

An Undated James I Sixpence

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The sixpences of James I comprise several busts and varieties, but all recorded examples include a date on the reverse. Recently, a coin with no date present has appeared (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Undated sixpence, m.m. mullet

The coin is a 2018 metal detecting find from the Isle of Wight; detailed inspection of the reverse shows no evidence of a date having been removed (Figure 2). The find was submitted to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and has record ID IOW-69639D, with the resultant opinion that this coin is a contemporary copy. This note provides evidence that the coin is, in fact, genuine.



Figure 2: Close-up of the expected datal region

The obverse die provides further valuable information about this coin's status. It has an obvious die flaw extending from the rear of the crown to the letter B in the legend, rendering this die easily recognisable. An extensive search has so far found six other sixpences with this obverse die. It is observed on two coins paired with reverse dies dated 1611, and *m.m.* mullet¹. Subsequently, this obverse die continued in use to the next mintmark (tower), having been over-marked, and is thus seen coupled with reverse dies *m.m.* tower, dated 1611 and 1612. Close examination of the obverse mintmark does, indeed, confirm that it is an overmark – a fact that has eluded the cataloguers of some coins in the past. Figure 3 shows two 1611 dated coins using the same obverse die, with over-struck mintmark and re-cut 'X' in 'REX', giving the appearance of 'RER'. Two further examples of this obverse die (1612) are provided by the Bole collection².



Figure 3: 1611 m.m. tower sixpences using the same (re-cut) obverse die as Figure 1

The details of both obverse and reverse dies of the undated coin appear genuine; there is nothing crude or suspicious about the design. The individual punches correspond well to those used on many other coins. In particular, the harp clearly shows the damaged left-hand string which frequently appears on sixpences dated between 1607 and 1615; a forgery would be unlikely to so faithfully replicate this defect. Some representative examples are shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: The Irish harp on typical sixpence reverse dies for the years shown, alongside the undated coin's harp, showing the damaged string

¹ Dix Noonan Webb 9th December 2010 lot 67 (part). The coin was not pictured in the catalogue; it was confirmed to use this die from a subsequent eBay listing of the coin. The second coin was observed on an internet site in 2009.

² Dix Noonan Webb 29th September 2010 lot 1521; 16th March 2011 lot 46 (part)

One other issue of potential significance is the coin's weight. It is very light for a sixpence of this issue (2.18g compared to the expected 3.01g). Some of the loss is accounted for by the flan damage, and there is also some clipping. Such a light weight is not without precedent, however; James I sixpences of similar weight have been recorded³, and there is no suggestion that these are anything other than genuine issues. The specific gravity of the coin has been measured, and it compares favourably with other James I silver coins, within the accuracy of the measurement apparatus.

With the evidence provided, it is proposed that this coin is a genuine issue, with a die sinker's error accounting for the absence of the date.

I would be interested to know if anyone has an example of a dated sixpence whose reverse die (apart from the presence of the date) appears to correspond to this example. My own search of auction catalogues, FPLs *etc.* has yielded images of two unique reverse dies on 1610 dated sixpences *m.m.* mullet, and twenty-one unique reverse dies on 1611 dated sixpences *m.m.* mullet. Within this limited photographic survey, there is no reverse die that matches this coin's die in other respects (*i.e.* the reverse die of Figure 1 but with a date present). Doubtless there are many more specimens within private collections that may shed light on this. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to know of any other examples using the obverse die (with, or without its characteristic flaw).



³ *e.g.* Dix Noonan Webb 16th March 2011 lot 45 (part); 16th September 2015 lot 465 (part)