

Coins of the Tudors and Stuarts

Elizabeth I

Part 2

Introduction

This month I continue my examination of the long reign of Elizabeth I and the coins produced in her name. Elizabeth's coins have been classified into seven sequential issues but this complex format has been simplified here into three, of which this article deals with the second coinage. In Ireland there were no new issues in this period and thus the fine coinage of 1561 continued to circulate.

The Virgin Queen 1561-82

One of the long-standing questions of Elizabeth's reign was her marriage. She had several suitors from the great royal houses of Europe, including Philip II of Spain (who had been married to her half-sister and predecessor Mary), King Eric XIV of Sweden, Archduke Charles of Austria, and the Valois princes Henry and Francis, successive dukes of Anjou. But, there was no marriage agreement in any case. It is said that Elizabeth was in love with her childhood friend Robert Dudley, duke of Leicester, who died in 1588 (Fig.1). Indeed when Elizabeth herself died there was found among her most personal belongings a letter from Dudley marked 'his last letter' in her handwriting. The lack of a husband and therefore any heirs was problematic for any state and thus when Elizabeth died so did Tudor rule of England.

Elizabeth's Second Coinage (1561-82)

As in her first coinage Elizabeth's English coins were all struck at the Tower mint in London. At the top were the gold denominations; the angel (Fig.2), half-angel (Fig.3), and quarter-angel (Fig.4), struck in fine gold (23ct 3½ grains); and the halfpound, crown and halfcrown (Fig.5), struck in crown gold (at the slightly reduced 22ct). The values of these pieces are outlined in Table 1. There were no sovereigns of 30 shillings struck in this coinage period.

The gold coins were conservative in design with the angel and its fractions continuing the design first introduced under Edward IV in 1464-5 and continued through later reigns with little alteration. The reverse inscription **A: DNO: FACTVM: EST: ISTVD ET: EST: MIRABL** is an abbreviation of a quote from Psalm 118.23 (*A Domino factum est iudicium et estimabile in oculis nostris*) meaning 'this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes'. The crown gold denominations continued the



Fig.1. Robert Dudley.



Fig.3. Elizabeth I, gold half-angel, i.m. eglantine (1574-78). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.2. Elizabeth I, gold angel, i.m. plain cross (1578-80). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.4. Elizabeth I, gold quarter-angel, i.m. eglantine (1574-78). The small size of this coin means that the obverse legend spills over to the reverse of the coin and is incomplete. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.5. Elizabeth I, gold halfcrown, i.m. castle (1570-72). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

traditional left facing bust of the queen on the obverse and the royal shield flanked by **E R** on the reverse.

There was a noticeable shift in the denominations produced in silver in this coinage. Shillings were not produced until after 1582 and the groat (or fourpence) was withdrawn as a denomination and not struck again – although there was a milled fourpence (see below) as well as a fourpenny Maundy coin. The silver coins, produced in some quantity, comprised

the sixpence (Fig.6), threepence (Fig.7), halfgroat (Fig.8), three-halfpence (Fig.9), penny (Fig.10) and three-farthings (Fig.11).

This last coin might at first sight

Gold	Denomination	Value
'Fine' gold (23 ct 3½ gr.)	Angel	10 shillings
	Half-angel	5 shillings
	Quarter-angel	2s 6d
'Crown' gold (22 ct)	Halfpound	10 shillings
	Crown	5 shillings
	Halfcrown	2s 6d

Table 1. Value of gold coins.



Fig.6. Elizabeth I, silver sixpence, i.m. coronet, dated 1569. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.11. Elizabeth I, silver penny, i.m. pheon, dated 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.14. Elizabeth I, milled silver shilling, decorated dress, i.m. star (1560-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.7. Elizabeth I, silver threepence, i.m. pheon, dated 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.8. Elizabeth I, silver halfgroat, i.m. coronet (1567-70). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.12. Elizabeth I, milled gold halfpound, i.m. lis (1566/7-70). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.15. Elizabeth I, milled silver shilling, decorated dress, large bust, i.m. star (1560-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.9. Elizabeth I, silver three-halfpence, i.m. pheon, dated 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.10. Elizabeth I, silver penny, i.m. portcullis (1565/6-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.13. Elizabeth I, milled gold crown, i.m. lis (1566/7-70). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

the mint wanted to differentiate coins of quite similar size from one another in a visually obvious way. In order to do this a rose was placed behind the portrait of the queen on the sixpence, threepence, three-halfpence and three-farthings and on the reverse of these denominations the date of minting was placed above the shield, a useful clue to dating coins when the initial mark is obscured. The other denominations were plain and thus we are left with a system of silver coins of descending value with identifying marks on alternative coins.

Technological Innovation

An important development in Elizabeth's reign, albeit one that did not take hold during the 16th century, was the first trialling of machine technology to produce coins. In around 1560 a former employee of the Paris mint named Eloye Mestrell came to England and established a sub-department at the mint where he produced Elizabeth's 'milled' coinage. The term comes from the fact that the machinery was powered by a horse-drawn mill. The half-pound (Fig.12), crown (Fig.13) and halfcrown were produced in crown gold (i.e. 22ct) and the shilling (Figs.14-16), sixpence

seem a strange one, but it was a mechanism that allowed for the purchase of goods valued at one farthing. One could pay with a penny and receive a three-farthing coin in change. The minting of

silver farthings would have been impractical given how tiny the coin would have needed to be. Additionally, the disproportionate expense of striking such small coins at the mint was uneconomic and a further impediment to their introduction. The three-halfpence was similar as it allowed one to buy goods for halfpence with two pence and receive the appropriate change. Given the fact that there were six denominations in this coinage and that shillings and groats of the first issue would have continued to be in circulation, it is little surprise to find that

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



Fig.16. Elizabeth I, milled silver shilling, decorated dress, small bust, i.m.star (1560-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.17. Elizabeth I, milled silver sixpence (proof), dated 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.18. Elizabeth I, milled silver sixpence, small bust, dated 1561. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.21. Elizabeth I, milled silver sixpence, bust breaks legend, dated 1570. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.24. Elizabeth I, milled silver pattern threepence, dated 1575. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

(Figs.17-21), groat (Fig.22), threepence (Figs.23-4), halfgroat (Fig.25) and three-farthings in silver.

There is a lot of variety in the bust designs on these relatively short-lived coins as shown in the examples above. Anyone looking at these elegant coins can see the superior levels of production that were achievable with Mestrell's innovation but opposition came from the mint workers themselves who, fearing that this method would put them out of work, engineered his dismissal in 1572. In 1578 he was hanged for counterfeiting.

Scotland

North of the border Elizabeth's cousin Mary was on the throne. The coinage of Scotland is more varied than that of contemporary England with a range of denominational and design changes implemented throughout the 16th century. In 1560 Mary's husband, the young French king Francis II, died and after nine months the 19 year old returned to Scotland. The Scotland Mary returned to was a dangerous place as Catholic and

Protestant factions vied for control. The coinage of her first widowhood comprised testoons (Fig.26) and their halves and are dated 1561 and 1562. This has been called the best numismatic portrait of Mary.

In 1565 Mary married Henry, Lord Darnley. A coinage ordered by the Privy Council in December 1565 ordered the production of a large silver coin in the style of the crown and dollar coins that were commonplace in Europe. The ryal, a two-thirds ryal and one-third ryal were produced (Figs.27-31). On their obverses they carried the arms of Scotland with the legend naming 'Mary and Henry Queen and King of Scots'. On the reverse was a tortoise climbing a palm tree with a scroll reading **DAT GLORIA VIRES** or glory gives strength. The inscription reads **EXVRGAT DEVS ET DISSIPENTVR INIMICI EIVS** from Psalm 68.1 which means God is my defender and my redeemer. These were produced until 1567 when Darnley was murdered and a final emission of coins was struck in the same three denominations



Fig.19. Elizabeth I, milled silver sixpence, plain dress, dated 1562. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.20. Elizabeth I, milled silver sixpence, tall bust, dated 1562. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.22. Elizabeth I, milled silver groat, i.m.star (1560-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.23. Elizabeth I, milled silver threepence, dated 1562. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.25. Elizabeth I, milled silver halfgroat, i.m.star (1560-66/7). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.26. Scotland, Mary I, third period (1560-5), first widowhood, silver testoon, dated 1562. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

but omitting Darnley's name. Mary soon married the Earl of Bothwell, a poor choice as he was implicated in the murder of Darnley, which alienated her from her people and her cousin Elizabeth. She was imprisoned at Loch Leven Castle, the first of her many prisons over the next 20 years, where she miscarried twins. The following day she abdicated in favour of her one-year old son James.

In next month's article I'll look at Elizabeth's third coinage and the final years of her long reign in which the death of Mary of Scotland and the threat of the Spanish Armada loomed large.

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



Fig.32. Loch Leven Castle, near Kinross.

Fig.31. Scotland, Mary I, fifth period (1567), second widowhood, silver two-thirds ryal, dated 1567. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.30. Scotland, Mary and Henry Darnley, fourth period (1565-57) silver ryal, dated 1567. The thistle countermark on the reverse of this coin was a product of its revaluation to 36s 9d in 1578. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.29. Scotland, Mary and Henry Darnley, fourth period (1565-57) silver one-third ryal, dated 1565. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.27. Scotland, Mary and Henry Darnley, fourth period (1565-57) silver ryal, dated 1565. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig.28. Scotland, Mary and Henry Darnley, fourth period (1565-57) silver two-thirds ryal, dated 1565. The thistle countermark on the reverse of this coin was a product of its revaluation to 24s 6d in 1578. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.