

The Watchet Mint

BY A. L. WEDLAKE

THE fact that Watchet had a mint in Saxon times is well known from various histories of Somerset and the South West. The reference is invariably very brief, and usually dismissed with the remark that 'Æthelred II minted money at Watchet'. Mention is seldom made of the mint being used by later kings and, as a result, many people are under the impression that Æthelred II was the only king who minted there.

During Saxon and Norman times the money in general use in this country was not struck at a central mint as it is today, but was produced by moneyers in the more important towns. In Somerset, money was minted at what were apparently the principal towns, namely, Axbridge, Bath, Bruton, Cadbury, Crewkerne, Ilchester, Langport, Milborne Port, Petherton, Taunton and Watchet.

The first of the Saxon kings to mint money in Somerset appears to have been Edward the Elder; there are also examples of coins struck during the reigns of Æthelstan, Edgar and Edward the Martyr. These early coins are extremely scarce, only a few examples being known.

By the time of Æthelred II, money seems to have been issued in greater quantity from the Somerset mints, and the first money struck at Watchet was apparently made by the local moneyers for this king. Numerically the coins greatly exceed those of any other king as the following table of four collections shows:

	<i>Taunton.</i>	<i>British Museum.</i>	<i>Copenhagen.</i>	<i>Stockholm.</i>
ÆTHELRED II	5	6	1	9
CNUT	—	1	4	6
HAROLD I	—	1	—	2
HARTHACNUT	—	—	1	1
EDWARD CON-				
FESSOR	—	3	—	2
WILLIAM I	—	2	—	—
WILLIAM II	—	1	—	—
HENRY I	—	—	—	—
STEPHEN	—	1	—	—

In a list at the end of this paper will be found particulars of all the coins I have been able to trace in museum collections as having been minted at Watchet. This list gives the name of the reigning king from the obverse, and from the reverse, the name of the local moneyer and the mint. As will be seen there are seven different names of moneyers on the Watchet coins, one of whom, Godcild, appears to have minted for no fewer than four kings: Cnut, Harold I, Harthacnut and Edward the Confessor.

The moneyer was an important official in Saxon and Norman times, the post being usually held by a burgess of the town, a man of property and a responsible citizen. His name inscribed on a coin guaranteed its genuineness, and enabled the king's representatives to check any irregularities.

Reverse legends on the coins of Æthelred read: **SILERIC M-O PECEd** and **HVNEPINE M-O PECEd**, meaning, *Sigeric*, or *Hunewine*, *monetarius* (*moneyer*), *Weceð*. The Saxon character which looks like a triangular P, was used for W until the reign of Stephen. From the time of Cnut the legend reads: **GOdcILD ON PECEd**, the ON meaning IN, so that we have *Godcild in Weceð*. It will also be noticed that the name of the mint has several variations of spelling during the period, from PECEd at the time of Æthelred to WAcET in the reign of Stephen. These differences may be clearly seen in the coins illustrated in Pl. V, which was prepared by the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum to show their collection of Watchet coins.

The currency of the country during the whole of the period under review was the silver penny, and no denomination of larger size or value appears to have been issued. Pennies could be cut to make halfpennies and quarters (farthings), though as far as we are aware none of these cut pieces are known from Watchet.

Reference to the list will show that the money from Watchet is well dispersed. It is also significant that most of the Anglo-Saxon pennies are in Scandinavia. Mr. N. L. Rasmusson, Keeper of the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm, informs me that their collection contains a very large number of Anglo-Saxon coins, 'mainly originating from hundreds of hoards buried in the period A.D. 950-1100, the later time of the

Vikings'. Mr. Georg Galster of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, writes that several of their Anglo-Saxon coins, including three from Watchet, came from hoards discovered in Jutland and Seeland.

In a paper written by the Rev. T. F. Dymock in 1851¹ a comparison of the numbers of Anglo-Saxon coins in the British Museum and in the Royal Collection of Stockholm is given. At this time, he states, the British Museum had 144 pieces of Æthelred II, while the Stockholm collection had 2254; of Cnut, the British Museum had 380, Stockholm 1396; and of Harold I the British Museum had 48, while the Stockholm collection contained 237.

A considerable difference is noticed in the relative numbers of the coins of Edward the Confessor; of this king the British Museum had 450 pieces, while the Royal Collection of Stockholm contained only 273. During the period that has elapsed since this was written there have been additions to both collections, but it is extremely doubtful if the relative proportions have altered very much.

Commenting on these figures, the Rev. Dymock wrote: 'This statement may serve as an illustration of the extent to which our Forefathers were plundered in the tenth and eleventh centuries.' The Danes undoubtedly organized their raids on a commercial plan. After a preliminary harrying a demand was made for payment of money as a condition of withdrawal, every few years the operation being repeated.

Payments of Danegeld were made on numerous occasions during the tenth and eleventh centuries, and we have seen it estimated that between A.D. 991 and A.D. 1014 the Viking armies received 158,000 pounds of silver, probably equal to between £8 and £10 millions in modern money. There seems every reason to believe that among this considerable amount of tribute collected by the Danes, coins minted at Watchet found their way into Scandinavian hoards, and the evidence that we have of raids on Watchet during these unsettled times appears to substantiate this.

The first recorded raid on Watchet was that of A.D. 918, mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

¹ Rev. T. F. Dymock, 'On Coins issued from Somerset Mints', *P.S.A.S.*, i (1851), ii, 12.

Then nevertheless they [the Danes] stole away by night on some two occasions, once up to the east of Watchet, and on another occasion to Porlock. Then they were beaten on both occasions, so that few of them came away save only those who there swam out to the ships. And these seated themselves out on the island of Flatholme.

A more serious raid is mentioned by Florence of Worcester,² as having taken place in A.D. 977. He records that the Danes :

Entered the mouth of the river Severn, and ravaged sometimes Cornwall, sometimes North Wales, and then Watchet in Devonshire, and there brought great evil in burning and man-slaying.

A most interesting account of a raid on the Watchet district is given in a tract, believed to have been written by Robert Gay (1631-72), parson of Nettlecombe.³ Here is a verbatim extract from the document :

The 4th Invasion (A.D. 988) was *apud* Wecheport, *alias* Wechport, (*i.e.*) Watchett. Thus the heathonish Danes having left Brittain, for the space of 19 years, at length return hither, under the command of Ohterus and Rhoaldus their Generalls, and having sailed round Cornwall, came into Seaverne, plundered and burnt upon the Sea Coast wheresoever they had opportunity, but the King had disposed his Armie into convenient places of defence from the River Avon, which runs through Bristoll, along the Sea Coasts to Cornwall, notwithstanding the Danes brake into Watchett by stealth in the night, plundered and burnt the same, and then they marched toward the other part thereof, which must be Williton. . . .

Both Worsaae,⁴ and Albany Major,⁵ suggest that Sihtric III of Dublin used the Watchet mint. The last named writes :

Watchet at all events lost neither its importance nor its connection with the Danes of Ireland in Saxon times. At the end of the tenth century it had a mint, where not only coins of the Saxon Kings were struck, but also those of Sigtrygg Silkbeard, King of Dublin.

As a result of enquiries made to the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum regarding this claim, I was informed that it was most improbable on historical grounds

² Albany F. Major, *Early Wars of Wessex* (1913), pp. 29, 131.

³ H. St. George Gray, F.S.A., 'Battlegore, Williton', *Proceedings*, lxxvii (1931), pp. 8-9.

⁴ Worsaae, *The Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland and Ireland* (1852), pp. 339-40.

⁵ Albany F. Major, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

that Sihtric ever minted at Watchet. It was suggested that contemporary Anglo-Saxon coins were closely copied by the Dublin moneyers.

I have received confirmation of this recently in a letter from Dr. O'Sullivan of the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, who writes: 'There are two coins in our collection, struck under the authority of Sihtric of Dublin, bearing on the reverse the name of Sigeric, Watchet. They are both copies of the CRUX issue of Æthelred II of England and the appearance of an English moneyer's name is merely slavish copying on the part of the moneyer.' With this evidence it seems that we can rule out the claim that Sihtric minted at Watchet; at the same time it would appear that there may be grounds for assuming that there were connections between Watchet and Ireland at this time.

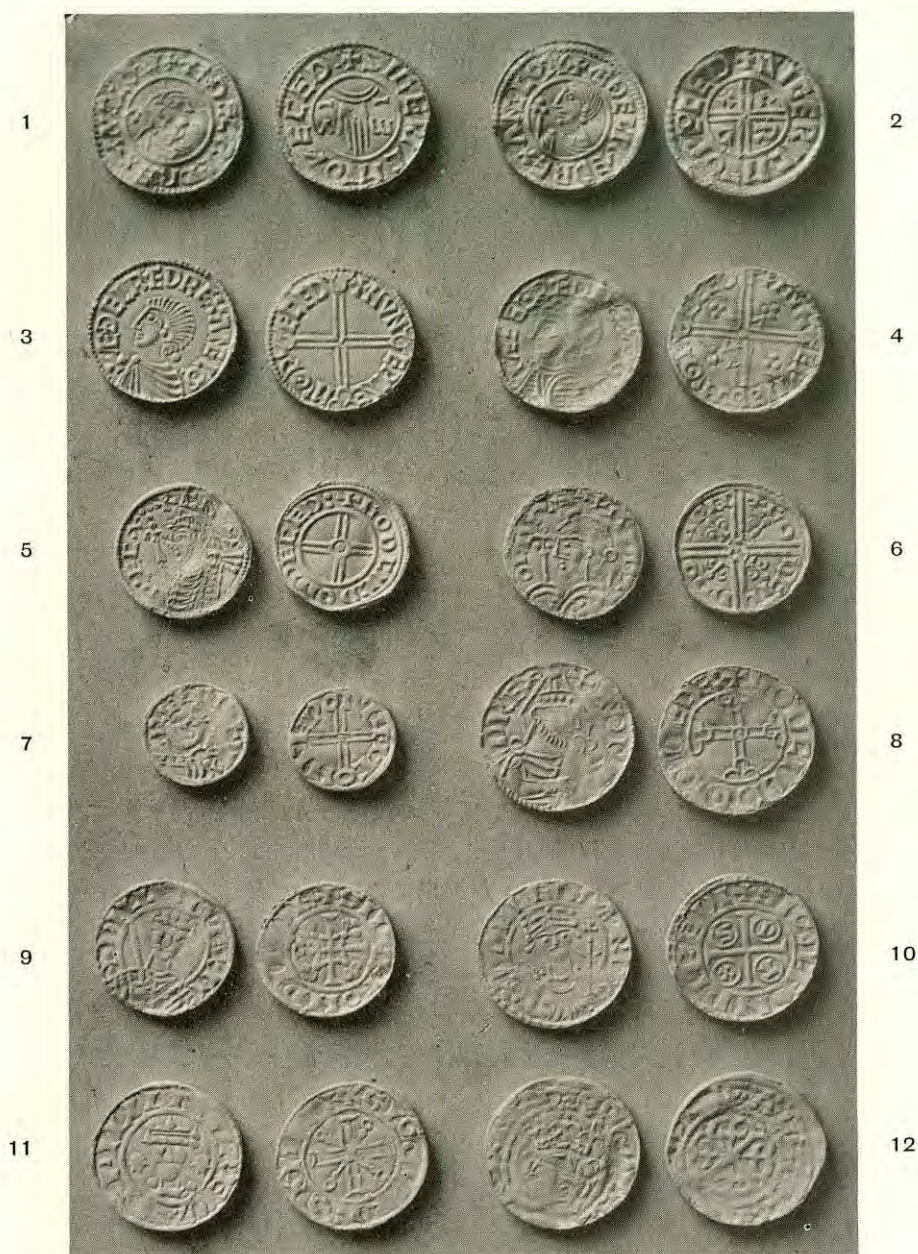
Unfortunately no early records exist which give us any information about the Watchet mint, the only evidence we have being the coins themselves. As to the site of the mint, we cannot even hazard a guess since no ancient buildings remain. It seems certain that the constant erosion of the river gravel, on which the old part of the town still stands, has removed all traces of the original site of the ancient Saxon settlement, and the spot, on which Hunewine, Godcild, Loc and the other moneyers of Saxon and Norman Watchet plied their craft, has long since been washed over by the waters of the Severn Sea.

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The Royal Cabinet Collection, Stockholm, contains a number of recent additions to those listed on page 117 but unfortunately they have not yet been classified. There are also a small number of Watchet coins in private collections, particulars of which I have been unable to obtain.

KEY TO PLATE

<i>No.</i>	<i>King.</i>	<i>Reverse Legend.</i>	<i>Moneyer.</i>
1	ÆTHELRED II	SIGERIC M-O PELED.	SIGERIC
2	"	SIGERIC M-O PELED.	"
3	"	HVNEPINE M-. PELED	HUNEWINE
4	"	" " "	"
5	CNUT (CANUTE)	GODCILD ON PELED.	GODCILD
6	HAROLD I	GODCILD ON PEL.	"
7	EDWARD CONFESSOR	L.L ON CEPOR.I	LOC
8	EDWARD CONFESSOR	GODCILD ON PECE:	GODCILD
9	WILLIAM I	SIWOLF ON PIEDE.	SIWOLF
10	"	SIGOLF ON PIEDI.	SIGOLF
11	WILLIAM II	SIGOVLF ON PICI.	SIGOULF
12	STEPHEN	FO... .ON. WACET.	FO ... ?



[British Museum.]

COINS OF THE WATCHET MINT

APPENDIX : LIST OF WATCHET COINS IN
MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

<i>King.</i>	<i>Moneyer's Name.</i>	<i>Mint Spelling.</i>	<i>Cat. No.</i>	<i>Museum.</i>
ÆTHELRED II	SIGERIC	PELED.	336	<i>British Museum</i>
	"	PELED	337	" "
	HVNEPINE	"	338	" "
	SIGERIC	"	—	" "
	HVNEPINE	"	—	" "
	"	"	—	" "
	"	"	—	<i>Copenhagen</i>
	"	PELT	3381	<i>Stockholm</i>
	"	PEC	3382	"
	"	PECED	3383	"
	"	"	3384	"
	"	"	3385	"
	SIGERIC	"	3386	"
	VAR	"	3387	"
	"	"	3388	"
	"	"	3389	"
	SIGERIC	"	—	<i>Taunton</i>
	"	"	—	"
	HVNEPINE	"	—	"
	"	"	—	"
	"	"	—	"
CNUT (CANUTE)	GODCILD	PELED	550	<i>British Museum</i>
	"	"	—	<i>Copenhagen</i>
	"	PECD	—	"
	"	PECE	—	"
	"	PELED	—	"
	"	"	3583	<i>Stockholm</i>
	VAR	"	3584	"
	LOTCIL	PECD	3585	"
	LOTCILD	PE	3586	"
HAROLD I	HVNEPINE	PE	3587	"
	"	PECD	3588	"
	LODCILD	PEC	—	<i>British Museum</i>
	LODCILDD	PEC	96	<i>Stockholm</i>
HARTHACNUT	LOTCILD	PECD	968	"
	Attribution to	Watchet uncertain.		<i>Copenhagen</i>
EDWARD CONFESSOR	GODCILD	PELED	191	<i>Stockholm</i>
	LOC	CEPOR. I.	1298	<i>British Museum</i>
	GODCILD	PECE:	1299	" "
	"	PE	743	<i>Stockholm</i>
WILLIAM I	"	PEC	744	"
	SIVOLF	PICDE	440	<i>British Museum</i>
WILLIAM II	SIGOLF	PICEDI	1054	" "
	SIGOULF	PILI	226	" "
STEPHEN	FO—?	WACET	113	" "