

A False Greyhound Countermark Revisited

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Introduction

The piece shown below was recently offered at auction with no provenance⁽¹⁾. The author received two separate emails suggesting that it may be of interest and one that the countermark “didn’t look quite right”. This is indeed the case, a message was sent to the auction house and the lot was withdrawn for further investigation.



Fig. 1. Edward VI testoon, MDL, mintmark Swan, with Greyhound Countermark. Kuenker⁽¹⁾.

Background and Provenance

Having collected images of both the Portcullis and Greyhound countermarks for some years, the piece was immediately recognisable as ex **R.C. Lockett**. Thus the search began to trace its earlier keepers. Starting with the Lockett sale of **1956**, Lot 1919⁽²⁾.



Fig. 2. The same countermarked coin in the Lockett sale⁽²⁾.

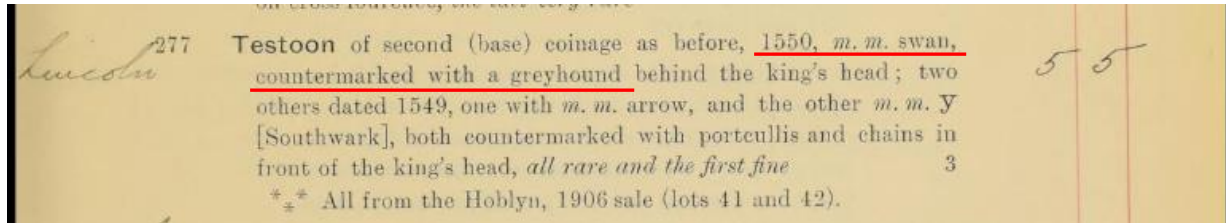
21 0 0 1919* A similar countermark (greyhound) on a base Shilling of 1550,
m.m. swan both sides. *The counterstamp very fine.* 1
Ex Webb, Hoblyn and Bliss Collections.

The provenance is confirmed in Lockett’s own hand in his collection notes now available on the BNS website⁽³⁾.

*Edward VI Testoon in Swan
countermarked with seated greyhound on shield
Ex fine Hoblyn Bliss & Webb coll. d/s 5 0*

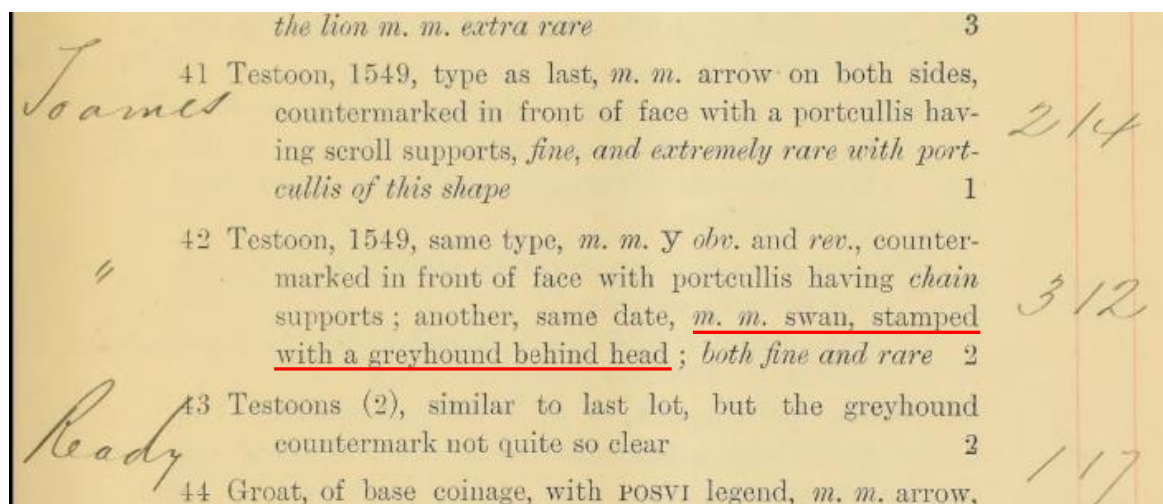
Working through the various Webb's that have had sales of coins listed in Manville and Robertson's index leads to a single candidate⁽⁴⁾. A Henry Webb had sales as follows: Sotheby 6 August 1885 – an early sale of duplicates and Sotheby 9 July 1894. The piece was not listed in either of these and the dates do not tie in with the Bliss sale. However, in the Appendix listing, the **H. Webb Jr** collection including English was bought by **Baldwin** pre-1945. This is the likely Webb in the provenance of the coin, then via Baldwin to Lockett.

The next step backwards is the **Thomas Bliss** sale of 1916, part of Lot 277⁽⁵⁾.



Note that this is a multiple lot, including two further countermarked pieces, both with the Chained Portcullis countermark.

The earliest provenance for the piece shown in figure 1 is the **Richard Armstrong Hoblyn** sale of 1906, part of Lot 42⁽⁶⁾.



Once again, there are two coins in lot 42, the other being the mintmark y with a Chained Portcullis countermark. Note the cataloguer gives all to be dated 1549, the error is corrected in the Bliss catalogue.

Another Example from the Same Punch

In 1962, two short articles were published in Spink's Numismatic Circular describing the contemporary documents and background to the countermarked issues of the early years of Elizabeth I⁽⁷⁾. This was illustrated with a Greyhound countermarked testoon as shown below.



Fig. 3. Another Greyhound countermark, from the same punch as figure 1, as illustrated by Pridmore⁽⁷⁾.

Whilst Pridmore did not doubt this piece, he included the following telling paragraph.

In the 18th and early 19th century when English numismatics first became firmly established as a serious study and English coins collected on a comparable basis with the classical coinages of Greece and Rome, many large and important cabinets were formed, but owing to lack of accurate information, many forgeries unfortunately found their way into such collections. Unscrupulous dealers taking advantage of the demand for rare and desired pieces deliberately concocted and forged such specimens, and I regard the chains " type of portcullis stamp as belonging to this category despite the pedigree some of them can boast.

A piece with a Chained Portcullis countermark was illustrated and condemned.

The first doubts about the piece shown in figure 1 were raised by Jeffrey North in 1960⁽⁸⁾. In a footnote to catalogue entry 1990 describing the pieces known countermarked with a Greyhound, devaluing them to 2¼d:

N.B. – A shilling dated 1549 (i.m. doubtful) and one dated 1550 (i.m. Swan) exist with this mark. They should in fact bear the portcullis mark.

This is a purely numismatic argument and as Pridmore noted a few years later the contemporary documents go to great lengths to describe the process that would be used to ensure the correct countermark was used on the appropriate issue of testoons. The present author has yet to see a genuine Portcullis or Greyhound mark on a genuine coin of the wrong issue.

When the present author acquired a piece with a Greyhound countermark from the David Rogers collection, this began an interest in this series that continues to the present day, with an ongoing project collecting images of countermarked pieces, both genuine and false. A separate study of the Portcullis punches is in preparation. Having seen over 15 genuine Greyhound countermarked pieces, the countermark used on the pieces illustrated in Lockett and Pridmore is clearly false. A short note was written about this some 20 years ago⁽⁹⁾.

Genuine Greyhound Countermarks

It is very difficult to find genuine pieces that display the complete profile of the Greyhound. The pieces shown in figures 1 and 3 have a profile that is too good and yet none of the subtle details of the Greyhound are present. The figures below show two genuine Greyhound countermarks. The punches are slightly different, but they have features common to all genuine Greyhound punches.



Fig. 4. Greyhound countermark on an Irish shilling, i.m. Harp, dated MDLII. Noonans⁽¹⁰⁾.



Fig. 5. Greyhound countermark on a shilling, i.m. Lion (clearer on rev.), dated MDLI⁽¹¹⁾.

The Greyhound is sitting on its haunches, with a straight front right leg and a raised left paw. The tail curls under the greyhound, passing over its side and back. The end of the tail protrudes upwards behind the shoulders. This protrusion may be some other heraldic device, but nothing similar has yet been found. Figure 4 is the only piece that has been clear enough to show the ears of the Greyhound. On some punches, the nose and some of the Greyhound's head is missing due to the punch breaking.

More False Marks

A visit to Baldwins in London to look through their Forgery Cabinet for another project revealed several more genuine shillings bearing false Portcullis and Greyhound countermarks. The first is the piece illustrated by Pridmore (Figure 3 above), illustrated again below with an improved close-up.



Fig. 6. Greyhound countermark on base shilling dated MDXLIX, indistinct i.m., but definitely wrong issue. Baldwin.

A second piece, and just in case there are any lingering doubts about this countermark, is illustrated below!



Fig. 7. Greyhound countermark on a silver shilling of Philip and Mary dated 1555. Baldwin.

This countermark is particularly well struck and shows the tail and collar which are not clear on the Lockett or Pridmore pieces. Again these elements are in profile and there are no fine details visible within the design of the Greyhound. The chances of the original countermarking procedures making such an error on such an obviously wrong coin is vanishingly small.

The Origin and Date of the False Countermark

A piece in the British Museum bears the same countermark.

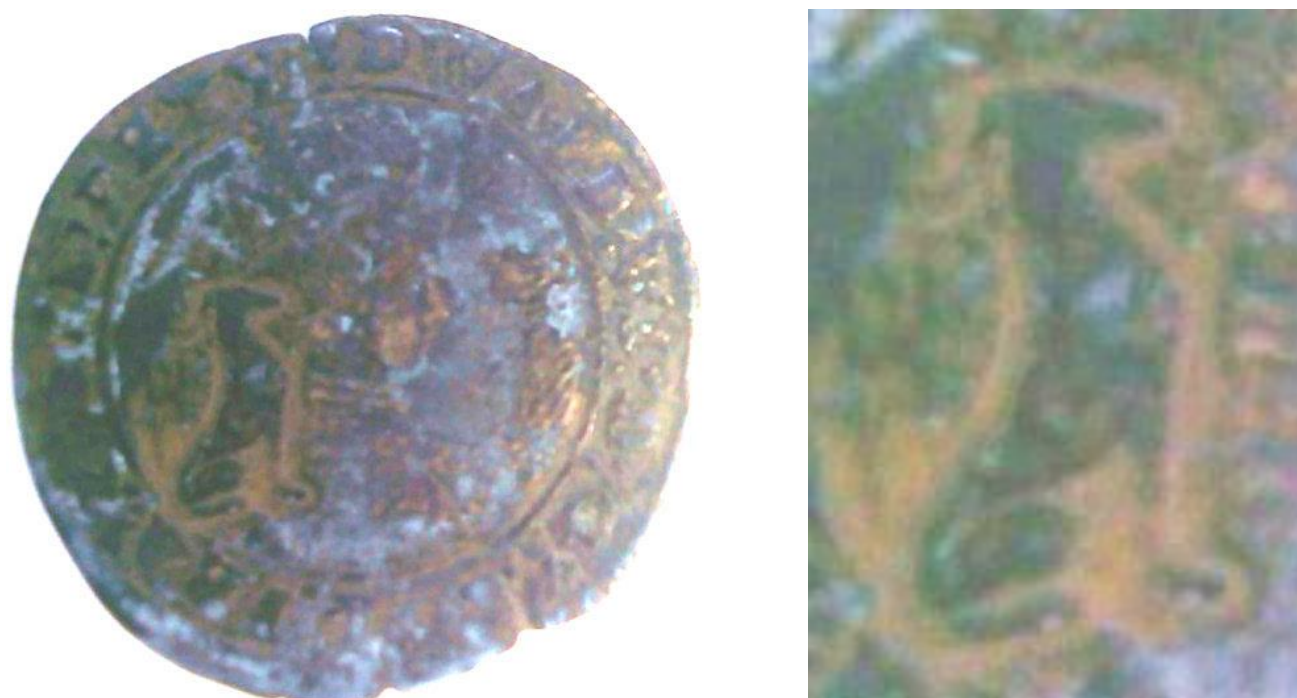


Fig. 8. Greyhound countermark on base shilling date MDXLIX, i.m. Y, another wrong issue. BM.

The British Museum ticket gives the manufacturer of the false mark as Edward Emery. Whilst the coin is genuine, the countermark was first noted as false in the 1842-3 issue of the Numismatic Chronicle amongst a small group of other spurious pieces by Edward Emery⁽¹²⁾. A more extensive discussion and listing of Edward Emery's products was published in 1971 and this piece is number 65 in the catalogue⁽¹³⁾.



Fig. 9. Ticket with BM coin above.

Conclusions

This note has presented five examples of Edward VI base shillings bearing the impression of a Greyhound countermark. All of the host coins are genuine issues. Two of the countermarks are genuine and show fine design details. The false Greyhound countermarks have none of these details and are just an outline through which some of the underlying coin design can be seen.

The presence of the same false Greyhound countermark on a good silver shilling of Philip and Mary is the conclusive evidence that the countermark is a later concoction.

The false piece from the Lockett sale in 1956 has a distinguished provenance, but in its early appearances at auction was sold along with a piece bearing a Chained Portcullis countermark. The Chained Portcullis countermark is certainly from a false punch, and this suggests that the Chained Portcullis and false Greyhound countermarks are from the same workshop, operating sometime in the nineteenth century.

Another piece with the same false mark can be found in the British Museum with a ticket naming Edward Emery as the manufacturer. The same British Museum tray contains a genuine base shilling of Edward VI bearing a Chained Portcullis countermark, also ticketed as an Emery counterfeit.

The false Greyhound countermark can be dated to before 1842 and the prolific workshop of Edward Emery.

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