Kings and Coins in Medieval England

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The Short Cross Coinage (1180-1247) Part 2

Introduction

In my last instalment I looked at the short cross coinage introduced by Henry II and continued under Richard I, and touched on the fact that the coins changed very little from king to king. The persistence of the HENRICVS title and what we call an "immobilised" type would continue into the reigns of John and Henry III (where for the latter it was not problematic). Only in Ireland would John's name appear on coins (as Richard's had in his Aquitainian lands) (Figs.1 & 2.).

My brother John is not the man to win lands by force if there is anyone at all to oppose him

Richard I quoted in Roger of Hoveden's **Chronica**

This month I'll also look at mints and moneyers and the circulation of hoards and single finds as well as short cross imitations. These emerged in the later 12th century and began a trend of Continental imitation which would come to a head in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, and would force Edward I's government into a major recoinage.

John (1199-1216)

In many respects John was the runt of the Angevin litter, but the deaths of all three of his elder brothers pushed him to the front of the succession queue and led to his coronation in 1199. He was born at Oxford on Christmas Eve 1167 and we know little of his early years. By the 1180s he had gained the nickname "Lackland" due to his lack of territory, although he was lord of Ireland in his father's and brother's reigns. In trying to rectify John's under-endowment Henry II alienated a large number of his subjects, including his son Richard, which led to open rebellion and conflict in Angevin France and England (Fig.3.). When Richard was on crusade and during his subsequent captivity in Germany John, encouraged by Philip Augustus, King of France, took measures to usurp the English crown but was checked upon Richard's return. He was widely distrusted and regarded as a treacherous man.

On becoming king the great Angevin empire that his father had created quickly began to crumble around John. He lost significant territory in France, including the Angevin heartlands of Anjou, Maine, the Touraine and northern Poitou. His reputation took on a more ghoulish aspect with his probable hand in the murder of his 16-year-old nephew Arthur Duke of Brittany. The story, from a source close to events, claims that a drunken John killed the captive Arthur at Rouen striking him with a heavy stone and dumping his body in the Seine. John's mother – the formidable Eleanor of Aquitaine – died in 1204 and with her went his last significant support. All that was left of the continental Angevin empire were a string of coastal ports and the inland outposts of Chinon and Loches which soon fell to the French. John did, however, regain Gascony and south west Poitou.

Fig.1. Silver penny of Prince John as Lord of Ireland © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.2. Silver halfpenny of Prince John as Lord of Ireland. Round halfpence were minted in Ireland well before they were in England on a regular basis. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.3. Odiham Castle in Hampshire, built 1207-14 at a cost of £1,000, was one of only three castles built by John in England (© Peter Curbishley 2006 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence).

Fig.6. King John's tomb effigy at Worcester Cathedral (© Ben Sutherland 2011 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence).

Fig.7. Silver short cross penny of John, class 4b, struck at Shrewsbury by the moneyer Ive. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.4. Lead papal bulla of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) found at Banham, Suffolk © Portable Antiquities Scheme.

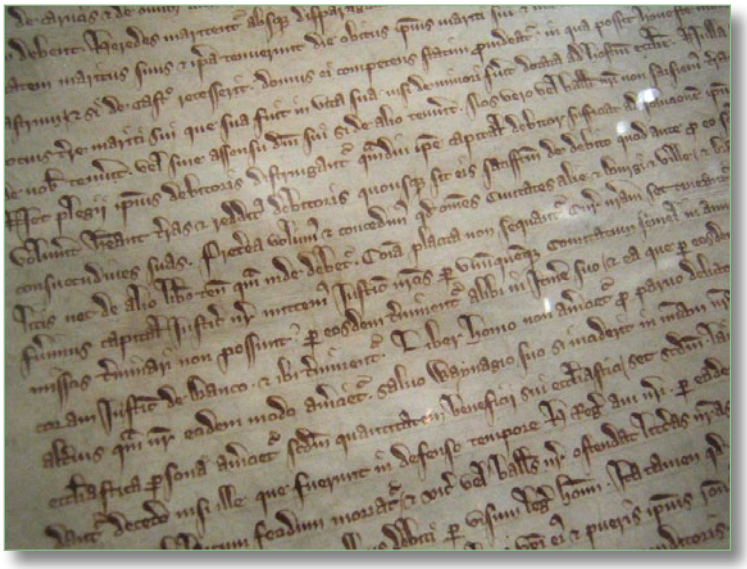


Fig.5. A page from the copy of the 1297 Magna Carta on permanent loan to the National Archives in Washington DC. (© Eric Chan 2006 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence). The four surviving exemplifications of the 1215 Magna Carta are held in the British Library (2), Lincoln and Salisbury Cathedrals. Later ones are held in Durham Cathedral (3), Hereford Cathedral, the Bodleian Library Oxford (4) and Parliament House in Canberra, Australia.

Quarrels with Pope Innocent III (Fig.4.) over the right of the king to appoint bishops led to his 1209 excommunication, but closer to home a far more memorable event took place, certainly in the context of John's legacy – the signing of the Magna Carta or "Great Charter" (Fig.5.). This long document, reissued several times in medieval England, was first signed in 1215 and was a direct attempt by a group of leading magnates to limit the oppressive powers of the king over the nobility. John went along with it as a means of buying time while he waited for the pope (who he had been reconciled with) to excommunicate the rebels.

In 1216 the rebels offered Prince Louis of France the throne and he embarked for England, meanwhile Alexander II of Scotland and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth invaded from Scotland and Wales. By this time John had lost the support of around two-thirds of his nobles. While en route to reinforce his garrison at Lincoln John suffered an attack of dysentery and died at Newark on 18 October 1216. His body was taken to Worcester Cathedral for burial (Fig.6.). Matthew Paris records the startlingly harsh contemporary feeling that "foul as it is, Hell itself is made fouler by the presence of John".

John's Coinage

Under John the same immobilised short cross coins continued to be struck in the name of his father Henry II. L.A. Lawrence's short cross classification of 1915 laid out the eight main classes we still use today. Over the last century it has been refined and sub-divided but Lawrence's basic classification stands. Classes 4b to 6b are attributed to John's reign. Classes 4b and c follow what went before in terms of design with only minor changes to the obverse design (Fig.7.). In 1204-5 a partial recoinage took place. Official letters patent prohibiting clipped money suggest a crisis in the condition of the circulating coins, which would be remedied by the recoinage. The new coins were of improved workmanship with a neat bust comprising hair made up of two (or sometime three) curls at each side of the head often enclosing a pellet (Figs.8-10.).

Prior to his accession to the English throne John had been made Lord of Ireland and coins were struck there in his name. As king, new-style coins were introduced depicting on the obverse the king's bust set within a triangle and on the reverse a star over crescent in the same. The triangle motif would mark out Irish coins for the next century (Fig.11.). It was not only pennies that were produced as we see also halfpence and farthings of similar design well before such an experiment was tried in England (Figs.12 & 13.). A further small scale Irish issue was minted under John de Curcy, Lord of Ulster (c.1185-c.1205) who seized Downpatrick in 1177 and ruled the kingdom of Uladh as an independent prince. His coins, known as the "St Patrick" coinage, are very rare (Fig.14.).

Fig.8. Silver short cross penny of John, class 5a1/5a2, struck at Canterbury by the moneyer Ernaud. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.9. Silver short cross penny of John, class 5a2, struck at Norwich by the moneyer Iohan. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.10. Silver short cross penny of John, class 5a2, struck at Canterbury by the moneyer Simon. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.11. Silver penny of John struck in Ireland at Dublin by Roberd. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.12. Silver halfpenny of John struck in Ireland at Dublin by Roberd. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.13. Silver farthing of John struck in Ireland at Dublin by Willem. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.14. Silver halfpenny of John de Curcy, Lord of Ulster, struck at Downpatrick. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Henry III (1216-72)

Henry was born at Winchester on 1 October 1207, the first child of Queen Isabella of Angoulême, John's second wife. Henry's reign of 56 years remains the fourth longest in British history – after only Victoria, Elizabeth II and George III.

He was crowned king aged just 9 at Gloucester Abbey on 12 October 1216. During his minority William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, acted as regent, followed by other leading men. In 1217 Henry declared himself of full age, ending the minority although he would rely on several "father figures" early in his reign. The first of these was Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent who was followed by Peter des Roches, Bishop of Winchester (Fig.15.). The actions of these men in promoting their own factions led to uprisings and limited civil war.

Henry's personal rule began well, he was a man of peace and effected truces with Wales and Navarre to protect his interests and made alliances through

Fig.15. Netley Abbey, Hampshire is one of the best preserved medieval Cistercian monasteries in southern England. (© Rebecca Louise 2011 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence).

Fig.17. Silver short cross penny of John, class 6a1 struck at London by the moneyer Ilger © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.18. Silver short cross penny of Henry III, class 6c3 struck at York by the moneyer Tomas © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.19. Silver short cross penny of Henry III, class 7a struck at Durham by the moneyer Pieres © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.20. Silver short cross penny of Henry III, class 8c struck at Bury St Edmunds by the moneyer Iohan © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.21. Silver short cross halfpenny of Henry III, struck at London by the moneyer Raulf © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.16. Dover Castle, Kent (© Matthew Black 2013 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence).

marriage. His sister was married to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II while he married the 11-year-old Eleanor, daughter of the count of Provence whose family connections immediately drew him closer to the king of France and the papal curia.

In his reign Henry commissioned major works on the royal castles including Dover (Fig.16.), and made Westminster Palace the focus of court life. The famous Cosmati pavement was laid in Westminster Abbey in imitation of the splendour of the courts of Louis IX of France and the Emperor Frederick II.

The Coinage

The short cross coinage continued into Henry's reign with classes 6c to the end of 8 given to him. In terms of style there was little change, with the transition from John to Henry largely imperceptible on the coins themselves (Figs.17 & 18.). The large class 7 (Fig.19.) spanned several decades and is complex with many subdivisions. In class 8 the bust elements become a little more crude (Fig.20.).

One of the innovations in the short cross coinage under Henry III was the introduction – however brief – of round halfpence and farthings. For most of the preceding period the short cross coinage pennies were cut into halves and quarters to provide smaller denomination coins. In 1222 round halfpennies and farthings were minted at London but these were quickly discontinued. Although mentioned in documentary sources the discovery of the first actual coins had to wait until the 1980s. Since then a small number of further examples have emerged (Fig.21.).

Mints & Moneyers

The mint network at the reform was geographically broad (Fig.22.) to facilitate the recoinage of the old cross-and-crosslets coins. New mints in the short cross included Lichfield and Lynn

Fig.23. Silver short cross penny of Henry III, class 8b struck at Canterbury by the moneyer Iohan. For much of the reign of Henry III it was Canterbury that had the higher output of coins, eclipsing the traditionally dominant London mint © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

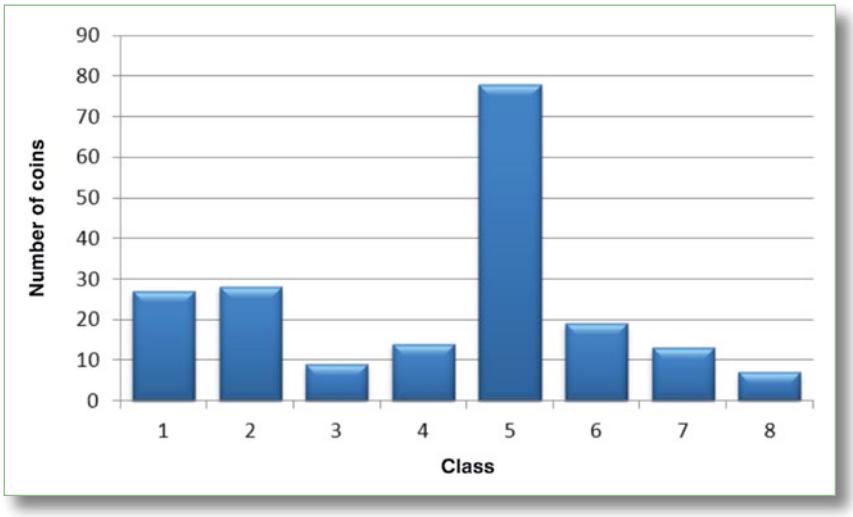


Fig.24. Short cross coins by class recorded on PAS adjusted for length of class © Richard Kelleher.

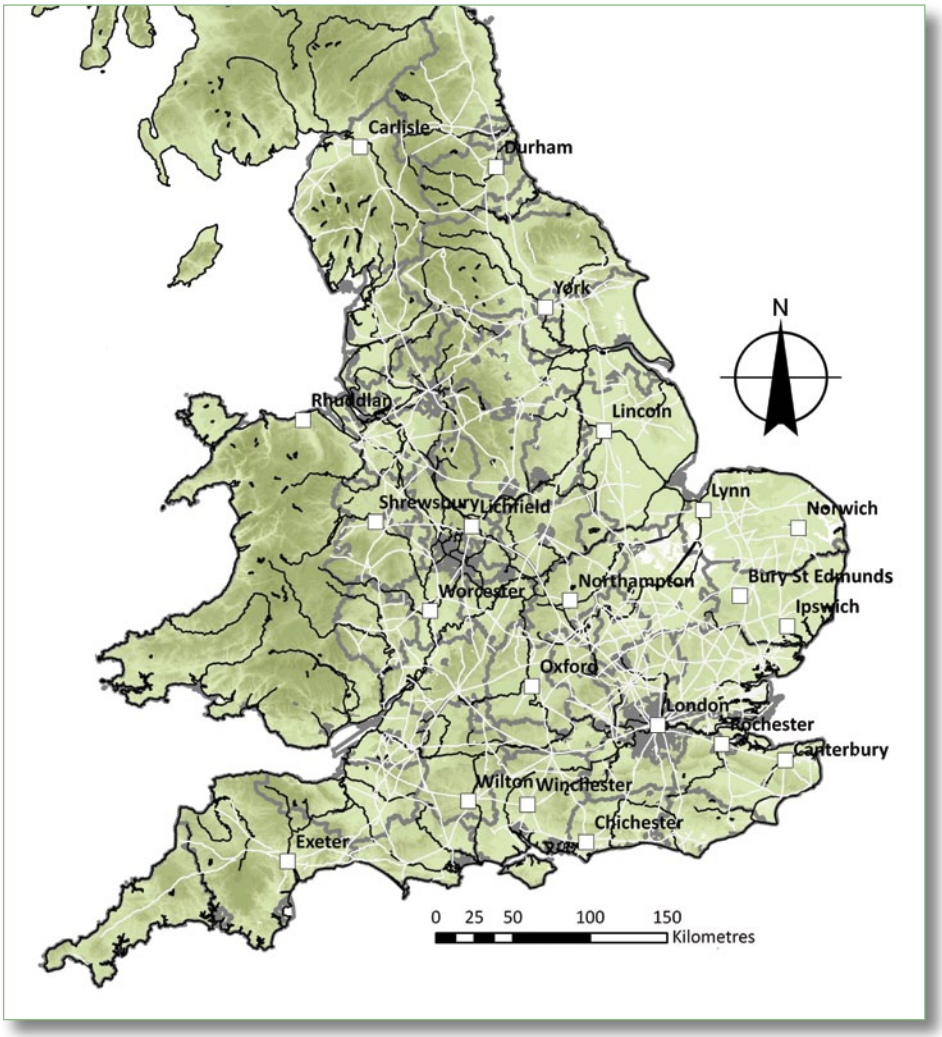


Fig.22. Map of the short cross mints active over the period 1180-1247 © Richard Kelleher.

(King's Lynn) as well as a return to minting at Rochester after a lengthy break. The majority of minting, however, was to be carried out at London and Canterbury the medieval powerhouses of coin production (Fig.23.). In the initial recoinage phase there were six mints (class 1a) which expanded to 10 for the rest of the class. Seven of these were in the top 10 towns for tax revenue.

Pennine silver mined at Alston Moor encouraged the development of a mint at Carlisle. In 1204-5 the network expanded to 16 mints to enable the partial recoinage which had been ordered to remedy the poor state of the circulating currency, largely through clipping. In class 7 minting became concentrated in just London, Canterbury, Durham and Bury St Edmunds, with Durham absent in class 8. Just as had been the case at the start of the cross-and-crosslets coinage, the old moneyers were dismissed and new men put in place for the 1180 recoinage.

Circulation – Hoards & Single Finds

Comparing the short cross coinage with its predecessors brings into stark relief the huge growth in the provision and use of coinage that occurred over the period. Single find numbers increase dramatically in this period. To put this into perspective the PAS single finds from 1158-80 number 203, in the short cross it grows to 3060. Of course the short cross was a longer period – 67 years compared to 22, but finds per year across the two series show real growth from 9.7 to 46.4.

The expansion in output was part of a wider European trend made possible by the expansion of silver mines in central Europe. The growth was not evenly spread throughout the short cross period, however. The recoinage types (1 and 2) are well represented as the old coins were minted into the new (Fig.24.). We then see low level output in types 3 and 4. The peak in class 5 is huge and can be partly explained by the 1204-5 recoinage,

Fig.26. Silver short cross penny of Rhuddlan, struck by the moneyer Tomas © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

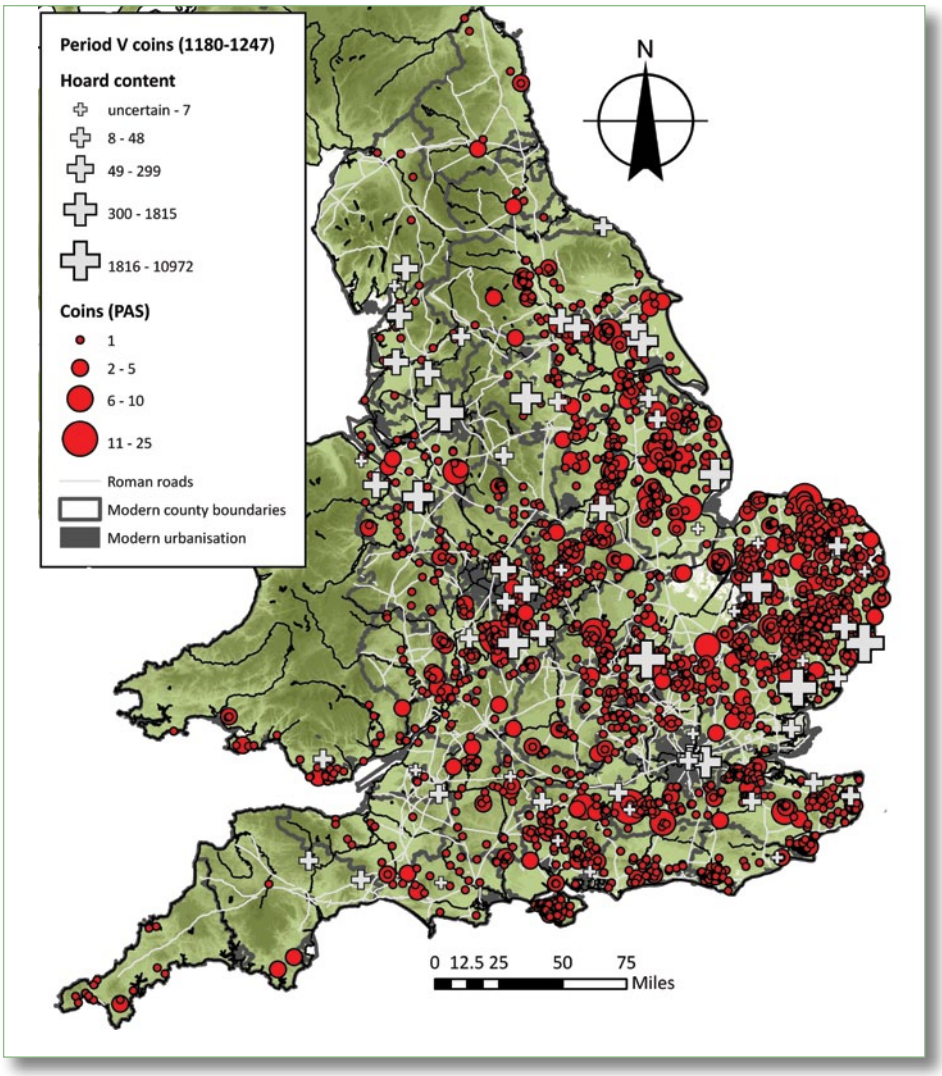
Fig.27. Silver short cross and stars penny of William the Lion, phase B, struck by Hue and Walter the Edinburgh and Perth moneyers working jointly. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.28. Silver short cross and stars of Alexander II minted at Roxburgh by the moneyer Pieres © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.29. Silver pfennig of Otto I of Oldenburg (1203-18) Bishop of Münster © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.30. Silver short cross sterling of Bernhard III (1229-65), Count of Lippe, minted at Lemgo © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.25. Distribution map of short cross hoards and single finds © Richard Kelleher.



which we know was instituted to remedy a currency beset by problems of clipping and underweight coins. In subsequent classes we return to low levels of output diminishing over time. Hiding within this data is another interesting fact – the increase in the use of cut halfpennies and farthings. This change hints at the ways in which coins were being used for smaller transactions replacing, or at least working alongside, traditional methods of trade and exchange. Compared with the cross-and-crosslets coins, short cross are regularly found over a much broader swathe of the country and in greater numbers (Fig.25.).

The Sincerest Form of Flattery

A measure of the integrity and success of a coinage can be seen in how far it travels and is adopted and imitated beyond the borders of its issuing state. The short cross coinage, despite its internal problems (which were more an issue of clipping than silver content), was the first English coinage to be used on the Continent in any serious way. Indeed there are more hoards of short cross coins from Normandy, Maine, Anjou and Brittany than there are from England and both hoards and single finds have been found as far away as the Balkans, Greece and the Holy Land.

It was also influential in Wales and Scotland. The short cross coins minted in Rhuddlan, North Wales are enigmatic (Fig.26.). They do not fit

Fig.31. Silver pfennig of Adolf I (1199-1249), Count of the Mark, minted at Hamm © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

happily into the English classification and have recently been interpreted as issues minted under the authority of the princes of Gwynedd.

In Scotland coin design and style closely followed the English model with the short cross being influential on the coins of William the Lion and Alexander II (Figs.27 & 28.).

From further afield (in these cases the Rhineland) we find a range of issues showing the influence of the English short cross coinage. The coins of the Bishops of Münster imitate the reverse type with the traditional emblem of the bishops coins – the bust of St Paul – found on the obverse (Fig.29.).

The sterlings of Bernhard III, Count of Lippe imitate the English coins even retaining the HENRICVS legend on the obverse and substituting the reverse cross for a solid cross with cinquefoils (Fig.30.).

The short cross reverse also appears on coins of Adolf I, Count of Mark while the obverse depicts a half-length figure of the count holding orb and sceptre (Fig.31.).

The short cross was an influential type in English numismatic history in terms of centralising production and the work of moneyers. It also marks the first time that English coins had a significant international impact with the design being recognised as of good, trustworthy metal. Next month I'll move onto Henry III's 1247 reform and the long cross coinage.

Further Reading

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