

Caveat Emptor: Some Modern Fakes of Henry III Long Cross Pennies

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Whilst it is not surprising to hear of fakes of rare coins, valued in the hundreds or thousands of pounds, it is somewhat disconcerting to know that fakes of relatively common coins which might sell for only £30-60 have been appearing on the market in recent years. In this brief article I describe some examples of modern counterfeits of Henry III long cross pennies which are so well executed that most numismatists or collectors could easily be fooled by them.

(i) A class 3a1 Willem of Norwich

This example was spotted on Ebay recently. At first I was not suspicious and made a bid which I quickly retracted when I saw it's twin also being offered by the same vendor, who is based in Nish, Serbia. Ebay # 203224366633 was being advertised by "stangeorg" who had an excellent feedback rating of 466 ratings and a 100% score. When looking at the feedback most of the sales are from "private listings" which is a little suspicious. In the illustrations which follow this first coin is labelled as "Serbia #1". It was reported as having a weight of 1.35 gm, which is quite normal for the issue.

The second coin, "Serbia #2", Ebay # 203224366443, was reported as having a weight of 1.40 gm, again quite normal for the issue. It is being sold by the same vendor and was listed at the same time, and with the two listings due to end within 60 seconds of each other.

Close examination of the obverse and reverse of the two coins shows them to have been struck from the same dies, though on slightly different sized and shaped flans. If one only had a single coin to examine I think that one would be hard pressed to identify it as a fake. However, the chances of two genuine coins from identical dies turning up in Serbia with identical wear patterns is beyond belief.



Obverse of "Serbia #1"



Obverse of "Serbia #2"

The flan size is different on each coin and the first coin is advertised as having a diameter of 18mm; the second 17mm.

On the obverse, a few of many points of similarity include:

- Bottom left shorter point on the initial mark
- Weak central pellet below the crown-band
- Damage to the top pellet on the central fleur
- Damage to a particular part of the letter h
- A weak strike to the RH cheek.

Additionally, letter and pellet positioning is identical on both coins.



The reverses are also from an identical die...



Reverse of Serbia #1



Reverse of Serbia #2

Again, lettering and pellet positioning is identical. In particular, please note the short horizontal line within the WIL quadrant. This line may prove a handy recognition feature for any of these coins which appear in the future. Finally, for clarity, I am not asserting that "stamgeorg" is the fabricator of these forgeries, or even deliberately attempting to sell them; he may simply be an innocent victim himself. I will keep an open mind.

Whilst the above coins appear to have been struck with a hammer it seems many modern fraudsters are resorting to the use of laser scanners to produce dies identical to the original coins which are thereafter used with pressure moulds rather than by hammering. In many cases groups of coins are made from flans which are more or less identical in overall size and shape even if there are minor variations in weight. Images produced using this method give coins which have identical features even if the irregularities in the die circumferences do not appear in the same positions with each fake thereby produced. However the actual outline of the flans will be the same each time and this gives another means of comparison (Personal comments from Bob Thomas as discussed between him and David Palmer).

(ii) A Class 3c, Roger of Newcastle

This is an older example - In 2015 I located a fake Newcastle coin which I publicised on the henry3.com website at the time. Soon after publishing it three other people also notified me of having examples of the same forgery, and I suspect there are many more examples circulating in the marketplace. These appear to be pressure casts thereby leaving coins which appear identical except for variations in the flan shapes.



The vendor of coin CIF-8004 was quite honest, and described it in his Ebay listing as a forgery, despite it looking quite realistic, however it weighs only 1.08 gm. The coin on the right can be seen to be practically identical - look at the pattern of clipping, the position of dents, the position of scratches - e.g. the long scratch near the RH neck line, and on the reverse note the identical number of pellets in the inner circle for each quadrant. This coin weighs a more respectable 1.27 gm, but still less than the 1.4+ gm that we like to see. I have little doubt that these are both modern forgeries made in recent years and after showing these on the website three more examples came to light where the variations in flan shape can be seen.





Anyone having Roger of Newcastle class 3c coins should compare them with the examples published here.

(iii) Class 5c2, Roberd of Canterbury

Take a look at the following coin, which weighs 1.29 gm, and see if you can see anything wrong.



On the obverse we see oval eyes and a non-disjointed central fleur, and the tail of the letter R is wedge-shaped, so we are looking at class 5c2. On the reverse we can clearly read ROB/ERD/ONC/ANT. Now coins of ROBERD, as opposed to ROBERT, are scarce and, where known, usually appear on 5d style

reverses. In fact there were no examples of Roberd 5c2 from Canterbury seen by Churchill and Thomas in their study of the Brussels Hoard¹. This would tend to make this a highly sought after coin where at first sight, there is nothing to arise suspicion that it may be a fake. The weight is 1.33 gm. However, take a look at this next coin...

(iv) Class 5c2, Willem of London



A class 5c2 coin with an obverse looking similar to the last example, but this time with a reverse of WILLEM of London. It is instructive to compare the two obverses side-by-side:



¹ The Brussels Hoard of 1908; the Long Cross Coinage of Henry III. Churchill, Ron & Thomas, Bob. Baldwin's, 2012. (An essential reference for all interested in the Henry III long cross coinage).

On close inspection it is apparent that the two coins were struck from the same obverse die. The London obverse is fresher than that of the coin from Canterbury. Is this possibly an example of die-sharing between mints? That is, in this case, has a broken obverse die at Canterbury been replaced by one that had only recently gone into use at London? This is not impossible however unlikely it may be. The suspicion is that these could both be modern forgeries. The writer would be very interested to hear from anyone who has a coin with this obverse die and any other reverse die, as that would help to confirm the position.

It is perhaps pertinent to mention here the four exceptionally rare 5g coins known for Robert of London. Churchill and Thomas suggest it is possible that a small number were struck in Canterbury before it was realised that the reverse die read ROB ERT ONL VND. This error was spotted early on but not before a few coins had been issued and disbursed. See Churchill and Thomas page 79 and Fig 65.

Lawrence, in his article in BNJ Vol IX (1912) page 160, said when listing the moneyers:

“Robert, unidentified except for his name on two coins of class 5g, one in the possession of Colonel Morrieson and the other in my collection.”

Two more recently discovered coins are in the Ashmolean Museum: the Lawrence coin is in the collection of the late Ron Churchill and the Morrieson coin is in that of Bob Thomas.

Conclusion

The coins published here may only be the tip of the iceberg; there could be many more forgeries out there. The fact that unscrupulous people are now forging relatively cheap coins is very disturbing for collectors. Anyone knowing of any other probable Henry III fakes is invited to contact the author using henrymints@gmail.com. The point about realistic looking fakes now being spotted on the market does of course apply not only to coins of Henry III; many other coins are likely to have been copied too. My New Year resolution is to not buy any Ebay coins from Eastern Europe, though buying coins only from reputable dealers is not the simple answer as dealers are also likely to be fooled by some of these coins, and in fact coins #3 and #4 described in the article were purchased from two separate reputable dealers. Caveat Emptor!

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