Kings and Coins in Medieval England

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The Long Cross 14th Century
Part 1: Edward I

Fig.1. Statues of Edward I and Eleanor on the outer south wall of the east end of Lincoln cathedral (© Brian 2006 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence). Unlike in most politically motivated marriages Edward and Eleanor appear to have loved each other very much.

Fig.2. The magnificent Caernarfon Castle in Gwynedd, North Wales (© Nelo Hotsuma 2013 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence). The polygonal towers and dark stripes of masonry are reminiscent of the Theodosian walls of Constantinople. This idea linked with the Welsh tradition that the father of the Emperor Constantine was buried at Caernarfon.

Introduction

This latest instalment about coins of medieval England considers the reign of Edward I – one of the more familiar monarchs of the Middle Ages. In his reign there was a significant reform of the coinage, which included the permanent introduction of halfpennies and farthings. It was also a period that saw widespread European imitation of English pennies – a fact which threatened the stability of the English economy.

Edward I

Edward was born at Westminster in 1239 and named after Edward the Confessor, the sainted king to whom his father Henry III was so devoted. In 1254 he was married to Eleanor of Castile (Fig.1.) and the couple had at least 14 children (and probably 16). However only six survived into adulthood, five girls and one boy named Edward of Caernarfon.

Edward I had been active in the politics of England before he became king in 1272 and had supported the baronial reform movement before reconciling with his father and joining the cause against the rebel barons. He was made hostage after the Battle of Lewes but managed to escape and later fought at the decisive victory against Simon de Montfort at Evesham.

Edward was endowed with extensive lands; receiving Gascony, Ireland, the earldom of Chester and significant estates in Wales, Bristol, Stamford and Grantham. In 1270 he set off on crusade with a small expedition arriving at Acre (modern Akko in Israel) in May 1271. His participation achieved very little, the most notable event being the attempt made on his life. The prince disarmed a Muslim assassin wielding a poisoned dagger and killed him although he himself was injured in the struggle. It was while en route to England from the Holy Land that Edward learned of his father's death and yet he took some time to get back to England. He was crowned in 1274.

As king Edward, known as "Longshanks" due to his 6ft 2in frame, was a major figure in European politics but in England, to his neighbours at least, his rule was aggressive and brutal. The first area of campaigning for Edward was in Wales against its prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Although he marched into Wales in 1277 with a large force of English and Welsh soldiers, no pitched battle took place and a treaty was agreed. War broke out again in 1282 in which Llywelyn and his brother Dafydd were killed. This led to the imposition of an oppressive English administration on the Welsh, the planting of English settlers, and a programme of castle building unlike any witnessed in England before (Fig.2.).

Above all other things Edward's reign is remembered for his Scottish wars. Relations in the first part of the reign were smooth and it wasn't until the death

Fig.3. Scottish silver penny of John Balliol's second "smooth" coinage (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.4. Edward III silver penny, Class 15d, minted at York. (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.8. Edward I silver penny, Class 9b1, minted at Kingston-upon-Hull. (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.5. Edward I silver penny, Class 9a1, minted at London. The style of crown on the Edwardian pennies can help identify the class; up to class 9c the sides of the crown had three lobes (trifoliate) (©The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.6. Edward I silver penny, Class 10cf2, minted at London. The style of crown in Class 10 changed to a bifoliate-lobed crown (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

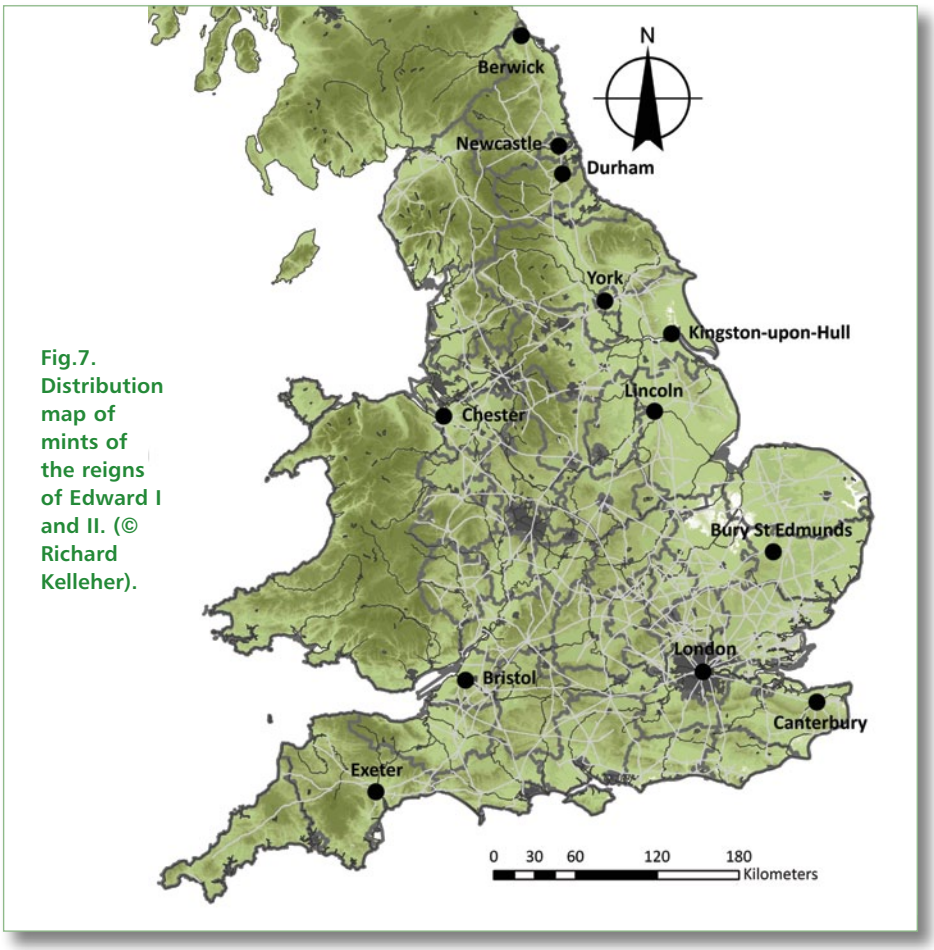

Fig.7. Distribution map of mints of the reigns of Edward I and II. (© Richard Kelleher).

of King Alexander III in 1286 and his granddaughter and remaining heir, Margaret "the Maid of Norway", in 1290, that Edward became involved. Initially his role was to arbitrate between the competing claimants John Balliol (Fig.3.) and Robert Bruce. Balliol's case was upheld and he became king although Edward used his position as feudal overlord to undermine Balliol and demand the Scottish magnates provide military service against the French. The Scots ruling council removed Balliol, allied themselves with the French and attacked Carlisle.

Edward's response was to invade Scotland and take Berwick. He left the north in 1296 but within a year a popular rebellion had spread led by Bruce, William Wallace and Andrew Moray. Wallace defeated a larger English army at Stirling Bridge prompting Edward to return north again where he defeated the Scots at Falkirk although English control was limited after this. An Anglo-French peace treaty in 1303 removed Scotland's ally against the English and most of the Scottish barons came over to the English side. Bruce had already done so in 1302. William Wallace was betrayed by his own countrymen and executed in a gruesome public spectacle. In 1306 Bruce had himself crowned and embarked on a campaign to restore Scottish independence.

Fig.9. Edward I silver penny, Class 2a, minted at Berwick. (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

	Estimated date range for each class, based on Allen 2003.	London	Bristol	Canterbury	Chester	Durham	Exeter	Kingston-upon-Hull	Lincoln	Newcastle	St Edmundsbury	York
1	May 1279–Nov/Dec 1279	●										
2	Nov/Dec 1279–*c.* May 1280	●	●	●		●						●
3	*c.* May 1280–May 1282	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
4	*c.* 1282/3–*c.* 1289	●		●		●					●	
5	*c.* 1289–*c.* 1290	●		●		●					●	
6	*c.* 1293– *c.*1294	●		●		●					●	
7	*c.* 1290– *c.* 1293	●		●		●					●	
8	*c.* 1294–*c.* 1299	●		●							●	
9	*c.* 1299–late 1300	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
10	*c.* late 1300–*c.* 1310	●		●		●				●	●	
11	*c.* 1310– *c.* 1314	●				●					●	
12	*c.* 1314	●		●		●					●	
13	*c.* 1314– *c.* 1317/18	●		●		●					●	
14	*c.* 1317/18– *c.* 1319	●		●		●					●	
15	*c.* 1319–1333 x 1338	●		●		●					●	

Fig.10. Table of Edwardian mints and classes. Note Berwick is not included in this table as its coins do not conform to the main classification.

An ill Edward saddled up and again headed north but died at Burgh-by-Sands in Cumbria on 7 July 1307.

Coinage Reform

In earlier episodes of this series, reference has been made to the important reform that took place early in Edward I's reign in 1279. The impact of this reorganisation of monetary affairs should not be understated, as it had a profound impact on the coinage and its contemporary users as well as redefining the model of currency in England (and elsewhere) for the next 250 years.

Coin Types & The Mints

The Edwardian series is divided into many types and sub-types and was struck at 12 mints. The first serious classification of the Edwardian pennies was devised by the Fox brothers in the early part of the 20th century. In this groundbreaking work the coinage was divided up into 15 sequential types, classes 1 to 9 being of Edward I; class 10 straddling the reigns of Edward I and II; classes 11 to 15c given to Edward II; and the final 15d being the very first class minted under Edward III in 1327-35 (Fig.4.).

Over the course of the last century refinements have been made to this series so that a large number of sub-varieties have now been identified. We also have a detailed relative chronology which provides quite accurate date-ranges for the minting of the coins.

There are some general points of classification to help establish which type a coin belongs to. These small variants help us classify the coins and take the form of changes in the crown, additional objects in the field or on the breast and changes to the inscription. There are also more general changes that we can track through the lifetime of the coinage. The first clue comes in the inscription. The earlier inscription (on the majority of coins of classes 1 to early class 9) settled down to read +eDWRaNgLDNShyB up to class 10 when an additional A was included to read +eDWaRaNgLDNShyB. At around the same time as the change in the legend came an accompanying change to the crown introducing bifoliate fleurs in place of trifoliate ones (Figs.5 & 6.). The network of mints at the re-coinage numbered nine and were fairly well spread around England (Fig.7.). Once the majority of old coins of Henry III had been re-minted into the new types most mints closed down. Only in 1299/1300 and the partial re-coinage, which corresponds well with class 9 (more below), was the network increased to the extent seen at the re-coinage with Exeter active and a new mint at Kingston-upon-Hull striking for the first time (Fig.8.). The mint at Berwick, taken from the Scots by Edward I, produced coins with locally made dies, and as such they do not conform to the main classification (Fig.9.).

Fig.11. Edward I silver halfpenny, Class 3c-e, minted at Bristol (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). In most respects the smaller coins were reduced size versions of the penny.

New Denominations: Groats, Halfpennies & Farthings

An innovation in Edward's reign was the introduction of new denominations, both smaller and larger than the penny. Until 1279, only pennies were produced and halfpennies and farthings were produced by the practice of cutting whole pennies into halves and quarters; after 1279 fractions of the penny would be minted and they would be round (Figs.11 & 12.). The groat was equivalent to four pence and was inspired by the Italian *grosso* and French *gros* (Fig.13.). The English coin, however, was short-lived and would not be struck again until 1351. The smaller

Fig.12. Edward I silver farthing, Class 2, minted at London. Found at Bottisham, Cambs. (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.13. Edward I silver groat, minted at London (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). The larger flan size allowed more room to enhance the design.

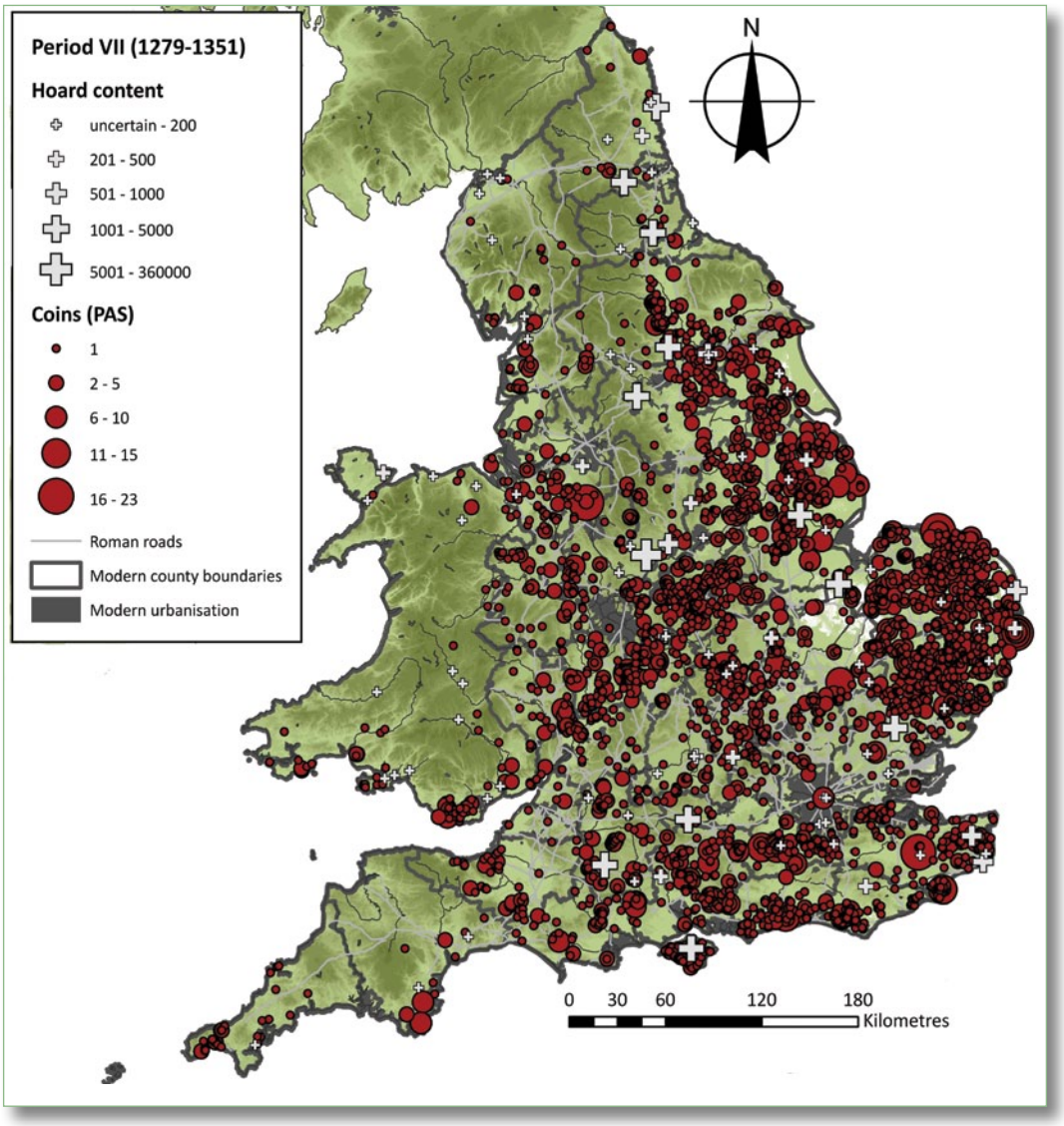

Fig.14. Map of hoards and single finds of Edwardian coins (© Richard Kelleher).

silver coins were successful although contemporary reports tell us that they were not produced in large enough quantities to satisfy the needs of the population.

Hoards & Finds

The number of hoards buried in the Edwardian period is huge compared to other periods (Fig.14.) and are geographically more widespread. The concentration seen in the north east can be linked with the movement of men and levies associated with the Scottish Wars.

Elsewhere finds are well spread. One of the most spectacular hoards of the period came from Tutbury in Staffordshire in 1831 (Fig.15.). Workmen digging in the River Dove discovered a great number of silver coins. The find was rapidly dispersed as local people heard of the hoard and came to claim a piece of it. Officers of the crown eventually arrived to take possession of the remainder. Recent research has indicated that the hoard could have comprised as many as 360,000 pennies. The original find was undoubtedly the war chest of Thomas of Lancaster who was in rebellion against his cousin, King Edward II, in 1322. After the Battle of Burton Bridge Thomas retreated to his castle at Tutbury (Fig.16.) before heading north to his caput at Pontefract, where he was later executed. The barrels of coins were lost or concealed in the flight from the castle. Single finds of Edwardian coins are frequently made in the UK. Among all medieval coins they are the most common, but the figures disguise an important fact. In earlier periods older types or classes of coin were completely replaced by the new ones. For the Edwardian coinage there was no such wholesale replacement and as such pennies of Edward I and II could, and did, survive in currency for extended periods, some are known in hoards from as late as the 1480s.

Edward I In Ireland & France

The traditional Angevin-Plantagenet lands had shrunk to a fraction of their

Fig.15. Coins from the Tutbury hoard.

Fig.16. Tutbury Castle, Staffordshire viewed from the bailey © Richard Kelleher.

Fig.17. Irish silver penny of Edward I, class 1b, Dublin mint (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.18. Irish silver penny of Edward I, class III, Cork mint (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.19. Irish silver halfpenny of Edward I, class 1a, Dublin mint (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.20. Irish silver farthing of Edward I, class 1a (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

former extent due in large part to the failures of Edward's grandfather John. The lordship of Ireland had been granted to Edward during his father's lifetime but coins were not struck there until later. In design they bore similar traits to those of Henry III but with some minor changes (Fig.17.). The obverse triangle was inverted and the bust within was much improved, matching the developments in the English coinage. The English solid reverse cross was also adopted. Coins were minted at Dublin, Waterford and Cork in three denominations, though the latter two are rare (Figs.18-20.).

It was in the reign of Edward I that coins minted for the English kings in the French possessions in the south east, particularly in Aquitaine and Poitou, began again on a significant scale; the first time since the issues of Richard I. Edward's first coins were struck during the lifetime of his father Henry III (Fig.21.). These were *deniers* with an obverse showing a lion on one side and a cross on the reverse with the legend +ñDVVãRD'FILI': and +h'RñgI4ãNgLIñ translated as "Edward son of Henry King of England". In 1279

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Fig.21. Anglo-Gallic denier of Edward I as duke of Aquitaine (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.23. Scottish silver penny of Alexander III, (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Scottish coins of this period do not name the mint on the coin's reverse.

Fig.25. Crockard of either John I (1261-1294) or John II (1294-1312), Dukes of Brabant and Limburg, 1286-1299. Found at Brighstone, Isle of Wight (© The Portable Antiquities Scheme, IOW-0538A0).

Fig.22. Anglo-Gallic denier of Edward I as count of Ponthieu with the reverse inscription in two lines ÓO¯Ta POHTI (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.24. Scottish silver halfpenny of Robert Bruce (1306-29), the halfpence carried mullets in only two angles of the reverse cross rather than the usual four (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Fig.26. Pollard of Gui of Dampierre. Found at Upper Poppleton, York (© The Portable Antiquities Scheme, LANCUM-5D6537).

Fig.27. Silver sterling imitation of Louis of Bavaria, Holy Roman Emperor. Found at Flawborough, Nottinghamshire (© Portable Antiquities Scheme, LEIC-8EEEA7).

Edward's wife Eleanor of Castile inherited the county of Ponthieu and coins were minted there under Edward (Fig.22.).

Scottish Contemporaries & Continental Imitations

English coins continued to have a major influence on the coinage of neighbouring states, probably more so than they had ever before. The government of Alexander III king of Scotland (1249-86) was quick to respond to changes in the English coinage, producing a new issue along the same lines from c.1280. The Scottish coins retained their distinctive profile bust and the use of mullets (stars) in the angles of the reverse cross (Fig.23.). Round halfpennies and farthings were produced as in the English coinage under Alexander and his successors John Baliol and Robert Bruce (Fig.24.) although these tend to be rare finds.

The period between about 1290 and 1340 saw an unprecedented influx of foreign coins into England and Scotland. These derived mainly from the Low Countries where many petty rulers had the right to mint coins in their own names. The first wave of imitations were of two types and were visually distinguishable from the English coins; the bust on the obverse was either bare headed or wore a chaplet of roses, for this reason they became known colloquially as crockards (roses) and pollards (bare-headed) (Figs.25 & 26.).

In 1299 the government took action to combat these unwelcome coins. The Statute of Stepney banned the import of foreign coins and the export of silver coins, plate and bullion. At Christmas 1299 they were valued as a halfpenny and March the next year were completely prohibited. However, this did not solve the problem. The second wave was more deceptive and copied the crowned bust of the English king making them rather more difficult to distinguish at a glance. The inscription usually identified the Continental ruler and these could be counts or bishops or even in one case the Holy Roman Emperor Louis of Bavaria (Fig.27.). These later imports were known to contemporaries as "Lusshebornes" after John the Blind, King of Bohemia and Count of Luxembourg in whose name many of them were struck.

Conclusion

Edward's reign was notable in many respects but particularly in terms of the administration and appearance of the coinage. The innovations of his reign set out the model for currency which would endure for the next two centuries with only the addition of gold coins and larger silver denominations. Next month we'll look at the developments which came in the currency under Edward I's son and grandson.

Further Reading

Allen, M. **Mints and Money in Medieval England**, (Cambridge, 2012).

Mayhew, N. **Sterling Imitations of Edwardian Type**, (London, 1983).

North, J.J. **Edwardian English Silver Coins 1279-1351**, (Oxford, 1989). TH