

Kings and Coins in Medieval England

Dr. Richard Kelleher

Department of Coins and Medals,
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Henry II Cross-and-Crosslets Coinage (1158-80)

Fig.3. Map of Henry's Angevin domains c.1170 (© Richard Kelleher). Henry's large territories were gained by a combination of inheritance, diplomacy and conquest.



Fig.1. The first great seal of Henry II.



Fig.2. Henry II's tomb at Fontevault Abbey (Anjou, France) alongside that of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The site was the family mausoleum for the Angevins. Although the tomb effigies are intact the physical remains are no longer present (© g0ng00zlr 2006 and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic Licence).

Introduction

The coronation of the young Henry II at Westminster on 19 December 1154 signalled the arrival of a powerful new state on the medieval European scene. Henry's mother – the formidable "Empress" Matilda – had been the chosen successor of Henry I, before her cousin, Stephen of Blois, had claimed the throne. This began the unhappy period of civil war that characterised Stephen's reign (1135-54).

By the Treaty of Westminster (1153)

it was agreed that Stephen be allowed to die on the throne provided Henry of Anjou was appointed as his heir. Within a year Stephen was dead and Henry became King Henry II first of the "Angevin-Plantagenet" kings (Fig.1.). His inheritance on his mother's side had made him king of England, but his father's lands extended Henry's realm across the channel and into France. Two reforms of the coinage took place in Henry II's reign, with far reaching consequences; here we will focus on the first.

Background

Henry was born in Le Mans in 1133, the eldest of the three sons of Matilda and Geoffrey Plantagenet, count of Anjou. Contemporaries tell us that he was of medium height, with a strong square chest, and legs slightly bowed from endless days on horseback. His hair was reddish, lightening somewhat in later years, and his head was kept closely shaved (Fig.2.).

On 18 May 1152 Henry married Eleanor of Aquitaine, the "dark-eyed

Kings and Coins in Medieval England



Fig.4. External view of Orford Castle in Suffolk (© Richard Kelleher). The castle was built between 1165 and 1173 at a cost of more than £1,413 to check the power of Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk. Its octagonal keep is a splendid survival of 12th century architecture and may have been inspired by Byzantine fortifications.

Fig.5. Late 14th-early 15th century pilgrim badge of Thomas Becket found in the City of London (© Portable Antiquities Scheme LON-C638E2). Pilgrim souvenirs were bought by medieval pilgrims as mementoes of the pious journeys they took to visit shrines. These objects were believed to protect their wearers from harm and to heal the sick.



Fig.6. Lead ampulla, probably from Becket's shrine at Canterbury dated c.1300-1500. Found at Wilden in Bedfordshire (© Portable Antiquities Scheme BH-9CB614). Ampullae like this were sold at shrines and filled with holy water to be taken away by pilgrims.

beauty" who had recently been divorced by King Louis VII of France. This union expanded Henry's rule over most of western France. At its fullest extent Henry's dominion stretched from the Scot's border in the north to the Pyrenees in the south and the Norman settlements of Ireland in the west to the Auvergne in the east (Fig.3.). Henry and Eleanor had eight children all of whom, bar one, survived infancy. The family, and their conflicts, will be more fully explored next month.

Henry's Reign to 1180

As king Henry was an energetic and tireless man; although gentle and friendly, he nevertheless displayed a ferocious temper common to his Angevin ancestors. It has been said he was approachable, and took care to listen with patience to petitioners, and had an unusually sharp memory. Henry's principal achievement was the development of the structure of royal justice. He also spent heavily on massive building projects such as the churches at Witham, and Waltham; castles at Scarborough, Newcastle, Nottingham and Orford;

and palaces at Windsor and Clarendon (Fig.4.).

The king's quarrel with Thomas Becket and the archbishop's subsequent murder have often overshadowed his achievements as a ruler. Becket had been promoted to the see of Canterbury by Henry in 1162 in the expectation that his friend would be a useful ally in imposing the king's will on the church. Henry would be disappointed; instead of a staunch ally Becket proved to be an obstinate and difficult man to deal with.

By 1170 the relationship had soured to such an extent that when the king exclaimed "What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!" a small retinue of four knights sailed to England to deal with the archbishop.

On 29 December 1170 the knights confronted Becket in Canterbury Cathedral and, whatever their initial intentions were, ended up killing the archbishop, cutting open his head and spreading his brains about the cathedral floor. Henry's reaction was to quickly distance

himself from the killing; however, it was not until 1172 that Henry was reconciled with the papacy, agreeing to go on crusade and respect the authority of the pope in ecclesiastical matters in England.

One of the unforeseen outcomes of Becket's murder was his canonisation in 1173 and the emergence of his cult that flourished throughout the Middle Ages. Canterbury became a site of pilgrimage on a European scale behind only Rome and Santiago de Compostella in Spain. The monks of Christ Church became incredibly wealthy by the pilgrim trade and souvenirs, in the form of badges and ampullae found widely in Britain and beyond, speak of his popularity among devotees (Figs.5 & 6.).

Coinage Reform of 1158

For the first four years of Henry's reign Stephen's type VII "Awbridge" pennies continued to be posthumously struck (Fig.7.). When Henry turned his attention to the coinage, probably on the occasion of his second visit to England (April 1157 to August 1158), the changes he implemented were hugely significant



Fig.7. Silver penny of Stephen, BMC 7 minted at Gloucester by the moneyer Raulf (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.9. Billon denier of William X (1126-1137) Duke of Aquitaine (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Aquitanian coins are distinguished by the four small crosslets in a cross on their obverses.



Fig.11. Silver cross-and-crosslets penny of Henry II, perhaps Class C. The mint and moneyer name do not appear on the coin (© Portable Antiquities Scheme NMS-00F4D2). Found at Foulsham, Norfolk.



Fig.8. Immobilised silver denier struck anonymously for the counts of Angouleme in the 12th century (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). The four small annulets are the distinctive feature of the coins of Angouleme.



Fig.10. Silver cross-and-crosslets Class F penny of Henry II struck by the moneyer Lefwine at London (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.12. The six bust types of the cross-and-crosslets coinage (© Richard Kelleher).

for both the administration and appearance of the coinage. First, the design of the coin became immobilised, thus unlike the earlier Norman coins which changed design at regular intervals, each successive issue was basically the same design as its predecessor (Figs.8 & 9.). Second, there was a policy, gradually implemented, of centralising minting so that over time the number of active mints was reduced. Third, there was a major upheaval in the moneyers responsible for the administration and manufacture of the coins.

The new coin type was named "cross-and-crosslets" by Derek Allen in his **British Museum Catalogue** of 1951 which set out the classification we use today. Previously the type had been known as the "Tealby" type thanks to a large hoard (over 6,000 coins) found at

Tealby in Lincolnshire in the early 19th century.

Despite the coinage being brought in to replace the chaotic currency under Stephen the pieces themselves are often poorly struck and on irregular flans with bust details and inscriptions missing or difficult to decipher (Figs.10 & 11.). Identifying the bust on these coins is the key to the classification, particularly the style and arrangement of the king's cloak. The series is divided into six types A-F with sub-classes (Fig.12.). The standard type has an obverse of the king's bust turned slightly to the right (Fig.13.). He holds a cross-headed sceptre in his right hand with the arm raised at the elbow to fit within the circuit of the coin. Visible on the arm is his hauberk (mail armour) while the mantle (cloak), often decorated with pellets, covers the rest of the body.



Fig.13. Obverse of a cross-and-crosslets penny.

Later coins include a jewelled collar. The king is moustached and a pellet on the chin represents an "imperial-style" beard. His large crown is thought to be the great German crown which had once belonged to the German Emperor

Kings and Coins in Medieval England



Fig.14. Silver cross-and-crosslets of Class A minted at Bury St Edmunds (©Portable Antiquities Scheme BH-1234F2) Found at Aylesham, Norfolk.

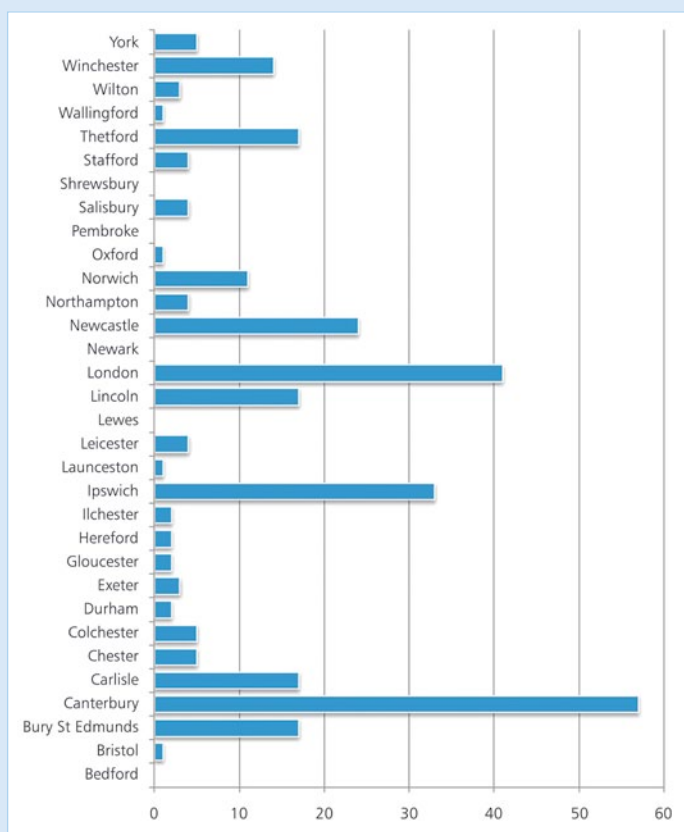


Fig.16. Mint output by finds.

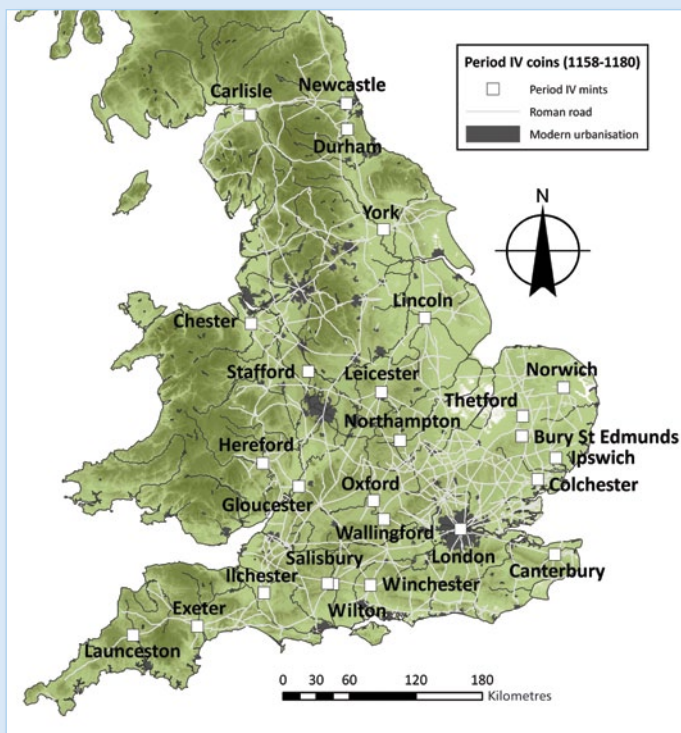


Fig.15. Map of mint locations.



Fig.17. Silver cross-and-crosslets penny of Class A1 struck by Turstien probably at Thetford (©Portable Antiquities Scheme SF-9EBCE5). Found at Wangford, Suffolk.

Henry V and came to England with his widow Matilda (Henry's mother). The legend begins at the king's elbow and runs clockwise, reading a variation of +HENRI REX ANGL for "Henry King of the English".

The reverse of the coin bears the large cross with small crosses set diagonally in each of the four quarters that gives the type its name. A small cross is visible superimposed over the centre of the large cross. Beyond the beaded border is the legend, which begins a 12 o'clock with a small cross and is followed by the name of the moneyer and mint, so for example PILLELM ON EDMV (for William at Bury St Edmunds) (Fig.14.).

Mints

Of nearly 100 moneyers active in Stephen's last type just nine struck in Henry's reformed coinage, and less

than half of the mints (20/46) continued to be active – supplemented by nine new mints. The location of mint towns reveals a specific agenda (Fig.15.) built around an overall reduction in the number of mints, the placing of mints in towns where foreign silver was encountered through trade, and the gradual elimination of ecclesiastical privilege mints. For example, William Thorne's chronicle records the taking of St Augustine's Abbey and its die into the king's hands after the death of Abbot Sylvester in 1161. The abbot's moneyer was recorded as Elverdus Porrere and Canterbury coins bearing his name as ALFERG are not known after the 1158-60 recoinage. The network also better represented the currency needs of the northern counties than had previously been the case. York was the only mint north of the Humber until 1087-88 when

it was joined by Durham. New mints at Carlisle (in c.1123) and Newcastle (c.1158-63) were well placed to exploit the new mines of Cumberland.

Four mints stand out among the known mints in terms of output: London, Canterbury, Ipswich, and Newcastle (Fig.16.). Only in Class A is London preeminent among the mints. The busiest mints for the recoinage of Stephen's old coins were the larger towns like Norwich, Winchester, Thetford, Canterbury and Lincoln with otherwise absent or small-scale mints like Leicester and Salisbury active only in this class (Fig.17.).

After this the picture changes reflecting the beginnings of a reduction in mints but also the placing of mints where commerce and the need for exchanging silver was most pressing. Through Classes B, C and D, Canterbury



Fig.18. Silver cross-and-crosslets of Class F minted at Ipswich by the moneyer Rodbert (© Portable Antiquities Scheme BUC-D41D56). Found at Alford, Lincs.



Fig.19. Silver cross-and-crosslets of Class D2 minted at Carlisle by the moneyer Willame (© Portable Antiquities Scheme ESS-202D42). Found at Fingringhoe, Essex.



Fig.20. Silver cross-and-crosslets of Class D minted by Acard at London (© Timeline Originals).

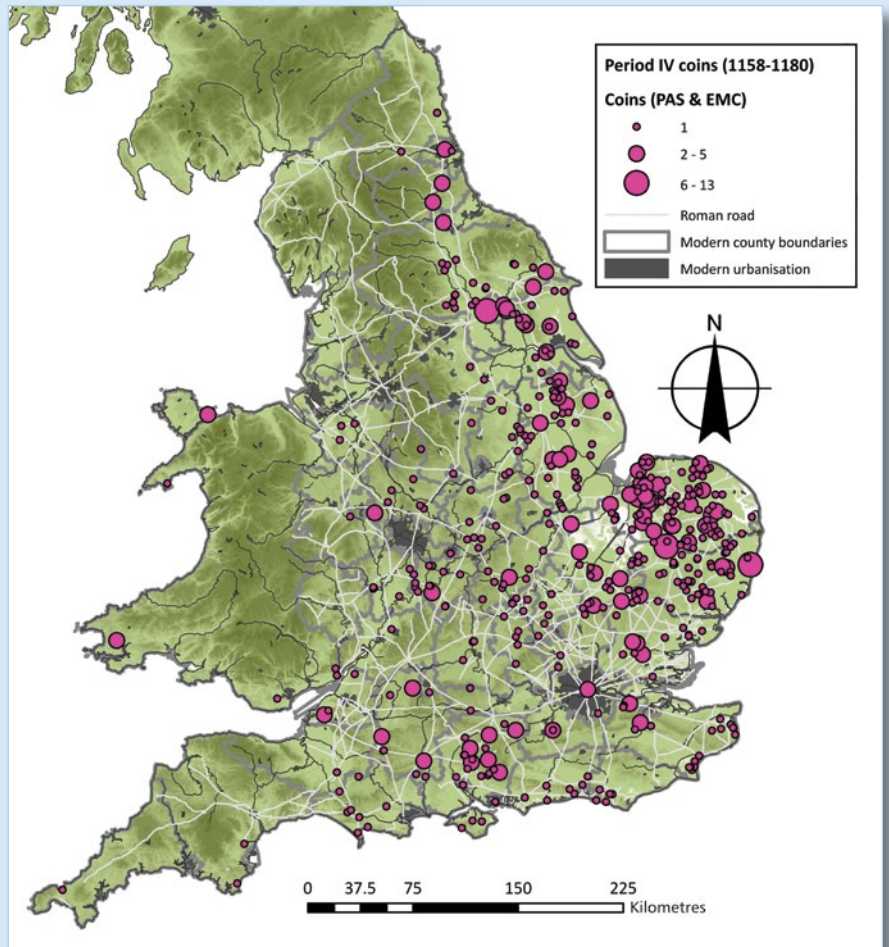


Fig.21. Distribution map of single finds recorded with PAS and EMC (© Richard Kelleher).

dominates, but in E and F we see the emergence of mints, other than London and Canterbury, assuming responsibility for the greater proportion of mint production.

Two noteworthy developments in minting occurred in this period involving two regions of the country usually at opposite ends of the scale of coin production – East Anglia and the northern counties of Cumbria and Northumberland. Ipswich came to become a significant mint in Classes B and C and after being absent in D and E accounts for more than a third of the sample in Class F (Fig.18.).

This huge growth after a hiatus has been associated with the rising of Henry II's eldest son the "Young King Henry" in 1173/4 where the heavy penalties imposed on East Anglia in the aftermath led to the minting of poorly struck

emergency issues. Carlisle first appeared as a minor mint under Henry I and Stephen. In this period its importance grows. It is present as a mid-range mint in A and B but comes to rank fourth most productive in C and joint-second in D before returning to a low ebb in E and F (Fig.19.).

Newcastle was a lower ranked mint in A, C, D and F and absent in B; however, in E – just as Carlisle's importance waned – Newcastle becomes the most dominant mint. Both mints were opened to exploit the new mines of Cumberland particularly at Alston Moor.

Debate over the productivity of these mines has ensued, but it is likely that the known number of dies for Newcastle and Carlisle between 1158 and 1205 would have been capable of producing £3,000-£8,000 in pennies. The single find sample is small, but shows that the northern mints contributed to the national currency in a way not seen in

earlier or later periods; and, as will be seen below, there was an element of localisation to their distribution.

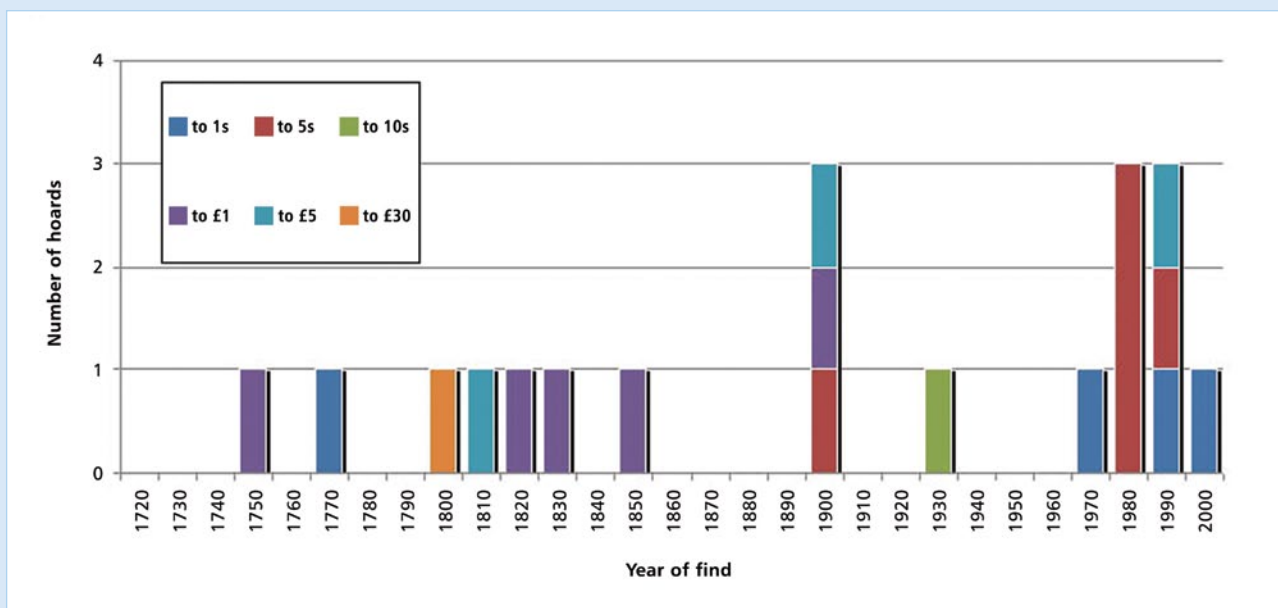
Looking for regional patterns of circulation is a key way to address questions about the currency and how it moved and was used. The general trend among the larger and second tier mints is one of wide dispersal. Ipswich coins found in the south are limited, and are found mostly to the north and west of the mint. They turn up most densely in East Anglia, but with some around the Severn Estuary, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Durham. The northern mints display some regional patterning and in percentage terms account for a larger proportion of the finds in the counties north of the Humber.

Moneyers

It is in this period that that we begin to learn more about the men who ran the mint operations. This is thanks to the survival of the Pipe Rolls for almost every

Kings and Coins in Medieval England

Fig.23. Hoards plotted by date of finding and value of content (© Richard Kelleher).



year of Henry's reign. These rolls were exchequer records detailing not only payments made to the government, but debts owed to the crown and disbursements made by royal officials. So, for example, we know of a debt of 10 marks owed by the moneyer Willelm of Wilton of which half is paid in 1158-9. The following year he pays a further 10 shillings and is then recorded as disappearing. A moneyer of London, named Accard, is shown to have left to go on crusade or pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Fig.20.).

Circulation Patterns

The distribution of single finds is in many ways very similar to that seen in Stephen's reign (Fig.21.). The dominant areas for finds are Norfolk and Suffolk with lesser numbers in Essex and Cambridgeshire. Lincolnshire, and North and East Yorkshire are well represented with increased intensification of sites along the road from the Humber to York. In the South East numbers rise in coastal Kent and Sussex, while in Hampshire coins are being recovered in greater numbers and from more individual locations than under Stephen.

Modest growth is visible in Warwickshire and Leicestershire, but in marginal areas such as Cornwall, Devon, Lancashire and Cumbria individual finds are scarce.

The numbers of coins minted in each class (as single finds) is shown in Fig.22. Two-thirds are of Classes A (1158-1163)

and C (1163-1167), with just over one fifth from Class F (1174-80), suggesting that production peaked at the recoinage (re-minting the existing coins of Stephen into the new money), in the following four years and again in the second half of the 1170s. As the mint network contracted there is no evidence to suggest that mint products were limited by class in their circulation in fact even the short-duration of Class F did not limit its dispersal.

Hoards

No English hoard terminating after Class C (c.1163-7) contains coins of Stephen so we can be fairly certain that by this stage the circulating medium was comprised almost exclusively of

cross-and-crosslets coins. In terms of interpretation hoards are of limited use due to the small size of some, such as the finds from Leiston, Suffolk (two coins), Little Barningham (three coins) and Mile Ditches (eight coins) and the lack of full publication of others.

Fortunately, some of the older hoards, like Lark Hill and Leicester, are sufficient for comparative analysis. Recent finds have tended to be of smaller size, only two hoards since 1900 have been greater than £1 in value (Fig.23.). The hoards, the largest of which from Tealby (Lincs.) consisted of c.6,000 coins, are almost entirely in the east of the country, and in general come from the areas of significant single finds, particularly in East Anglia, Lincolnshire and Hampshire and to a lesser

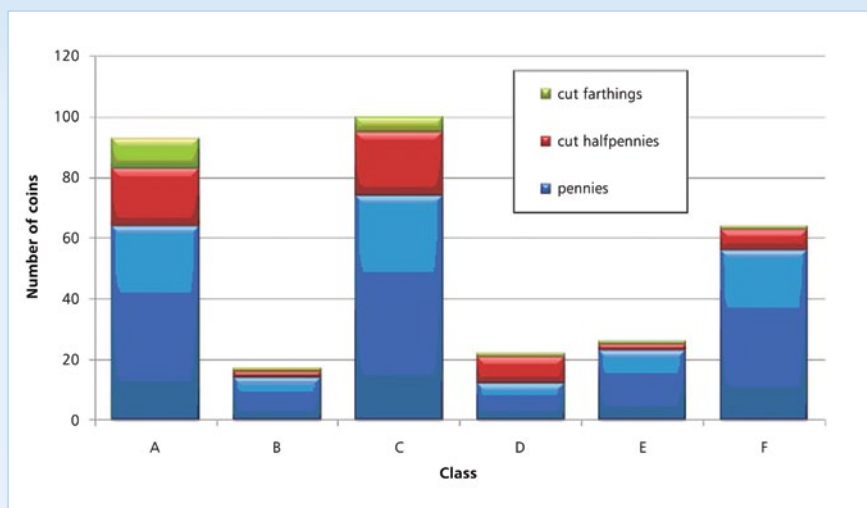


Fig.22. Coins by class and denomination (© Richard Kelleher).

Fig.25. Silver cross-and-crosslets Class F cut farthing. Found at Foulsham, Norfolk. (© Portable Antiquities Scheme NMS-012B91).

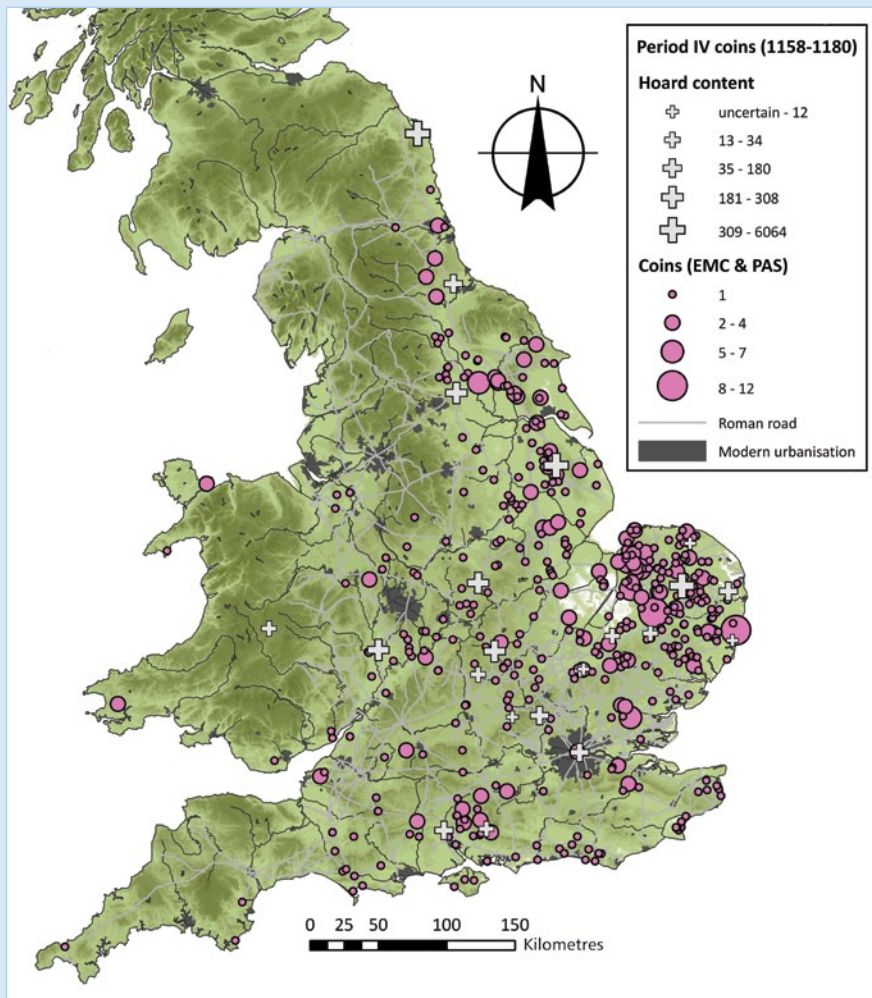


Fig.24. Distribution map of hoards (© Richard Kelleher).

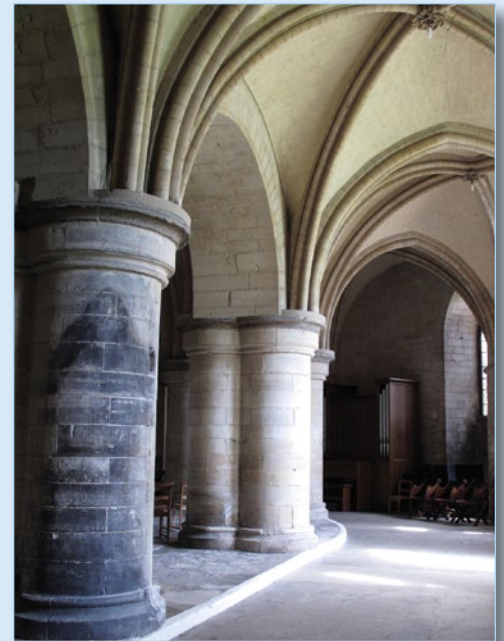
extent in the south Midlands (Fig.24.).

However, the Outchester hoard (Northumberland) reveals possession of coins away from the main areas of coin use, although there is an obvious link via the east coast to Durham and East Yorkshire where coin finds are more prevalent. The hoard from Cwmhir Abbey (Powys) is doubly analogous in its location – well outside the circulation zone – and in the fact that it was apparently composed entirely of French *deniers* which were not a part of the normal currency.

Denominations

Coins in this period – as with the previous Norman kings – consisted entirely of silver pennies. These would be cut into halves or quarters to produce half-

pennies and farthings (Fig.25.). Within the PAS and EMC data we find pennies dominate (60%) with cut halfpennies (30%) and cut farthings (10%) less prevalent. Fractions are rarely included in cross-and-crosslets hoards. Some like Awbridge and Gayton are composed entirely of pennies. A cut-halfpenny was in the West Meon hoard (2.9%) while cut-halfpennies and farthings accounted for 3.4% of the Lark Hill hoard. Wick-lewood differs from most hoards in a number of respects and its denominational profile is certainly interesting. More than a quarter of this hoard comprised fractions (23% halfpennies; 5% farthings) and the high proportion of East Anglian mint signatures shows they were probably drawn at a local level.



The crypt, Canterbury Cathedral.

Final Years

The cross-and-crosslets coinage marked a point of significant change in the English currency. This was most evident in the tightening of royal control over the king's money. Mint numbers began to be reduced with ecclesiastical mints gradually eliminated. The abolition of frequent changes of type not only makes modern identification more tricky, it would also cause its own problems, most damagingly in allowing underweight, clipped and generally poor quality coins to build up in the currency pool. At a meeting of the Curia Regis (king's royal council) at Oxford in January 1180 the decision was taken to introduce a new coinage. Next month we'll look at the end of the reign of Henry and those of his sons Richard and John and the important short cross coinage that was minted under all three men.

Further Reading

D.F. Allen, **British Museum Catalogue of the Cross-and-Crosslets ("Tealby") type of Henry II**, British Museum, London.

M. Allen, "Henry II and the English coinage", in C. Harper-Bill and N. Vincent (eds.), **Henry II. New interpretations**, (Boydell: Woodbridge, 2007).

Thomas K. Keefe, "Henry II (1133–1189)", **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography**, Oxford University Press, 2004. TH