

# Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts

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## Henry VIII Part 1

Fig.1. As Prince of Wales Arthur and his new wife relocated to the Welsh border at Ludlow Castle to govern the principality.



Fig.2. Portrait of Henry VIII by an unknown artist, c.1520 in the National Portrait Gallery.

### Introduction

In the January 2015 issue I concluded a series of articles on the coinage of late medieval England with a look at the impact on the coinage of the accession of Henry VII, first of the Tudor kings. This month I continue in a similar vein, charting the development of coinage and money beyond the medieval period and into the early modern world of the Tudor and Stuart monarchs. I begin here with the first part on the currency of Henry VIII which focuses on the years 1509 to 1526, the 'first coinage' of Henry.

### Henry VIII (to 1526)

As a second son there is limited detail regarding Henry's early life. He was born at Greenwich Palace in 1491 and as his elder brother Arthur was heir apparent. Henry's position in the national conscience in these early years was minimal. His first public appearance was leading the wedding procession of his brother and his bride Katherine of Aragon through London.

The couple moved to Ludlow Castle in Shropshire but less than two years into the marriage Arthur was dead, from an unknown illness described as 'a malign vapour which proceeded from



Fig.4. Gold excelente (or double castellano) of Ferdinand and Isabella (1474-1516) minted at Seville before 1497. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

the air' (Fig.1). Henry was now heir to the throne.

As a young adult Henry reached 6 feet 2 inches tall and was athletic, relishing martial pursuits such as hunting and tournaments (Fig.2). On 22 April 1509 Henry VII died and the 18 year old Henry became the new king Henry VIII. He took his brother's widow Katherine as his wife, and the couple were crowned at Westminster shortly after (Fig.3).

When we think of Henry VIII we often picture the corpulent king and his six wives; however, the first half of his reign was in fact spent with his first wife Katherine of Aragon despite the existence of several mistresses during the marriage.



Fig.3. The first great seal of Henry VIII.

The marital alliance between England and Spain was seen as a vital defence against the French monarchy. Katherine was the sixth child of the powerful rulers of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella (Fig.4)



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Fig.5. Bronze medal of Pope Leo X (1513-21). © Fitzwilliam Museum.



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Fig.6. Silver teston of Louis XII of France (1498-1515). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig.8. Gold angel of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark portcullis crowned. The portcullis was a device used by Henry VII's Beaufort ancestors and was used extensively as a badge of the Tudors. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.7. Hampton Court Palace was first started by Wolsey.

and indeed, through Isabella, could trace her ancestry back to John of Gaunt's first two wives. Katherine was well received as queen of England, was a pious Catholic and interested in education, particularly for women. Of Katherine's six pregnancies only one child – Mary – survived beyond infancy and she would come to be queen in 1553.

As king Henry was happy to delegate partial responsibility out to a council of advisors but after five years, one minister emerged from the group as preeminent – Thomas Wolsey. Wolsey was an energetic and able minister and soon became Henry's chief advisor and confidante. Wolsey soon accrued honours from the church becoming Bishop of Lincoln and Archbishop of York in 1514, was raised to Cardinal by Pope Leo X in 1515 and made Prince-Bishop of Durham in 1523 (Fig.5). Domestically he is credited with creating a fairer system of taxation and justice. While abroad he was a skilled diplomat and was able to maintain English forces in Henry's French campaigns against Louis XII of France (1512-14), which led to a favourable Anglo-French treaty (Fig.6).

Wolsey built the magnificent Hampton Court Palace as his private residence in c.1514 (Fig.7). However, Wolsey's fall would come when he failed to resolve Henry's 'Great Matter' – an annulment of his marriage to Katherine.

## Coinage In England

In the last years of Henry VII's reign the coinage system had settled down into a stable pattern and this would continue under his son. At the top of the



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Fig.9. Gold half angel or angelet of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark castle. The use of a castle as an initial mark has been plausibly linked to the tower of Castile in honour of Katherine. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



scale were the gold denominations: the large sovereign of 20s. and its half; a brief issue of ryals in the 1520s; and the angel and angelet (Figs.8-9).

The obverse inscription on these gold coins was updated to read **HENRIC VIII** while the reverses bore the traditional inscription for the angel **PER CRUCE TVA SALVA NOS XPE REX** (by Thy cross, save us, O Christ our redeemer) and the half angel **O CRUX TUA SPES VNICA** (Hail! O Cross, our only hope). The angels in particular formed the backbone of the top level of the monetary economy as evidenced by their presence in hoards of the period. Both the Asthall (Oxfordshire) hoard and the Spitalfields (London) hoard comprised angels of this period; and in the case of Asthall half angels as well. Asthall is much the larger of the two comprising 210 coins and worth £67 10s., while the Spitalfields find of eight angels was worth £2 13s. 4d – still a significant sum of cash (Fig.10).

Below the gold were the silver coins – the four penny groat, the half groat, the penny, the halfpenny and briefly in 1523 the farthing (Figs.11-14).

Despite the first attempts at the introduction of a shilling coin under his father the 'testoon' was not part of Henry's first coinage. I mentioned last month how the obverses of the large silver coins had adopted the innovative step of portraying the king in a realistic profile portrait. Henry VII's portrait type was continued in the first coinage of Henry VIII unchanged.

The ecclesiastical mints at Canterbury, Durham and York were active under Henry VIII in support of the main mint in London. The classification is well understood and each mint has a distinctive series of sequential initial marks (Fig.15). The majority of production was

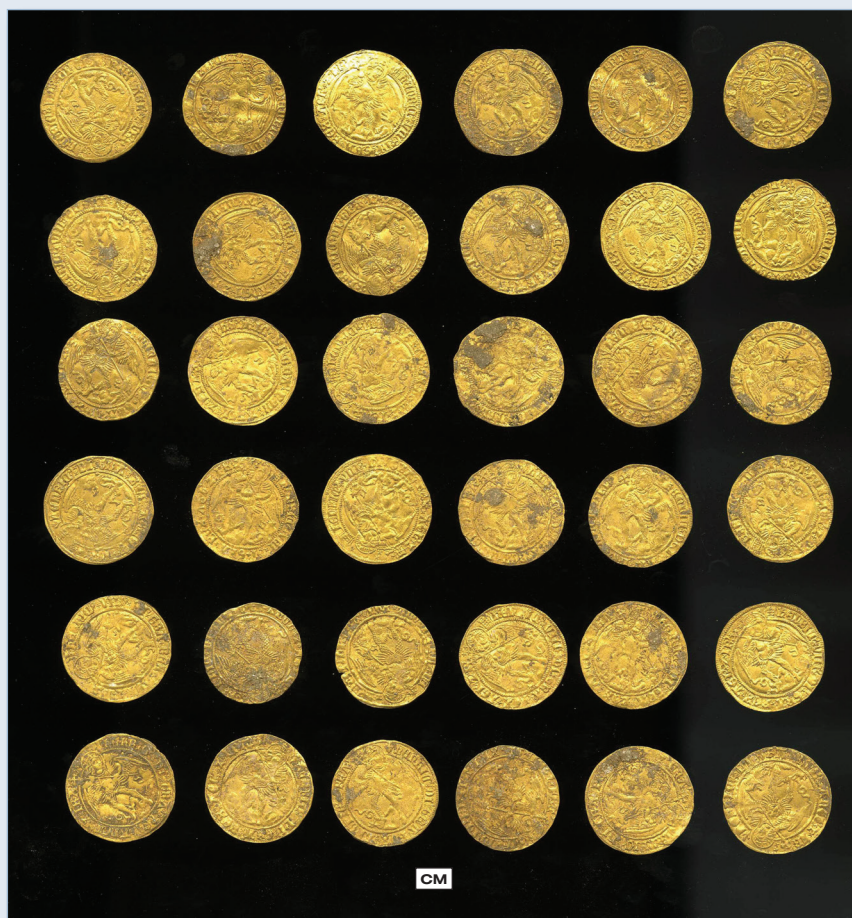


Fig.10. Selection of coins from the Asthall hoard. © Portable Antiquities Scheme made available by a CC BY-SA licence.



Fig.11. Silver groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark castle. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.12. Silver half groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark portcullis. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Canterbury	York	Durham (from 1510)
Rose	Martlet	Lis
Martlet	Estoile	Estoile
Latin cross	Star	Spur rowel
Lis	Pansy	
Pomegranate	Escallop	
	Voided cross	

Fig.15. Initial marks of the ecclesiastical mints (1509-26).



Fig.14. Silver halfpenny of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark portcullis. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.13. Silver penny of Henry VIII, first coinage, initial mark pheon. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 16. Silver half groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, Canterbury mint under Archbishop William Warham (1504-32), initial mark pomegranate. The pomegranate was the device of Granada in Spain and references Katherine's homeland. The initials W A on the reverse identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 17. Silver half groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, York mint under Archbishop Christopher Bainbridge (1508-14), initial mark martlet. The keys on the reverse identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig. 19. Silver penny of Henry VIII, first coinage, Canterbury mint under Archbishop William Warham (1504-32), initial mark uncertain. The initials W A on the reverse identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 21. Silver penny of Henry VIII, first coinage, Durham mint under Bishop Thomas Wolsey (1523-29), initial mark spur rowel. The initials D W either side of the reverse shield identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

in half groats (Figs. 16-18) although in 1510 Durham joined Canterbury in the striking of pennies (Figs. 19-21). Halfpennies were struck at Canterbury and York.

## Tournai

The last king of England to strike coins in France was Henry VI in 1453. For a brief period in the early 16th century English coins would once again be minted in

France. The revival of the English claim to the French throne was manifested in two expeditions in 1512 and 1513. In the second expedition the city of Tournai (in modern Belgium) was besieged, taken and held for five years before being returned as part of a treaty agreement. In the five years of English occupation groats and half groats in the English style were struck at Tournai using dies supplied from the London mint (Fig. 22). These coins are recognisable by the reverse naming the mint *CIVITAS TORNAÏENSIS* and the obverse inscription placing the French title before the English. Henry VIII's relationship with the young French King Francis I (1515-47) who succeeded Louis XII was initially cordial with the two famously trying to outdo each other in a battle of 'bling' at the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold', in which by all account Francis was the victor (Fig. 23).

While Henry was in France in the campaign of 1513, the Scots under James IV invaded northern England and were soundly beaten by the English at the battle of Flodden. James IV was among the dead and his one year old son James V (1513-42) came to the throne. The only Scottish coins attributed to the period 1513-1526 are rare gold issues. No coinage was produced in Ireland in the first coinage period in England although it would come into production after 1526.

## Conclusion

The coinage of the first part of Henry's reign was very much in tune with that of his father and continued much as it had done at the end of Henry VII's reign. However, as we move into the second and third coinages in next month's issue we will see the picture change dramatically and in many respects mirrors the significant political and religious upheaval in England that was Henry's lasting legacy. The gold currency was overhauled to prevent it draining overseas and we begin to see a true likeness of the king portrayed on his money. The most damaging act of the king came towards the end of his reign in 1544, when he undertook a most unnatural course for an English king; the debasement of his own coinage as a means to fund his wars.

## FURTHER READING:

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

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

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Fig. 18.

Silver half groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, York mint under Archbishop

Thomas Wolsey (1514-30), initial mark pansy. The cardinal's hat and keys on the reverse identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 20.

Silver penny of Henry VIII, first coinage, Durham mint

under Bishop Thomas Ruthall (1509-23), initial mark lis. The initials T D above the shield on the reverse identify the archbishop. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 22. Silver groat of Henry VIII, first coinage, Tournai mint, initial mark crowned T. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



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Fig. 23. Gold ecud'orsoliel of Francis I, struck at Lyon in 1519. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

