

## A vital clue in establishing Northumbrian chronology for early pennies

Tony Abramson<sup>1</sup>

In December 2020, a new variety appeared (Fig. 1b). This sceat of Æthelred by the moneyer Ceolbald, found at Hayton East Yorkshire, has been designated *Sceatta List* 80-05 in edition III. The obverse is a die duplicate of the reverse of *Sceatta List* 77-10 (Fig 1a), a joint issue of Æthelwald Moll and his son Æthelred, ostensibly under the auspices of the former.



Fig. 1a) Joint issue of Æthelwald Moll and his son Æthelred, *SL* 77-10. b) Early penny of Æthelred by the moneyer Ceolbald, *SL* 80-05.<sup>2</sup>

The new coin poses chronological questions. Variety 77-10 is assumed to date from the reign of Æthelwald Moll, 759-65, whereas 80-05 is part of a distinct and well engraved series by the moneyer Ceolbald attributed to Æthelred's second reign, 790-6, separating the emissions by some 25 to 37 years.

In the dynastic strife of eighth-century Northumbria, it is difficult, but not impossible, to conceive that a die would remain available to Æthelred's moneyers despite the intervening reigns of Alchred (765-74) and Ælfwald (779/80-788).

A more likely circumstance would be that the two usages of the die have greater propinquity and this die was, in fact, produced under the auspices of Ceolbald. Certainly, the crisp execution of 77-10 is much closer to group 80 than to 76-10, the joint issue of Æthelwald Moll and Archbishop Ecgberht (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Joint issue of Æthelwald Moll and Archbishop Ecgberht (76-10)

As far as this writer is concerned, the replacement of the fantastic beast reverse by one bearing the moneyer's name, is firmly fixed in the reign of Ælfwald I, though some would attribute the named-moneyer reverses to a shadowy Aelfwald II, 808-10, who deposed Eardwulf. It has even been hypothesised that an unrecorded 'Æthelred IA' followed a restored Eardwulf.<sup>3</sup>

My preference is to adopt the simplest explanation that fits the facts – Occam's Razor.

It is more likely that in the seemingly prolonged aftermath of the Viking raid on Lindisfarne, with the exception of the extremely rare issues of Eardwulf (796-806), no serious coin production took place until the second half of the reign of Eardwulf's son Eanred (810-841).

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Stewart Lyon for his observations.

<sup>2</sup> Images courtesy of Wayne Boyd

<sup>3</sup> Lyon, S., 2016, *The Lyon Collection of Early Anglo-Saxon Coins*, SCBI68, (Oxford University Press), 7-14.

Assuming the die usages of varieties 77-10 and 80-05 to be close in time, one appealing possibility is that variety 77-10, clearly designating Æthelred with the titular R for Rex, was issued during his reign to commemorate his father Æthelwald Moll and endorse Æthelred's dynastic authority.

Ceolbald and his colleague Cuthheard enjoyed considerable longevity if the former is the moneyer of the same name who worked for the Mercian Ceolwulf (821-3) and the latter produced coins for Eanred, known from a mere handful of specimens. Cuthheard minted for Ælfwald, Æthelred, solely for Eardwulf and during Eanred's first silver-alloy coinage (Figs. 3 – 4).



Fig. 3. Emissions of Cuthheard for a) Ælfwald (79-10) and b) Æthelred (83-10)



Fig. 4. Emissions of Cuthheard for a) Eardwulf (86-10) and b) Eanred (86.5-10)

The only residual untidiness in this scenario, are some extremely rare and anomalous issues for Ælfwald by Cuthgils, *Sceatta List* 79-20. It is conceivable that this is the same moneyer who produced the 'shrine' issue for Æthelred (85-10, Fig. 5), speculatively ascribed by Stewart Lyon to the years following the Viking raid on Lindisfarne.<sup>4</sup> Both emissions fall short of the neat execution of Æthelred's named moneyers, which, taken together, demonstrate that the moneyer and engraver are not the same official.



Fig. 5. The 'shrine' issue for Æthelred by Cuthgils (85-10)

Indeed, Stewart Lyon points out that there exists the possibility of two engravers operating for Cuthheard. The reverses of *Sceatta List* varieties 79-10 and 86-30 (Fig. 6) display no initial cross, a rounded C and a final T, whereas varieties 83-10, 86-10 and 86.5-10 have an initial cross, a square-cut C and a final T. The central motif is a cross pattée.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. I endorse this interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> In a beaded circle only in the case of 86-10.



Fig 6. Eardwulf (86-30)

The new find, 80-05, is most welcome in carrying us a further step along the road to unravelling the rival contiguities of the fascinating Northumbrian series.

<b>Figure</b>	<b>SL variety</b>	<b>SCBI69</b>	<b>EMC</b>	<b>Accession no.</b>
1a	77-10	861	2008.0085	Y150
1b	80-05	-	-	Y265
2	76-10	1036	2012.0036	Y145
3a	79-10	877	-	Y390
3b	83-10	892	-	Y327
4a	86-10	904	2017.0043	Y347
4b	86.5-10	-	-	02-07-02
5	85-10	891	-	Y311
6	86-30	906	2009.0079	Y360

Reference table for illustrations

This article is available online at: <https://britnumsoc.blog/2020/12/13/a-vital-clue-in-establishing-northumbrian-chronology-for-early-pennies-tony-abramson/>

©Tony Abramson, December 2020.