

# Jamaica “Type X’ Countermark – A Modern Fake

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Jamaica was the bullion centre for the British Colonies in the West Indies for much of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Commercial and illicit activities insured a constant supply of Spanish-American gold and silver coinage flowed into the island economy. As no supply of coinage was provided by the home government Jamaica, along with other colonies had to rely on coinage of Spanish-American or Spanish origin. By the 1750’s the supply of coinage on the island began to diminish due to increased trade with other colonies and the old ‘cob coinage’ was increasingly compromised due to clipping.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1758 the Jamaica Assembly passed “An Act for Ascertaining the Value of Spanish Milled Money, and for Rendering the Payment of Debts More Certain”<sup>2</sup>. Under the provisions of this act four denominations of gold and six denominations of silver coinage would be stamped on both sides with a countermark consisting of the ‘floriate design letters GR’, in relief within a circular indent. Both sides of the coins were struck simultaneously with an upper and lower die. It has long been known that a number of die pairs were used to stamp the Dollar coins (this is probably the case with the other denominations as well, but to date no specific study of these other denominations has been conducted). There seems to be no pattern of consistency relative to obverse or reverse as to how the coins were positioned when being struck. Unfortunately, the precise mechanism for the stamping process is not known and to date no serious study of die linkage has been undertaken. However, an examination of 33 specimens (actual coins and photo images) suggests perhaps 4 different genuine die pairs and no indication of die linkage between these pairs is apparent (sadly not all of the images are of the best quality, so this statement is made with a degree of uncertainty). This examination does reveal die deterioration and it could be that the dies were fixed such that when one broke down the pair had to be discarded. Clearly, there is room for further research on this aspect.

No specimens of the two smaller gold coins and the smallest of the silver coins with stamps are known and it is presumed that these denominations were not stamped. A total of £100,000 was authorised over all ten denominations. These stamped coins would circulate at a new and higher value. The measure was futile as by common consent all milled coins, whether stamped or not, also circulated at the new 6s 8d per dollar rate. As a result, only £12,000 of all the coins were actually stamped and the project was abandoned in 1759. Furthermore, the Act was repealed by the home authorities and the Governor of Jamaica was censured for exceeding his powers in approving the passing of the Act.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 60,000 Dollar (8 Reale) coins were authorised and it can be presumed that only part of this quantity was actually stamped. Possibly several hundred examples have survived to this day; always popular with collectors of countermarked coins and World Crowns.

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers, R.: History of Currency in the British Colonies, 1972 Reprint by John Drury, pg. 82

<sup>2</sup> Pridmore, F.: Coins of The British Commonwealth of Nations, Part 3 (West Indies etc.), 1965, Appendix 11

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: pg. 92

At least two die pairs of modern fakes have been recorded. In the 1980's one of these die pairs was privately given the designation of 'Type X' by a colleague in Jamaica. Nearly all the examples I have personally noted are on host coins with dates ranging from 1761 to 1770 ... all past the date when stamping was discontinued in Jamaica. I have used two coins to illustrate this article: Fig. 1 (a/b) is the modern fake, designated Type X, and Fig. 2 (a/b/c) is a genuine example of the issue. Other than the host coin date being the most obvious feature of the vast majority of this fake the other identifying feature is on one of the GR dies where the 'R' is offset a bit lower than the 'G' and the R has a long-extended tail (Fig.1/a). However, are all specimens with these latter characteristics to be condemned? Clearly the genuine coin used to illustrate this article (Fig. 2) is the model that Type X was based on. Our modern fabricator thought they were being quite clever. They tried diligently to make the false die pair as close as possible to a genuine die pair and on one side, they succeeded (compare Fig. 1/b false to Fig. 2/c genuine). The genuine die pair also has the lower R and the long-extended tail, but the identifying difference is that on the genuine die the R has an upward swirl at the top left side of the R and there is a die crack which runs over the top of the R (Fig. 2/a and 2/b). The fake does not have these features and thus in combination with the late host coins date this effort was not as clever as it might at first seem.

Sadly, it would appear that a quantity of these fake coins have entered the numismatic marketplace; I have four examples in my own Reference Collection of Modern Fakes; thus, I have to presume that many more are in other collections. The fabricator was ignorant of the date range of the Act and its termination so while coins with a late host coin date are readily identifiable as fakes one must be extremely careful when this fake die pair appears on coins with a host coin date of 1758 or earlier, as without comparison against an example on a late date host it could be difficult to identify this fake.



Fig. 1/a: false



Fig. 1/b: false

Were it not for the late date host coin, this fake (Figs. 1/a & 1/b) has very convincing characteristics: A genuine host coin was selected having a good degree of circulation wear and a bit of graffiti and the fabrication of the die pair is also very well executed.



Fig. 2/a: genuine



Fig. 2/c: genuine



Fig. 2/b: genuine

Countermarks are generally hand-made either by engraving or using number and letter punch sets. Many countermarked issues have been made using more than one 'countermark punch' and there will always be some differences in these punches due to characteristics as a result of the hand-made aspects. One must be extremely cautious when encountering a countermark where great effort seemingly has been made to make a stamp virtually as close as possible to another stamp. The question then arises which example is genuine? This question could be difficult to answer, but using provenance details for specimens is most helpful along with diagnostics of post countermarking circulation wear and toning. Similarly, the appearance of a completely new countermark 'out of the woodwork', so to speak, should at least spark the need for closer investigation.

Once again, I use the example of Manville X92, Rothsay Mills 4/6.<sup>4</sup> The fabricator of this false countermark went to a great effort to produce a countermark nearly identical to Manville 92, but he was unaware of the need for the small 'privy mark' on the reverse at the bottom of the shield and thus the true nature of this false stamp is made clear.

The study of countermarked coins presents some interesting challenges, some of which are hampered by the small survival rate of many issues. These coins were stamped to address a specific condition and in many cases the life span of these countermarked coins was fairly short-lived and, in some instances, concluded with an 'official recall', which was often extremely effective.

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<sup>4</sup> Manville, H.: Tokens of the Industrial Revolution Foreign Silver Coins Countermarked For Use in Great Britain c. 1787-1828, British Numismatic Society Special Publication No. 3, 2001, Spink, London, pgs. 177-182

I would like to thank Eric Hodge for his very pertinent questions and comments that greatly assisted me in 'fine tuning' this article.

