

AN UNUSUAL BALLINDALLOCH COUNTERMARK

Eric C. Hodge

At a recent auction¹ there was an unusual Ballindalloch countermark described² as:- *SCOTLAND, Countermarked coinage. Ballindalloch Cotton Works. AR 5 Shillings-Crown (40mm, 28.29 g). Undated, but issued 1800-1810. BALLINDALLOCH/Cotton Works (should be singular) around bale of cotton, countermarked on a 1791 Nantes (the mintmark appears to be I so the mint should be Limoges) Écu of Louis XVI.* (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1 Ballindalloch Cotton Work around bale of cotton, on écu, 40mm 28.29g.
Photographs courtesy Classical Numismatic Group, LLC.

Ballindalloch Cotton Works at Balfron, Stirlingshire, about eighteen miles west of Stirling and sixteen miles north of Glasgow is a well-known issuer of UK merchant countermarked silver coins.³
Two types are known.

Firstly, on Spanish American eight reales and countermarked on the obverse **BALLINDALLOCH** (surrounding) **COTTON WORKS** (surrounding) **5/** so presumably issued for value five shillings (Fig. 2). There are 11 examples known, though one of these is ex Cokayne collection and was stolen c. 1918 and believed melted, all with photographic proof. 5 of these examples are in museums.

Secondly, on French half-écus and countermarked on the obverse **BALLINDALLOCH COTTON WORK** (surrounding) a cotton-wool sack design (Fig. 3). There is no value shown but they are presumed issued at 2s 6d based upon a similar countermark, also on a half-écu, on a type from Adelphi Cotton Work at Deanston (Fig. 4) and research work on that issue.⁴ There are 4 examples of this Ballindalloch type known, with photographic proof, with 3 in museums.

¹ CNG 117, 19-20 May 2021, lot 1052.

² The description in the catalogue was partly corrected in the online version before the sale.

³ Manville, H.E., 2001. Tokens of the Industrial Revolution – foreign silver coins countermarked for use in Great Britain, c.1787–1828, BNS Special Publication 3 (London), pages 15-18. (Manville.)

⁴ Eric C. Hodge, Adelphi Cotton Work, Spink Numismatic Circular, June 2002, p 110-112 and Andrew T. Macmillan, Adelphi Cotton Work Accounts, SNC, August 2002, p 190 and Eric C. Hodge, Adelphi Cotton Work Revisited, SNC, December 2009, p 210.

There is also one example of this Ballindalloch countermark in the Hunterian Museum Glasgow (reference GLAHM39393) on a blank shilling-size silver disc (Fig. 5) which Manville describes as '*presumably ... a test piece or workman's sport.*'⁵ Manville goes on to state that '*Halfpenny-sized coins and tokens, including one on a French sou, are recorded stamped with the same punch as the half-écus*'⁶



Fig. 2 Ballindalloch 5/ issue on 8 reales host.
Private collection.



Fig. 3 Ballindalloch 2/6? Issue on French half-écu.
Private collection.



Fig. 4 Adelphi 2/6 issue on French half-écu.
Private collection.



Fig. 5 Ballindalloch mark on shilling-size disc.
GLAHM: 39393, © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.

The above details indicate how this Ballindalloch punch, with the cotton bale mark, has been placed on a number of low value coins. These could have been officially issued with a known value or to have been either test pieces, or possibly made during illicit use of the die for other nefarious uses.

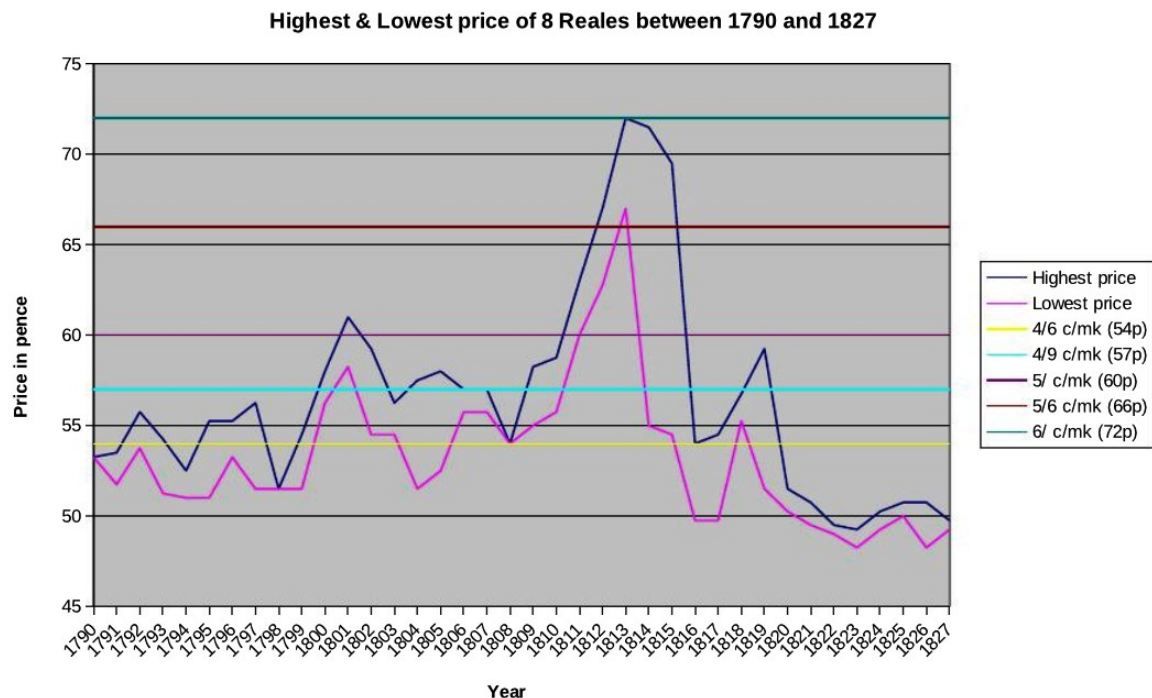
It is this information which makes the countermarked host (Fig. 1) so unusual. It is a full écu so is definitely worth more than 2/6, yet no value is placed on the coin and the same countermark is used as on the half-écu.

⁵ Manville, p 17.

⁶ Manville, pp 17-18.

The dates of issue for the 2/6 bale marked half-écus (Figs. 3 & 4) are difficult to ascertain, yet based on the host coin dates⁷ and the research carried out on the Adelphi issue, on a 1792 Day Book, are considered to be well before the 5/ issue (Fig. 2). This 5/ type is estimated, based on the price of silver, (Table 1) to have been issued between mid 1810 and 1814. The latest host coin date is 1799. The estimated dates of issue for the half-écus are likely to have been early in the 1790's. It is worth bearing in mind that an écu had more silver than an 8 reales and a half-écu the relative equivalent, following the French currency reforms of 1724-6. So the use of French coins would need to be taken into account when setting their issue value.

Table 1. Silver prices on the London bullion market between 1790 and 1827.



As was the case with most British coinage at this time⁸, there are no marks to indicate value on the original écus and half-écus. The only differentiating factors between the two are the diameter of the coins and their weight. On average an écu is between 39-42 mm diameter and weighs 27-29 grams. The equivalent values for the half-écu are 32-34 mm and 13-14 grams. It is certainly possible, on a cursory glance, to mistake one for the other especially when no other coin is available for comparison. However, in this case, (Fig. 1) as the countermark is the same as used on the half-écu, it is clear that there is more host coinage showing around the countermark.

⁷ Ballindalloch have four known examples, with photographic proof, dated 1728, 1729, 1730 & 1757. Adelphi have 27 known examples, with photographic proof, dated 1723, 1726(2), 1727(4), 1728, 1729(2), 1730(2), 1731, 1740, 1741, 1757 & 1759. The dates of 10 examples cannot be read.

⁸ No values are given but the coins are differentiated by their designs.



Fig. 6 Lanark Mills 2/6 countermark on French half-écu (with graffiti).
Dated 1730, Louis XV, mint mark L (Bayonne).
Private collection.

It is worth mentioning a third issue of countermarked French half-écus, that of Lanark Mills (Fig. 6). There are nine examples known with photographic proof and their host dates are 1728(2), 1730(2) and five unknown, but all are on coins of Louis XV who reigned from 1715-1774. These dates could indicate an issue date comparable with Ballindalloch and Adelphi, except that in the case of Lanark Mills the countermark clearly shows 2/6. There were two separate issues of the Lanark Mills 2/6 exhibiting different countermarks, so it is quite possible that these 2/6 issues were made at different periods.

Why, then, would a bale marked écu be issued at five shillings using exactly the same countermark as a 2/6 issue? Subsequently a clearly marked 5/ type was made (Fig. 2) when this became necessary.

An interesting fact to bear in mind is that both the Ballindalloch Cotton Work and the Adelphi Cotton Work were owned by Kirkman Finlay of James Finlay & Company. He purchased Ballindalloch in 1798 and Adelphi in 1807-8. Both these dates are subsequent to the offered issue dates of the half-écu countermarks of the early 1790's. So are these dates too early? Could the issue dates be when Finlay owned both concerns, after 1808? Looking at Table 1 an 1808 issue date is certainly possible but it is contradicted by the entries found in the 1792 Day Book from Adelphi. Also, Kirkman Finlay owned Catrine Cotton Works, another countermarked issuer, from 1801, but no bale marked or 2/6 marks are known from that concern.

One of the entries from the 1792 Day Book from Adelphi, mentioned above,⁹ state:

EXTRACTS FROM THE '1792 DAY BOOK' OF ADELPHI COTTON WORK.
The '1792 Day Book' covers the period 14 December 1791 to 31st July 1793.

1) 3rd December 1792. Ref. 20
40

Gained upon Stamping a quantity of Spanish Dollars and French half Crowns	£1-5-1.
Cash Dr. to Profit & Loss	£1-5-1.

This entry clearly shows that the business was dealing with Spanish Dollars and French half Crowns, i.e.: Spanish 8 reales and French half-écus. There is no mention in the ledger entries of 'French Crowns'. Presumably this was because they only dealt in French coins for the lower value countermarks and used the ubiquitous 8 reales for the higher values. There is, in fact, one known example of the Adelphi bale mark on a Spanish 8

⁹ Eric C. Hodge, Adelphi Cotton Work, Spink Numismatic Circular, June 2002, p 110.

reales as shown in Fig. 7. This was tentatively valued by Manville at 'Five Shillings?'¹⁰ but was calculated at a likely issue value nearer 4/6d ¹¹ during research of the 1792 Day Book.



Figs. 7a & 7b Adelphi Cotton Work with 'bale-mark' on Spanish-American 8 reales dated 1751.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum, ref. 1996-10-1-19.)

It, therefore, would appear reasonable to assume issue dates of the bale mark half écus from Ballindalloch and Adelphi to be the early 1790's when these concerns were individually owned. Maybe one learned from the other, but the similarity of the countermarks certainly raises questions of collaboration. Reference to Manville¹² may give us a clue. *In 1789 Robert Dunmore Laird of Ballindalloch formed a partnership with the Buchanan brothers of Glasgow, who recently had built a cotton mill at Deanston ... and they erected a cotton mill at Balfron, to be known as the Ballindalloch Cotton Works.* The date and the link seem to highlight the possibility that the bale mark countermark used at both concerns were issued in the early 1790's and at the same value.

The host coin date of Fig. 1 is 1791, much later than all the countermarked half-écus for Ballindalloch and Adelphi, which certainly sets it apart. Was it a coin available when countermarking was commenced on the half-écus and was marked as a keepsake, or was there an issue of écus at double the value of the half-écus? If the latter should we see similar écu countermarks from Adelphi?

There is still much uncertainty about this issue (Fig. 1) but it is reasonable to treat this countermarked coin as a new type and allocate it the Manville number M006A.

The writer would welcome views and ideas for the countermarking of this French écu.



¹⁰ Manville, p 58.

¹¹ Eric C. Hodge, Adelphi Cotton Work, Spink Numismatic Circular, June 2002, p 110.

¹² Manville, p 15.