

Coins of the Chester Mint

RECENTLY the Chester Archaeological Society has acquired for the sum of £1,443, raised by public subscription, the Willoughby-Gardner collection of 652 Chester minted coins. Generous grants were received from the Chester City Council, the Pilgrim Trust and the National Art-Collections Fund. This collection will be housed in the Grosvenor Museum, which will then have the finest provincial series of early English coins. It is particularly fitting that this collection has been purchased instead of being dispersed, which is the fate of so many similar things today. Coins of this period are becoming increasingly difficult to acquire; this is due to the stricter application of the law of Treasure Trove (see note in *Cheshire Historian*, vol. 1). Fifty or more years ago when hoards were found they often became dispersed and many coins passed into the hands of collectors. Nowadays, the coins go into national and provincial museums and, as the source of these coins is almost entirely from hoards, the number available for purchase is constantly diminishing. Anglo-Saxon coins are thus gradually acquiring a scarcity value which makes it all the more difficult for a small provincial museum to obtain particular specimens.

Chester, from the early 10th century, was an important trading centre and under Aethelstan (A.D. 925-939) was allowed eight moneys. Coins were used almost entirely as bullion by the merchants, and the King allowed approved members of this class to mint them with dies which he sold to them for a handsome fee. The dies appear to have been changed every year and so the King enjoyed a considerable income by farming out the mint, at the same time a strict watch was kept on the quality of the silver and if the standard dropped, the moneyer was punished by mutilation and the loss of his right hand, sometimes remitted by a heavy fine.

On the obverse of the coin was the King's name and titles, usually REX and sometimes with the addition TOT(IVS) BRIT(ANNIAE) (the whole of Britain). The centre of the obverse is usually blank except for a small cross but a small percentage of coins bear a portrait of the King. The reverse carries the name of the moneyer together, in some cases, with the name of the town in which the coin was minted. In the case of Chester this appears as LECE (CEASTRE).

The importance of these coins for any historian, for the economic, political, social or artistic aspects of the period, need hardly be emphasised. Quite recently, a system of privy marking on Saxon coins has been noticed which previously was thought to date from the Norman reorganisation of the mint. From the artistic aspect,

one can trace the degeneration which came at the end of the Saxon period and which the Normans did nothing to arrest. The names of the moneyers help to assess the extent of Scandinavian influence in different parts of Britain. These are only a few of the important results of a study of the numismatics of early England.

This important collection will be available to students for study and research and it will be of inestimable value to future historians.

G.W.

CESHIRE MATERIAL CULLED FROM JOURNALS.

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