

A sixth Cork groat of the reademption of Henry VI

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1. Introduction

A recent corpus study by one of us of the Cork mint of c. 1469-c.1476, and in particular the four Irish groats then known from the second reign of Henry VI, in the political and numismatic context of the contemporary earldom of Desmond,¹ has happily been overtaken almost immediately by exciting new discoveries. At the end of last year, a fifth specimen was identified, and recorded on this blog;² now, a sixth has come to light, found while metal detecting by another of us in Pembrokeshire, and identified by the third of us on the Facebook group *Hammered Coinage Identification Group*. The purpose of this note is to record and discuss this new specimen, which has numerous novel and interesting features, and adds substantially to knowledge of the Desmond coinages of the period. The coin is described in the next section. The portrait makes its first appearance in the reademption with this new specimen, and is of importance to the understanding of the operation of the Desmond mints (Cork and Limerick) in the period as a whole; it is discussed in the third section. The chief novelty of this new specimen is that it ties the use of the portrait chronologically to the reademption.

2. Description



Figure 1. The sixth Cork reademption groat specimen.

¹ Mac Conamhna 2023.

² Mac Conamhna and Pope 2023.

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The new specimen is shown in Figure 1. It has suffered an extensive chip to the left side of the obverse. It is from a new pair of dies otherwise unattested in the corpus, and its portrait is unlike that of any of the other known reademption specimens.

Obverse die

The initial mark is a saltire cross fourchée, otherwise unattested in the Cork corpus. The surviving obverse legend is NCNRIC (D+E)I GRA D[]E, where the ligated DE is represented by a reversed E. To aid discussion of the reading of the name the relevant portion of the obverse is enlarged in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Enlargement of the name.

The materiality of the spelling errors is exaggerated by conventional 21st century letter forms; in the fifteenth century originals the reading is unmistakeable. H and N – both of which are required for the name Henric – were then sufficiently similar that they could both be represented by a single letter punch, with economy of effort and without compromising legibility. The mint as a whole appears not to have had a distinct H punch during the reademption. The two other known reademption obverses render the name as ENRIC', and also declare Henry DNS IBERNIE, suppressing the H in both cases.



Figure 3. Two instances of C (top) and two of E (bottom) on the new specimen. Bottom left from the reverse, the remainder from the obverse.

Furthermore, the reading is not really compromised by the C-for-E error either. The C and E punches appear to have both been fashioned from a single E-punch matrix (i.e., a die for making a punch), because they appear to be identical in external outline and shape of internal cavities, Figure 3. It appears that initially two identical E punches were made, then a C fashioned from one by cutting away the internal crossbar. This again speaks to economy of effort, but with the drawback that the punches were difficult to distinguish from one another, particularly in low-light interior conditions, such as a mint in the bowels of Cork castle in 1470-71. The C and E punches were mixed up in punching the E of Henric, though the error was corrected for striking the C. This suggests that the reversed-E-for-D in (D+E)I is intentional, and therefore an ingenious visual abbreviation of DEI, by ligation of D and E represented by a single reversed E.

Given that one of the reademption dies is known to have been used in a modified state, where “ ■■ENRIC’ ” was punched over the original “ EDWARDVS ”, it is warranted to check this new die carefully for evidence of overpunching. Both the first N and the first C of NCNRIC are double-punched. In the orientation of Figure 2, the N moved upwards and to the left, with some anticlockwise rotation, between punchings. The C moved upwards and to the right, also with slight anticlockwise rotation. The (quite obscured by wear) R may be compared to the reverse instance of the letter, enlarged in Figure 4. It seems that there is no evidence of overpunching, and that this obverse was made from the start in the name of Henry.

The final letter before the chip around 6 o’clock, after A, is mostly lost to the chip, but is of significance, as it determines which of Henry’s Irish title (DNS HYBERNI or similar) or English and French titles (REX ANG Z FRANC or similar) was/were used on this specimen. Both are attested at Limerick, but to date, only the Irish title is known at Cork (not all Cork dies are represented by specimens with legible titles). There remains just enough to be reasonably confident that the last remaining letter of the obverse legend is a reversed-C-or-E-for-D, rather than an R, Figure 2; and therefore, Henry’s Irish title is inferred. This is reinforced by the lower right tail of an E visible just to the left of the initial mark, just before 12 o’clock. The entire obverse legend is therefore inferred to be NCNRIC (D+E)I GRA D[NS NIBERNI]E.



Figure 4. Comparison of the trace of the last letter before the chip (left) to the reversed-E-for-DE on the obverse (centre) and the reverse R (right). Reversed-E-for-DE appears the closer match, and hence the Irish title is inferred.

Reverse die

The mint signature is CIVI – TAS – CORC – AGIE and the outer legend is POSVI – DEVMA – [DIVTO – REMEU] Unusually, the outer legend starts at 6 o'clock, with respect to the orientation defined by the mint signature. The second C of CORC is noticeably double-punched.

Weight

The weight of the specimen as-is is 1.55g. This is obviously lower than it was originally, due to the chip. There is some merit in estimating what the pre-chip weight of the coin might have been, assuming a flan of constant thickness. To this end, consider the geometry of Figure 5:



Figure 6. Concentric circles superimposed on the coin with which to estimate the full-flan weight.

The area of the full flan, approximated by the larger circle, is πr_1^2 . The area of the inner circle is πr_2^2 . The area of the annulus formed by excising the inner circle from the outer is $\pi r_1^2 - \pi r_2^2$. The area of the chip is approximately half of this, or $(\pi r_1^2 - \pi r_2^2)/2$. The area of the coin as-is is therefore the area of the full flan minus the area of the chip, $\pi r_1^2 - (\pi r_1^2 - \pi r_2^2)/2$, which equals $(\pi r_1^2 + \pi r_2^2)/2$. The estimated weight in grams of the full flan coin, pre-chip, is therefore the ratio of the area of the full flan to the area of the coin as-is, multiplied by 1.55, which is

$$\frac{\pi r_1^2}{(\pi r_1^2 + \pi r_2^2)/2} \times 1.55 = \frac{2r_1^2}{r_1^2 + r_2^2} \times 1.55 \approx 1.92,$$

where the scale and units used for the measurement of the radii to evaluate the dimensionless ratio are irrelevant, and the values used were the Powerpoint lengths of the lines on the slide

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used to make Figure 6 (8.80 and 6.90 respectively). The estimate of 1.92g for the full-flan weight is still very light; the official groat weight standard in the Pale that pertained during the readeption was 2.83g.

3. The significance of the portrait



Figure 6. Comparison of the portrait (centre) with its two other extant representatives. Left, Cork groat, unclear regal name, in the British Museum, 1854,0901.83, © the Trustees of the British Museum. Right, Limerick groat in the name of Edward in the Ulster Museum, BELUM.X35293. Courtesy National Museums of Northern Ireland.

Figure 6 compares the portrait of the new specimen with the other two extant specimens of the portrait, both in museum collections. It is to be recalled that the face, crown, hair on either side, and shoulders were all punched separately, so their relative orientation is different on each specimen; comparison should be made of each element individually. The face of the new specimen has been slightly double-punched – this may be seen at the top of the eyesockets, and along the edge of the cheek at lower right, just above the collar – which distorts its appearance somewhat, particularly the “goggle” around the eye on the viewer’s right. The shoulders have been triple-punched, once egregiously (the ghosted image in the field at left) and once more subtly (the discontinuity in the shoulder line at right). With these observations, the identity of the portrait with that of the other two specimens is clear. The particular significance of the new specimen is that it anchors the use of this portrait to a period of time including the readeption (October 1470 – April 1471). A somewhat later date of 1473-76 was previously suggested by one of us³ for the British Museum specimen on the left of Figure 6. This should be revised, to a period of perhaps 1470-1472, in light of the evidence of the new specimen. The British Museum specimen has traditionally been attributed to Edward IV, including by Mac Conamhna 2023; however, the name is clipped away to effective illegibility, with only the smallest, ambiguous traces of the feet of some letters remaining. In light of the evidence of the new specimen, an attribution of the British Museum specimen to Henry, while uncertain, is if anything more likely than an attribution to Edward. The implications of the use of this portrait during the readeption at Cork, and at

³ Mac Conamhna 2023 161.

some other time in Limerick, for the understanding of the joint operations of the Desmond mints of the period, will be discussed more fully elsewhere.⁴ The start of the outer reverse legend of the British Museum specimen is also mis-aligned with the orientation defined by the mint signature (it starts at 9 o'clock); it starts consistently at 12 o'clock on the Limerick specimen.

The letter punches of the new specimen also correspond – apparently in every case – with those of the British museum specimen, in further evidence of their near-contemporaneity, and of the likelihood of the British Museum specimen also being of the redeption, Figures 7 & 8. Some deformation of the letter I of the British Museum specimen, relative to that of the new specimen, suggests that the former may be the later of the two. The letter punches of the Limerick specimen are largely different; only the E, T and V appear to be common with the Cork specimens. This is suggestive of a gap in production between the Cork coins and the Limerick one.

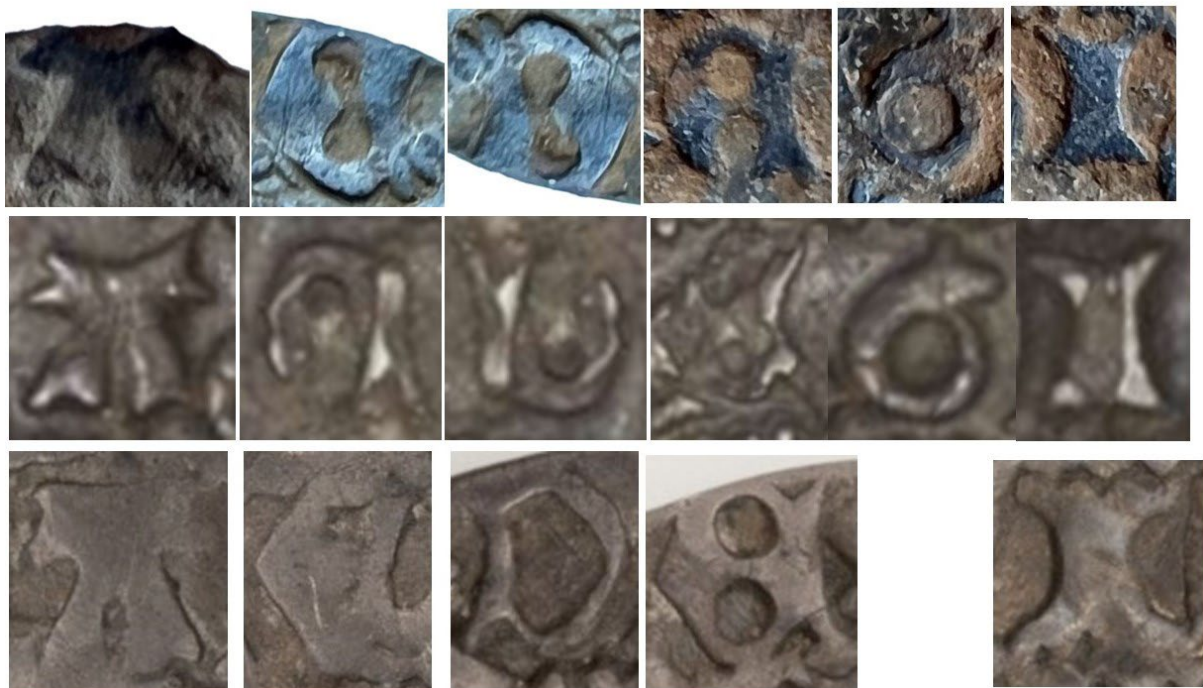


Figure 7. Comparison of the letter punches, A-I, of the coins of Figure 6. Top row: from the new redeption specimen. Middle row: from the British Museum specimen, © the Trustees of the British Museum. Note the bent I (top left of letter) relative to the I of the new specimen.

Bottom row: from the Ulster Museum Limerick specimen, courtesy National Museums Northern Ireland.

The slapdash nature of production of the dies of the new specimen – with copious double-punching of letters and elements of the portrait – relative to those of the other specimens (which while still crude, appear to be relatively superior in execution) is suggestive that the dies of the new specimen were produced first, when the moneyer responsible for them was most inexperienced. A particular implication of this is that the Limerick specimen appears to post-date the redeption.

⁴ Mac Conamhna 2024.

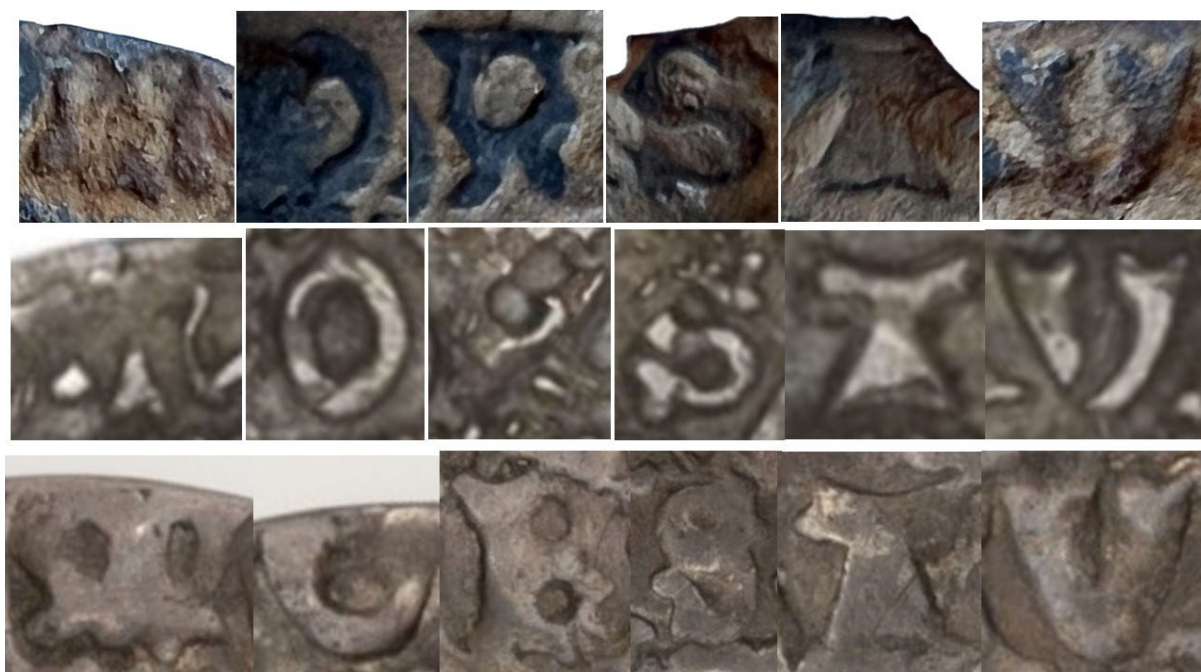


Figure 8. Comparison of the letter punches, M-V, of the coins of Figure 6. Top row: from the new redeption specimen. Middle row: from the British Museum specimen, © the Trustees of the British Museum. Bottom row: from the Ulster Museum Limerick specimen, courtesy National Museums Northern Ireland.

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