

A Suns and Roses halfpenny of Drogheda

Lee Hodgkiss and Oisín Mac Conamhna

One of us found a small coin at a detectorist club dig at Hanbury, Staffordshire, on 25 January 2026, that is a notable addition to the fifteenth century Irish numismatic corpus. The find has been reported to the PAS in Staffordshire.

To our knowledge it is the first recorded halfpenny of Drogheda, whose mint operated from c.1467-1483.¹ It adds to the recent evidence of a halfpenny of Trim,² that fifteenth century regional Irish mints did indeed cater to local needs for small change, and raises expectations that halfpennies of Waterford and perhaps Limerick may appear in the future. It provides a Drogheda counterpart to the Dublin Suns & Roses halfpenny S.6391, incidentally re-enforcing the attribution of the latter to the 1479-83 period of Suns and Roses production. The obverse was made with Dublin portrait punches, with a local Drogheda reverse made during its Suns and Roses issue, which seems to have been confined to 1483. This is in contrast to the Drogheda Suns and Roses groats and pennies, which, with the possible exception of one anomalous penny reverse, were all made with local die pairs.³

The new coin, and evidence of its size and denomination, is shown in Figure 1. It weighs 0.3 g. There is a pellet either side of the neck on the obverse. The portrait punches are shared with the Dublin Suns and Roses halfpennies S.6391,⁴ providing further evidence of the transfer of minting equipment, by some means, from Dublin to Drogheda for Suns and Roses coinage production. The obverse inscription is read as EDW[] . The obverse inscription of the Dublin specimens of S.6391 is EDWARD:D[NS:H]YB , or possibly EDWARD:D[:G:DS:H]YB, saltire colons, with IM rose; the new specimen probably shares these, or something similar.

The reverse has a large rose on cross, with no other devices in the quadrants. The inscription is VILL-ADR-OGH-[EDA] . The petals and central circle of the reverse rose were punched separately, from the same punches used to make the Drogheda Suns and Roses penny reverses. The choice of reverse inscription, and lack of punctuation, is identical to the pennies, and is otherwise unique in the Drogheda penny corpus.⁵ There is no reason to doubt that the making of the reverse, and its use at Drogheda to make the new halfpenny, was contemporary with the making of the corresponding Drogheda Suns and Roses pennies in the name of Edward. The best interpretation of the available evidence appears to be that these coins were made during the reign of Edward V, from April-June 1483.

Some comment is warranted on the muling of a local reverse with an obverse made from Dublin portrait punches. Context is provided by the fact that some of the letter punches used for Dublin Cross on Rose groats were also used for the Drogheda Suns and Roses groats, indicating that the same moneyer in possession of the punches produced the dies for both, presumably on location for each. Three alternatives appear to offer a possible

¹ The Drogheda mint corpus studies Mac Conamhna 2025, Mac Conamhna 2026 find no evidence of halfpenny production.

² Highlighted to one of us by Bente and Paul Withers, ex the David Rogers collection.

³ Mac Conamhna 2025.

⁴ S.6391 is illustrated in Sovereign Rarities 2025 161, and in earlier editions of the Standard Catalogue. The reverse central rose is different to that of the new Drogheda specimen.

⁵ Mac Conamhna 2025, Mac Conamhna 2026.

explanation of the halfpenny muling. The first is that the obverse die was produced in Dublin, and dispatched through official channels for use in Drogheda, possibly in conjunction with a Dublin-made Drogheda reverse which was subsequently replaced by the local reverse of the new specimen, or possibly on the understanding that a local reverse would be produced in Drogheda. The second possibility is that the Drogheda moneyer who worked on the Cross on Rose coinage brought not just some of the letter punches, but also a Dublin Suns and Roses halfpenny obverse die with them, officially or otherwise. The third possibility is that this moneyer brought not an obverse die, but the Dublin halfpenny portrait punches, to Drogheda, again officially or otherwise. Deciding between these alternatives with confidence on the basis of the available evidence is impossible. The second possibility need not be discarded on the basis that S.6391⁶ has saltires by crown, not pellets by neck as for the new specimen; however S.6371 is known to us from a single die pair, and it is conceivable that obverse penny dies with different marks may have been issued to different moneyers in Dublin in order to control production; this possibility would be favoured should evidence of use of the obverse die of the new specimen at Dublin ever come to light. If the first possibility is correct, then contemporary production of the new specimen and S.6391 is implied, with S.6391 therefore most likely dated to 1483; if the second or third, then this need not be so, and the new specimen could postdate S.6391 by conceivably up to a few years. And while the reverse die and the use of the die pair may be attributed to the reign of Edward V, in the second or third possibilities, it is possible that the obverse die was made during the reign and in the name of Edward IV, so exposing the new specimen to the vexed question of the English series as to whether or not it “really” counts as a coin of Edward V.⁷

It remains to address the apparent inconsistency of referring to the new specimen as a “Suns and Roses” halfpenny, when the defining obverse motif of alternating sun and rose at crown and neck is not present. The naming and attribution here is on the basis of the large rose of the Drogheda Suns and Roses (and Four Roses) pennies on the reverse. The lack of the defining obverse symbols on the new specimen, as on S.6391, is suggested to be due to the practical difficulties of executing recognisable sun and rose motifs in conjunction with the portrait and inscription on such a small coin. It is also worth noting that under Edward IV’s 1479 decree which apparently led to both the Cross on Rose and Suns and Roses coinages, a rose and cross motif on one side was mandatory, while the design of the other side was left to the discretion of the moneyer: “*that all and every of the peces to be coyned ber a notable difference on eyther side, on the cross side a Rose, and upon the pile side a notable difference of the [device] easy to be known to every body.*”⁸ Whether the pellets of the new specimen, or the saltires of S.6391, constitute a “notable difference” is open to debate, but a plausible case could be made for overall compliance given the reverse design.

⁶ Known to us from two specimens, both from the same dies.

⁷ This objection from the possibility of re-use of earlier obverse dies does not apply to the Drogheda Suns and Roses groats and pennies.

⁸ Gilbert 1865 599.



Figure 1. Top, the Drogheda Suns and Roses halfpenny. Middle, a Drogheda Suns and roses penny reverse, with the central rose (from the same punches) scaled to the same size for comparison. Bottom, the halfpenny with a contemporary UK five pence piece.

References

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