

Counterfeit Shillings of George III 1816-1820

(iv) A Contemporary Mould Revisited

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The mould shown in figure 1 was first published in 1986⁽¹⁾ and was acquired by the present author a few years afterwards⁽²⁾. At that time it was conjectured that this was from a 19th C. token. However, close inspection reveals vestiges of a previously un-noticed incuse letter G. With a diameter of about 37mm, no edge markings and a weight of 22.11 g, this is likely a smoothed Cartwheel penny of 1797.



Fig. 1. Contemporary counterfeiter's mould, and location of an incuse "G". (200%).

The piece is not quite circular, so was probably made by squeezing a genuine coin between the two copper discs, whilst very hot, thus causing some distortion. The impression of the coin itself is also not quite circular. Analysis of the surface using XRF gives Cu 93.6%, S 3.5% and Si 1.2 %. The surface is quite corroded and dirty and switching off the light element detection leaves a 98.8% copper substrate, confirming the previous result of 'almost pure copper'.

The obvious question arises – does the reference collection contain a piece made from this mould? Though the surface of the mould has lost a lot of detail, figure 2 shows a close-up of the date.

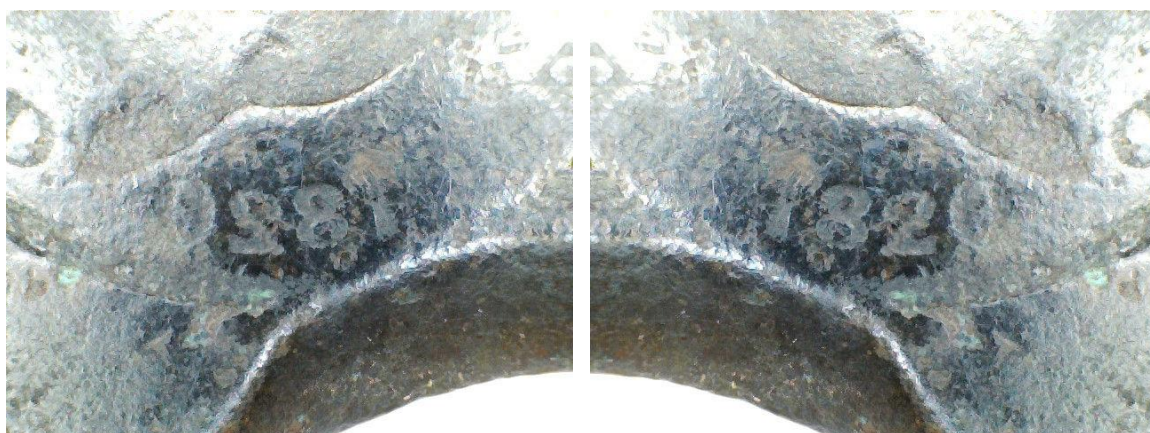


Fig. 2. Close-up of the date on the mould, and reversed image (~600%)

Characteristic features are that the '1' is quite faint, the '2' has a particular slope to the end of the horizontal bar without a serif, and the '0' is a lightly larger font and the top is slightly higher than the other digits. The piece is a mould rather than a die, so was most likely used for the lower melting point 'tin' alloys. This reduces the search to 13 pieces. A cast counterfeit from this mould will also have signs of the casting sprue on the edge somewhere between the '18' of the date and 'GEOR'.

Whilst a few were close, none were a perfect match.

The moulds for the cast counterfeits would have been made from an impression of a genuine coin. From 1816 onwards, the mint used master punches for the main design elements; portraits and reverse designs, but the lettering, punctuation and numbers were added by hand. On a very small scale, this leads to many minor varieties (relative position and alignment of added components) and a few major varieties such as overstruck dates and letters, broken punches etc. Looking at a small enough scale, every die used during the official coinage of 1816-1820 will be unique. This variation will be reflected in the cast counterfeits.

The detail on the mould has suffered some wear and corrosion since it was made, but as the impression of the portrait is not very deep, it was probably made using a quite worn coin, likely sometime after 1850.

Another similar mould was seen on eBay in 2001, though the photographs were not very good, it also looks like a smoothed cartwheel penny with the impression of the obverse of an 1816 shilling.⁽³⁾

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) R.N.P. Hawkins. A Mould for Counterfeit George III Shillings. SCMB June 1986, p171.
- (2) Many thanks to Richard Colliass for allowing an exchange for this piece – if I recall correctly a contemporary counterfeit of a Charles I shilling and some modern paper currency.
- (3) eBay item 1288858595 ended 30 October 2001. Vendor based in Monterey, California. I am in touch with the winner and will upload pictures and more details when available. Thanks to Neville Shrimpton.

