

Cartouche Countermarks Revisited

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Introduction

This note will take another look at the Stuart hammered silver coins that have been countermarked with a cartouche containing various Roman numerals; III, VI, VII and VII above a horizontal I. The five known specimens were discussed almost 20 years ago⁽¹⁾ and since then a further specimen that might be attributed to this group has been found.

The note will begin with a description of the known specimens and then discuss directions that might be pursued to identify the issuing authority.

The Specimens

The first notice of a cartouche countermark was made by C.H.V. Sutherland in 1947.⁽²⁾ Presented to the Ashmolean Museum by Major and Mrs R.S. Rowell of Appleton, Berks, from the collection of Richard Rowell, their late son. Sutherland speculates a Scottish use (six shillings), but the weight doesn't work.

Obv. James I shilling, second issue, third bust. i.m. Rose.
Oval countermark with small indents and VI, across front of face.
Rev. Normal design, area flattened smooth from the countermarking.
Details. Clipped to approx. 27 mm, 70.5 grains, 4.568g. 125%.



Two further pieces appeared in the Bridgewater House sale in 1972.⁽³⁾

Obv. Charles I shilling Tower 4⁴, G1/2. i.m. Triangle in Circle. Cartouche countermark with VII on neck and front of bust.
Rev. Normal design, area flattened smooth from the countermarking.
Details. 29.2×28.3 ↔↑mm, 85.8 grains 5.563g. 125%.
Notes. Brooker 1216, then ex Emyr George. GO.



Obv. Charles I shilling Tower 4⁴ G1/2. i.m. Sun.
Oval countermark with small indents containing a VII above a horizontal I, on neck and front of bust.
Rev. Normal design, flattened smooth from the countermarking.
Details. 29.5×28.8 ↔↑mm, 89.4 grains 5.792g. 125%.
Notes. Brooker 1217, then ex Emyr George. GO.



The Bridgewater House pieces and a similar countermarked sixpence were noted by Michael Sharp in 1973.⁽⁵⁾

Obv. Charles I sixpence, Tower 3a i.m. Crown.
Oval countermark with small indents and III across front of bust.
Rev. Not seen.
Details. Approx 25 mm, 44.3 grains, 2.781g. 125%.
Notes.



Three years later a further note by Mike Sharp brought a fifth piece to our attention,⁽⁶⁾ this had been sold in 1960 in the Gibbs sale.⁽⁷⁾

Obv. Charles I shilling, Tower 4², i.m. tun.

Cartouche countermark with VII in front of neck and chin.

Rev. Not seen.

Details. Estimate nearly full flan at 30mm, weight not known. 125%.

Notes. Ex H.D. Gibbs.



5.⁽⁶⁾

When I wrote about these in 2002 and found a reasonable correlation between the numeral in the countermark and the current weight of the coin, taking the symbol in the third piece as XIII just didn't feel correct. All of the punches are different, so why not create a punch with VIII?

Then, whilst watching a live auction a bidder was seen moving his flat hand horizontally at the auctioneer to request a split bid and thus a possible interpretation sprang to mind – does the VII over a horizontal I indicate 7½?

As a final addition, the following piece was purchased from a non-numismatic source in 2007 with no provenance or suggestion as to use.

Obv. Charles I shilling, Tower 4⁴, G1/2. i.m. indistinct.

Almost circular countermark with small indents and cruder VII in the middle of the coin.

Rev. Normal design, flattened but slightly rough from the countermarking.

Details. 28.7×27.9 ↔↓ mm. 5.278g. 125%.

Notes. eBay UK, 2007. GO.



6.

The mark has been made using a punch, but the shape of the punch and the location of the indents is different to the others and the VII is quite primitively created, with a single line forming the upper and lower serifs of all of the numerals. Might this be a contemporary counterfeit of a circulating countermarked coinage, a later concoction or just something random that is unrelated?

The Figure below plots the countermark numeral against the weight of the coins for the five pieces for which the weight is known. Two points are plotted for the countermark showing the VII with the horizontal I below, the first interpreting the numeral as an 8 and the second with the revised 7½ interpretation.

A best straight line is drawn through the data points and the origin. The minimised (least squares) residual, $R^2 = 0.9979$, confirms the correlation between the countermark numeral and weight is reasonable, however this should be treated with some caution as there are only five data points. The slope of the line is 1.2821 which means a fine silver coin that weighs 5.46g would have a countermark VII and the linear relationship suggests a currency or revaluation use for the countermark.

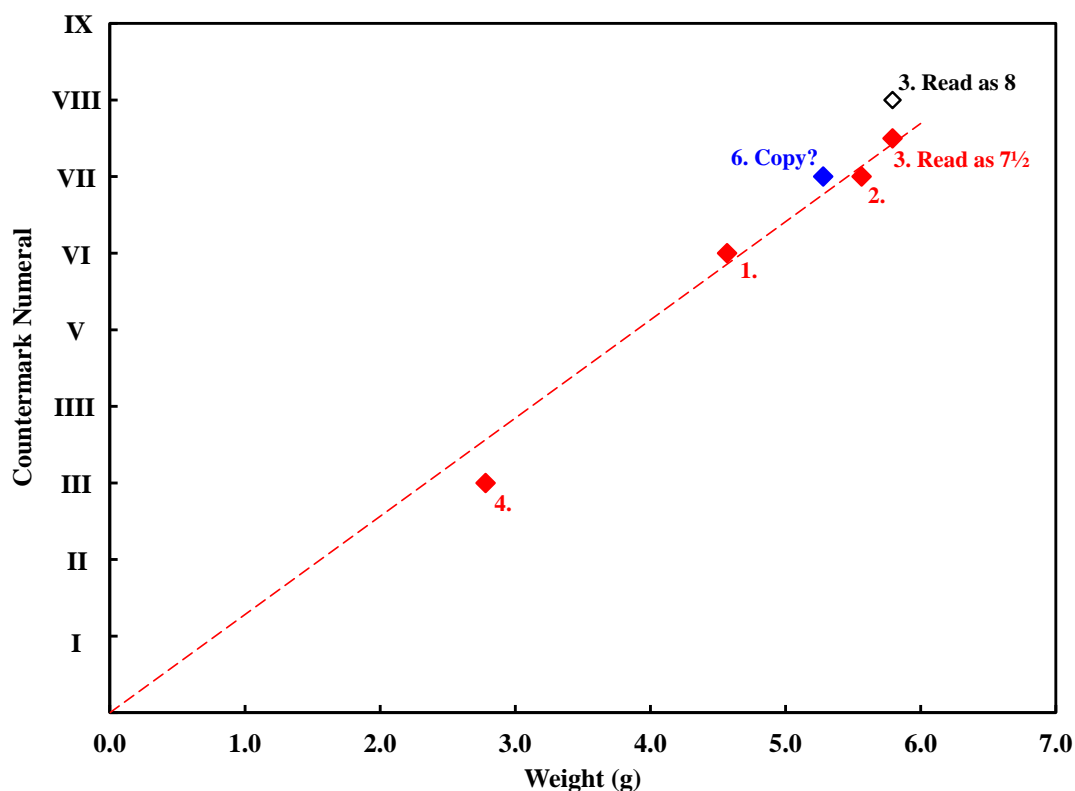


Fig. 1. Plotting the countermark numeral against the weight of the coins.

Discussion and Conclusions

It has been suggested that the first five pieces are all early fabrications, the two from the Bridgewater House collection are likely from before 1730, a date after which little was added to the collection. It has been suggested they are fabrications made for collectors, possibly as siege pieces, but the numbers do not make sense for circulating in Britain as pence, the coins are just too heavy. The punches are all different, pointing to a significant effort by someone, somewhere. In the index of Harry Manville's encyclopaedia, these are described as 'concoctions'.⁽⁸⁾ Having been unable to correlate the numerals with the weights, Mike Sharp was also dismissive.

However the weights do seem to correlate reasonably with the numerals, even more so if the VII above a sideways I is taken as a 7½. The new piece with the cruder VII countermark, seems to fit the series, though may also be spurious. There remains no smoking gun as to the purpose or even location of this issue.

Thus if any readers know of any other countermarks of this type on anything or any countries where there was a coinage where a coin of fine silver weighing about 5.5 grammes was valued at 7 units I would be very pleased to hear. All of the pieces should be considered as unsolved until new evidence appears.

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) G. Oddie. Cartouche Countermarks on Hammered Silver Coins. TCSB v7n5 December 2002 pp191-2.
- (2) C.H.V. Sutherland. A Countermarked Shilling of James I. NC 1947 pp86-87.
- (3) Bridgewater House Collection. Sotheby & Co. 15-16 June 1972. Lot 316.
- (4) J.J. North and P.J. Preston Morley (with G.C. Boon and J.P.C. Kent.). The John G Brooker Collection. Coins of Charles I (1625-1649). SCBI 33, 1987.
- (5) M.B. Sharp. Some Interesting Countermarks. SNC 1973 p374.
- (6) M.B. Sharp. Another Cartouche Countermark. SNC 1976 p184.
- (7) H.D. Gibbs Collection. New York, 1960. Lot 2.
- (8) H.E. Manville. Numismatic guide to British and Irish Periodicals 1836-1995. Part 2 Numismatics. 1997 p975.

