



# 'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

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email: amdawson@numsoc.net

*What have you all been up to? Any chat, photos, news, recent acquisitions etc. by members for future issues please!*

## COINS AND CHRISTMAS

The link between coins and the celebration of Christmas goes back many centuries. First, the age-old tradition of putting a freshly minted coin, or later a bag of foil-covered chocolate coins in children's stockings has its roots back as early as the 4th century A.D.

St. Nicholas of Myra, a 4th century Roman saint, was renowned for his habit of secret gift-giving to the poor. One apocryphal story about the saint's altruistic endeavours concerns the three daughters of an impoverished nobleman. Having lost both his wife and his wealth the nobleman was forced to live in a peasant's hovel and was struggling to even feed his three daughters. When the girls reached a marriageable age they stood little chance of attracting a suitable husband without a substantial dowry. When St. Nicholas heard of the man's dilemma he visited the hovel and found the three girls had hung their stockings above the fire to dry overnight. The following night he returned and secretly placed a bag of silver coins in the eldest girl's stocking. This was repeated until the third night when he was discovered. St. Nicholas made the man swear to keep this charitable deed a secret, but people being people, word of it soon got out. Before long everyone was hanging their stockings over the fire in the hope of a benevolent reward!



*The silver threepence is still the coin of choice for the Christmas pudding custom*

Another Christmas tradition concerning coins is the putting of small silver coins in the plum pudding. This can be traced back to at least the 13th century when a dried pea would be stirred into the pudding mix. The fortunate person who found the pea (or choked on it!) was then crowned 'King or Queen for the day'. Later the custom changed to putting a small silver coin, such as a hammered farthing or halfpenny in the mixture. This gave rise to the belief that whoever found the coin would enjoy wealth and happiness throughout the coming year. In the mid 17th century the Puritans sought to have Christmas plum pudding banned, as it was deemed too rich and decadent for a Puritan's austere lifestyle. By the 19th century all Christmas traditions were being actively encouraged by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, no more so than the giving of festive coins. Silver threepences were the then coins of choice for insertion into Christmas puddings and this lasted well into the 20th century, followed by sixpences when the tiny silver threepence was no longer available. After decimalization the smallest silver looking coin was the five-penny piece, and these had to suffice. This particular Christmas/numismatic tradition is still widely upheld today.

The 'wreath crowns' of the 20th century were made specifically to be used as gifts or keepsakes. Early in the century it had been another tradition to give a silver crown as a special gift at Christmas, but few had been in circulation since Victorian times. Despite the onset of the Great Depression the Royal Mint bowed to public demand for crowns, mainly to be used as Christmas presents, and began minting limited numbers. At the Depression's height in 1932 surprisingly the demand was till there, so the Mint had a limited striking late in that year, with a mintage figure of just 2,395. The new crowns were soon snapped up by the public and, as expected, many were then given as special gifts.

Both traditions and folklore have an extremely long life, yet their roots and origins in society are all too often forgotten. Numismatics and Christmas celebrations have been inextricably linked for over 1600 years and look set to continue.

## LOW VALUE UK MERCHANT COUNTERMARKS ON SILVER COINS

Eric Hodge

In the series of UK Merchant countermarks (1780-1830) the majority of examples are on Spanish-American 8 Reales. There are, however, three issues on French half écus and even one issuer using cut 8 Reales.



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.23

The three countermarks on French half écus are Ballindalloch Cotton Work (showing a cotton bale) (Fig. 1), Adelphi Cotton Work (showing a cotton bale) (Fig. 2) and Payable at Lanark Mills \* (showing 2/6 plus an additional mark in the shape of a D) (Fig. 3). They are all believed to have been issued at 2/6, Lanark Mills because that value is shown on the countermark and Adelphi because contemporary accounting ledgers have been discovered that indicate that issue value. It is, therefore, assumed that the Ballindalloch issue is also 2/6 until documentation proves otherwise. In the case of Lanark Mills there are examples known with countermark value 2/6 without the additional D mark. Maybe this would indicate two issues separated by a number of years. Where the host dates are discernible on the much worn French coins they date from the 1750's and earlier. Thus the host coins are of little help in determining the tokens' dates of issue, and neither is the price of dollars on the bullion market.

The cut 8 Reales mentioned above was issued by Rothsay Cotton Mills. They are of various shapes and values. The first half cut countermark is at 2/4 in a rectangle. (Fig. 4) shows what is assumed to be the following issue of 2/6 over 2/4 in a rectangle, whereas (Fig. 5) shows the same value of 2/6 but this time in an oval. This type seems to be an improvement style-wise to the 2/6 in rectangle and is, therefore, assumed to be a later issue. (Fig. 6) is different again, this time being a one third cut with a countermarked value of 1/8. It is difficult to allocate these types to any particular time period of issue because firstly the host coin date is not clear and secondly, being cut, the section will not have the proportionate amount of silver, relevant to a complete 8 Reales.



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

A detailed article on these cut issues was published on the British Numismatic Society Blog site ([britnumsoc.blog](http://britnumsoc.blog)). If you click on the yellow button marked INDEX and page down to TOKENS it is listed as 'Cut 8 Reales Countermarked by Rothsay Mills'.

In these 'Lockdown' times this source of brief articles can be a real boost to the moral giving a huge amount of detail, covering all aspects of numismatics in an easily accessible format. Well worth a look.



## YET ANOTHER RARE BARONIAL COIN FOUND

An extremely rare silver penny of Baron Eustace Fitzjohn, a twelfth century powerful Yorkshire nobleman, has been discovered by a metal detectorist from Leeds. Rob Brown was searching a stubble field near Pickering in North Yorkshire when he found the coin at a depth of just two inches. The obverse of the coin depicts a helmeted knight holding a sword, surrounded by the inscription EVSTACIVS. The reverse of the coin is a cross within a quatrefoil with the legend EBOR ACIT DEFT.

This fascinating piece of our history was offered at auction by Dix Noonan Webb, the Mayfair auctioneers, on Tuesday November 3rd. and was knocked down for an incredible £24,000 against a pre sale top estimate of £15,000.

## COIN QUIZ No.8

- QUESTION 1.** Where was 'Irish Rebel Money' made?  
**QUESTION 2.** Which Roman emperor features on a 'Tribute Penny'?  
**QUESTION 3.** Where in York was its Civil War coinage struck?  
**QUESTION 4.** Who designed and engraved the famous 'Reddite' crown?  
**QUESTION 5.** What is a 'Pavilion d'Or' coin?  
**QUESTION 6.** What coin used to be referred to as 'First Brass'?  
**QUESTION 7.** What does V.O.C. in monogram form signify on a coin?  
**QUESTION 8.** What date is the 'Northumberland' shilling of George III?

### ANSWERS (Quiz No.7)

- Q1. A 'bale mark' is a company's logo or identity stamp, also known as a 'chop' after the Hindi word 'chap' which means stamp.  
 Q2. The heraldic term 'triquetra' is used to indicate three symmetrical interlaced shields in a coin's design.  
 Q3. Bullet Money is an old form of Siamese gold and silver currency in the form of a bullet or musket ball. Valued in multiples of a 'tical'.  
 Q4. The Tudor game of 'shovel-board' was usually played using a fine silver issue shilling of Edward VI.  
 Q5. The Royal Num. Soc. was founded in 1836 as the Numismatic Society of London. It was granted Royal status in 1904.  
 Q6. The Indian 'Ramatanka' or temple token depicts Hanuman the monkey king.  
 Q7. The British Num. Soc. was founded in 1903 with only three members. It now has over 500.  
 Q8. The mystery singer is the Jamaican musician Bob Marley (1945-1981)  
 Q9. Both the obverse and reverse of the 1821 and 1822 crowns were designed and engraved by Benedetto Pistrucci (1783-1855)



**QUESTION 9.**  
 Can you name this silver crown from the image?



## A TALE OF FIVE FARTHINGS

Phil Turner

When my father entered our family tree onto a couple of hundred index cards he included a thumbnail sketch of each person. The information on all the cards is quite informative – but there is only one mention of coins.

Charles Phillips Turner, my grandfather, was born in 1884 in Macclesfield and died in 1941 in St. Helens. He was manager of the Boston, Lincolnshire branch of Currys, the electrical retailer, from 1925 to 1935. Farthings at that time were already becoming quite scarce in change, which prompted a Boston Market trader to make the following unusual offer of 'a pair of shoes to any gent with five farthings' – Charlie got his shoes! He paid just 11/4d (approximately 0.5 decimal pence in today's money).

So, it would appear that the humble farthing was already uncommon and in short supply as early as the 1930s. The denomination was finally demonetised in 1960 as its purchasing power had diminished considerably over the course of the first half of the 20th century. Although I can still remember buying a loaf of bread in the early 1950s for tenpence threefarthings (103/4d) and some sweets were still being sold at four for a penny, or singly at a farthing each.

After failed attempts to introduce a round silver farthing in 1222 during the reign of Henry III, it was in the reign of Edward I in the late 13th century that the denomination finally entered general circulation. Prior to that, small change in the form of halfpennies and farthings (OE *feourthlings*) had been obtained by cutting a silver penny into halves or quarters. By the reign of James I base metal farthing tokens were issued under licence. Over the centuries currency farthings have been struck in fine silver, debased silver, copper, bronze and tin. They have also varied considerably in size, from the impossibly tiny hammered coin (literally a farthing's worth of silver) to the more robust copper issues from Matthew Boulton's Soho Mint in the reign of George III.



'Short-cross' silver farthing of Henry III

Edward I (c.1278) farthing (earliest type)

George III 1799 'Soho' copper farthing

As a denomination the coins have been both welcomed and despised in almost equal measure. For the poor they came as much needed small change, whereas further up in society it became practice to leave just a farthing tip as a sign of having received bad service. We don't often appreciate things until they've gone and the passing of the little farthing, the smallest coin in circulation, was tinged with a fair amount of nostalgic sadness after a lifespan of nearly 700 years.

## BNS LECTURES BEGIN ON ZOOM

The British Numismatic Society is to begin giving lectures on the internet via 'Zoom'. This is an audio and video conferencing platform, the app for which can be downloaded from the Zoom website. The first lecture being by Professor Joanna Story on *England and the Continent in the Age of Charlemagne: money, manuscripts and nobility*. The next on-line lecture was scheduled for November 17th when Jonathan Callaway gave a presentation on *The Evolution of Irish Paper Money 1919 to 1929*. BNS members wishing to view this and subsequent lectures have to register first, then they are sent log-in details by email. Capacity for these Zoom lectures is strictly limited and members are requested to register well in advance.



## USELESS COIN FACTS No.8

**Tulips as currency?** Holland is well known for its growing and export of tulips throughout the world. In the 1600s the world experienced one of its first major financial bubbles in the form of *Tulipmania*. The phenomenon started about 1624, reaching its peak between 1636 and 1637. During this time, the price of tulips rose to ridiculous heights. This was fuelled by supply and demand, as it takes roughly seven years for a tulip to grow to maturity. The beauty of the flower, originally from Turkey, was unlike other European flowers and soon became a status symbol. At its height the value of some single tulip bulbs exceeded ten times a craftsman's annual wage. Bank loans and debts were paid off in tulips instead of cash, but like all such financial bubbles – it burst in 1637 and investors and institutions lost heavily – Better to have stuck to coins!

## A HAMMERED SOVEREIGN

Peter Thompson

The things our members get up to in their spare time has been an interesting topic in the last few issues of the Society's 'Lockdown Newsletter'. We all of course have interests other than coins but it wasn't until I swallowed the anchor and retired that I thought I might have a little time to devote to something else. This was in 2006 and the very next year our local Library Service agreed to open a new branch attached to a school and community centre not far from my front door.

Volunteers were asked for and I recklessly put up my hand. The next few years were an interesting involvement in library work and Sure Start activities and I learnt that running such a place was far more complicated than running a ship. It was there that I reached the apogee of my career being asked to stand in for Father Christmas - a prospect that terrified me more than a force ten storm warning in the Atlantic. In the event it was considerably more pleasant and became one of my regular duties. When the library branch was downsized I moved on to Wigan Archives where volunteers do a variety of work on extensive records that stretch back, in one or two cases, to the 13th century. My task there is to assist in transcribing 19th century Quarter Sessions records so that they can eventually go on to the Ancestry Site. These of course record the minor peccadilloes of the day and are a constant reminder that human nature doesn't change. Breaches of the peace, feloniously stealing a chicken and driving recklessly in a souped up phaeton all have their modern counterparts and some of the misdemeanours naturally involve money.

In July 1868 one such case involved Boris Johnson (names have been changed to protect the innocent) who had just been paid off from a spell of work on the railway. He had received a sovereign, four half-crowns and two shillings in silver and had immediately adjourned to the tap room of the Crofters Arms in Hallgate to celebrate and relax. Becoming a little unwell Boris left his friends and went to lie down in the snug where he fell fast asleep, the sovereign and four half-crowns still in his pocket. When he awoke he was dismayed to find that his money was gone and immediately suspected one of his party of the theft. A constable was called and Maggie May was duly taken away to the lockup. Reluctant to empty her pockets a search by the Police Inspector's daughter produced a sovereign and four half-crowns which Maggie claimed belonged to her husband. At Petty Sessions Boris pointed out that his sovereign (held as evidence) had a dent in it as if hit by a hammer and the game was up. Maggie wisely pleaded guilty and received one month hard labour at Kirkdale House of Correction.

Identifying and reclaiming his sovereign in this way reminds us that even mass produced milled coins can often be individually identified from imperfections much less significant than a blow from a hammer. A scratch, a bump or a minor edge imperfection is sufficient.

## RABBITING ON ABOUT PAST COINS

David Regan

As a full time coin dealer for 36 years my days are now filled with callers asking if their Peter Rabbit 50 pence, with three and a half whiskers is really worth a thousand pounds as stated on the internet? Are 1967 pennies extremely rare? I long for the days when my customers bought coins for their historic or artistic merits. The coin world is filled with ancient and medieval items, many of them beautiful and affordable. Greek and Roman coppers, silver denarii and many early English coins are available and within most people's price ranges. Foreign coins, many from countries that have changed their names or been absorbed by larger states can also be obtained, even on a low budget.



Peter Rabbit 50 pence – and for comparison an as of Vespasian

When I look at a Roman denarius of Vespasian, 69 to 79AD, I see a man of great strength who played a major role in the invasion of Britain, had the upper hand in many eastern conflicts and was involved in the building of the Colosseum in Rome. I can even forgive him for introducing payments to use the public toilets in Rome. Youngsters should be encouraged in this wonderful hobby of ours but *please* teach them to appreciate the past.

## COIN FAIR UNCERTAINTY

It looks increasingly likely that the ever popular York Coin Fair, scheduled for mid January 2021 will be cancelled, due to the unprecedented spread of Coronavirus and the latest Government restrictions. The monthly Midland Coin Fair has also fallen victim to the present circumstances, as has the monthly Wakefield Coin Fair. This leaves collectors in the north of England without any regular fairs to attend. Of course, auction houses are still operating on-line as are a multitude of eBay dealers. But this is not quite the same as holding a coin in the hand and examining it carefully before deciding whether or not to buy. Buying over the internet doesn't have the same intimacy as a face to face deal between seller and buyer. Hopefully things will change in the near future.

*'If I sat on the couch all day and didn't go out, I was called a Lazy bas\*\*\*d – Now they call me a responsible adult'*

*'God, please reboot the year 2020 – it appears to have a virus'*

## A FIRST? - MAYBE NOT

Alan Dawson

In 1971 the Royal Mint announced that the old ten shilling note was to be replaced by a decimal 50 pence piece. The statement proclaimed that this would be the first heptagonal currency coin in Britain, and indeed the world. But was it?

Henry II's first issue, the so-called 'Tealby' silver pennies were current in England between 1158 and 1180. The series is renowned for its poor striking and irregular flans and some of the 31 mints involved in producing the coins show a marked proclivity for asymmetrical flans. One such provincial mint, with a remarkably high output, was Ipswich. Coins from this mint turn up quite regularly but are rarely on a round flan. The blanks were sheered to conform to weight of silver alone, regardless of their resulting shape and many are either octagonal or heptagonal. So, The Royal Mint's claim that the fifty pence piece was the first seven-sided coin is not quite true. These oddly-shaped hammered pennies from nearly 830 years ago were certainly official currency in England and as such must claim the title for being the *First Heptagonal Coin*. I rest my case.



Heptagonal Henry II Tealby penny of Ipswich mint

Heptagonal decimal 50 pence piece

Charles I 'rose' farthing with brass wedge

Bi-metallic decimal £2 piece

We are now quite used to our decimal £2 and £1 bimetallic coins, when at first they seemed quite strange and were heralded as being innovative inasmuch as the joining of two metals would prove to be a deterrent to would be forgers. Looking back over the history of British coinage this is actually nothing new. In the reign of Charles I the familiar little copper 'rose' farthings mostly have a brass wedge inserted in the flan, but hardly noticeable when toned. The tin halfpennies and farthings of James II and William & Mary have a copper plug in the centre; seen as a security device in both cases. In more modern times Italy could be credited with issuing the first truly bi-metallic coins back in 1982 with the 500 lira. This particular coin does have one legitimate claim as a 'first' and that is being the first coin in the world to have the denomination struck in Braille. Over the centuries many pattern and trial coins have often employed the use of two metals but the concept was never taken up by the minting authorities. One familiar example is the tiny pattern pennies produced by the British medalist Joseph Moore in the 1830s and 1840s. This was a proposal to replace the cumbersome large copper pennies in circulation with a small bi-metallic equivalent. They were not legal tender but Moore's rather novel little coins were readily accepted at face value by many merchants. The Royal Mint rejected the idea and instead opted instead for bronze pennies in 1860.

Delving into the history of numismatics often reveals that nothing is actually new. Today's coins may be more uniform and consistent in appearance and weight, but any perceived innovation was probably tried, tested and ultimately rejected centuries before.

## POUND STERLING or MARK STERLING?

Chris Leather

**Think of the mark** as a currency unit and you immediately think of Germany, with its Reichsmarks and Deutsche Marks, but had it not been for the vagaries of history we would today be calculating our money in Marks Sterling rather than Pounds Sterling.

No, this has nothing whatever to do with wars and possible conquests. We are justifiably proud that our currency has continued more or less unchanged since Saxon times – but the qualification here must be ‘more or less.’ Starting with the late Saxons, a stable and reliable currency of pennies was instituted. These pennies derived from the system of weights and measures introduced in the Frankish kingdom by Charlemagne, with a principal unit of a livre, or pound, comprising twelve ounces of fine silver, and being divided into twenty sols or sous, each of twelve deniers or pennies - hence £.s.d.

The system of Charlemagne was introduced into England by Offa and, as in its homeland, only the denier or penny was struck for circulation; the sol and the livre being units of account only. To begin with, the penny, being quite a large sum, did not really need multiples, and these did not appear as part of the currency until the time of Edward III when, in 1351, two- and four-penny pieces appeared. These set the pattern for much of the middle ages.

But there was an alternative system, originating in the Germanic lands. The mark, comprising eight ounces of fine silver, was divided up into 160 pfennigs, or pennies. Perhaps because England has always been a trading nation, both systems came into use – made easier by the fact that the denier and the pfennig were in the beginning interchangeable.

As trade grew, and inflation began to diminish the value of the pennies and pfennigs, it became necessary to think of larger amounts. In England, gold currency had begun in 1257 in the time of King Henry III with the gold penny of twenty silver pence, one eighth of a mark, but the face value and the gold value were out of line with each other, and the coin did not succeed. Much later, in 1344, there came another attempt to introduce gold coins; these were issued in both systems: the Double Florin of six shillings - and its fractions - and the Noble of six shillings and eight pence and its fractions. The noble with its odd value of eighty pence very conveniently represented both half of a mark, and a third of a pound, and the florins did not survive!

Use of marks and pounds as units of account continued in parallel until the sixteenth century, but when larger denominations were minted from 1489 – firstly as vanity pieces, then as trade coins for circulation – these were based on the shilling and pound system, and the production of mark-based coins ceased with the George Noble of King Henry VIII, struck during his second coinage 1526-1544.



Henry VII gold sovereign of 20 shillings

Although no longer represented by physical coins, the use of the mark as a money of account did continue for some while, rather in the same way that the use of guineas as money of account has continued to our own time, even though no physical guineas have been struck since 1813. From the magnificent sovereigns of Tudor times to the work-a-day bits of brass and whatever of our own day the pound has continued in an unbroken direct line, and it is a very satisfying historical factlet that, while the relative values may have changed, our pound today is the very same pound that Henry VII had in his pocket, while the mark has disappeared into the melting pot of Euroland.

## DON'T DISCARD THEM - DONATE THEM!

**Don't forget even worn** pre-decimal bronze coins, brass threepences, post 1946 cupro-nickel coins and even withdrawn decimal issues, such as the large 50p pieces, all have a value as scrap metal. As such they are a really good source of funding for charities such as Queenscourt Hospice or a charity of your choice. So please don't discard – donate!

## A TIME FOR CHA-CHA CHANGE

Jim Clayton

**There have not been many** coin meetings of any description recently, so I reckon it's definitely time for a change! My one faint glimmer of interest in this ocean of despair we are presently facing is that I have finally bid on, and won, a lovely early sovereign. It's my first purchase in quite a while. Not a perfect example, but these variants hardly ever are. It was the only lot in the auction I was interested in and, to compound things still further, the bidding started well above top estimate - don't you just hate it when that happens! When our meetings finally resume I'll bring the coin along to the next Recent Acquisitions evening – but be patient, it may be quite a wait.

On the subject of our 'other hobbies' my regular dancing lessons have taken quite a hammering recently, as well as other social events which have all gone the same way. However, recently lessons had tentatively re-started only to be stopped again with this second lockdown. I'll try to 'waltz' through this next bit. My dance partner is my wife Sharon and she is an angel on the dance floor. I started my dancing interest some six years ago after many years of relentless pressure from Sharon, no, too strong a word here, *persuasion* to take up the hobby. I would never have imagined what a good idea it actually turned out to be! It's a great way to find new friends and has opened up a great new social calendar I never thought would have been possible. It's good for keeping both mind and body active, and with all the technicalities of step structure and how one action achieves (hopefully) a suitable reaction between lead and follower, it can be quite challenging.

The graceful ballroom disciplines are Sharon's preferred choice of dance but for me it is the dramatic Latin variants. We both really do enjoy the jive. Yet another completely unexpected benefit of taking this up is the fitness element. I had always been plagued with a bad back following a mining accident when I was working 'down't pit' and many years younger.

Surprisingly however, almost at the same time as taking to the floorboards, my back troubles oddly disappeared. Discussing this with my GP he informed me it probably wasn't a coincidence and recommended I continue. Having said all that, I have now gone from typically three nights a week out 'cutting some moves' to very close to zero and not venturing out at all. This virus has been a bit of a *cha-cha*-challenge to say the least!



Strictly Sharon and Jim in mid Argentine Tango

We certainly need a *quick step* change of direction, although I'm sure the pendulum will swing around for us all soon. We coin collectors and buffs really need to meet up again and I only hope the Eagle & Child pub survives these desperate times. Sometimes you just have to *Rock and Roll* with it! This really is an odd world that we live in, with the stock market and coins being no exception. Every time someone buys, another one sells, and they both think they're being smart! I'll finish with a note from Sharon – "*Jim now has more pairs of dance shoes than me – and with more sparkle!*"

## LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEW YEAR

**We mustn't get too downhearted** but it's sometimes difficult to be optimistic about what the future might hold. With the current social restrictions in place and the seemingly relentless spread of the virus we'll all be glad to see the back of 2020. Recent news could mean the New Year will see a proven and thoroughly tested vaccine rolled out across our nation, which will herald a gradual return to better times. The speakers, whose talks we would have enjoyed at our meetings this year, have all kindly agreed to be re-booked once things are running smoothly again. Thanks to Norman, the Society is financially secure and now having passed the 50 year threshold, albeit without celebrations, the future of the Society should be bright. In the meantime, try to put worries and anxieties behind you and enjoy a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year one and all – and keep collecting coins!

The next 'Lockdown Newsletter' will be the January 2021 issue