

# A Significant Findspot for a Penny of Harold I

by Professor Michael Dolley

An Anglo-Saxon silver penny (fig. 13) of the eleventh century was found recently in hoeing sugar-beet on the north-east outskirts of Southwick, some three miles to the north-west of Oundle. It has proved to be of some significance.

A description of the types and legends is as follows:

## HAROLD I (1035-1040)

Fleur-de-lis type (Hild. B = *BMC* v.c. = Brooke 2 = North 803 = Seaby 681)  
Obv. + HAR//OLD(R)I+C: Rev. + PIL/GRI/(O)NS/TANF  
Weight 0.74g (= 11.4 grains)—broken and chipped. Die-axis: 270°.

The coin clearly is one struck late in the reign of Harold I, nicknamed 'Harefoot', the eldest son of Cnut (1016-1035) by his superseded English 'wife' AElfgifu of Northampton. Two pennies of the mint, moneyer and type are recorded by B. E. Hildebrand on p.371 of the second edition of his *Anglosachsiska Mynt* (Stockholm, 1881). One (fig. 14) is numbered 921 and has a partially illegible obverse beginning + HAR//OLDR. . . ., but is from the same die as the new coin from Southwick. The other (fig. 15) is numbered 922 and has a somewhat irregular obverse legend + HAR//OLDRIX and a reverse reading + PIL/:GRI/ONS/TAF, the 'S' being retrograde and 'F' inverted. We may suppose this indecipherability in the one case and the degree of blundering in the other to underlie the curious fact that Wilgrim, a perfectly normal and attested Old English name (= Old Danish Vilgrim; cf. O. von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (Uppsala, 1937), 415, where three Lincolnshire occurrences are cited), does not figure in the list of 'at least nine' names of 'recorded Stamford moneyers coining in this type' appearing in *British Numismatic Journal* XXIV, 1941-44, 172. Both coins in fact are admitted to the *corpus* that follows, where they are numbered 95 and 96 respectively on p. 174. The reference is to the fourth, and in the event final, part of the late W. C. Wells' never completed monograph *The Stamford and Peterborough Mints*, which appeared in irregular instalments in that journal between 1934 and 1944.

Only the second of the Stockholm coins is recorded (as no.216) on p. 235 of the first (Stockholm, 1846) edition of Hildebrand's *Anglosachsiska*

*Mynt*, and the most likely provenance for the coin that can be linked with the new find from Southwick is therefore the great hoard discovered in 1880 at Espinge in the parish of Hurva to the north-east of Lund in Southern Sweden (cf. most recently *Numismatic Chronicle* 1973, 127). The hoard contained English coins of the second of Wells' two coinages in unusual quantity, but also present were a number of local (Scanian) imitations of English pence from the 1040's. In the conditions that obtained when Wells was writing a degree of caution was understandable, even if not perhaps entirely justified.

To this day Wilgri(m) coins of the issue are of the greatest rarity. No example is recorded in H. A. Grueber's relevant volume of the *British Museum Catalogue* (1893), and in fact no specimen has been acquired by the English national collection in the intervening period. Similarly there is no example recorded by Dr G. Galster in the fourth of the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* (1972) fascicules, embracing the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman coins in the Royal Coin and Medal Collection at Copenhagen. Even more important, there is not a specimen in the unrivalled private collection of coins of the Stamford mint which formed part of the princely benefaction made to the City of Lincoln by Sir Francis Hill in 1974. Coins of Wilgri(m) are likewise absent from the wide range of public cabinets recorded in Mr A. J. H. Gunstone's Midlands Museums fascicule of the *Sylloge* (1971).

This apparent paucity of coins of the particular moneyer could be explained plausibly by supposing that he only began to operate quite late in the *Fleur-de-lis* issue when the great bulk of the coins of the type had already been struck by his established colleagues.

The weights of the two Stockholm coins, 0.96 and 0.92g (14.8 and 14.2 grains), give absolutely no cause for suspicion. The fact that coins are known from early in the reign of Edward the Confessor (eg. Hildebrand, (1881), 454, nos.700-703) by Stamford moneyers with names compounded with the same prototheme, namely Wileric (? = Old Danish Vilric) and Wilgrip (certainly = Old Danish Vilgrip, see von Feilitzen (1937), 405, with Domesday instances from Shropshire, Staffordshire and Suffolk) would be another argument in support of their authenticity. It is well-known for name elements to descend in the same family, and Mr R. S. Kinsey has shown (*British Numismatic Journal* XXIX, 1958, 12-49) how the office of moneyer could be hereditary, so that, whatever view may be taken of a spelling PILERIC with postulated *svarabhakti*, the likelihood is that Wilgrim, attested by two reverse dies at Stamford c.1040, is the father or at least the uncle of the Wilgrip impeccably evidenced at the same mint throughout the 1040's and 1050's.

G. C. Brooke (*English Coins* (1950), 76 (third edition)) and Mr J. J. North (*English Hammered Coinage I* (1963), 127) both felt able to override Wells' hesitations, even though North unnecessarily normalised Wilgrim's name to Wolgrim (= Old English Wulfgrim?).

The new Northamptonshire provenance provided by the Southwick find-spot may be said finally to have established Wilgrim's credentials as an undoubted Harold I moneyer of the Stamford mint.

All that remains is for the author of this note to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr J. A. Hadman, the Secretary of the Nene Valley Research Committee, for bringing to his notice so interesting and even critical a single-find, and to the authorities of the Ulster Museum and of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Stockholm for the photographs. He may perhaps be permitted to express the hope that the day is not too distant when a central register will be kept of all such discoveries from England of coins of the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman periods. The former series in particular was the subject of intermittent imitation, insular as well as continental, but the existence of a register of pieces of impeccable English provenance could provide a most serviceable touch-stone of individual authenticity.

### Postscript

It is pleasant to be able to record that the coin from Southwick has been acquired for the Sir Francis Hill Collection of Coins of the Lincolnshire Mints housed in the Usher Art Gallery at Lincoln.



Fig 13 *The Anglo-Saxon silver penny from Southwick (scale 3:1)*



Fig 14 *Hildebrand no. 921: a penny from the same die as the Southwick coin (scale 3:1)*



Fig 15 *Hildebrand no. 922: a silver penny (scale 3:1)*