

The attestation of Edward IV Irish penny portrait “M” at Waterford

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The purpose of this note is to record the attestation of the Edward IV Irish penny portrait “M” at Waterford, on a specimen that has come to the author’s attention recently. The portrait was not noted specifically by Burns 2017 in his foundational work on the series, but is labelled here by extending his portrait classification scheme (which ends with portrait “L”) to the next available letter. The significance of the Waterford attestation is that it elevates the portrait to “universal” status; that is, attested at all four of the controlled Irish mints of Edward IV, of Dublin, Drogheda, Trim and Waterford; and this observation is of relevance to the chronological placement of the portrait in the series. The coin is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: the attestation of the Edward IV Irish penny portrait M at Waterford.

The coin is in poor condition, but sufficient detail remains to be sure of the portrait, with its jewelled crown, and at least the face, shoulders and left hair punch. The obverse inscription is illegible; a saltire is visible to the left of the neck, and presumably another lost to wear to the right. The reverse has a central quatrefoil with mint signature [I-TAS[saltire]-WAT-F[]]. The type (previously known only with portrait G) is S.6376D (Sovereign Rarities 2025) and Burns 2017 W-27. The attestation of portrait M at Dublin, Drogheda and Trim is shown in Figure 2.

Portrait M was considered in Mac Conamhna 2017, and on the basis of the evidence then available of its attestation at Dublin, Drogheda and Trim, the author proposed it dated to the Second Cross and Pellet coinage of 1470-73, when, according to the extant documentary record, these three mints only were active. In this paper the author wrote “If its attribution given here is correct, then no specimens from this punch will be found with another mint signature.” Such a specimen has now appeared, and the argument by which the portrait was attributed to the 1470-73 coinage is invalidated by it.

What is corroborated is the suggestion of Mac Conamhna 2017 that portrait M is related closely chronologically to portrait G. They bear something of a visual resemblance. At

Drogheda, they and only they both appear with pellet each side of crown, although M also appears with a plain obverse.¹ A systematic investigation of the Drogheda evidence also reveals that they and only they of Drogheda penny portraits appear in conjunction with the full unabbreviated mint signature VILL-A:DE-DROG-HEDA.² At Trim, both appear with a plain obverse only, but that is unremarkable for the mint because so do four of the five other Trim portraits known to the author. At Waterford, however, portrait M appears with a saltire each side of neck, as does portrait G only; furthermore, all Waterford specimens of portrait G known to the author also appear with the same abbreviation of the mint signature, CIVI-TAS-WAT'-FOR['].



Figure 2. L-R, portrait M at Dublin, Drogheda and Trim. See Mac Conamhna 2017, coins 8 and 10, for other specimens of Drogheda and Trim.

It is hard to ignore this clear evidence of association, and the indication of now both Drogheda and Waterford that the use of one of these portraits (in the author's opinion, probably G) succeeded the other immediately at each regional mint. An implication of this happening is that it now seems more likely that the dies were issued centrally, rather than the portrait punches carried from mint to mint by peripatetic moneyers.

Portrait M thus joins A, B, E and G as attested universally by the controlled mints; and the question of its absolute chronology needs to be re-assessed. It appears to be impossible to fit now five universal portraits into the brief period, 1478-79, when all four mints were simultaneously active according to the extant documentary evidence; and it is clear that the record must be incomplete. In particular, in the process of a systematic

¹ The type Dr-8 with pellets by crown and portrait I, given to Drogheda by Burns 2017, is in fact of Trim, as is shown by the specimen NMIHC:2002.1232 in the National Museum of Ireland, from the same dies and with a clear mint signature.

² Mac Conamhna 2026.

investigation of the extant numismatic evidence of all denominations from each mint, it is becoming increasingly apparent to the author that the assumption on the basis of the extant record that Waterford was inactive from 1470-5 may well be unsafe; and it would seem premature to offer further opinion on the chronology of portrait M, other than it almost certainly belongs to the 1470s, until the survey of the numismatic evidence is complete.

References

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