

# A Contemporary Forgery of a Henry V Groat

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In early 2019 this unusual groat was purchased online, which had been found by a metal detectorist somewhere in the UK. The general appearance is that of a standard issue Class C groat of Henry V, with the mullet on the right breast. The reverse has the mint signature for London. Initially assumed to be a genuine issue piece, there are several points which indicate that this coin is, in fact, a forgery, contemporary with the examples which it copies.



The first is that the style appears slightly off. Though apparently double-struck, the portrait does not quite conform to the norm, certainly in the facial features. The reverse also shows some anomalies. Though this phenomenon is known, it is unusual to note that the mint signature starts in the fourth quarter, rather than the first. The size and weight of the coin are 25mm and 2.784g, respectively. The weight falls short of the official 3.7g, even though the coin has apparent clipping. The coin also has a rather "hollow" feel to it and does not ring as a true silver coin of the period should, though the presence of a crack does not help.

An XRF test was undertaken to establish the true composition of the coin. It was of no surprise to find that close examination only confirmed that it was a forgery. The density is 8.335g/cm<sup>3</sup>, which is very low (silver should be 10.5g/cm<sup>3</sup> and copper 8.96g/cm<sup>3</sup>). The surface appears to be cast, unsurprising given the porosity of the coin. As for the composition, two points from either side were taken, and results are listed on the next page.

- Obv. **Ag 72.5%, Cu 10.6%**, Si 5.4%, Al 4.2%, Fe 2.7%, Zn 1.9%, Pb 1.0%, P 0.7% and P, W, Sn, Sb, Bi <0.8%  
**Ag 75.1%, Cu 9.9%**, Si 4.5%, Al 3.5%, Fe 2.4%, Zn 1.9%, Pb 1.0%, P 0.7% and P, W, Sn, Sb, Bi <0.8%
- Rev. **Ag 70.5%**, Si 9.5%, **Cu 7.7%**, Al 5.2%, Fe 3.0%, Zn 1.2%, Pb 0.8%, P 0.6% and Sn, Au, Sb, Bi <0.6%  
**Ag 70.7%**, Si. 10.0%, **Cu 6.9%**, Al 5.7%, Fe 2.8%, Zn 1.2%, Pb 0.8%, P 0.5% and Sn, Au, Sb, Bi <0.5%

The above, keeping in mind that the surface of the coin is quite dirty (Si, Al, Fe etc) and the alloy has higher than usual contaminants (Zn, Pb etc). The composition highlights a variety of lower grade metals in the composition of the coin.

The dating of this interesting forgery is almost certainly the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, likely to the period c.1415-1425. This estimate takes into account that the forger did not use the far more common issues of Henry VI as a template, which flooded circulation in the 1420s and 1430s. However, there is still a chance that it is later, simply copying a Henry V groat still in circulation at the time. The fact that it was lost in the ground shows that it managed to evade the scrutiny of the authorities to be melted down. Indeed, the last person to have the coin in the 15<sup>th</sup> century likely lost it accidentally, as they would an official coin, rather than throwing it away due to suspicion of it being a forgery. The clipping of the coin is likely post-manufacture, rather than made already with clipping to add an extra level of deception. As such, it may have circulated for a fair amount of time, perhaps for quite a few years. It is impossible to conclude any of this with certainty, but it is certainly worth considering the options.

Whatever the case, this is an incredibly interesting coin which warrants more in-depth study, and how it may link to other forgeries of the period and the part they played within the English monetary system in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Contemporary counterfeit groats of this period are unusual, with just two groats of Richard II and one groat of Henry IV catalogued by Lawrence<sup>(1)</sup>.

## Reference and Acknowledgement

- (1) L. A. Lawrence, 'Forgery in relation to numismatics', *BNJ* vol. 4 (1907), 311-16. See plate 1, nos. 10, 11 and 16.

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