

Contemporary Counterfeit Shillings of the Commonwealth 1649-1660

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Having collected shillings for many years, especially contemporary counterfeits, two questions often arise: how can you tell it's a counterfeit? And how do you know it is contemporary? The first is sometimes obvious; plating wearing through, wrong metal, wrong design, the metal doesn't ring when tapped etc. The second is more challenging and unless die linked to; pieces contained in reliably dated hoards, an early collection provenance or a reliable metal detector find, the counterfeit could have been made at any time after the original date of production. Contemporary counterfeits are those manufactured to blend in with the circulating medium while the genuine coins were circulating. Pieces manufactured after the coins have been demonetised have many purposes – ranging from education and tourism to deceiving collectors, and might also be called copies, forgeries, fakes or fantasy pieces.

This note will begin with a very brief description of the history behind the shillings issued under the Commonwealth⁽⁴⁾, followed by illustrations of some counterfeit shillings and finishing with some general observations.

The Commonwealth Coinage

On the 7 July 1649 an act of Parliament was passed that defined the design, legend, denominations, weights and standards of the new coins to be issued by the Commonwealth. The coins dated 1649-57 bear the initial mark sun and those issued 1658-1660 have the initial mark of an upright anchor. Typically of the hammered series, the methods used to create the dies – each individually made with each design entered into the die by hand means there are many minor varieties and errors. These include any or all of the following: missing stops, overdates, error legends, different date digit and letter styles etc.^(1,2,3) Outside hoards or very detailed die studies it is unusual to find die duplicates of a particular hammered coin. The images below show a typical shilling, though above average grade with no signs of clipping.

Obv: **THE COMMONWEALTH•OF•
ENGLAND•** •

Around wreath and shield with St George's Cross.

Rev: **GOD • WITH • VS • 1649 •**

Around • **XII** • and conjoined shields with St George's Cross and Irish Harp.

Details: 32.3 mm, 5.911 g, 90° (125%), GO.



Richard Cromwell resigned on 15th May 1659 and the newly elected Convention Parliament sat for the first time on 25th April 1660. Charles II entered London on 29th May 1660, though most of the groundwork for running the country was already in place.

A proclamation of 7th September 1660 stated that silver coins issued by the Commonwealth would no longer be current after the last day of November but they could still be used for official payments or brought to the mint and be exchanged for an equal weight of new coins (less the coinage costs). Pepys diary gives the end of common circulation as three months later. The proclamation also states that as many already considered the coins no longer coin of the realm, they were being widely counterfeited, hoping to escape punishment.⁽⁴⁾

On the 28th November 1661 it was decided to extend the acceptance of the coins for official payments until the 25th March 1661/2 and a proclamation was issued on 7th December. Counterfeiting of the Commonwealth coins was again forbidden from the last day of November until the 1st May. After some lobbying, this proclamation was recalled and the 1st of March was set as the date after which the Commonwealth coins would no longer be accepted by his majesty's officers.

However, a piece of silver is a piece of silver and evidence suggests that the Commonwealth silver coins continued to circulate up to the recoinage of 1696-7. During the recoinage, unclipped and almost full weight silver coins were allowed to continue to circulate at full value after being officially pierced through the centre. The piercing was designed so as not to remove any metal. Any subsequent clipping would be obvious and illegal and the coins would no longer be accepted in official payments^(4,5). However, coins that still showed the inner circles were also received at face value. This clippers' charter resulted in many coins having their full legends removed in one piece. Hoards of these clippings have been found, though a clipping that shows the whole legend from a commonwealth shilling has not yet been seen by the author. The images below show a centrally pierced shilling and a shilling clipped to the inner circles.



33 mm, 5.54 g (125%), G. Charman.⁽⁵⁾



23.5 mm, 3.347 g, 160° (125%), GO.

Thus we have a known upsurge in counterfeiting of silver coins of the commonwealth during the period between the end of the Commonwealth and the first legislation for the coinage issued under Charles II. The simplicity of the design features (i.e. no portrait and bold legends) and very variable quality of official dies all combine to make this series open to counterfeiting up to the 1696-7 recoinage and the final withdrawal of hammered silver from circulation.

Analysis of Counterfeit Commonwealth Shillings

The pages below illustrate Commonwealth shillings that are considered to be contemporary to the original circulation of the coins and are from two sources. Firstly there are specimens found in the Baldwin black museum around 1995 and loaned for photography by the late Michael Sharp. Two pieces that look genuine but have been tooled and an electrotype have been omitted. The weight was noted and diameter and die axis determined from scaled photographs.

The second group is the author's collection, which allows the same parameters to be determined along with a metallurgical analysis using XRF. The usual caveats with the XRF metal analyses apply – the measurement covers a small sample area (about 6 mm diameter in the middle of the obverse), if it is plated, that is what dominates the measurement, if the plating is partially worn the result is an average of the plating and the core metal etc. The method typically 'sees' through oxygen, carbon and chlorine-based corrosion products to determine the metal content within the crust and below.

Only pieces with clear dates or those die-linked to dated pieces are included. Die duplication within and between the two sources is noted, but all are included and illustrated.

The Catalogue

1649



1649-001

32.0 mm, 170°, 6.200 g (125%), Baldwin.
Silvered brass.



1649-002

31.5 mm, 330°, 4.965 g (125%), Baldwin.
Appears to be good quality silver, but poor die engraving. Small die on a large flan. Contemporary?

1652



1652-001

31.5 mm, 270°, 5.850 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base silver.



1652-002

32.5 mm, 0°, 5.135 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base silver? Hand-cut dies. Die duplicate of 1652-006.



1652-003

31.8 mm, 270°, 5.037 g (125%), GO.
Brassy silver, hand cut dies. Obv. die as 1653-009 but later.
Ag 55.3%, Cu 42.8%, Si 0.7% others < 0.6%.



1652-004

29.5 mm, 180°, 3.694 g (125%), GO.
Silvered copper or brass, green surface corrosion.
Ag 47.0%, Cu 32.8%, Si 13.2%, Al 4.2% others < 1.2%.



1652-005

31.3 mm, 270°, 5.009 g (125%), GO.
Heavy copper plating on base metal, localized corrosion.
Cu 64.8%, Sn 32.6%, Si 2.0% others < 0.3%.



1652-006

33.0 mm, 0°, 5.839 g (125%), GO.
Base silver? Hand cut dies. Die duplicate of 1652-002.
Ag 94.5%, Hf 2.4%, Fe 2.0% others < 0.6%.



1652-007

30.4 mm, 70°, 4.984 g (125%), GO.
Cast base silver. Whole obv. design doubled.
Ag 83.0%, Cu 16.1%, Si 0.4%, Pb 0.3% others < 0.1%.

1653



1653-001

30.0 mm, 140°, 4.450 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base Silver.



1653-002

32.0 mm, 140°, 5.175 g (125%), Baldwin.
Silver plated, copper core showing through.



1653-003

30.0 mm, 70°, 6.010 g (125%), Baldwin.
Silver plated, copper core showing through.



1653-004

32.5 mm, 20°, 3.930 g (125%), Baldwin.
Very thin, base silver.



1653-005

30.0 mm, 190°, 4.820 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base silver.



1653-006

32.0 mm, 145°, 4.175 g (125%), GO.
Looks and feels like bright pewter?
Ag 85.3%, Cu 7.8%, Si 4.3%, Al 1.2%, others < 0.7%.



1653-007

31.9 mm, 120°, 5.591 g (125%), GO.
Plated very base silver?
Cu 56.8%, Ag 40.9%, S 0.7%, others < 0.4%.



1653-008

32.8 mm, 60°, 5.330 g (125%), GO.
Plated base silver?
Ag 49.5%, Cu 47.0%, Si 1.0%, others < 0.8%.



1653-009

28.5 mm, 180°, 4.615 g (125%), GO.
Brassy silver, hand cut dies. Obv. die as 1652-003 but earlier.
Ag 61.4%, Cu 34.6%, Pb 1.7%, others < 0.9%.



1653-010

31.9 mm, 280°, 6.575 g (125%), GO.
Pewter? Contemporary?
Sn 88.2%, Sb 7.7%, Cu 1.4%, Fe 1.1%, others < 0.9%.

1654



1654-001

29.5 mm, 135°, 3.630 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base silver? Dies as 1654-002 and 1654-003.



1654-002

30.4 mm, 45°, 5.121 g (125%), GO.
Very base silver. Dies as 1654-001 and 1654-003.
Cu 51%, Ag 47.5%, Si 0.6%, others < 0.4%



1654-003

31.2 mm, 45°, 4.111 g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Dies as 1654-001 and 1654-002.
Ag 45.0%, Cu 42.7%, Si 6.1%, Al 2.6%, Fe 2.2%, others < 0.5%.

1656



1656-001

31.0 mm, 135°, 5.590 g (125%), Baldwin.
Plated copper or brass.



1656-002

31.5 mm, 250°, 4.661 g (125%), GO.
Plated copper or brass.
Ag 72.9%, Cu 18.5%, Pb 3.4%, Fe 3.3%, others < 0.7%.



1656-003

31.3 mm, 270°, 4.647 g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Crusty surface.
Cu 53.6%, Ag 43.2%, Si 1.2%, Pb 1.1%, others < 0.2%.



1656-004

30.7 mm, 190°, 4.614 g (125%), GO.
Plated base silver.
Ag 73.3%, Cu 22.2%, Pb 1.5%, Si 1.4%, others < 0.3%.



1656-005

31.0 mm, 270°, 5.263 g (125%), GO.
Plated base silver.
Ag 60.4%, Cu 35.2%, Pb 2.0%, Si 1.0%, others < 0.4%.



1656-006

30.5 mm, 135°, 4.445 g (125%), GO.
Plated copper.
Cu 71.5%, Ag 26.0%, S 0.5%, others < 0.4%.



1656-007

30.9 mm, 0°, 3.864 g (125%), GO.
Plated base silver.
Cu 54.8%, Ag 41.5%, S 1.3%, Pb 1.2%, others < 0.3%



1656-008

29.8 mm, 90°, 4.167 g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Looks fire damaged.
Ag 55.3%, Cu 35.2%, Si 4.6%, Al 2.4%, Pb 1.6%, others < 0.7%



1656-009

30.8 mm, 0°, 2.336 g (125%), GO.
Cracked fragile base silver?
Ag 90%, Cu 6.9%, Al 1.1%, Fe 0.9%, others < 0.4%. Genuine?



1656-010

29.8 mm, 2300°, 4.241 g (125%), GO.
Base silver, crusty surface.
Cu 44.5%, Ag 35.8%, Si 7.6%, S 6.9%, Al 2.2%, others < 0.9%.

1657



1657-001

31.2 mm, 160°, 4.848 g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Wrong '7' font.
Ag 69.1%, Cu 23.3%, Si 2.9%, Al 2.3%, Pb 1.6%, others < 0.2%.

1658



1658-001

31.5 mm, 135°, 4.840 g (125%), Baldwin.
Base silver.



1658-002

31.0 mm, 90°, 5.43 g (125%), Baldwin.
Plated copper.



1658-003

29.0 mm, 135°, 4.350 g (125%), Baldwin.
Plated copper?



1658-004

31.0 mm, 135°, 4.250 g (125%), Baldwin.
Brass.



1658-005

32.2 mm, 90°, 3.986 g (125%), GO.
Base silver.
Ag 78.8%, Cu 17.5%, Pb 2.1%, others < 0.6%.



1658-006

30.1 mm, 0°, 6.400 g (125%), GO.
Plated brass.
Cu 53.2%, Ag 44.3%, Al 0.7%, Pb 0.6%, others < 0.4%.



1658-007

29.8 mm, 0°, 3.656 g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Crude letter forms.
Ag 49.6%, Cu 46.4%, Pb 2.9%, others < 0.7%.



1658-008

30.7 mm, 315°, 4.315g (125%), GO.
Base silver. Poor die engraving.
Ag 65.4%, Cu 30.1%, Si 1.7%, Pb 0.7%, others < 0.5%.

1660



1660-001

29.0 mm, 315°, 4.255 g (125%), Baldwin.
Plated copper.



1660-002

31.7 mm, 350°, 4.566 g (125%), GO.
Plated copper.
Ag 61.6%, Cu 36.0%, Pb 1.5%, others < 0.3%.



1660-002

31.0 mm, 340°, 4.330 g (125%), GO.
Plated base silver.
Cu 56.9%, Ag 39.6%, Pb 2.8%, others < 0.3%

Discussion and Conclusions

Whilst the numbers of pieces presented here is relatively small (Baldwin 16, GO 28), that there is very little die duplication between the two sources suggests that there is a large number yet to be discovered. The absence of any counterfeit shillings dated 1651 is surprising. Considering the rarity of the official coin, the presence of a counterfeit 1657 is also unexpected, however this piece is a very high-quality counterfeit, with good silver plate. Some years ago, a die duplicate of this 1657, with intact silvering, was found in the Fitzwilliam Museum amongst the genuine Commonwealth issues.

Even allowing for the small numbers, counterfeit shillings with the initial mark anchor do seem to be over-represented ($11/44 = 25\%$) when compared to the present-day rarity of genuine coins with this mark. This may be consistent with the known surge in counterfeiting around 1660, when the dates 1658-1660 would have been fresh in circulation.

Apart from 1656-006 and 1656-009, all of the pieces analysed using XRF show significant debasement, either with a copper core or low silver alloy. The presence of Hafnium in 1656-006 (die duplicate of 1656-002) is extremely unusual – the first time I have detected this metal in a coin of any sort. As an element it was first isolated in 1923 and is found in several modern industrial applications. Therefore this issue is probably of modern manufacture (though pre 1995). At the opposite end of the scale, the metal content of 1656-009 suggests this is probably just a very worn and damaged genuine coin.

It should also be remembered that many of the pieces presented here have obviously been in the ground and have survived because their alloy/plating protected them to some degree. Many counterfeits made from tin or poor alloys will not have survived let alone be identifiable.

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) P.A. Rayner. *English Silver Coinage since 1649*. 5th Edition, Seaby, 1992.
- (2) M. Bull. *English Silver Coinage since 1649*. 5th Fully Revised Edition, Spink, 1992.
- (3) For excellent discussion and illustrations see: <http://www.sunandanchor.com/>
- (4) R. Ruding. *Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain*. 3rd Edition, 1840.
- (5) G. Charman. *The Punched Hammered Coinage of 1696*. Galata, 2019.

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