

# Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts

## Henry VIII Part 2



Fig.1. Henry VIII, coronation medal in bronze.



Fig.2. Pope Clement VII (1523-34), struck bronze medal. This medal has been ascribed to Giovanni Bernardi and was probably issued in 1530 to celebrate the return of Medici rule to Florence (where Clement had been archbishop, cardinal and governor).



Fig.3. Ruins of Tintern Abbey on the River Wye. The abbey was surrendered by Abbot Wyche to the king's visitors on 3 September 1536.

### Introduction

Last time I looked at the first coinage of Henry VIII's reign. This was the first of three coinage periods, each of which was distinctive and in its own way had an impact of the English currency. The first period (1509-26) was largely a continuation of the monetary situation that had pertained under Henry VII. The second coinage was more ambitious and the changes instituted in this period better reflected the needs of the crown, under the management of the Chancellor Thomas Wolsey, in making the currency more financially robust against the vagaries of international bullion prices and prevent the leaching of English gold coins overseas.

### Henry VIII (from 1526 to 1544)

The second coinage broadly coincided with Henry's 'Great Matter' and

the search for a wife who would produce a male heir. Henry had come to believe that the failure of Katherine of Aragon to produce a son was a punishment from God (Fig.1). He required an annulment and had grounds for such a move given that Katherine had been married to his brother Arthur. The issue in achieving this papal dispensation, as Thomas Wolsey was to find out, would hinge upon wider European politics.

The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (Katherine of Aragon's nephew) sacked Rome in 1527 and thereafter held sway over pope Clement VII (Fig.2) and so an annulment became increasingly unlikely and led to the demise of Wolsey as the king's leading councillor. Under new influences, not least the Boleyn faction, Henry's solution to his Great Matter was radical and led to the break of the English with the Roman Catholic Church. With

Henry as supreme head his marriage to Katherine was annulled and he was free to marry Anne Boleyn. After the birth of one daughter and two miscarriages Henry began to believe that his marriage to Anne was cursed and thus his chief councillors and the Seymour faction set in motion a grotesque fit-up job which saw Anne executed in May 1536. Eleven days after Anne's beheading Henry married Jane Seymour, who lasted only 17 months but did give birth to a son, Edward before dying as a result of complications following the birth. Three more marriages, two in 1540 and one in 1543 completed Henry's sextet of wives. Beyond the king's domestic situation his impact was keenly felt in many areas of English politics. He made major changes to the English Constitution and dissolved the monasteries (Fig.3) and yet with this extra income was still on the brink of financial ruin, thanks to his extravagant spending and expensive wars overseas.

### The Second 'Wolsey' Coinage

The 'first coinage' of Henry VIII (1509-26) was, with the exception of the newly designed 'portcullis' farthing of 1523, a continuation of that of his father even down to maintaining the profile portrait of Henry VII. The 'second coinage', struck between 1526 and 1544, would change the currency in dramatic fashion. The motivation for the changes to the currency was financial. Henry's carefree spending was a major concern as, like most English kings before

him, was his proposed military campaigning in France. There was also an international perspective which impacted monetary policy. The problem lay around the relative valuation of silver against gold in England compared with the ratio at Continental mints, the net result of which was the draining of English gold abroad rather than remaining in circulation in England and available for recoinage. Measures were quickly taken to resolve the problem under one of the key figures in Henry's reign the chancellor Cardinal Thomas Wolsey.

He first increased the value of the English gold by 10% – thus raising the value of the gold sovereign from 20 to 22s. and the angel from 6s. 8d to 7s. 4d. A new gold coin – the crown of the rose – was introduced at 4s. 6d., matching the nominal value of the French écus au soleil which were permitted to circulate in England in this time of need, and which were an early forerunner of many other European gold coins that were permitted to circulate at different times in the Tudor period by royal proclamation. Henry's crowns of the rose (the predecessor of the silver crowns which circulated widely until the 18th century, but declined in popularity and thereafter tended to be struck as commemorative pieces) are extremely rare. With them came a new type of inscription with the obverse reading **HENRICVS DEI GRA REX ANGLIE FRANCIE** and the reverse continuing **DNS HIB RVTILAN S ROSA SINE SPINA**, which translates as 'Henry VIII, by the grace of God, king of England and France, Lord of Ireland, a dazzling rose without a thorn'. The last floral flourish (minus the 'dazzle') would be a motif that remained popular

into the reign of Elizabeth I. What has since become known as the Wolsey coinage was instituted in November 1526 and the approach was radical. First the recently introduced crown of the rose was discontinued and replaced by the crown of the double rose and the introduction of a halfcrown (Figs.4 & 5); next the use of foreign gold coins was limited to their bullion value only in an attempt to encourage the exchange of this precious commodity at the mint; the value of the sovereign (Fig.6) and angel were again increased (to 22s. 6d. and 7s. 6d respectively) and the popular unit value of 6s. 8d. (a third of a pound and half a mark) which had existed in the guise of the angel had held since its introduction under Edward IV was filled by a new coin

– the George noble (Fig.7) – so named for its reverse design which depicted a mounted St George spearing a dragon, the first such appearance on the coinage of England's patron saint.

In the silver coinage there was much more continuity. One move was to reduce the weight of the coins down from 12 grains to 10 2/3 (0.69 grams) per penny. Another was a change of portrait on the groats and half groats, from the profile image of his father that had appeared on the first coinage, to a realistic portrait of the young Henry VIII (Figs.8 & 9). In design the penny continued the 'sovereign' type of the previous coinage which showed a small figure of the king enthroned (Fig.10). Of the two smallest denominations halfpence were



**Fig.4. Henry VIII, gold crown of the double rose, mint mark arrow.** These coins are of special interest as they show a sequence of initials for the king and three of his wives to either side of the obverse rose and the reverse shield. On the left is the **H** for Henry while on the right is a **K** (Katherine of Aragon), **A** (Anne Boleyn) and **I** (Jane Seymour). After Jane's death the right initial became **R**, for Rex.



**Fig.5. Henry VIII, gold halfcrown.**



**Fig.6. Henry VIII, gold sovereign.** The design of the sovereign remained unchanged from the first coinage.



**Fig.7. Henry VIII, gold George noble.** The obverse image continued the ship used on the old nobles and ryals but with the inscription **TALIS DICATA SIGMVS FLVQTVARI NEQOT** which translates as 'a mind sealed with such a sign (the cross) cannot be tossed' which comes from a 4th century Latin hymn of the Roman Christian poet Prudentius.

**Fig.8. Henry VIII, silver groat, London mint.**



**Fig.9. Henry VIII, silver half groat, London mint.**



**Fig.10. Henry VIII, silver penny, London mint.**



# Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts

produced in some numbers but farthings of the second coinage are extremely rare (Fig.11). The measures introduced by Wolsey seem to have been largely successful in attracting bullion to the mint and saw production generally increase. Annual gold output at London from Michaelmas 1526-1527 was £122,026 (up from £11,914 in the previous recorded period) while silver rose from £15,900 in 1521-3 to £68,359 per year between 1526 and 1530.

At the start of the second coinage the ecclesiastical mints of Canterbury, York and Durham were significant contributors to the national output of coin. This was particularly the case with the half groats of Canterbury and York, and the pence from Durham (Figs.12-14). However in c.1534 the privilege of minting enjoyed by the church was ended forever and was just one strand of the aggressive imposition of the Act of Supremacy and the break of the church in England with Rome.

Single finds are the best evidence we have for gauging the money that was in use among the population and what

form the specie of daily transactions took. The PAS finds of Henry's second coinage are tabulated in Fig.15.

This find data brings into clear relief the composition of the general currency pool. It is dominated by the three larger silver coins, the groat, half groat and penny, which together account for 85% of all losses.

The halfpennies and farthings in particular appear to have become marginalised over the course of the previous few decades to such an extent that less than one in every 100 coins lost was a farthing. Their small size (6-8mm in diameter) must surely have rendered them impractical. However, this small size could also be a contributing factor in their non-recovery today. At the other end of the scale were the gold denominations.

The massive gold sovereign, half-angel, crown of the rose and the rare George nobles and half nobles are not represented as finds; however, there are still 13 gold coins of the more common denominations recorded on the PAS database. While these coins make up a

small proportion of the sample in terms of individual recoveries (2.1%), in reference to the value of the sample they account for £3 (35.7%) of the total.

Single finds provide one perspective on the composition of the currency. The other source we have are hoards. There are scarcely more than 10 hoards which date to this period and at least four of these were discovered in the 19th century and so are limited in the amount of information they can supply.

One find that was fully recorded in the 1950s came from Maidstone in Kent. The hoard of five gold and 498 silver coins was found by workmen in a glazed grey stoneware pot while digging near the River Len. The authors of the report on the hoard suggest it was the property of one of the local monastic establishments at Aylesford (Fig.16) or Boxley and date its concealment to 1538 when Cromwell's men were said to be threatening visitation on the Kentish houses but the burial and non-recovery of a hoard need not always be linked with known historical events. What is notable in this hoard, in the context of getting an



Fig.11. Henry VIII, silver halfpenny, London mint.



Fig.12. Henry VIII, silver half groat of the Canterbury mint. The T and A beside the shield on the reverse refer to the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.13. Henry VIII, silver half groat of the York mint. Thomas Wolsey's initials appear to either side of the shield with his cardinal's hat below.



Fig.14. Henry VIII, silver penny of the Durham mint.

Fig.15. Table of second coinage denominations recorded with PAS © Richard Kelleher.

Denomination		Qty.
Gold	Angel	1 (0.2%)
	Crown of the double rose	9 (1.4%)
	Halfcrown	3 (0.5%)
Silver	Groat	177 (27.3%)
	Half groat	175 (27%)
	Penny	199 (30.7%)
	Halfpenny	80 (12.3%)
	Farthing	5 (0.8%)



Fig.16. Aylesford Friary in Kent was founded in 1242 by the first Carmelites to come from the Holy Land. After the dissolution it passed through several wealthy families until it was purchased back by the order in 1949.

idea of the composition of the currency, is the number of coins that pre-date Henry's second coinage (Fig.17).

Authority	No. of coins
Henry V	2
Henry V or VI	2
Henry VI	4
Edward IV	124
Richard III	2
Henry VII	72
Henry VIII	198
Uncertain	83
Foreign	16

**Fig.17. Content of the Maidstone hoard.**

In some ways this acts as a corrective to the low numbers of single finds of Henry's second coinage and shows that a significant percentage of the circulating medium at this period was made up of earlier money. Among the coins in the hoard it is interesting to note that the

halfpence all come from the reigns of Henry VII and VIII, as do all but one of the gold coins (the outlier being an angel of Edward IV). This reinforces the idea that the workhorse denominations that were indicated by the single finds – the groat, half groat and penny – were also important in the storing or saving of wealth. Of the 236 pennies in the hoard 85 came from the mint of York and 72 from Durham with just eight from London. This stresses the dynamics of the mint network in the late 15th and early 16th century as regards the production of different denominations – a dynamic which ended with the closure of the ecclesiastical mints. The impact of international coinage can be gleaned by the presence in this hoard of 12 doubles patards from the Burgundian Netherlands, one meio real of the Portuguese king Alfonso V and three soldino of the Venetian doge Leonardo Loredan.

## Ireland

When Henry's government turned its attention to the silver currency in Ireland Henry's characteristic penchant for cen-

tral control of all aspects of the state was made clear in his decision to strike the Irish coinage in London. No coins had been struck in Ireland in Henry VIII's first coinage but Anglo-Irish coins, of all the English kings from John to Henry VII, had been minted in Dublin and other Irish mints and so this move was a departure from a long-held tradition. The new coins, which consisted entirely of groats and half groats, began production in 1534 and had as their reverse design a harp from where the coinage derives its name. The silver was slightly debased to ensure they stayed in Ireland and their import into England was strictly forbidden after 1540.

The initials of the royal consorts that had been included on the gold crowns in England were also introduced to the first harp coinage of Henry in Ireland. These appear for Anne Boleyn (**h A** Figs.18 & 19), Jane Seymour (**h I** Fig.20) and Katherine Howard (**h K** Figs.21 & 22), after which the queen's initial was replaced with **R** for Rex. In 1541, part-way through the second harp coinage (1540-2), the inscription naming Henry as lord of Ireland ('Dominus') was altered to read king ('Rex') in order to obviate the belief that Henry held the lordship of Ireland from the Pope, which of course he would no longer be able to with the break of the English church from that of Rome (Fig.23).

## Scotland

When James IV (1488-1513) was killed at the battle of Flodden Field in 1513, his one year old son and heir James V (1513-42) became king of Scotland. He only assumed absolute rule in 1528 after his escape from his stepfather the 6th Earl of Angus who had held him since 1526. James' coinage comprised issues in gold, silver and billon. The second coinage (1526-38) was brought into production under the master moneyer James Achesoun. The crowns bore the arms of Scotland on the obverse with a cross fleury on the reverse (Fig.24). The



**Fig.18. Ireland. Henry VIII, first harp coinage (1534-40) silver groat, with Anne Boleyn's initial.**



**Fig.19. Ireland. Henry VIII, first harp coinage (1534-40) silver half groat, with Anne Boleyn's initial.**



**Fig.20. Ireland. Henry VIII, first harp coinage (1534-40) silver groat, with Jane Seymour's initial.**



**Fig.21. Ireland. Henry VIII, first harp coinage (1534-40) silver groat, with Katherine Howard's initial.**



**Fig.22. Ireland. Henry VIII, first harp coinage (1534-40) silver half groat, with Katherine Howard's initial.**



**Fig.23. Ireland. Henry VIII, second harp coinage (1540-2) silver groat with the 'Dominus' legend.**



**Fig.24. Scotland. James V, gold crown, second coinage type III.**





Fig.25. Scotland. James V, silver groat, second coinage type III.



Fig.26. Scotland. James V, silver one-third groat, second coinage.



Fig.27. Scotland. James V, billon plack, first coinage.



Fig.28. Scotland. James V, billon bawbee, third coinage.



Fig.29. Scotland. James V, billon half bawbee, third coinage.

Fig.30. Scotland. James V, gold ducat, third coinage, dated 1540 (but struck until 1542 unchanged).



regnal number '5' is given in the obverse inscription while the reverse carries the inscription **CRVCIC ARMA SEQVAMVR** meaning 'let us follow the arms of the cross'. The silver groat returned to a profile bust under James V and shows the king wearing a fur mantle over his tunic

(Fig.25). The reverse bears the shield with lion rampant with the inscription **OPPIDVEDINBVRGI** naming the mint of Edinburgh – the only mint active in minting groats.

An issue of one-third groats accompanied the later groats, probably struck

in the late 1530s (Fig.26). Billon placks were struck in the first coinage of James V (1513-26) (Fig.27). In the third coinage billon returned once more with the bawbee and its half bearing a thistle and saltire cross (Figs.28 & 29). In the third coinage (1538-42) a new gold coin replaced the crown (Fig.30). This 40 shilling ducat bore the bust of the king wearing a hat, from which it gets its alternative name of the 'bonnet piece'. The reverse inscription **HONOR REGIS IVDICIVM DILIGIT** means 'The king's honour loves justice'.

## Conclusion

In Henry's second coinage there were a number of important changes in the denominational structure as well as adjustments to the weights and values of the coins. The inclusion of initials of Henry's queen(s) on the gold crowns and Irish groats was a rare reference in the coinage to the king's consort. Next time we'll be focussing on the third coinage of Henry's reign which, while lasted little more than three years, had a monumental impact on the English coinage for the next several decades.

## Further Reading

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

Dolley, R.H. and Winstanley, E.J. 'Maidstone Treasure Trove', *British Numismatic Journal* 27 (1952-4).

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

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



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