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### THE ILLUSTRATION OF COINS: AN HISTORICAL SURVEY. PART I

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#### Introduction

BECAUSE of the scope of my subject, embracing physics, art, aesthetics, printing and photography, and their impact on the evolution of numismatic publications and studies, I have decided to divide my address into two parts. This year I shall – with the occasional excursion into modernity – take my study up to 1840, and publication of the third edition of Ruding's *Annals*.<sup>1</sup> Next year I shall deal with the impact of photography from the 1840s through to the present digital age.

The illustration of coins gives rise to both theoretical and practical challenges. The extent to which these challenges are met determines the accuracy of such images and their usefulness to the numismatist. I would like to begin with a little homely philosophy and science. The only true image of a coin is the coin itself. But even this statement needs qualification. The appearance of a coin will vary according to the circumstances in which we observe it. Since what we see is determined by the light which the object absorbs and reflects, the quality and degree of light and the colours derived from the ambient environment affect what we see. This is as true of the camera lens as it is of the human eye. It is especially true of coins with a bright surface. For example, photographing a ten pence piece with my Nikon D200 digital camera when I was wearing a fawn sweater produced a very different toning from when I experimented by wearing a red sweater. A further qualification is that we cannot know to what extent you and I are seeing the same image in identical situations, regardless of any impairment, such as colour blindness.

The unique boon of coin illustration is that it enables both sides of a coin to be seen together, an advantage denied in nature. However, a complete edge inscription, as used by Thomas Simon, with such telling but unrewarded skill, cannot be shown naturalistically.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the greatest disadvantage of illustration is that a three-dimensional object is usually being reproduced on a two-dimensional plane. Steps have been taken to overcome this drawback. In the middle of the nineteenth century, H.N. Humphreys published *Ancient Coins and Medals*, illustrated (in his words) 'by Barclay's process in the metals of the respective coins' (Pl. 17.1).<sup>3</sup> This probably represents the most serious effort made to capture verisimilitude of any book on coins. However, it did not carry the day, possibly because of cost and inconvenience, but most importantly because, apart from being appealing to a lay public, it failed to convey numismatic detail as clearly as two dimensional illustrations.

The challenge of mimicking relief without visual impairment is integral to the history of coin illustration, which I shall now consider.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruding 1840.

<sup>2</sup> Oman 1931, 331–2; Challis 1992, 344, 348–50, 363.

<sup>3</sup> Humphreys 1851. Barclay conducted a business from 22 Gerrard Street, London.

### Earliest illustrations

The spread of numismatically significant coin illustration sprang from two separate, but complementary phenomena: the Renaissance in Europe and the invention of printing. The Renaissance revived an avid interest in the ancient world of Greece and especially Rome beyond the realm of ethics. An early stage involved collecting objects surviving from the past, including, of course, coins. By education, wealth and opportunity the earliest collectors were from the highest echelons of secular and ecclesiastical society.<sup>4</sup> The story of numismatics is how, from those beginnings, the serious study of coins evolved and their collection ceased to be the preserve of the very wealthy and elite. How many collector schoolchildren with pocket money to spend realise they are following in the footsteps of such exalted forebears?

The Renaissance, and with it numismatics, received an enormous stimulus from the invention of printing, starting with the Gutenberg Bible c.1455 and its spread to England, through Caxton, from 1476.<sup>5</sup> Before the invention of printing, representations of coins in manuscripts were used for decorative purposes. In the most famous early example, *Historia Imperialis* by Giovanni Mansionario, dated between 1313 and 1320, the images were placed in the margins to portray the emperors mentioned in the text (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup>

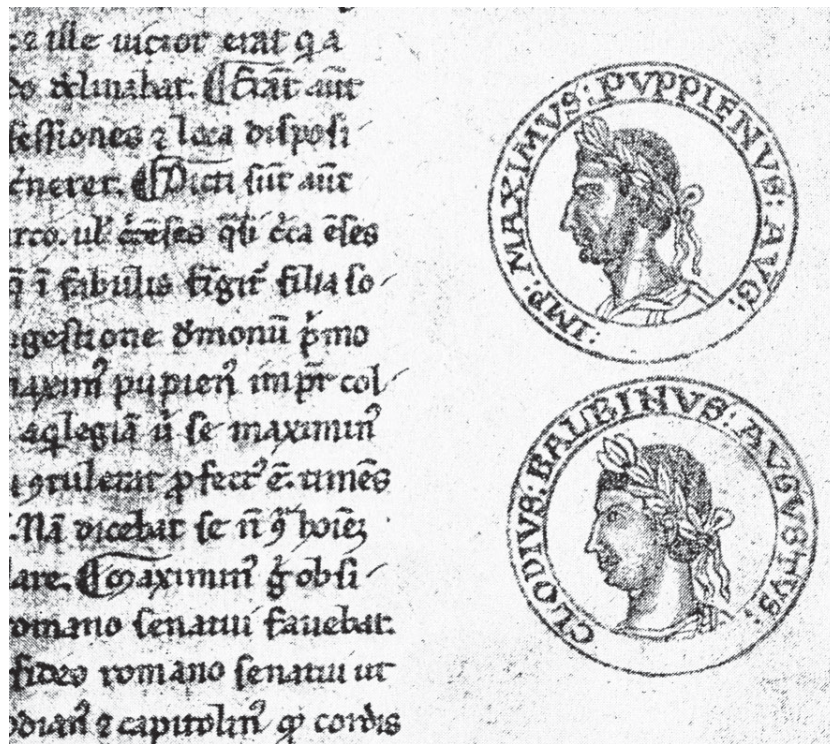


Fig. 1. Mansionario's *Historia Imperialis* (1313–20) (Vatican Library, Rome).

### Coins in art

Alongside both manuscript and later printed material, coins also appear in the works of artists. They were normally, however, portrayed generically – as metal discs – because their inclusion generally served to convey a moral or satirical message. A good example is Hans Holbein the Younger's *Lais Corinthiaca* (1526), representing venal love (Pl. 17.2); Corinth had a prodigious

<sup>4</sup> Babelon 2004, 65. A valuable bibliography on the history of coin collecting is contained in Cunnally 2004, 156–7, n.1.

<sup>5</sup> Tames 2000, 5, 10; *ODNB* 1975, 1292.

<sup>6</sup> Vatican Library MS, Chigiano I.VII.259. See Cunnally 2004, 34; Weiss 1968, 177.

reputation in classical times for its courtesans and prostitutes.<sup>7</sup> More unusually, in *Two Tax Gatherers* (Pl. 17.3) by Marinus van Reymerswaele (c.1509–67), the coins on the counting table are identifiable but this is irrelevant other than to emphasise that the unsavoury characters in the picture are also lifelike. Compared with Holbein's discreet portrayal, Marinus's opinion of the two men is left in no doubt.

Cartoonists in more recent centuries offer parallel examples. An anonymous cartoon, prompted by the last recoinage of George III in 1817, shows an unidentifiable mass of silver (Pl. 18.1) whereas Peter Brookes' cartoon, following the recent and much derided abolition of the 10% income tax rate, reproduces the waspishly modified reverse of a ten pence piece (Pl. 18.2). A salacious fusion of art and cartoonists' ribaldry is manifest in Tracy Enim's inkjet photographic print entitled 'I've got it all' in 2000 in which Enim is seen inserting coins and banknotes into herself.

### Woodcuts and copper-plate engravings

Albrecht Dürer, born in 1471, recognised – as did Hogarth later – that a livelihood was to be made from designing and issuing affordable artistic prints.<sup>8</sup> For this purpose he perfected both the techniques of the woodcut and of engraving on copper plate. The latter technique derived from engraved artefacts, including armour, for which Germany was renowned. Few could achieve the virtuoso skills of Dürer, however, and although wood-engraving was used effectively for coin illustration – as in a work by A. Berg in 1597 (Fig. 2)<sup>9</sup> – the capacity for easier precision ensured that copper-plate engraving prevailed by the early seventeenth century. It has nevertheless to be admitted that well executed wood-engraving could achieve a close affinity to the coins being copied. This raises the question how far die and wood-engravers influenced each other.



Fig. 2. Berg (1597, Pl. Lii verso) (Douglas Saville).

### Printed images

The earliest book containing printed images derived from coins is Andrea Fulvio's *Illustrium imagines* (1517), featuring Roman emperors and other personages.<sup>10</sup> Pl. 19.1 shows a page devoted to Mark Anthony. It will be observed that no attempt is made to reproduce the inscription from the coin on which the engraving is based, the field being used simply to label the portrait. Somewhat extraordinarily, no examples of British coins appear in books published in England until the fifth edition of Camden's *Britannia*, printed in 1600 (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> This was

<sup>7</sup> Grant 1986, 188; *OCD* 2003, 1263–4; Genz 1956, Pl. 70 and cat. nos 40, 231.

<sup>8</sup> Rübesamen 1963, 7; Webster 1979, 31–2; Rosenthal 1980, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Berg 1597, 119, Pl. Lii verso.

<sup>10</sup> Weiss 1969, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Camden 1600, 69; *DNB* 1975, 736; Manville 2009, 48.



closely followed by illustrations in Speed's *History of Great Britaine* in 1611 (Fig. 4), associated with his renowned publication of maps.<sup>12</sup> In Speed, the Two Stars type of William I, shown here, was attributed to William II.



Figs 3–4. Stater of Cunobelin from Camden's *Britannia* (1600) (left); Two Stars type of William I from Speed's *History of Great Britaine* (edition of 1627) (right) (Society of Antiquaries, London).

In the previous century, however, books had been produced on the continent to help merchants determine the value of the coin types likely to pass through their hands. One notable example was by Joos Lambrecht, published in 1551 and revised in 1580. In it a variety of the George-noble of Henry VIII was illustrated, with a three-masted, rather than the usual single-masted ship on the reverse (Fig. 5 below). This variety was unknown until one appeared at auction through Sotheby in 1981.<sup>13</sup> Such handbooks were of less use in England where foreign coin was mainly, but not always effectively, banned from circulation.<sup>14</sup> When an official exception was made, as in the case of gold pistolets in 1560, the proclamation to that effect illustrated the types of coin referred to (Pl. 19.2).<sup>15</sup> The antecedents of such proclamations are to be found in Germany as early as the 1480s, where certain cities printed pamphlets and posters warning about the circulation of false gulden.<sup>16</sup>

### Development of numismatic studies

The first British numismatic studies proper were carried out by distinguished churchmen at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> First came Archbishop Sharp (?1645–1714), although his work was not published in its entirety until 1785.<sup>18</sup> Before other later authors, Bishop Nicholson made use of Sharp's work in his *The English Historical Library* (1696–99),<sup>19</sup> and Bishop

<sup>12</sup> Speed 1611 (Fig. 4 taken from edition of 1627, 417); Manville 2009, 270. The illustrations used by Speed came from coins owned by Cotton (Archibald 2006, 175–6).

<sup>13</sup> Sotheby, 18 February 1981, 14 (illustrated).

<sup>14</sup> See Cook 1999, 232–84.

<sup>15</sup> Challis 1978, 217–8.

<sup>16</sup> Griese 1997, 52, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Ruding 1840, I, vii–viii.

<sup>18</sup> Sharp 1785; Ruding 1840, I, viii; Manville 2009, 256.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholson 1696–99; Manville 2009, 200, 256.



Fig. 5. Lambrecht's illustration of a three-masted ship on the George-noble of Henry VIII (revision of 1580) (Trustees of the British Museum).

Fleetwood gave an account of English money in his *Chronicon Preciosum* of 1707. This was republished with plates in 1745.<sup>20</sup> The first fully-fledged monograph devoted to English coins, however, was published by Stephen Martin Leake, eventually Garter Principal King of Arms, in 1726, under the title *Nummi Britannici Historia*. This work included eight plates, with six more added cumulatively to the enlarged 1745 and 1793 editions (Pl. 19.3).<sup>21</sup> The longevity of Leake's book is symptomatic of the halting progress made in British numismatic studies during the eighteenth century.

The effort required to produce engravings undoubtedly impeded such progress and, as Leake's work exemplifies, the inherent inflexibility of engraved plates resulted in the addition of further plates in the subsequent editions of illustrated works. This led not only to frequent re-use of engravings, but also stylistic variation and loss of a logical, chronological sequence. It could even lead to additional coins being engraved on existing plates, where space allowed.<sup>22</sup> An extraordinary example of the consequent lifespan of engravings comes from two other important monographs from the eighteenth century: Martin Folkes's *Table of English Gold Coins* (1736),<sup>23</sup> and *Silver Coins* (1745).<sup>24</sup> These works were not illustrated but Folkes had employed George Vertue and Francis Perry to prepare a series of engravings and these, with significant additions, were eventually published with a reprint of the works, under the aegis of the Society of Antiquaries of London, in 1763.<sup>25</sup> The plates, amongst others specially commissioned, were again used by Ruding when he published his *Annals* in 1817 and retained in the posthumous edition of 1840.<sup>26</sup> In the following century individual images were selected by Seaby when they introduced their *Standard Catalogue of Coins of Great Britain and Ireland*

<sup>20</sup> Fleetwood 1707 (published anonymously), 1745 (republished with plates); Ruding 1840, I, viii; Manville 2009, 97.

<sup>21</sup> Leake 1726, 1745 (Pl. 19.3 = second series, Pl. V); Ruding 1840, I, viii; Manville 2009, 160.

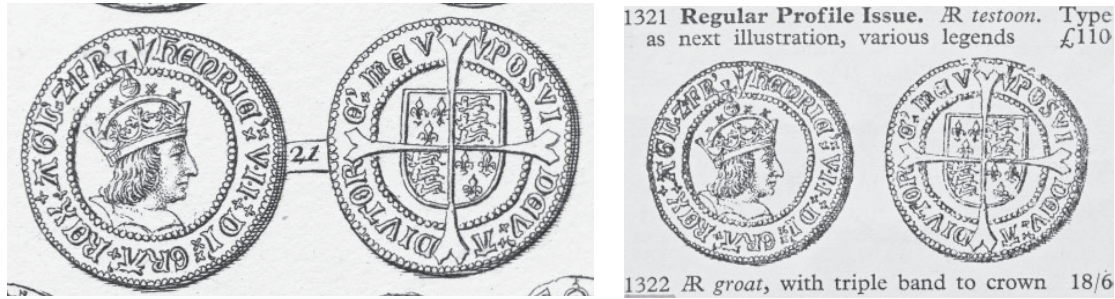
<sup>22</sup> See n.25 below.

<sup>23</sup> Folkes 1736.

<sup>24</sup> Folkes 1745.

<sup>25</sup> Folkes 1763. See Pagan 2003, 158–63. Only four plates in 1763 were signed with Vertue's monogram, compared with nineteen signed 'F. Perry'. Hugh Pagan has, however, pointed out to the author that a number of the original Vertue plates were modified by adding further coins in the course of which his monogram was obliterated.

<sup>26</sup> Ruding 1840, I, xix; Manville 2009, 246.



Figs 6–7. Groat of Henry VII from Ruding's *Annals* (1840) (left) and Seaby's *Standard Catalogue* (1952) (right).

after the Second World War. Figs 6–7 show a groat of Henry VII, taken from the 1840 edition of Ruding,<sup>27</sup> and the same image from the 1952 edition of the *Standard Catalogue*.<sup>28</sup>

Seaby also plundered heavily from other sets of plates in Ruding. Figs 8–9 show a First Hand type of Æthelred II engraved for the 1817 edition,<sup>29</sup> as used by Seaby.<sup>30</sup> The contrasting style of these two sets of images is very pronounced. The hatched shadow to the right of the First Hand illustrations is a praiseworthy if ineffectual attempt to suggest a three-dimensional effect. In fact, the elimination of shadow can be counted as one of the strengths of line engraving, the difficulty in portraying relief by no means being limited to this mode of illustration. Some engravers adopted a hatched background but this tends to diminish the clarity of the image (Fig. 10).<sup>31</sup>



Figs 8–9. Æthelred II, First Hand type, from Ruding's *Annals* (1817) (left) and Seaby's *Standard Catalogue* (1952) (right).

Following upon Leake the most important and extensive series of coin illustrations, with accompanying commentaries, were issued by Thomas Snelling, a highly energetic publisher, bookseller, numismatist and coin and medal dealer, who died in 1773. The series began with *A View of the Silver Coins and Coinage of England* in 1762, and was followed by English gold (1763), copper, including tokens (1766), miscellaneous coins and counterfeits (1769), jetons and counters (1769), culminating posthumously with Scottish coins (1774) and English medals (1776).<sup>32</sup> As in other eighteenth-century works, more than one hand contributed to the variable engravings. Snelling used Frances Perry, as had Folkes, besides Charles Hall, the medalist John (or James) Kirk and others.<sup>33</sup> Many of the plates were unsigned, although often clearly attributable. Snelling appears to have offered his plates for sale separately as well as in bound form (Fig. 11).

<sup>27</sup> Ruding 1840, III, Plate VI, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Seaby 1952, 41 (1322).

<sup>29</sup> Ruding 1840, III, Plate 22, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Seaby 1952, 21 (554).

<sup>31</sup> Taken from a proof plate to James Anderson's *Selectus Diplomatum & Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus...*, edited and published in sheet form by Thomas Ruddiman in 1739, amongst the papers of Sarah Sophia Banks at the Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant; Manville 2009, 7, 246.

<sup>32</sup> Manville 2009, 268.

<sup>33</sup> Manville 2009, 120, 153, 218–9. The first plate in *English Medals* (Snelling 1776) is signed 'Jas Kirk'.





Fig. 10. Part of a proof plate from Anderson's *Selectus Diplomatum...* (1739) (Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant).



Fig. 11. Extract from Snelling (1762), Pl. 14 (Peter Woodhead).

It is easy to appear critical that greater efforts were not made in terms of coin illustration in the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth century. However, the existing plates were doubtless considered perfectly adequate for the state of numismatic studies at the time and many of them have an enduring charm and artistic interest beyond their numismatic content. These images served the purpose of showing the main designs to be identified within any series. The detailed classifications and die studies with which we are familiar today were the result of being able to study large numbers of coins from a given series, for which purpose the availability of photographic images was a major contributory factor from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

### Accuracy of reproduction

The Achilles heel of engraving was, of course, uncertainty about the extent to which the draughtsman and/or engraver was reproducing the coin faithfully. This *caveat* applies equally to later photographic methods of reproduction where the coins illustrated have been drawn from life. In 1984 my late friend and benefactor to the Society, Roy Osborne, published in the *BNJ* an article on the Tower coins of Charles I (Pl. 19.4).<sup>34</sup> Because coins of the reign are often worn and flat in places, many of his drawings were created from photographs of more than one specimen, raising the question whether the dies used to strike the examples chosen were assuredly identical.

<sup>34</sup> Osborne 1984, 166.



There are plenty of examples amongst engraved plates where accuracy is immediately suspect (**Pl. 20.1**).<sup>35</sup> But there are also examples which tend to inspire confidence. Apart from the occasional difficulty in construing inscriptions and thus recording them accurately, the relatively simple designs and low relief of Anglo-Saxon and early medieval coinage in England are very amenable to linear reproduction. For example, in Richard Gough's publication on the coins of Cnut in 1777, he engraved (or had engraved) 42 Cnut Short Cross reverses (**Pl. 20.2**).<sup>36</sup> The coins found their way to the trays of the British Museum where there is no difficulty in matching the images to the coins. In spite of this example, die study from engraved coins is generally a hazardous undertaking.

Where an engraving is taken from a known coin the degree of accuracy may be precisely judged. Nicholas Holmes has kindly provided me with examples from James Sutherland's collection, now in Edinburgh.<sup>37</sup> Unique coins from that collection were reproduced both in Adam de Cardonnel's *Numismata Scotiae* (1786),<sup>38</sup> and in John Lindsay's *A View of the Coinage of Scotland* (1845).<sup>39</sup> Fig. 12 shows the gold striking of a groat of James V and how this piece was illustrated by Cardonnel (above) and by Lindsay (below). Both representations have defects, but that of Cardonnel especially so. Another entirely different pitfall of identification may arise in early numismatic works: it is not always certain if the illustration of the coin referred to in the text is indeed of that coin or merely representative of the type.



Fig. 12. Gold striking of a groat of James V (centre), with illustrations by Cardonnel (above) and Lindsay (below) (National Museums of Scotland).

<sup>35</sup> Herbert (undated).

<sup>36</sup> Gough 1777. Annotations on **Pl. 20.2** are in the author's hand.

<sup>37</sup> Manville 2009, 279.

<sup>38</sup> Cardonnel 1786, Plate II, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Lindsay 1845, Pl. 18, 38.

The challenge of faithfulness to nature inevitably increases with the greater complexity of coin design from the fourteenth century onwards. One curious feature encountered is that although inscriptions and other elements in the design – such as mint-marks – are creditably handled, there is an almost irresistible urge to humanise facial features. Two examples are shown here (Fig. 13, **Pl. 21.1**).<sup>40</sup> The treatment of eyes, mouth and hair are enhanced, and the use of stippling suggests a degree of relief in the image which is not present in the coins. Another facet of engraving is whether the illustration is, or is intended to be shown life size or not. The Revd Walsh in his *Essay on some Ancient Coins, Medals and Gems* of 1828 indicated the actual size of the coin alongside its enlarged image (Fig. 14).<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 13. Extract from Vertue (1753), Pl. XIV (Douglas Saville).



Fig. 14. Extract from Walsh (1828), opposite p. 87 (Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant).

<sup>40</sup> Vertue 1753, Pl. XIV (Fig. 13); Ruding 1840, Pl. VII (**Pl. 21.1**).

<sup>41</sup> Walsh 1828, opp. 87.

One method of copying accurately the surface design of a coin as a single image was to take a rubbing. This was normally done by using fine paper and a wax or soft lead pencil.<sup>42</sup> When James Wise recorded his collection in 1744 he inserted rubbings into his manuscript catalogue. He thereby captured the appearance of coins formerly owned by Cotton, who had died in 1631.<sup>43</sup> **Pl. 21.2** shows an example.<sup>44</sup> The minutes of the Society of Antiquaries of London record that the impressions were made by the Revd George North, using a screw press devised by the scientist, Henry Baker. The device was illustrated in the Society's minutes for 19 April 1744.<sup>45</sup> It consisted of a shallow strip of wood inset with two upright threaded spindles and a matching strip designed to wind downwards onto the first, using wing nuts. Its use on fragile coins must have been a risky exercise.

The practice of taking rubbings appears to have largely fallen into disuse, probably because, unlike photography, it can be invasive. When a little grandson of a friend recently sought my comments on his centenionalis of Constantius Gallus he properly relied upon his freehand artistic skills (Fig. 15).<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 15. Centenionalis of Constantius Gallus (Ben Jones).

## Conclusion

I said I would conclude the first part of my address with the third edition of Ruding's *Annals* published in 1840. His work, culminating in this posthumous edition, took British numismatics to an altogether higher plane. Within a short time the world of numismatics was further changed by another major development: the invention of photography. The continuing impact of that invention will form the subject matter of next year's address.

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<sup>42</sup> Various other methods of taking impressions of coins are dealt with in Welter 1976, 76–84. Stewart Lyon used to use carbon paper to make impressions of Anglo-Saxon stycas (see Lyon 1956, 236).

<sup>43</sup> Archibald 2006, 182, 185.

<sup>44</sup> MS in papers of Sarah Sophia Banks at the Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant.

<sup>45</sup> Society of Antiquaries of London, minutes for 19 April and 8 November 1744. Hugh Pagan generously drew the author's attention to these minutes.

<sup>46</sup> Ben Jones of Manchester, aged 7.



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