

Potential Tradesman Countermarked Dollar Issuers

By Ken Eckardt

The study of British Tradesman Countermarked Dollars has been difficult due to the general scarcity of specimens and the poor availability of contemporary documentation. However, thanks to more recent research, especially by Harry Manville and Eric Hodge, our overall knowledge of this series has been greatly enhanced.

Three or four issues have a surviving population of 50 or more examples, but at the other extreme more than 70 issues have a surviving population of less than 10 specimens and often only one or two examples. Perhaps another 20 issues are known with a population of 10 to 35 examples. It is clear that the 'redemption recall' of these countermarked dollars was very effective for the majority of enterprises and these coins would have been consigned to the melting pot at their current bullion value. In many cases firms 'cancelled' their countermarked dollars by applying a grill countermark over the original countermarked value to avoid having to redeem them at a higher price when the value of silver had dropped. Ultimately these pieces would also be melted, but in the first instance they may well have passed back into general circulation at a value agreed by the local population by convention with some link to bullion value.

In looking at the generally low survival rates of the various issues of dollars the question in my mind has been how many potential issues from various enterprises have no recorded survivors at all? We may get some guidance to this question by examining contemporary half-penny size countermarked coins.

Many enterprises in Scotland countermarked half-penny size coins including a number of issuers of countermarked dollars. In some cases, the same countermark punch seems to have been used on both the dollars and the copper coins. However, countermark punches wear or break and they could be replaced with a similar punch of the same style, but not an identical copy due to their 'handmade' nature. The countermarks I have been reviewing tend to be a 'ring' with a central space where a denomination could be stamped on the dollar coins. Some examples are illustrated below (Figs. 1 to 4).

All images are from the author's collection and are not depicted in actual size.



Fig. 1, Rothsay Mills, Manville 93 and Scott 60.1A



Fig 2, Alloa Colliery, Manville 5 and Scott 60.2B



Fig. 3, Lanark Mills, Manville 69 and Scott --



Fig. 4, Deanston Cotton Mill, Manville 21 and Scott 77.2

Examining the style of these countermarks I have noted a number of other copper coins with countermarks with the same 'ring' style, and as a central space would allow a denomination stamp to be applied the strong suggestion can be put forward that these enterprises also issued countermarked dollars. However, no dollars are known from these issuers. Perhaps the numbers issued were small and/or the eventual redemption recall was very successful and as such no examples have survived.



Fig. 5, Perth, Scotland I. Mitchell, Scott 77.5*



Fig. 6, Perth, Scotland Mrs Sommervills, Scott 77.6A*



Fig. 7, Stirling, Scotland Zuill, Balfron, Scott 83.3



Fig. 8, Stirling, Scotland Balfron: Vict: Society, Scott 83.2



Fig. 9, Perth, Scotland Dun. McLaren, Lochearn, Scot 77.3

Other examples of a similar nature are noted: A. Butchart, Scott 55.1; Renfrew VT Society, Scott 78.4; Balfron Fruit, Scott 83.1; and there could well be others.

It now remains, if possible, to investigate the 'Day Books' of these enterprises and search for any information that would suggest that dollars were countermarked.

I would like to thank Eric Hodge and Mike Shaw for reviewing this paper and providing constructive comments along with the Scott reattribution details.

References:

Manville, H.E., *Tokens of the Industrial Revolution*, British Numismatic Society, Special Publication No. 3, Spink, 2001

Scott, J. Gavin, *British Countermarks on Copper & Bronze Coins*, Spink & Son Ltd, 1975

**Gavin Scott reattributed these two coins after further research, which was published in the SNC, May 1980, pg 173. Scott had originally followed the attribution set down by W. J. Davis (The Nineteenth Century Token Coinage, 1904) and listed these two coins under the northern part of Ireland: The I. Mitchell piece to Meath, ref. 109.1 and the Mrs Sommervills piece to Down, ref. 89.2A.*

