

A Commonwealth Bronze Mortar design inspired by the Domestic Coinage

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The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 marked the end of England's brief flirtation with republican government. Charles II was keen to obliterate Cromwell's legacy and set about removing traces of the previous regime. The Puritan ideology was tossed aside in favour of a much more liberal system. Doubtless it would have become deeply unfashionable in elite circles to maintain adherence to Cromwellian principles.

Amongst other things, Commonwealth of England coinage was recalled, melted down and re-minted into stunning new modern milled denominations. Doubtless other objects associated with Cromwell were also recycled in the 1660's.

The short-lived nature of the Commonwealth coupled with the destruction of items associated with it mean that antiques that can be decisively dated to this period are scarce. One such object did however come up for sale at a Bonhams Oxford auction in April 2021 – a leaded bronze apothecary's mortar impressed with Commonwealth insignia. The person who commissioned this mortar must have loved the Commonwealth as the insignia was impressed into the mould no less than six times and it is therefore visible from all angles. When new it would have looked very impressive on the countertop of the apothecary's shop.





The markings are instantly recognisable to numismatists - being similar to the design of hammered Commonwealth coins. However, there is a key difference; on the mortar we have the shields of England and Ireland surrounded by fronds of palm and laurel whereas on the coins its just the shield of England. So, the mortar design seems to “hybridise” the obverse and the reverse of the coins.

I would be interested to hear from any readers how common it is to see this design on items other than coins. It seems to me to be quite likely that the London foundry which made the mortar was inspired by the new Commonwealth coins then in circulation.

