

Collector's Choice

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I have selected a few coins, from various sources, to illustrate the history of British coinage over the last two thousand years.

I start with an example of the Celtic coinage of Britain, a coin of the Iceni tribe who occupied a large area of eastern England, around Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. Some have suggested that this coin belongs to the reign of their most famous leader, Queen Boudicca or Boadicea, who rose up in revolt against the Romans in AD60. However, the likelihood is that the coin is from an earlier period. The typical Celtic horse is on the reverse, and we can imagine Boudicca and the British in chariots pulled by horses such as this.



Roman coins were once used in Britain. This is the emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), seen here on a denarius, a forerunner of the penny and from which we get the 'd' in our £ s d. Rome seems to have had more than its fair share of evil and insane emperors, and Domitian was a combination of both. It was probably in his reign that the apostle

John was exiled to the island of Patmos. We know quite a bit about Britain at this time from the historian Tacitus, whose father-in-law Julius Agricola was governor of Britain. Agricola campaigned pretty far north into Scotland, and in AD84 the Romans routed the Caledonii at the battle of Mons Graupius, probably somewhere in the Grampian Mountains. The fleet also sailed round the far north of Scotland, proving Britain to be an island. On the reverse of this denarius is depicted Minerva, a popular figure on 1st century coinage. By AD96 the Romans had had more than enough of Domitian and he was assassinated.

It was the Romans who first put Britannia on the reverse of the coinage in the time of Hadrian. This is a rather ordinary looking copper as of Antoninus Pius, who was emperor from 138 to 161. But it shows Britannia. Britannia was the Roman name for the province of Britain, and it was typical of the Romans to personify not only attributes such as justice and piety, but also the names of cities, such as the goddess Roma, and of countries. Britannia is seen here depicted as a sad, despondent figure seated on a rock holding a spear and with a shield by her side. The letters SC stand for Senatus Consulto. This indicates that the coin was minted under the authority of the Senate, as was the case with all copper coins, silver and gold being authorised by the emperor.



This is what is known as a sceat, from the Anglo-Saxon term for money. Sceats were really the forerunner of the silver penny, although they are smaller, and there are a number of types. This one has a superb bust with a cross in front, signifying the shift to Christianity. Like other sceats, there is no

inscription so we cannot attribute it to a particular ruler. It has, however, been dated to the period AD710-60.

This penny is of Edgar (959-75), probably the first true king of all England. We have the simple inscription EADGAR REX surrounding a cross within a circle. Surprisingly for Anglo-Saxon times, Edgar's



reign was largely peaceful. For some reason the king was not crowned until 973 at Bath but this became a great propaganda exercise, and later we have the story of him being rowed across the River Dee near Chester by 8 submissive kings, including the rulers of Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Man and Strathclyde. The name of the moneyer appears on the reverse of the coin, a man called Grid.



Aethelred II is known to history as the Unready or Redeless, and for buying off the Danish invaders. This is probably the commonest type of Aethelred penny, the Long Cross type, minted during the period 997 to 1003, thus making it the millennium penny proper. It shows a left-facing bust of the king wearing some kind of head-dress. The reverse, as the name of the type suggests, bears a long cross, the arms of which extend into the inscription, GODWINE MO LUND – Godwine, moneyer at London.



Here are some pennies of the Norman kings. William I is known to history as the Conqueror, and for some reason or other lists of English kings seem to start from his reign. Every schoolboy has heard of Hastings, his victory in 1066 over Harold II, the last of the Saxon kings. Many things changed, but not the coinage, which continued on with a series of neat silver pennies. There were 8 major types. Illustrated are the profile left type, the earliest of the reign, and the 3rd or canopy type of 1071-4, so-called because the facing bust of the king appears under an elaborate canopy. The inscription is simply PILLEM REX, the initial letter being the Anglo-Saxon wen (W), although the inscriptions on these coins are notoriously difficult to read. I have also included a penny of William II, known as the profile type.

During the reign of Stephen civil war raged in England between the king and Henry I's daughter Matilda. But in 1154 Matilda's son succeeded peacefully as Henry II. And he was not only King of England. He was also the richest prince in France, ruling over not only Anjou and Normandy, but also the Duchy of Aquitaine in the name of his wife Eleanor. As head of the Angevin Empire he was a greater king than any of his predecessors. But the reign is notorious for a murder, that of Thomas à



Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in 1170 in Canterbury Cathedral, apparently on Henry's orders. We see Henry here on what is commonly called the Tealby type from a large hoard found in 1807 at Tealby in Lincolnshire. It was instituted in 1158 and has a facing bust of the king with sceptre. The official name of the issue is the cross and crosslets type, from the reverse. They are generally badly struck and often irregular in shape.

For much of the Medieval period pennies were the only coins. First, we had the short cross, then came the long cross. The short cross started in 1180 under Henry II and continued right through to 1247 in the reign of Henry III. The name remained as Henry on all these coins, even those of Richard the Lionheart and John. All have a short cross in the centre of the reverse which gives them their name. The example on the left is a type of Henry III and is distinguished



by the fact that the king has no neck. Clipping silver from the edges of these coins was a problem, and so in 1247 we have the long cross coinage with the cross extending to the edge of the coin. It was hoped that this would be a safeguard against the practice of clipping. Coins come with or without a sceptre, and the example in the centre has a sceptre. A notable innovation was the inscription Tercii or III to indicate the third Henry, although this was not repeated until the reign of Henry VII. Henry's son was Edward I, and when he returned from the Crusades, he turned his attention to reform of the coinage. The great recoinage of 1279 included not only pennies but also halfpennies, farthings and a new denomination of 4 pence - the groat. Coins such as the penny on the right were to be the model of English coins for the next 2 centuries. The obverse has a facing bust with the crown ornamented with 3 fleur de lis. The legend proclaims Edward as king of England and Lord of Ireland. The cross on the reverse still extends to the edge but is now a single line rather than double. The pellets in the angles are retained. This example is from the Lincoln mint. The moneyer's name is no longer shown.



This is a half noble of Edward III. The noble was worth 6/8d and so this coin has a face value of 3/4d. The king stands in a Medieval ship, holding a large sword and a shield bearing the royal arms, and some have seen a connection with the naval victory of Sluys in 1340. Edward's issue of nobles, half nobles and quarter nobles was the first successful attempt at a gold coinage, although Henry III had

issued a gold penny and Edward III himself had previously issued florins, leopards and helms. The omission of French titles shows this example to be from the Treaty period when there was peace with France. The reverse inscription is a quotation from Psalm 6:1 - *Domine ne in furore tuo arguas me* ('Lord rebuke me not in thine anger').

The groat worth 4 pence introduced in 1279 was an imitation of a French coin called the *gros tournois*, but never really took off until the reign of Edward III. I have illustrated here a groat of Richard III, along with a couple of halfgroats - of Henry VI and Henry VII. The Henry VI coin is of rosette-mascle issue of 1430-1. Rosettes and mascles (a lozenge shape) appear in the legends. The coin was minted at



Calais, which belonged to England at the time. The portrait was basically still little different from the coins of Edward III, with a representation of the monarch rather than a true portrait. Indeed, we find a similar portrait on the groat illustrated of Richard III (1483-5) and the halfgroat of Henry VII who succeeded him. There are interesting differences between Henry VII's coins and those of earlier monarchs, especially in the crown which is the Tudor arched crown rather than the medieval open one. Reverse inscriptions on these coins appear in 2 concentric circles. The inner one states the name of the mint (Villa Calisie, Civitas London, Civitas Cantor), while the outer contains the motto, which by now had become common on many coins – *Posui Deum Adiutorem Meum* ('I have made God my helper'). The letter M in the centre of the reverse on the Henry VII coin pinpoints it to an issue by Archbishop Morton.

Some would see Henry VII's reign as a watershed between the medieval and modern worlds, and in many respects this is true, including the coinage with a realistic portraiture introduced in 1504, something more appropriate to the period of the Renaissance. This groat is of the so-called Tentative issue with two bands to the crown; the regular issue has three bands. The reverse is also completely redesigned with a central shield bearing the lions of England and the fleur-de-lis of France intersected by a cross fourchee (or forked cross). The motto remains the same, but the mint name has been dropped.



Pennies also got a new look around 1489-90 with a new sovereign type obverse. This one is of Henry VIII and dates to his second coinage of 1526-44. The mint is London. The design is so-called because of its similarity to the gold sovereign, with the enthroned monarch depicted in a relatively confined space.

Henry VIII is here seen on a testoon. This is an old name for the shilling and comes from the Italian *testone*, meaning a coin with a head on it. Coins of this third coinage period, from 1544-7, have the portrait that we associate with Henry VIII, not unlike that depicted in paintings by Holbein. The coins became more and more debased, with only a thin layer of silver covering over a base metal centre.



Henry earned the nickname Old Coppernose, as the silver quickly rubbed off the high points of the coin's surface. Testoons of the Tower Mint, such as this example, retain the "Posui deum" motto on the reverse. The reverse has the crowned Tudor rose flanked with the letters HR ('Henricus Rex'). The mintmark is a pellet within an annulet.



And here are two groats from Henry's third coinage, one from Bristol and the other from Canterbury. The Canterbury coin is posthumous, minted under Edward VI, and indeed Edward's first coins bear the

image of his father. It is interesting to note that until 1526 Henry's coins retained the portrait of his father Henry VII.

The first shillings of Edward VI appeared in 1549. The coin on the left is an example. They were notable for their small size, not much larger than a groat. Bishop Latimer got into trouble for some remarks he made about it: "We have here a pretty little shilling, indeed a very pretty one. I have but one I think in my purse, and the last day I had put it away almost for an old groat, and so I trust some will take them." Legends are transposed, so Edward's name and titles appear on the reverse, while the motto is on the obverse: *Timor Domini Fons Vitae* ('The Fear of the Lord is the Fountain of Life'). The date is in Roman numerals. The shilling on the right is of the so-called fine coinage, almost restored to the old standard prior to debasement. This was introduced in 1551. A new facing bust shows Edward, wearing an ermine cloak, flanked by a rose and the Roman numeral XII for twelve pence. This was an innovation, introduced to avoid confusion as to the value of the coins. The mintmark 'y' is for John Yorke, mintmaster at the Southwark mint. The halfcrown in the middle is contemporaneous with the fine shilling, and is in fact dated, 1551. These were the first English silver halfcrowns and depict the king in armour holding an unsheathed sword and seated on a richly caparisoned horse.



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Edward was followed on the throne by his half-sister Mary. After Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain, a new English coinage was produced, which included shillings and sixpences. This is the shilling with the mark of the denomination XII on either side of the crown on the reverse. These coins are unusual in that they show facing busts of both Philip and Mary beneath a crown. Early versions list a number of titles which rather tactlessly gave the impression that England was part of the Spanish Empire. This is one of the later coins which dropped the Spanish titles. On the reverse shield we have the elaborate quarterings of the Habsburgs in addition to the usual English heraldic devices.

Other denominations, such as this scarce halfgroat, have Mary's portrait only, although Philip's name appears along with Mary's in the legend.



This is a shilling of Elizabeth I, the last of the Tudors, although there is no mark of value to tell us what it is. Some of the smaller silver coins must have been difficult to distinguish from one another, and so we

find a rose placed behind the bust of the Queen on some denominations – sixpence, threepence, three-halfpence and three-farthings. These coins are also dated. This shilling displays the cross and crosslets mintmark, dating it to the second coinage issue of Elizabeth of 1560-1.



More different denominations were struck for Elizabeth I than for any other monarch either before or since. This is the halfcrown which appeared in 1601 and 1602. We have a mature portrait of Elizabeth wearing a jewelled headdress topped by a crown, set off by a high ruff and quilted shoulder of her gown. She holds an orb and sceptre. The mintmark is either '1', standing for 1601, or the much scarcer '2' (for 1602).



Mintmark bell dates this halfgroat to 1582-3. Halfgroats of the sixth and seventh issues have two dots behind the bust to denote the denomination. Earlier issues do not.

Some milled coins, manufactured by machine, were produced by a Frenchman called Eloi Mestrelle. These are some examples of milled sixpences from the 1560s. Mestrelle himself came to a sticky end on the gallows at Norwich, convicted of counterfeiting.



Elizabeth's successor was James I, who was also James VI of Scotland. Here we see the six busts of James as depicted on his English shillings and sixpences. On James's 1st coinage, which includes Busts 1 and 2, James is King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, - the first time that the claim to Scotland appears on the English coinage. But from Bust 3 onwards, in the 2nd and 3rd coinages, a new concept appears where James is hailed as King of Great Britain, France and Ireland. This concept was pushed by James himself, but Parliament was not so keen. However, the idea caught on and much credit for publicising it must go to the coinage.





Here are a couple of halfgroats of James. First coinage halfgroats, as on the left-hand coin, have a bust of the king and read *I D G Rosa Sine Spina* ('James by grace of God, a rose without a thorn'). But later halfgroats are a complete change. Gone is the portrait, and we now have a crowned rose on one side and a crowned thistle on the other. The 'Rose without a thorn' inscription is retained on the obverse, while on the reverse we have *Tuaetur Unita Deus* – 'May God guard these United (Kingdoms)'.

There is a wide variety of coins of Charles I. This is the crown, with the design of the king on horseback. Mintmark harp dates it to 1632-3 and the plumes over the shield on the reverse indicate the use of Welsh silver. The reverse legend has political significance - *Christo Auspice Regno*, which translates 'I rule under the auspices of Christ', an allusion to Charles' belief in the Divine Right of Kings and that he exercised his rights over his subjects by direct descent from God.



Portraits used on coins from the shilling down are divided into 7 groups labelled A-G. These coins are of Group B, with the 2nd bust. The shilling with castle mintmark is from 1627-8, while the halfgroat with mintmark plume is from 1630-1. Note how all early portraits of Charles on the coins show him with a ruff around his neck.

Some of Charles's coins are milled, i.e., made by machine as opposed to the normal hammered method. The engraver was a Frenchman called Nicholas Briot, who had previously worked at the Paris mint. Milled coins were minted during the period 1631-9 during the time of Charles' personal rule when he tried to govern without Parliament.

This is one of the early ones (1631-2), as shown by the mintmark of a flower with a small letter B below.



The Civil War saw coins issued from a number of different Royalist mints. One of these was Oxford, where Charles made his headquarters. Here we see the threepence, halfgroat and penny from Oxford. The threepence has the declaration reverse, proclaiming the promises made by the king at Wellington in 1642, namely, to uphold the Protestant Religion, the Laws of England and the Liberty of Parliament. It seems rather ironic that Charles is upholding the liberty of Parliament, the very body he is fighting against, while Parliament in turn continue to mint coins in London with the king's head and a reverse motto proclaiming his divine right to rule.



Royalist forces captured Bristol in July 1643 and coins were minted here identified by the abbreviation BR, as seen on the reverse of this shilling and halfgroat. Minting ceased with the fall of the city to Parliament in September 1645.



Coins of the Commonwealth of England reflected the wave of Puritanism that swept the country following the execution of Charles I. This is a sixpence of 1651. Portraiture was definitely out; the obverse shows a simple shield bearing the cross of St George, while the reverse has twin shields with the cross of St George and the Irish harp. The

curious linking of these shields inspired the derisory nickname of breeches money. The inscriptions are in English, Latin being regarded as a mark of popery.

Oliver Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector in 1653. It seems that he was not content with the breeches money and so we find his own portrait appearing on some later coins of the Commonwealth. We even see a return to the Latin inscriptions. This halfcrown is from 1658, the year of his death. The obverse inscription translates: 'Oliver by the grace of God Protector of the



Republic of England, Scotland and Ireland et cetera'. On the reverse we have rather interestingly a crowned shield and *Pax Quaeritur Bello* – 'Peace is sought by war' – and, of course, Oliver Cromwell was above all a soldier. There is also an edge inscription *Has nisi periturus mihi adimat nemo* – 'Let no-one remove these [letters] from me under penalty of death' - a warning to the clippers.

Milled coins became the norm under Charles II, but his early coins were still produced by the old hammering method. These coins had no date but were produced in 1661 into early 1662. The first of these coins had neither mark of value nor inner circle on either obverse or reverse, as can be seen on the example of the shilling on the left. A second issue gave the mark of value, as in the shilling in the middle, while the sixpence on the right has beaded circles separating the inscriptions from the field.



The quality of production of these coins is not great, pointing to a great deal of haste in their manufacture. The coiners were probably trying to prove that their hand hammering method was every bit as fast as that using the new machinery now being installed. But they were fighting a losing battle.



In the 17th century, there was a shortage of small change and many tokens circulated issued by local tradesmen. Then in 1672 a regal issue of halfpennies and farthings was struck - legal tender for payments under sixpence. The obverse portrays Charles II, laureate and in Roman armour, with the Latin legend *Carolus a Carolo*, signifying Charles (II) in succession to Charles (I). The reverse

reintroduces the figure of Britannia, last seen on Roman coins. The model for Britannia was the Duchess of Richmond, one of the King's mistresses. Halfpennies such as this one appeared from 1672-3 and 1675.

Here we have the official silver medallion produced for the coronation of Mary of Modena in 1685. Mary was the second wife of James II, whom he married in 1673, following the death of his first wife Anne Hyde in 1671. Anne was the mother of Mary, who married William of Orange, and her sister Anne, later Queen Anne. This medal is by John Roettiers and on the reverse proclaims Mary as *O Dea Certe* – 'assuredly a goddess'. Interestingly, although a Catholic, Mary apparently joined in the responses at the Anglican coronation service, whereas James remained tight-lipped. It was of course the birth of Prince James, later the Old Pretender, to Mary that brought about the invasion by William of Orange and the flight of King James.



This is a sixpence of James II dated 1687. It always amuses me that James proclaims himself King of France. A couple of years later Louis XIV would send him to win back Ireland backed with a French army. He was, as we all know, unsuccessful, and ended his days in France in 1701.

This is a halfcrown of 1689 with the conjoined busts of William and Mary. There are two major types of William and Mary halfcrown, and this is the first bust. It in turn has two reverses, of which this is Type 2 with the 2nd shield. Note the arms of England and France in the 1st and 4th quarters, along with the Scottish lion and the Irish harp. The rampant lion of the House of Orange is in the centre. Mary tragically died of smallpox in 1694, aged only 32, and it was left to William to carry on alone.



During the period from 1684 to 1692 some coins were issued that were made of tin. This included halfpennies of James II and William and Mary, and farthings of those monarchs plus Charles II. The idea was to stimulate the Cornish tin industry. This example is a halfpenny of William and Mary of 1690 - the date appears on the edge which also has the legend NVMMORVM FAMVLVS ('the servant of the

coinage', i.e., a subsidiary coinage). This, along with a plug of copper through the centre of the flan, was to make them more difficult to counterfeit. Tin was not satisfactory for coinage however, being very susceptible to corrosion, and copper coins were reintroduced in 1694.

This is a shilling of William III dated 1700. The Great Recoinage took place under William from 1696 when all the old badly worn and clipped hammered coins were taken out of circulation. There are several varieties of bust – this is the 5th, first seen in 1699, although 1700 is the common date.



During the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14) the War



of the Spanish Succession was in full flow, and we had Marlborough's famous victories at Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet, as well as the capture of Gibraltar. But one famous exploit of 1702 was the capture of the Spanish treasure fleet by Sir George Rooke at Vigo Bay, and coins were made from the gold and silver captured. They can be recognised by the word VIGO below the bust of

Anne, and they are dated 1702 or 1703. This is a sixpence of 1703.

Anne was succeeded by George I, the first of the Hanoverian monarchs. The coin on the left is a George I shilling of 1720. The king's titles are now continued on the reverse of the coin, to include his German possessions, and the Hanoverian shield is included. The centre coin shows the young bust of George II on a shilling dated 1737. The young bust was designed by John Croker, and shows the King in Roman dress armour, an unusual feature being



the lion's mask decorating the shoulder piece. Roses and plumes in the angles of the shields on both of these shillings signify the use of silver from the Company for Smelting down Lead with Pit Coale and Sea Coale. Roses alone depict coins using West of England silver, while plumes denote Welsh silver. Some coins of George II dated 1745 and 1746 bear the word LIMA below the bust. The sixpence on the right is an example. Lima is the capital of Peru, and in 1743 Admiral George Anson captured a Spanish treasure ship with bullion from the Peruvian silver mines. These coins bear the old bust of the king, designed by John Tanner.

Some nice portraits can be found on the Maundy Money, and this is the 1792 issue of George III known as wire money because of the thin scrawly marks of value on the reverse. Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday and commemorates Christ washing the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper, giving them a mandate to follow his example. Maundy Thursday is thus *Dei Mandati* – ‘the day of the Mandate’. The monarch shows pity by distributing gifts of money to some poor and aged people. Food and clothing used to be given as well as money, but in 1837 a money allowance was made in lieu of food and in 1883 the clothing allowance was also converted to money. Part of the original ceremony actually included washing the recipient's feet, but this was discontinued in the 17th century, a time when plague was rampant, the last record being in 1698 by William III. The ceremony can be traced back to 1213, when King John distributed silver pennies among 13 poor men at Rochester.



There was a shortage of copper coinage in the reign of George III, and again various tradespeople started producing their own tokens, mainly halfpennies. These tokens were illegal but became extremely popular and were accepted locally as a regular medium of exchange. Most of them were of good weight and material, equal at least to that of the regal coins.

This example is from Scotland, from Leith, the port of Edinburgh. The obverse depicts a ship sailing past a fort, with the inscription ‘Success to the Port of Leith’ and the date 1796. The reverse shows the seated figure of commerce and that it was issued by John White, whose premises were in the Kirkgate, Leith.

Although George III had been on the throne since 1760, no halfcrowns were issued until 1816, and they caused quite a stir. The design, by Benedetto Pistrucci, views the King from behind his right shoulder, and because of the appearance of the portrait has become known as the Bull Head. There was a lot of criticism, in particular from the Prince Regent, and eventually Pistrucci was persuaded to replace it with a smaller, less aggressive-looking bust. The Bull Head halfcrowns thus appear for two years only – 1816 and 1817.



This crown of 1822 is of George IV and displays the first bust by the Italian Benedetto Pistrucci. You can see the initials BP just below the truncation. But Pistrucci was noted for the design that appears on the reverse of the coin - that of St George slaying the dragon. This had first been introduced on gold coins and crowns in the latter years of George III, and it is still employed today on the sovereigns.

Once again, the letters BP appear at the right side of the exergue.

This George IV sixpence dated 1829 has the later portrait of the King by William Wyon based on a sculpture by Sir Francis Chantrey. Benedetto Pistrucci, who had produced the earlier bust which the King did not like, refused to engrave a coin based on another artist's work, hence Wyon was given the job. The reverse of the sixpence, and also the shilling, was something completely different from anything that had gone before. We have a large crown surmounted by a lion beneath which is a floral sprig of shamrock, rose and thistle.



You might think a farthing a very small amount of money, but under George IV, William IV and Victoria we had half farthings, third farthings and even a quarter farthing. These were for use in the colonies, but they are included in the British series. These third farthings of George IV and William IV were for use in Malta.

Gothic Crowns appeared in 1847 and were so-called from the unusual portrait of Victoria in the manner of the Gothic Revival and use of Old English lettering. They are scarcer than the 1847 Young Head crowns and may have been intended as a commemorative issue to mark Victoria's tenth anniversary on the throne. Both obverse and reverse are by William Wyon, the reverse returning to a cruciform arrangement of heraldic shields, with the star of the garter in the centre and floral emblems of the United Kingdom in the angles. The Latin motto on the reverse is borrowed from coins of James I – *Tueatur Unita Deus* ('May God protect the United.). The motto is balanced at the foot by the date, also in Latin – *anno dom mdcccxlvii*. The edge inscription reads *Decus et Tutamen Anno Regni Undecimo*.



The early copper Victorian pennies show the portrait of the 18-year-old Queen designed by William Wyon. They appeared for general circulation in 1841. We have a seated Britannia on the reverse, with the date on the obverse, and the exergue on the reverse occupied by a spray of heraldic flowers. There are different variations,

notably to Britannia's trident which can be ornamental or plain.

The Victorian bronze bun-heads are so-called from the style of the Queen's hair. The portrait was designed by Leonard Charles Wyon, son of William, and depicts the 41-year-old queen as a still-youthful personality. The reverse again features Britannia, flanked by a man-o'-war sailing ship and lighthouse, with the date below. The lighthouse appears to be a fairly accurate rendition of the third Eddystone tower, built by John Smeaton in 1756-9. The lighthouse remained longer on the coin than in reality, for it was replaced in 1878-82. Bun pennies were struck each year from 1860 to 1894. In some years, a small letter H appears at the date. This was a mintmark to indicate that the coin was manufactured by Ralph Heaton and Sons of Birmingham.



There were subtle changes over the years to the bun head portrait. In 1874, for instance, Victoria was aged. Some points to note are a thicker neck, changes to the ribbons of the hair, the bridge of the nose is pinched, the fabric rose is only half visible, and the name Victoria is more widely spaced.

There are also many different varieties of reverse. Some of the early ones have Wyon's initials LCW either below Britannia's shield or at her foot. Others have wide dates. The lighthouse becomes much thinner. There are also subtle changes to Britannia, for example her hair is shorter on the later coins, her right shoulder has dropped, her waist is slimmer with a larger gap between her and the trident shaft, and the diagonals of the shield are different.



The florin or two-shilling piece of Edward VII has a rare depiction of Britannia standing on the prow of a deck of a Roman galley. This example is dated 1902. Unfortunately, the date on these coins is in rather high relief and is easily worn away. The coin was designed by George de Saulles and is probably the one he is best remembered for. The Britannia

reverse was clearly based on the Trade Dollar which had been introduced in 1895 for circulation in the Far East.

This is a halfpenny of George V in his coronation year of 1911. The King's portrait was by the Australian artist Bertram Mackennal, and is the large head type, struck in each year from 1911 to 1925. A modified effigy was adopted in 1925, followed by a smaller head from 1928.



This medallion commemorates the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Carnarvon Castle in 1911. This was the future Edward VIII. This is the official Royal Mint issue and the Prince is shown wearing his crown and robes, with the words Carnarvon July XIII MCMXI across the field. On the reverse is Carnarvon Castle with the Welsh dragon below. In the sky is the Prince's crest within the garter. The

inscription is in Welsh and translates roughly as "The Investiture of the Prince of Wales July 1911".

Scotland was a separate kingdom with its own coins. Pennies of William the Lion are probably the earliest affordable Scottish coins. He reigned from 1165 to 1214 and was named the lion not on account of his bravery but because he replaced the dragon on the arms of Scotland with the lion rampant. In 1174 he was forced to do homage for the whole of Scotland to the English king Henry II. Robert the Bruce is of course well known for his famous victory over the English at Bannockburn in 1314. His coins are quite



scarce. David II was the Bruce's son, and was a captive of the English for 11 years following the Battle of Neville's Cross in 1346, the same year as Crecy in the Hundred Years War against France.

This is a groat of Robert III, king of Scots from 1390-1406. The style is similar to the English coins, with the mint indicated as Edinburgh. Robert was actually born as John, but changed his name on becoming king; John was too much a reminder of the bad old days of John Balliol. But Robert was never an effective ruler, having been badly injured by a kick from his horse from which he never really recovered. His younger brother (rather confusingly called Robert) had the real power.



Portrait coins of Mary Queen of Scots are scarce. This example shows the infant head and dates from 1547 when Mary was 5 years old. The following year she was sent to France where she was brought up and later married the Dauphin, who became King Francis II of France in 1559. So, Mary for a while was Queen of two countries. Shortly after the death of

Francis in 1560 Mary returned to Scotland.

When James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English throne in 1603 as James I, the Scottish and English coinage became fairly uniform. You could mistake this coin for an English halfcrown of James, with the King depicted on horseback. But on closer examination the King is wearing the Scottish crown and the coin bears the mintmark thistle. So, it is a Scottish thirty shillings, the equivalent of the English halfcrown. At this time, the face value of the two currencies stood at a ratio of 12 to 1.



A few examples of Irish coins, starting with a Hiberno-Norse penny of Phase 6, dating c.1095-c.1100. From the 9th century large groups of Norsemen were starting to settle in Ireland, and their first pennies were produced at Dublin before the end of the 10th century in imitation of contemporary Anglo-Saxon coins. As time went on

the style of these coins became cruder and the inscriptions meaningless.

Although none of King John's English coins bear his name, the Irish coinage does, both as Lord of Ireland and later as King. We have the name *Iohannes Rex* on this penny of the period 1205-11. The quality of fineness is the same as on the English coins. One distinctive feature is that John's head is set in a triangle. Turning to the reverse we see a sun, moon and 3 stars and that the moneyer was Roberd. The coin was minted in Dublin.



This is an Irish shilling of James I. It has the 3rd bust of the King with a square-cut beard. The mint mark is rose. The reverse is dominated by a very imposing harp. The legend is interesting – *Henricus Rosas Regna Iacobus*, a reference to the fact that the Lancastrian Henry VII had united the roses by his marriage to Elizabeth of York, while James had united the kingdoms of England and Scotland. I am not sure why that should appear on an Irish coin.



Here we have an Irish halfpenny of George IV dated 1822. Although there had been a formal union between Britain and Ireland since 1801, it was not until 1817 that the two Exchequers were merged, and finally in 1821 the two currencies were standardised with equivalent values. An issue of Irish pennies and halfpennies was produced in 1822-3, only to be withdrawn in 1826, from which

date onwards United Kingdom coinage was to be the only Irish currency for about 100 years.

And to finish off, we have George III on a penny of 1786 struck for the Isle of Man. These pennies, along with an issue of halfpennies, were struck in London, and were the first regal coins struck for the Isle of Man. The reverse shows the Manx triune or three conjoined legs with the motto *Quocunque Ieceris Stabit* – ‘Wherever you throw it, it will stand’.



I hope you have enjoyed this brief tour of the British coinage, a series which I find interesting in its variety, ranging from the earliest Celtic and Roman coinage, through that of the Anglo-Saxons and the medieval period, to the introduction of realistic portraiture under the Tudors and the milled coinage in the reign of Charles II. On a personal note, I started collecting the old bronze pennies from 1860 to 1967, looking closely at the dates in my change, and I have had a fascination with coins ever since.