

Tracing The Elusive 1775 Pattern Shilling

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Since buying my first copy of the book *English Silver Coinage since 1649*, in 1978, the pattern shilling of George III dated 1775 has always been on interest.⁽¹⁾ The pattern, ESC 1239, was given a rarity rating of R⁴ i.e. 11-20 examples known. The fifth edition, published in 1992,⁽²⁾ repeated the rarity rating at R⁴ and the most recent fully revised edition of 2015 rearranged the catalogue, giving the piece a new number, ESC 2166, and increased the rarity to R⁵, i.e. 5-10 examples known.⁽³⁾

However, in the decades since I first noticed the piece, I could find no trace of a specimen being sold. Accepted it is not possible to be aware of all sales of all coins, but rarities have a habit of migrating to big collections and the major auction rooms, and something rated R⁴ or R⁵ might be expected to ‘cross the radar’ at least every five to ten years.

Trawling back through the major auctions of the twentieth century produced nothing. The auction catalogues of the likely collectors from the previous century Montagu⁽⁴⁾ and Murdoch⁽⁵⁾ also lacked this piece.

A small ad. at the back of *Coin News* a few years ago resulted in a suggestion that a specimen was in the Montague collection, but another search of the auction catalogues revealed nothing. Requests on a few Facebook pages provided no leads.

Then, whilst tracking down photos of coins for another project, the subject of the 1775 shilling cropped up and within a few minutes two specimens had been found. It turns out that I had been looking in the wrong places all along! Whilst tracing the provenances and examining the specimen in the British Museum, it became clear that there are three specimens as will be described below. There may be others.

Hyman Montagu specimen, current location unknown.

John Greaves, Christies 6 Mar 1866 (Catalogue not in NNP, copies in V&A and Christies archives⁽⁴⁾).

William Forster, Sotheby 28 May 1868. Lot 224 sold to Price for £2-0-0.⁽⁶⁾

William Lake Price collection, Sotheby 27 May 1880.⁽⁷⁾ Lot 168 sold to Webster[‡] for £6-15-0 and subsequently ended up in the William Brice collection.

The piece did not appear in the sale of the William Brice collection, Sotheby 15 June 1881⁽⁸⁾, but was likely bought by Hyman Montagu with Brice’s main collection in 1887.⁽⁹⁾

The piece did not appear in Montagu’s sale catalogues.⁽⁴⁾ However Montagu’s collection of milled English coins from George I to Victoria was purchased by Spink & Son on condition that a catalogue record be published.⁽⁹⁾ This rare catalogue was published by Spink in 1891 and lists 1,853 pieces including many patterns and proofs, including the 1775 shilling as entry 642.^(10, 11)

Royal Mint Museum

Weighing 6.48g, plain edge.

Acquired from SS Banks, number 842. The piece was catalogued by Webster[‡] in 1874 (entry 956)⁽¹²⁾ and again by Hocking in 1906 (entry 1806).⁽¹³⁾

British Museum

BM catalogue number E.3549 weighing 6.310g, plain edge.⁽¹⁴⁾

The coin has a very old ticket with an early catalogue number: MUS. CAT. P.123. N.10 and below this the name Roberts is written in the same ink and hand. This is likely Barré Charles Roberts (1789-1810). His main collection, including Petition and Reddite crowns and many other rarities, was acquired by the BM from his family for 4000 guineas.⁽⁹⁾

[‡] It is interesting to note that the William John Webster (1848-1919, Coin and Medal dealer, worked at Spinks 1892-1919) who bought the William Lake Price specimen for William Brice in 1880 was the son of William Webster (c.1821-1885). The Websters were nephew and great nephew of dealer William Till and ultimately inherited his business. W. Webster, the nephew, catalogued the Royal Mint Collection in 1874 and W.J. Webster, the great nephew, was appointed “Chief official expert for giving evidence as to counterfeit money” at the Royal Mint.

The illustration below is of the specimen in the Royal Mint Museum collection.



© Royal Mint Museum

The example in the BM is in a similarly fine state of preservation and is clearly from the same dies. The Royal Mint specimen has some tiny metal flaws near the outer beads close to the 17 of the date that are not present on the BM specimen. This is possibly the result of a metal flaw or the die bouncing during striking.

Close inspection of the obverse die reveals that it is the same as that used to strike the patterns of 1764. The slight irregularities of the outer beads and their alignment with the legend letters provides a unique ‘fingerprint’. It is impressive that the 1764 obverse die had been stored for 11 years and yet shows no signs of any surface damage or corrosion. The reverse die of the 1775 pattern is completely new and has slightly smaller lettering and smaller garter star than the 1764 pattern.

Conclusions and a Misunderstanding

After many years of looking in vain for an example of a pattern shilling dated 1775, the “waiting for a bus” theory of numismatics came into play and this note now presents three specimens. The locations of two, in captivity, are known with certainty but a third may still be out in the wild. Other specimens may exist in museums or private collections, and the author would be happy to hear of any details.

For future editions of catalogues, the rarity rating of this piece might be further increased to R⁶, consistent with the three or four specimens known.

When I was told many years ago that there was a specimen in the Montague collection, I was then only aware of the auction catalogues. A gentle reminder that there was more to Montagu than the auctions prompted me to rediscover the Spink catalogue of the Montagu milled coins⁽¹⁰⁾, a book that I should have been aware of a long time ago.

References and Acknowledgements

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- (2) Rayner, P.A., *English Silver Coinage since 1649*. Seaby, 1992.
- (3) Bull, M., *English Silver Coinage since 1649*. Spink, 2015.
- (4) For a full list of the Montague sales see Manville, H.E. *Encyclopædia of British Numismatics volume I. British Numismatic Auction Catalogues, 1710-1984*. A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd, Spink & Son Ltd, 1986. Which are all available on the Newman Numismatic Portal:
<https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/auctioncompanies>
- (5) Murdoch, J.G. sale part 5, of English coins, George I to Victoria. Sotheby's 15-19 March 1904.
<https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/auctionlots?AucCold=511728&AuctionId=525401>
- (6) Forster <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/auctionlots?AucCold=511728&AuctionId=524399>

- (7) Price <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/auctionlots?AucCoId=511728&AuctionId=525195>
- (8) Brice <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/auctionlots?AucCoId=511728&AuctionId=525205>
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- (12) Webster, W., *Catalogue of coins and tokens in the museum of the Royal Mint.* 1874.
- (13) Hocking, W.J., *Catalogue of the coins, tokens, medals, dies and seals in the museum of the Royal Mint. Volume 1, Coins and Tokens,* 1906.
- (14) BM catalogue: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_E-3549

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