This paper introduces and discusses two Civil War hoards that have been discovered in Somerset in recent years. The first, a coin hoard, was found at Castle Cary in February 2006 and the second, a hoard of silver tableware, was unearthed at Nether Stowey in October 2008. Both hoards were reported as Treasure through the author, the former Finds Liaison Officer for Somerset.

The Castle Cary hoard

A hoard of 152 silver half crowns, shillings and sixpences of Edward VI, Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I (Treasure reference 2006 T77; Portable Antiquities Scheme database reference SOM-D3C4E4) was discovered by workmen who were laying pipes under the floor of a house in Paddock Drain, Castle Cary. Paddock Drain is an alley leading north from Fore Street. It currently provides access to a footpath that leads to the site of Castle Cary’s Norman castle. There was no trace of any container with the coins and it seems most likely that they were concealed within a cloth bag or purse, or perhaps a wooden box. The workmen removed the coins and there was no opportunity to investigate the archaeological context.

Coins

The coins were examined by Barrie Cook of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. The following information about the coins is taken from his report, which was published in summary form in the Treasure Annual Report for 2005–6 (Barton and Hitchcock 2008, 217). The coins comprised the following denominations and monarchs:

2 shillings and 3 sixpences of Edward VI (1547–53)
13 shillings and 52 sixpences of Elizabeth I (1558–1603)
13 shillings and 3 sixpences of James I (1603–25)
17 halfcrowns, 35 shillings and 14 sixpences of Charles I (1625–49)

The breakdown of the hoard is tabulated (Table 1). All the coins were official issue and therefore had the sterling standard silver content of 92.5%. The latest datable coins in the hoard are two halfcrows with the (R) initial mark, demonstrating that they were minted in 1644–5 (North 1991, 153). The range of denominations and monarchs is consistent with other hoards concealed during the Civil War. The total value of the coins was £6 1s 6d, broadly equivalent to about £500 today. Most of the Charles I coins are from the Tower mint in London, but one half-crown (Fig. 1) was minted in 1644 at the King’s mint in Bristol, which was in royalist hands between July 1643 and the autumn of 1645. Additionally, one shilling was minted in Oxford in 1642. The mint at Shrewsbury was moved to Oxford in 1642 and remained there until the city fell in 1646. A number of emergency provincial mints were opened during the Civil War (North 1991, 20–1).

Deposition

The coins were presumably deposited for safekeeping on a single occasion during or soon after
1644–5. This is very likely to have been done by an occupant of the property at that time. The Civil War affected Castle Cary directly. In 1643, All Saints’ church appears to have been broken into by parliamentarian soldiers, who caused damage and confiscated the vestments (Underdown 1985, 181). The churchwardens’ accounts for that year record that new locks were put on the vestry and tower doors, and the organ was repaired (Siraut forthcoming). On 2 June 1645, 5000 men, many of whom were armed, gathered outside Castle Cary to protest against the behaviour of the royalist general George Goring’s soldiers (Underdown 1973, 99) and the New Model Army marched through the town on 18 August the same year (ibid., 112).

Other Civil War coin hoards from Somerset

Civil War coin hoards are not common but neither are they very rare. When Edward Besly published English Civil War Coin Hoards in 1987, he listed 223 such hoards from England and Wales. In addition to the Castle Cary hoard, seven other certain or probable Civil War coin hoards are known from the historic county of Somerset, which are outlined in the table (Table 2). Unfortunately, precise details are often lacking for finds made during the 19th century. In addition to those listed, there is also a hoard of 480 silver coins of unknown provenance, which is possibly from Somerset (Besly 1987, H18, 97), and there are two further groups of coins which may have been deposited during the Civil War.

Prior to the finding of the Castle Cary coins, the most recently discovered Somerset Civil War hoard had been unearthed in 1980. This hoard, which comprised 275 silver coins, was discovered during building work at 32 East Street, Taunton (Minnitt 1981). The coins that were declared comprised 268 shillings, 6 halfcrowns and one crown with a total value of £14 8s. The latest coins dated from 1643-4. As with the Castle Cary hoard, the earliest coins (two shillings) were from the reign of Edward VI. The
coins were concealed in an earthenware pot, but this was broken at the time of discovery and only the base was removed with the coins. The 57 coins discovered at Blakeway, Wedmore in 1891 had an unusual hiding place: they were concealed in the false base of an old 'plain black coffer' (Besly 1987, 109).

The two further hoards that may or may not have been concealed during the Civil War were discovered at Stoke St Mary and Ilchester in 1816 and 1840 respectively (pers. comm., Steve Minnitt). The discovery of the Stoke St Mary hoard was reported in the Taunton Courier. A pot containing about 100 coins, mainly of Elizabeth and James I, was apparently located whilst digging building foundations. There was no mention of any Charles I coins so it is possible that the collection was hidden prior to the Civil War. The find of several hundred coins in Church Street, Ilchester was reported in the Sherborne Journal. The report mentions silver coins of Elizabeth, Charles and James II. If, as seems more likely, the coins were of Elizabeth, Charles and James I, this would be a Civil War concealment.

Disposition

The Castle Cary hoard was declared Treasure at a coroner’s inquest in July 2006 and it was subsequently acquired by the Somerset County Museum (accession number TTNCM 47/2007) for the sum of £3300.

The Nether Stowey hoard

The Nether Stowey hoard (Treasure reference 2008 T645; Portable Antiquities Scheme database reference SOM-849CA3) is rather unusual. The hoard (Fig. 2) comprises six silver items: four slip top spoons, a goblet and a bell salt, and the incomplete earthenware vessel in which the silver was concealed. Under the Treasure Act 1996, associated artefacts, such as containers, form part of the Treasure find, whatever they are made from.

The hoard was discovered by a metal detectorist who removed both the silverware and pottery from their context. This was done thoroughly and a number of the ceramic sherds brought in with the silverware were found to come from different vessels.

An identical owner’s mark can be seen on each piece of silverware. This comprises a G and an A surmounted by a C, all formed from numerous pricked dots. The combined weight of the silverware is 781.6g. This equates to a contemporary intrinsic value of £6 5s 8d, based on 5s per Troy ounce (see Besly 1987, 2).

Table 2: Civil War Coin Hoards from Somerset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findspot</th>
<th>Found</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Latest coin</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stoke, Montacute</td>
<td>1808?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charles I halfcrowns*</td>
<td>Besly 1987, K63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Taunton</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth to Charles I, shillings and halfcrowns*</td>
<td>Besly 1987, K65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh House, Bath</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>James I &amp; Charles I coins*</td>
<td>Besly 1987, K3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Hatch</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>£16.6d</td>
<td>1643–4</td>
<td>Minnitt 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blakeway, Wedmore</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>£2.2s</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Besly 1987, K69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enborne</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>£10.14s</td>
<td>1645</td>
<td>Besly 1987, G3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East St, Taunton</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>275+</td>
<td>£14.8s</td>
<td>1643–4</td>
<td>Minnitt 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddock Drain, Castle Cary</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>£6.1s</td>
<td>1644–5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* no further details

Spoons

All four of the silver slip top spoons were manufactured in London. The crowned facing leopard’s head (for London) is stamped just inside each fig-shaped bowl, adjacent to the stem, oriented with the crown beside the stem. On the back of each stem, beside the bowl, there are two
marks: the maker’s stamp and the lion passant. The date letters are located on the back of the stems, close to each terminal.

Three of the spoons are similar in dimensions. They have the same maker’s mark (‘IF’ within an ornate shield, with two pellets above the initials and a mullet flanked by two pellets below) and hallmark letter (‘v’ within a square shield, for 1617) and presumably formed part of a purpose-made set. This mark has not been identified with a particular maker, but the same mark features on three spoons with lion sejant terminals which date from 1617–18 and are in the collection of the British Museum (Jackson 1949, 114). The angled terminals of two of the three spoons are engraved with the letters ‘MD’ and the other is plain.

The fourth spoon has a shorter stem and a different year stamp and maker’s mark. The year stamp is a ‘k’ within a square shield, for 1607. The maker’s mark is a crescent enclosing an indistinct letter, within a wavy-edged shield. There are a number of spoons of various types with similar makers’ marks dating from 1607–8 (Jackson 1949, 110). All four of the Nether Stowey spoons are marked with the CGA owner’s mark on the back of the bowls, adjacent to the stem. The total weight of the spoons is 185.6g.

Goblet

The goblet is in two pieces (the stem has come away from the beaker) and the stem itself has been bent. The beaker has a circular cross-section and flares slightly from the base to the rim. The baluster-like stem of the goblet has been turned and is decorated with a number of incised circumferential lines. The hallmarks are located on the exterior of the beaker, about 12–15mm from the rim. They comprise (from left to right) the maker’s stamp, the crowned leopard’s head, the lion passant and the date letter, which in this case is a ‘q’ within a square shield, for 1633. The maker’s mark features the letters ‘RS’ with a single mullet above and a large pellet below, all within an ornate shield. This precise mark is not listed by Jackson (1949) but there are a number of similar marks, including one that is near identical with the exception of the pellet, which has a heart in its place. This mark is stamped on the foot of a small salver dating from 1635–6 (Jackson 1949, 119). The CGA owner’s mark is located on the exterior of the beaker, opposite the hallmarks. The weight of the goblet is 318.8g.

Bell salt

Bell salts are so called because of their broad resemblance to bells. The form originated in the 1530s and they were most commonly made during the later 16th century (Hughes 2000, 45). As with comparable examples, the Nether Stowey bell salt (Fig. 3) comprises four separate pieces. When assembled, these become progressively larger from top to bottom. The dished interiors of the two lower tiers would have been used to store salt and the perforated sphere at the apex was a pepper castor. The shaker unscrews to allow more pepper to be added. Other examples have three spherical feet, which the Nether Stowey salt lacks. It would also be more usual for the wells to have gilded interiors, to prevent salt from eating into the silver, but there is no surviving trace of gilding anywhere on the Nether Stowey bell salt.
Stowey salt. The total weight of the salt is 277.2g and when assembled it stands 220mm high. It has a maximum diameter of 106mm.

The lower and middle sections are hallmarked. On the lower section, the hallmarks are located about one third of the way up on the exterior surface. They are (from left to right) the date letter (‘s’ within a square shield, for 1615), the lion passant, the crowned leopard’s head and the maker’s mark. The latter two marks are rather indistinct. The maker’s mark appears to be an anchor flanked by two letters (‘DG’?) within a shield. The silver gilt bell salt in the collections of the Salters’ Company has this maker’s mark (Hughes 2000, 45). This salt, which dates from 1613, is similar in form but its external surfaces are covered in engraved tulips and foliage, and the largest tier sits on three ball-shaped feet. The CGA owner’s mark is located on the opposite side to the hallmarks, just below the seat for the middle section.

The central section’s hallmarks are less clear again. They are located about half way up on the exterior surface and comprise (from left to right) the maker’s stamp, the leopard’s head (presumably, although there is some minor damage in this area), the lion passant and the date letter, in this case an ‘r’, for 1614. The maker’s mark is not the same as the mark on the base. It appears to be a monogram consisting of a ‘T’ superimposed on a ‘W’, within an unclear shield. Broadly similar stamps feature on a communion cup from Penmark, Glamorgan, dating from 1602-3 and on a standing cup from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, which dates from 1607–8 (Jackson 1949, 109–10).

The difference in date letters and makers’ marks raises the possibility that the lower and central sections were not originally made as a set. They do not fit together perfectly, but this may be due to the effects of burial, or having been accidentally dropped at some point. The upper section is stamped with the same maker’s mark as the middle section, in the centre of its base. It fits snugly with the central tier and was presumably made to fit it. The upper section consists of a dome surmounted by a sphere that is perforated by eight equally spaced circular holes. It has a ribbed and coned terminal at the apex. The screw thread that holds the two sections together has five twists.

Ceramic vessel

The silverware was discovered within an internally glazed earthenware jar. David Dawson has examined the pot and provided the following report.

The pottery vessel in which the hoard was found is fragmentary. Twenty-four sherds were recovered which represent approximately one half of the original pot. The whole of the base is represented although there appears to be an old break on one side. There is only one rim sherd and its edges also appear to be old breaks.

The form is a plain jar (MPRG type 4; Brown 1998). The fabric is a hard-fired red earthenware that has been reduced and mostly reoxidised. The internal green glaze is a good glossy lead-glaze coloured dark green from the reduced fabric underneath. It has all the characteristics of the ware found associated with kiln debris in the construction of the Nether Stowey by-pass in 1968 (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1970). This type of ware has been found stratified in Bristol in excavations at St Nicholas’ Almshouses and Narrow Quay in deposits dated to the mid-17th and late 16th/early 17th centuries respectively (Barton 1964; Good 1987).

Deposition

The hoard is most likely to have been hidden for safekeeping during the Civil War. At this time, Stowey Court, which is located about 800m from the findspot, was used as a royal garrison (Dunning 1985, 194). According to a note in the earliest surviving Nether Stowey parish register, ‘it is supposed that the register books before this were burnt in the great house in this parish [ie Stowey Court] in the time of the great rebellion, the parishioners having removed their best goods & things of value into it, it being made a garrison by the king’s forces.’4 At Orchard House, south-east of Taunton, £200 in silver was concealed in the long gallery at some point before the siege of Taunton started in October 1644. This money vanished when the house was garrisoned soon afterwards (Mayberry 1986, 18). It is not impossible that the occupants of Stowey Court heard about the theft at Orchard House and decided to hide their own valuables.

The CGA owner’s mark may possibly relate to the Civil War era owner of Stowey Court, Angel Grey, and his first wife Catherine, although the initials are not in the arrangement expected in a triad and the occurrence of these three letters may be coincident. Mr Grey was born in c. 1603 and purchased the lordship at Stowey in 1627. He was still living in Nether Stowey in the 1660s, as he signed a document as Justice of the Peace in 1664 and was entered in the poll tax for the parish in March of 1666/7 (pers.
Grey died in 1670 and was buried at Stamford, Lincolnshire. The land where the hoard was buried was probably in the ownership of the lord of the manor during the 17th century; it certainly was in 1839, when the Nether Stowey tithe award was compiled. However, the person who concealed the hoard need not have been its owner. It could have been entrusted to a servant to be hidden, or it could have been looted, perhaps by a soldier who was garrisoned at Stowey Court, who subsequently was not in a position to recover the items, or, not being local, could not locate the exact spot where they were hidden. If a soldier had looted the silverware, it is possible that the items had previously belonged to a family in another part of the country.

Other Civil War hoards including items other than coins

Several Civil War coin hoards also contained items of jewellery or plate and there are also a number of contemporary hoards of silver spoons (pers. comm., Edward Besly). These are detailed in Table 3.

Disposition

On 14 May 2009, the coroner adjourned the initial Treasure inquest for six months. The Somerset County Museum hopes to acquire the hoard once a decision has been reached on its status.

Endnotes

1 It is likely that more coins had originally been deposited.
2 15 August 1816
3 30 January 1840
4 SRO D/P/n.sty 2/1/1
5 SRO Q/SR 106/32 and DD/WY 34

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