

# A Currently Unique Coin of John Digge on Canterbury

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The coin illustrated below was purchased on Ebay in August 2023. The appearance of the bust suggests a late coin of 5h and has been attributed to the Archbishop's moneyer John Digge by myself which is an opinion shared by Bob Thomas, to whom I am grateful for reading through the draft of this document and for making several useful comments and suggestions which have been incorporated into the text.



John Digge was granted a die for life and sworn in as the Archbishop's moneyer on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1271. Archbishop Boniface of Savoy, uncle of Henry III, died on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1270 but had already left England in November 1268 although, his successor, Archbishop Robert Kilwardby was not appointed until 1273<sup>1</sup>.

Henry III died on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1272 after the issue of class 5h coins had commenced and well before Classes 5i and later issues appeared. Churchill suggests that John Digge held the die whilst it was in the possession of the king, between the appointments, and surrendered it on the appointment of the new archbishop although other evidence suggests that John was reluctant to surrender the dies and that it was not until 27<sup>th</sup> June 1275 that it was surrendered along with two other dies he obtained from Richard de Clifford whilst the see was vacant.<sup>2 3</sup> Unfortunately it is not clear whose name appeared on these dies and to what use they were put, if any.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kilwardby was provided to the archbishopric on 11 October 1272, given the temporalities on 12 December 1272, and consecrated on 26 February 1273. (Source Britannica.)

<sup>2</sup> P.103, foot note 33. R Churchill – Mints and Moneyers During the Reign of Henry III, Baldwins, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> P.107 Churchill suggests that Willem the Brewer's die passed to John Digge although the document quoted refers only to William's "share" of the foundry.

If John Digge began striking using Richard's dies whilst waiting for his own, it would certainly help to explain why no other coins of John have been found to date although a further reason for the rarity is that the output from Canterbury by 1272 would have been very low.

Mayhew records that the mint output from December 1270 to November 1272 totalled only £643, with possibly five moneyers striking in those years. Having paid 50 marks or £33.6s.8d for the privilege of being granted a die for life on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1271 one can understand John's reluctance to return it so soon.

No one can say with absolute confidence when this coin was struck but on broad balance of evidence, in fact, legend and portrait, 1272 would not seem unreasonable although it may or may not be posthumous, there is currently no way of knowing.

As well as the illustration above a detailed description of the lettering and all other design aspects of the coin for comparison with any future finds, which seem highly likely, is included at the end.

### **The Case for the Coin being Issued by John Digge:**

John Digge was the successor to the die of Richard l'Espece who issued in Class 5h and whose coins are scarce but well known<sup>4</sup>. The only other contestant for the die is John Terri who started striking coins with class 4a/b and continued into class 5g at least. It is known that there were two John Terri's from the same family – cousins – with one acting as moneyer and it seems likely that he would have retired, if he was still alive, at around the time the mint underwent the period of low production by which time John Digge had taken over.

Looking at the portraits below, the deterioration in the presentation of the bust is discernible. However there are elements that are shared. The later bust of Ricard has a double line of pellets for the beard and a further decorative line outside the image of the bust, as does the coin of Iohs but perhaps more importantly so does the coin of Roger le Assur who succeeded John.

Ricard on Canterbury  
5h Early



Ricard on Canterbury  
5h Mid



Iohs on Canterbury  
5h Later



Roger on Canterbury  
Late



A further suggestion that this is a coin of John Digge and not a late issue by John Terri, lies in the detail and not just in general appearance and this is set out at length below.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard l'Espece obviously ceased issuing before September 1271 since that was the date of John's appointment. Churchill refers to him as Richard the Spicer inferring that the surname was in some way descriptive of the actual person's source of income "The spicer or spiceman" however Espece was also the name of a very influential family much favoured by royalty, which can be traced back to the Domesday Book. However Richard l'Espece cannot be directly linked to that lineage although it is possible that he was.



The dies of Richard have X type 12b<sup>5</sup>; this style can also be found on some coins of Alein on Canterbury from 5g onwards so it is particularly fortunate that the letter shape transformed to Type 14b on later coins. In London this type featured, identically, on a number of dies of Renaud including some of the 5h issues where the centre of the X appeared to be thicker. As the dies were created in London it seems reasonable to compare the lettering which must have been used by the same die sinker at approximately the same time<sup>6</sup>.

Although the X of the lohs 5h is of poor quality the similarity is clear. One might conjecture that the initial, thicker wasted Type 14b was a transformation of Type 12b and subsequently became type 14c (See below).

As Ricard did not produce coins with an X of types later than 12b, Type 14b can be placed after his die ceased but earlier than the end of Robert's production and before that of Roger began officially, on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1275.

Ricard on Canterbury Class 5h  
Type 12b



Renaud on London Class 5h  
Type 14b



lohs on Canterbury Class 5h  
Type 14b

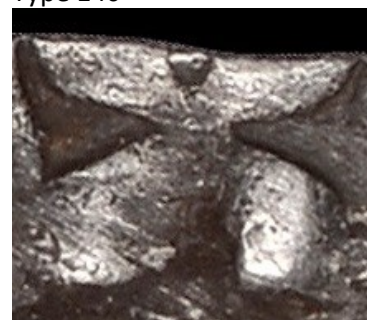


When the die of Roger le Assur is examined the connection is finally made.

Robert on Canterbury Class 5h  
Type 14c



Roger on Canterbury Class 5h  
Type 14c



Renaud on London Class 5h  
Type 14c



<sup>5</sup> A detailed listing of the letter types referred to here will be published for verification, on the Blog as soon as possible following this publication, and is the product of a lengthy in-depth study of the coinage.

<sup>6</sup> P.117-120 "The Fitz Otto Monopoly of Die Production In London" in *Mints and Money in Medieval England* Martin Allen, Cambridge, 2012

When the reverses are compared the letter R of Ricard and Robert and the letter R of Canter on the coin of Iohs, they are not only the same but are of a type which seems to have been used, particularly on coins of Canterbury, since Class 5b2 by a particular die sinker to “sign” his dies<sup>7</sup>.

Ricard reverse letter Type R2\*



Robert reverse Type R2\*



Iohs reverse letter R Type R2\*



The letter S featured on the reverse of the Iohs coin displays signs of the degeneration of form associated with later coins of 5h but is still an approximate form of the original letter style, so not early but not so late as to be near 5i.



#### The Ioh 5h coin data:

Obverse reads:

HENRICVS REX III (?)

Triple pellet fleur to crown without stalks.

V count= 7.5 (Counts are made from the pellet nearest to the crown rim on the right hand side. In this case the tip of the letter V is between pellet 7 and 8).

<sup>7</sup> The existence of this type of R is without significance for classification purposes and seems to have been executed regardless of whether there was another form in the legend. See Blog “The Letter R as a Die Sinkers Signature”, Ian Heavisides.



N1 count =14 (First letter N encountered in the legend, counting pellets from beneath the crown, right hand side).

N2 count= 21

Upper curls = C2, C2 (Curl joined to crown by two curved lines)

Beard = triple row, ie decorative line of pellets below the normal beard of two rows.

Between curls = uncertain.

Reverse inner ring count = 9,9,9,(8 or 9)

Reverse reads

IOh / SON / CAN / TER. (The N in SON has a pellet above the diagonal bar).

### Lettering Illustrated Below

A = type 2f (found on coins from 5g – 5i) with left leg pointing straight downwards and ending in a simple rounded point.

N = 1a obverse (Normal plain N), N reverse = 1d (tilted slightly sloping cross piece with pellet – in this case slightly above the crossbar).

R = Similar hooked style for both obverse & reverse but the reverse has added pellet R\*<sup>2</sup>.

S = 5d (fishtailed/crescent shaped type but with a large deliberately created central pellet)

X = 14b ( Class 5h)

A type 2f  
Class 5h



N type 1a



N type 1d



Hooked type



Type 2\*



Obverse S type 5d  
(as type 1a but with large  
pelleted centre).



Reverse type 5d



Type 14b



Thanks again to Bob Thomas and Mike Shott for supplying images of coins of Roger on Canterbury, and to Robert Page for additional comments.

