

A Hoard of Coins from Barr

ROBERT KERR, O.B.E., M.A., F.S.A. SCOT.

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Early in 1955, Mr. Hugh Kennedy Sloan, the owner of Balligmorrie Farm, in the parish of Barr (near Girvan), Ayrshire, decided to plough up, for reseedling, a hillside which had never previously been ploughed and had been used only for grazing cattle and sheep. On the 3rd of June the farmer's nephew, who bears exactly the same name as his uncle, was out with a tractor ploughing the hillside, when he noticed a small spherical object lying on the grass at the foot of the slope across which he had been ploughing for several days. Picking up this object he found that it was a pottery bank or "pirlie-pig," slotted to receive coins.

For these details we are indebted to the police who have described the find-spot by reference to the Ordnance Survey "Popular" edition 1-inch map of Scotland, Sheet 82, on which a spot-height 771 is marked on the top of the hill to the south-east of Balligmorrie Farm. The bank was found about half-way between there and the spot-height 680 shown below it (Grid ref. approx. 25/227895).

The upper part of the bank was found to be broken, presumably by the plough, and part of it was missing; but, thanks to the hole thus made being closed by part of the broken top and by adherent earth, the contents of the bank had not been dispersed. The bank has been repaired and will be preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities. As shown in fig. 1, it is onion-shaped with a flat base.¹ It is of reddish-buff pottery, grey inside. The upper surface is largely coated with irregularly applied yellow-green glaze and there are a few spots of glaze on the base. Part of the lower part, just above the base, has been trimmed with a knife. The height is 3 ins., the base diameter 2.65 ins., and the oblique slit measures 1.35 ins. by no more than 0.1 in.

The contents of the bank were found to be a hoard of 578 small coins. After being cleaned in the Museum they were carefully examined and classified. The hoard was found to be of an unusual kind, consisting entirely of Scottish billon coins

1. This photograph has not been reprinted, but may be found in *P.S.A.S.*, Vol. 89.

(placks and pennies) of James III, James IV and James V. From the composition of the hoard, of which the James IV coins form by far the greatest part, it may be seen that the bank and its contents must have been lost, or buried, fairly early in the reign of James V, probably between A.D. 1515 and 1520.

The following is a summary of the hoard, of which fuller details are given in the *Num. Chron.* (1955), 245-7 :—

James III.	Half-plack	1
	Pennies	3
James IV.	Placks	49
	Half-plack	1
	Pennies	488
James V.	Placks	36
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					578
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Nothing in the hoard suggests the desirability of any serious change in the classification of Scottish placks and pennies set forth by Burns in his standard work on *The Coinage of Scotland*. The correctness of his arrangement of the several successive series of these coins appears to be confirmed by the composition of the hoard. It is interesting also to note that its contents fully attest the progressive deterioration in the quality of the metal of the pennies of James IV which Burns points out.

The Balligormorie hoard, however, is important in that it has offered a hitherto unequalled opportunity for the detailed study of the pennies of James IV. The 36 pennies of this reign, which formed part of the hoard found at Creggan, in Argyllshire, in 1876, appear to be the largest number of these coins previously recorded as having been found together. It was to be expected then that the 488 James IV pennies found at Balligormorie should include some unpublished items, and expectations were fully realised; for close examination revealed no fewer than 126 minor varieties of these coins which had not been recorded by Burns.

The placks of both James IV and James V in the hoard also include a number of varieties not described by Burns. Two placks of special interest are mules, with James IV obverses with Old English lettering, and James V reverses with Roman lettering. The existence of such coins was known to Burns only through a fragment from the Creggan hoard. It is very fortunate that the National Museum has now been able to acquire two complete specimens.

The half-placks of James III and IV are uncommon coins, although the degree of rarity which Burns ascribed to those of James III was considerably reduced by the discovery of no fewer than 63 specimens in the Perth hoard in 1920. The James III half-plack in the Balligormorie hoard is, as might be expected from its relative age, badly worn by circulation; and the James IV specimen is unfortunately broken, with part missing.

Of the coins in the hoard, 204 have been retained for addition to the National Collection. They are either varieties new to the collection or better specimens than those already in it. They comprise: James III, half-plack 1; James IV, placks 21, half-plack 1, pennies 155; James V, placks 26.