

Oxford Coin-collectors of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

By the late J. GRAFTON MILNE

THE foundation of the study of Numismatics in Oxford is usually dated to 1636, when Archbishop Laud sent five cabinets of coins to the Bodleian ; but there were collectors amongst the members of the University some decades earlier. The first record that has been found is in 1552, in the nuncupative will of Edward Beaumont, B.A., of Christ Church, who bequeathed half of his antiquities, certain foreign silver coins, to Bridges, who was presumably a fellow student.¹ The inventory annexed to the will does not give any particulars of the coins, but it may be surmised that they were contemporary European, from the analogy of Barcham's collection, the next to be described : if they had been Greek or Roman, they would probably have been so named.

Of John Barcham and his coins much more is known, and the greater part of his collection has been re-united at the Ashmolean after a division of three centuries.² He was a Devon man, who was elected to a Scholarship at Corpus in 1588 and proceeded to his Fellowship in 1596 ; shortly after that there are traces of his activity as a collector in several quarters. He was Bursar of the College in 1600, and appears to have worked on tidying up the College Archives, buying up old parchments to serve as wrappers : one of the sources of supply was probably Christ Church, where the Clerk, some years later in Anthony Wood's time, seems to have been ready to sell or give away any old parchments that he regarded as waste.³ This may account for the presence in the Corpus Muniment-room of some Christ Church documents which were probably picked out by Barcham as worthy of preservation from a bundle of salvage, as well as of others used as bindings : notes in his hand occur on several. It was possibly the enthusiasm of a collector which led to his being summoned before the Prebendal Court at Thame about 1600. But he was no hoarder of his treasures : he gave valuable books to the Library at Corpus on several occasions, and to the Bodleian on its foundation in 1602 ; the latter gift may have led to the transfer of his coins to the Bodleian some years later.

¹ *Oxoniensia*, iv, 199.

² J. G. Milne, *Early History of Corpus Christi College, Oxford* (1946), p. 33.

³ Wood, *Life and Times* (ed. Clark), ii, 112, 113.

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A few donations of coins appear in the Bodleian Register of Benefactors before 1635,⁴ the year in which Archbishop Laud began his great campaign for the enrichment of the Library ; but they do not seem to have been of much moment, and there are no details preserved by which they could be identified. Coins were probably not envisaged by Sir Thomas Bodley as instruments for teaching ; but Laud took a wider view, possibly moved by the development of numismatic studies on the Continent, and in the first instance apparently turned to Barcham for help. Anthony Wood records concerning Barcham : ' He had the best collection of coins of any clergyman in England, which being given by him to Dr. Laud archb. of Cant. (who much desired them) they came soon after, by his gift, to Bodley's library.'⁵ The collection was accompanied by a list, now MS. Laud Misc. 554, which is a fair copy of one at Lambeth in Barcham's hand : both these lists have entries of later additions, presumably also from Barcham, as the copy pasted at the end of the Laud MS. in Bodley was written by Barcham. From the lists it is evident that the collection, which was sent from Lambeth in five cabinets, was composed almost entirely of English, Greek, and Roman coins : the Greek, and to a lesser degree the Roman, can often be identified from the catalogues of Roman coins drawn up by Elias Ashmole in 1666, later annotated by Thomas Hearne, and of Greek coins by Hearne about 1702. The English series, which from the lists would have been the most interesting, suffered a severe loss in 1649 : many of the best were lent to Sir Simonds D'Ewes on 13 February of that year and never returned, although he had given a bond of £500 to return them by the following October.⁶ It may not have been entirely his fault, as he died less than two months after the date of the bond ; but a note in Hearne's Collections, which quotes a statement of William Baker of Cambridge, suggests that either Sir Simonds or his agents were not scrupulous in their acquisition of antiquities.⁷ These coins probably passed into the Harley collection, but the catalogue of the Harley Sale gives very few particulars of the lots.⁸

It is fairly clear from the lists that Barcham's collection was that of a serious student of numismatics. Thomas Fuller says that ' he was a greater lover of Coyns than of Money, rather curious in the stamps than covetous for the Metall thereof',⁹ and he may be accounted the first English numismatist of whom any details are preserved. He is credited by Hearne with having been the actual author of Guillim's Heraldry, which would fit in well with

⁴ Sir Edmund Craster, in *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, iv, 24 ; 44 ; 68.

⁵ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (ed. Bliss), iii, 35.

⁶ *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, vii, 422.

⁷ *Hearne's Collections*, x (O.H.S., lxvii), p. 179.

⁸ *Catalogue of the Collections of Edward, Earl of Oxford* (Cock), 1742.

⁹ T. Fuller, *Worthies* (ed. 1662), i, 276.

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his interest in coins. The whole of the collection did not go to the Bodleian : a small parcel of twenty-five gold and four silver European coins, the latest dated 1566, was found in the Tower Chamber at Corpus in 1648 by the newly-appointed President, Edmund Staunton, and recorded by him in the Tower Register : it had fortunately escaped the notice of the Parliamentary Visitors.¹⁰ There seems reason to connect this parcel with Barcham : Laud probably was not interested in modern coins, so Barcham passed them over to his old College when he gave his collection to Laud for the Bodleian in 1636 : this date may be supported by the fact that Staunton did not know anything of the history of the parcel when he found it in 1648, and he had been a Fellow of the College till 1628. There is also in the Tower a deed relating to a mortgage on lands at Bocking in Essex, dated in 1613, and redeemable in 1615 : the College never held any lands at Bocking, but Barcham became Dean of Bocking in 1610 : so he may well have picked up this deed and used it to wrap up the parcel of coins that he wished to send to the College in 1636 : the condition of the parchment suits the idea that it had served as wrapping for a small parcel.¹¹ The coins were placed with the College collection early in the 18th century, and came with it to the Ashmolean to rejoin their old associates.

These coins are in very good condition, much better than the majority of Barcham's Greek and Roman ; and, as there are fourteen different Continental mints represented amongst the twenty-nine pieces, and Barcham is not known to have travelled on the Continent, it may be suggested that he picked them up from goldsmiths or money-changers in London : a prebend at St. Paul's was annexed to his Deanery at Bocking, which would involve visits to London ; and from his earlier history he can well be imagined as hunting in any likely places for accessions to his collections.

The next gift to the Bodleian was also due to Laud, though it did not come to Oxford till after his death. In 1644 Sir Thomas Rowe of Magdalen, who had been Ambassador at Constantinople in 1621, bequeathed to the Bodleian all his silver and brass coins, to be sent there 'when safely they may, and if these tymes doe not evyve both ye universyte and librarrye' ; and 244 coins were duly received.¹² Laud was staying at Rowe's house on his way to Oxford a few days after the despatch of the first consignment of Barcham's coins, and that would give an opening for the suggestion of the gift.¹³ The coins were joined to Barcham's in the cabinets, and Hearne was unable to separate the two, so marked them all 'L' in his catalogues. As the only

¹⁰ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 5th Ser., vii, 187.

¹¹ *Essex Review*, xlii (1933), 122.

¹² *Oxoniensia*, i, 159.

¹³ A. J. Taylor, in *Oxoniensia*, i, 153.

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collection containing any Greek coins received after Rowe's and before Hearne's work was Freke's in 1657, and his coins are marked 'F' in the catalogues, it may be assumed that those Greek coins which are not in Barcham's lists and are marked 'L' come from Rowe's bequest. Most of them are of the class which might be expected to be found in the bazaars of Constantinople: the most notable are of the Aegean islands. Sir Thomas seems to have picked his coins with discrimination, and the terms of his bequest suggest that he regarded them with interest, though it is perhaps unsafe to envisage the Ambassador as spending his spare time in hunting through the bazaar.

The next gift to the Bodleian recorded in the Register is that of Ralph Freke just mentioned: this consisted of about 500 coins, apparently all Greek or Roman, and would appear to have been a scholarly collection, if the description in the Register may be trusted: it says that they were 'sumptu industria judicioque singulari a se collecti', and those which can be identified justify the entry. At the same time his brother William Freke gave a cabinet 'regale plane et augustum, auro gemmisque coruscum, opera tamen materiam superante', of which only some drawers survive: it was according to Hearne 'a curious large cabinet', and there is a figure of what is most probably this cabinet as a headpiece in Wise's catalogue of 1750;²⁴ but there is no trace of what ultimately happened to the shell.

The gifts which followed in the next few years were rather of a miscellaneous type, several of them single coins, some of which can be identified—for instance, a gold medal given by the widow of Sir Thomas Rowe struck in honour of her husband, and a triple unite of Charles I struck at Oxford in 1644 given by Thomas Philpott, both in 1668.²⁵ The descriptions of the larger gifts in the Register are summary: in 1666 George Purefoy gave 'antiqua plurima et moderna Romanorum Anglorum Germanorum Hispanorum aliarumque nationum numismata', James Hyde 'antiqua aliquot numismata aurea argentea et aenea', and Thomas Locket 'aurea argentea et aenea aliquot numismata': from these entries no definite information as to the character of the coins can be derived. But in one case at least it is clear that the donor was interested in the fate of his coins: in 1680 George Hickes gave about 200 Greek, Roman and Oriental coins, and on 22 March 1707 Hearne records in his Diary the receipt of a letter from Hickes enquiring what had been done with them: Hearne's reply, in which he explains that the coins had been incorporated with the main series in the cabinets, has lately been acquired by the Ashmolean.

²⁴ F. Wise, *Nummorum antiquorum . . . catalogus*, p. 93, with which see J. N. L. Myres, *Bodleian Library Record*, III, no. 29 (1950), 45.

²⁵ W. D. Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library*, p. 134.

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The general impression derived from the Register of gifts to the Bodleian is that there was a good deal of collecting of coins in the University during the second half of the 17th century, but no use of the collections for teaching purposes, nor anything like a centre for numismatic studies. The first attempt at making them available to the members of the University generally was in the catalogue drawn up by Elias Ashmole and presented to the Bodleian in 1668: it is in three manuscript volumes, and contains a fairly accurate description of all the Roman coins then in the Library. But a more important work on practical numismatics was that written by Obadiah Walker, Master of University College from 1676 to 1689: it was published in 1691 at London, but may fairly be regarded as an Oxford book. It is entitled 'The Greek and Roman History illustrated by Coins and Medals', and gives much advice and guidance to teachers of history which might belong to the 20th century: it was violently attacked in France some years later, but, as will be seen, would appear to have had considerable influence in Oxford amongst antiquarians, some of whom were associated with the foundation of the Royal Society: John Aubrey of Trinity may serve as an example. He was an enthusiastic amateur rather than a trained student, whose interests were wide and aims indefinite, but nevertheless his notes record items of value in several fields of archaeology, including numismatics.¹⁶

Elias Ashmole, who has been mentioned as the first cataloguer of the Roman coins in the Bodleian, founded his Museum in 1683 with the design of making in it a collection of material for the study of all branches of Science, practically parallel with the objectives of the Royal Society. Coins inevitably found a home here: the nucleus of the Museum consisted of the Tradescant Museum, which contained a number of coins of a very miscellaneous character, strongest on the medallic side, as was natural in what was primarily a show-place. But Ashmole was interested in coins in their relation to history, and had collected a number, though they were lost before his Museum was opened in a fire at his rooms in the Temple: the cabinet was, however, kept going by gifts from several sources, and under the fourth keeper, Edward Whiteside of B.N.C., it seems to have become the recognized centre for local finds, while larger collections given to the University were deposited in the Bodleian. This was probably the most convenient arrangement under prevailing conditions: the Ashmolean provided a laboratory, while the Bodleian was close at hand for literary references. It would appear that in the 18th century it was recognized in some quarters that the Bodleian was not the only centre for research in Oxford, from the terms of Rawlinson's will, which bequeathed his collections to the University to be placed in the

¹⁶ J. Britton, *Memoir of John Aubrey* (Lond., 1945).

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Bodleian Library or in such other place as they should deem most proper for the use and benefit of the University.

For a time, however, at the beginning of the century the Bodleian was the scene of the chief numismatic activity in Oxford, owing to the presence on the staff there of Thomas Hearne, appointed Janitor in 1701 and Sub-Librarian in 1712; he was removed from the latter post in 1715. His catalogues of the collections in the Library are first-rate in their accuracy of detail: this comes out most clearly in the list of coins given by William Raye, a Smyrna merchant, in 1702, where he had to deal with an assemblage of Greek and Roman coins in all degrees of condition: he puts down with meticulous care all that he could read on each coin, and there is seldom anything to be added to his transcripts, except where a later publication of a better preserved specimen makes it possible for a defective legend to be completed. He also served as a guide and adviser to the younger members of the University who were interested in numismatics, and who were fairly numerous: his Diaries, which he kept from 1705 till the end of his life, are full of allusions to visits paid him by such men, and he often adds his identifications of the coins they showed him. Finds of coins are also noted, not only from Oxford and the vicinity, but from places much farther afield: he kept up a steady correspondence with Yorkshire, and in one case with Ireland: these records provide valuable evidence of some finds which have now been lost.

Hearne's poverty prevented him from collecting coins on any large scale: he was too much occupied with his work in the Library to wander about Oxford, as Anthony Wood had done, and pick up stray pieces from labourers for a trifle; and what he possessed in the way of coins was derived from the gifts of his friends, so far as can be judged from the entries in his diaries. But he inspired enthusiasm in those who came to consult him, and to him may be attributed in some degree a fashion amongst the younger members of the University of forming collections, which led to the foundation of collections by Colleges. Two of these in particular attained some size at this period—at Corpus and Christ Church.

The nucleus of the Corpus cabinet, which is mentioned by Hearne as already existing in 1705, was formed by Barcham's parcel of gold and silver described above; to this some few additions had been made, for instance, a large Spanish gold piece of Enrico IV given by a former Fellow, William Creed, who was practising as a physician in London and had probably received it as a present from a Spanish patient; he is not known to have been an antiquarian. But Hearne's note in 1705 was prompted by a visit from Christopher Wase the younger, who told him that he designed to leave his coins to the College; and a few days later showed him about 50 Roman

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coins found at Cirencester : some of the coins identified by Hearne can be traced in the Corpus cabinet. And from that date onwards the Register of the College shows frequent gifts by members and others : in 1716 a large find of Roman coins was made at Exeter, and three gifts of specimens from this find from non-members indicate that steps had been taken by some member, probably Joshua Reynolds, an Exonian, to secure a share of the find for the College from local people at Exeter.¹⁷ The most important accession came from William Hallifax, who had been Chaplain of the Levant Company's factory at Aleppo, and had done some amount of archaeological research there : he is best known as one of the first visitors to Palmyra in modern times. When the cabinet was catalogued about 1750 by Thomas Randolph, the President of the College, it had attained a respectable size : Randolph, who himself made several additions to it, was a good numismatist, and his catalogue is a competent piece of work.

The Christ Church cabinet began to be formed a little later, but soon outstripped its next-door neighbour at Corpus.¹⁸ The earliest donation recorded is one from Charles Brent received in 1718, which comprised 488 specimens, almost entirely Roman. But this does not mark the first numismatic activity at Christ Church : a year before this Hearne noted in his Diary the names of two members of the House who were 'studious of antiquities, particularly coins', and they recur in the next six years, together with those of five others, as coming to consult him about their coins. A little later, in 1737, there came a notable bequest from Archbishop Wake of some thousands of coins, which he had collected specifically with a view to their use for purposes of study : in his own words, the collection was 'intended for the use of the public when I myself must have done with it'. It is a much better representative collection than either of the two University cabinets was at the time, at any rate so far as the Greek and Roman series are concerned, and at the end of his life he was busy building up the English section.

The 18th century witnessed the development of coin-collecting into a kind of fashionable pursuit amongst the aristocracy : the number of titled names that occur in Hearne's Diary is significant. But they did not affect Oxford : in 1718 Hearne notes that Lord Abingdon intended to give all his coins to Christ Church Library, but there is no record that they were ever received. The prices of fine coins soared, and the desire of wealthy collectors to possess unique specimens led to unscrupulous practices : in 1732 Hearne notes that 'Lord Pembroke destroys all duplicates of his coins', which is amplified by Stukely's statement that Lord Pembroke often told him that he

¹⁷ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 6th Ser., VIII, 219.

¹⁸ C. H. V. Sutherland, in *Oxoniensia*, V, 140.

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had hatfulls of coins brought him from the quarries of Portland from which he selected what he wanted and melted down the rest.¹⁹ This probably forced poorer collectors to go out into the highways and hedges—to field-work ; and thus had some beneficial result. Among these collectors was another Christ Church man, Browne Willis ; and from his papers some idea may be obtained of his researches. They began with the century, in his undergraduate days, and one of his early captures was an Oxford pattern crown of Charles I, which he bought for 12s. 6d. from an old lady who had kept it ever since it was struck : it is probably the finest specimen known. As early as 1716 Hearne notes that Willis's collection of English coins was the finest he had seen, and from 1738 onwards the Bodleian Register contains entries of gifts by him, culminating in a bequest on his death in 1760.

Two other gifts received by Bodley about the same time provide similar evidence that the study of numismatics was still pursued amongst the senior members of the University. One of these was a cabinet of English and French medals, bequeathed by Dr. George Clarke of All Souls in 1738, which is specially notable for the medals of Louis XIV and XV : the notes made by Clarke in a copy of his catalogue show that he was endeavouring to complete the series, and had almost succeeded. The other collection, which came from Dr. William Buck of St. John's in 1741, has no history apart from a manuscript catalogue by Francis Wise : but its composition suggests that it was formed by a specialist student of the Roman coinage.

Though the coin collection at Bodley had been increased by gifts of note in the first half of the century, no catalogue had been issued for the benefit of students : Ashmole's three volumes on the Roman coins remained in manuscript, and Hearne's one on the Greek was left on his hands. Francis Wise of Trinity, who had been appointed Sub-Librarian in 1719, numbered coin-collecting amongst his antiquarian interests, and had contemplated the preparation of a catalogue for the Bodleian for some years, but was unable to arrange for its publication till he was chosen as Librarian of the new Radcliffe Library in 1748 : this provided the necessary funds, and in 1750 the first Bodleian coin-catalogue appeared, the only one till 1886. Wise explained that the reason for the publication was 'for the reviving of this sort of study among the people of this place' ; it is a meritorious piece of work, carefully executed and furnished with a good commentary. Wise's own collection was given by his sister to the Radcliffe after his death, and ultimately passed to the Bodleian and thence to the Ashmolean.

The noble collectors did not remember the University in their wills ; but one of the collections found a home at Oxford, and so was preserved

¹⁹ J. G. Milne, *Finds of Greek Coins in the British Isles* (1948), note on p. 40.

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for the information of future generations. The Earls of Winchelsea and their family had been noted as collectors by Hearne in 1706; and their collection was acquired by Charles Godwyn of Balliol, who bequeathed his coins to the University in 1770. It had been described by Nicholas Haym in his *Thesaurus Britannicus*,²⁰ and all but four of the coins illustrated by Haym from it can be definitely identified in the Godwyn examples. Godwyn does not appear to have written on coins, though there is a fairly full list of his collections, which included over 3,000 pieces of various series, coins and medals, preserved in his notebooks. Another gift, from Thomas Knight of Godmersham (Kent) in 1795, is interesting for its local flavour, as illustrating what could be done by an antiquary for his own district: it includes the collection of an earlier researcher of the same locality, Barrett, who had secured four pieces taken from the pocket of King James II when fleeing from England by one of the Faversham fishermen who ferried him over to France.

Knight's gift is an example of what may be called the extra-mural activities of Oxford numismatists in the second half of the 18th century, when comparatively few of the collectors of coins remained at the University. After Wise and Randolph, the only senior member of the University who worked there on coins was John Swinton of Wadham and Christ Church;²¹ he contributed some papers to the *Philosophical Transactions* and formed a collection which was sold by his widow to John Hunter: during his lifetime he had given a number of pieces to the Christ Church cabinet. The Ashmolean had practically ceased to be a laboratory for humanists and been monopolized by physicists, like the Royal Society; and the Bodleian coin-room offered small facilities for research. The College collections were more alive, especially that at Christ Church, which received a choice series of English coins from Philip Barton in 1764, and many smaller donations: those of John Swinton have been mentioned, and another collector whose cabinet ultimately passed out of Oxford to the British Museum, C. M. Cracherode, contributed frequently to his College Library's collection. Similarly Corpus profited by isolated gifts from its members; and other Colleges joined the list. During this period New College accumulated a very considerable collection, and smaller ones are found at Lincoln and Jesus: one which has a rather different tone is that at Oriel, which was given by Lord Leigh about 1770, and according to tradition was acquired by him when doing the Grand Tour in his youth: the coins are certainly such as might have been obtained in Italy about 1750.

An instance of the contributions which were made to numismatic science by the field-archaeologists of this period can be found in the papers of Thomas

²⁰ N. Haym, *British Treasury* (Lond., 1719, 20).

²¹ G. Macdonald, *Greek Coins in the Hunterian Collection*, I, p. xxv.

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Rackett of University College. During his tenure of the living of Spettisbury in Dorset, from 1780 to 1840, he recorded his observations in local history and antiquities, and from time to time communicated them to the Societies of which he was a member. It was only at the end of his long life that he secured a considerable body of evidence concerning finds of Greek coins in and near his parish, and he was working on this evidence at the time of his death. His notes, which together with the coins in question have lately been found by his descendants, are most valuable, and provide convincing proof that Greek coins were being regularly imported into Britain in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. : if they had been published in 1840, they might have forestalled a good deal of scepticism about the early relations of Britain with the Mediterranean countries.²²

The story may break off here : the Victorian system of examinations had no use for archaeological studies, and it was not till the last quarter of the 19th century that they recovered a standing in Oxford through the zeal of men like Arthur Evans, W. M. Ramsay, and Percy Gardner.

²² J. G. Milne, *op. cit.* The coin collection at Christ Church benefited by the interest in field-work shown by one of its members : cf. J. N. L. Myres and C. H. V. Sutherland, in *Numismatic Chronicle*, 5th Ser., xvi, 30, for the deposit in Christ Church Library by Mr. Phelps of Montacute, shortly after 1800, of the Ham Hill hoard of third-century Roman coins, with the pot in which they had been found.