

Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts **Edward VI**

Part 1

Introduction

Having covered the eventful reign and coinage of Henry VIII in three instalments it is now time to turn to the heir Henry was so desperate for, his young son Edward VI. The coinage under Edward is one of the more complicated and interesting of the early modern period in England. Its complexity lies in the mass of issues produced on various standards of weight and fineness and the many changes in design that occurred in the reign.

Fig.1. Woodcut image of Edward VI.



Background

Edward was born on 12 October 1537 at Hampton Court Palace to Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife, and witnesses commented that Henry wept with joy when he first held the boy (Fig.1). Within two weeks of his birth Jane was dead, most likely a result of the retention of parts of the placenta in her womb – an oversight of the royal physicians who had banned experienced midwives from the delivery. Henry's sixth wife Katherine Parr brought Edward and his sisters Mary and Elizabeth into the royal household.

His education was directed by the Cambridge scholar John Cheke who was committed to evangelical reform of the Church (Fig.2). When the old king died the young Edward, who was not yet 10 years old, became king. The day before his coronation Edward rode with hundreds of horsemen for five hours in a grand procession to Westminster Palace, showing himself to his people, as protocol demanded, in a brilliant attire of white velvet and cloth of silver and gold.

He was crowned on 20 February 1547 (Fig.3). During his minority his uncle Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset became Protector of the Realm, but it was a role he was never suited to and in 1549 after a catastrophic handling of a series of popular uprisings he was deposed and executed. The Protestant Reformation, urged by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer gained pace with the young king's

support but was not universally popular. From 1548-50 the rich pictorial heritage of the medieval English church had largely disappeared, as windows were re-glazed and church walls limed (Fig.4), and Cranmer's production and enforced use of the vernacular *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), incited armed resistance in the west country and numerous revolts elsewhere.

Henry's Legacy

The third and last coinage of Henry VIII, struck over a short period between 1544 and 1547, suffered debasement on a scale never before seen in England. Upon

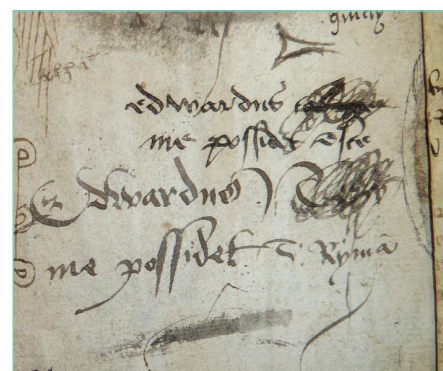


Fig.2. Edward's signature in his 1528 copy of Homer's *Iliad*. *Edwardus me possidet* translates as 'Edward owns me' (© Provenance Online Project 2011.CC BY-SA license).

Fig.3. Silver copy of the large coronation medal of Edward VI.

The obverse shows the half-length figure of Edward VI, facing right, crowned, in armour, holding sword and orb. There is an inscription in three circles, divided into four parts by the royal badges, the rose, portcullis, fleur-de-lis, and harp, each crowned. It reads · EDWARDVS·VI · D · G ·

ANG FR · ET · HI · REX FIDEI · DEFNS · E · IN · TERRIS ANG · E · HIB · ECCLE · CAPVT SVPREMV · CORONATVS · EST · M·D·XLVI · XX· FEBRVA · ETATIS · DECIMO, which translates as 'Edward VI, by the grace of God, King of England, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, and the supreme head on earth of the Church of England and Ireland, crowned 20 February, 1546, at the age of ten years.'

On the reverse are inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek, similar to the legend on the obverse, although neither are very correctly written. The use of non-Latin script on English coins and medals was linked with the burgeoning interest in the study of both Greek and Hebrew and the early texts of the Bible. It may have been issued at the archiepiscopal palace at Lambeth as the word 'Lambhith' appears above the reverse inscription.



Edward's accession the government recognised the need to remedy the parlous state of the currency but in the early years the country's finances dictated that remedial action would need to be deferred. The causes of the problem were many but inflation, on a European scale, certainly played a major role throughout the 16th century generally. The influx of large amounts of South American gold and especially silver into Europe from the Spanish colonies meant that too much money was chasing too few goods and caused prices to increase six-fold in the century after 1496 (Fig.5).

The first of Edward's coins continued to be struck in silver using the image of the dead king Henry VIII. Testoons (at the Tower of London only), groats, half groats, pennies and halfpennies were minted bearing the familiar image of the old king at three mints in London (Tower, Southwark and Durham Place on the Strand) and the three branch mints at Bristol, Canterbury and York (Figs.6-13). Gold sovereigns, half sovereigns, crowns and halfcrowns were also produced with the half sovereigns displaying a youthful looking face on the figure of the seated king (Fig.14). A new, crisp form of Roman lettering was used for the inscriptions on most of Edward's coins.



Fig.4. This wall painting at Bloxham Church (Oxon) which depicts an unidentified saint was revealed under layers of whitewash (© Allan Barton 2006 used CC BY-SA license).

Fig.5. The Bolivian town of Potosi was a massive mining operation under the Spanish conquerors and provided huge quantities of silver bullion for the Europe.



Fig.11. Edward VI, silver penny in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Canterbury (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.12. Edward VI, silver halfpenny in the name of Henry VIII, struck at the Tower, London (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.13. Edward VI, silver halfpenny in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Canterbury (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.8. Edward VI, silver half groat in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Southwark (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.9. Edward VI, silver half groat in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Canterbury (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.10. Edward VI, silver penny in the name of Henry VIII, struck at the Tower, London (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.6. Edward VI, silver groat in the name of Henry VIII, struck at the Tower (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.7. Edward VI, silver groat in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Durham Place, London (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).





Fig.14. Edward VI, gold half sovereign in the name of Henry VIII, struck at Southwark (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.15. Edward VI, gold half sovereign, first period, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.16. Edward VI, silver groat, first period, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.17. Edward VI, silver half groat, first period, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.18. Edward VI, silver penny, first period, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.19. Edward VI, gold sovereign, second period, struck at the Tower (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.20. Edward VI, gold sovereign, second period, struck at Southwark (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.21. Edward VI, gold half sovereign, second period, uncrowned, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

First Issues in Edward's Name

Coins of the first period in Edward's name were in fact minted alongside the posthumous coins naming his late father. These were struck between April 1547 and January 1549 and consisted of gold half sovereigns, crowns and halfcrowns (Fig.15) and base silver groats, half groats, pennies and halfpennies, which were struck on a 4oz standard (Figs.16-18). Edward's coinage returned to the profile of the last coins of Henry VII and early Henry VIII rather than the facing bust of Henry VIII's later issues.

In the second period (January 1549-April 1550) action was taken to improve the fineness of the coinage. This began with the gold which was raised from 20 to 22ct. At the top was the sovereign (Figs.19 & 20) with the distinctive figure of the king enthroned. In the design of the half sovereign we see some experimentation with both an uncrowned and crowned bust of the young king (Figs.21 & 22) which was also adopted on the smaller gold coins, the crown and its half (Figs.23-25). The second period, in which the only denomination was the shilling, witnessed a confusing series of changes to the silver standard. The initial issues were struck on an 8oz standard but at a weight of 60 grains, this was quickly altered to produce heavier coins of 80

grains but at the reduced fineness of 6oz silver. These were struck at the Tower, Southwark, Durham House, Canterbury and Bristol and introduced some new features such as new mottoes, the transposition of the legends, the addition of the date at the end of the inscription and the change to an oval reverse shield (Figs.26-28).

The last shillings before the fine silver coinage came into production in 1551 were struck on a very base 3oz standard (Fig.29) with pennies and halfpennies produced alongside them. The third period and return to fine silver coinage (1550-3), Ireland, Scotland and Edward's death will be covered in part two.

Further Reading

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Challis, C.E. *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester, 1978).

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Lord Stewartby, *English Coins 1180-1551* (London, 2009).

Sutherland, C.H.V. *English Coinage 600-1900* (London, 1973).

Note: Coins and medals in this article are shown at actual size (100% scale). TH



Fig.22. Edward VI, gold half sovereign, second period, crowned, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.23. Edward VI, gold crown, second period, uncrowned, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.25. Edward VI, gold halfcrown, second period, crowned, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.24. Edward VI, gold halfcrown, second period, uncrowned, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.28. Edward VI, silver shilling, second period, Durham Place mint. The obverse inscription on the Durham Place coins reads INIMICOS EIVS INDVAM CONFVSIONE 'As for his enemies I shall clothe them in shame', Psalm 123.18. The bow mintmark alludes to John Bowes who operated the Durham Place mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.27. Edward VI, silver shilling, second period, Canterbury mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig.29. Edward VI, silver shilling, third period, Tower mint (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). These coins were reduced in value to 9d in 1551 and 6d later in the year.



Fig.26. Edward VI, silver shilling, second period, Tower mint. On this type the obverse and reverse inscriptions have been transposed. The inscription reads TIMOR DOMINI FONS VITÆ MDXLIX which means 'The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life' (Proverbs 14.27) and the year 1549 (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).