

A GLANCE INSIDE THE MINT OF ABERYSTWYTH
IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES I.

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THE country mints of Charles I., and especially those in the smaller towns, are so veiled in obscurity that even the attribution of their coins is in some cases still a matter of debate.

Under these circumstances it may be useful to call attention to certain written details of the work carried on at one of these towns, with the view of increasing our knowledge of the methods employed and quickening our interest in the products of the undertaking.

No. 18760 of the Harley Manuscripts in the British Museum is represented by the document in question, but before describing its contents I will briefly recall the events which led up to the establishment of this mint.

Although the silver mines in Wales were well known before the time of Charles I., it was that monarch who first endeavoured to utilize their output on the spot by licensing Thomas Bushell to mine the ore, and to set up a mint within the Castle of Aberystwyth for the conversion of the metal into currency. The original deed of July 30th, 1637, by which Charles carried the plan into effect, is preserved in the Public Record Office, and shows that the grantee was authorized to coin the halfcrown, shilling, halfshilling, twopence, and penny from Welsh silver only ; a commission in October adding the groat, threepence, and halfpenny.

This was the position of affairs on the day when Bushell's scribe made the first entry on the pages from which I will now give some extracts.

The book is in size a small folio, the paper being of good quality and bearing the water-mark of a *fleur-de-lys* within a circle ; the binding is of later date. The following heading appears on one of the earlier pages which are otherwise blank :—

“From the first erecting of his Ma^{ties} royall mint at Aberistwith in the county of Cardigan within the Principality of Wales untill the 10th day July 1641, the booke being the privy marke.”

This statement may be held to justify the assumption that the open book was the only mint mark used during the first few years of the operations, and that the crown and the cross which are found on a few pieces of the same type denote that the latter were struck either in the Castle after July, 1641, or elsewhere while Bushell was in attendance upon the king. There is, unfortunately, no evidence as to what mint mark, if any, succeeded the open book. The main item in the volume consists of an account beginning on the 21st of January, 1638, showing, on the one side, the weight of silver ingots (standard 11 oz. 2 dwt. fine) delivered to the moneyers, and on the other side the weight of coined money and syzel¹ returned by them to Bushell's representative. It is to be regretted that this system of accounting affords no clue to the number of pieces that were struck of each denomination.

The chief moneyer was Henry Sutch, who received a salary of £100 per annum, which sum was perhaps divisible with others of the craft, as there is on another occasion a reference to his “company.”

The pages devoted to the years 1640 and 1642 are distinguished by the addition of an excellent sentiment, *Laus Deo ÷is et sibi gloria sola in aeternum*, which may be said to do more credit to the writer's piety than to his scholarship.

The account runs without a break from the previously mentioned date, January, 1638, until September, 1642, the latest return of coined money being made on the 20th of that month. At this point the transactions come to an end, and the results of the working during the first period are cast up and tabulated. Silver weighing 4,052 lbs. had been handed to the moneyers, producing £13,069 in currency at the rate

¹ The metal which remained after cutting the blanks from the strips or sheets.—N. E. D.

of "64s. 6d. per lb., coyne and coynage." The average weekly output is stated to have been £68 1s. 5d., by tale.

It is, of course, obvious that something unusual must have happened during this month of September, 1642, and the reason for the unexplained cessation of work is not far to seek. It was on the 19th of the same month that the king issued his historic Declaration at Wellington, Salop, and the inference seems irresistible that the break in continuity must be attributed to Bushell's departure for Shrewsbury with some portion of his apparatus and bullion (*cf. Numismatic Chronicle*, N.S., vol. vi, p. 152).

The subsequent diversion to Oxford of the supply of silver ingots may well have been the cause of this shutting down of the Welsh mint until January, 1645-6, when another and a less careful hand begins a new record for a period of three months only, January to March, during which time about 73 lbs. of coined metal were received from the workmen.

Once again the moneyers are idle and a few empty pages appear in the book; then we reach the last and still shorter account which begins and ends in February, 1648, presumably 1648-9. This expiring effort produced only 8 lbs. of coin, and in the light of the wording of the memorandum and form of receipt which follow we may assume that danger was then near, if not actually at the gates of, the Castle. Bushell's deputy writes on February 23rd, 1648:—

"What irons for coyning were taken up by me John Sydenham by order from Tho^s Bushell esq from M^r W^m Cogan, and delivered to Thomas Harington."

A list of general tools is then set out, together with a separate list of the dies in use. The latter comprises:—

One. halfcrown pile and two tresles.				
One. shilling	"	"	"	"
One. sixpence	"	"	"	"
One. groat	"	"	"	"
One. threepenny	"	"	"	"
Two. penny	"	"	"	"
Two. twopenny	"	"	"	"

One. threepenny pile and one tresle.
One. halfcrown " " " "
One. shilling pile.
One. halfcrown tresle.

The book says "30 stamps," but my arithmetic makes them only 29 in number. It will be noticed that a stamp for the halfpenny does not appear.

Finally, we have a receipt for the items in these terms:—

I do acknowledge to have received the^{se} thirty stamps above mentioned and the tools and implements in the mint above also mentioned, at the hand of John Sydenham deputy to Thomas Bushell esq, and to deliver into hand^s again upon demand. Witness my hand this 23 of February 1648. Tho Harington.

So ends this short but not uninteresting history of the Aberystwyth mint, the manuscript being probably the only surviving record of a country mint in the days of the Civil War.



PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM III., IN OIL ON COPPER. FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL IN
THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION. SIZE $\frac{1}{4}$.