

A Die Study of Victorian Shillings Dated 1865.

Part 3 – Contemporary Counterfeits

Gary Oddie

Introduction

The contemporary counterfeits of Victoria's silver coinage are almost always made from a white metal that has been cast in a mould made from a genuine coin. There are a few exceptions where hand-cut dies have been used and the counterfeits made of silvered brass or even silver. A silvered brass shilling is known for 1844, brass 1852, and a silvered cupro-nickel shilling is known dated 1887 (YH).⁽¹⁾ For the halfcrowns there is the group of "wrong" dates that were struck in silver. For these, the counterfeiter's margin was in the manufacture of worn and thus lighter weight products.⁽²⁾

For the majority of the counterfeit Victorian silver coins the white metal alloy means that they rarely survive in good condition. The soft alloy is easily worn and damaged and any original plating has long since disappeared. On many pieces, this is further compounded by tin pest which attacks the surface producing blisters and corrosion products or at best leaves a very dark and rough surface.

The generally poor condition and damaged white metal counterfeits make it very challenging to identify die varieties – and quantify the likely number of manufacturers. It is here where the official issues of die numbered shillings can be of use as any mould made from a genuine die numbered coin will also bear the die number.

Having collected counterfeit shillings for many years, the die numbers on counterfeits have been used to distinguish different issues that are dated 1864-1879. Many of the tiny die numbers are too worn/damaged/corroded to be easily read. However, for 1865, now that there is an illustrated catalogue of genuine die numbered shillings, it is much easier to find the image of the genuine coin that best fits what remains of the counterfeit design.⁽¹⁾ Four different 1865 counterfeit shillings are presented below.

The Counterfeits

1865-5



Sn 88.7%, Cu 6.4%, Sb 3.6%, Si 0.8%, Pb 0.4%, Ag 0.3%, traces Fe, Zn, Bi.
4.167g. [\[GO\]](#).

Single digit die number, small dimple in the top of the 5 of the date and slightly closer to the left ribbon. [\[eBay\]](#).



1865-58



Sn 80.3%, Sb 11.2%, Cu 3.6%, Zn 3.3%, Ag 0.6%, Pb 0.6%, Si 0.2%
4.124g. [\[GO\]](#).

A reasonably faithful casting, but the counterfeit shows extra blobs of metal in the 6 and the 5 of the date. The 5 of the die number has started to merge with the ribbon of the wreath and the gap between the 8 of the die number and the 6 of the date is less well defined on the counterfeit. [\[Noonans\]](#).



1865-66



Sn 82.3%, Sb 10.7%, Cu 4.2%, Si 1.1%, Pb 1.0%, Fe 0.2%, Zn 0.2%
3.938g. [\[GO\]](#).

The first digit of the die number is clearly a 6 and it is very close to the ribbon of the wreath. The only “rounded” second digit in that position and alignment to the 6 of the date is a 6. [\[Noonans\]](#).



1865-104



Sn 70.3%, Pb 20.8%, Sb 3.9%, Cu 3.5%, Si 1.3%, Fe 0.1%, traces Zn
4.330g. [\[GO\]](#).

This is the only genuine piece with a three digit die number where the 1 of the die number lines to the middle of the 8 of the date and is very close to touching the ribbon, and the 1 and 5 of the date are slightly taller than the 8 and 6. [\[eBay\]](#).



Discussion and Conclusions

Four contemporary counterfeit shillings dated 1865 have been presented and their die numbers identified with genuine pieces.

They are all cast using moulds made from genuine coins. From the composition, 1865-5 is a fairly typical pewter (tin (85–99%), antimony (approximately 5–10%), copper (2%), etc.). The 1865-58 and 1865-66 are also a pewter but with a lower tin and higher antimony content, around 80% and 10% respectively. The 1865-104 is more unusual with a 21% lead content which a typical solder.

The table below gives the die numbers on contemporary counterfeit shillings, 1864-1879, that are known to the author.

Date	Contemporary Counterfeit Shilling Die numbers
1864	4, 14
1865	5, 58, 66, 104
1866	1, 11, 20, 23, 27, 35 (or 55), 41?
1867	14, 15, 18 (with dot)
1868	6, 14?, 41 (or 47)
1869	6?
1870	8
1871	5?, 6, 23, 53
1872	1, 29, 50, 139, 151 and one with 3 faint digits made to look worn (seen 2).
1873	14, 32, 52, 53 (or 55), 83?
1874	10 (or 70, misaligned first digit), 11, 21, 22?, 61, 89?
1875	8?, 10?, 14, 56, 72?
1876	7?
1877	3
1878	35, 45
1879	Counterfeit with die number not yet seen

Table 1. Contemporary counterfeit shillings 1864-1879 and the known die numbers.

Contemporary counterfeit shillings are known for almost every date of Queen Victoria's reign. Counterfeit shillings dated 1840, 1841, 1848, 1850 and 1854 have yet to be seen. As might be expected the rarer genuine dates appear less frequently as counterfeits. This is a natural result of the counterfeiters copying what is in circulation, and the pieces used to make the moulds. It is very likely that there were many counterfeiters operating throughout the reign, and afterwards, copying the coins as the genuine pieces became more worn and thus easier to produce a deceptive counterfeit. The table above is likely a significant underestimation of the number of counterfeiters active during the next few decades, and that is just for the shillings – contemporary counterfeits are known for all the silver denominations and most dates of Victoria's reign.

The presence of die numbers for the period 1864-1879 allows different issues to be identified, and these are likely from different counterfeiters. It is expected that a similar number of different "varieties" exist for other dates but have not been detected because of the absence of the easily distinguished die number.

References and Acknowledgements

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- (2) Anon., 1968. The Unknown Halfcrown. Coin Monthly, September p26. Also noted on p101. Illustrates an 1868 halfcrown which also appears on the front cover.
- (3) Anon., 1969. Readers' Rarities. Coin Monthly, February pp60-61. Illustrates halfcrowns dated 1861, 1866, 1868, and 1871.
- (4) Bullmore, G. and T., 1969. Victorian Young Head Halfcrowns. Coin Monthly, March pp81-83.
- (5) G. Oddie. A Die Study of Victorian Shillings Dated 1865. Part 2 – The Die Numbers BNS Blog 5th July 2023.
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