

A Die Study of James I Shillings – Third Issue, Sixth Bust, mm Rose

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Introduction

The recent acquisition of a James I shilling with a die sinker's error in the reverse legend has resulted in a short die study that will be presented here. The piece shown below is typical of the third issue shillings, with the 6th bust and bearing mintmarks Rose, Thistle, Lys and Trefoil.

Obv. **IACOBVS D:G:MAG:BRI:FRA:ET HIB. REX.**
mm Rose. Around crowned bust facing right, XII to left.

Rev. **QVÆ DEVS CONIVNXIT NEMO SEPERAT**
mm Rose. Around a square topped shield

Details Ar, 29.9mm, 5.797g. (125%).



The only unusual feature of the coin is the die sinker's error SEPERAT for SEPERET on the reverse.

The first detailed catalogue of the silver coinage of James I was published in 1841⁽¹⁾ and the series had been quite comprehensively catalogued by the middle of the twentieth century, with most of the mintmarks predicted by the pyx records having been found.^(2,3,4,5,6) The shillings are undated, but all bear mintmarks and fall neatly into the various issues, types and busts identified along with variations in the legend abbreviations: MA(G) BR(I) FR(A) ET HI(B) and a few dies having the IACOB⁹ contraction for IACOBVS⁽³⁾ and an errant IACOBS⁽⁷⁾. The third issue also sees the introduction of the Welsh Plumes silver provenance mark above the shield for the final three mintmarks: thistle, lys and trefoil.

A new transitional bust was noted in 2007⁽⁸⁾ and other die curiosities have also been noted, such as an IIX behind the head instead of XII⁽⁹⁾ and slight bust variations.⁽¹⁰⁾ There have also been attempts to estimate the mintage figures based on the documented annual silver production and assumptions about the proportions coined into each denomination.⁽¹¹⁾ An independent estimation of the proportions of silver used for the denominations was also made based on hoard data and was very similar.⁽¹²⁾

Returning to the illustration above and comparing it to a tray of James I shillings, another feature leapt out from the design – the bust breaks through the inner circle. The inner circle has a deliberate gap in the beading and the bust reaches into the legend. Accepted, all of the elements of the die are added individually by hand, but in terms of constructing the design, there is a significant difference between having a complete inner circle and a gap to avoid the bust. The pictures below zoom in on the area where the bust and the cross on the crown break the inner circle.

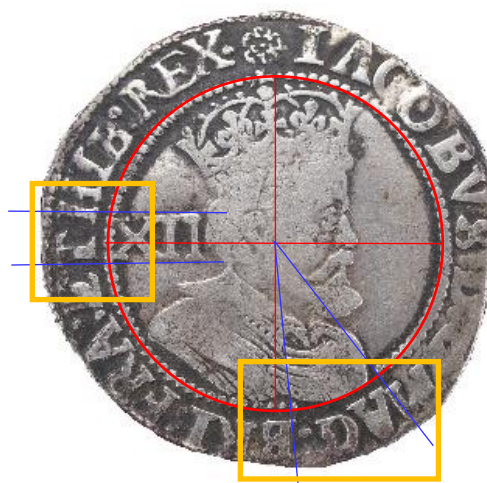


Die Study

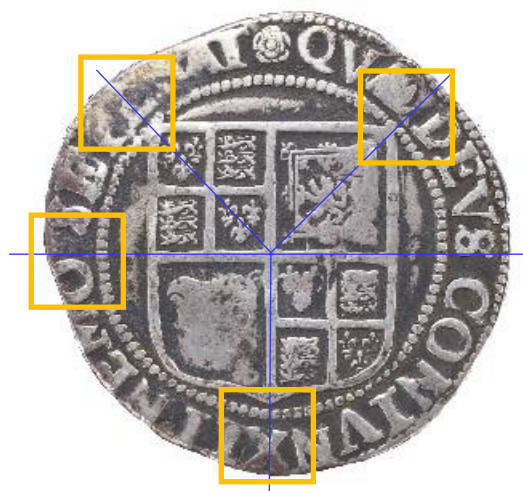
A quick look through auction catalogues, both paper and online archives confirmed that of the James I shillings from the third issue those with the mintmark rose are by far the scarcest. Though not on the rarity level of the earlier mintmarks: book, plain cross and spur rowel, which are known from just a few specimens struck from the same die pairs, a die study of the rose mintmark shillings might be manageable.

With the first few photos to hand, a simple way to identify the different obverse and reverse dies was devised as follows. Once the legends and punctuation have been noted along with identifying the shield as either a coarse work (irregular and wider borders and right hand border slightly curved) and fine work (very neat layout, fine borders and right hand border straight), the next step is to identify sufficient details to uniquely fingerprint a die.

For the obverse. Draw a circle that coincides with the inner circle of beads and find the centre of the circle. From that centre point, draw two lines radially outwards that pass through the middle of the beads at the end of the inner circle. Note where these lines pass through the letters. If the bust doesn't break the inner circle, use a similar line to determine where the front edge of the bust aligns with the legend and note the proximity of the edge of the bust to the inner circle: touching, just clear or clear of the inner circle. Draw two parallel lines that just clip the top and bottom of the XII and extend them through the legend noting where they pass through the letters. For each die, close-ups of the two yellow boxes are used to identify the die.



For the reverse. Using the centre of the shield as the origin, draw radial lines through the top corners and left, right and downward lines of the cross as shown, and note how they pass through the letters. Note the positions of the top left and top right corners of the shield relative to the inner circle. For each die, close-ups of the four yellow boxes are used to identify the die.

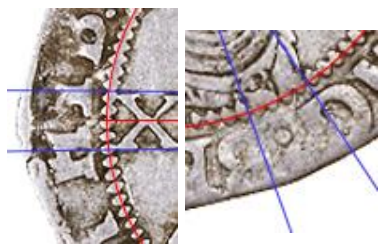


Using this method, it has been possible to identify 11 obverse and 11 reverse dies as shown below. The pieces fall into two main groups identified by the type of reverse shield. Reverses with coarse shields are covered first, followed by those pieces with fine shields. Where a die appears twice it is joined with a red line to indicate the mule. Observations are made in red text, and a simple description of the bust placement is in black text. Each die has been given a code **O1-O11**, **R1-R11** in blue text. Where die duplicates of a given die pair have been found they are indicated with a +1, +2 etc to indicate the number seen and the best (or most photogenic) piece illustrated. For compactness, the source of the illustration is given in green in square parentheses and listed on the following page. All coins are shown approximately 120%, with close-ups at about 200%

This is where the use of pdfs on the online blog really does have an advantage. It should be possible to zoom in on all of the pictures to really see the details that would not be visible on a printed document.

Reverse Dies With A Coarse Shield

Bust touches i.c.



[P1]



+1

O1

As second issue: plain harp, stops on Rev.



Bust and shoulder break i.c.

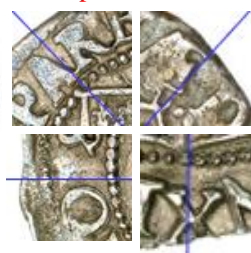


[P2]

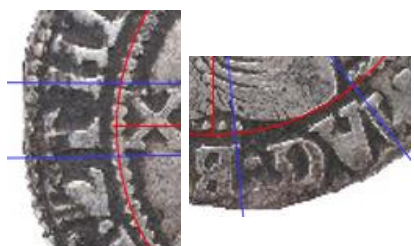


O2

Bird headed harp, no stops on Rev.



Bust breaks i.c.



[P3]

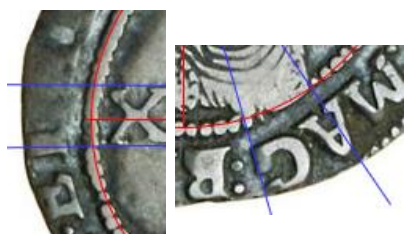


O3

SEPERAT error



Bust covers i.c.



[P4]

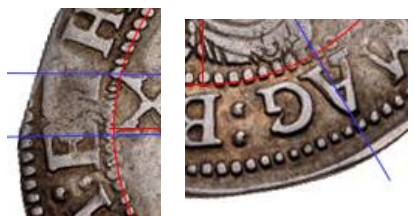


+1

O4



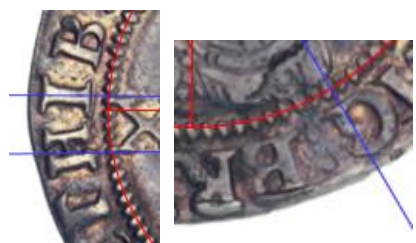
Bust touches i.c.



[P5]



O5



[P6]



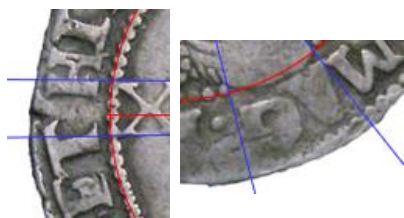
+1

O6



Reverse Dies With A Fine Shield

Bust breaks i.c.



[P7]

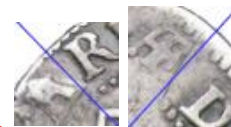


O7



R7

Bird headed harp,
no stops on Rev.



Bust covers i.c.



[P8]

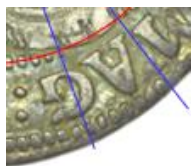


O8

+1



R7



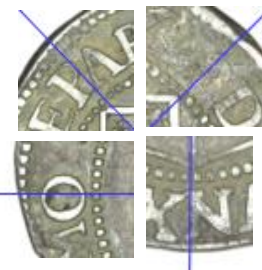
[P9]



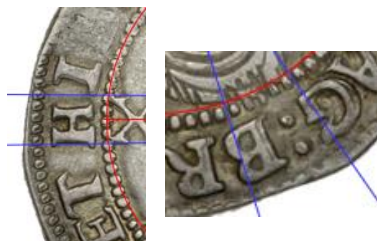
O9



R8



Bust touches i.c.



[P10]



O10

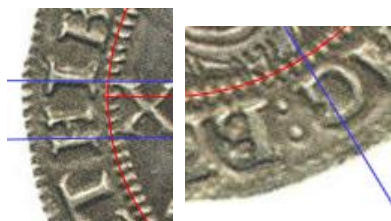
+1



R9



Bust just clear of i.c.



[P11]



O6

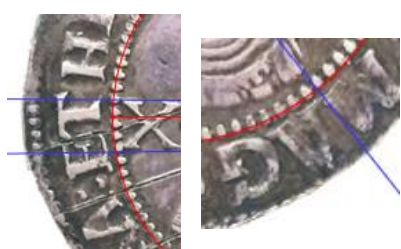
+5



R10



Bust clear of i.c.



[P12]



O11



R11



Sources of Images and Acknowledgements

- [P1] DNW auction, 12 December 2005, lot 66
- [P2] Noble Auction 89, 25-28 November 2008, lot 2899
- [P3] GMO
- [P4] Spink Coin Auction, 27 March 2017, lot 1793
- [P5] CNG Auction 440, 20 March 2019, lot 636
- [P6] Private collection
- [P7] London Coins Auction 158, 9 September 2017, lot 1753
- [P8] GMO
- [P9] British Museum
- [P10] DNW auction, 5 June 2019, lot 364

- [P11] Spink Coin Auction 3024, 15 May 2003, lot 38
- [P12] Private collection

Many thanks to all the collectors who have provided photographs of their specimens, the museums that have allowed access and all of the auction houses for their images, and especially Peter Preston Morley at DNW, now Noonans. Thanks also to Barrie Cook at the British Museum for the photo of one of their pieces.

Discussion

Reverse die **R1** has been placed first as it has all of the features of a second issue die: plain harp rather than bird headed harp and the legend is punctuated with stops, rather than blank spaces. The bird-headed harp and absence of stops appears on **R2-R11**.

The die combination **O6-R10** has been seen six times and four have the appearance of finework strikings, with a very central striking on a very round flan, on the other two the flan isn't quite round enough. The finework obverse die **O6** was also used to strike ordinary issues in combination with reverse die **R6**.

Dies **O1-O10** all have the same contractions in the legend: **IACOBVS D:G:MAG:BRI:FRA:ET HIB. REX.** whereas **O11** is the only die with **HI.** for **HIB.**

While the number of specimens remains small (22 so far) they are suggesting that roughly equal numbers of obverse and reverse dies were used; and as the number of mules is small (2 so far), the die pairs were kept together during production. This is a different pattern to that observed in the silver crowns of James I where through the reign the Obv:Rev die ratio is 1:2 (11:21 in Cooper⁽¹³⁾) and there is significant muling of Obv and Rev dies for most of the mintmarks.

Looking at other James I shillings of all mintmarks, it would appear that having the bust breaking through the inner circle seems to be peculiar to the third issue coins with the Rose mintmark. This feature will reappear in the early issues of Charles I.

As would be expected with such a small sample, quite a few of the dies (6 obv and 6 rev) are known from just a single specimen. Applying the usual statistical methods^(14,15) for estimating the numbers of original dies produces a most likely value of 19 obv and 19 rev dies but there is a 95% confidence that the numbers will lie between 11 and 33 obv and rev dies. However the coverage is just 0.72, confirming that the sample really needs to be larger.

If any readers have specimens of this issue, with mm rose, either from known dies but especially from dies not shown in this note, irrespective of condition, please could they get in touch via the blog or goddie1@hotmail.co.uk ?

References

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- (2) H. W. Morrieson. The busts of James I on his silver coinage. *BNJ* vol. 3 (1906), pp173-79.
- (3) H. W. Morrieson. The English silver coins of James I. *BNJ* vol. 4 (1907), pp165-78.
- (4) H. W. Morrieson. Some further notes on the silver coins of James I. *BNJ* vol. 9 (1912), pp229-33.
- (5) H. Symonds. The mint-marks and denominations of the coinage of James I as disclosed by the Trials of the Pyx. *BNJ* vol. 9 (1912), pp207-27.
- (6) G. R. Francis. James I crowns - new discoveries. *BNJ* vol. 16 (1921-22), pp123-28.
- (7) T.M. Jones. Irregular inscriptions on James I Coins. Shilling with IACOBS. *SCMB*, March 1964 p95.

- (8) D. Holt. A New Bust Type for James I Shillings. *SNC*, February 2007, p17.
- (9) G. Oddie. An Unusual James I Shilling. *BNS Blog* 7 August 2021.
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<https://britnumsoc.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/james-i-oddie-blog-002.pdf>
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- (13) F. R. Cooper. The English silver crowns of James I: a study of the dies and die combinations. *BNJ*, vol. 39 (1970), pp145-57.
- (10) W.W. Esty. Estimation of the size of a coinage: A survey and comparison of methods. *Numismatic Chronicle*. Vol 146 (1986) pp185-215.
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