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BRITISH COINS H 159

Replica King Cnut Penny (1) and Replica King Harold I Penny (2)



The first copper penny was minted in 1797 - before that date pennies were always made of silver. The first copper farthings were made during the reign of James I (1603-1625), but copper coins of any kind were rare until the eighteenth century.

The roots of the English penny go back to Roman times. Before decimalisation in 1971, the abbreviation for penny was a letter d, rather than the letter p, as it is today. The d. stood for denarius, which was originally a Roman silver coin.

The Anglo-Saxons called these coins *sceattas*, which meant wealth, or treasure. Gradually the term penny became more widely used, although the origins of the word are obscure.

Many Anglo-Saxon pennies feature a cross as part of the reverse design, and this roughly coincides with the British conversion to Christianity. From 978 King Eadgar's pennies introduced the king's head as the main obverse design, a feature which had been common on many Roman issues. In the reign of Aethelred II (reigned 978-1016), the cross was extended to the edge of some coins, largely as a counter-measure against clipping or filing the edges. This device continued, and was used also on other denominations, until the reign of Charles I (1625-49), when a beaded circle was used for a similar purpose, and eventually milled coinage with milled or lettered edges made the long cross redundant.

Cnut (sometimes called Canute) was King of England from 1016 until 1035. He was the son of King Swegn Forkbeard of Denmark. Cnut also became King of Denmark and Norway. Harold I (sometimes called Harold Harefoot) was the son of Cnut and his first wife, Elfgifu. He reigned from 1035 to 1040.

Henry I Penny (3)



During the Anglo-Saxon and early medieval period there were many mints scattered around the country. During the reign of William the Conqueror there were nearly seventy. This sometimes meant the quality of the coins produced was poor and by the second half of the thirteenth century the issue of coinage had been centralized at London and Canterbury (though occasionally mints in other towns were opened for brief periods). Not that this could stop people clipping bits of silver off the edge of pennies.

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In the early part of Henry III's reign all the coins minted featured short-crosses on the reverse. However, in 1247 a fresh coinage was ordered in which the cross was extended to the edge of the coin to prevent the spoiling of coins. The Henry III penny in this box is of this kind.

Already at this early date another problem was causing problems the absence of coins with a low value. Small-scale transactions were impossible if the coins were made of a precious metal like silver. Henry III produced both silver ha'pennies and farthings, but these coins are very rare, which suggests few were made. To get round this shortage people often cut silver pennies into pieces. Often the coins would be cut along the lines of the cross. A ha'penny was, in common practice, literally a half of a penny. Similarly a farthing was a fourth-ing - a piece of a penny which had been cut into quarters. Cut ha'pennies and farthings are common in the thirteenth century, being one hundred times commoner than in the late Anglo-Saxon times.

Elizabeth I Sixpence (4)



Elizabeth's reign was notable for the large number of different denominations issued, from gold crowns to a three-farthing piece, which was introduced to provide change if a penny was tendered for a farthing purchase. The Elizabethan sixpence in this box dates from 1567. This was the year in which Mary Stuart of Scotland was forced to abdicate and in doing so freed Elizabeth from the threat of a Roman Catholic rival on her northern frontier.

Charles II Groat (5)



A groat is worth four pence. This Charles II groat dates from 1683. It is made of silver. Several of King Charles II's coins use the interlinked C monogram, which can be seen on the reverse of this example. Pennies had a single C, two-pennies had two, three pences had three and groats had four.

William III Shilling (6)



This coin is badly worn, but it is probably a William III shilling from around 1697. During the reign of William III (1694-1702) a great recoinage was undertaken to replace the hammered silver that made up most of the coinage in circulation, much of it being clipped and badly worn. This recoinage began in 1696. Branch mints were opened in several provincial towns to help with this procedure. Coins made in thee mints are stamped with an identification letter below the bust of the King. Almost three-quarters of the coins were made at the Tower mint, in London, and these coins, like this example, bear no mint letter.

Queen Anne Sixpence (7)
The Queen Anne sixpence dates from 1711. After the Act of Union in 1707, which unified the kingdoms of England and Scotland, the rampant Scotch lion and the three English lions were united on two of the shields on the reverse.



William IV Shilling (8)
This coin was issued in 1834.



William III Halfpenny (9)
The first copper halfpenny was minted in 1672 during the reign of Charles II. This example dates from about 25 years later. Its date has been worn away, but the figure of Britannia on the reverse has her right hand raised, which places it between 1695 and 1699.



George II Halfpenny (10)
This coin was issued in 1750.



George III Halfpenny (11)
This coin was issued in 1807.



George IV Halfpenny (12)
This coin was issued in 1826.



William IV Halfpenny (13)
This coin was issued in 1831.



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George III Cartwheel Twopence (14)



The 'cartwheel' twopence and penny were the first coins to be produced by steam power - and the cartwheel penny of 1797 is the first ever to be made in copper, rather than silver.

They were made by Matthew Boulton. Boulton was born in Birmingham in 1728. In 1762 he established the famous Soho Manufactory, two miles north of Birmingham, which undertook the manufacture of objects in metal. In 1773, Boulton went into partnership with the inventor James Watt. For the next eleven years Boulton's factory produced and sold Watt's steam-engines. These machines were mainly bought by colliery owners who used them to pump water from their mines, but Boulton and Watt also turned their attention to the problems of the coinage, particularly copper coins that were being counterfeited. Boulton applied his engineering success to ways of producing coins efficiently using steam power. He proposed using a retaining collar to ensure a constant diameter, which would protect the design from wear, and also deter counterfeiting because of the heavy equipment need to strike the coins. In 1797, Boulton was given a contract to supply 20 tons of twopences and 480 tons of pennies. These magnificent and impressive coins weighed two ounces and one ounce respectively - the twopences are the largest and heaviest British coins ever issued. A further order for the same quantities was received the next year. Unfortunately for collectors, these were issued with the same date as the first issue - 1797.

Queen Victoria Half-Crown (15)



A half crown was worth two shillings and six pence one eighth of a pound. This example was issued in 1891. In 1887 the gold and silver coins issued by Queen Victoria were redesigned as part of the celebrations for her golden jubilee, which was celebrated in that year. The new sequence of coins were the work of Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm. Born in Vienna, he came to live in England in 1862, and was granted citizenship in 1865. The portrait of the queen on this example is typical of this sequence. The gold and silver coins were redesigned again in 1893 and the Queen's head took on a chubbier look.

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Charles II Farthing (16)



This farthing is worn, but probably dates from 1673. A farthing is worth a quarter of a penny.

Until decimalisation in 1971, the British monetary system was duodecimal. The duodecimal system is a numeral system using twelve as its base. In many ways it is a more useful system to use than the decimal system, which is the one we now have, as the number 12 has four factors, which are 2, 3, 4 and 6 and is therefore a more convenient number system for computing fractions than the decimal, which has only two factors, which are 2 and 5.

In the duodecimal system there were 12 pennies in a shilling and 240 pennies in a pound - which meant there were 960 farthings in a pound!

Victoria Half Farthing (17)



This coin was issued in 1844. The half farthing was first issued in 1828 and then only for use in Ceylon. It did not become legal tender in Britain until 1842. At various times a half farthing and even a third farthing (that is, one twelfth of a penny) were produced, though these third farthings were intended only for use in Malta. There were 1,920 half farthings in a pound!

Victoria Farthing (18)



This coin was issued in 1884.

Victoria Farthing (19)



This coin was issued in 1892.

Victoria Three Pence (20)



This coin was issued in 1895. It shows the older style of head which featured on Queen Victoria's coinage after 1893.

George V Farthing (21)



This coin was issued in 1916.

George V Farthing (22)

This coin was issued in 1929.



George V Three Pence (23)

This coin was issued in 1931. At the end of the reign of George V the small silver threepence like this one was thought to be unpopular. In 1937, in the reign of George VI, a twelve sided brass threepence (or 'thre'penny bit', as it was generally referred to) was introduced to replace the traditional coin.



Elizabeth II Half Penny (24)

This coin was issued in 1957.



Bristol Penny Token (25)



Trade tokens were used as far back as the sixteenth century. They have their origin in the fact that, until the reign of James I (1603-25) the Royal Mint issued only gold and silver coinage. Even pennies were made of silver. This meant that there was a shortage of small-value coinage for poorer people. As more and more people were drawn into the cash economy, rather than relying on home-produced goods and food, this shortfall became acute. Shopkeepers found it very difficult to deal in small quantities of goods, although for many the bulk of their trade involved small amounts and low value goods. Even after copper coins became more widely available in the early eighteenth century there were often production and distribution problems. The Royal Mint was situated in London, but the coins it produced were slow to percolate through to the north and west of the country. Small tradesmen responded to this shortage by producing their own tokens, such as these in this box. Tokens are known to have existed in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, though the earliest in this box is dated 1659 the last year of the English republic. Many such token were probably only used in a very small area the town, perhaps even the area of the town, in which they were issued.

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This example has the coat of arms of the city above the words 'Civitas Bristol' on the reverse. The other side has a bust of King George III with short hair (for a comparison see the image on the cartwheel pennies) and the words 'One Penny Token' and the date 1811. This was the year George, Prince of Wales, becames Regent because of the perceived insanity of his father. This token was engraved and manufactured by Thomas Halliday, medallist, token-engraver and manufacturer of buttons, studs and other items, who was based in Newhall Street, Birmingham between about 1810 and 1842. He engraved dies for the trade, or engraved and manufactured tokens and medals at his own works for all traders who wished to issue them.

One Penny Model (26)



This is a token that was intended to be used as a gaming piece, rather like a poker chip used in a casino.

T. Kift Token (27)



Thomas Kift was the landlord of the White Horse public house, Northampton Street, Bath. He was licensed in 1851 and the license was assumed by Mary Ann Kift in 1861, so this token must have been issued between these two dates. This token would have been used in Kift's pub and may have been worth a halfpenny - it is difficult to know how much beer it would have bought! For some reason the pub later became known as the Dark Horse.

King's Private Road Token (28)



This is probably a pass for the King's private road from St. James's Palace to Hampton Court. Tokens like this one were carried by government messengers when they travelled along royal private roads. The reference book *Tickets and Passes of Great Britain and Ireland*, by Davis and Waters, states that the hole in these tokens were for attaching gate keys. The Roman numerals indicating that the monogram GR refers to George II (reigned 1727-1760) seem to have been scratched on.

'Good Old Days' Gaming Token (29)



This is another gaming token. Despite the date stamped on it, it was probably made in the nineteenth century. 1768 was not a particularly important year in the long reign of George III. The most noteworthy event of the year was the imprisonment of the radical anti-monarchical politician John Wilkes. Presumably the motto on the reverse (In Memory of the Good Old Days') implies approval of his imprisonment. It is rather poorly made and the head of the king has failed to take.

E.P.A. Token (30)



This is the earliest token in the box. The initials are explained on the reverse side of the token, where the text reads 'Philip Eldred Apothecary' around the shield of the Eldred family. The number 59 on the obverse side of the token refers to the year it was issued, 1659, and this side also indicates where the token was issued - Wallingford. It was worth one farthing.

Edward Bewley Token (31)



Edward Bewley was a grocer who lived at 35 Earl Street Dublin. The obverse has the words 'Wellington & Victory' and a bust of the famous general above the date 1814. The reverse shows Hibernia holding out an olive branch and a shield with the Irish arms above the date 1816. The two dates are rather confusing, perhaps the token was reissued in 1816 after the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. 1814 was the year in which Napoleon was defeated by the combined forces of Russia, the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, Austria and Portugal. Paris was occupied on March 31 and Napoleon abdicated on 6 April. He was then exiled (briefly!) to the isle of Elba, before returning to face Wellington at Waterloo. Edward Stephens, another Dublin grocer, also produced a token celebrating Wellington.

Victoria Hong Kong Cent (32)



In the nineteenth century British coinage was issued for use across the British Empire. Such coins often shared features with those intended for use at home, while adding text or images that were appropriate for the colony where the coin was in circulation. This one cent coin, issued in 1866, has Chinese text on the reverse.

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George VI New Zealand Three Pence (33)
This example dates from 1937. The reverse shows two crossed patu - Maori fighting clubs. This basic design was used from 1933 to 1965.



George VI Malayan Ten Cents (34)
This coin was issued in 1948.



George VI Australian Penny (35)
This coin was issued in 1951. Decimal coins were introduced into Australia on 14 February 1966.

