

Two Unusual Counterfeit Victorian Shillings

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The majority of contemporary counterfeit Victorian silver coins are made from pewter by casting in moulds taken from genuine coins. This short note will present two counterfeit shillings, dated 1863 and 1882 which are struck in silver using hand-engraved dies. They share the same obverse die and are very well made but are unlikely to be contemporary.

The pieces are illustrated below x2 along with close-ups of the date x4.



Fig. 1. Counterfeit shillings of 1863 (left) and 1882 (right) and close-up of the date.

The close-up of the date reveals that the date is engraved rather than entered into the dies using punches. The pieces are very deceptive and the edge milling gives nothing away. The 1882 was first acquired from a dealer as a genuine coin in the 1990's. More recently another specimen of the 1882 has been seen in a slab, from an American company, displaying the same amount of wear as the piece illustrated above and graded as AU55.

The figure below shows a close-up of the obverse legend around NNIAR: and the field behind the Queen's hair for the two counterfeits.



Fig. 2. Close-up of the obverse legend and field for the 1863 (left) and 1882 (right) (x10).

There are distinct raised lines in the field to the right of the hair curls on both pieces and there is also a die flaw running through the lower part of the legend NNIAR on the 1863 piece, most visible between the I and A. Thus the pieces share an obverse die and the 1863 piece was struck after the 1882.

The engraving of the portrait is very good, but just isn't quite right; the 1863 should be a second young head type A3, which is in higher relief, and the 1882 a fourth head type A7 which is in shallower relief.

The table below gives more details of the counterfeit pieces. The metal composition has been determined using XRF analysis.

	Weight (g)	Axis	Diameter (mm)	Ag	Cu	Si	Pb	Pd	Zn	Bi	Au
1863	5.578	0°	23.80	93.87	5.22	0.217	0.066	0.054	-	0.012	-
1882	5.633	180°	23.79	93.59	5.61	0.528	0.157	0.028	0.036	0.025	-

Table 1. Details of counterfeit 1863 and 1882 shillings.

For comparison, the table below gives details of a genuine shilling of 1863 and 1882.

	Weight (g)	Axis	Diameter (mm)	Ag	Cu	Si	Pb	Pd	Zn	Bi	Au
1863	5.655	180	23.63	94.52	4.90	0.061	0.305	0.075	0.030	0.020	0.081
1882	5.643	180	23.55	92.85	6.64	-	0.229	0.049	-	0.028	0.049

Table 2. Details of a genuine 1863 and 1882 shilling.

Thus the counterfeits are of good silver and good weight. The diameters are slightly too large and the 1863 has an incorrect die axis. Considering the weight and silver content there would be only a small profit margin to be had if these were manufactured in the nineteenth century.

This brings to mind a group of halfcrowns dated 1861, 1866, 1868, and 1871^(1,2), made from good silver and struck using exceptionally good dies. All of the known specimens have turned up since the 1960's and are at best in poor to fair condition. What remains of the portrait appears to be type A5, a portrait not used until 1874, so the pieces are considered to be contemporary counterfeits^(3,4). Manufactured to appear low grade in the 1870's, to blend in with worn halfcrowns circulating from before 1850, would have given a profit margin for the counterfeiters. These halfcrowns stayed in circulation until found during the change checking that took place around decimalisation.

For the shillings presented here, the grade and choice of dates may not be an accident. Shillings dated 1863 are certainly very rare and those of 1882 were also considered rare up to the 1980's, though less so today. It is quite possible that these pieces were manufactured for collectors sometime in the third quarter of the twentieth century, but they were not made in sufficient numbers or in too high a grade to create suspicion.

If any readers have other specimens from this group, especially with other dates, or showing significantly more wear from circulation, the author would be happy to hear.

References

- (1) Anon., 1968. The Unknown Halfcrown. Coin Monthly, September p26. Also noted on p101. Illustrates an 1868 halfcrown which also appears on the front cover.
- (2) Anon., 1969. Readers' Rarities. Coin Monthly, February pp60-61. Illustrates halfcrowns dated 1861, 1866, 1868, and 1871.
- (3) Bullmore, G. and T., 1969. Victorian Young Head Halfcrowns. Coin Monthly, March pp81-83.
- (4) Rayner, P.A., 1992. English Silver Coinage from 1649. 5th revised edition, footnote 2 on p85.

