

The 'ED PERTH' mint signature on the coins of Robert II

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Three mints were responsible for the coinage of Robert II – Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee. All three mints produced four denominations – groat, halfgroat, penny and halfpenny. The groat, halfgroat and penny from the Edinburgh and Perth mints are relatively common. All denominations bearing the Dundee mint signature are rare. The Edinburgh halfpenny is scarce. The Perth halfpenny is extremely rare¹.

This note concerns an enigmatic rendition of the mint signature on some groats, halfgroats and pennies. On these coins the signature of VILLA DE PERTH is rendered as VILLA ED PERTH. This latter legend has been attributed to die-sinker error, born of familiarity with producing VILLA EDINBURGH mint signatures².

The representation of this anomaly across three denominations, involving multiple dies and many coins, suggests that the ED PERTH reading may have been intentional.

In this report, coins or coin images bearing an ED PERTH signature were examined from private and public collections. The sample is unselected in regard to any feature other than the mint signature, and may be assumed to be typical of these anomalous coins. It is comprised of 10 groats, 4 halfgroats and 3 pennies.

Images of the reverses of the seventeen coins are illustrated below or are available at the web sites indicated.

The abbreviations used are:

B - Edward Burns, *The Coinage of Scotland*, 3 vols., Edinburgh, 1887

SCBI 35 - *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* 35, London, 1987

BM – British Museum

SR – Sovereign Rarities Ltd

PAS - Portable Antiquities Scheme

1. Hitherto unknown, but now listed as 5153A in *Coins of Scotland, Ireland and the Islands*, 4th Edition, Spink, London, 2020.

2. Ian Stewart, "Scottish Mints", Ch. XV in R. A. G. Carson (Ed.) *Mints, Dies and Currency*, London, 1971, p. 228.

Groats



1³.



2.



3.



4.



5.

6. B Vol. III, 11, *fig.* 318

7. B Vol. III, 12, *fig.* 319

8. SCBI 35, 473

9. BM <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=1841,0722.19>

10. BM <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=1889,0714.32>

Eight reverse dies are represented on the ten groats. Coins 1 and 2 share the same die. Coins 3 and 6 share another die⁴. Coins 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 each have a different and unique reverse die.

3. I am grateful to Martin Roberts of AMR Coins Ltd. for kindly providing this image.

4. The condition of coin 6 and its illustration in Burns makes for a less than certain assessment of this reverse die. I have erred on the side of conservatism in not exaggerating the number of different dies.

Halfgroats



1.



2.

3. B Vol. III, 11, *fig* 321

4. S <https://www.sovr.co.uk/robert-ii-halfgroat-perth-mint-last-m-of-obverse-legend-absent-cg04316.html>

All of the four reverse dies are singletons.

Pennies



1.

2. BM https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1897-1103-158

3. PAS <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/NCL-433370>

Coins 1 and 2 share the same obverse and reverse dies. Coin 3 is struck from a different reverse die, but shares the same obverse die as Stewart 36a and 36b⁵, coins with the Edinburgh and Perth signatures respectively.

The seventeen coins exhibit reverses struck from 14 dies. This suggests a very large mintage of coins bearing the ED PERTH reverse, the majority probably being groats. The small number of surviving pennies with this mint signature, and the observation that two of the three pennies in the sample are from identical obverse and reverse dies, suggests that the mintage of pennies with the ED PERTH reverse may have been small. Stewart noted a Perth penny on which “the error has been corrected, DE being punched over ED”^{6, 7}. The assumption of ‘error’ might at the very least be accorded some doubt. The changed rendition of the legend could have been the result of any number of initiatives, including those imposed on the die sinker. Under Robert II there was a separate warden for the Perth mint⁸, presumably with similar administrative oversight to the warden at Edinburgh.

The number of different dies bearing the anomalous mint signature, their presence across three denominations, and their comparable service to dies bearing conventional mint signatures as reflected in surviving coin numbers, raises the possibility that this form of mint signature was intentional, with ED and PERTH signifying a mintage at either Edinburgh or Perth.

The scourge of the Black Death was omnipresent during the latter half of the fourteenth century⁹, driving king and court from urban centres of pestilence during outbreaks¹⁰. The location of minting activity was in all likelihood similarly peripatetic, so that readily available coinage dies reflecting the duality of operational sites would have been a convenient expedient.

Stewart notes that the activity of the Edinburgh and Perth mints during this period was “exceptionally interdependent”, with a number of obverse die links

5. Stewart (1971), Plate XVII

6. Stewart (1971), p. 228

7. The coin is not illustrated, nor a provenance given. Jesper Ericsson, Curator (Numismatics), Hunterian Museum, kindly confirmed that the coin is not amongst those bequeathed to the Museum by Lord Stewartby.

8. Joan E. L. Murray (1977), The organisation and work of the Scottish Mint 1358-1603, in D. M. Metcalf (Ed.) *Coinage in Medieval Scotland (1100-1600)*, British Archaeological Reports 45, p. 158

9. Richard Oram, (2015), ‘The worst disaster suffered by the people of Scotland in recorded history’: climate change, dearth and pathogens in the long 14th century, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 144, p. 230

10. Richard Oram, Disease Control – Halting the Spread of Plague in Fifteenth-Century Scotland, <http://www.kingjames1ofscotland.co.uk/publications/disease-control-halting-the-spread-of-plague-in-fifteenth-century-scotland/>

recorded^{11, 12}. There is a precedent for this sharing of minting locations. Hue at Edinburgh and Walter at Perth are jointly named as Hue Walter on pennies of William the Lion that were almost certainly a general issue from Edinburgh and Perth.



11. Stewart (1971), p.229

12. I have been unable to find any obverse die links between groats in the sample and coins bearing conventional Edinburgh or Perth reverses, although comparisons have of necessity been restricted to published images. The halfgroat no. 1, illustrated above, exhibits the same obverse die as a coin in my collection with a Perth reverse.