL EADBEARHT PRÆN

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A recent paper in the *British Numismatic Journal* has described at some length the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon silver penny from the end of the eighth century which is of no little significance for the student of Kentish affairs.[1] In a purely numismatic publication, however, it was not possible more than to hint at wider issues, and the purpose of the present note is to suggest to the non-numismatist why it is that the new piece has proved to be of such compelling interest for specialists in a field less and less ignored by the historian proper. Publication in this form, too, will provide a convenient opportunity for indicating where a new school of Anglo-Saxon numismatists would seek to modify, often in quite important respects, the picture of the first Kentish coinage that appears in the late Dr. G. C. Brooke's masterpiece, *English Coins*, still after more than a quarter of a century the fundamental textbook for all concerned with the discipline. One may also express the hope that enlarged direct photographs of the coin in question (Pl. I) will give the non-numismatist a vivid impression of the technical skills of the Canterbury school of die-engravers. One does not have to subscribe to the out-moded view that after Offa the art of making beautiful coins was lost, to recognize that Kent played a decisive role in the formation of a tradition of virtuosity maintained long after the business of die-cutting had been transferred to London. The diameter of the coin is only slightly more than that of the modern shilling, and the thickness considerably less, but the standards of design and of execution bear witness to the craftsmanship of the Canterbury engraver who forged steel punches only a few millimetres long, combined them into an exquisite pattern on the face of a soft iron die, and then succeeded in hardening the latter without distortion of the intricate design.

Of the Saxon silver penny it may truly be said that :

> Cantia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes
> Intulit agrestis . . .

and, as we shall see, the new coin provides new and conclusive evidence of the extent to which Offa relied on the moneyers of Canterbury when

[1] *B.N.J.*, XXVIII, ii (1956), pp. 243-8.

Coin of Eadbearht Præn.
(Enlarged 3×)

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it came to striking the first essay at a national English coinage. Recent research by Mr. C. E. Blunt has established that the earliest English versions of the *novus denarius* of the Carolingians were struck for the Kentish kings Heaberht and Ecgberht, and this important paper has since been vindicated by the emergence of two quite unpublished pence of the latter, one in a private collection and one in the Vatican Cabinet.[1] If a consequence of this is that the very rare early pence which Brooke attributed to Æthelberht II must now be given to Æthelberht of East Anglia, Kentish patriots can find ample consolation in Mr. Philip Grierson's 1957 Ford Lectures which stress the Kentish contribution to the ephemeral Anglo-Saxon gold coinage of the late seventh century. In particular one may draw attention to the prominence Mr. Grierson accords to the Kentish origins of Eorcenwald to whom are now attributed the London thrymsas which in the past have been given, albeit on quite insufficient grounds and against the numismatic evidence, to his predecessor Mellitus.[2]

There are known today precisely eleven coins of a King Eadbearht, four being in the National Collection, one apiece in the University Collections at Cambridge, Glasgow and Oxford, and four, including the coin which is the subject of this note, in as many private collections. One coin is a single find from near Sandwich, and another a single find from near Norwich. A third occurred in a major hoard of the late nineteenth century from the Middle Temple, and two more are from the Delgany find from Ireland, an important mid-nineteenth century hoard which there is reason to associate with the Viking attack on Kent in 835, while a sixth is believed to have been purchased in Copenhagen, though a Maidstone provenance has been claimed for it. The newly discovered coin was acquired in the neighbourhood of Letchworth and in all probability was found locally, and an eighth coin may be presumed to be from an East Anglian find. The provenances of the remaining three coins are discreetly veiled by the mists of the eighteenth century, but it is interesting to note that no coin of King Eadbearht was known to Speed, or Walker, or even to Fountaine.

The eleven coins are from ten pairs of dies, and bear the names of five moneyers, Babba, Ethelmod, Ethelnoth, Iaenberht and Tidheah. From this it may be inferred that Eadbearht's coinage was on a not insignificant scale, but the coins themselves are silent as to his kingdom and to the place of their minting. The fact that two occurred in the Delgany hoard, however, puts them before 835, and already a date much earlier than that was clearly indicated by their style and fabric. There are five distinct varieties of design, and each is exactly paralleled

[1] *B.N.J.*, XXVII, i (1952), pp. 52-4.

[2] Cf. C. H. V. Sutherland, *Anglo-Saxon Gold in relation to the Crondall Find*, Oxford, 1948, pp. 41-5 ; C. E. Blunt, *B.N.J.*, XXV, iii (1948), pp. 343-5, etc.

on late coins of Offa, while three of the five moneyers concerned also struck for the Mercian king. Prosopographically and typologically, therefore, the coins in question belong to the last five years or so of the eighth century, and from the time of Taylor Combe onwards they have been associated with a certain Eadbearht " þam was oþer noma nemned Præn," a one-time cleric who led a Kentish revolt after the death of Offa in 796 which was not finally put down until Coenwulf mounted a full-scale invasion of Kent in 798. The correctness of this attribution now seems established beyond all question, as examination of the new penny has shown that it bears the imprint of a reverse die which had actually been used to strike coins for Offa.

No less important is the new light thrown by this critical die-link on the coinage of Offa himself. In the first place there is not the least reason to suppose that the Kentish rebels were ever in possession of London. Yet the evidence of the die-link is that they had occupied Offa's major mint, and corroboration comes from the fact that three of Eadbearht's moneyers had struck for Offa while the types of the rebel coins are indistinguishable from those of the Mercian coinage which they succeeded. The presumption must be that Offa had relied on Canterbury for the bulk of his coinage, and this traditional picture fits in well with what we know of the pre-eminence of the Canterbury mint in later times. If a new generation of Anglo-Saxon numismatists cannot accept Brooke's intercalation of an Eadwald in the Kentish dynasty, and reverts to Haigh's century-old attribution of coins with his name to an East Anglian counterpart of Eadbearht otherwise unknown to history, at least it more than redresses the balance by giving to Canterbury a number of coins of Æthelwulf of Wessex hitherto associated with the very minor mint of Winchester.[1] Nor should we forget that Æthelwulf's possession of Kent enabled him to deny Æthelbald all rights of coinage,[2] while the decline of Mercia is well exemplified by the absence of coins in the name of Burgred struck prior to his marriage into the West Saxon royal house which from Ellandune onwards effectively controlled Canterbury.

A second consequence of the new die-link between coins of Offa and of Eadbearht Præn is that we can at last be absolutely confident which are Offa's last types. The picture that now begins to emerge suggests that Offa coined very heavily during the last few years of his reign, and certainly " over-production " of coin *c.* 795 would go far to explain apparent interruptions in the flow of pence during the next quarter of a century. Eadbearht was taken prisoner in 798, but the Canterbury mint did not strike on any considerable scale for Coenwulf

[1] Brooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 43, etc.
[2] *Ibid.*, cf. C. E. Blunt, *B.N.J.*, XXVIII, i (1955), pp. 20-1.

at least until *c.* 800. Even then the resumption was comparatively short-lived, and most numismatists would now agree that the coins of Archbishop Wulfred and of the upstart Baldred, which Brooke implies were struck over the whole period from 805 and 807 respectively, in fact are to be dated after rather than before *c.* 820. Probably, too, we are to move back a few years from *c.* 825 certain anonymous issues which Brooke was inclined to associate with the confused position that obtained after Ellandune. On this telling it would seem that we are to postulate a somewhat unlooked-for economic resurgence of Kent at a time when kingdom and archbishopric seemed at their lowest ebb, but much more work will have to be done before we can be quite certain of the light which the coins throw on the events of the momentous decade which saw the emergence of Wessex as the strongest single power in England. For the present, however, it may be said with confidence that typologically there is no reason to date any of Wulfred's extant coins earlier than his "reconciliation" with Coenwulf, and the fact that on all these coins the name of the Mercian king is conspicuous by its absence may suggest a date after rather than before Ellandune.

If Wulfred and the Mercian dynasty came to be at daggers drawn, the wheel had turned full circle since the short-lived usurpation of Eadbearht Præn. From more than one historical source we may infer that Æthelheard was Offa's nominee to the See of Canterbury, and there is reason to believe that the Archbishop had had to abandon his cathedral city and take refuge beyond the Thames when the Kentish rebels threw off the Mercian yoke.[1] What unfortunately does not emerge from Brooke is the extreme rarity of the coins of Æthelheard struck between the death of Offa and the elevation of Cuthred, Coenwulf's brother, to the throne of Kent *c.* 801—extant examples, if any, can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and stylistically they are closer to the coins of Cuthred than of Offa. The coins, then, seem to confirm the view that the Archbishop was driven from his See, and certainly if Æthelheard had remained in Canterbury it would be curious if Eadbearht had not sought ecclesiastical support—or at least the semblance of recognition—by a joint issue of the type that Offa had tolerated even in the case of that uncompromising Kentish patriot Archbishop Jænberht.

There can be little doubt, then, but that the revolt of 796 was "anticlerical" in the sense that the rebels expelled an Archbishop whom rightly or wrongly they considered a tool of the Mercians, and it is perhaps noteworthy that the Pope was prepared to excommunicate Eadbearht. The savage mutilation of the rebel king is no less sugges-

[1] A letter of Pope Leo III may imply that at one time even his life was in danger.

tive that the rising may have been considered something more than the gesture of a spirited people only recently brought into submission to a new "Bretwalda," but we must be careful not to exaggerate the consequences of failure. If we examine the coins we find that two of Eadbearht's moneyers who had struck for Offa strike also for Coenwulf after the repression of the revolt. Clearly not all who were associated with Eadbearht shared his downfall, and it would be interesting to know how they succeeded in compounding what technically at least was high treason in the eyes of the Mercian king. On the other hand these moneyers were not permitted, or so it would seem on the evidence of extant coins, to strike for Cuthred, puppet though he was, while Eadbearht's "new" moneyers, i.e. those who had not struck previously for Offa, seem to have been as ephemeral as their creator. Much work remains to be done on the status of the Anglo-Saxon moneyer—and for the present we are not even justified in assuming that the moneyer of *c.* 800 enjoyed a position analogous to that of his counterpart of *c.* 1000—but the fact that a moneyer could strike for Offa, Eadbearht and again for Coenwulf is a straw in the wind the significance of which it would be foolish entirely to ignore.

All in all, then, the new penny of Eadbearht Præn must rank as one of the more intriguing discoveries in Anglo-Saxon numismatics for a number of years, and it is hoped that the publication of this note may encourage members of the Kent Archæological Society to bring to the notice of specialists any medieval coin that comes their way. The same number of the *British Numismatic Journal* that contains the account of the penny of Eadbearht also includes a short note on a Calais heavy quarter-noble of Henry IV recently found at Ashurst, near Tunbridge Wells.[1] All heavy quarter-nobles of Henry IV are rare, and in fact this little gold coin, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, is only the third example to be recorded from the Calais mint, and the only one with a known find-spot. In the fields of Ancient British and medieval numismatics at least, the single find can be just as important as the hoard, and few counties are as rich in coins as Kent, which over the last seven years has produced for the present writer's inspection rather more rarities than any other comparable area, the Swedish island of Gotland not excepted.

[1] *B.N.J.*, XXVIII, ii (1956), p. 416.