

An Unusual 1920G Shilling from West Africa

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The history of the coinage of West Africa has been well documented elsewhere, especially for the period around 1920 when the silver coinage was replaced by a tin-brass alloy⁽¹⁾. The contract for 4,000,000 shillings was given to J.R. Gaunt and Son Ltd. of Birmingham. The company was unable to complete the work due to old equipment and ultimately produced just 16,000 pieces⁽²⁾. It is not known how many, if any, went into circulation.

Surviving pieces are quite rare and the table below traces 12 specimens. There may be some duplication in the table and other pieces are likely to exist.

No	Source	Vendor/Collection	Date	Lot	Weight (g)	Grade	Notes
1	Glendining & Co	Major F. Pridmore	21-22 Sept 1981	655	5.24	nEF	Obv die flaw
2	D. Vice ⁽¹⁾		Before 1983			Unc	
3,4	D. Vice ⁽¹⁾		Before 1983			Unc	Die flaws
5	Heritage 357	Prof. W.N. Palmer	9-10 Sept 2004	12371		aU	Rev die flaw
6	Baldwins 58	Diana	23 Sept 2008	1423	5.75	VF	Rev die flaw
7	Baldwins 58	Diana	23 Sept 2008	1424	6.22	EF	
8	Baldwins 85	Arielle	26 Sept 2013	3154	5.79	EF	nicks
9	Baldwins 85	Arielle	26 Sept 2013	3155	6.25	gEF	
10	Heritage 3039		10 Jan 2016	37016		BU	Ex R.J. Ford ⁽³⁾
11	Heritage 3039		10 Jan 2016	37100	6.27	F	Ex R.J. Ford ⁽³⁾
12	eBay 132627729528	casellinik	14 June 2018		6.25	EF	NGC 2456455-002

Close inspection of specimen #12 revealed that the edge was tapered with a diameter 23.5mm on the reverse and 24.0mm on the obverse as shown in the x2 photographs. Excess metal has also flowed up the edge of the obverse die. A similar high rim was noted on #8 in the table.

From the table the 1920G shillings fall into two groups: normal weight, close to the 5.66g standard, and heavy, around 6.25g. The number of die flaws and uneven edges on surviving specimens does confirm that Gaunt were having difficulties with manufacturing the coins.

Several of the auction catalogues were illustrated well enough to reveal that there are two distinct reverse dies. In the first, the first I in SHILLING aligns to an edge bead and in the second the I aligns to a space between two edge beads.

References

- (1) Vice, D., 1983. The Coinage of British West Africa & St. Helena, 1684-1958 (Birmingham).
- (2) Sweeny, J.O., 1982. A Numismatic History of the Birmingham Mint (Birmingham).
- (3) Spink Coin Auction 88. R.J. Ford Collection (part 2). 14 October 1991 (London).
- (4) Thanks to Baldwin's for permission to use the image of #9.

