

# A Die Study of Victorian Shillings Dated 1878

## Gary Oddie

### Introduction

The year 1878 is the penultimate for which die numbers were used on the shillings and it is clear that the process of adding the numbers was becoming less precise. Several of the die numbers are very weakly entered on the die, and others have been entered two, three or more times.

As early as 1979 it had been pointed out that the die numbers on the 1878 shillings were not a simple sequence with the two types Obv. 5 and Obv. 6.<sup>(1)</sup> The concept of a simple transition and linear sequence of die numbers persists in some more recent catalogues.<sup>(2,3)</sup>

Also in 1979 a few die numbers didn't make sense and were suggesting that certain numbers were duplicated. What was then considered to be a die number 32 with a tiny 2 in the lower loop of the date digit 8 has subsequently been identified as a second variety of die number 52. As will be seen below there are two reverse dies each bearing numbers 49-52, and there are three reverse dies for die number 53. A probable second die for 54 is included for completeness, but this remains to be validated, and might be a 34.

The following table summarises the known die numbers for the shillings of 1878.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	<b>18</b>	19
20	21	<b>22</b>	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	<b>32</b>	33	<b>34</b>	35	36	37	38	39
40	<b>41</b>	42	<b>43</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>45</b>	46	47	48	49 ×2
50 ×2	51 ×2	52 ×2	53 ×3	54 ×2	55	56	57	<b>58</b>	59
60	<b>61</b>	62	63	<b>64</b>	65	66	67	68	69
		<b>72</b>	73	74	75	76		<i>78</i>	
				<i>84</i>			<i>87</i>		

**Table 1.** Die numbers on shillings dated 1878. Black – illustrated, Red known elsewhere.  
Bold – extremely rare, Blue italic – not confirmed, probably misreadings.

Thus there is a complete run of die of numbers 1-69, and another block 72-76. Combined with a run of multiple dies 49-54, this is pointing to the die numbers being created in batches of about five or six at a time. A closer inspection of the shape of the last two date digits (7 and 8) and the punches used for the individual die numbers might be able to clarify and validate this.

### Acknowledgements

It would be usual for the acknowledgements to appear at the end of the publication. However, a catalogue such as this can only be attempted with the help of many people who have avidly collected and researched these little die numbers for many years, spending many hours looking closely at tens of thousands of coins. In no particular order the following are thanked for their willingness to share their knowledge and images: Ron Stafford, David Morley, David Price, Malcolm Wootton, and Steve Bentley.

Additionally, the members of the Shilling Appreciation Society group on Facebook who have made a significant contribution and sent images ranging from single pieces to almost complete sets of die numbers: Nadeem Baqai, Andrew Wide, Dave Morey, Ruslan Moroz, John Lambert, and Ian Eden.

The highest grade coins are not necessarily the most photogenic and there are varying standards of photography, especially images found on eBay and the internet. For the die numbers, a well taken image of a coin in fair condition is often better than an image of a badly illuminated high grade coin. In all cases the best image (in many cases the only available image) has been used.

## Obverse Die Variations

The portrait of Victoria changes very slightly on the shillings during 1878. This is not a simple linear transition, that would be easily identifiable in the die numbers (for example Obv.5 with dn 1-10 and Obv.6 with dn 11-end).

The terminology for the portrait varies with author/catalogue and the original ESC listed all 1878 shillings to be type A6.<sup>(2)</sup> The latest ESC divides the 1878 shillings into two groups: type A6 for dn 1-42 and A7 for dn 44-84.<sup>(3)</sup> The situation with the shillings of 1878 is not so simple.

For this catalogue of 1878 shillings, Victoria's portrait will be classified according to Peter Davies' excellent book *British Silver Coins Since 1816*.<sup>(4)</sup> The shillings of 1878 can be found with Obverse 5 and Obverse 6, always paired with Reverse type B. The differences are subtle, and some of them are described in the images below. These details usually remain visible even on the most worn specimens.



### 5B

single tress in profile  
hanging curls fuller  
hair ends in hooked loose end  
I's have short serifs



### 6B

double tress visible in profile,  
hanging curls have clear hole  
hair ends in closed loop  
(sometimes weak)  
I's have long serifs



From the die numbers presented in the catalogue below it appears that there was an attempt to stop using Obv. 5 after die number 10 and that Obv. 6 was already in use at that point.

However, Obv. 5 dies were brought back into service for dn 35, 38, 42 and 53. The reported proof of Obv. 5 dn 36 probably doesn't exist and is likely an Obv. 6, which has been seen but was miscatalogued. A third reverse die 53 is paired with a hybrid Obv. 5 where the head is that of type 5B, but the I's have long serifs

In the following catalogue coins with Obv. 5 appear on the left and Obv. 6 on the right. Outlined circles and rectangles indicate known pieces, but no illustrations were available at the time of writing. Notes have been added in small text adjacent to the relevant images. Extra images have been added to help the identification of difficult pieces.

Die numbers that include 3's and 5's and 8's and 6's can be very problematic to identify. If any readers can provide upgraded images, they will be gratefully received, especially if they lead to a change of attribution.

## The Catalogue

Images with a small **F** are photographs of foil rubbings of pieces in the Ron Stafford collection. Sources of other images will be found at the end of the catalogue.

1878-1



5B

1878-2



6B

1878-3



5B

1878-4



6B

1878-5



5B



6B

1878-6



6B

1878-7



5B



6B

1878-8



5B

1878-9



5B

1878-10



6B

1878-11



6B

1878-12



6B

1878-13



6B

1878-14



6B

1878-15



6B

1878-16



6B

1878-17



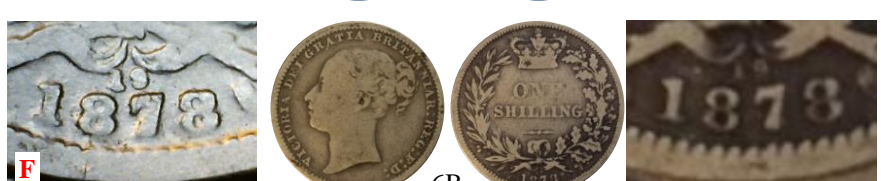
6B

1878-18



David Morley

1878-19



6B

1878-20



1878-21



1878-22

Weak second 2



1878-23



1878-24



1878-25



1878-26

Double entered 6 over 6



1878-27



1878-28



1878-29



1878-30



6B

1878-31



6B

1878-32



F

6B

F

F

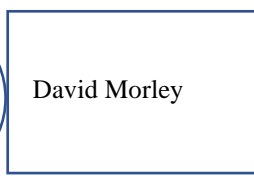
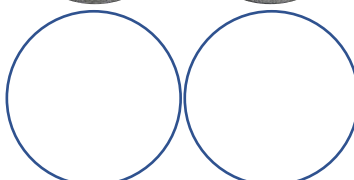
1878-33



F

6B

1878-34

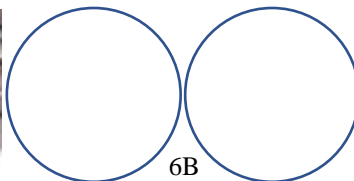


David Morley

1878-35



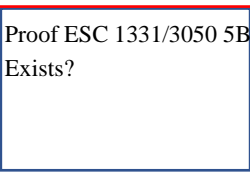
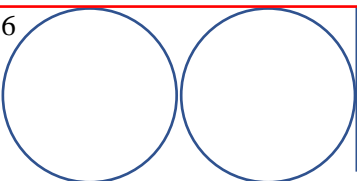
5B



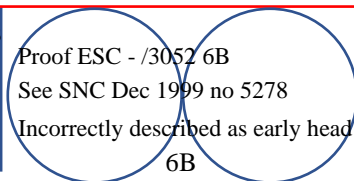
6B



1878-36



Proof ESC 1331/3050 5B  
Exists?



Proof ESC - /3052 6B  
See SNC Dec 1999 no 5278  
Incorrectly described as early head

6B



6B



1878-37



6B

1878-38



5B



1878-39



1878-40



1878-41 Weak diagonal on 4



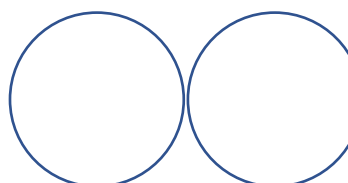
1878-42



1878-43



1878-44



1878-45



1878-46

Double entered 4 over 4. Wears to look very odd, but all so far from same die.



1878-47

Double entered 4 over 4




1878-48



1878-49

Rev die t1  
7 slightly to right of bead  
4 and 9 farther from ribbon

Rev die t2  
7 slightly to left of bead  
4 and 9 closer to ribbon  
9 entered over higher 9




6B

1878-50

Rev die t1  
5 over lower 5  
5 long top bar  
5 large lower loop ends in curl

Rev die t2  
5 more upright  
5 short top bar  
5 small lower loop ends in point




6B

1878-51

Rev die t1  
7 aligns to bead  
5 closer to ribbon

Rev die t2  
7 aligns to gap  
5 larger and farther from ribbon




Small 2 in lower loop of 8 – Coin News Oct 1979 p71

6B

1878-52

Rev die t1  
8 aligns to gap  
5 farther from 8 and farther right  
Base of 2 weak or missing

Rev die t2  
8 aligns to bead  
5 closer to 8 and farther left  
Full 2 over much higher 2



6B



1878-53

Rev die t1  
7 aligns to gap  
53 closer to 8 and 7  
7 serif aligns middle of 3



Rev die t2  
7 aligns to bead  
53 closer to ribbon  
7 serif aligns left of 3



Rev die t3  
7 aligns to right of bead  
53 farther to left  
7 serif aligns right of 3

This is a hybrid obv. die:  
The head is the old type from 5B  
BUT the 1's have long serifs

1878-54

Rev die t1  
7 aligns to bead  
54 closer to ribbon



Rev die t2  
7 aligns to right of bead  
54 farther from ribbon  
No lower loop on 5, touches 8  
See also Mystery Nos at end



1878-55



1878-56



1878-57



1878-58 Though one of these has been recorded from an online auction, all pieces so far examined have been dn 56. A high grade 56 does look like a 58, but when worn becomes more obviously a 6. The exact location of the die numbers relative to the ribbon and date digits is expected to be different for the 58 and 56.



1878-59

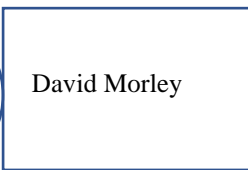
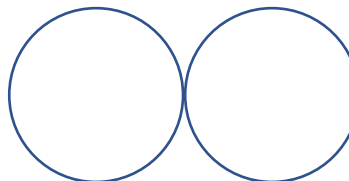


1878-60



6B

1878-61



1878-62

Four attempts to enter the 2, reaching from the ribbon to the 7. Often described as dn 64



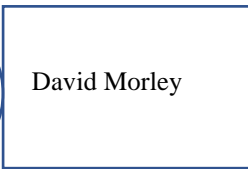
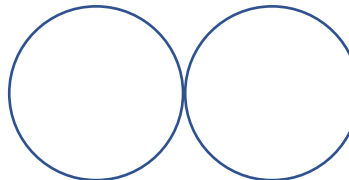
6B

1878-63



6B

1878-64



1878-65

Double entered 1 over 1 in date



6B

1878-66



6B

1878-67



6B

1878-68



6B

1878-69

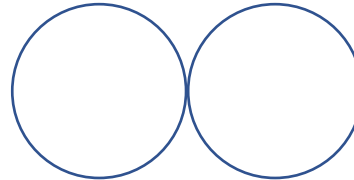


6B

1878-70 Not known

1878-71 Not known

1878-72 dn 7 entered over a much higher 7 in ribbon. dn 2 also entered over a higher 2.



1878-73



6B



1878-74 Large S in SHIL



6B



1878-75 Large S in SHIL



6B



1878-76 Large S in SHIL



6B



1878-77 Not known

1878-78 Not confirmed and likely a misreading – see mystery numbers at end.

1878-79 Not known

1878-80	Not known
1878-81	Not known
1878-82	Not known
1878-83	Not known
1878-84	Not confirmed and likely a misreading <sup>(3)</sup>
1878-85	Not known
1878-86	Not known
1878-87	Reported, but later confirmed as a misreading of 67

## Mystery Numbers

At a first glance a 13 or 15 with blocked serifs on the 1. However for 13 and 15 the 1 is higher and touches the ribbon.

Working through other possibilities – this is a match for die 53 type 1.

This is yet another specimen of dn 54, given above as type t2. The reading of the dn is in some doubt and it may turn out to be a dn 34 for which an image has yet to be found. All images of this variety seen have graded fair at best. An example in EF should reveal the shape of the top of the first digit – 5 or 3.



6B



F

6B

F

F

This was thought to be a 55, but doesn't look at all like the one in the main catalogue. However, the relative positions of the two die numbers relative to the ribbon and 8 and 7 of the date match a die 66 where also the top edge of the 7 aligns to the middle of the upper loop of the 8 in the date (high 8).



This was originally considered to be a die 78.

First dn digit definitely a 7

Not dn 73 or 76 as 7 of date points to gap

– on dn 73, 76 the 7 points to bead

That leaves a 75 or 78.

Overlaying this close up onto an obvious high grade 75 and varying the transparency of the image shows that this is a match for a 75.

Though the top left of 2<sup>nd</sup> digit of the dn is rounded, and the top right appears closed – this must be die damage or wear on the coin itself.

Looking at the variability of the positions of the date digits and die number digits on the other pieces, the probability of the die sinker creating a 78 with such a close match to a 75 is slim at best.



6B

## Sources of Images and Acknowledgements

The following are thanked for the use of their images:

[001]	www	[025]	eBay	[049 t1]	AW	[066]	DM2
[002]	DP	[026]	DP	[049 t2]	DM2	[067]	DP
[003]	Noonans	[027]	DP	[050 t1]	LCA	[068]	Noonans
[004]	KB Coins	[028]	www	[050 t2]	DM2	[069]	DP
[005]	DM2, SB	[029]	eBay	[051 t1]	SB		
[006]	DP	[030]	DM2	[051 t2]	www		
[007]	LCA + LCA	[031]	GO	[052 t1]	RS	[072]	DM1 via RS
[008]	eBay	[032]	RS	[052 t2]	SB	[073]	DM2
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[010]	LCA	[034]		[053 t2]	RS	[075]	Kos Coins
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Thanks are due to David Price (DP), David Morley (DM1), David Morey (DM2), Ron Stafford (RS), Andrew Wide (AW), Steve Bentley (SB), London Coin Auctions (LCA), and Noble Numismatic Australia (Noble).

## Conclusions

This is a first attempt to illustrate all of the die numbers for the shillings of 1878. There is no simple transition from types 5B to 6B, and from die numbers 49-54 there are multiple dies with the same die number. Combined with the observation that many of the die numbers are weakly or badly entered into the dies, these all confirm that the die numbers were being applied less rigorously and their intended original use (identifying faulty dies) was no longer the prime importance. At this stage the die numbers were probably just an anachronism, serving no useful purpose and they would cease to be applied early in 1879.

There may be errors in the above catalogue, especially with the problematic 3's and 5's, but an illustration can always be improved and reconsidered, whereas the historical lists of numbers cannot be checked or refuted.

## References

- (1) R. Stafford. The Die Number Experiment, Part 2 (The shilling series). *Coin Monthly*, October 1979, pp65-76.
- (2) P.A. Rayner. *English Silver Coinage Since 1649*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Seaby, 1992.
- (3) M. Bull. *English Silver Coinage Since 1649*. Fully revised 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Spink, 2015.
- (4) P.J. Davies. *British Silver Coins Since 1816*. 1982.

