

Some thoughts on the Royalist badges of Charles I

The reign of Charles I of England (1625-1649) is numismatically the most varied in history, both for collectors of coinage and also for those with an interest in historical medals.

It is a period during which the European practice of the wealthy and powerful giving out small tokens of appreciation in the form of (mostly) oval 'badges' bearing their likeness to those they wished to reward or influence became, in England, political. Such badges became not just a reward for service rendered, but an opportunity for people to own something signifying allegiance. [1]

Whether personally given by a member of the Royal family, or purchased as a private commission from Mint employees, these small items likely held considerable significance to their owners. We see that from the small number of badges that have been engraved with messages such as "I feare my god, I love my King, I abhorre a rebel" or the heart shaped (likely memorial) locketts that contain a tiny badge and state that the owner would "live and dy in loyaltie"

It is not surprising therefore that such items have continued to attract collector interest from such notables as Edward Hawkins (whose collection formed the major part of that held by the British Museum), Montagu, Murdoch, Farquhar, Platt and Foley.

What is perhaps surprising however is that we know little of how such things were distributed, exactly who made them and under what circumstances and how many were made.

It seems likely that, compared to coinage of the period, these badges never existed in any large numbers, those coming down to us having survived due to luck and sentiment. It must also be stressed that, due to the fact that most of such items were made by casting and subsequent chasing to tidy up any irregularities, it is largely impossible to accurately date an individual medal. Most were likely made some time between 1640 [2] and the end of the reign of Charles II, however there was a revival of interest in the late Victorian era and again in the 1970s when further examples may have been made. Fortunately, the latter examples are generally obvious copies, made as souvenirs rather than to deceive.

What we do know is that, despite the comprehensive work of Hawkins, Franks and Gruber (Medallic Illustrations) and subsequently by Jerome and Arlene Platt (The English Civil War: Medals, Historical Commentary and Personalities) there are still discoveries to be made.

It is here that I move from established 'understanding' to speculation.

As mentioned above, most badges were cast (although it is possible that originally struck medals were used to make the moulds). It is not difficult to imagine that, were demand to increase, moulds might break or become lost. Even that some owners, whose badge had become worn or damaged through wear, might want a replacement. In those circumstances, those making such items might combine an obverse in good condition with a reverse from another badge of a similar size.

Certainly there are a number of rare badges that have come to light that were unknown to Hawkins and it might be of interest to some readers see such a thing and to be able to add a previously unrecorded example of a Royalist badge to their records.



Mli 355/216



Mli 355/218

The reverse of this new badge, the bust of Queen Henrietta Maria with her hair flat at the top and tied back and wearing a pearl necklace and figured bodice, will be familiar to collectors of the series from Mli 354/215 and Mli 355/216 (shown left).

However the obverse bust of Charles, facing right has been replaced by the smaller and better proportioned one found on Mli 355/218 (right). Here we find the king laureate and facing left, wearing armour with a lion's head to the shoulder and a medal suspended on a chain on his breast.



The key difference from no. 218 is that in this case, the larger size of the medal allows space for Charles' titles to appear as a legend, written in relief around the edge.

Investigation to the best of my abilities has not turned up any similar badge in the British Museum or any of the other major collections. There is no entry in Medallie Illustrations or Platt & Platt that matches it and it appears unrecorded.

Of course, unrecorded does not necessarily mean un-noticed. A search of auction records shows a likely example in the Montagu collection [3] in silver (Lot 181 'a fine and unpublished badge of great rarity').

Helen Farquhar's sale [4] yields another in silver-gilt (Lot 251 '(M.I. 355/218a), fine and a rare variety, with unpublished inscription') which surely must be the example found in the Foley collection (Lot 310 'the gilding light and contemporary and a seemingly unpublished variety. The Rawlins portrait of the King on this badge is found on others (...), sometimes with and sometimes without a border, *but it is not recorded in this larger sized and with a legend*'). [My italics]

Sadly neither the Montagu nor Farquhar badge is illustrated so although the dimensions of each are similar, it must be assumed that they are different examples.

The example I have shown appears to be a third and so I feel it is high time the variety is recognised. Rather than revisiting the well established numbering of Medallie Illustrations I suggest the 355/218a designation used in the Farquhar catalogue as adequate.

References

[1] See Platt & Platt (The English Civil Wars. Medals, Historical Commentary & Personalities. Jerome J Platt & Arlene Kay Platt) Spink 2013 for further discussion.

[2] See Farquhar (Portraiture of the Stuarts on Royalist Badges. Miss Helen Farquhar, British Numismatic Journal 1905, pp 243-290) for her views on the dating of badges.

[3] Montagu The Very Valuable Collection of Medals, Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 24-30 May 1897

[4] Catalogue of the Important Collection of English Coins and Medals of Charles I, the property of a deceased Lady Collector (Helen Farquhar), Glendining & Co, 25 April 1955