

ever, that uneven flan surfaces can throw up the most convincing yet totally misleading illusions. This coin will most likely prove to be of Ricard of London or Canterbury. The dies appear not to be published. Weight: 1.44g

16. Class F3 -EN-I:REX
+RA[VL:]ON:∞:ED[MV]
Bury St Edmunds mint. From the same dies as *BMC* 37/38. Weight: 1.45g

AN ISSUE OF FARTHINGS OF RICHARD II

J. P. C. KENT

It is unusual for the exact date, circumstances and amount of an issue of our mediaeval coinage to be known; the following record of the striking of farthings in London in 1382 seems not to have been discussed in numismatic literature.

The shortage of halfpence and farthings was endemic in the Middle Ages, not least under Richard II. In 1380, for example, the Commons petitioned that three-quarters of every pound of silver coined should be in halfpence and farthings, which were required, it was said, for small purchases, especially of bread and beer, for God and for works of charity.¹ The farthing played an important part in fourteenth-century London life. It was, for instance, the toll for a laden horse crossing Holborn Bridge, the price of half a gallon of best ale, the charge for a cartload of general goods coming to Dowgate, the cost of two red herrings or two and a half eggs. In 1380, London imposed a charge of a farthing on every laden horse passing through the city gates, the proceeds to be devoted to road repairs.²

An undated proclamation of 1382 by the mayor (John Northampton, alias Comberton) and aldermen, following up the petition of 1380, decreed that in order to help the poor, bakers were to make farthing loaves and brewers to sell ale by farthing measures. To this end, measures had been made and stamped with the letter F to show that they were for farthings-worths. The mayor and aldermen had, furthermore, had farthings made at the Tower to the value of £80

sterling. The brewers were to come on an appointed day to the Guildhall to collect both measures and farthings, and thereafter were forbidden to refuse to sell on demand that amount of best ale, or decline to give change for a halfpenny. And since the parsons of London churches had been raising their customary charges because small money had ceased to circulate, it was decreed that henceforward no-one should offer more than one farthing a mass at vigils of the dead or similar ceremonies. If the parson would not give change for a halfpenny, the entire offering might be refused. On 10 May, a proclamation commanded all bakers, brewers, hostellers and huxters to come to the Guildhall by the following Thursday, when they should receive as many farthings as they required; but like so many official orders, it had to be repeated ten days later.³

The situation seems for once to envisage an adequate supply of halfpence. How adequate the 76,800 farthings struck on this occasion proved we cannot tell, though ten years later the Commons were once more complaining of the shortage of halfpence and farthings. With our imperfect documentation, it seems at present impossible to tell which variety of London farthing corresponds to this occasion,⁴ or whether this self-help was resorted to at other times or in other places. It may be significant that the event coincides with a period when the internal politics of London were dangerously, and for some fatally, enmeshed with those of a weak government.

¹ R. Ruding, *Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain*, 3rd edn (1840), I, 237-42.

² City of London Record Office. Letter-Books G and H, *passim*.

³ City of London Record Office. Letter-book H f. cxliv, cxliv b.

⁴ P. F. Purvey, 'The pence, half-pence and farthings of Richard II, of the mints of London, York and Durham', *BNJ* 31 (1962), 88-108; E. J. Harris, 'The halfpence and farthings of Richard II', *NCirc* 1987, 325.