

A STUDY INTO DIE NUMBERS FOUND ON BRITISH

HALF SOVEREIGNS IN THE PERIOD 1863-1880

PART 2 1870-1875

Introduction

In Part 1, which covered the years 1863 to 1869, if you excluded the years 1863 and 1864, the remaining years follow a similar pattern with the die numbers starting at 1 each year and seemingly completing a range. After 1869 the die numbers used do not follow any pattern with different types of half sovereign being minted in the same year, some bearing the same die number although they are different varieties of half sovereign. Using the Spink reference numbers I will detail which coins appear in which years and the die numbers that have been recorded to date. All the different varieties will be fully explained after the details for the 1871 die number half sovereigns have been given.

Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
1870	981,406	N	MS64	PCGS

Die Numbers:

S3860 Normal Border: 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 (14)

S3860A Coarser Border: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, (8)

Total 22

Annual Report 22 (Percentage completion 100%)

Comment

If you exclude the coarser border die numbers 1 to 8, the remaining die numbers, excluding die number 32 continue the sequence from 1869's numbers. These coins come from left over dies from the previous year..

In my opinion the coarser border die numbers would have been used after reverses dies from 1869 had been used, and the later coarser border varieties commencing with die number 9 and higher would be the first ones to be issued to production in 1871.

The British Museum has a 1870 half sovereign with a normal border which bears the die number 6, taken from the 1869 reverse die of the same number. This coin was donated by Charles Freemantle, Deputy Master and Comptroller of the Royal Mint to the British Museum in 1871. No other examples have been noted. I am of the opinion that this coin was not part of the normal production of half sovereigns for the year 1870,

Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
1871	2,217,7760	N	MS63	NGC/PCGS

Die Numbers:

S3860 Normal legend	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 22, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 83, 87, 92,	(49)
2 Version dies	58A, 63A	(2)
S3860A Coarser Border	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18,	(6)
S3860B No Die		(1)
S3860C Repos' legend	23, 25, 26, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 74, 76, 78, 80, 81, 89,	(32)
Total	90	
Annual Report	93 (Percentage completion 97%)	

Comment

Includes die numbers for coarser border variants which have no dot on the shield and far fewer denticles. They are counted twice for die number purposes as they are different reverse dies even though they bear the same die number. This is also the case with the repositioned legend coins (nose to T) as these reverses also do not have a dot on the shield, which does occur on the normal legend reverses and are therefore again counted twice.

There are three versions of the die numbers 58 & 63, two distinctly different dot on shield reverses, plus a re-positioned legend coin which bears the same number. One version of each number could be from the original reverse dies that were numbered in 1863/4. I have not been able to trace any die numbered coins bearing die numbers 58 and 63 in the period 1863-1870.

In the pages that follow I have listed the varieties of coins that appear in 1871 that differ from the dot on shield coins and how they can be identified.

Spink 3860A Second Portrait – Coarse Boarder Variant no dot on shield

Obverse – As previous but coarser border fewer denticles 98 in total

Reverse – As previous but coarser border 101 denticles, no dot on shield

Year	Mintage	Comments	Rarity	Best	Grading body
1870	Incl in above		R2	MS62	NGC
Die numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,				Total: 8	
1871	Incl in above		R2	MS62	NGC
Die numbers 9, 10, 11,12, 13, & 18 (Proof coin reverse only),				Total: 6	

From my studies if the 1870 coin has a die number in the range of 1 to 8 it will be exclusively the coarser border variety. However in 1871 some of the die numbered coarser boarder coins also bear the same die number with the normal dot on the shield type coins.

1871 Half Sovereign Coarser Border Variety Die #12



Spink-3860B Second Portrait – No die number no dot on shield

Obverse – As previously but with a crenulated border of 115 denticles, bust slightly turned with the nose pointing to just above the T in Victoria. This obverse is unique to this coin

Reverse – This reverse has a crenulated border of 122 denticles with no dot on the shield line. This is the exact same number of denticles that are found on the reverses which appear with the repositioned legend obverse coins (S3860C). The coin has the top of cross on the orb shaped around the top most denticle. This same reverse is also found on a few 1872 Sydney Mint half sovereigns.

Year	Mintage	Comments	Rarity	Best	Grading body
1871	Incl in above		R6	N/A	

These are extremely rare coins in any grade. I think that estimates of 15-25 examples, are an overestimation. None have been graded by the two main grading bodies NGC and PCGS. And I personally have only seen three. The only other coin without a die number occurs with a 1876 wide ribbon obverse (see later for details).



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Spink-3860C Second Portrait – Repositioned Legend – Nose points to T in Victoria

Obverse – As previous but with 123 denticles, bust again turned with the nose pointing to T.

Reverse – As previous 122 denticles no dot on shield, top of cross in/touching the border. There appears to be at least three variations as to how the top of the cross abuts the topmost denticle

A Top of the cross shaped to fit the topmost denticle



B Top of cross on the top denticle point pointing downwards slightly to the left.,



C Top of cross on top most denticle pointing straight down.



Spink-3860D Third Portrait – 1872 – 1877

Obverse - Bust slightly larger second ribbon points to E in DEI. The back of the bun is closer to the G in the word Gratia. Denticles 146

Reverse – Garnished shield no dot on central vertical line of shield. The top of cross on the orb touches the border. Denticles 147.

In 1872 new dies featuring a new portrait of the Queen and a new reverse started to be used. However the repositioned legend that was first encountered on half sovereigns bearing the date 1871 continues into this year as well, but with the date 1872. The same die numbers can be found on both the new 147 denticle reverse and on the repositioned legend reverse of 122 denticles. Being completely different reverses they are counted twice in the totals. In most circumstances the particular type of reverse is matched to the correct obverse, however there is always an exception to the rule! This is die number 99 where a version has the 122 denticle reverse but has been minted with the newer 146 denticle obverse.

Below is a picture of the new third portrait and revised reverse 1872 die number 30



Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
1872	3.235,112	N	MS64	NGC/PCGS

Die Numbers:

S3860C Rep' Legend 11, 12, 18, 32, 62, 72, 77, 79, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92,
94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 103, 105, 106, 111, 112,
120, (30)

S3860D: 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45,
49, 50, 51, 58, 59, 61, 62, 64, 66, 69, 70, 71, 73, 75, 76,
77, 79, 80, 82, 85, 86, 87, 92, 93, 94, 96, 99,
100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 109, 110, 111, 112, 114, 117,
119, 120, 121, 122, 124, 125, 126, 129, 131, 135, 136, 138,
139, 140, 142, 144, 145, 147, 150, 151, 158, 162, 163, 164,
165, 168, 170, 171, 172, 173, 178, 179, 181, 182, 183, 186,
189, 192, 194, 195, 196, 198, 199, 202, 203, 209, 210, 212,
213, 218, 221, 223, 227, 228, 229, 231, 233, 238, 241, 242,
243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 249, 250, 251, 253, 254, 255, 263,
264, 265, 271, 274, 276, 277, 279, 280, 282, 283, 284, 285,
286, 287, 291, 293, 294, 296, 297, 298, 300, 301, 304, 308,
312, 314, 318, 320, 322, 324, 326, 329, 331, 332, 334, 336,
337, 338, 340, 343, 344, 346, 349, 350, 351, 353, 354, 355,
357, 363, 364, 365, 369, 376, 378, 379, 380, 382, 383, 391,
392, 399, (188)

Total 218

Annual report 402 (Percentage completion 54%)

Comment: The Royal Mint Annual report for 1872 states that 402 reverses were used in the year but only 140 obverse dies were used in the same period. The reason for this vast increase in the number of reverse dies used, is attributable to the defective steel used to produce the dies (see below for details). The significantly lower number of obverse dies used would seem to suggest the mint had large stocks of the obverse dies made prior to the steel problems. The obverse dies for the repositioned legend coins could have been made as early as 1871 or earlier.

A total of 402 number of reverses used in the year compared to the actual number recorded would seem to suggest that there are approximately 190 die numbers yet to be discovered. However it should be noted that in the period commencing 1871 the Royal Mint was facing exceptional pressure to step up production, although nearly six million half sovereigns were struck in 1872 only just over three million were of an acceptable standard. Problems were also encountered with the quality of the steel for the dies commencing in 1872 and continued for most of 1873.

“Much difficulty has been experienced during the past year in obtaining good steel and large numbers of dies have been rejected at the very last stage of manufacture entirely in consequence of the bad quality of the metal. In other cases dies have cracked as soon as they have been placed in the press, and many instances have occurred in which it has been necessary to reject dies after striking but one piece. A large proportion of the steel has been returned to the firm from which it was obtained as unfit for coining purposes.”¹

The following is taken from the report for the year 1873

“Great difficulty has been experienced during the year, as in the latter part of 1872, in obtaining steel of good quality for the manufacture of dies, and this has been apparent in the largely increased consumption of dies of all denominations. Before the end of the year however, a change in the shape of some parts of the dies, recommended by Mr Hill of which details are given in the Appendix (Page 33) , and an improvement in the quality of the steel supplied, had a beneficial effect in reducing by about one half the average number of dies consumed.”²

It should be noted that in 1873 production of half sovereigns had been completed before the end of June 1873 accounting for the high number of dies also consumed in this year.

¹ 3rd Annual Report of the Deputy Master and Comptroller of the Royal Mint p26

² 4th Annual Report of the Deputy Master and Comptroller of the Royal Mint p15

Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
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1873	2,003,464	N	MS64	PCGS
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Die Numbers: 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 16, 19, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37, 40, 45, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 65, 70, 79, 83, 88, 89, 92, 93, 96, 98, 103, 104, 105, 108, 110, 111, 112, 113, 118, 114, 121, 123, 124, 126, 128, 132, 137, 144, 147, 157, 158, 163, 179, 184, 185, 193, 195, 196, 197, 204, 205, 206, 208, 211, 218, 220, 221, 228, 230, 233, 234, 237, 238, 241, 242, 243, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 253, 255, 256, 257, 259, 260, 263, 264, 265, 269, 272, 273, 276, 277, 278, 279, 281, 283, 284, 286, 288, 289, 290, 294, 295, 296, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 306, 308, 309, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 317, 319, 320, 324, 327, 328, 329, 331, 333, 335, 339, 351, 359, 388, 395, 405, 409, 410, 412, 413, (149)

Two variety dies 8A, 204A, 264A, (3)

Total 152

Annual Report 352 (Percentage Completion 43%)

Comment:

I am of the opinion there are a small number of die numbers to be recorded perhaps 20-30 but certainly not the 200 reflected by the difference between the annual report and the total quantity recorded to date. Moreover the condition of a great number of the coins recorded in this year has been extremely poor.

Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
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1874 1,883,872 N MS64 PCGS

Die Numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19,
 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34,
 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 50, 52, 53, 56,
 57, 58, 59, 60, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 72, 74, 78, 195,
 230, 325, 332, 338, 341, 342, 344, 345, 346, 347, (71)

2 Version dies 23A, 53A (2)

Total 73

Annual Report 83 (Percentage completion 88%)

Comment – The reverse dies with die numbers of 195 and higher, probably utilise reverse dies already numbered in 1873 and earlier and matched with a 1874 dated obverse die when production recommenced in June 1874. These dies numbers were probably the first coins to be produced in this year.

Year	Mintage	Rarity	Best	Grading body
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1875 486,494 R MS64 NGC/PCGS

Die Numbers: 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 12, 13, 17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 28, 31, 38, 42,
 46, 47, 53, 72, 73, 74. 75, 76, (24)

2 Version dies: 76A, (1)

Total 25

Annual Report 41 (Percentage completion 61%)

Comment – The 1875 half sovereign is a fairly rare coin reflecting the low mintage compared to other years. The low percentage completion rate is surprising for this year. The Royal Mint report for 1875 shows that 956,136 half sovereigns were coined but only 484,494 were good pieces. On average an 1875 reverse die would produce 11,866 good coins compared to 22,697 in 1874 and 19,608 good coins in 1876.

