

EXCAVATIONS AT DREENAN, CALDRAGH GRAVEYARD, BOA ISLAND, CO. FERMANAGH

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18th October 2012

SMR	FER 153:008 (Scheduled)
Site	Caldragh Graveyard, Boa Island
Townland	Dreenan
Ex. Lic. No.	AE/12/117
NGR	H0852 6198
Dates of fieldwork	24-27 th September 2012

Introduction

Caldragh Graveyard is located on the southern side of Boa Island, in Lower Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh. The graveyard is currently demarcated by a metal fence which appears to have been in place since at least the 1930s as Lowry-Corry (1932-4, 200) refers to it. There are no known church remains at the site although it has been suggested that there was once a tradition for a church there in the 1820s (*ibid.*, 200) and the name *Caldragh*, from the Irish *Cealltrach* meaning ‘old graveyard’ contains the element *ceall* ‘church’. No mention is made of the graveyard in the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey memoirs for the parish of Templecarn, in which Caldragh Graveyard is located - the only antiquities referred to are ‘old forts’ (Day and McWilliams 1992). The graveyard is in private ownership and scheduled due to the presence of two carved stones within it – the Boa Island and Lusty More figures (the latter was moved to Boa Island in 1930s). The site is maintained, principally through grass cutting, by Fermanagh District Council.

Investigations in Caldragh Graveyard were proposed in order to examine the area around the Boa Island figure in advance of the erection of a shelter over it. A temporary ‘awning’ over the figure was erected by the Department in 1994 and stood until 2010 but was vulnerable to blow over in high winds and rain and was often removed by visitors to the site to take photographs. Given the ongoing erosion and deterioration of the figure through weathering, but the wishes of the owner and local people to keep the figure *in situ* in the graveyard (Gormley and Foley in prep.), the erection of a more permanent shelter has been proposed.

One half of the base of the Boa Island figure, the southern side, was discovered by Richard Warner formerly of the Ulster Museum in 2001 (Warner 2003). The piece was found approximately 2m due south of the Boa Island figure (see Figure 1) and it has two hands, each with elongated figures, reaching around the side-elevation of the stone and two raised bands matching the central bands, representing garment folds, on the upper part of the statue. Soon after its discovery the newly found fragment was pulled up from its find spot, unrecorded and by persons unknown, and is now set on the ground surface to the south side of the concrete plinth at the base of the Boa Island figure. The discovery of this large lower section indicates that the sculpture was once a much taller piece extending to 1.40m in height and that a substantial segment is still missing but is potentially located in the immediate vicinity. It was hoped that a detailed search of the ground in and around the figure might locate more of this base.

Account of the 2012 excavation

A 3m by 3m square was opened centred approximately on the Boa Island figure with the Lusty More figure at the south-eastern corner (Figure 2). This is the approximate footprint of the proposed shelter, yet to be designed, and which will most likely be supported by four posts. Additional investigations of the four postholes will need to be undertaken in advance of the erection of the superstructure when their precise location and size is known.

The excavation trench was set out and the sod was then cut and removed by hand. As throughout the graveyard, the area around the figure was uneven and extremely stony. Numerous coins were found across the square especially in and around both figures (see Tables 1-3). Some rounded stones and pebbles, sea shells (dogwhelk and scallop), artificial flowers, beads, a couple of hair clips, the stub of

a candle and pieces of quartz were also found. At the time of the excavation the socket at the top of the Boa Island figure, between the two heads, also held a small collection of coins and a limpet shell. The discovery of coins was limited to the sod and the upper few centimetres of earth and to voids around the edges of stones. A concentration of coins and piece of green gabardine was found adjacent to the headstone immediately east of the Boa Island figure ('cache' in Tables 1-3). It seems possible that was a collection of coins 'cleared out' of the socket at the top of the figure or from other stones used as deposition 'altars' close by.

After removal of the sod the trench was cleaned back by hand and the loose earth in and around the stones was trowelled back (Plate 1). The area around the base of the concrete plinth for the Boa Island figure was unobstructed by stones and presumably this area was cleared when the plinth (0.46m by 0.34m and approx. 0.58m in height) was erected (Plate 2). This cleared area (0.78m north-south by 0.69-0.71m east-west) was investigated further and the sub-circular cut for the plinth was identified to the northern and western sides where it extended out by 0.23m northwards and 0.15m to the west (Figure 3). The southern side was obscured by the lower half of the figure and the cut was not identified to the east. The feature cut through a soft brown sandy loam and was filled with an orange-brown loam which contained fragments of soft, orange-coloured sandstone (Plates 2 and 3). The cut was exposed in plan but was not excavated. In cleaning back around the base of the plinth along the eastern face a couple of fragments of bone were recovered. The bone pieces are fragments of limb bones and probably human but are undiagnostic. No other bones were discovered during the excavation nor were any other pieces identified anywhere else within the graveyard which was criss-crossed during the course of the week.

Cleaning back around the plinth also demonstrated that the concrete plinth on which the Boa Island figure is set was constructed in two parts. The visible upper part to which the figure is bonded has a smoothed surface and was probably shuttered. There are lips of concrete projecting outwards at the base to the west and east, where the shuttering must have ended. At ground level a lower section of much coarser concrete was exposed and clearly goes much deeper; it was measurable by probing to at least 20cm lower than the earth surface (Plates 4 and 5).

A recumbent gravestone, aligned roughly east-west and measuring 1.77m by 0.91m, straddled the western side of the excavation trench. The inscription on the stone was not fully legible but appeared to include two dates; March 18015 (should be 1815 -?) and 1719 or 1729. The cut for this grave was outlined with medium-sized stones, some set at an angle downwards into the cut. It is possible that when the stony soil was cut in advance of burial that the stones that were dug up were then used to outline the grave-cut. Other sub-rectangular arrangements of stones are evident elsewhere in the graveyard and these may also have once supported inscribed gravestones or stone slabs that have since been removed. The cut for the grave within the excavation trench must predate the cut for the plinth which was erected in the 1930s (eastern edge of the cut is located 0.09m west of the south-western corner of the plinth).

A shoulder and upper part of the left arm on the north side of the east-facing figure of the Boa Island sculpture is also missing and it was hoped that pieces of this part of the sculpture, as well as the missing basal section, might be discoverable in the ground immediately below. However, due to the natural fracture lines (bedding planes) within the stone and this corners exposure to the prevailing weather it is probable that this part of the figure has been eroded and scalled off and it is unlikely that identifiable fragment(s) survive. Indeed it is possible that as this stone was recumbent in the 1840s and up until the 1930s that this part was in contact with the ground and may have suffered from more wetting and drying action. The Boa Island figure is carved from a piece of carboniferous sandstones. Many of the stones within the graveyard and in the vicinity of the figure, including the stone on which the Lusty More figure has been set, are of a soft iron-rich sandstone easily scratched with a trowel. On the basis of rock type alone it was possible to dismiss many of the stones as potential matches for the missing basal part of the Boa Island figure. Other stones within the trench were examined and several

were turned over in the search for additional fragments of the Boa Island figure but no positive recognisable carved fragments of stone were identified.

Four small sub-rectangular erect stones were present within the trench which are interpreted as grave markers. These are not inscribed. The surface of the graveyard is extremely stony and includes several large boulders. It is not clear what stones are constituents of the natural 'background' and what stones represent grave markers. It is also of note that the graveyard is not mounded-up like some ancient graveyards due to centuries of use. A couple of lines of simply-marked graves running approximately north south in the western half of the graveyard are clearly distinguishable. One of these lines-up with the Boa Island figure and they are also aligned with the modern headstones located close to the gate at the northern end of the graveyard

On completion of the excavation the trench was backfilled and the sod was relaid. The trench was triangulated so it could be located accurately onto the digital plan held by NIEA.

Finds

A total of 301 coins were recovered during the excavation. These were recovered from general cleaning back across the trench (C.101), the cache just east of the Boa Island figure and from in and around the bases of the two stone figures (Tables 1-3). The largest quantity of coins was in sterling (56%), followed by Euros (25%), with a small quantity of punt (6%). Other non-Irish or UK coinage made up 8% of the total. The coins were dried and cursorily cleaned with wire wool although some were too heavily corroded to identify them (5%). The coins recovered ranged in date from 1959 to 2010 although the year of minting was not decipherable on all of the coins. The majority date to recent decades – the 1980s (19%), 1990s (26%) and the 2000s (46%). This would suggest that the habit of leaving coins and other objects is relatively recent, or alternatively, that any earlier objects that were left have been cleared away, perhaps when the Boa Island figure was erected on the concrete plinth. Although the excavations were relatively superficial, the absence of any finds of pre-twentieth-century date is of note. This absence might suggest that the Boa Island figure is not in its original setting and possibly that it was located somewhere else in the graveyard or, as with the Lusty More figure that it too was brought in from somewhere else. Given du Noyer's illustrations, however, we know the Boa Island figure was here in 1841 (Lanigan Wood 2004, 38) at least and have no clear evidence or reason to believe that it comes from another site.

References

- Day, A. and McWilliams, P. 1992 *Ordnance Survey memoirs for the parishes of Co. Fermanagh II 1834-5: Lower Lough Erne* (Vol. 14). Belfast. IIS and QUB.
- Gormely, M. and Foley, C. (in prep.) Conservation Statement on Caldragh Graveyard. NIEA.
- Lanigan Wood, H. 2004 Early stone figures in County Fermanagh. In E. Murphy and W. Roulston (eds), *Fermanagh History and Society*, 33-56. Dublin. Geography Publications
- Lowry-Corry, 1932-34 The stones carved with human effigies on Boa Island and on Lusty More Island, in Lower Lough Erne. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **41C**, 200-204.
- Warner, R. 2003 Two pagan idols: remarkable new discoveries. *Archaeology Ireland*, **17(1)**, 24-27.

FIGURES

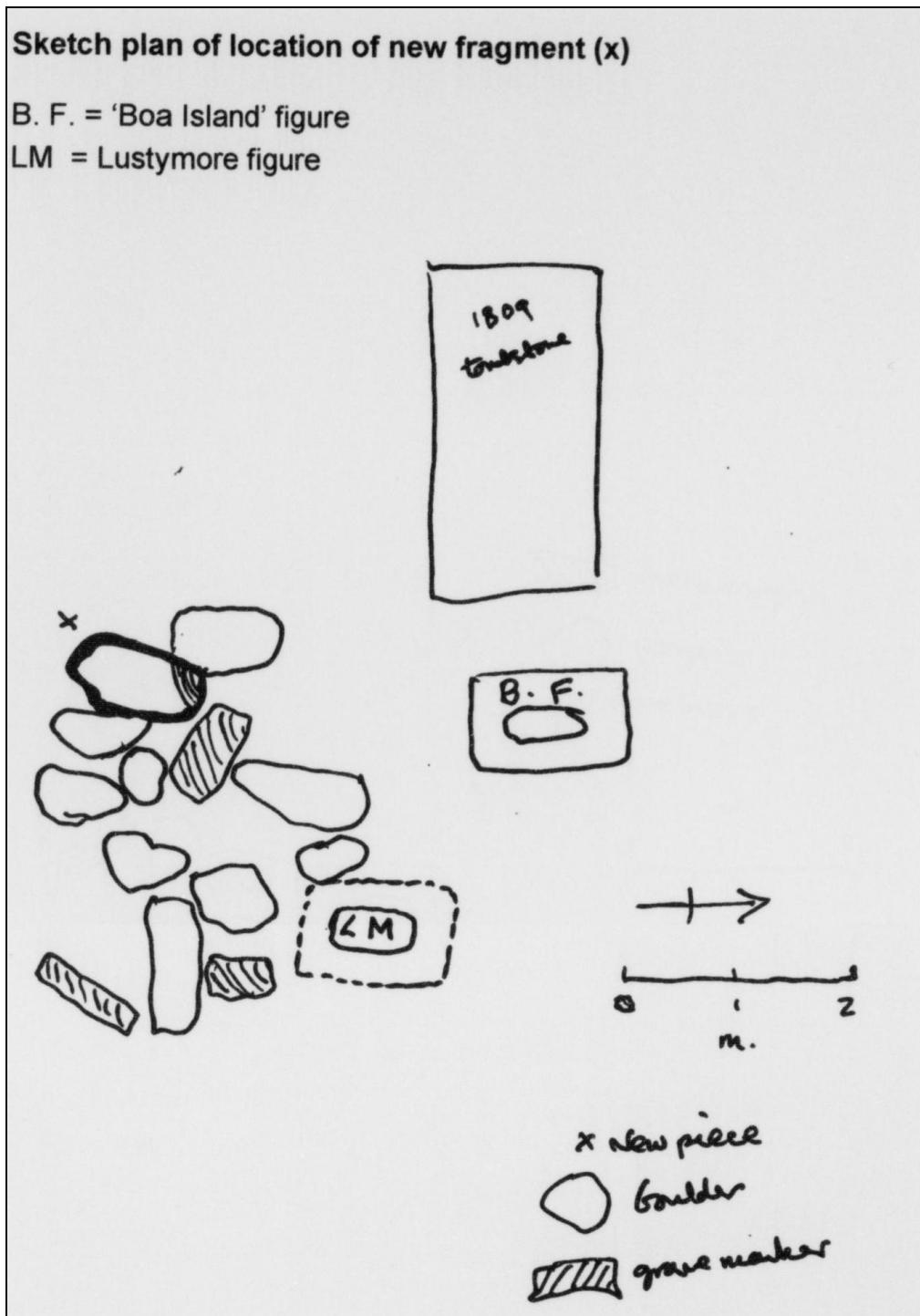


Figure 1 Sketch plan showing the find spot of the lower half of the Boa Island figure (from NIEA SMR online. Accessed 9-10-12).

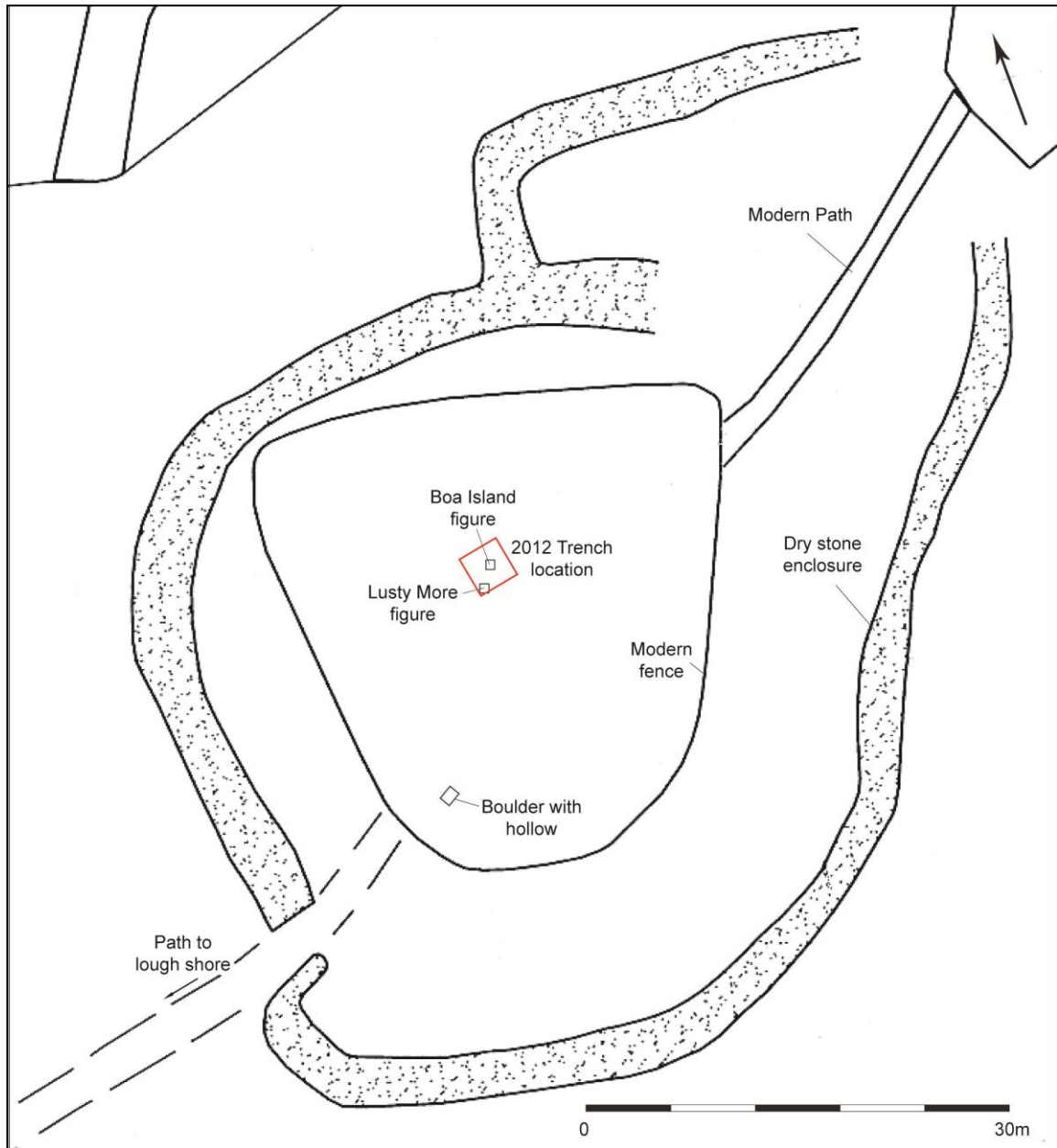


Figure 2 Location of the 2012 trench (3m x 3m) excavated in Caldragh Graveyard (base plan from James Patience, NIEA).

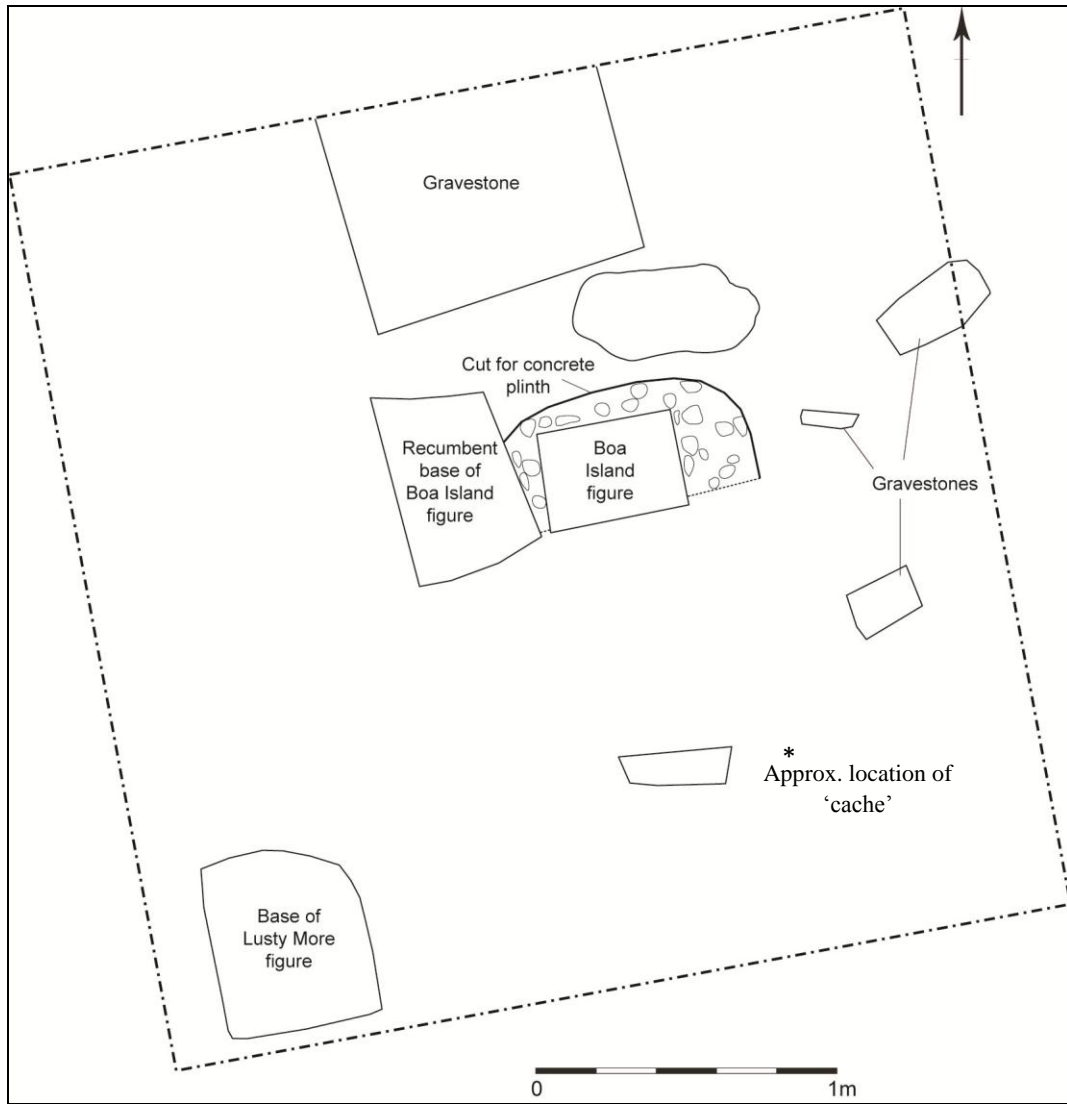


Figure 3 Sketch plan of the 2012 excavation trench (see Figure 2 for location).

PLATES



Plate 1 Excavation trench after removal of the sod and cleaning back around the stones (photo taken facing west).



Plate 2 Photo showing the area cleared of stones around the base of the plinth supporting the Boa Island figure (photo taken facing south).



Plate 3 Vertical photo showing the stony fill of the cut for the plinth at the base of the western and northern sides.



Plate 4 The Boa Island figure and basal 'hand' piece to the left (with C. Foley, E. Logue and NIEA wardens).



Plate 5 Eastern face of the Boa Island figure showing the two parts of the concrete plinth with the junction marked by the projecting lip of concrete (eastern face).

TABLES

	Sterling	Euro	Punt	Belgium	Canada	Croatia	Denmark	France	Germany	Greece	Poland	Ukraine	USA	unid.	Total
General C101	80	31	5	-	1	1	1	-	2	1	1	1	2	6	132
Boa Island figure	38	10	8	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	6	66
Lustymore figure	36	25	5	1	-	-	-	1	2	1	-	-	3	2	76
Cache	16	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	27
Total	170	76	18	1	1	1	1	1	5	2	1	1	9	14	301
%	56	25	6	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	2	1	<1	<1	3	5	

Table 1 Frequency and denomination of coins found during the 2012 excavation. ‘Unid.’ = heavily corroded coins, denomination unidentifiable/indeterminable.

	Sterling coins									Euro coins						
	1p	2p	5p	10p	20p	50p	£1	£2	No.	1c	2c	5c	10c	20c	1E	No.
General C101	34	24	13	2	4	-	3	-	80	7	10	7	5	1	1	31
Boa Island figure	15	14	6	-	1	-	2	-	38	4	3	2	1	-	-	10
Lustymore figure	18	7	10	-	-	-	1	-	36	4	4	9	5	3	-	25
Cache	7	3	3	-	2	-	-	1	16	5	-	4	1	-	-	10
Total	74	48	32	2	7	0	6	1	170	20	17	22	12	4	1	76
%	44	28	19	1	4	-	4	1		26	22	29	16	5	1	

Table 2 Distribution and frequency of sterling and Euro coins.

Table 3 (below) Frequency of coins by year. The ‘unidentified’ coins in Table 1 (No. 14) are excluded.

		unid	1959	1969	1971	1973	1974	1975	1976	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
General C101	Sterling	11	-	-	3	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	3	2	1	-	1	1	-	8	-
	Euro	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	other	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Boa Island figure	Sterling	5	-	-	4	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	2	1	6	-
	Euro	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	other	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Lustymore figure	Sterling	6	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3
	Euro	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	other	4	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
Cache	Sterling	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
	Euro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	39	1	1	10	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	6	3	1	2	2	5	2	17	5

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	
6	2	2	1	1	3	5	1	2	3	3	1	3	3	2	4	-	1	1	1	1	80
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	9	4	4	4	2	1	1	-	-	31
1	-	1	1	1	2	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	15
																					<i>126</i>
4	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	38
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	10
1	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	12
																					<i>60</i>
3	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	1	1	2	3	3	-	1	-	-	-	36
-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	11	1	4	2	-	1	-	-	-	25
-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
																					<i>74</i>
-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	2	-	1	2	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	16
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	10
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
																					<i>27</i>
15	5	9	3	3	8	6	2	6	8	11	2	34	15	16	16	6	10	4	1	2	287