

A Mis-Struck Limerick Halfpenny of 1691

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The issue of halfpennies from Limerick in 1691 has been well documented⁽¹⁾ and catalogued⁽²⁾. The pieces are found on large and small flans and are often catalogued as halfpennies and farthings respectively⁽³⁾. The most recent work suggests that all the pieces might be halfpennies irrespective of weight and diameter⁽²⁾. The smaller pieces are found struck on virgin flans, but many of the larger pieces are found overstruck on large gunmoney shillings from a few years earlier. Often faint traces of the host gunmoney shilling can be seen under the design of the new dies, but very rarely can the exact die combination of the host coin be determined.

Thus when the following piece was found it was not initially clear if sufficient of the host shilling remained to allow identification of the dies.



A quick email was sent to Team Withers and Bente quickly replied with: “Large Hibernia obv. 5 rev. 5. Undertype March 90 rev. 26, but I can’t find the obverse”.

I thus set out to see if I could arrive at the same result when starting from first principles and along the way identify the obverse die. Having now completed the task, hence this note, I realise there are several assumptions made when carrying out this exercise.

Firstly, that the dies are in the Withers corpus. A statistical analysis has shown that the corpus, based on over 6000 gunmoney pieces with over 1000 obverse and 1000 reverse dies, has probably captured about 87% of the dies. Following publication of the corpus, as of 4 February 2021, just 21 new gunmoney dies, die links and die pairs had been found⁽⁴⁾. Finding a new die is unlikely, but not impossible. Secondly, die damage such as die cracks, cuds etc and die infilling are good for die fingerprinting, but are not infallible, as the damage was not there for the first striking, but evolved during the life of the die. Thirdly, the overstriking leads to stretching of the metal, distortion of the flan and different wear patterns and finally, whilst the illustrations in the printed corpus are very good, using the pdfs of the plate coins at 400% on a computer screen is much easier.

Starting with the reverse of the gunmoney shilling:

Though worn, the date is clearly March which means it can only be March 1689 (17 dies) or March 1690 (26 dies). Three details are used for the search: the shape of



Mar, with the tops of the M level with the top of a and r, the relative position of the tail of the R from the IR initials to the first upright of the R in BR and, the location of the end of the sceptre between the T and H of ET HIB. There may also be no stops in the reverse legend, but the piece is very worn and the dies could have infilled.

Working through the corpus leads to: **March 1690 rev. die 26.**

The reverse die unusually has no stops and incorporates the distinctive T punches of one particular engraver. Possible reasons for the use of this unfinished die have been discussed elsewhere⁽⁵⁾.

Then the gunmoney shilling obverse:

There is a clear die flaw running from the edge beading, through the D of DEI and through the wreath. The lower serif of the D is absent and the V of IACOBVS is closer to the B than the S.



There are 18 obv dies for March 1689 and 22 for March 1690

Working through the corpus leads to: **March 1689 obv. die 7.**

This could have been arrived at more quickly by noting that March 1690 rev. 26 is known linked with three obv. dies: January 1689 die 47, March 1689 die 7 and March 1689 die 14. Whilst taking a little longer it is good to arrive at a die combination that is already known. It is also interesting to note that the piece shown here is from an obv die that is in a much later state than the piece illustrated in the corpus.

The Limerick halfpenny obverse:

There is a distinctive die flaw running from the S of IACOBVS to the edge beading, through the II, the bead and the DE of DEI. The top of the bust where the wreath should be looks odd and the surface of the coin above this appears curved as if the die is distorted.

For the large Limerick pieces overstruck on gunmoney shillings there are 26 dies.

Working through the corpus leads to: **Obv. die 5.**



The specimen illustrated in the corpus was struck by the die in a much earlier state. There is a smaller die distortion above the head and the die flaws much less extensive

And finally the Limerick halfpenny reverse:

There is a characteristic die flaw running through the date and with just 25 reverse dies to search, it is quickly found.



As with the gunmoney shillings there is very little muling in the Limerick series, with just 25 reverse dies. So going straight to the corpus leads to: **Rev. die 5.** Once again the Limerick die is in a much later state, with the date numerals less well defined.

The illustrations below show examples of pieces from all of the dies involved⁽²⁾.



Conclusions

This note has presented an unusual mis-struck large Limerick halfpenny. The fact that the month of issue of the host coin was visible made it relatively easy to identify all of the dies involved even though less than half of the host coin design remained. This also proved a useful exercise in using the Withers and Withers corpus and die study.

Many of the Gunmoney and Limerick dies have very distinctive die cracks and provided the month of issue is still sufficiently clear to note the font and layout, identifying the individual die should be possible by a simple method of elimination.

References and Acknowledgements

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Many thanks to Bente Withers for a copy of John Rainey's article and for the initial identification of three of the dies, which made me look at the die study much more closely. Thanks also to Oisín Mac Conamhna for useful suggestions and additions and a final thank you to the Withers for permission to use the images from their plates and for correcting an early version of this document.

