

THE BASE SILVER SHILLINGS OF EDWARD VI

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Introduction

THE base silver shillings of Edward VI were struck between 1549 and 1551 at six English mints – Tower I, Tower II, Southwark, Durham House, Bristol and Canterbury – and in 1552 at Dublin. Patterns for a new twelve-penny coin bearing the portrait and titles of Edward VI had been prepared as early as 1547 but it was not until 24 January 1549, that a substantive issue was authorized, and even then few coins were produced. Struck in 8 oz. silver and at 96s. per lb., the new coins were just too light to win public confidence and production of them ceased at all the mints concerned at the end of February. A fresh start was made on 12 April when commissions ordered a shilling of 6 oz. fine struck at 72s. per lb. Although there was no more silver in this second shilling than there had been in the first, the increased weight being precisely cancelled by the reduction in fineness, the greater weight did in fact ensure the coin's acceptability, and it was at this 6 oz. standard that most of Edward's shillings were struck. In 1551 the government halved the fineness of the shillings while retaining their weight and a restricted issue took place between April and August. As far as England was concerned production of debased shillings was now at an end, but in the following year another issue, again at 3 oz. fine and 72s. per lb, was authorized from the Dublin Mint.

Coins from Tower Dies

Between 1545 and 1550 the Tower engraver was Robert Pitt,¹ whose salary covered all the dies he made, whatever their destination. The Tower smith, who also produced dies when the need arose, was paid separately at the rate of 7s. per dozen. The Tower supplied all the dies to Tower I, Tower II, Southwark and Canterbury. A few dies were also sent to Bristol where they were used alongside dies produced locally by the Bristol engraver, Giles Evenett. Six bust types exist from Tower dies (pl. 1, nos 1–6) and slight modification can be noted from bust three to four. Durham House made its own dies.

Although no Edward VI shillings were ever struck at York it seems possible from the numismatic evidence that the original intention was that this should have been the case. Certainly dies bearing the privy mark G, for George Gale the under-treasurer at York, were prepared at the Tower and can still be seen today, overstruck with the privy marks of other mints. All the mints supplied with Tower dies received these overstruck dies. Arrow over G occurs on both the obverse and reverse dies of Tower I under Sir Martin Bowes; t over G is found on obverse and reverse dies of Canterbury under William Tyllsworth (pl. 1, no. 12); and TC over G is found on an obverse die of Thomas Chamberlayne at Bristol, the reverse is of a Bristol die (pl. 1, no. 13). All coins overstruck with G are rare, but those of Bristol are by far the rarest. In fact I have seen only three such coins, two in private

Acknowledgements

I am much indebted both to Michael Sharp of A. H. Baldwin & Sons, who over the years has encouraged me in this series, and to the many friends in the Society who have brought

their coins to my attention.

¹ C. E. Challis, 'Mint Officials and Moneyers of the Tudor Period', *BNJ* 45 (1975), 51–76, at 66.

collections and one in the British Museum. Two other examples of overstruck coins have been noted, grapple over G from Tower II and Y over G from Southwark.

The other overstruck dies for the second-issue shillings of Edward VI which I have noticed have Y over grapple, dated MDXLIX, indicating that a die at first intended for Stephen Vaughan at Tower II was subsequently re-cut for use at Southwark under John Yorke. Later that year a die destined for use at Southwark had the initial mark Y overstruck with swan I for use at Tower I under Sir Martin Bowes. The last overstruck mark on the second issue of which I am aware, is of Y over swan II, dated MDL. In view of the enormous difference in output at these two mints – Southwark in fact ranked in importance second only to Tower I at this time – this switch is readily understandable. A busy mint need never bear the inconvenience of waiting for new dies to be cut, if dies already prepared for another mint were at hand and could be easily altered.

With these general points in mind, let us now turn to the three readily distinguishable issues of base-silver shillings of Edward VI.

1. The First Issue (8 oz. fine 60 gr.)

Although no separate commission exists for Tower II, I attribute those coins not bearing a mint mark to this mint; which means that the marks on coins of the first issue are as follows:

TOWER I No mint mark obverse, arrow reverse; arrow, reverse and obverse.

TOWER II No mint mark, obverse and reverse; 'Vite'.

SOUTHWARK Y, obverse and reverse; EY obverse and Y reverse.

CANTERBURY No mint mark obverse, rose reverse.

These first issue shillings were of neat style and were struck on quite uniform blanks, compared with what came later on. Edward's name and titles are on the reverse (pl. 1, no. 9) and the reverse legend is on the obverse, with the date in Roman numerals, M.D.XLIX. This is known as the transposed type. The legend used here is TIMOR DOMINI FONDS VITAE (Fear of the Lord is the fountain of life). The *Timor* legend is to be found on all shillings struck from Tower dies between 1549 and 1551. Understandably, all the first-issue shillings are scarce, as they were struck only in February 1549. There are two bust types in this coinage; bust 1 (pl. 1, no. 1), the most common of the 8 oz. issues, was struck at all the commissioned mints that are listed above, and bust 2, with no mint mark obverse and arrow mark reverse. One coin that I have seen has a weight of 71 grains, all the other coins with bust 2 (pl. 1, no. 2) are of the weight standards to have been struck in the first coinage. All of these coins were struck with the same obverse die. The 71-grain coin may be the result of a blank prepared for coinage according to the 12 April commission being struck with dies from the 8 oz. issue.

TABLE I

The Tower Dies for the First Issue

Obv: TIMOR:DOMINI:FONS:VITAE:M:D:XL:IX (XLIX)

Rev: EDWARD:VI:D:G:AGL:FRA:Z:HIB:REX:

| Mint | Obverse | Reverse | Bust | Note |
|------------|---------|---------|------|--|
| Tower I | arrow | arrow | 1 | All Tower dies have diamond stops Bust 2 is very rare |
| | none | arrow | 2 | |
| Tower II | none | none | 1 | VITE on Tower II coins |
| Southwark | Y | Y | 1 | E punched before Y |
| | EY | Y | 1 | |
| Canterbury | none | rose | 1 | |

2. The Second Issue (6 oz. fine 80 gr.)

Bust nos. 3-3a-4-5 and prototype 6 (plate 2, nos. 7-8).

Here the marks are as follows:

BRISTOL TC monogram

CANTERBURY t, T

SOUTHWARK Y. It should be noted that a variety exists where the reverse is different from the normal Tower die reverse. It has a plain, large garnished shield and is very similar to the die used at Durham House at this time.

TOWER I The major part of the second issue was struck here while Sir Martin Bowes was under-treasurer, and there are three marks in all. Fortunately, a number of mules survive which enables us to establish the correct sequence. Arrow, the mark used on the previous issue of 8 oz. coins, is followed by pheon, which is very rare. To my knowledge, only one coin exists which was struck using both obverse and reverse dies marked with pheon; all the other coins I have seen with the pheon mark have been mules. After pheon comes swan, in two forms. Swan I is quite squat in style, with hardly any neck, whereas swan II has a long curved neck, down-turned tail, and thick stumpy legs. With the exception of the pheon/swan I mule, the only marks found on Tower I coins dated 1550 are : swan I and swan II, muled.

TOWER II All the debased shillings struck at this mint dated MDL are rare.

Stephen Vaughan (under-treasurer, 1548-49), grapple.

Sir Nicholas Throckmorton (under-treasurer, 1549-1552), martlet and crowned leopard's head. Until recently this second mark was called pelt, but the appearance of a clearly marked specimen has facilitated a more accurate identification.² For the most part shillings of the second issue have either bust 3, 4, or 5, but a few, now extremely rare, have bust 6. These coins were struck either at Southwark or Tower II and in a way are a prototype for the next issue, which also bore the same bust. They are of 6 oz. silver and dated MDL, bearing the Y mark of Sir John Yorke, (pl. 1, no. 7), or, very much rarer, is the martlet mark of Tower II (pl. 1, no. 8).

TABLE 2

The Tower Dies for the Second Issue

Obv. EDWARD etc.

Rev. TIMOR.DOMINI:FONS:VTTE:M D X LIX.

| <i>Mint</i> | <i>Obverse</i> | <i>Reverse</i> | <i>Bust</i> | <i>Note</i> |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|--|
| Tower I | arrow | arrow | 3 4 | All bust 3 have cut away at shoulder |
| | arrow over G | arrow over G | 3 | |
| | arrow | arrow over G | 3 | Same reverse die as above |
| Tower II | grapple | grapple | 3 4 | I have noted a type 4 struck from a reverse die that omits the E.R. at shield |
| | grapple | grapple over G | 3 | |
| | grapple over G | grapple over G | 3 | Also noted large reverse shield as Y mark below |
| Southwark | Y | Y | 3 4 | Shillings exist with bust 3 that have very large shield and large letter punches on reverse die, |
| | Y over G | Y over G | 3 | Y mm both sides |
| | Y over G | Y | 3 | |
| | Y | Y over grapple | 3 | |

² J. Bispham, 'Crowned Leopard's Head with Collar', *BNJ* 50 (1980), 135-36.

| <i>Mint</i> | <i>Obverse</i> | <i>Reverse</i> | <i>Bust</i> | <i>Note</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|-------------|---|
| Canterbury | t | t | 3 | 4 Although bust 3 has been engraved more upright, it is similar to bust 4 London observe die. Reverse die engraved at Bristol by Giles Evernett |
| | t over G | t over G | 3 | |
| | t over G | t | 3 | |
| | T | T | 3 | |
| Bristol | TC over G | TC | 3 | |
| Tower I | arrow | arrow | 5 | |
| | arrow | pheon | 5 | |
| | pheon | arrow | 5 | |
| | pheon | pheon | 5 | |
| | pheon | swan I | 5 | |
| | swan I | pheon | 5 | |
| | swan I | arrow | 5 | |
| | swan I over Y | swan I | 5 | |
| Southwark | Y | Y | 5 | |
| Date change reverse now given as M.D.L. (1550) | | | | |
| Tower I | pheon | swan I | 5 | |
| | swan I | swan II | 5 | |
| | swan II | swan I | 5 | |
| | swan II | swan II | 5 | |
| Tower II | martlet | martlet | 5 | 6 Type 6 prototype for 3 oz. issue |
| | martlet | C.L.H. | 5 | |
| | C.L.H. | C.L.H. | | |
| Southwark | Y | Y | 5 | 6 Type 6 as above |

3. The Third Issue (3 oz. fine 80 gr.)

According to the proclamation of 27 September 1560, authorizing the revaluation of debased silver, coins of this issue bore one of four marks: harp, lys, rose, and lion. Harp has long been attributed to Dublin, where the under-treasurer, Martin Pirry, struck £32,400 of 3 oz. coins in 1552; and lys is clearly the mark of Southwark mint, for there are lys/Y mules, dated 1550, and Y/lys mules, dated 1551. In fact lys is the commonest mark found on the base shillings of the third coinage, a fact which harmonizes neatly with what is known of the mint output at this time. The official accounts reveal that Southwark produced £93,209 of 3 oz. coin, and Tower I £80,749. If the total for these two mints, £172,959,³ is deducted from the figure given in a reliable estimate for 1556 for all 3 oz. coins produced in England, £217,359, we establish that the output of 3 oz. coins from Tower II must have been approximately £44,400. Combining this documentary evidence with that of the coins themselves we may attribute the two remaining marks on the third-issue shillings, lion and rose, with some confidence. Lion, being by far the rarer of the two, must be the mark of Tower II, which leaves rose for Tower I. Incidentally, though both lion and rose occur on dies dated either MDL or MDLI, all the rose shillings dated MDL which I have seen are in fact lion overstruck with rose. (pl. 1, no. 11A).

³ C. E. Challis, "The Debasement of the Coinage 1542-1551", *EcHR*, 2nd series 20 (1967), 457-66.

TABLE 3

The Tower Dies for the Third Issue

Obverse and reverse legends as second issue dated M.D.L. and M.D.L.I.

| <i>Mint</i> | <i>Obverse</i> | <i>Reverse</i> | <i>Bust</i> | <i>Note</i> |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|--|
| M.D.L. | | | | |
| Tower I | rose over lion | rose over lion | 6 | No true 1550 die with lion mm has been found to date |
| Tower II | lion | lion | 6 | |
| Southwark | lis | Y | 6 | |
| M.D.L.I. | | | | |
| Tower I | rose | rose | 6 | |
| Tower II | lion | lion | 6 | |
| | lion | rose over lion | 6 | |
| Southwark | Y | lis | 6 | |
| | lis | lis | 6 | |

Durham House Shillings

A one time palace owned by the bishops of Durham, Durham House was situated in the Strand, London, with grounds which stretched as far as the Thames. It was taken over at the time of the dissolution by Henry VIII, and opened as a mint during the reign of Edward VI. The date is not definitely known but is thought to have been 2 December 1548. The history of this mint is shrouded in uncertainty, largely because its under-treasurer, John Bowes, never formally accounted for his office. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence, both documentary and numismatic, to leave no doubt of this mint's participation in the striking of both the first and second issue shillings of Edward VI.

All Durham House coins have mint mark bow, and are of two styles of bust. All the shillings with the exception of one die were struck with the legend INIMICOS EIVS INDIAM CONFUSIONE, (As for his enemies I shall clothe them with shame: psalm 132, v. 18), the exception being the legend 'Timor', as found on London die shillings. Various punches were used as stops between lettering: incurved mascles and straight arm crosses, the latter being the most common on the 6 oz. bust 2.

The Tower die shillings changed from the transposed legend type to the normal legend type, EDWARD VI etc. on the obverse, when the fineness was altered from 8 oz. to 6 oz. Durham House on the other hand carried the transposed type into the 6 oz. issue. A combination of obverse and reverse dies from the two main types used on the 8 oz. issue was also used on the 6 oz. coinage. Listed are the main obverse and reverse dies noted. It can be seen, by the variety in style of dies engraved for use at Durham House, that a large production of shillings was anticipated, although this is not evident from the existing records or from the coins that have survived to date.

TABLE 4

The Die Varieties and Die Links at Durham House

Obverse dies

Type

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Bust 1: beaded inner circle, INIMICOS etc. normal size letter punches. |
| 2 | Bust 1: wire line inner circle, INIMICOS etc, normal size letter punches, frosting to inner caul of crown. |
| 3 | Bust 1: beaded inner circle, TIMOR legend dated MDXLIX, frosting to inner caul of crown. |
| 4 | Bust 2: wire line inner circle, INIMICOS legend, frosting to inner caul of crown. |

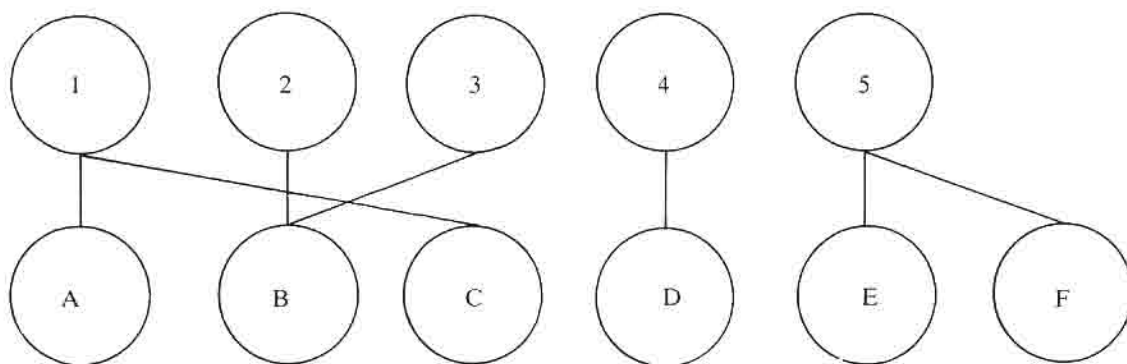
- 5 Bust 2: wire line inner circle, EDWARD + VI etc, frosting to inner caul of crown, this is the more common obverse employed on Durham House second coinage shillings.

Reverse dies

- Type
 A Beaded and wire line inner circle, large letter punches, large plain garnished shield, E.R to side of shield, letter R often breaks the inner circle, +EDWARD+VI+D+G+ANGL+FR+E+HIB+REX+(bow). E for Z in legend.
 B Beaded inner circle, as above.
 C Small letter punches, small garnished shield, frosting to 1st and 4th quarters of shield also to garnishing, beaded inner circle. legend EDWARD+VI+D+G+ANGL+FRA+HIBERNI+REX+(bow).
 D Small letter punches EDWARD+VI etc, HIB +. Wire line inner circle frosted garnished shield.
 E Large letter punches, beaded inner circle, large plain garnished shield, large E.R to side of shield, R breaks inner circle. INIMICOS etc.
 F Small letter punches, wire line inner circle, INIMICOS etc., frosted garnishing to shield. More common reverse employed on Durham House second coinage 6 oz. issue.

The first indenture sent to Durham House is dated 2 December 1548 and orders the striking of groats, half-groats, pence, half-pence, and farthings at 4 oz. fine. The mint then received the commission of 29 January 1549, to strike 20s, 10s, 5s, and 2s 6d, in 22c. gold at £34 per lb, and silver at 8 oz. fine and 96s. per lb. No commission exists for the 6 oz. fine silver coinage of April 1549 and John Bowes never accounted for his office so we do not know how many of these coins were struck. Actually they are far less rare than the 8 oz. coins.

Obverse die



Reverse die

FIG. 1 Die varieties and die links at Durham House (1A, first issue; 2B, 3B, first and second issues; 1C, 4D, 5E and 5F, second issues)

The main interest of these coins lies in the fact that the dies from which they were made are quite different from those cut in the Tower. Indeed, if they are related at all it is to the pattern shilling of 1547 (pl. 2, no. 1), rather than to the main series. The pattern has a high-arched crown with frosted inner caul, and the portrait is very like the portrait of Edward VI by Scrots (c. 1546). The reverse shows the garnishing on the shield to be frosted, as are the first and fourth quarters of the shield. The bust 1 Durham House shillings have the same high-arched crown, the same high collar around the neck, and the same decoration on the collar. On some of these shillings the inner caul to the crown is

frosted and, on the later issues, on bust 2 and in one case on bust 1, the garnishing to the shield and the quarters are frosted or etched.

To pinpoint the engraver of these dies it is necessary to look at the other silver coins of the period, in particular at those reading EDOARD. This gallicized spelling of the king's name on the 4 oz. half-groats of Canterbury mint are well known,⁴ but recently I have seen it also on two groats, die duplicates, from Tower I, mint mark arrow (pl. 2, no. 2). All these coins were in all probability struck from dies prepared by the French engraver, Anthony Levens,⁵ who was employed in the Tower between 1547 and 1550, and I believe it is likely that Levens engraved the dies for Durham House, and perhaps even the pattern shilling of 1547.

Dublin Mint Shillings (MDLII)

The engraver at Dublin was Henry Coldwell, a London goldsmith. The dies which he produced are all dated 1552 and are bust 6 (fig. 2, A). All are marked mint mark harp obverse and reverse. These shillings were struck as a result of an indenture dated 27 June 1552 when Martin Pirry was under-treasurer at Dublin. The indenture states that the shillings were to be struck at 3 oz. fine and 72s. per lb. The distinguishing feature of these dies is the very neat lettering, due to the use of small letter punches. Mixed lettering was used, but the Lombardic style predominates. Although the die was good, most specimens were weakly struck. All the harp mark shillings I have inspected are underweight at an average of 70 grains. All Dublin mint shillings are very rare and of those that I have seen a large proportion have countermark seated greyhound (fig. 2, B), which denotes that the coin was devalued to 2¼d. in 1561.



FIG. 2 Irish shillings

It is worthy of note that many counterfeit shillings, mint mark harp, exist. They are all of brass alloy and dated MDXLIX and MDLII (fig. 3, A: MDXLIX, struck). I have seen a number of these coins which were produced by casting (fig. 3, B: MDLII, cast). Also, though not so common there are copper alloy shillings, with obverse mark Y, reverse mark harp and date MDLII (fig. 3, C). These are of good workmanship, both obverse and reverse dies appearing official. All of this type have been struck rather than cast, and may perhaps be the product of an unscrupulous mint worker.⁶

⁴ C. A. Whitton, 'The Coinage of Henry VIII and Edward VI in Henry's Name', *BNJ* 26 (1951), 298-322, at 301, pl. XXI no. 19.

⁵ C. E. Challis, 'Mint Officials', p. 63.

⁶ C. E. Challis, *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester, 1978), p. 99 (the case of William Pate, moneyer of Islington, hanged in 1549).



FIG. 3 Counterfeit Irish shillings

KEY TO THE PLATES

PLATE 1. TOWER DIES

1. Bust 1.
2. Bust 2.
3. Bust 3.
4. Bust 4.
5. Bust 5.
6. Bust 6.
7. Bust 6 (prototype, struck 6 oz. fine).
8. Bust 6 (prototype, struck 6 oz. fine).
9. Reverse first issue.
10. Reverse second issue.
11. Reverse third issue.
- 11A. Enlargement of 11 showing mm rose over lion.
12. Canterbury, second issue, mm t over G.
- 12A-B. Enlargement of 12 showing mm t over G.
13. Bristol, second issue: obv. Tower die, mm TC over G; rev. Bristol die, mm TC.

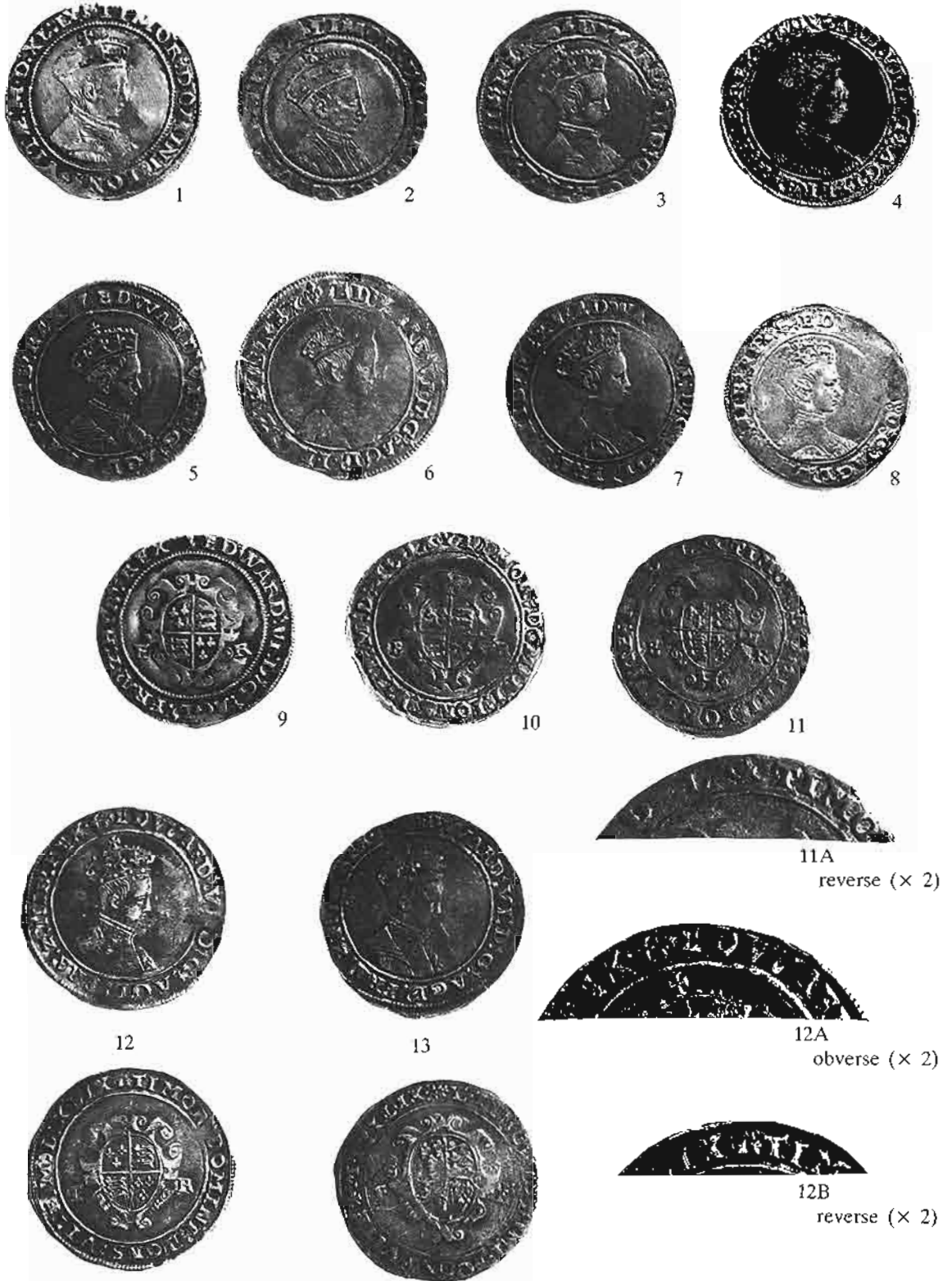
PLATE 2

1. Pattern shilling, 1547 (wt. 97gr.).
2. Groat, Tower I, mm arrow, EDOARD type.

DURHAM HOUSE SHILLINGS

3. Obverse type 1.
4. Obverse type 2.
5. Obverse type 3.
6. Obverse type 4.
7. Obverse type 5.
8. Reverse type A.
9. Reverse type B.
10. Reverse type C.
11. Reverse type D.
12. Reverse type E.
13. Reverse type F.

PLATE 1



Tower dies, Robert Pitt, engraver (1-12, 13 obv.); Bristol die (13 rev.)

PLATE 2



1 (x 2)



1



1 (x 2)



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13

Pattern shilling (1); EDWARD groat (2); Durham House shilling (3-13)