

THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE "BR" MONOGRAM
ON CHARLES I's COINS.

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 HERE is a certain series of Declaration coins having a distinctive mark, the letters "BR" in monogram, not only as a mint-mark, but in the field both on the obverse and reverse, and bearing the dates of 1643, 1644 and 1645. These coins were at one time attributed to Oxford, but later knowledge has transferred them to the mint at Bristol, which was alleged to be at work during that period. Mr. H. Symonds¹ supports the early attribution on the strength—first, that in 1684 Mr. Thomas Baskerville, in his topographical description of Oxford² in the account of St. John's College, states: "I am informed by my worthy friend Mr. Richard Rod y^t when King Charles ye first had his residence in Oxford in y^e time of our Civil wars, the King wanting cash to pay his soldiers he was necessitated to send for the colledge plate to coyne money and accordingly had it delivered to him, but St. John's Colledge people being loath to loose the memory of their Benefactors gave ye King a sume of money to ye value of it and so it staid with them some time; but ye King's urgent occasions for money still pressing him forward he sent to demand it a second time and had it, upon wch ye King ordered the rebus of Richard Bayley the then President of St. John's, 1644, to be put on ye money coyn'd with y^e plate; Mr. Rod did help me to half a crown of this money wch

¹ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th series, vol. x, pp. 203-5, "The Monogram 'BR' or 'RB' on certain coins of Charles I."

² *Rawlinson MSS.*, D. 810, in the Bodleian Library.

had y^e rebus of Rich. Bayley on both sides, viz^t under y^e King a horseback on one side and under this motto REL. PRO. LE. ANG. LIB. PAR. . . . and under 1644 on y^e other side." Second, the absence of any direct evidence that there was a mint at Bristol. Besides these two points, Mr. Symonds has two minor ones. Third, that the records of St. John's show that an unusual transaction was negotiated with Charles. Fourth, the similarity of type. If Mr. Rod had taken up any half-crown of 1643 to 1646 with OX on the reverse, he could have pointed out to Mr. Baskerville this same rebus, for all the R's in the legends have the bottom serif prolonged to the rear and slightly turned up at the end, so that the R appears as BR in monogram, especially when the coin is slightly rubbed.

From January 5 to 7, 1642-3, two to four days after the arrival of the mint at Oxford, the king sent letters to the colleges of that University—that to St. John's was dated the 6th—earnestly requesting them to lend him their plate to be coined into money, which would be repaid by him "after the rate of 5s. the ounce for white and 5s. 6d. for gilt plate, as soon as God shall enable us."

The Colleges, including St. John's, assented, and by January 20 twelve of them had handed over their plate. St. John's and others followed suit later. St. John's, however, added this stipulation to their assent, viz. "and withall an humble petition that His Majestie would please to assign a considerable part of the plate to bee coined for the proper use of the college; it being apparent unto them that unless his Majestie doe graciously yield unto them their humble petition, the College is left plainlie unable to answer the debt contracted by the new building (the new quadrangle), sustain the necessary burdens of the house and provide commons for the students." This was agreed to, for on a day not stated the wardens acknowledge to have received "176 lbs. and 2 ozs. 10 dwts. of white and 48 lbs. 1 oz. 10 dwts. of 'gilt' plate;" and further, that "the President and Fellows have reserved to the necessary use of their College . . . the sum of £300 which Sir William Parkhurst and Thomas Bushel wardens of his Majestie's mint doe promise to pay

them accordingly."¹ The compiler of this Appendix makes no reference to any peculiar mark being granted to distinguish the coins made from this plate, which it may be presumed he would have done had it been so recorded, as he has apparently gone into the subject very fully. With other Colleges, St. John's had in July, 1642, lent the king £800, and likewise in July, 1643, was called upon for assistance towards the payment of his Majesty's foot-soldiers.

The value of the plate surrendered by the College works out at approximately £688 at the rate of repayment promised by the King. It would not have taken long to have coined this amount, for at the rate the Shrewsbury mint worked, viz. under a thousand pounds a week,² it would have been finished easily in five days, and at the average working of the Aberystwith mint, £68 1s. 8d. a week, it would have taken about ten weeks and a day. It can be taken that the mint at Oxford could work at a higher rate than that of Shrewsbury, as it was considered at the time that the latter had been more for reputation than use. I think, therefore, that this money was all coined before the end of 1642.

On the coins struck in 1642 there is no mark that can distinguish the source from whence the silver was derived, and only on one of the early pieces of 1643, a nearly unique half-crown, with the mint-mark plume, which has an A stamped under the horse, is it indicated.³ This coin must have been struck for some special reason, as the A has been added to a die. If this A had been a BR it might have been attributed to St. John's, but clearly this letter can have no reference to that college. The BR coins must have been struck later in 1643, for those bearing that date are much scarcer than those of 1644, and therefore come twelve months after the plate had been sent to the mint. The dies were evidently engraved by a different artist, and are quite different from any Oxford coin. The reverse is quite distinctive, as the legend commences at the top

¹ 4th Report, Historical MSS. Commission, Appendix, p. 466.

² *Ruding*, vol. ii, p. 209.

³ Hamilton-Smith Sale, Pl. IV, lot 39.

instead of from the left, and the declaration reads on the half-crown, which is the commonest denomination, RELIG: PROT-LE:AN:LI:P.A. instead of RELIG: PROT: LEG-ANG: LIBER: PAR. There are, however, some half-crowns of Oxford which have the same legend as those with "BR," but they are of peculiar workmanship, which puts doubts into my mind as to their right attribution. Even if the silver had been sent at the time these "BR" coins were issued, it does not appear to be credible that for striking the trifling sum of £668 a whole new set of dies for coins, from the half-crown to the half-groat, would be made, and that, after doing all this, the authorities would take the best part of two years to strike that which could be done in a few days. As Magdalen, All Souls, and Exeter Colleges surrendered greater quantities of plate than St. John's, and apparently without any stipulation,¹ and no peculiar mark is claimed by any of them, nor did St. John's do any greater service than was demanded of any other College, I fail to see why it should have any special privilege, and Mr. Rod must have been voicing a popular error of the day.

At the restoration of Charles II, Bushell petitioned the King to repay him various sums of money which he had disbursed for the services of the late king. This petition was referred to a committee of the Privy Council, consisting of the Lord Treasurer and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for enquiry and report. Bushell was unable to produce actual vouchers, as many had perished in the house of Mr. Edwards, an apothecary of Bristol with whom he lodged, when it was burnt down by accident, while the remainder of his papers were afterwards seized by order of Cromwell. However, many written statements were procured from various persons with whom Bushell had had dealings.

The Committee reported favourably, but no compensation was ever paid. After Bushell's death these statements were collected by Colonel Colpepper his executor, and now compose a part of *Harl. MS.* 6833, now in the British Museum.

¹ Dr. Nelson, "The Gold Coins issued from Oxford, 1642-46," *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. xi, p. 186.

Most of the documents in this MS. refer to the supply of clothing for the soldiers of the Royal Army, others to his claims for compensation for the loss on a twenty-one years' lease of the duties and customs of lead, lead ore and lytherage of lead in England and Wales, which had been granted to him on February 20, 1643, and of which he had been deprived; a few concern his expenses incurred by his defence of Lundy Island, and the remainder relate to Bristol.

I will now give a few extracts which refer to a mint at Bristol:—

A.—Page 54. “The Petitionary Remonstrance of Thomas Bushell Esqre. to the Right Honourable the Lord Treasurer and the Lord Ashley Chancellor of His Majesty's Exchequer touching his accompt” states: “I was at great charge of maintaining Lundy garrison and building a castle there, repairing the Castle of Bristol by His Majesty's Special Command and setting up a mint there by His Majesty's Command.”

B.—A letter under the Royal Sign Manual concerning clothing addressed “To our trusty and well beloved Thomas Bushell Esqre. one of the wardens of our mint at Bristol,” dated 17th May, 1644.

C.—Page 23. “The accounts of Thomas Bushell Esqre. for several disbursements in His late Majesty's service, presented to the Right Honourable the Lord Treasurer and the Lord Ashley Chancellor of the Exchequer.”

“II 1643. For repairing the Castle of Bristol and setting up a mint there by His Majesty's special Command, £1,020.

“N. Anno 1642, 1643, 1644 he weekly supplied with fine silver the mints of Salop, Oxford and Bristol, 100*l.*”

D.—Sir J. Knight of Bristol, who appears to have been employed in collecting evidence, in his report, p. 45, states: “I will not trouble your Lordship with his repairing the Castle

of Bristol and setting up a mint to coin 100*l.* of his own silver brought from the mines in Wales."

E.—Page 40. Sir Wm. Parkhurst recommends Sir J. Knight to take the evidence of Richard Nichols, the Vice-Provost of the Corporation of Moneyers of the Mint at the Tower, and trusted by his fellows to manage their business at the mint at Shrewsbury, Oxford and Bristol.

F.—Pages 40, 41. Richard Nichols, referred to by Sir Wm. Parkhurst, states that Bushell at Bristol was "at great charge in repairing the Castle and setting up a mint therein," and supplied silver till the enemy took his mines.

Bristol was taken by the Cavaliers on July 26, 1643, and recaptured by the Parliamentary forces on September 11, 1645, a period which comprises the years of the "BR" coins. The extracts given above show that the mint there was in existence in the years 1643 and 1644. 1645 is not mentioned, one reason, perhaps, being that by that time Bushell had lost his mines in Wales, but it is reasonably to be expected that the mint existed until its surrender in September of that year.

The "BR" coins themselves fit in well with a regular issue. The first of these are mules of the half-crown and shilling, the obverse dies belonging to the early types of Oxford, 1643, followed by proper obverses; the first reverses are without the BR. These coins without the BR I consider were issued at the same time as the intermediate coins of 1643 at Oxford with the small horse without OX on the reverse, and that the BR was introduced at the same time as OX at Oxford. Bushell must have worked under his letters patent for the Aberystwith mint, for the rule about the plume was well complied with. He may have looked upon it as a branch from Oxford which was worked under the same patent. With the exception of the halfpenny, all the pieces authorised by his patent were struck; there is, however, one strange coin—the nearly unique unite

of 1645. The series ends in 1645, which coincides with the fall of Bristol. As regards these initials BR, there is OX for Oxford, EX for Exeter, CHST for Chester, and W which is attributed to Weymouth, so I fail to see the objection to BR standing for Bristol.

From the above I trust I have shown these coins cannot have any reference to St. John's College, as they must have been first struck months after its plate had been delivered, and that their right attribution is to Bristol.

