

The Dies and Chronology of Charles I Oxford Mint Sixpences

J Davidson

This note serves two purposes. Firstly, to rationalise and update the die designations of this series, and secondly to provide new insight into a possible chronology of the coins and the die usage.

The Dies

Naturally, die analysis starts with the work of Morrieson¹, who did so much to identify and categorise the dies used for the Oxford mint. But this work is now a century old, and some further discoveries are now available. Combined with a detailed analysis of Morrieson's work these allow the present update to be made.

Oxford sixpences are relatively scarce. The issue is limited to three years (1642-1644), with those of 1642 scarce compared to the more plentiful issue of 1643, and those of 1644 particularly rare.

We start with an overview of the dies identified by Morrieson.

Unconfirmed dies: Two dies (one obverse and one reverse) are listed by Morrieson, but not illustrated. Firstly, in deference to Hawkins², Morrieson lists '1642 obverse B' mm. plumes, said to be in the BM collection, but not found by Morrieson. As such, no example could be found to illustrate this die. This is possibly an erroneous identification of a mm. book coin, and is not considered further. Secondly, the un-illustrated reverse die is '1642 reverse B', "*Mint-mark, four pellets (∴). Otherwise as 1. Found on a half unite (R. C. Lockett)*". If we assume this half unite subsequently appeared in the Lockett sales, the only candidate is lot 2431³, which is described as from a sixpence reverse die (and it is clearly a different reverse die to that designated as sixpence die 1642 rev 1). However, a confirmed observation of this half unite die on a sixpence remains elusive, and may indeed be erroneous. As such, it is omitted from further discussion within this note.

Confirmed dies: Morrieson describes and illustrates three obverse dies (labelled 1642/43 Ob A, 1643 Ob B and 1644 Ob A), and 6 reverse dies (1642 rev 1, 1643 revs 1 – 4, and 1644 rev 1).

¹ Morrieson, Lt-Col H.W. 1921 'The Coinage of Oxford, 1642-46', BNJ 16, pp 129-188

² Hawkins, E. 1841 'Silver Coins of England' p 190

³ Glendining & Co. 1956 'Catalogue of Part IV of the celebrated collection of coins, formed by the late Richard Cyril Lockett, Esq.: English, Part II'

Since Morrieson’s work, other observations have been reported:

- A fifth 1643 reverse die, with a different abbreviation of the declaration, was reported by Macleod⁴. An example is shown in Figure 1. As Macleod suggested, we shall call this reverse 5.
- There is another (sixth) 1643 reverse die. In publications, this is sometimes reported as a rev 2 variant, and sometimes as a rev 4 variant. In fact, Morrieson’s descriptions preclude this new die from being a variant of either die 2 or die 4; the difference is that it has only one pellet between EXVRGAT and DEVS. We shall call this die reverse 6.
- Morrieson was unaware of his ‘1643 Ob B’ obverse die being used at Aberystwyth (believing that it was prepared at Oxford for the 1643 issue). This opinion was repeated in the Brooker sylloge⁵. However, the die was indeed used at the earlier mint location - this is documented by George⁶. I too have seen such a coin, confirming the identification.

A peculiarity of Morrieson’s work is that he identifies his Oxford ‘1644 Ob A’ die as his Aberystwyth Ob C die⁷, and then states a little later that he has not seen this die used at Aberystwyth or at Oxford in 1642 or 1643. But in his Aberystwyth paper, he states that Ob C is seen muled with Oxford reverses 1642, 1643 and 1644 (however, I can find no instance of this die combined with the 1642 reverse). Having the same die identified under different naming conventions makes terminology challenging – the same die now has several names (‘Aberystwyth Ob C’, ‘1644 Ob A’ in Morrieson and simply ‘A’ in the Brooker sylloge). For simplicity, I shall call this die ‘Ob C’ in the current discussion. Images of all dies are shown in Figure 1.

With these die descriptions in place, 2 below shows the number of unique coins / die pairings available from an extensive review of journals, auction catalogues etc.; a total of 143 coins forming a photographic study group. Naturally this is not exhaustive, and is still quite a small sample, but it provides some illustration of comparative rarity, and perhaps more importantly of those pairings that do *not* appear to exist. In particular, the absence of several potential die pairings within the 1643 issue suggests that it may be possible to reconstruct a chronology for the die use. This forms the remainder of the discussion.

Ob \ Rev	1642	1643						1644
	Rev 1	Rev 1	Rev 2	Rev 3	Rev 4	Rev 5	Rev 6	Rev 1
A	12	17		20	15			
B			19	10	4	11	8	
C		10		9	4			4

Table 1: Die pairings and their observed occurrences in the study group

⁴ Macleod, Dr. I.R. 1971, ‘An Unrecorded Sixpence of Charles I, Oxford Mint’, SNC 79, p 359

⁵ North, J.J. and Preston-Morley, P.J. (Editors) 1984 ‘The John G. Brooker Collection – Coins of Charles I (1625-1649)’ SCBI 33

⁶ George, E. 1988 Correspondence, SNC 96 p 248

⁷ Morrieson, Lt-Col H.W. 1913 ‘The Coinage of Aberystwith, 1637-42’, BNJ 10, pp 181-197



Figure 1: Oxford sixpence dies (all images except 1643 Rev 4 are © Noonans Mayfair Ltd)

Proposed Chronology

Unlike Morrieson, we now know that all three confirmed obverse dies used at Oxford did, in fact, precede the relocation of the mint from Aberystwyth, and thus were available at the outset of minting in 1642. This forms the starting point for the proposal below.

Period 1: In 1642, sixpence minting at Oxford begins. Evidently, only a single anvil is used: from the three obverse dies available, ex-Aberystwyth die Ob A is selected, combined with a single reverse die also used on half-unites. The short time available between the mint relocation from Shrewsbury and year end are consistent with the relative scarcity of this coin and the need for only one pair of dies / one anvil.

Period 2: Moving into 1643, the 1642 reverse die is retired and replaced by a new 1643 dated die (rev 1). This is the only 1643 sixpence reverse die using 'Oxford' plumes (with bands); it is therefore a natural choice for the initial 1643 die, bearing such similarity to that of 1642. Within this period, a single anvil, pairing the continued use of Ob A and 1643 Rev 1 is used for sixpence striking.

Period 3: Sixpence production increases – a second anvil is introduced. To enable this, a new reverse die (Rev 3), now with 'Shrewsbury' plumes (without bands) is prepared. There is no need to prepare a new obverse die – one of the other two dies available from Aberystwyth is resurrected – Ob C. During the remainder of this period, all four possible die pairings of Ob A, Ob C, Rev 1 and Rev 3 are produced, implying a 'loose box' system.

Period 4: Die 1643 Rev 1 breaks. It is replaced by a new die (1643 Rev 4), and minting carries on with both anvils producing all 4 possible pairings of the available dies (Ob A, Ob C, Rev 3 and Rev 4).

Period 5: Obverse die A breaks. The third and final ex-Aberystwyth obverse die (Ob B) is released to replace it. For the remainder of this period, obverses B and C are used in all possible pairings with reverses 3 and 4.

Period 6: Sixpence striking is reduced to one anvil. Only one obverse die is now needed – that chosen is Ob B. Ob C is retired, but we know that it was still in good condition as it re-appears later in 1644 with no apparent deterioration. Similarly, only one reverse die is needed. Here, we cannot distinguish which of the two available dies was selected (Rev 3 or 4). For simplicity, assume Rev 3 continues, and Rev 4 is retired. So, B-3 pairings are produced within this period.

Period 7: Reverse die 3 breaks. It is replaced by the recently retired Rev 4 die; B-4 pairings then continue.

Period 8: Reverse die 4 breaks. It is replaced by a new reverse die (Rev 5 or Rev 6). Note how within periods 6 and 7, the selection of reverse dies 3 and 4 is arbitrary – the actual selection could be reversed without any major change to the overall chronology. Similarly, we cannot easily distinguish the sequence of use of reverse dies 5 and 6. For simplicity, assume Rev 5 is used first – so within Period 8, B-5 pairings are produced.

Period 9: Reverse die 5 breaks. It is replaced by Rev 6. B-6 pairings are produced.

Period 10: Reverse die 6 breaks and is replaced by Rev 2. B-2 pairings are now struck. In this period, Ob B, now showing its age, develops a progressive die break on the inner circle adjacent to the V and S of CAROLVS – this is shown in Figure 2 and 3. In the photographic study group, this flaw is only apparent when Ob B is paired with Rev 2 - all coins of Ob B paired with other reverse dies show no such defect. I have seen one example of a B-2 coin where this defect is either absent or perhaps present to a tiny amount. This provides strong evidence that B-2

pairings lies towards the *end* of the 1643 sixpence production, and that at this time only one die pair was being used.



Figure 2: The Ob B die break at an advanced stage



Figure 3: The progression of the die crack on Ob B. The left-hand image is taken from a B-5 coin before the crack appeared (all images except rightmost two are © Noonans Mayfair Ltd)

Period 11: Ob B finally breaks (perhaps it was the die flaw that caused this?) and sixpence production stops. It could (or indeed may) continue without the need to make any new dies, as both Ob C, and Rev 2 are available – but this pairing has not been observed.

Period 12: In 1644, sixpence production resumes, presumably for a short time only. Ob C is now the only available obverse die, and the change of year requires a new reverse die. Due to the limited requirement, a 1644 groat reverse die is used instead of preparing a new sixpence die.

This proposed chronology explains all observed die pairings, and all missing potential pairings. Is an alternative chronology possible? I would be interested to hear of any opinions. Finally, an appeal is made to help confirm or dispel the theories in this note. Input on these points would be of particular interest:

- The existence of Morrieson's two unconfirmed dies;
- Die combinations that are not listed in Table 1 - in particular, an example of C-2 would be of interest with reference to 'Period 11';
- A 1643 Ob B coin displaying the die crack, combined with a reverse die other than Rev 2.

Update February 2024: A further search has revealed an example of the C-2 die combination sought above⁸. This discovery adds further credence to the proposed chronology, and allows the following revision to the penultimate section:

Period 11: Ob B finally breaks (perhaps it was the die flaw that caused this?). Ob C, having been unused since 'Period 5', is returned to service, coupled with Rev 2. The C-2 pairing is used for the remainder of the 1643 dated sixpence issue.

Acknowledgement:

Many thanks to Peter Preston-Morley of Noonans for the kind permission to use their images.



⁸ Seaby Coin and Medal Bulletin, Feb 1973, item 6452