

An Unusual Late Edward IV London Penny

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During the latter part of the second reign of Edward IV mintage of different denominations seems to have been concentrated at dedicated mints. York and Bristol royal mints had closed in 1472 so all gold and groats and most halfpence were minted at the Tower of London. The majority of halfgroats were minted at Canterbury. Most pennies were minted at the ecclesiastical mints of York and Durham. The result is the halfgroats and pennies of London were issued in relatively small numbers and remain rare today. Pennies were seldom hoarded so it is the advent of the metal detector that has led to an increase in those available for study, although many are barely identifiable, and the majority of extant examples are found in lower grades. Very few pennies have been illustrated in auction/dealer catalogues until the recent practise of photographing auction lots and dealer lists for the benefit of on-line buyers became standard and even then they are rarely seen. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) has proved very useful in finding images of these rare coins for comparison.

The Edward IV penny illustrated below was a single 2011 detector find from Nottinghamshire purchased on-line soon after its discovery. The salient obverse features remaining visible on the chipped flan are a portrait that matches the style of other London pennies of the period, a partially discernible initial mark, and the legend ED)WARD DEI (GRA RE)X ANG. The reverse confirms it was minted in London. It also shows a very unusual engraving error. The inner part of the DON quarter shows four pellets instead of the expected three pellets.



The Initial Mark

As a collector I was particularly interested in identifying the initial mark. The half sun and rose initial mark is no more important than others in the series from a numismatic perspective but it has the historical significance of being assigned to the last months of Edward IV's reign and continued into the very short reign of Edward V. At first glance some features of the worn initial mark looked like a half sun and rose. Fortunately, an example of the latter was in the PAS corpus with identification SUSS-A9A6E2 (see <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/SUSS-A9A6E2> . It is shown below.



Edward IV Second Reign Penny London i.m. Half Sun and Rose. Image courtesy of Portable Antiquities Scheme

The portrait and lettering are very similar indicating the dies could have been made using contemporary punches. The initial marks look similar to that on the first coin but it could also be a slightly off-centre mark from the cross group. Images of few pennies with initial mark cinquefoil are available and are certainly a possibility given they are relatively common but after looking at several examples in my opinion do not quite match (see PAS ref IOW-63C7DC <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/744475>). A coin with cross and pellet in the third quarter (PAS ref SURF7AF09 see <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/SURF7AF09>) shows the cross end slightly off centre. I have not been able to sight an image of a penny with cross and pellet in the fourth (left bottom) quarter that could be applicable to this coin. Blunt & Whitton (BNJ25, p327) refers to an example illustrated in Num. Chron. 1914. This has DEI in the obverse legend but differs in that the legend ends in ANGL. The Delme-Radcliffe collection (Glendinings, 17th April 1985, Lot 361 – not illustrated) also refers to this initial mark.

The Reverse Engraving Error.

The error of putting four pellets instead of three must be very unusual as I cannot recall having seen or heard of a similar error over several decades of interest in medieval coins. There are examples of coins that appear to have extra/fewer pellets in a quarter but they are clearly due to double strike or other striking error. This coin shows no such evidence. This is also the sort of error one might expect in a contemporary forgery. However, the good style makes that less likely.

Conclusions

The coin shown provides more questions than answers. The identification of initial marks on late 15th century minor denominations is often difficult if not impossible and there remains doubt with this example. The circumstances in which the apparent engraving error was made will never be known. I look forward to hearing opinions of others interested in this period.

