

The Forty-Shilling piece of James VI revisited

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The following images of a rare Scottish Forty-Shilling piece of James VI were recently posted on the internet by a representative of the London numismatic firm of Baldwin's.



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The coin is of interest for a number of reasons. First, it is an addition to the ten documented specimens; secondly, it displays an unrecorded reverse die, and thirdly, its general appearance is consistent with the little that is known of its history. The 'revisiting' of my title is both an allusion to an article I published some time ago¹, and my former acquaintance with this particular coin.

The coin was illustrated for sale in the *Numismatic Circular*, April 2007, SCO599. I had the good fortune to be in London at that time, and was given the opportunity of examining the coin. I noted the coin had a dusty grey colouring, which was more uneven on the reverse. The reverse design also appeared slightly crude, especially in the rendition of the crown, the apparent absence of a jewelled band being the most conspicuous aberration. I stress the 'apparent' qualification, as the reverse was double-struck, making it difficult to compare the die used with

¹ D. J. Rampling 'Edward Burns and the Forty-Shilling Piece of James VI', *Numismatic Circular* (1996), vol. CIV, no. 3, 85-86

the three known reverse dies documented by J. K. R. Murray.² Nevertheless, the wide vertical gaps between I and XL, and between R and s, as well as other subtleties, pointed to this being a newly identified die. This was also the conclusion of Sotheby's who sold the coin in 1993.³ The greyish and uneven colouring was explained by the coin having been "fire-stained", as were eight other Scottish silver coins consigned along with it by the same "private person living in Ireland".⁴

The obverse die is Murray's B, one of three documented obverse dies. This die is exclusively linked to five of the seven coins having Murray's reverse die 2. This being the case, the attributing of a different and hitherto unknown reverse die, should carry a small caveat of doubt in view of the mis-striking.

An updated summary of Murray's listing of the ten forty-shilling pieces follows, using the same numbering for ease of cross referencing. The institutional reference designation follows where applicable. I have included the known provenances, beginning with the most recent location. The year in which the coin changed hands, where known, is given in brackets; transfers other than by auction have an 'a' preceding the date.^{5, 6} The dies exhibited by each coin, as noted by Murray, are given last.

I am unaware of the current whereabouts of the four coins 5, 7, 8 and 10. They are placed below the separating line in this listing.

National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

1. 1455 unprovenanced (in Soc. of Antiquaries of Scotland collection, 1822). B2
2. 1454 National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (a1921), T. Coats. C2
3. 1456 Lord Haddington (a1947); Cochran-Patrick (1936). B2
9. 1457 Royal Scottish Museum (a1985); Lindsay Carnegie bequest (a1911); Cholmley (1902); Sheriff Mackenzie of Tain. A3

² J. K. R. Murray, 'A further note on the forty-shilling piece of James VI of Scotland' *Numismatic Chronicle* (1968), 8, 161-167

³ Renaissance Medals, Ancient, Islamic, English and Foreign Coins, Sotheby's, 12th July, 1993, lot 329

⁴ Letter from Sotheby's, 29th April, 1996 – The eight other fire-affected coins formed part of lot 330 in the sale listed at footnote 3.

⁵ I am indebted to the Murray article (footnote 2) and the Sylloge (footnote 6) for much of this information.

⁶ N. M. McQ Holmes, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, 58. Scottish Coins in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, Part I, 1526-1603, Oxford University Press and Spink & Son Ltd., 2006. Coins 1, 2, 3 and 9 are illustrated in this publication.

British Museum

4. GHB,S.140 unprovenanced (a1899)⁷. C1

Hunterian Museum, Glasgow

6. S/3537 Lord Stewartby (a2017)⁸; R. Carlyon-Britton; H. A. Parsons (1954); Marquess of Bute (1951)⁹, catalogued in the Bute collection in the eighteenth century¹⁰) illustrated. B2

Arnold Mallinson collection¹¹

5. Ibid. catalogue, lot 133 (1984) illustrated; R. C. Lockett collection (1957); B. Roth (1918); J. G. Murdoch (1903); S. Addington; J. Wingate (1875). A1

Dundee collection¹² (S. P. Fay)

7. Ibid. catalogue, lot 255 (1976) illustrated; N. Asherson (a1967); H. B. Lorimer (a1960); H. M. Lingford (1951). B2

Archbishop Sharp of York collection

8. Archbishop Dr John Sharp, died in 1714. His coins were retained in the family, but from the 1960s onwards they were dispersed through the agency of dealers and auctioneers, the most recent dispersal being in 2017.¹³ I am unaware of the fate of the forty-shilling piece. J. K. R. Murray identified the dies it displayed, and so must have had access to the coin or images of the coin. I am unaware of any published illustration. A2

W. W. Woodside collection

10. A catalogue in my possession of crayon rubbings of Woodside's Scottish coins includes an image of the forty-shilling piece. Bill Woodside was a former curator of coins and medals at the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh. He died in 1978. B2

⁷ Illustrated at - https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_GHB-S-140

⁸ I wish to thank Jesper Ericsson for confirming the Museum's curatorship of the specimen from Lord Stewartby's collection.

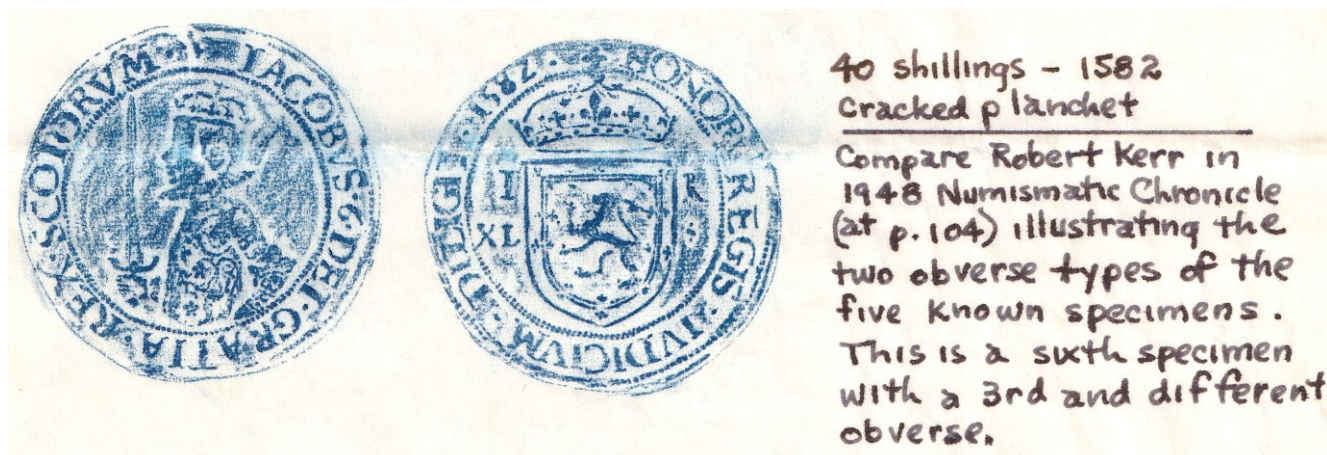
⁹ Illustrated in Sotheby & Co. sale catalogue of Part II of the Marquess of Bute collection, 11th June 1951, lot 256

¹⁰ Ian Stewart, 'Note on the contents of the Bute collection', *British Numismatic Journal* (1964), XXXIII, 55

¹¹ Spink Coin Auctions No. 39, 6th December, 1984

¹² The Dundee Collection of Scottish Coins, Spink & Son, London, and Bowers and Ruddy, Los Angeles. 19th February, 1976

¹³ Morten & Eden Ltd., Auction 91, 7-8 December 2017



W. W. Woodside's annotated rubbings of his Forty-Shilling piece

Woodside was correct in differentiating the obverse of his coin from the two obverse types as illustrated by Kerr¹⁴. Kerr, however, did not recognise that the cohort of five coins then known exhibited all three obverse dies. Kerr mistakenly described coins 3 and 5 (as numbered here), as having the same obverse. Coin 3 exhibits the same dies as Woodside's coin.

It may be premature to give a definitive description of the reverse die exhibited on the new coin in view of the mis-striking, apart from the observations already noted. This reservation does not, however, preclude it from being added to the corpus of specimens of this handsome and extremely rare denomination.



¹⁴ Robert Kerr, 'The forty-shilling piece of James VI of Scotland', *Numismatic Chronicle* (1948), Sixth Series, Vol. 8, No. 1/2, 104-105