

A RICHARD II CRESCENT ON BREAST HALFGROAT

WILLIAM MACKAY

INCLUDED in the Spink October 2011 auction was an example of a halfgroat in the name of Richard II which clearly has a crescent on the breast of the king's bust.¹ Until this coin, found at Ford in Northumberland in 2010,² emerged, the only coins of Richard II known with this feature were the extremely rare type IV groats.³ The existence of halfgroats with a crescent on the breast was for long suspected, with a coin formerly in the Walters collection, sold in 1913 and later acquired by the British Museum, cited as an example.⁴ That attribution was firmly rejected by Marion Archibald in 1965, who showed that the imagined crescent on the coin was an effect created by carelessly punched cusp ends below the king's bust.⁵ The new coin suggests that it is now possible to confirm that crescent on breast halfgroats were indeed struck and should now be added to listings of the English coinage.



Fig. 1. Richard II halfgroat with crescent on breast and detail of obverse enlarged. © Spink & Son Ltd.

The coin has a full flan and weighs 2.04 g. It is uncleaned with lightly corroded surfaces, and all the key details are visible. The obverse has the new style, type IV, Richard II bust with an oval face with bushy hair, and the wide crown 2. The legend omits the French title and has wedge shaped contraction marks after **ANGLI** and **RICARD**. The mint mark is a cross pattée and the legend reads **†RICARD·DEI·GRA·REX·ANGLI** with a saltire stop after **DEI** and **REX**. The reverse has no contraction marks, unbarred Ns in **LOIIDOII** and the mint mark is a cross pattée. The legend reads **†POSVI·DEVM·A·DIVTOR·E·MEV**, with a double saltire stop after **DEVM**, and on the inner circle, **CIVI/TAS/LOII/DOII**.

The obverse style and the contraction marks matches Greenhalgh's Richard II type 4 obverse 3 halfgroat, but the sole example that Greenhalgh illustrates is rather corroded and the crescent, if present, is indistinguishable.⁶ The reverse type of this new coin is known from a single die and the form with the unbarred Ns has been traditionally attributed to Henry IV. The traditional identification for this new coin would be as a mule of a Richard II type IV obverse with a Henry IV reverse. To accept this though is to ignore the significance of this coin being the first specimen indisputably having a crescent on the breast of the bust, a variety only associated with the type IV groats of Richard II. This issue was dated by Potter to some time after Richard II's French marriage in 1395, a view also accepted by Lord Stewartby, who saw

¹ Spink auction 210, 6–7 Oct. 2011, lot 79.

² Recorded with UKDFD (United Kingdom Detector Finds Database), ref. 31762.

³ See North 1991, no. 1321b and Spink 2012, no. 1681.

⁴ Potter 1958–59, 347; Brooke 1950, 259.

⁵ Archibald 1965.

⁶ Greenhalgh 2010, 45, illustrated as a Richard II type IV/Henry IV heavy coinage mule.

it as dating from late in his reign.⁷ Walters thought they were the missing heavy coinage groats of Henry IV, with the crescent as a personal symbol of this king, but this is a view no longer accepted.⁸

The new halfgroat bears comparison with the crescent on breast groat, for which one of the two known reverse dies has in common with this new coin the unbarred Ns in LOIIDOII. Until now, the presence of unbarred Ns on the groat reverse was a feature attributed to issues made under Henry IV. With this new coin firmly linking to Richard II's issues this attribution has to be reconsidered and this reverse is more correctly to be identified as a die of Richard II that was later reused under Henry IV.

Lord Stewartby, whilst attributing the unbarred N reverse style to Henry IV, pointed out that halfgroat mules of Richard II and Henry IV always pair earlier reverses with later obverses.⁹ The new coin does the opposite, pairing a Richard II obverse die with what on a traditional interpretation is a later reverse, the unbarred N die, previously attributed to Henry IV. Stewartby, considering this complex series of muled halfgroat issues, observed that the unbarred N reverse die, when occurring on Henry IV halfgroats, always seemed worn and suggested that this might be better linked to the type IV issue of Richard II with the dies reused under Henry IV.¹⁰ This new coin, although with surface corrosion, lends support to this being the case, as it does not seem to have been struck from a worn die. The conclusion from this is that the reverse is not a Henry IV type but is in fact the reverse die for a crescent on breast Richard II type IV halfgroat. This would be entirely consistent with the Richard II type IV groat issue, alongside which were struck similar halfgroats.

The wedge shaped contraction marks, notably that after **ANGLI**, are worthy of comment. The discredited Walters example lacked these but they do occur on the halfgroat illustrated by Greenhalgh as a Richard II type IV/Henry IV mule.¹¹ They do not occur on the Richard II type IV groats but such marks are found on some small silver denominations such as the type III York pennies.¹² This feature seems to be consistent with the later issues of Richard II.

The final question is where does this coin fit within the chronology of the coinage during the revolution through which Henry IV seized the throne? It seems clear that crescent on breast groats and halfgroats are all very rare – they are considered one of the classic rarities of the English medieval silver coinage – suggesting this was a short lived and limited output. It is known that the London mint continued to use reverse dies of earlier issues after the accession of Henry IV, with halfgroat mules known using Richard II and Edward III reverses paired with later obverses. As this new coin is not a mule, it should be placed firmly within the reign of Richard II. Potter considered the crescent on breast groats as exclusively an issue of Richard II, a view shared here for this halfgroat.¹³ It may be time to reconsider the purpose of the crescent which seems so significant on these coins. Whilst the case for this being a personal symbol of Henry IV is very uncertain, it is known from a comment in Holinshed that the crescent was a personal badge worn by Richard II's household members when he was seized at Pontefract on August 19 1399 by the supporters of Henry IV.¹⁴ This would suggest that the crescent groats and halfgroats are an issue associated in some way with this personal mark of Richard II and most probably dated to the very end of his reign in 1398–99. In conclusion, this newly found coin proves the case for an issue under Richard II of crescent on breast type IV halfgroats at the same time as the type IV groats.¹⁵

⁷ Potter 1958–59, 339; Stewartby 2009, 242.

⁸ Walters 1904, 335–6.

⁹ Stewartby 2009, 246.

¹⁰ Stewartby 2009, 246.

¹¹ See n.6.

¹² Stewartby 2009, pl. 15, no. 303.

¹³ Potter 1958–59, 337.

¹⁴ Cited by Potter 1958–59, 343.

¹⁵ Now added as a substantive variety to Spink 2012 edition within S.1685.

REFERENCES

- Archibald, M.M., 1965. 'Two fifteenth century notes', *BNJ* 34, 168.
 Brooke, G.C., 1950. *English Coins from the Seventh Century to the Present Day*, 3rd edition, revised by C.A. Whitton (London).
 Greenhalgh, D.I., 2010. *The Galata Guide to Medieval Half Groats Edward III – Richard III* (Llanfyllin).
 North, J.J., 1991. *English Hammered Coinage. Volume 2. Edward I to Charles II 1272–1662* (London).
 Potter, W.J.W., 1958–59. 'The silver coinages of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V', *BNJ* 29, 334–52.
 Spink 2012. *Standard Catalogue of British Coins. Coins of England and the United Kingdom*, 47th edition (London).
 Stewartby, Lord, 2009. *English Coins 1180–1551* (London).
 Walters, F.A., 1904. 'The coinage of Richard II', *NC*, 4th ser. 4, 326–52.

AN UNRECORDED HALFGROAT TYPE OF ROBERT III OF SCOTLAND

PHILIP HIGGINSON

THE first silver coinage of Robert III, the heavy coinage, 1390–c.1403, is represented by two issues. Both have a crowned facing bust of the king and three pellets in the angles of the reverse cross. The first issue, struck at Edinburgh only, has a tall rough bust and rather large lettering. The outstanding feature of most of the groats and halfgroats of this issue is that the cusps of the tressure are ornamented with three pellets.



Fig. 1. Robert III heavy coinage halfgroat of Perth.

The second issue struck at Edinburgh, with the addition of Perth and Aberdeen, has a much neater bust with small neat letters and small trefoils on the cusps of the tressure, though in the case of the halfgroats they are sometimes left plain. The coin in Fig. 1 is a halfgroat of Perth which is exceptional in that it combines features from both first and second issues. Of recent discovery and known only from this one example, and hence of some importance and excessively rare, I have called it here the 'initial variety'. The obverse bears a crowned facing bust of the king surrounded by a tressure of seven arcs, the lower arc to the right extending partially across the bust, but rather than being ornamented with trefoils or left plain the points of the tressure are ornamented with three pellets in a manner similar to coins of the first issue, three pellets also on the centre of the king's breast. The lettering to both the obverse and reverse is large, the words divided by saltires and pellets:

Obv. †ROBERTVS*.D*.G*.RÆX*.SCOTTORV
Rev. †DNS*.P / TÆCTOR / MS[] / BΛTORM
 VILL / ʌ*.DÆ / PÆR / Th†

Acknowledgments. I wish to express my gratitude to Nick Holmes of the National Museum of Scotland and to Dr Barrie Cook of the British Museum for their diligence in confirming that neither museum possessed an example of the coin. I also wish to thank Lord Stewartby for his encouragement to write this short article.