



Forsyth, David S (2014) Current developments with the coin cabinet at National Museums Scotland.

Money and Medals: The Newsletter for Numismatics in Britain, No. 63, December 2014

<http://repository.nms.ac.uk/1478>

Deposited on: 30 September 2015

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Current developments with the coin cabinet at National Museums Scotland

David S. Forsyth

Over the past two years National Museums Scotland (NMS) has undergone a comprehensive review and restructure of the curatorial departments as the organisation progresses its ambitious Masterplan to modernise and redevelop the Chambers Street museum complex. In 2012 a new Department of Scottish History and Archaeology was created with *inter alia* the purpose of leading the research, development and curation of the future redevelopment of the Scotland galleries within the National Museum of Scotland. These are the displays which are housed in the modernist extension to the Chambers Street complex and designed by the architectural partnership of Benson and Forsyth, and which were opened by HM the Queen on 30 November 1998.

As any readers of this newsletter, who have visited the National Museum of Scotland, might recall numerous specimens from our coin cabinet are peppered throughout the Scotland galleries. Their own inherent interest and importance aside, coins have been liberally used to help to augment the permanent displays and enhance both the interpretation and the narrative of special exhibitions. In 2013 as curator of the NMS exhibition *Mary, Queen of Scots* held at the National Museum of Scotland, I was delighted to be able to use key objects drawn from our numismatic collection including the extremely rare Marriage Ryal of 1565 (above). This being the one with the then notorious design of the portraits of Mary and her husband facing each other and the legend beginning with the name of Mary's consort Henry before that of the Queen of Scots.

Under the new departmental structure the management of the numismatic collection will fall under the aegis of the Medieval-Early Modern Section, although specific elements of the collection will have curatorial input from the other relevant chronological sections within the Department. However, at present the first points of contact for the numismatic collection are as follows: David Forsyth, Principal Curator, Medieval-Early Modern Collections, Department of Scottish History and Archaeology (d.forsyth@nms.ac.uk) and Lyndsay McGill, Curator, Medieval-Early Modern Collections, Department of Scottish History and Archaeology (l.mcgill@nms.ac.uk).



Currently the Medieval-Early Modern Section is the most active sectional collector in terms numismatics. The majority of these acquisitions are made through cases which come before the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel. Indeed through this Scottish Treasure Trove process in more recent months we have made some rare and interesting numismatic acquisitions. We successfully bid for a specimen which constitutes a previously unrecorded variety of Malcolm IV's coinage. This coin is particularly exciting due to the fact that coins of Malcolm IV are rare, additionally the facing bust of the king on this example is currently known on only a handful of specimens. However, most significantly the reverse design is one previously unknown in combination with this particular obverse. It is similar to a design used on some sterlings of David I, save that the stalks in the angles of the cross on the latter are shorter and thinner. We are also pleased to have made a successful bid through Treasure

Trove for a further group of 14 coins from the hoard previously found on 6 September 1922 by John Cochrane, farmer at Auchenbart in the Parish of Galston, Ayrshire, in the course of repairing drainage in one of his fields. Of the original find of around 240-250 coins, 216 were examined for Treasure Trove purposes while a selection of 45 were retained by the then National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS), one of the predecessor institutions of today's NMS. This is in stark contrast to the current situation where it is now customary for all coins in a hoard to be declared Treasure Trove. This is reflected in the fact that 12 specimens in the original find 'passed into private hands' before due process by the Crown authorities was able to take place. As was common at the time many of these coins were never declared by the finders

This hoard was highly unusual as it comprised of a majority of continental issues (there being only seven English issues, and not even a single Scottish example). The more recent find continues to reflect this fact, as all of the 14 coins are varieties of continental sterlings. The significance of this addition to the Auchenbart hoard is that it imbues the 1922 find with a more highly accurate findspot.

In recent weeks we actively sought to purchase by auction a rare David I Silver Penny, Quadrilateral on Cross Fleury type, by the moneyer Erebald of the Carlisle Mint. Although we were outbid on this sale NMS is keen to ensure that we continue to acquire for our coin cabinet whenever ever-decreasing resources allow. At the time of writing (November 2014) the department is in the process of moving the bulk of its history and archaeology collections to a new bespoke building within the National Museums Collections Centre at Granton, our main storage, conservation and research facility situated in the north of Edinburgh. This means that access to our collections is seriously limited until this major task is accomplished. However, this project is scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2015. That being said, we continue to engage with and welcome enquires from the numismatic world. The author is grateful to Stuart Campbell, Treasure Trove Manager at NMS for his advice in the preparation of this note.