New Light on the 1872 Find of Coins from Ballykinvarga (Kilfenora) Co. Clare

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In the 1961 *British Numismatic Journal* (Vol. 30, ii, p. 216) Dr. Peter Spufford of Keele University was able to publish the text of a letter addressed by Dr. Nicholas Caulfield of the Royal Institution at Cork to the Rev. Samuel Savage Lewis, Fellow and Librarian of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. This letter, dated 18 April 1873, amplified in the most unexpected fashion an account of a coin-hoard from Kilfenora in Co. Clare given by Mr. J. D. A. Thompson of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford in the *Inventory of British Coin Hoards* (London 1956, p. 76, no. 206) on the basis of an earlier letter, since one understands mislaid, from the acquisitive Robert Day of Cork to the famous English numismatist Sir John Evans, and the date of the coins' concealment was satisfactorily fixed as "post 1344" instead of being assigned the rather vague bracket "Deposit: c. 1280-1307." Yet a third letter hitherto unpublished is of critical importance because it establishes for the first time that Anglo-Irish coins were present. Nor is this the only correction that this third letter enables there to be made to the lists of thirteenth and fourteenth-century coin-hoards with and without Anglo-Irish coins given in the present writer's recent paper "The Irish Mints of Edward I in the light of the Coin-Hoards from Ireland and Great Britain" (*PRIA*, 66, C (1968), 235-297). Identity is demonstrated between the Kilfenora Hoard as such which is known to have been found in the summer of 1872 and the shadowy Ballykinvarga find concerning the date of discovery of which the most that could be said hitherto was that it was before 1897, and it is suggested that henceforth the find should be known as the 1872 Ballykinvarga (Kilfenora) Hoard.

The new evidence is a letter preserved in the National Museum of Ireland, and it was very kindly brought to my notice by Mr. John Waddell, Assistant in the Irish Antiquities Division, who had come across it in the course of his official duties. With it is preserved a silver penny of Edward I struck at London and of the very distinctive variety known to English numismatists as Fox class IVd (cf. J. J. North, *The Coinages of Edward I & II*, London, 1968, p. 19). The exact date of this variety has still to be established with precision, but it is probably not removed by more than a year or two from 1285. There is no reason to think that the coin is not that mentioned in the opening sentence of the letter, and especially since coin and letter both have affixed to them a small red label inscribed 1285, the customary Royal Irish Academy registration ticket of that period. The letter is a holograph and occupies three and a half sides of a folded piece of Victorian letter-paper. It begins on the outer side, continues on the right-hand opening, moves back to the left-hand opening where the writing runs up instead of across the page, and ends about halfway down on the back. Inexplicable at present are two endorsements which seem to have been added subsequent to its
dispatch, an inverted, underlined, and rather elaborate capital letter 'G' and, to the right of the signature, what appears to be a capital letter 'L' enclosed in a lozenge or heraldic fret.

The first side of the letter runs as follows:

SIDE A

Kilfenora — Co. Clare
28th June 1872.

Sir,

Enclosed I transmit to you an ancient coin—one of a large number which was found in this locality. As it seems to be very ancient and as you may desire to acquire the whole or the larger part of them I request that you will reply immediately before they are otherwise disposed of stating the amount you will pay for each. In case you do so I think I can send you Several Hundreds if necessary. As you have one enclosed I need write no description of them as they are all similar.

SIDE C

save being a trifle larger or smaller and Having the King's Head surmounted by differently shaped Crowns and having in some Cases triangles enclosing the Head instead of a circle. In some of them the Crown resembles a bishops mitre. As the three smaller circles in relief would appear to indicate the shamrock it is likely they are Irish Coins—

The circumstances of their discovery are that on Wednesday 26th June some little chaps were in a field adjacent to a Danish rath and spied these coins in the cleft of a rock & found some on the Earth by the rock. In this spot they found bones apparently the ribs of a Human being.

The Rath is one of the largest & most formidable looking of the sort in Ireland. It is situate at Bally Kinvariga about a mile to the East of the Village of Kilfenora. It is Circular about 60 yds in

SIDE B (vertically)

diameter having a wall about 5 yards thick built dry but of solid masonry and although thrown down in various places and being in no place perfect, still in some parts the wall is upwards of 14 ft High. There appeared to have been buildings inside as there are ruins of walls running in various directions which appear to have been foundations. This Rath is protected on the outside by a ring entirely covered [alteration from closed up] with large pointed stones placed closely so as to make the access to the rath very difficult. This ring is about 30 yards wide all round the rath. On the outer edge of the ring are very large and massive stones
and on one of these stones the Coins were found—This stone was standing on edge until a few years ago when it fell on the flat so that what is now the upper surface that on which the coins were found must formerly [addition] have been the side surface. The Current opinion here is that the coins must

SIDE D

were [sic] in the possession of some man who was killed on the outer edge of the Ring before the Danes yielded up this this [dictionary] stronghold which is said to be one of the last they surrendered. I have given this detailed account as it may be of some interest.

Expecting you will immediately reply
I am, Sir,
yours faithfully,
John C. Crowe.

To The Secretary,
of the Museum Committee
Royal Irish Academy House
19 Dawson Street,
DUBLIN

There follows a neat endorsement in the hand of the well-known artist Edward Clibborn (d. 1880) who had retired from the posts of Resident Secretary and Resident Curator at the end of the previous March. Clibborn, a protege of George Petrie's and interested in coins, had held office for thirty-three years, and it is easy to imagine the newly appointed MacEniry turning to him for guidance. The endorsement runs:

Wrote to him explaining circumstances [?] of treasure trove law E.C. 1 July 1872.

No further action appears to have been taken, and one may suppose that MacEniry did not feel as yet sufficiently sure of himself and of precedent to insist that the peremptory Crowe disgorged the balance of his treasure. It is pleasant to think that a century later there might have been a little more official solicitude for the interests of the "little chaps," but against the background of Ireland of 1872 it is easy to see why the matter was not pressed.

The new information afforded by Crowe's letter is significant. Not only is it clear that the "Kilfenora" and "Ballykinvarga" hoards are one and the same, but we are given the exact date of the discovery, and the exact find-spot. Added to this we learn that there was no container, and no associated artifact. All this would be valuable enough to justify publication here, but more important still is the additional information concerning the content of the hoard. Until now the find was not known to have included Anglo-Irish pence of Edward I, though the present writer had issued a caveat in general terms to the effect that many finds without formal record of Anglo-Irish
Irish pieces may be supposed to have included the odd specimen (op. cit., p. 251), and Crowe’s description of the triangular treasure leaves no room for doubt, however ludicrous his identification of the trefoils of pellets in the angles of the reverse cross as shamrocks. This particular feature is one common to all sterlings, the English as well as the Anglo-Irish.

What is perhaps most intriguing in Crowe’s account, though, is the reference to coins where “the Crown resembles a bishop’s mitre,” it being an open question whether the portrait on such pieces is one contained in a triangle or in a treasure. No mitre appears on any English or Anglo-Irish coin of the period, but an episcopal portrait is found on half a dozen so continental imitations of sterling type. On coins of Liège and Trier (J. Chautard, Les imitations des monnaies au type esterlin, Nancy 1872, Pls. X, 3 & XXIII, 1-4), however, the discrepancies in the reverse type particularly are so marked that it may be thought unlikely that they would not have been the subject of comment by the not unobservant Crowe. The same is true of one of the two designs found at Cambrai (Chautard, op. cit., Pl. XVII, 2). On another coin of that bishopric, on the other hand, there is sufficient agreement between the design and Crowe’s description that there must be considered very seriously the possibility that one or more specimens were present in the hoard from Ballykinvara. The coin in question (Chautard, op. cit., Pl. XVII, 1) is one attributed to Bishop Enguerrand de Créqui (1273-1292). No specimen is on record as having been found in Ireland, but one did occur in the Montraive hoard from Scotland which is thought to have been concealed a decade and more after the find from Ballykinvara. A more likely candidate still, perhaps, is a sterlimg of Archbishop Heinrich von Winneburg of Cologne (1304-1332). The reverses of these coins (Chautard, op. cit., Pl. XXIV, 3 & 4) admittedly diverge from the norm to the extent that mullets replace the trefoils, but in each case the obverse is a tolerable reproduction of that of an Anglo-Irish penny of Edward I. Again there is no record of such a coin ever having been found in an Irish context, but examples are known from the Montraive find and also from the great Tutbury treasure abandoned in the River Dove in England some two decades before the concealment of our hoard from Co. Clare. If it is not possible finally to decide whether the coins Crowe saw were from Cambrai or Cologne, or very possibly from both, it must appear virtually certain that there were present at Ballykinvara Continental sterlings of a class or classes not hitherto on record as having occurred in Irish coin-finds.

From the foregoing it will be seen that Irish numismatists are very considerably in Mr. Waddell’s debt for his having brought to their notice the Crowe letter now printed for the first time. It is to be hoped that others may be encouraged to bring comparable material to our notice, for only in this way will the day be brought nearer when there will be a reasonably reliable corpus of hoard-evidence on which numismatist, historian and archaeologist alike may base their respective arguments. In the meantime it is suggested that possessors of the Inventory may like to emend the entry on p. 76 numbered 206 to read as follows:

BALLYKINVARGA, Kilfenora, Co. Clare, 26 June 1872.
300 AR English, Irish, Scottish and (?) Continental pence.
Deposit: after 1344.
ENGLAND (the great majority): Edward I—Edward III including Edward I. Fox III/IV mule, Canterbury, i: Fox IVd, London, i: Fox Xb, London, i: Edward III, florin coinage, York, i. IRELAND (some): Edward I, mints and types not given. SCOTLAND (at least one): Alexander III, not described. CONTINENTAL (?) (a few); the description suggests sterlings of Bishop Enguerrand de Créqui and/or Archbishop Heinrich von Wirnenburg of Cologne.


Disposition: perhaps 500 coins were seen within days of the discovery by a Mr. J. C. Crowe of Kilfenora; 1 is in the National Museum of Ireland. Some 80-100 came into the possession of Mr. T. Ware, a Cork solicitor; 3 are in the cabinet of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. There was no container, the coins lying in a crevice on the surface of a fallen standing stone.