

***Exhibition in Winchelsea of a rescued medieval coin found on
Trust property***

Press Release

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The town of Winchelsea in East Sussex, where the Trust has considerable property holdings, is a unique survivor of one of Edward I's planned towns. The new medieval town was formally founded in 1288, to take the place of a town of the same name that had been washed away by the sea. In addition to its original grid pattern of streets, Winchelsea retains, from that time, an impressive church, three town gates and over 50 vaulted medieval wine cellars (more than anywhere else in the country other than Southampton and Norwich).

However, one thing that Winchelsea did not seem to have retained from medieval times was much evidence of the coins that would have frequently changed hands in the markets of the busy port town. In fact, only three medieval coins have ever been found in the village and none were unusual.

Then, in February 2010, a rare and important find was made. Brian Thomas of Icklesham was digging in his allotment (owned by the National Trust and leased to the parish council) when he discovered a silver gros tournois dating from the reign of the French king Louis IX (also known as St Louis or Louis the Pious) and struck before 1270. Moreover, it was in mint condition due to being completely enclosed in mud two spades depth down in the ground. Intriguingly, not only is the date of the coin close to date of the foundation of Winchelsea, but it was found close to the scene of a notorious massacre during a French raid in 1360.

This type of coin, also known as a livre tournois, was the main unit of account in France between 1203 and the French Revolution. Like our pre-decimal pounds, shillings and pence, the livre tournois was sub-divided into 20 sou and 240 denier.

Mr Thomas wanted to investigate what it was he had found and in the process contacted the local Finds Liaison Officer for identification. The Winchelsea Archaeological Society (WAS) became aware of the existence of the coin through the Finds Liaison Officer and as a result Mr Thomas was able to present the coin to National Trust's Property Manager for Winchelsea, George Bailey. "I have checked with our specialists who have advised me that it is a rare find to discover a silver coin of this age in this condition. It must have been lost in the mud at the time it was dropped and this has sealed the oxygen out and preserved it as new. I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to accept this important object for the National Trust collection in Winchelsea from Mr Thomas, and am grateful for the Winchelsea Archaeological Society for making me aware of its existence. It is really

exciting that people will be able to view the coin in early 2012 for the first time in over 700 years.”

To celebrate the recovery of this rare and valuable find, **an exhibition about the coin** is being arranged by WAS in partnership with the Trust and the local Museum. The exhibition, which will display the coin and set out the background to both the coin and medieval Winchelsea, will take place in **Winchelsea Museum on Saturday, 3 March 2012, between 11:00am and 1:00pm. Entry is free.** Visitors can take the opportunity to walk around this beautiful community and view the important archaeological and conservation landscape around the town.

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