

Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts

Elizabeth I

Part 1



Fig.2.
Crayon
drawing of
Elizabeth I
by Federico
Zuccaro.

Fig.1. Hatfield House, Hertfordshire.



Fig.3. Elizabeth I, gold halfpound, initial mark cross-crosslet (1560-1). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The cross-crosslet and martlet initial marks were struck concurrently between December 1560 and c.October 1561. All other initial marks in sequence. (Shown at 120% scale.)

Introduction

Along with her father Henry VIII, Elizabeth is arguably the most familiar of the Tudor monarchs. Immortalised in countless books and on the silver screen, England's 'Virgin Queen' ruled through some of the more turbulent events of the early modern era. This month I will take a first look at the coinage of Elizabeth's long reign.

Early Life

Elizabeth was born at Greenwich Palace in September 1533 to Anne Boleyn and spent the first few months of her life at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire (Fig.1) before moving to Eltham Palace. As she moved into adulthood Elizabeth would return to Hatfield as head of a large household. Elizabeth was not the son Henry VIII so desperately craved although his disappointment was tempered when Anne became pregnant again late in 1535; but in January 1536 Anne miscarried the baby which would have been a son. Henry's chief councillor Thomas Cromwell plotted Anne's demise, she was accused of multiple counts of adultery and executed on 19 May. The following day Henry married Jane Seymour.

Like Mary, her elder half-sister, Elizabeth was made legally illegitimate by her father's third marriage and the subsequent birth of Edward (the future Edward VI). Elizabeth was well educated in both classical and modern languages and would continue to translate works into adulthood (Fig.2). She was ostensibly Protestant but historians have characterised her religion as an 'odd' or 'old sort of Protestantism'. When her half-sister



Fig.4. Elizabeth I, gold crown, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.5. Elizabeth I, gold halfcrown, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.6. Edward VI, base silver shilling, countermarked with the portcullis, revaluing it at four pence halfpenny. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.7. Edward III (1327-77), silver groat, series E, London mint. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.8. Elizabeth I, silver shilling, wire-line inner circle, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.9. Elizabeth I, silver shilling, beaded inner circle, initial mark lis. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Mary came to the throne, Elizabeth's position became dangerous. Rebellions in her name caused Mary's chief advisors to suggest Elizabeth was too dangerous to be allowed to live and she was sent to the Tower to the very lodgings which her mother had occupied before her execution. Elizabeth, however, was not privy to the plots against the queen and was instead bundled off to live at Woodstock. By November 1558 Mary was dying and acknowledged Elizabeth as her heir.

Elizabeth is Crowned

Elizabeth was crowned in London on 15 January 1559 by the bishop of Carlisle and a great procession around the city followed which was described in an official eulogy as "a stage wherein was shewed the wonderfull spectacle of a noble hearted princesse toward her most loving people." In the early years, and arguably throughout the reign, the pressing issues were reconciling the religious differences of her subjects and the question of marriage.

Elizabeth's First Coinage (1558-61)

By the time Elizabeth came to the throne the coinage of England had undergone a series of momentous changes. The chronic debasement of the currency carried out by her father had left the coinage in a parlous state. Under Edward VI and Mary, attempts had been made to restore the currency to a good standard, but given the short reigns of her two predecessors this was only fully realised under Elizabeth. The coinage is rather complicated in terms of its classification and

has been simplified here according to the three coinage periods used by J.J. North.

What the coinage lacked in innovation of design is made up for by the wide range of different denominations that were struck over the course of the reign – 20 in all, in both gold and silver. Elizabethan coins are well engraved and thus are usually easily identified and read – this has been credited to a man named Derrick Anthony who was chief engraver at the mint from 1551-99. His achievement came from several stylistic changes; the clothing of the bust, the clear field around the bust and the neat lettering in Roman script.

The gold in the first coinage (1558-61) consisted of the sovereign of 30 shillings, the angel, half-angel and quarter-angel in fine gold of 23ct 3½ grains; and the halfpound, crown and halfcrown

in crown gold of 22ct, which were produced in greater quantity than the fine gold coins (Figs.3-5). The three specimens illustrated were of similar design with the obverse depicting the bust of Elizabeth in portrait facing left. She is crowned with long, flowing hair cascading down her back and is attired in a plain dress and ruff. On the reverse is a crowned square shield with the quartered arms of England and France and the letters E R to either side. The inscription

reads **SCVTVM FIDEI PROTEGET EAM** which means 'the shield of faith shall protect her'.

The coinage in circulation when Elizabeth was crowned was a mishmash of issues of her predecessors and included coins made of debased silver of Edward VI. These coins were revalued for use by countermarking with a portcullis or greyhound. The portcullis was used on the 6oz and 8oz issues and indicated a new value of fourpence-halfpenny (Fig.6) while the greyhound was used on the very base 3oz issues and indicated a value of twopence-farthing.

New silver coins were issued in four denominations, the shilling, groat, halfgroat and penny. Other than the obvious size difference there's very little to distinguish the silver coins from one another as all have a very similar design.

Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts **Elizabeth I**



Fig.10. Elizabeth I, silver shilling, beaded inner circle, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.12. Elizabeth I, silver groat, beaded inner circle, initial mark martlet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.13. Elizabeth I, silver halfgroat, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.11. Elizabeth I, silver groat, wire-line inner circle, initial mark lis. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.14. Elizabeth I, silver penny, initial mark cross-crosslet. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.15. Ireland. Elizabeth I, shilling, base coinage of 1558. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.17. Ireland. Elizabeth I, shilling, fine coinage of 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.16. Ireland. Elizabeth I, groat, base coinage of 1558. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.18. Ireland. Elizabeth I, groat, fine coinage of 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.19. Scotland. Mary, testoon, second period, 1558. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

The obverse shows the bust of the queen as on the gold coins illustrated earlier with the standard obverse inscription **ELIZABETH D G ANG FRA Z HIB REGINA** (Elizabeth by the Grace of God Queen of England, France and Ireland). The reverse bears the shield over a long cross which divides the legend **POSVI DEVM ADIVTOREM MEVM** (I have made God my helper), this inscription first appeared on the groats of Edward III in 1351 (Fig.7).

There are a number of minor variants among the silver coins; the shillings can either have a wire line or beaded circle and the initial marks lis, cross-crosslet or martlet (Figs.8-10). The groats (Figs.11 & 12), halfgroats (Fig.13) and pennies (Fig.14) also use these initial marks in the first coinage.

Ireland

Elizabeth was queen of Ireland. Although she never travelled to the island coins were struck there in her name. The first types were a continuation of the shillings and groats of the previous reign (Figs.15 & 16) which shared some similarities with the English but with a harp on the reverse. In 1561 a new 'fine' coinage was ordered and brought the Irish coinage closer to the restored English. These new types had a slightly more elaborate reverse design with three harps on a shield and the date inscribed on either side of it (Figs.17 & 18).

Scotland

The queen of Scotland at the time of Elizabeth's accession was Mary Stuart and in 1558 she was married to Francis, the French Dauphin. Coins depicting the couple were struck in gold and imitated the design of the facing couple seen on coins of Mary and Philip of Spain. The silver coins were produced in significant numbers and comprised two denominations; the testoon and its half (Fig.19).

The testoons of 1558 had as their obverse design the arms of Scotland impaled by those of the Dauphin and on the reverse the FM monogram for the couple with the legend **FECIT VTRAQVE VNVM** ('He has made the two, one'). Just a year later the King of France, Henri II, died making the Dauphin king and in 1560 the design was altered to reflect this fact (Fig.20). The obverse inscription named the couple king and queen of France and Scotland and the arms of France were impaled with those of Scotland on the shield. On the reverse the monogram remained but was accosted by a crowned lis and thistle representing



Fig.20. Scotland. Mary, testoon, second period, 1560. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.21. Scotland. Mary, billon twelve-penny groat, second period, 1559. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

the two kingdoms. A new inscription **VICIT LEO DE TRIBU IUDA** ('The lion of tribe of Juda has prevailed') was added.

Billon coins were also produced. The twelve penny groat bore the FM monogram on the obverse while the reverse carried a rectangular frame in which was the inscription **IAM NON SVNT DVO SED VNO CARO** ('They are no longer two, but one flesh') which gave the coin its popular name 'nonsunt' (Fig.21).

This month's article has introduced the coinage of Elizabeth I at the very start of her reign. In the next article I will continue with a look at the long second

coinage and the tumultuous events that had a real impact on the coinages of England and Scotland.

Further Reading

Bateson, J.D. *Coinage in Scotland* (London, 1997).

Seaby, P. *The Story of British Coinage* (London, 1985).

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

Note: Unless stated otherwise, coins in this article are shown at actual size (100% scale). TH

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