

## An Unusual Forgery

Gary Oddie

Over the past few millennia, coin counterfeiters have found many ways to deceive the unwary. From simple cast copies, in lightweight, base or plated base metal, from moulds made from genuine coins to the more skilful homemade dies used to strike false coins. In the eighteenth century the upgrading of coins was relatively common, for example silver plating a very worn halfpenny to produce a worn looking shilling, or gilding a sixpence or shilling to appear as a half or full guinea. In the last two cases, the deception could be made more convincing by engraving the reverse design by raising sceptres<sup>(1)</sup>.

When an unusual coin modification is first discovered the usual questions are asked; when, where, why and who? Many coin modifications are unique and, with the exception of some engraved coins, are unlikely to be traced. When two pieces with the same modification arise, suspicions deepen.

Illustrated below are two hammered shillings, both of reasonable weight, but on unusually full and round flans. Each has been countermarked twice with an incuse irregular square shape containing a raised X. The resulting pieces have been gilded, though subsequently worn through to reveal the silver. Close inspection reveals that the same punch has been used on both pieces.



**Fig. 1.** Edward VI Fine shilling, im tun (1551-1553). 5.63 g. Traces of gilding countermarked XX to the right of the portrait.



**Fig. 2.** Elizabeth I shilling, im Bell (1582-1583). 5.81g. Almost full gilding, countermarked XX to the right of the portrait.

These are clearly an attempt to produce false twenty-shilling coins. It is also interesting to note that the punch mark does not show through on the reverse and the pieces show no sign of distortion or tooling. This is very skilled and practiced work. So when might they have been made?

It has been suggested that the second piece might be a Victorian fantasy pound piece<sup>(2)</sup>. However, anyone buying a one-off piece of gold at any period would surely check the weight which is almost 50% short.

The use of an XX numeral to indicate the denomination first appeared on the third coinage Laurels of James I in 1619 and ended with the third hammered issue Unites of Charles II in 1662. When freshly made and fully gilded and slipped into a group of twenty-shilling pieces these would have been very deceptive, especially when the diversity of designs on genuine Laurels and Unites is considered. Whilst the hammered gold coinage continued to circulate into the eighteenth century, it is possible that these counterfeits are mid seventeenth century.

### **References**

- (1) G.M. Oddie. A Note on raising sceptres. TCSB v9n5 pp192-3. December 2008.
- (2) DNW Auction, 10 June 2015, lot 68.

