

RICHARD SAINTHILL AND THE NEW BRONZE COINAGE

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THAT the numismatist Richard Sainthill might have something interesting to say about the new bronze coinage of 1860 is not surprising. A long friendship with the Wyon family, much in evidence in the two volumes of *Olla Podrida*,¹ gave him access to a rich source of privileged information and there seems no doubt that he was kept in touch with the development of the designs for the bronze coins. What is disappointing, given the scattered and incomplete glimpses of the story which are to be found in the official mint records, is that Sainthill published little more than the brief note which appeared in 1863 in the second volume of his final work, *The Old Countess of Desmond: An Inquiry*.² It is this note, however, which has prompted us to take a fresh look at the course of events in 1859 and 1860.

Reform of the copper coinage had been in prospect since at least 1856³ but it was not until 4 August 1859 that Gladstone, as chancellor of the exchequer, obtained from Parliament a vote of £10,000 for replacing the old copper with new coins in bronze.⁴ Leonard Wyon was already at work on the designs for the coins, and only a few days later Gladstone expressed his satisfaction with the appearance and design of some unidentified specimen coins which he had received from Thomas Graham, the master of the mint.⁵ But much remained to be settled, including the inscription to be placed on the coins. For the obverse Gladstone suggested VICTORIA D.G.BRIT. (or BRITT.) REG. FID. DEF. and, in the hope of saving confusion, the denominational value in words for the upper part of the reverse and 1859 for the lower. This involved some re-designing of the reverse, and a letter from Graham to Gladstone towards the end of August confirms that Wyon was proceeding with designs for Britannia as well as for the queen's head.⁶

The impending change in the coinage provoked the usual comments and suggestions in the press. The *Literary Gazette* hoped for 'something really creditable to the country' and in particular that the queen, a grandmother in ripe middle age, would be represented with a 'somewhat more matronly aspect'.⁷ A similar view was expressed in the *Mechanics' Magazine*, which also wanted the portrait of the queen to 'tell the truth'. It, too, wished to see a coinage superior to that of any other country, and to this end it proposed an open competition, insisting a little disingenuously that this suggestion was no slur on the mint engraver 'whose name — Wyon — is known and respected the world over'.⁸ At first the *Magazine* seemed content that Britannia should again provide the reverse design for the new coins, but as the weeks passed it grew increasingly hostile to the idea. By 2 September it was arguing that nothing could be worse than Britannia, pleading for something novel in order to show posterity that 'we were not deficient of taste, skill, or public spirit'.⁹

¹ Richard Sainthill, *An Olla Podrida*, 2 vols. (London, 1844 and 1853). In his diary for 10 September 1853 Leonard Wyon notes that in the evening he looked through the second volume, which had just been sent him: 'surprised to find how much I figure in it' (BL, Additional MS. 59617).

² Richard Sainthill, *The Old Countess of Desmond: An Inquiry*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1861 and 1863), II, 85–87.

³ PRO, Mint 1/42, p. 549.

⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 155, columns 978–82.

⁵ PRO, Mint 8/37: Gladstone to Graham, 15 August 1859.

⁶ PRO, Mint 8/36, p. 64. Designs had been received in August from Joseph Moore of Birmingham but Moore seems to have acted on his own initiative and he is not mentioned again (PRO, Mint 21/6, No. 2253).

⁷ *The Literary Gazette*, 13 August 1859, p. 161.

⁸ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 5 August 1859, p. 81.

⁹ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 19 August 1859, p. 124; 2 September 1859, pp. 146–47; and 9 September 1859, pp. 163, 164 and 168.

To this suggestion Sainthill responded in a brief article, characteristically signed only by his initials and published in the *Literary Gazette* on 8 October. He strongly urged the retention of Britannia, arguing that the smaller surface area of the new coins prevented anything more extravagant than a single figure. 'I do not apprehend', he wrote, 'we can do better than retain a Britannia, but clearly indicating our insular empire by having her placed on a rock surrounded by the sea, and our mercantile greatness by ships, inwards and outwards . . .'. After praising the existing obverse and reverse designs, he expressed the wish that British coinage designs could be symbolical and historical, and he quoted with disapproval the reply of a former master of the mint that 'we were a nation too divided in politics to allow such a system to be carried out'. Finally, he demonstrated that the enormous quantity of new coins required would inevitably frustrate the hope expressed in the *Mechanics' Magazine* that they could be issued on 1 January 1860.¹⁰

Sainthill followed this on 8 November with a letter to Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, to whom he had already sent a copy of the *Literary Gazette* 'with my paper on the intended new Bronze Coinage, in which I shewed, the delay requisite for bringing it out, and the artistic propriety, of retaining the Britannia'. He explained that it had not been necessary to bring forward the strong political reasons for not removing Britannia 'at this present moment, when France is working hard, to deprive us of our maritime supremacy, and would hail this withdrawal, as a tacit admission, that our Government, do not expect to keep it; and like the intrusive Dog, quietly walk, before being kicked, out'. He then described for Acland's benefit how Britain's naval supremacy had been represented on the coinage for more than five hundred years, and he asked if Acland agreed that it would be a 'cowardly act indeed' for Britannia to abdicate her position 'NOW; when she is threatened by France. . .'.¹¹ That Acland was in agreement seems likely from the speed with which the letter was forwarded to Gladstone, who passed it to Graham on 15 November.¹²

Whether Sainthill's intervention made any difference is not clear. It may possibly be significant that it was almost immediately afterwards, on 19 November, that Wyon called on Graham to hear the news that Gladstone 'wished to have my Britannia on the bronze coinage'.¹³ On the other hand, Wyon is known to have been at work on designs of Britannia as early as August, and the retention of Britannia was evidently still contemplated by Graham in September.¹⁴ At that time the *Mechanics' Magazine*, while acknowledging that 'a strong determination is manifested in one quarter to keep Britannia', was reporting rumours of great differences of opinion on the subject within the government.¹⁵ Unfortunately, Wyon's diary makes no mention of the controversy, and indeed it contains no explicit reference to the bronze coinage until the entry of 19 November. To what extent, therefore, the *Mechanics' Magazine* was right to hint later that the retention of Britannia was imposed on a reluctant artist cannot be substantiated.¹⁶

What does seem certain is that Wyon did not find the designing of the new coins an easy task, and that there was good reason for Graham to fear that it was the preparation of designs which would provide the chief obstacle to the rapid introduction of the bronze coins. He wrote to Gladstone on 10 September that Wyon had not yet succeeded in producing a Britannia which could be recommended, and he lamented that a design in high relief was not possible: 'with the restrictions under which the Mint Artist works it is I see

¹⁰ *The Literary Gazette*, 8 October 1859, p. 357. Sainthill was no stranger to this periodical, which had mentioned his collection in passing on 13 August 1859 (p. 161). His article does not refer to the *Mechanics' Magazine* but is undoubtedly intended as a reply to it. The *Magazine's* comments had been widely reported and in any case Sainthill's description of the Indian Mutiny Medal in its issue of 30 September 1859 (p. 221) shows that he was a reader.

¹¹ PRO, Mint 7/37.

¹² PRO, Mint 1/43, p. 165.

¹³ BL, Additional MS. 59617: 19 November 1859.

¹⁴ PRO, Mint 8/36, p. 65.

¹⁵ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 23 September 1859, p. 204.

¹⁶ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 7 December 1860, pp. 390-91.

extremely difficult to hit off anything highly beautiful and effective. Modern coining has indeed more of a character of manufacture than a fine art'.¹⁷ This was perhaps an unduly pessimistic view of the artistic constraints of the minting process, but Graham was undoubtedly on sure ground about the likely cause of delay.

The pace looks to have quickened after Wyon's meeting with Graham on 19 November. Besides talking about Britannia, they must also have discussed the obverse and Wyon apparently received instructions to prepare a further portrait of the queen. On 21 November he commenced a model 'with lengthened bust', and his diary records that he worked on this bust on each of the following three days.¹⁸ By 29 November he was able to take it to Graham along with some sketches,¹⁹ and on 1 December Graham forwarded to Gladstone three models and a sketch by Wyon for submission to the queen. These included the obverse model just completed showing head and bust; an alternative obverse model which Wyon had taken from a marble bust by Baron Marochetti²⁰ in the queen's collection; a model of Britannia 'in an erect attitude'; and finally a sketch to show 'the intended disposition of the figures on the coin'. Graham's undertaking to engrave the approved designs and to submit proof pieces from the dies suggests that no patterns of any of these designs had so far been struck.²¹

The queen cannot have been entirely satisfied. A few days later, on 7 December, Wyon was at Osborne, where the queen 'sat, or rather *stood*, to me, and told me that she would do so again when I was ready'. The next day he reported progress to Graham, and on 9 and 10 December he was at work 'on my model of the Queen'. He went again to Osborne on 16 December, when the queen gave him a sitting in the morning and again after lunch: 'she and the Prince expressed themselves much pleased'. By 20 December he was ready to begin 'a large die' of Britannia,²² and on 29 December a note from Graham gave him the diameters to be followed for the new coins. A pattern penny, of slightly different size and presumably one of the young head trials of 1859, was enclosed and Wyon was directed to adopt its obverse inscription of VICTORIA D.G. BRITANNIAR. REG. F.D., contracting or expanding it as he saw fit. For the reverses he was told to include the value and the date, showing the latter as either MDCCCLX or 1860.²³

The first patterns of the new series are unlikely to have been struck before 1 February, when Wyon's diary records that he hardened punches for the obverse and reverse of the penny.²⁴ The continuing failure of the new coins to make their appearance prompted on 20 February a question in the house of commons, to which Gladstone replied that the 'cause of delay was to be found in that most delicate part of the operation – namely, the execution of the design by the artist'. In this part of the operation he confessed himself unwilling to interfere, for fear that pressure to accelerate the process might result in an unsatisfactory design.²⁵ The statement caused astonishment to the *Mechanics' Magazine*, which had fondly supposed, so it claimed, that large quantities of the new coins had already been struck. It found it hard to imagine how even the most lethargic of artists could take so long over 'so small a work as the designs for three coins'. How much better, it argued, to have had the public competition for which it had urged six months before.²⁶

On 23 February Wyon went to the mint 'to take 2 varieties of the new Penny to Mr. Graham: he and Mr. Barton seemed pleased with them'.²⁷ With the work now apparently

¹⁷ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 65.

¹⁸ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 19, 21, 22, 23 and 24 November 1859.

¹⁹ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 29 November 1859.

²⁰ Carlo Marochetti (1805–67), a favourite sculptor of the queen and the prince consort. Wyon on a previous occasion had described him as a first rate sculptor and had indicated that he would be prepared to work from Marochetti's designs (BL. Additional MS. 59617, 27 October 1855).

²¹ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 92.

²² BL. Additional MS. 59617: 7, 8, 9, 10, 16 and 20 December 1859.

²³ PRO. Mint 8/36, pp. 93–94.

²⁴ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 1 February 1860.

²⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, vol. 156, column 1352.

²⁶ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 24 February 1860, p. 119.

²⁷ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 23 February 1860.

so well advanced, Wyon felt able on 28 February to submit his proposed charges for engraving the master tools for the three bronze denominations.²⁸ In recommending these charges to be treasury for approval, Graham added, with less truth than he may have known, that Wyon had devoted his whole time since the previous July to the preparation of the designs. He also explained that one of the designs had had to be 'reprinted' three times through circumstances over which Wyon had had little control, an oblique and strangely untechnical reference to Wyon's difficulties.²⁹

A fresh pattern penny was promised by Wyon for the beginning of March, and he welcomed a suggestion from Graham to diminish the exergue.³⁰ It was presumably this penny, still considered imperfect by Wyon, which Graham forwarded to Gladstone on 8 March, his haste being explained by a problem with the inscription. By confining the royal style and titles to the obverse, Wyon had left himself no room for F.D., which could only be introduced by contracting either BRITANNIARUM or REGINA, 'which words the Artist considers it very desirable to preserve entire, both from the importance of the words themselves, and for the appearance of the piece'.³¹ Perhaps with some recollection in his mind of the debacle over the Godless florin, Graham sought the advice of the chancellor, whose reply may be deduced from the presence of F.D. on all subsequent pieces.

Gladstone also seems to have submitted the latest penny to the queen, for it can scarcely be coincidence that Wyon went to Buckingham Palace on 26 March. He was unable to see the queen, but an appointment was made for the following day, when he saw the prince consort as well as the queen. They criticised 'the likeness on the new Penny' and while Wyon was there he made a 'rough sketch of the Queen's profile with which they were much pleased'. On 30 March he was again at the palace but the prince was away and he saw only the queen: 'she was much pleased with my work, but suggested trifling criticisms: - she gave me a long sitting for a pencil outline'. The alterations were quickly made and on 9 April Wyon went to Windsor, where he waited while a 'new penny' was taken to the queen and approved.³²

It was probably this penny which Graham submitted to Gladstone on 16 April, to be followed two days later by a letter in which Graham drew the chancellor's attention to 'a change of some importance . . . which may perhaps escape your eye'.³³ This was the introduction of the abbreviation BRIT for BRITANNIARUM. Graham's own preference, perhaps unwisely, was for BRITAN but the two extra letters could only be accommodated at the expense of F.D. Since there were precedents for BRIT and the necessity for the contraction was so obvious, he thought 'it would probably be generally excused'. But he reckoned without the classical scholarship of the chancellor, who objected to BRIT on the grounds that the plural BRITANNIARUM required the final consonant to be doubled,³⁴ something which he had foreseen in his letter of 15 August 1859.³⁵ It is likely that Graham was required to sound out other opinion, for on 23 April he discussed the matter with Edward Hawkins of the British Museum, reporting to Wyon the following day that

²⁸ PRO. Mint 8/36, pp. 95-96. Wyon copied the estimate into his pocket-book (BL. Eg. MS. 3812, pp. 26-27).

²⁹ PRO. Mint 8/36, pp. 97-98. Another example of Graham's surprisingly non-technical language is his reference to 'moveable type' in connection with the lettering of dies (PRO. Mint 1/43, p. 181).

³⁰ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 96.

³¹ PRO. Mint 1/43, p. 181.

³² BL. Additional MS. 59617: 26, 27 and 30 March, 9 April 1860. Further evidence of the prince consort's involvement may be found in the words 'original drawing for style of type for bronze coinage of 1860 by Prince Albert' written on an empty envelope in the mint records (believed

to have been attached at one time to PRO. Mint 14/2 but not traced).

³³ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 107.

³⁴ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 7 December 1860, pp. 390-91 and G.F. Ansell, *The Royal Mint*, 3rd edition, (London, 1871), p. 76. It is, incidentally, to Ansell that we appear to owe the famous story about the loss of one of the patterns for the bronze coinage: 'the pattern penny in bronze, which was submitted to and approved by her Majesty, was lost in its passage through the post, for the postman opened the letter and destroyed both it and the penny in a closet in the Royal Mint' (p. 76).

³⁵ PRO. Mint 8/37: Gladstone to Graham, 15 August 1859.

Hawkins was so decidedly in favour of BRITT that the double T must be adopted if at all possible.³⁶

Within a day or two of the BRIT pennies having been struck, a specimen must have been on its way to Sainthill, since the descriptive note which he subsequently published in 1863 bears the date 1 May 1860.³⁷ The note gives immediate evidence of his knowledge of events. He knew that the coin had been approved by the queen, and the early reference to the hardness of bronze necessitating the adoption of designs in much lower relief than hitherto echoed what had clearly been a paramount concern of the mint. There is further proof of his good information in his report that Wyon, having obtained permission to wait on the queen at Osborne, had been granted three sittings for the purpose of modelling the portrait. The pattern itself is described in characteristically fulsome terms and, apart from the unnecessary inclusion of the wreath of laurel, the bust is said to be perfection: 'at length we have a portrait of the Queen which every one must feel assured is the living, loving likeness of the Sovereign of a mighty empire; the earnest, commanding dignity of the Queen, and the matronly kindness of the mother, with the most exquisite delicacy and highest finish of medal engraving'. The reverse, too, receives lavish praise: 'The ship and the lighthouse, artistically balancing each other, with Britannia as a centre, combine in forming a very beautiful composition, minutely and admirably engraved'. The presence of the ship and lighthouse, together with Britannia's less stooping attitude, probably went some way towards satisfying the wish which Sainthill had expressed in 1859 for Britain's naval supremacy to be represented on the coinage. Reference to the lighthouse in fact draws from him a quotation, more dutiful than apt, from T.D.A., who may perhaps be identified as the Sir Thomas Dyke Acland to whom his letter of 1859 had been addressed and the first volume of *Olla Podrida* dedicated.

Sainthill was not alone in having seen the pattern penny, since descriptions also appeared in the *Mechanics' Magazine* on 27 April³⁸ and in the *Literary Gazette* on 28 April.³⁹ The latter shared Sainthill's approval of the obverse: 'the likeness of the Queen is especially truthful, and, without the faintest attempt at flattery, the regal and classical expression of the face has been perfectly caught'. The coin, it thought, would add to the 'well-earned fame' of the artist. The *Mechanics' Magazine*, on the other hand, could find little to praise. It grudgingly conceded that 'the artist appears to have achieved a certain amount of success in catching and transferring the features of Her Majesty' but it detected a sternness of expression which was neither flattering nor truthful. The unwanted presence of Britannia on the reverse was a further cause of disappointment, to be attributed either to a paucity of artistic talent or to the obstinacy of some overruling power governing the artist. More particularly, the *Magazine* found the arms of Britannia immensely large in proportion to her stature, and with heavy humour suggested that 'as we are becoming a boxing nation perhaps this peculiarity is intended to be emblematical of the muscular development of the English people'.

Like Sainthill, the two magazines were unaware that the penny, though informally approved by the queen, was to be amended by the extension of BRIT to BRITT. Even the joint-secretary to the treasury, in reply to a question in the house of commons on 30 April, reported that the penny die was now ready. In another three weeks he thought the halfpenny die would be finished, and he anticipated that the coins would be issued in about two months.⁴⁰ There was another parliamentary question on 14 May⁴¹ and Graham's

³⁶ PRO. Mint 1/43, p. 184; Mint 8/36, p. 108.

³⁷ Sainthill, *The Old Countess of Desmond*, II, 85-87.

³⁸ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 27 April 1860, pp. 279-80. The *Magazine* was particularly interested in the operations of the Mint and claimed to possess 'exclusive sources of information' (11 May 1860, p. 321).

³⁹ *The Literary Gazette*, 28 April 1860, p. 530. The

Gazette was less consistently interested in the coinage but its editor is known to have recently called on Wyon (BL. Additional MS. 59617: 21 March 1860).

⁴⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 158, column 335.

⁴¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 158, columns 1207-08.

memorandum of that date, intended as a briefing note for the chancellor of the exchequer, was rather more cautious in indicating that it would still be a few weeks before the dies were received from the artist 'in a complete state'.⁴² This continuing delay excited the wrath of the *Mechanics' Magazine*. While acknowledging that discussions about the retention or sacrifice of Britannia might have been partly responsible for the delay, it still found it extraordinary that the engraver should be taking so long.⁴³

The alteration of BRIT to BRITT had been completed by 21 May, when Wyon's diary records that he went to the mint 'to take the puncheons of the Penny to Mr. Graham'. On 7 June he was again at the mint to see some pennies struck in a coining press, concluding from the experiment that 'the punches require a little reduction of relief'.⁴⁴ Whether the two bronzed specimens of the penny which he forwarded to the mint on 11 June incorporated this modification to the relief is not known,⁴⁵ but events were certainly beginning to move with some swiftness. On 13 June Wyon was able to take to the mint all the punches for the new coinage except the reverse punch for the farthing, which followed on 15 June. A few days later, on 20 June, he saw pennies and halfpennies being struck at the mint; and on 25 June he was there again, though on this occasion his diary does not record the purpose of the visit.⁴⁶ Clearly, however, the trials had reached an advanced stage and on 30 June Graham submitted 'specimens of the New Bronze Coin' to the chancellor of the exchequer for the queen's approval.⁴⁷ A confident and well-informed *Mechanics' Magazine* promised its readers facsimiles of the coins in its issue the following week.⁴⁸

Sadly, the specimens failed to please. An entry in Wyon's diary for 4 July reports 'bad news today: - The Queen wishes the portraits on the new copper coins to be altered'. The cause of the queen's dissatisfaction is not specified but it cannot have been too serious since on 9 July Wyon received 'at ½ past 8 this evening the Queen's approval of the coins'.⁴⁹ Even so, difficulties continued and in reply to a further question in parliament on 16 July Gladstone rather grandly attributed the delay to 'a mysterious secret of art'. Whether these difficulties were aesthetic or technical is not altogether clear, and Gladstone's answer was given without the benefit of the latest advice from Graham, who was temporarily out of town.⁵⁰

The latest problems were undoubtedly of some magnitude, and on 20 July Wyon received a letter from Graham about the bronze coinage which he feared might prevent his imminent departure for the Continent. The following day he hastened to see Graham and, while able to obtain permission to go on holiday on the grounds of ill-health, he felt obliged to work 'very hard till late in the evening on a Halfpenny die'. By 23 July, when he left as arranged for the Continent,⁵¹ progress had been made and at the beginning of August Graham sent three new specimen pieces to the chancellor.⁵² This time all was well and on 6 August Gladstone wrote to Graham with the good news that 'Her Majesty is well satisfied with the Copper Coins as they now stand'.⁵³ The patient readers of the *Mechanics' Magazine* had at last seen facsimiles of the new coins on 27 July. The obverse was described as a partial success, for though the artist had succeeded to some extent in capturing 'the pleasant features' of the queen and the bust was 'exceedingly good', there

⁴² PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 109, and BL. Additional MS. 44591, f. 34.

⁴³ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 18 May 1860, pp. 326-27. It was also critical of Laing's statement in its issue of 4 May 1860 (p. 304).

⁴⁴ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 21 May and 7 June 1860.

⁴⁵ PRO. Mint 21/6, No. 2788.

⁴⁶ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 13, 15, 20 and 25 June 1860.

⁴⁷ PRO. Mint 21/6, No. 2834.

⁴⁸ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 29 June 1860, p. 433.

⁴⁹ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 4 and 9 July 1860.

⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 159, column 1947.

⁵¹ BL. Additional MS. 59617: 20, 21, and 23 July 1860.

⁵² PRO. Mint 21/6, No. 2886.

⁵³ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 152. On his return from the Continent Wyon copied Gladstone's letter into his pocket-book (BL. Eg. MS. 3812, pp. 27-28).

was something in the form of the royal head which seemed not quite faithful to the original. The Britannia, as expected, was not at all to the *Magazine's* taste and it could say no more than that the artist had done the best he could with her. 'In all other senses than the artistic', however, 'the new bronze pieces may be regarded as a complete success'.⁵⁴

By the end of September production was under way at the Royal Mint. On 15 October a letter from Graham to Gladstone reported the last daily return to show an output of 151,395 halfpennies and farthings, a substantial improvement on the previous three weeks but still falling some way short of the target of 200,000 pieces a day. The problem, he explained to Gladstone, was that too many dies were being broken, 'a die giving way on an average after 30,000 impressions instead of 60,000 our usual average'. This was costly both in making new dies and also in the time taken to remove old dies from the press, so that attention was being concentrated on the improvement of the coining qualities of the dies: 'the changes to be made have no sensible effect upon the design but refer to the border & other small technical points of which the effect upon the durability of the dies can only be learned by trial'. These changes, apparently intended in the main to lower the relief of the designs, had been approved for the farthing, while the halfpenny was very nearly ready: 'the penny dies will be put into operation in a few days after an alteration which it is hoped will be the last required'.⁵⁵ Difficulties, however, persisted and it was early January 1861 before Wyon could report in his diary that he had been to the mint and 'had great satisfaction in seeing pence and halfpence struck well from the new dies, which I trust will complete all that I have to do with the coinage'.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, by late November 1860, with Graham waiting for the main contractors James Watt & Co to begin production, the new coins had still not reached the public. A correspondent in *The Times* on 26 November complained that, despite the promises of the chancellor, the mint was continuing to send out to enquirers a printed circular 'that the new bronze coin has not been prepared for issue, and that public notice will be given when coin is ready for delivery'.⁵⁷ He called upon *The Times* to do what it could to hasten the appearance of the coins but, whatever the influence of that august newspaper, the issue was in any case about to begin. Production had at last started at Watt's and, with the prospect of a continuous supply from Birmingham as well as from the Royal Mint, Graham felt that it was safe for deliveries to commence, anticipating with treasury authority the royal proclamation giving currency to the new coins.

Not unexpectedly the new coins were something of a nine days' wonder. There were the inevitable rumours, denied in *The Times*, that the coins were to be recalled, and in particular controversy was provoked by the double T of BRITT.⁵⁸ In *The Times* on 1 December T.K.B. was unable to satisfy himself that BRITT was correct and sought enlightenment from other readers.⁵⁹ This came two days later in a letter, signed *Monetarius* and almost certainly from Thomas Graham himself, which after explaining that the double T was the classical method of indicating the plural number, added significantly that 'before settling the designs of the present coinage, the point in question was referred to high numismatic and classical authorities, and their opinion found to be unanimous and decided in favour of "Britt."'.⁶⁰ On 4 December T.T. supported *Monetarius*, observing with some

⁵⁴ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 27 July 1860, pp. 49–50.

⁵⁵ BL, Additional MS. 44394, f. 150.

⁵⁶ BL, Additional MS. 59617: 7 January 1861.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 26 November 1860, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 1 December 1860, p. 8. Wyon learned of the rumour when he took his family round the bank and the mint on 30 November: 'heard a report that the new coinage was called in on account of the wrong spelling of "Britt", the fact being that the issue is stopped till the Proclamation has appeared' (BL, Additional MS. 59617: 30 November 1860).

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 1 December 1860, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 3 December 1860, p. 10. Apart from the internal evidence of the letter itself, the link with Graham is further demonstrated by a similarly well-informed letter from *Monetarius* carried by *The Times* on 24 August 1869, when the gold coinage was a subject of public controversy. On this later occasion *Monetarius* is shown to have written from Malvern, and Ansell hints darkly (*Royal Mint*, p. 54) that Graham was at that time residing at Malvern.

justice that it was curious that there should be objection when the abbreviation was shown correctly and not when, as on the current florin, it was shown incorrectly with a single T.⁶¹ The subject even reached the Numismatic Society of London on 13 December, when F.W. Madden's paper was read in favour of the use of BRITT and suggesting that it was right for the society to 'lay down the law' concerning the spelling of the inscription on the new coinage.⁶²

It was a controversy which would have interested Sainthill, who long ago had written in approval of the use of BRITT on the sixpences and shillings of 1816.⁶³ But it was in fact another aspect of the new coins which prompted him to add an undated postscript to his note of 1 May 1860. In this he complained that the portrait of the queen had been changed from that on the pattern to show her 'as a damsel in about the twentieth year of her age'. This personal anachronism, according to Sainthill, occasioned loud and universal surprise and condemnation, and he suggested that the public preferred a faithful portrait, showing the queen 'as the actual and visible embodiment of those excellencies which, as a sovereign, a wife, and a mother, have won their reverential love'. The dissatisfaction, he asserted, was all the more keenly felt by those who had seen 'the Sovereign herself' on the pattern.⁶⁴ Outspoken views on coinage design are typical of Sainthill, and it is possible to see his criticism as that of an opinionated numismatist, anxious to flaunt his access to preliminary designs. Certainly a degree of exaggeration is suggested by what might be thought by a disinterested observer to be a rather close similarity between the features on the pattern penny and the first currency pieces. To dismiss his opinion in this way, however, may be to do him an injustice. The criticism of the portrait is so unlike his normally sympathetic reaction to anything by the Wyons that the alternative explanation that he is reflecting the views of his friend seems possible. While the differences in the portraits may appear slight, to the artist each line and curve would have been significant and would have presented a conscious choice on his part. If the changes required by the queen to the portrait were not to Wyon's liking, then Sainthill's note becomes a loyal defence of his friend.

No such kindly explanation can be attributed to the strictures of Sebastian Evans in a paper, read for him by John Evans, to the Numismatic Society on 24 January 1861. While acknowledging that the greater hardness of bronze was responsible for many of the shortcomings, Evans confessed to a feeling of 'decided disappointment'. The shape of the head, for instance, was incorrect and the likeness inferior to that of any previous copper issues. The reverse he found as 'discordantly symmetrical' as the obverse and, taking a directly opposite view to Sainthill, he complained that the placing of a ship and a lighthouse of almost exactly equal bulk on either side of Britannia 'set all rules of composition at defiance'. The conclusion was emphatically unambiguous: 'altogether, on both obverse and reverse, the design is feeble and the work less satisfactory than in any former coin of the reign . . .'.⁶⁵

An unexpectedly friendly reception was accorded by the more practically-minded *Mechanics' Magazine*, which despite its continuing reservations about the designs extended a welcome to the 'light and graceful' coins and warmly approved on grounds of 'portability, colour, odour, and durability' the adoption of bronze in place of copper. It even sympathised with Wyon, who 'appears to have exerted himself under certain restrictions to give the public the full advantage of his talent', acknowledging the constraints imposed on

⁶¹ *The Times*, 4 December 1860, p. 9. In 1867 'brit' on the florin was replaced by 'britt', a change suggested by Leonard Wyon on 18 December 1866 according to the notebooks of John Graham (now destroyed). Wyon had copied into his pocket-book the substance of a letter in the *Morning Post* of 4 December 1860 'proving the correctness of "Britt" by

examples' (BL. Eg. MS. 3812, p. 28).

⁶² NC 20 (1857-58), 195-200.

⁶³ Sainthill, *Olla Podrida*, I, 34.

⁶⁴ Sainthill, *The Old Countess of Desmond*, II, 85-87.

⁶⁵ NC new ser. 1 (1861), 38-41.

him by the hardness of the metal and the thinness of the coins, and adding 'in short, since minting began there was never issued, from hammer or stamping press, a coinage more fraught with practical difficulties than that which is just now undergoing the criticisms of connoisseurs, numismatists, and the public generally'. For the 'pedantic quibblings' over BRITT it had little time, though it suggested that had the head been confined like that of Napoleon III within an inner circle there would have been space for an unabbreviated inscription. The inclusion of the denominational value on the reverse it found particularly welcome, being something which it claimed to have long recommended for the whole of the British coinage and which it had 'especially suggested . . . in the formation of the new money'.⁶⁶

Of rather more concern to the modern numismatist than these contemporary criticisms of the approved designs is the identification of the pattern penny described by Sainthill. It is known that he received more than one such piece, for a letter written some years later by his niece C.G. Saunders Forster speaks of '3 Pattern Pennies of 1860 by Leonard Wyon' which had been inherited from the uncle and which she intended 'to sell, but not in a hurry'.⁶⁷ Fortunately, Sainthill in his note of 1 May 1860 gives the obverse inscription of the piece he was describing as VICTORIA D.G. BRIT. REG. F.D. and, equally fortunately, there is only one type of pattern penny listed by C.W. Peck with the abbreviation BRIT.⁶⁸ The identification is helpfully confirmed by a copy of the second volume of *The Old Countess of Desmond* in the British Library. This copy contains additional illustrations and among them is a photograph of the penny itself, answering to Sainthill's written description and corresponding to the type listed by Peck.

Since it is known that the BRIT patterns were submitted to Gladstone on 16 April⁶⁹ and almost immediately rejected, Sainthill's coin is useful in providing a fixed point in the sequence of pattern pieces of 1860. Eight types of pattern are identified by Peck and he divides them into two groups by distinguishing two portraits of the queen, placing types 63 to 66 in Group A and types 67 to 70 in Group B. The Sainthill piece belongs to type 67 and since types 68, 69 and 70 all show the correct abbreviation BRITT it also follows that 67 stands first in Group B. The other fixed point is provided by Graham's submission to Gladstone on 8 March of a pattern with BRITANNIARUM REGINA in full but without F.D.⁷⁰ Again, there is only one piece listed by Peck which bears this inscription and it can therefore be linked with confidence to type 63 in Group A. With 63 having been struck in March and 67 in April, it is now clear that Peck was fully justified in placing Group A before Group B. It is also possible that 63 comes at the end of Group A and that the entire Group was struck between February and March 1860. Type 64 could conceivably be later than 63, but this may be a little unlikely in view of Wyon's comment in his letter of 28 February 1860 that his proposed charges include the cost of 'the dies requisite to strike three varieties of pattern pieces'.⁷¹ If this means that three types had already been struck by the end of February, then 64 ought to join 65 and 66 as having been struck in that month; but 63 and 64 are evidently closely related, since according to Peck they were struck from the same reverse die. As for types 65 and 66, these show the date in Roman numerals and for this reason probably belong to the beginning of Group A. Type 66 may be supposed to come first because it includes the beaded inner circle which are a feature of the earlier 1859

⁶⁶ *The Mechanics' Magazine*, 16 November 1860, p. 346; 23 November 1860, p. 352; 30 November 1860, p. 372; 7 December 1860, pp. 390-91; and 21 December 1860, p. 424.

⁶⁷ Three letters from C.G. Saunders Forster to a lady named Ada are held by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, having been presented in 1954 by Miss V.G.M. Rogers of Exeter along with a group of Wyon clichés, medals and a coin to which they relate. One is undated, one

14 July and the third 21 July but the year is not given. The three pattern pennies are mentioned in the undated letter.

⁶⁸ C.W. Peck, *English Copper, Tin and Bronze Coins in the British Museum, 1558-1958*, (London, 1960), pp. 470-74.

⁶⁹ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 107.

⁷⁰ PRO. Mint 1/43, p. 181.

⁷¹ PRO. Mint 8/36, p. 95.

patterns, and there is perhaps confirmation of this in the direction given to Wyon on 19 November 1859 that his Britannia was to have 'an inner circle of beads'.⁷² On the other hand, two varieties of the penny were delivered by Wyon on 23 February and if these were 65 and 66 then they were struck at the same time.

Certainly, there are problems in attempting to relate the patterns listed by Peck to the references in the documents and it may well be that not all the pattern pieces struck in 1860 have survived. Some of these difficulties could no doubt be removed if Sainthill had had more to say about the preparation of the bronze coinage. He was evidently well informed, and we can be sure that the somewhat arid and incomplete references in the mint records would have been enriched by the lively and provocative prose of the numismatist.

⁷² BL. Additional MS. 59617: 19 November 1859

PLATE I



1

1860 penny with incorrect abbreviation BRIT (courtesy of British Museum)



2

1860 penny with corrected abbreviation BRITT