A SERIES OF PORTRAIT PLAQUES IN THIN SILVER, STRUCK IN STUART TIMES, TECHNICALLY CALLED SHELLS OR CLICHÉS.

BY HELEN FARQUHAR.

THE French have a proverb to the effect that "Everything comes to him who waits," and the discovery amongst the treasures of an old Hampshire country house of a thin silver portrait of Charles II only now answers a question raised by me many years ago in our sixth volume, when I referred to the probable existence of such a "shell" or "cliché."¹

"It is a pity," I wrote, for to save reference I will quote from the past pages of the British Numismatic Journal, "that the chain of royal clichés is broken by the absence of any large specimen known to us representing Charles II. But," I continued, "in order to bring before you the excellence of John Roettiers's works on this scale, I am permitted to reproduce a fine silver plaque of a more solid character in the Franks collection.² It exists also cast in bronze in the Hunter cabinet, and in lead in the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum, but the silver medallion is the more delicately chased."

¹ This word cliché, technically used to signify a trial-piece or sketch, will for convenience be used by me in the sense in which it has been modernly adopted in England, as signifying a thin shell of silver—a uniface plate, usually in high relief, and incuse on the reverse. The original meaning in France, of a cast taken for printing purposes from a set of type, need not here affect us, for in England the word does not necessarily imply that the piece in relief is cast and not struck.

A similar example of the same design and quality in the precious metal had been illustrated in the second volume of this *Journal*, on p. 489, from the cabinet of Mr. T. W. Barron, but as it was not reproduced quite full size I thought I was justified in re-calling attention to the specimens in the National Collection, and with, I hope, the approval of my readers, I am re-using these blocks to facilitate comparisons. In one of my former articles—that in our vol. v, p. 255—I again referred to this portrait as reminding us in general, although not precisely in detail, of some glass window
panes\(^1\) bearing a similar bust of the King on a somewhat larger scale, in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Ceramic Department of the British Museum respectively, remarking that "the leaden plaque, corresponding as it does in size and execution with the thin silver plates representing Charles I and James II, would have made a satisfactory memorial of Charles II."

This vacuum appeared to have been partly filled by the fine heads of Charles II produced in the same manner which I had the privilege of illustrating in our seventh volume, facing p. 258, from the collections of the late Duke of Atholl and of Mr. Berney Ficklin, the latter now in my cabinet.\(^2\) A second example is at Kinnordy, the residence of Lord Lyell. But these fine clichés, although clearly the work of John Roettiers, are on a larger and more sculpturesque style than the series we are now discussing.

The shell now shown as our first plate by the courtesy of Mr. Edgar M. Burnett, who recently acquired it from an old Hampshire family, is a perfect medallion struck upon a thin sheet of silver, and takes up the intermediate position between the medallion of Charles I and the two examples of James II, which vary slightly in their inscriptions. I lay stress on the word struck as applied to these thin silver shells because, with the exception of a leaden plaque, a soft metal be it said, of James II, such solid examples as have come within my notice have all been cast, whereas the sharpness of the thin silver portrait shows contact with a die.

The sequence of these medallic pictures is carried forward by William III\(^3\) in three varying designs, one of which is in low relief;

\(^1\) These window panes measure 8\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches by 6\(\frac{1}{2}\). They were taken from an old building called Whitbread’s House in Purfleet. The bust, surrounded by a wreath, is less ornate than the plaque, and probably owes its origin to the Felicitas-Britanniae medal, and the portrait, with roughly indicated lion’s head and ermine, is further decorated at the corners with emblems of the rose and thistle and with a cupid on each side of a crown holding a trumpet and wreath respectively.

\(^2\) *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. ii, Appendix, Plate CLXXXIII, Nos. 1 and 2.

\(^3\) *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 219, No. 544, Appendix, Plate CLXXXIII, Nos. 4 and 6, and see also *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. vii, facing p. 256, and vol. ix, p. 271.
by Mary II,¹ from the hands of two differing artists; and by Anne.² One of those of William,³ however, and its companion of Mary⁴ are not worthy to be included in the series, being of inferior workmanship.⁵

There are others, although but few examples of private persons, such as the Duke of Marlborough, by a very poor artist, but these

![Silver Shell of Anne](image)

**SILVER SHELL OF ANNE.**

*(Medallic Illustrations, vol. 231, p. 236, No. 11.)*

need not detain us here. We must confine ourselves to the royal series, all of which were, when *Medallic Illustrations* was published,

¹ *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. ii, p. 106, No. 333, and Plate CLXXXIII, No. 5.
⁵ A pair of these were sold at Messrs. Glendining’s Sale Rooms on December 15th, 1921, Lot 91. The examples in the British Museum are figured in the *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. vii, pp. 256 and 259.
thought to be the work of Norbert Roettiers alone; but, with the subsequent agreement of Mr. Grueber, editor of the above invaluable book, I stated my reasons in our seventh,\(^1\) ninth,\(^2\) and tenth\(^3\) volumes for attributing these thin silver portraits in some instances to John Roettiers, Norbert’s father, namely, those of Charles I, James II, and, possibly, when the artist’s hand and eyesight were failing in his old age, that of Anne.

James Roettiers also perhaps shared in his brother’s work, and to him one of the clichés of William—struck on the Peace of Ryswick and dated 1697\(^4\)—seems due. But I think we may suggest without hesitation that the fine portrait of Charles II is either by Joseph or more likely by John Roettiers, the brilliant artists whose Felicitas-Britanniae medals\(^5\) it almost exactly reproduces; just as that of James II recalls, although less vividly, the long-haired Lowestoft medal.\(^6\) It is curious how very much alike the royal brothers appear in these particular medals, and the likeness is so marked in the clichés that some eighteenth-century possessor of Mr. Burnett’s example wrote on the back, “James II of England,” the name by which the exile was known abroad, a palpable mistake in identity, as all may see who are acquainted with the lines of the Stuart faces, but easily made by one who knew James only. An ancestor of the family from which Mr. Burnett acquired his medallion made a fortune in Dantzig, whence he returned in 1690. If he brought it home as the gift of James, it was probably soon after the recipient’s death regarded as a portrait of the donor, so that James and not Charles was written

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5. *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 460, No. 53. Nagler attributed this medal to Philip, and J. H. Burn to Joseph Roettiers. There is, however, especially in the point of workmanship, far better evidence for John, to whom it is usually adjudged. In point of time, it is, however, possible that Joseph executed the punchen for the obverse of the Felicitas-Britanniae medal and John the version now before us.
on the back some half-century later, when the shell was framed in an oval of wood somewhat too small for it.¹

Two questions present themselves for discussion. Firstly, are these mere trial-pieces, technically called clichés, taken to prove a die, the die being made on purpose to produce them, and the heavier plaques in lead being a by-product? Or were they cast in bronze or silver in moulds made from an example prepared with this object?

Secondly, how do we account for the differences, small although they be, in the few examples known to us, seeing that it would be scarcely worth while to make several dies for so small an output if we are to judge it by the pieces still in evidence.

¹ Seeing that the worm-eaten wooden frame was too small and not strictly contemporary, the medallion had been reframed by Mr. Burnett.
To the first question I reply, that only few solid plaques exist, and so far as our present knowledge takes us these are all cast, with the exception of the lead James II—a soft metal entailing no strain on a large die. It would at that time have been very difficult to strike solid silver medals from so large a die without great risk of fracture when fully hardened, although the Felicitas-Britanniae Medal proves that it could be done. If therefore we are right in believing that the shells were struck, they are no mere trial-pieces, for it must have been for this purpose that the dies were engraved, inasmuch as a mould to cast the plaques could as well have been made from a wax model.

We must, then, assume that the object in view was to make beautiful pieces of sharp outline, to be given framed or unframed as
the case might be, as memorials or presents to loyal adherents. For this purpose a thin silver impression, afterwards filled out with wax or shellac, was far more economical than a costly silver plaque.

The least rare of these shells is beyond question that of James II, a king to whom the expense was vitally important. A characteristic instance of such inexpensive presentations lies in the iron tankard,\(^1\) traditionally said to have been a present from James to the owner of Gwydyr Castle, Sir Richard Wynne, or to his daughter and heiress, Mary, Lady Willoughby de Eresby.

This tankard, with its silver rim bearing the words "Fear God and honour ye King—I.R." and a crown, has one of the thin silver portraits of James II let into the front.\(^2\)

The second question, that of the differences appearing in the detail, can only be answered by trying to solve the problem of the mode of production. We must take into consideration that the majority of these discrepancies are either in memorial inscriptions, subsequently added to the original lettering, and probably not to the die itself, or are of so trivial a nature that they may be due to the final chasing. It is, however, clear that in the case of James II more than one die was used.

How, then, were the portraits made? Probably a thin sheet of silver was pressed into a die in the screw or press by means of a backing of lead. I mean a fairly thin sheet of lead was covered with a thinner sheet of silver and then stamped or screwed down into the die. The lead in its turn must then have been backed by a roughly finished punch to "force" the metal up in high relief, for the back of solid plaques are themselves somewhat incuse and rather rough, be they cast or struck. Or, again, the soft metal—tin, copper or preferably lead impressions—may have first been gently struck from the die and fastened to the upper side of the screw before the silver

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\(^1\) This tankard was Lot 105 in the sale at Gwydyr on May 19, 1920, and I am not aware into whose hands it has now passed.

\(^2\) The fact that one of the thin silver pieces was used is apparent from a slight fracture in the edge.
was placed between positive and negative. The silver separated from the lead might be retouched from the front, or repoussé from the back, resting on a bed of pitch or sand, and if any improvements were desirable in the die these could be made, seeing that the die was probably not completely hardened. The lead impression would remain, but it would be smaller by just so much space as was occupied by the silver cliché.

The leaden example of James II in the British Museum which, as I have said, appears to be struck, exactly fits within the silver cliché bearing the memorial inscription,¹ suggesting that it was made in this manner, but one expert opinion kindly given to me is to the effect that the easier method would be that of making an impression

¹ *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. ii, p. 215, No. 538.
of soft metal for the "force" before placing the silver plate on the
die rather than striking both together. But this would result in
the "force" allowing no extra room for the silver sheet, and there
would be less risk of cutting the thin foil if the "force" were slightly
smaller, as I find the lead specimen to be. The British Museum
does not contain any other solid example of James II's portrait
than the lead specimen above mentioned, but there are in the Hunter
Collection two cast plaques in hard metal, one of which is untrimmed
as it came from the mould.

All the clichés which I have examined are more forcible and
sharper in front than behind, so I think we may dismiss the idea
that the silver is repoussé by means of a cast medal pressed into the
thin sheet of silver without the necessity for a die. The shell would
not take so sharp an impress from the back, but it would hardly be
possible to press the silver foil into a mould instead of a die. Giving
my inexpert opinion, however, for what it is worth, the clichés
and the lead medallion of James appear to me to bear the sharper
impress of the die.

The differences to which I have referred, lie in small matters, the
number of scales in the King's armour, the fluting or non-fluting of
a riband, the stippling or level treatment of the background—all
easily altered in the chasing; or we may even admit possibly due
to the alteration of the die. In the case of James II, although but
one puncheon appears to have been used—a puncheon made by
John Roettiers and dated 88 on the truncation of the shoulder—a
fresh die with slight alterations to the features seems to have been
made when the King died and a mortuary inscription substituted for
the original legend.¹ It would have been possible to add the words
NAT: OCT: 17. 33. OB. SEP: 4. 1701. ÂTAT 67, if the die had been

¹ John Roettiers, who had remained in England, and to whom his medal dies,
confiscated in 1697, had been returned, was lamed in the hands, but not in such
manner as to render him helpless, and he worked in his private house down to the
time of his death in 1703. If made abroad by Norbert Roettiers, it is likely that the
dates would have been given according to New Style.
available in the space simply filled by rosettes and stops in the old
die, but probably this die had been lost or mislaid and the fresh
legend, beginning at the top instead of at the left-hand lower edge
as in the original die, was substituted. Comparison between the few
duplicates or triplicates reveals that the lettering was in most cases

PLAQUE OF CHARLES II IN LEAD.
IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

on the die, and this is corroborated by the fact that the two specimens
of the Anne medallion known to me, show the same double striking
both in portrait and lettering. But if a letter failed, correction in
so thin a metal was easy either from the front or from the back, as,
for instance, in one of the examples of James II.

In this the die failed to mark the figure 4 in the date of the
King’s death, September 4th, when careless selection of a retrograde
punch applied from the back resulted in a retrograde letter. This example was struck on a square flan, and considerable ornamentation was added at the corners; but the line of the oval die is clearly visible. Nevertheless, as all the decoration has the appearance of being struck, we may have here a new die, and the slightly altered features of the King are in favour of this assumption, inasmuch as it presents a considerable number of small discrepancies from the cast and chased solid medallion. The lead plaque representing Charles II in the British Museum—see p. 239—differs in several minor details from the silver medallion there, and this again from that in Mr. Barron's collection, as he has been kind enough to point out after personal comparison of the three. We must, moreover, remember that cast pieces differ in size from the shrinkage of the metal. Alterations are, however, easy in chasing, such as that in my William III cliché pictured in the Appendix of Medallic Illustrations, Plate CLXXXIII, No. 4, where three rosettes and four stops were stamped from the back to fill a space left vacant in a duplicate which I was fortunate in being able lately to present to the Department of Coins and Medals. On the other hand, the British Museum's Mary II and mine—Plate CLXXXIII, No. 5—do not differ, and the same may be noticed respecting duplicates of Charles I and Anne. It remains to be said that the lettering is such as we expect from the family of Roettiers, and does not agree with that of Obrisset, who began to work shortly after John Roettiers died.

Little is known of John Obrisset, and the greater part of his output consisted usually of tortoiseshell or horn plaques for snuff-boxes. The details of his method may be found described in Some Minor Arts in an article on "Impressed Horn," by Sir Hercules Read. Obrisset, or O'Brisset, signed his work O.B. or J.O.B. and did not limit himself to the media mentioned above, but appeared sometimes to have used silver to make raised portraits on his boxes. His Charles I is modelled on the plaque by Roettiers, from which he may have taken a cast and effected some slight alterations; but his James II is based upon the short-haired Lowestoft medal.  

1 Medallic Illustrations, vol. i, p. 505, No. 143.
THIN SILVER PORTRAIT MEDALLION OF JAMES II.


(IN HELEN FARQUHAR'S COLLECTION.)
and not on the long-haired example,\textsuperscript{1} with which our plaques and clichés correspond. His conjugate portraits of William and Mary are modelled upon Bower’s medal\textsuperscript{2} and his varying presentments of Anne are based upon more than one of Croker’s medals of the Queen.

Although his tortoiseshell plaques are worthy of all praise, his silver heads should not as a rule be confused with our clichés, being of stouter substance, usually cast, and less delicate in finish. I, however, confess that I hesitate to which artist to attribute the tobacco box, which I here illustrate.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{tobacco_box_charles_1}
\caption{Tobacco Box with Portrait of Charles I.}
\end{figure}

Personally I am inclined to believe this head to be the work of Roettiers, and the die is not the same as that used by Obrisset for

\textsuperscript{1} Medallic Illustrations, vol. i, p. 505, No. 142.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., vol. i, p. 668, No. 38.
his signed boxes in tortoiseshell, and closely resembles the memorial of Charles I of 1649 illustrated below.

Since reading the above at the Anniversary Meeting of this Society in 1921, I have been frequently asked two questions with regard to the practice of striking these thin silver shells, whether for distribution as portraits or as trial-pieces, technically called clichés:—

**MEMORIAL OF CHARLES I, BY JOHN ROETTIERs.**

(Medallic Illustrations, vol. i, p. 347, No. 202.)

Firstly: Were they peculiar to the time of Charles II and his immediate successors? Secondly: Were coin and medal dies thus tested at this period by other artists than the family of Roettiers?

To the first question I reply that I know of no similar series of
clichés struck in England on so large a scale, but even in my own limited collection I have smaller medallic shells struck in the time of James I,\(^1\) and not a few produced during the reign of Charles I. I have even seen in the British Museum some thin shells of the Elizabethan period, but all these are of small dimension, and one at least is described by Dr. Hill as repoussé rather than struck.\(^2\)

As regards trial pieces for coins, we must bear in mind that

![Cliché of Charles I](image)

the currency was not, as a rule, made by the mill and press in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but dies for the hammered issues might be, and certainly were sometimes, tested in this manner by Thomas Simon.

In answer to the second question, that regarding the work of other artists of the same period, I must draw attention to certain portrait jettons or counters bearing the initials of Nicholas Briot,\(^3\) besides a number of unsigned medallions, some of which are known

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\(^1\) *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 224, No. 81, Charles, Duke of York and Albany, afterwards Charles I; and vol. i, p. 201, No. 32, Princess Elizabeth on her marriage to Frederick, Count Palatine.

\(^2\) A thin silver portrait of Queen Elizabeth, *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 183, No. 186, described by Dr. G. F. Hill in his *Medals of the Renaissance*, p. 158. One may, however, without hesitation, pronounce a tiny shell of the Earl of Essex in 1597 (*Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 173, No. 169), to be the product of a die.

\(^3\) *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 243, No. 1. Usually considered to have been made for largess at the Coronation, but which I have reason to believe was intended for a reckoning counter, as I have a complete set of them in a box. A somewhat similar shell representing Henrietta Maria is unsigned, but was probably the work of the same artist (*Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 240, No. 6).
to be the work of Thomas Rawlins. Of those by Rawlins the most important are two struck obverses, being clichés from dies prepared for military rewards of the Civil War, of which more anon. Another less interesting shell which bears the head of Charles I, in my cabinet, throws additional light on the methods of Rawlins, an artist whose Civil War badges are, as a rule, cast and chased, a struck example being but rarely found. This cliché strengthens our belief, founded on the occasional discovery of a struck badge of a type habitually cast and chased, that Rawlins usually made at least one pair of dies in each case, and only resorted to casting for the sake of expedition and economy, and possibly also because of the absence of continual facilities for striking medals during the war.

![MILITARY REWARD](Medallic Illustrations, vol. i, p. 302, No. 123.)

![EDGEHILL MEDAL](Medallic Illustrations, vol. i, p. 298, No. 118.)

The shell, which I referred to above, shows the portrait which appears upon the obverses of two rare cast badges, combined in the one case with a reverse signed by Rawlins,¹ while in the other the plain back is incised with a memorial inscription.² Rawlins died in 1670, and we have no certainty as to the date when the obverse was executed, possibly not until after the Restoration. But the military reward of 1643, commemorating the Battle of Edgehill of the previous year, and consisting of two cast and chased plates soldered together—representing Charles I with his son—appears also in the British Museum in the form of a struck cliché, as figured above.

¹ *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 444, No. 195.  
in Thin Silver, Struck in Stuart Times.

The same process, that of a preliminary die and struck cliché of the obverse, was followed, for the badge usually called the Edgehill Medal, from the National Collection, which is probably of about the same date, and is illustrated on the opposite page.

The "Military Reward" was obviously intended to be combined with different and suitable reverses, according to the action which called for recognition; and a drawing upon the warrant conferring this decoration upon Sir Robert Walsh, the rescuer of the Royal Standard at Edgehill, shows that in his case a special design was used portraying the standard in question.

In the reign of Charles II little pieces for distribution, for decoration of small articles of plate or tobacco-boxes, for book-bindings or for counters and the cases which contained them, became quite common, but it is no longer amongst medals only that we find thin silver shells. Thomas Simon, as I have already remarked, made trial-pieces in this manner to prove his dies prepared for various coins, hammered or milled, and I possess such clichés of the hammered half-crown and unite of his first coinage and of his famous Petition Crown, 1663, struck by the mill and press.

Medals and jettons were also issued by this artist composed of two clichés set back to back in a silver rim, a form of medallion already adopted in 1613 by an unidentified and probably foreign artist. This clever medallist, whose full name, so far as I am aware, is not known, signed his initials, "I. D. B.," on a pair of shells commemorating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of James I, with Frederick Elector Palatine, in the year above mentioned.

The instances given above are by no means exhaustive, and

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1 *Medallic Illustrations*, vol. i, p. 302, No. 124.
4 The British Museum specimen is cast and chased, but it is noted in *Medallic Illustrations* that two shells united were in Mr. May's collection, and I have seen a similar piece in the Hunter cabinet, and have myself the two separate shells.
are merely intended to show that the large portrait struck upon a thin sheet of silver from a die made for the purpose, was the natural development of the cliché, made to prove the die before it was finally hardened.

It is clear that shells, economical yet effective, were used for presentation in England during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is even possible that such thin silver medallions were brought over or sent to Scotland by James Francis Edward, struck from old dies in the hands of the Roettiers family. The three memorial examples—the rare head of Charles II in the more sculpturesque style mentioned on p. 231, and the usual presentations of Charles I and James II, now at Kinnordy in Forfarshire—are cases in point. These medallions, inherited by Lord Lyell from a distant relative, the last of his line, and long treasured in an old Highland residence, are contemporaneously framed alike and suggest corroborative evidence of such presentation. They also suggest that the larger head of Charles II was sometimes used as one of the series to which the smaller example in Mr. E. M. Burnett’s Collection more properly belongs.
FIG. 1.  FIG. 2.

CYCLE-CLUB GLASSES WITH EMBLEMS AND THE WORD "FIAT."

(HAMILTON-CLEMENTS COLLECTION.)