

The Fourth variety of Fleur-de-lis groats of James II of Scotland

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This notice has its origins forty years ago when I was in correspondence with the late Joan Murray. I had sought her opinion regarding what I thought to be an interesting inclusion on the obverse of a James II Fourth variety of Fleur-de-lis groat. (See image and discussion of obverse 7 below) This query initiated a shared project to re-examine Burns' classification of this coinage. Our application to this task was very intermittent due to other commitments, and was brought to an end with Mrs. Murray's death in 1996. I have recently reviewed the notes we made, and fashioned them into the notice that follows. Lacking her wise oversight, any errors are mine alone. Ian Stewart (later Lord Stewartby) was aware of our interest and provided photographs of the five examples of this coinage then in his possession.

Henry Christmas was the first to recognise the connection between groats with a clothed bust having fleur-de-lis in alternate quadrants on the reverse, and groats of James II with crowns displacing the fleur-de-lis, noting their similarity in style of bust and general workmanship.¹ Groats having the fleur-de-lis reverses had at this time been regarded as belonging to the coinages of James I.² Edward Burns subsequently classified them as the fourth variety of fleur-de-lis groats of James II,³ noting "two distinct" sub-categories on the basis of differences in the crown, tressure and legends as displayed on the obverses. He attributed the six available coins equally between the two divisions, viz. nos. 17 (*fig.* 508), 17a (*fig.* 508a) and 17b to the first division, and nos. 18 (*fig.* 514), 18a and 19 to the second division.⁴

The availability of further examples of the fourth fleur-de-lis issue has enabled a review of Burns' sub-classification, paying particular attention to die combinations as evidence for the validity of his division. The relatively large number of dies exhibited by the still relatively small cohort available for study, points to a larger mintage than surviving numbers would suggest.

The following descriptions of dies is based on 33 coins. This number includes a very recent addition to the corpus (Baldwin Auction 108, lot 304), the only example, to my knowledge, that has come to light since our initial list was compiled in 1983. No doubt others may have escaped my notice and I shall be grateful for such advice. Nevertheless, a search of archival catalogue listings has not revealed another. The Hunterian Museum has no specimens other than those gifted by Lord Stewartby,⁵ and the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh has not added another to its collection since our initial compilation.⁶

¹ The sale catalogue of the coins belonging to the Rev. Henry Christmas. Sotheby, 1-6 February, 1864; commentary to lots 128 and 129.

² Edward Burns, *Catalogue of a Series of Coins and Medals Illustrative of Scottish Numismatics and History*, Glasgow, 1876.

³ Edward Burns, *The Coinage of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1887.

⁴ *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 70

⁵ Confirmed by Jesper Ericsson, Hunterian Museum

⁶ Confirmed by Lyndsay McGill, RMS Edinburgh

I have grouped the obverse die descriptions according to Burns' two divisions, prefacing each grouping with reference to features common to the division. There are three obverse dies in Division 1 and four in Division 2. The thirty-three coins exhibit nine different reverse dies.

An illustration or reference(s) to an illustration of each of the obverse dies accompanies each description. Individual reverse dies are sufficiently distinguished by differences in the rendering of the legend.

Obverse dies

Division 1

Full spelling of GRACIA

Single T in SCOTORVM

Single large pellets on spaces of crown between fleurs-de-lis

- 1 Thin neat bust within an encircling tressure of greater diameter than that observed on the other obverse dies.
Illustrations: Burns III, *Fig. 508*, and Spink 'Coins of Scotland...' (2020) no. 5230.
- 2 S-shaped prolongation of bottom hair curl on right side. Sceptre leans to left.



- 3 Contracted spelling of SCOTORVM viz. SCOTORV



Division 2

Contracted spelling of GRACIA, viz. GRA

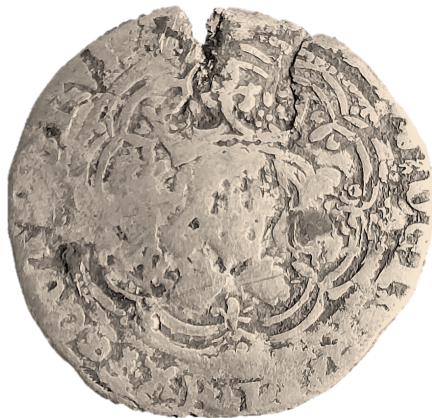
Double T in SCOTORVM, viz. SCOTTORVM, with the exception of Die 7

Three small pellets on spaces of crown between fleurs-de-lis

- 4 Neat bust. SCOTTORVM, followed by **I*I**

Illustration: Seaby 'Coins and Tokens of Scotland' (1972) no. 5230

- 5 Untidy composition. Wayward fly-away hair on right side. Central fleur of crown bends to right.



- 6 Crown tilting to right. Break in shaft of sceptre.

Illustrations: Burns III, *Fig. 514*, and Stewart 'The Scottish Coinage' (1967) Plate VI, 78

- 7 Contracted spelling of SCOTORVM, viz. SCOTRVM, followed by **✻ ✻ ✻**

Pomegranate-like inclusion to right of king's forehead; poorly defined sceptre.



Reverse dies

a **DRS ✻ PTE** | **CTOR ✻ ME** | **✻ Z ✻ LIBE** | **RΛTO ✻ ME**
✻ ✻ VI | **LLΛ** | **EDIR** | **BVRΘ**

b	DRS × PTĒ CTOR × ME * LIBER ATORME * × VI LLΛ EDIR BVRΘ
c	DRS × PTĒ CTOR × ME × LIBER ATORME * × VI LLΛ × EDIR BVRΘ
d	DRS × PTĒ CTOR × ME × Z × LIBER ATOR × ME * × VI LLΛ × EDIR BVRΘ
e	DRS * PTĒ CTOR * ME VS * Z * LIB ERΛT ~* ME ~* * VIL LΛ × E DIRB VRΘ *
f	DRS * PT CTOR * Ω EVS * ET * LI BERΛT ~* ME VILL Λ × EDI RBV RΘ × *
g	* LIBER ATOR × ME DRS × PTĒ CTOR × ME * VI LLΛ × EDIR BVRΘ
h	* LIBER ATORME DRS × PTĒ CTORME * × VI LLΛ × EDIR BVRΘ
i	CTOR × ME LIBER ATOR × ME DRS × PTĒ × * × VI LLΛ × EDIR BVRΘ

Die combinations

Code: A – Ashmolean Museum, B – Baldwin Auctions, BM – British Museum,
D – James Davidson colln., I – Innerwick Hoard (1979), L – R. C. Lockett colln.,
P – Perth Hoard (1920), R – D. J. Rampling colln., RMS – Royal Museum of
Scotland, Edinburgh, S – Lord Stewartby colln. at Hunterian Museum,
Sp – Spink ‘Coins of Scotland...’ 4th Ed. 2020, T – Tasmanian Museum and Art
Gallery

The notation immediately following the code letter(s) is the reference enabling
identification of the coin. The codes of private holdings are those given by their
custodians. Publications where abbreviated are indicated thus: SCBI – Sylloge of Coins
of the British Isles, DNW – Dix Noonan Webb auctions (now Noonans), Burns – The
Coinage of Scotland (1887), Lindsay – A View of the Coinage of Scotland (1845),
Wingate – Illustrations of the Coinage of Scotland (1868)

- 1 1a A., SCBI 35, 684
- 2 1a Sp., 5230; ex. J. E. L. Murray colln. 245
- 3 1a S., 1985
- 4 1a RMS., Burns Vol. II p.68. 17 (Vol. III, Fig.508)
- 5 1b S., 1986

- 6 1c RMS., R4
- 7 1c L., Glendining & Co. 26/10/1960, lot 847 (pt.)
- 8 1d BM., 1838,0919.31
- 9 1d B., Auction 108, lot 304
- 10 2a D., DNW Auction, 10 Dec. 2003, lot 407
- 11 2a S., 1987
- 12 2a T., T9186, MB464; ex. Talbot de Malahide colln., 464
- 13 2d BM., 1922,0619.21
- 14 3d R., 5230-1; ex. James Davidson colln.
- 15 3d S., 1990; ex. J. E. L Murray colln. 247
- 16 3d RMS., Burns Vol. II, 17b, p.70
- 17 3d RMS., 1960.13; ex. R. C. Lockett colln., Glendining & Co. 26/10/1960, lot 846 (pt.)
- 18 3e S., 1988; ex. J. E. L Murray colln. 246
- 19 3e RMS., Burns Vol. II p.69, 17a (Vol. III *Fig. 508a*)
- 20 3e R., 5230-4; ex. Spink (UK)
- 21 4f S., 1991; ex. J. E. L Murray colln. 249; illustrated in Seaby's 'Coins and Tokens of Scotland' 1972, no. 5230
- 22 5b S., 1992
- 23 5g R., 5230-2; ex. Dolphin Coins Fixed Price List No. 2 (1992), 1372
- 24 5g RMS., Burns Vol. II, 19, p.70; Lindsay, no. 328, pl.VI, 128; Wingate, pl. XVI, 6
- 25 6g S., 1993
- 26 6g L., Glendining & Co. 26/10/1960, lot 847 (pt.)
- 27 6g RMS., Burns Vol. II p.70, 18 (Vol. III *Fig.514*) and also illustrated in Stewart 'The Scottish Coinage' Spink, 1967, pl.VI, 78
- 28 6g I., 23
- 29 7g RMS., 1957.329; ex. R. C. Lockett colln.
- 30 7g RMS., Burns Vol. II p.70, 18a
- 31 7h S., 1994
- 32 7h R., 5230-3; ex. Spink (Australia) Auction 24, II (1988), 1619
- 33 7i RMS., X1.20.25; ex. Perth hoard

Despite the few coins available to Edward Burns, his numismatic instinct appears to have served him well in defining two groups within the fourth fleur-de-lis issue. The additional twenty-seven additional coins now studied fit nicely within his two divisions. Moreover, the coins of each division have reverses that are specific to them, with the single exception of coin number 22. This coin couples a Division 2 obverse with a reverse that only appears on one Division 1 coin (number 5), this latter coin sharing the obverse 1. die with three other reverse dies (a, c and d), that are exclusively coupled with Division 1 obverses.

Burns gives a comprehensive account of the shared features of all fourth variety fleur-de-lis groats,⁷ and those dis-similar features of the obverse dies that characterise each division.⁸ He notes that the Division 2 groats have the same contracted spelling of GRACIA, and double T in SCOTORVM, as on the Crown groats of the succeeding issue, suggesting that the Division

⁷ Burns Vol. II, p. 69

⁸ *ibid.* p. 70

2 groats were a later issue than those of Division 1. He acknowledges a less consistent finding in recording that the letter R is similarly rendered on Division 1 groats to those on the gold demies, and its rendering on Division 2 groats as on the first issue of the succeeding Crown groats. Based on these observations he states that “there would thus appear to have been two distinct coinages of the fleur-de-lis groats of the fourth variety”.⁹

The larger number of coins now available for study adds confirmatory evidence for Burns’ division, as with the singular exception noted above, each division of obverse dies links to a different group of reverse dies. Whereas the reverse dies a, b, c, d, and e linked to Division 1 obverses have a conventional placement of legends, three of the four linked to Division 2 obverses have aberrant placements, a feature characteristic of some of the reverses displayed by the first issue Crown groats of the subsequent issue. The moneyer of the non-conforming coin 22, would appear to have had access to an old die. Like many of the fourth variety of fleur-de-lis groats, its indifferent condition is unhelpful in determining the wear of the reverse die.

The rarity of these coins is noteworthy. They have seldom appeared in hoards, nor have they featured as isolated finds. The number of dies identified suggests that the mintage was not insignificant, although surviving accounts of the Edinburgh master-coiner suggest that these light groats of James II were produced in smaller quantities than those under James I or the heavier Crown groats of James II.¹⁰

It remains to comment briefly on the pomegranate-like inclusion appearing adjacent to the king’s forehead, and best illustrated by die 7 on coin 32. Joan Murray graciously dismissed my observation, suggesting that this fruitful illusion was in all probability an extraordinary prolongation of the long and undulating curls brought about by worn or damaged dies.¹¹

Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the memory of Joan Murray. Her insights, encouragement and friendship were an invaluable asset to my endeavours as an amateur numismatist pursuing an interest in Scottish coins from the other side of the world. Her advocacy of my efforts also brought Ian Stewart into my small group of correspondents. I wish to thank Jesper Ericsson at the Hunterian Museum for providing information and images of coins now under his curatorial oversight, and Lindsay McGill at the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh for responding helpfully to my enquiries. Finally, the staff at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery facilitated my viewing of Scottish coins in their collection, and I am grateful for their support of my interest.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ C. E. Challis, ‘Debasement: The Scottish experience in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries’ in *Coinage in Medieval Scotland (1100-1600)*, D. M. Metcalf (Ed.), 1977, p.175

¹¹ This feature occurs in less obvious form on dies 2 and 5, and on at least one of the dies of the first issue of Crown groats, a not surprising finding as puncheons from the fleur-de-lis issue continued to be used with the Crown groats. The historical imagination is gratified by the pomegranate illusion, as this fruit with its inner unity of many seeds, may have been an appropriate symbol for the Papal Jubilee of 1450 celebrating the unification of the Church following schism, an event important to the crown. The King’s marriage to the devout Mary of Guelders in the previous year introduced to Scotland a politically astute ally, whose subsequent involvement with the coinage is documented. It is an enticing but fanciful speculation to see her early influence in these dies.