

A Contemporary Counterfeit 1681 Twopence

Gary Oddie

Introduction

Having collected counterfeit shillings of all periods and looked at what other counterfeits have been manufactured in the milled and hammered series, a few oddities have been seen over the years, from the well-known evasions of the late 18th century to the casting of worn cartwheel pennies or Victorian bun-head pennies in brass that must fall in the class “was it really worth the time, effort and risk?”

While searching through a box of metal detector finds, described by the owner as “junk”, and mostly comprising seventeenth century tokens and small Roman bronze coins all far too corroded for a better identification, this piece stood out because of its colour.



Looking More Closely at the Coin

Obv. CAROLVS II DEI GRATIA
Around a bust of Charles II right.
Rev. MAG BRI [...] ET HIB REX 1681
With a crowned interlinked CC

Details. Ag?, 14.3×15.0mm h×w, 0.739g.
Shown ×3.

Thus it is a 1681 twopence (S.3388, ESC 2184, Bull 666).



Taking a Second Look

However, something isn't quite right. The coin is 20% underweight and the toning isn't typical of silver (not quite the right colour), the flan is very wavy, but without large dents on the opposite side of the coin (even a silver coin of this size is still quite robust) and the lettering on the reverse is very rounded without sharp details. The missing part of the legend where BR FRA should be appears to be die damage. More obvious is a significant fracture running from the top of the obverse, vertically downwards across most of the coin, and yet there is no distortion of the metal along the sides or near the end of the crack.

An XRF analysis of both sides of the coin gives the following conclusive results:

Obv. Sn 37.2%, Cu 29.0%, Fe 24.8%, Pb 5.2%, Si 1.7%, Sb 1.1%, Al 1.0%

Rev. Sn 37.5%, Cu 30.5%, Fe 22.7%, Pb 5.9%, Si 1.6%, Sb 1.1%, Al 0.8, and Bi etc <0.03%

Conclusions

The coin is a contemporary counterfeit of a 1681 twopence, cast in a soft alloy. Whilst the small silver coins did circulate, they are unusual as metal detector finds. For a contemporary counterfeit of the small silver to exist means that at one time the genuine pieces must have been commonplace enough for the counterfeit to blend in with the circulating medium.

The high iron content in the reading is unusual and may be a part of the alloy or part of the surface encrustation, similarly for the silicon and aluminium. I haven't met anything close to this composition before. If any readers have a piece from the same issue, or indeed any other counterfeits of the small silver, I would be interested to hear.

