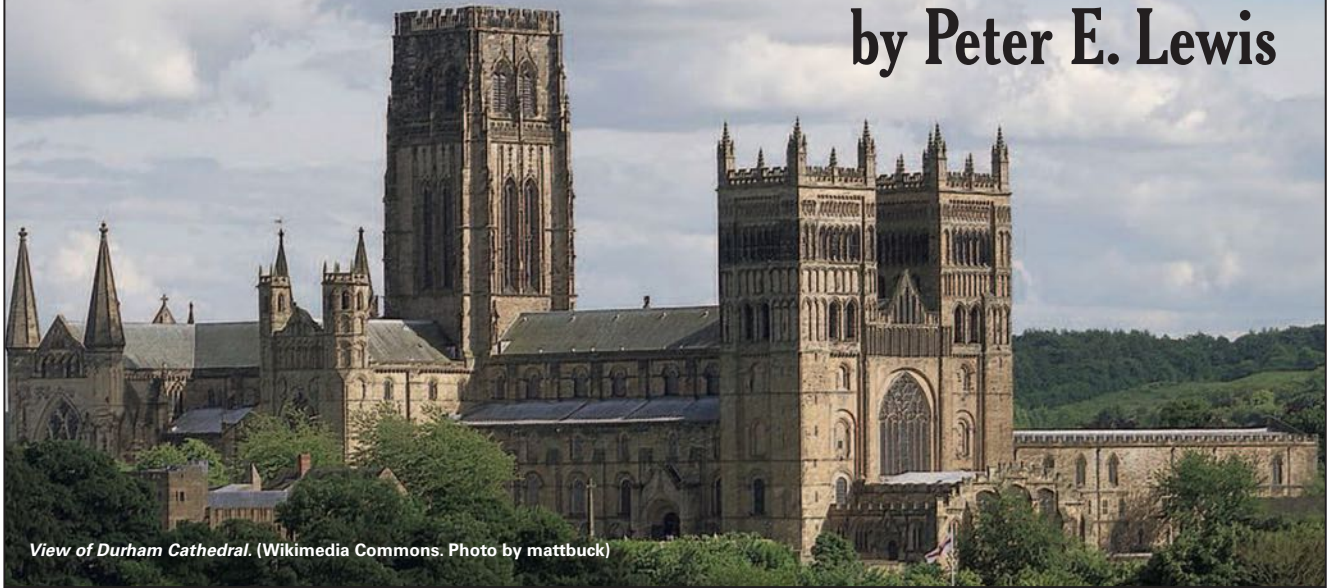


English Ecclesiastical Coinage

by Peter E. Lewis



View of Durham Cathedral. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by mattbuck)

MOST coin collectors are not aware that from 1279 to 1534 a number of English bishops minted coins, and their marks or initials appear on the coins. This period includes the reign of Henry VIII, and is interesting for several reasons, especially for the history of the Church in England.



Figure 1 – Silver styca of King Eadberht and Archbishop Ecgberht (737-758) minted at York. Diameter 13 mms. The king's name surrounds a cross on the obverse. The archbishop stands holding two long crosses on the reverse, and his name is to the right. SCBC 852. (Triton XV, Lot 1843)

There were Christians in England even before 410 when the Roman legions left and Roman control ceased, and during the subsequent Anglo-Saxon Period the Church became established in the country. Because secular control was often weak the bishops and archbishops became powerful figures, and sometimes their names appeared on the reverse of coins with the king's name on the obverse. The earliest example of this is a styca (a coin that circulated in the north of England) issued by King Eadberht of Northumbria (737-58) and Archbishop Ecgberht of York. (Figure 1) Ecgberht was Eadberht's brother. In the south of England the archbishop of Canterbury was particularly powerful in Anglo-Saxon times, and Archbishop Wulfred (805-32) minted a penny with his name and title on the obverse and the name of the moneyer on the reverse. (Figure 2) The archbishop is shown with his head tonsured, i.e. the hair on

top of his head has been shaved off. Why monks and priests were tonsured is unknown, but the remaining ring of hair might have represented the Crown of Thorns. According to malicious rumour a married woman could tell if it was her husband in her bed at night by feeling the hair on top of his head.

The last archbishop of Canterbury to issue coins in the Anglo-Saxon Period was Plegmund (890-914), and although the ecclesiastical mints continued to strike coins it was not till the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) that bishops' marks appear on the coins. Antony Bek (also spelt Bec and Beck) was the bishop of Durham from 1284 to 1311, and he put a cross moline (a cross with curved ends) in one angle of the cross on the reverse of the pennies minted at Durham. (Figure 3) A cross moline was Bek's coat of arms. (Figure 4) He had an interesting career, accompanying the king on crusade and being made patri-



Figure 2 – Silver penny of Archbishop Wulfred (805-832) minted at Canterbury. His tonsured bust appears on the obverse surrounded by his name. The name of the moneyer, Saeberht, appears on the reverse. Like SCBC 889. (Classical Numismatic Group Auction 63, Lot 1928. cngcoins.com)

arch of Jerusalem by Pope Clement V in 1306. The archbishop of York put a quatrefoil (a symbol with four leaves) in the centre of the cross on the pennies minted at York. (Figure 5) Bishops' marks continued to appear on pennies on and off till the reign of Henry VI (1422-61 and 1470-71), when a prominent B appeared to the right of the king's neck on the pennies minted at Durham. The letter stood for Lawrence Booth, who was appointed bishop of Durham in 1457. Putting an initial next to the king's bust seems rather bold, but Henry VI was a gentle and devout man who was more interested in church

music than in fighting battles or even ruling the country. During the reign of Edward IV (1461-70 and 1471-83) Lawrence Booth moved the B up to be on the left of Edward's crown. (Figure 6)

Edward IV granted Thomas Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury (1464-7), the right to mint halfgroats and halfpennies, in addition to the pennies that the ecclesiastical mints had previously produced. George Neville, Archbishop of York (1465-76) continued the practice of putting initials on coins, and a G appears to the left of King Edward's neck. Also there is a key to the right of his neck and a quatrefoil on the reverse.

(Figure 7) The key refers to Jesus giving Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19), and bishops put keys on their coins to emphasize their spiritual authority.

The first Tudor king was Henry VII (1485-1509), and in 1486 he appointed John Morton (Figure 8) to be archbishop of Canterbury. In 1487 Henry made him Lord Chancellor, and in 1488 the pope made him a cardinal. With secular and clerical power Morton was one of the most influential people in the kingdom, and it is not surprising that his initial should appear in the centre of the cross on the halfgroats, pennies



Figure 3 – Silver penny of Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham (1284-1311). On the obverse are the bust and name of Edward I. A cross moline appears in one angle of the cross on the reverse, and the legend is CIVITAS DUREME, Durham City. SCBC 1424. (St James Auction 7, Lot 58)



Figure 4 – The coat of arms of Bishop Bek in the form of a cross moline. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 5 – Silver penny minted at York during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307). It has a quatrefoil, the symbol of the archbishop of York, on the king's chest and in the centre of the cross on the reverse. The old Latin name of York, EBORACUM, is on the reverse. SCBC 1430. (ebay: wiglaf2008)



Figure 6 – Silver penny of Lawrence Booth, Bishop of Durham (1471-1476). On the obverse is the bust of Edward IV with a V on his neck, crosses above his shoulders and a large B to the left of his crown. SCBC 2120. (Baldwin's Auction 80, Lot 2220)



Figure 7 – Silver penny of George Neville, Archbishop of York (1465-1476). On the obverse are the bust and name of Edward IV with a key to the right of his neck and G (for George) to the left. There is a quatrefoil in the centre of the reverse. SCBC 2062. (Baldwin's Auction 80, Lot 2218, part)



Figure 8 – Portrait of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury (1486-1500). (Wikimedia Commons)

and half-pennies minted at Canterbury. (Figure 9)

Ecclesiastical coinage becomes particularly interesting during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) because in 1514 he appointed a clever and ambitious man to be archbishop of York. In 1515 he made him Lord Chancellor, and in the same year the pope made him a cardinal. His name was Thomas Wolsey. (Figure 10) Wolsey was skilful in dealing



Figure 9 – Silver halfgroat of Archbishop Morton. There is a bust of Henry VII on the obverse, and M (for Morton) in the centre of the cross on the reverse. SCBC 2208. (Collection of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane)

with European politics and expected to become pope, but in this he was not supported by the emperor Charles V. In 1527, when Henry began to take steps to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, Wolsey worked with this aim in view, but Catherine was the aunt of Charles V, and Wolsey failed to obtain the necessary papal dispensation. The pope did not want to offend Charles. Anne Boleyn, whom Henry intended to marry, blamed Wolsey, and in 1530 he was arrested on a charge of treason. In part, Wolsey was accused of overstepping his authority by issuing groats with his initials on either side of the king's arms

on the reverse, and his cardinal's cap below the cross. (Figures 11, 12 and 13) Bishops had not previously minted groats, which were fairly large silver coins worth four pence. They were a royal prerogative, having been first issued by Edward I (1272-1307), and it seems unlikely that Wolsey would not have obtained at least tacit approval from the king before minting them. Apparently it was the placing of his cardinal's hat on the groat that was the principal offence. It represented an authority that came from a figure above even the king. The wording of the actual indictment was: *Also the said*

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Scotland	One Pound		P204c	1-3-74	UNC	\$ 35.00
Scotland	20 Pound		P221b	2-12-96	UNC	\$ 145.00
Scotland	20 Pound E/ZZ		P229k	2009	UNC	\$ 140.00
Scotland	One pound		P336a	2-4-73	UNC	\$ 32.50
Scotland	One Pound		P346a	25-3-87	UNC	\$ 15.00
Scotland	One Pound		P351d	30-3-99	UNC	\$ 55.00
Scotland	One Pound		P358	3-12-94	UNC	\$ 9.50
Scotland	Ten Pound		P368	6-6-12	UNC	\$ 55.00
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lord cardinal of his further pompous and presumptuous mind, hath enterprised to join and imprint the cardinal's hat under your arms in your coin of groats, made at your city of York, which like deed hath not yet been seen to have been done by any subject within your realm before this time. (Quoted on page 76 of *Coins and Christianity* by Kenneth Jacob) Wolsey avoided trial and execution by dying on his way to London in 1530.

Wolsey was not the archbishop of Canterbury, who from 1504 to 1532 was William Warham. (Figure 14) But Warham was not a cardinal and was overshadowed by Wolsey. Although conservative in his views, in 1531 Warham agreed that Henry VIII should be head of the Church in England "as far as the law of Christ allows." This, of course, was part of Henry's strategy in obtaining a divorce from Catherine, but it encouraged those in England who were being influenced by the Reformation in Europe. In 1532, however, Warham protested against the changes being enacted by the pro-Reformation parliament. He might have been a powerful adversary of the king if he had not died of natural causes soon after. At Canterbury he minted halfgroats, pennies and halfpennies, with WA (for Warham Archbishop) on the reverse. (Figure 15)

Following Warham's death in 1432 Henry VIII arranged for Thomas Cranmer to be elected archbishop of Canterbury. (Figure 16) Cranmer had been strongly influenced by Reformation ideas and supported the king in breaking away from Rome. In 1533 he annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine, and subse-



Figure 10 – Portrait of Cardinal Wolsey, Archbishop of York. (1514-1530) His cardinal's hat is shown in the upper right. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 11 – Silver groat of Cardinal Wolsey, minted at York. There is a bust of Henry VIII on the obverse, and the letters TW (for Thomas Wolsey) beside the shield on the reverse. Wolsey's cardinal's hat is below the cross on the reverse. SCBC 2339. (Collection of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane)

quently worked towards aligning the Church in England with the Protestant churches in northern Europe. At Canterbury he minted halfgroats, pennies and halfpennies with his initials on the reverse. (Figure 17)

During Henry's reign the following prelates also issued coins with their marks or initials on them: Archbishop Bainbridge of York (1508-14), Archbishop Lee of York (1531-44), Bishop Ruthall of Durham (1509-23) and Bishop Tunstall of Durham (1530-59). Bishop Tunstall (Figure 18) had a stormy career. Named 'Cuthbert' after Saint Cuthbert, whose tomb is in Durham Cathedral, he eventually agreed that Henry should be the head of the Church in England, but he was devoted to Catholicism and as England became more Protestant under Henry's son, Edward VI (1547-53) his position became untenable. In 1552 he was deprived of his bishopric. When Henry's Catholic daughter, Mary Tudor (1553-58), became queen he was re-instated, but when Henry's second daughter, Elizabeth (1558-1603), became queen, he was imprisoned in Lambeth Palace. On the coins that he minted at Durham the initials CD (for Cuthbert Durham) appear on the reverse. (Figure 19) Tunstall's mint building at Durham still stands, and there is a one-minute video about it on the



Figure 12 – Silver halfgroat of Cardinal Wolsey. It is similar to the groat in Figure 11, and Wolsey's hat is clearly shown on the reverse. The reverse legend is CIVITAS EBO-RACI, City of York. SCBC 2346. (Collection of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane)



Figure 13 – Detail of reverse of Figure 12 with colour added. No hat has ever been so important in the history of a nation.



Figure 14 – Portrait of William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury (1504-1532). (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 15 – Silver halfgroat of Archbishop Warham. There is a bust of Henry VIII on the obverse, and the letters WA (for Warham Archbishop) beside the shield on the reverse. SCBC 2343. (Collection of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane)



Figure 16 – Portrait of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1532-1553). (Wikimedia Commons)

website 'Durham Video Diaries'. Go to <http://tapnortheast.co.uk/durhamblog/> and click on 'Durham Mint'.

Thomas Cranmer also had a stormy career. He was very influential during the reign of Edward VI who was only nine when he became king but he held strongly Protestant views. Cranmer was able to bring about fundamental changes in the Church, such as the Book of Common Prayer in English and the recognition of clerical marriage. When Mary became queen he was tried for heresy, and in order to save his life he recanted his previous views. In 1556, however, he renounced his recantations and was burnt at the stake. According to John Moorman, the author of *A History of the Church in England*, "He could not say he believed something which he knew to be untrue. So he faced his martyrdom, plunging the hand

that had signed his recantations into the flames, crying: "This hand hath offended".

In 1544 Henry VIII did not confirm the right to mint coins by the archbishops of Canterbury and York and by the bishop of Durham. This was part of his strategy to deprive the Church of its wealth and power. Monasteries were demolished and ecclesiastical mints closed. Even the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral was destroyed. Control of minting by the prince-bishops in their cathedral cities was replaced by state control.

It is amazing to think that these coins



Figure 17 – Silver halfgroat of Archbishop Cranmer. There is a bust of Henry VIII on the obverse, and the letters TC (for Thomas Cranmer) beside the shield on the reverse. The reverse legend is CIVITAS CANTOR (Canterbury City). SCBC 2345. (Collection of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane)

which bear the marks and initials of such famous men as Cardinal Wolsey and Archbishop Cranmer can be collected and studied today. Anyone interested in the history of the Church in England, which is relevant to the history of the Anglican Church of Australia, should treasure these coins.

☆☆☆



Figure 18 – Portrait of Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of Durham (1530-1552 and 1554-1559). He is wearing a biretta, which is a stiff, square hat with four ridges on top. It is black for priests, purple for bishops and scarlet for cardinals. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 19 – Silver penny of Bishop Tunstall. Henry VIII is shown enthroned on the obverse, and the letters CD (for Cuthbert Durham) are beside the shield on the reverse. The reverse legend is CIVITAS DURHAM, Durham City. SCBC 2354. (Classical Numismatic Group Auction 72, Lot 2569)