

THE TOWER MINT SHILLINGS OF CHARLES I (1625–49)

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MICHAEL Sharp published an article on ‘The Tower shillings of Charles I and their influence on the Aberystwyth issues’ in volume 47 (1977) of this *Journal*.¹ In this article he set out a categorisation of all the known obverses and reverses of shillings struck at the Tower Mint. He intended to publish a full update of new discoveries but sadly passed away in 2012. He had collected notes which he kindly handed over to the authors before his death. This article is written in Michael Sharp’s memory, and it is based upon his notes and coins known to the authors.

A number of factors have to be taken into consideration in tackling this subject. The Aberystwyth mint’s connection with the Tower Mint has been fully documented by Sharp and we have no further observations to enhance his work on this subject. A number of new discoveries have been published by Sharp as short notes since 1977, and it has been thought appropriate to include these coins in this article.² A section expanding Sharp’s discussion of the ‘Fine Work’ issues is included and also a section covering the Briot milled and hammered issues. The Sharp categories of obverse and reverse type have been retained in this article, and a new variety has been indicated by adding the suffix ‘a’ to the description (for example, D4a/1).

TABLE 1. Classification of the Tower Mint shillings of Charles I

| <i>Sharp</i> | <i>Mint marks</i> | <i>Sharp</i> | <i>Mint marks</i> |
|--------------|--|--------------|---|
| A1/1 | lis | E1/1 | bell, crown |
| A2/1 | lis, cross calvary, lightweight lis and cross calvary | E1/1a | bell, crown (over bell) |
| A2/2 | lis | E1/2 | crown, tun |
| A2/3 | lis, cross calvary | E2/1 | bell, crown |
| B1/1 | cross calvary, lightweight cross calvary, negro’s head, castle | E2/2 | bell, crown, tun |
| B2/1 | cross calvary, negro’s head, castle | E3/2 | tun |
| B1/2 | cross calvary, lightweight cross calvary, negro’s head, castle | E4/2 | tun |
| B2/2 | cross calvary, negro’s head, castle, anchor | E5/2 | tun |
| B3/2 | anchor | E6/2 | tun |
| B3a/2 | anchor | E1/3 | bell, crown |
| B4/2 | anchor, heart (over anchor) | E2/3 | bell, crown, tun |
| B5/2 | anchor, heart, plumes | E2a/3 | crown |
| B5/2a | plumes | F1/1 | tun (small and large XII), anchor (large XII) |
| B2/3 | negro’s head | F2/1 | tun (small and large XII), anchor (over tun, large XII) |
| B5/C5 | plumes | F3/1 | tun, anchor, triangle |
| C1/1 | plumes (over heart on obverse) | F3/2 | triangle |
| C2/1 | plumes, rose | F4/1 | anchor |
| C2/2 | plumes, rose (over plumes) | F5/1 | anchor, triangle |
| C2/3 | rose (short lis), rose (tall lis) | F5/2 | triangle |
| C2a/3 | plumes | F6/1 | triangle |
| C1/4 | plumes (over heart) | F6/2 | triangle |
| C2/4 | plumes, rose | F7/2 | triangle in circle |

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¹ Sharp 1977.

² Sharp 1980; 1984; 1989; 1990, 1992, 1995.

TABLE 1. *Continued.*

| <i>Sharp</i> | <i>Mint marks</i> | <i>Sharp</i> | <i>Mint marks</i> |
|--------------|--|--------------|---|
| C2/5 | plumes, rose | G1/1 | triangle |
| C2/6 | Rose | G1/2 | triangle, star, triangle in circle, (P), (R), (R) on side, eye (over R) |
| C3/5 | plumes (Fine Work only) | G2/2 | eye, sun |
| D1/1 | harp, portcullis | G3/2 | sun |
| D2/1 | harp | H1/1 | sun, sceptre |
| D3/1 | harp, portcullis | H2/1 | sceptre |
| D4/1 | harp, portcullis | H2/2 | sceptre (small and large XII) |
| D5/1 | portcullis, portcullis with no inner circles on rev. | H3/2 | sceptre (small and large XII) |
| D6/1 | portcullis | | |
| D1/2 | harp | | |
| D3/2 | harp | | |

Group A

The only new discovery in this group is a coin that seems to be a lightweight shilling of type A2/1 weighing 78.9 grains (5.11 g) with the mintmark lis (see Fig. 1). It is possible that an old pair of dies with the lis mintmark was brought into use during the short period in which the lightweight coins (of 80 grains rather than 92.75 grains) were minted during August and September 1626.³



Fig. 1. Lightweight shilling, type A2/1. (Private collection.)

Group B

A B1/2 mintmark cross/cross (over lis) lightweight shilling weighing 79.6 grains (5.16 g) is in the publication of the John G. Brooker collection.⁴ A B2/3 mintmark negro's head coin has been found with the reverse mintmark at the beginning of the legend and to the right of the cross at 12 o'clock (see Fig. 2). Of the four specimens of B2/3 recorded, two have the mark to the left of the cross, and the fourth example has not been seen by the authors. At least two reverse dies were therefore prepared with this design.



Fig. 2. Sharp Group B, reverse 3, mintmark negro's head to right of plumes. (Private collection.)

³ Sharp 1977, 103.

⁴ North and Preston-Morley with Boon and Kent 1984, no. 401.

A B3 obverse with mintmark anchor has the caul on the bust breaking through the inner circle at 7 o'clock between MAG and BR, giving the appearance of a B5 coin (see Fig. 3). We record this as obverse B3a.



Fig. 3. Sharp Group B, obverse 3a, mintmark anchor. (Private collection.)

Noted in the Fine Work section (pp. 174–6 below) is a B5 obverse with mintmark anchor.⁵ This obverse has not been seen as a currency issue. The transition between Group B and C features a number of overlaps. At the end of this series comes a reverse with a narrow based plume with spreading top which was to become the norm for Group C (see Fig. 4). We record this as reverse 2a. Two examples of a B5 obverse muled with a C group reverse 5, both with mintmark plumes, have been noted.⁶



Fig. 4. Sharp Group B, reverse 2a, mintmark plumes. (Private collection.)

Group C

A C2 mintmark plumes shilling similar to that of the Class III unites of Group C was recorded in the sale catalogue of the Martin Hughes collection.⁷ This coin was unusual for several reasons (see Fig. 5). The bust breaches the beaded inner circle from 4 to 7 o'clock, the inner circle is contained within two wire line circles, and the reverse garniture at the base of the shield is a turned-over rose petal. Reverse 3 had not previously been found with mintmark plumes. This is recorded as C2a/3.



Fig. 5. Sharp Group C, obverse and reverse 2a, mintmark plumes. (Private collection.)

⁵ Sharp 1989.

⁶ Sharp 1992, pl. 22, 2.

⁷ Spink Auction 139, 16 November 1999, lot 92.

A coin of C2/2 mintmark with plumes is recorded. Previously reverse 2 had only been known with mintmark rose (see Fig. 6). Close inspection of the rose reverse reveals that the original die was cut with the plumes mark, which had subsequently been over-punched with a rose mark.



Fig. 6. Sharp Group C2/2, obverse and reverse mintmark plumes. (Private collection.)

Group D

Two examples of a D1/1 shilling struck from the same pair of dies with portcullis marks on both sides have come to light (Fig. 7). The portcullis mintmark was introduced with the D3 obverse, so this would suggest that a D1 mintmark harp die had been over-punched. From examination of the two coins, the evidence of an over-punch on the obverse is not conclusive, although the reverse marks do appear to have a harp underneath the later mark.



Fig. 7. Sharp Group D1/1, obverse and reverse mintmark portcullis. (Private collection.)

Eight examples of D series shillings with reverse 2 mintmark harp are now recorded, following the discovery of two coins in the Prestbury Hoard.⁸ Six of these coins are coupled with obverse D1 and two with D3. Busts D3 and D4 are known with both the harp and portcullis marks: the latter mark occasionally taking a small form probably from a punch used for half groats. There are quite marked differences in appearance between coins with the two marks but it is very difficult to describe what they are. In the case of D3 portcullis mintmark coins, which are quite rare, the bust is much broader than those of the harp mark coins. The D4 shillings again differ in that the top of the crown generally found on the harp mintmark coins (Brooker 479) has more of a curve and is narrower in appearance, and also the hair has curls at the ear level whereas on the portcullis mintmark coins the hair is much straighter (Brooker 483).⁹ We record these as busts D4a and D4b. D5 and D6 shillings with mintmark portcullis have been found with the reverse mark punched over a harp.

Group E

Bust E1 with mintmark bell and crown is now known with all three reverse types.¹⁰ On occasion, the crown mark is found punched over a bell.¹¹ E1 with mintmark tun has only been

⁸ Sugden and Jones 2012, 141, nos 1085–6; Dix Noonan Webb Sale no. 68, 12 December 2005, lots 109–10.

⁹ North and Preston-Morley with Boon and Kent 1984, nos 479, 483.

¹⁰ Sharp 1984; Sharp 1990, 138, pl. 26, 1–3; Sharp 1995, pl. 19, 1–4.

¹¹ Sharp 1990, 138.

noted with reverse 2. Bust E2 mintmark bell also occurs with reverse 1.¹² There is a bust that displays features of both E2 and E3 which is found with mintmark crown and with reverse 3. This has been catalogued as Bust E2a (Fig. 8). It is only known at present from one pair of dies, with the Welsh plumes reverse. The king's tunic matches that on bust 2 but the head and crown appear both taller and broader.



Fig. 8. Sharp Group E2a/3, obverse and reverse mintmark crown. (Private collection.)

A recent discovery warrants recording. This is a shilling with a large Aberystwyth style bust punch similar to F2 but with no inner circles, a large mark of value, and the mintmark tun (see Fig. 9). The reverse is the standard reverse 2 for the E series with round shield. This is allocated the description E6/2 and provides further evidence of the experimentation taking place at the Tower prior to the establishment of the Welsh mint.



Fig. 9. Sharp Group E6 obverse, mintmark tun. (Private collection.)

Group F

Bust F1 mintmark tun mainly occurs with a small mark of value but it is found more rarely with either a medium-size or large XII. The same bust type has also been recorded with the anchor mintmark and with the reverse mark punched over a tun.¹³ Bust F2 occurs with both tun mintmark and rarely with anchor struck over tun, and a coin of Bust F5/1 has come to light with a vertical anchor on the reverse and also a vertical anchor over a tun mark.¹⁴ The vertical anchor mark was used extensively on F3 shillings but had not been previously noted on an F5 shilling. This might be accounted for by the use of an old reverse die. However, an F5/2 shilling with mintmark triangle which warrants recording has the obverse mark punched over a vertical anchor. This suggests that a die was prepared with the mark although no example of a coin has yet come to light with an unaltered mark.

Group G

Reverse 1 in Group G has been discovered with the triangle mint mark punched over a tun altered from an anchor (Fig. 10). G1/2 mint mark eye over (R) is recorded with the altered mark on both or either side of the coin. There was a suggestion in the catalogue of the Willis Sale that a G2 obverse exists with this altered mark. Unfortunately, the coin is not illustrated

¹² Sharp 1989.

¹³ Sharp 1990, pl. 26, 2.

¹⁴ Sharp 1980.

in the catalogue.¹⁵ An example of a G2/2 eye over (R) shilling has now been found but the authors have not seen a G2 obverse with an unaltered (R) mintmark.



Fig. 10. Sharp Group G, triangle mark over tun, altered from anchor. (From the unpublished notes of Michael Sharp.)

G3/2 mintmark sun was a remarkable new bust discovery recorded by Sharp in 1995.¹⁶ Since publication eight further examples have come to light, one with a very clear bust (see Fig. 11). At least three obverse dies appear to have been cut. All of the ten coins discovered to date are of good weight but struck on small misshapen flans. Although designated as G series coins the bust characteristics are more aligned with the H1 shillings. Perhaps there was experimentation at the mint to reduce the flan size, which was adopted for the H2 and H3 coins.



Fig. 11. Sharp Group G3, obverse and reverse mintmark sun. (Private collection.)

Group H

Several H2/1 mintmark sceptre shillings have come to light.¹⁷ These have been found on both larger and smaller sized flans, giving some support to the suggestion of experimentation with flan size in the previous paragraph. H2/2 shillings are less common with a smaller mark of value.

Odd and curious coins

A characteristic feature of the coinage of Charles I is the frequency with which spelling errors occur. Some even seem to be copied from one die to another. In this article we will however restrict ourselves to some of the more unusual errors which happened during the cutting of the shilling dies. A Group A obverse die, from which a few coins are known, exists with an inverted mark of value (IIX). This error is also found on E4 mintmark tun (Fig. 12) and G1 mintmark (P) and (R) shillings (Fig. 13). Several coins are also known in Group E where the XII is struck over an erroneous IIX: E2/2 mintmarks bell and crown, and E4 mintmark tun. This suggests that normally the XII was made up from a single iron but occasionally the spacing or level of the numerals is irregular, so perhaps individual letter punches were used when a XII punch broke. There is a D6/1 shilling with XI behind the king's head with no trace of

¹⁵ Frederick Willis sale, part 1, Glendining, 5 June 1991, lot 231.

¹⁶ Sharp 1995, pl. 19, 2–3.

¹⁷ Sharp 1989.



Fig. 12. Sharp Group E4, obverse mintmark tun, IIX. (Private collection.)



Fig. 13. Sharp Group G1/2, obverse and reverse mintmark (R), IIX. (Private collection.)

the second I, which might provide further evidence for the use of individual letter punches, although it is also possible that the end had broken off an XII punch.

A B2/1 reverse occurs with an inverted mintmark castle.¹⁸ A Group C2/3 reverse mintmark rose has the letters C:R at either side of the shield as well as the normal positioning of C:R above the shield (see Fig. 14). Was this a mistake by mint workers used to preparing dies for gold unites or a trial in the design process for Group D reverses?



Fig. 14. Sharp Group C2/3, C:R above and beside the shield. (Private collection.)

An E2 reverse with mintmark crown has the two groups of English lions inverted and on another E2 reverse the lions are above each other on the two inner quarters and the lis are above each other on the outer quarters. A coin with the triangle in circle mintmark is found on which the Scottish lion in the second quarter of the shield is inverted (see Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Sharp Group G1/2, mintmark triangle in circle, inverted Scottish lion in second quarter. (Private collection.)

¹⁸North and Preston-Morley with Boon and Kent 1984, no. 414.

There is an F Group reverse 1 which is known coupled with both F3 and F5 obverses which has 'comma' stops in place of pellets in the legend (see Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Sharp Group F5/1, mintmark anchor, comma stops. (Private collection.)

In Sharp's original *BNJ* article he noted a G1 obverse mintmark (P) paired with a reverse of a contemporary halfcrown.¹⁹ He subsequently noted another similar hybrid, which is a D4 obverse mintmark portcullis shilling with the reverse from a contemporary halfcrown die.²⁰ Rather more remarkable is a gold unite with mintmark plume struck from a C2 shilling obverse die carrying the XII mark of value.²¹ There is also a coin struck on a sixpence flan from sixpence obverse and unite reverse dies,²² so perhaps the gold and silver sections of the mint were not distinctly separate.

A G1/2 shilling has been noted on which the reverse mintmark seems to be (R) punched over a triangle in circle rather than the previous mintmark, (P) (see Fig. 17). The obverse mintmark is not clear but is presumed to be (R).



Fig. 17. Sharp Group G1/2, reverse mintmark (R) over triangle in circle. (Private collection.)

The coinage of Nicholas Briot

As a few new varieties and die combinations have come to light since Sharp's 1977 publication it was considered appropriate to include the Briot shillings in this update.

An accompanying table (Table 2) sets out all of the known die combinations.

Milled shillings: first issue

There are three obverse dies and four reverse dies. All coins with obverse A are very rare and those coupled with reverse two particularly so.²³

Milled shillings: second issue

There are five obverse dies and five reverse dies. With one exception all combinations are represented in the Brooker Sylloge.²⁴ The exception (E6 on Table 2) is unusual in that the obverse

¹⁹ Sharp 1977, 110. pl. IX, 72.

²⁰ Sharp 1990, pl. 26, 1.

²¹ Sharp 1995, pl. 19, 1.

²² Spink Auction no. 76, 24 May 1990, lot 84.

²³ Sharp 1989.

²⁴ North and Preston-Morley with Boon and Kent 1984.

mintmark is an anchor facing right with a vertical letter B below (see Fig. 18). The whole bust is also contained within the inner circle. The reverse mark is a plain anchor facing right. These coins appear to be less commonly found than the others from this issue.



Fig. 18. Briot milled shilling, E6, mintmark anchor and B (vertical)/anchor. (Private collection.)

Hammered shillings

No new bust or reverse types have been found. All the coins with the anchor mintmark are excessively rare. A number of new die combinations have been discovered since 1977 and these are listed in Table 2. One new feature that has come to light is the occurrence of a plain triangle mintmark on shillings struck from both obverse and reverse dies of Briot.²⁵ These are much rarer than the triangle over anchor coins.

TABLE 2. The shillings of Nicholas Briot

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obv.</i> | <i>Rev.</i> | <i>Remarks</i> | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--|----------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Milled: first issue | A | mm. B | 1 | mm. B at the end of the legend which commences at 6 o'clock on reverse. | Brooker 715A |
| | A | mm. B | 2 | mm. B at the end of the legend which commences at 12 o'clock on reverse; top left hand corner of shield touches inner circle | Unpublished notes of Michael Sharp |
| | B | mm. B and flower; bust breaks inner circle at 4-7 o'clock | 3 | mm. B at end of legend; shield corners touch inner circle | Brooker 716 |
| | C | mm. B and flower; bust breaks inner circle at A of BRITTAN | 4 | mm. B at end of legend; shield corners do not touch inner circle | Brooker 717 |
| Milled: second issue | D | mm. anchor and B (horizontal); bust breaks inner circle at A of MAG and F of FR; orb points to A | 5 | mm. anchor and B (Horizontal) | Brooker 725-6 |
| | E | mm. anchor and B (vertical); bust contained within inner circle | 6 | mm. anchor; bottom fleur breaks inner circle and points to S | See Fig. 18 |
| | F | mm. anchor; front arch of crown breaks inner circle at RIT;F of BRIT;FR | 7 | mm. anchor | Brooker 728A |
| | G | mm. anchor; crown contained within inner circle; bust breaks inner circle at RIT;F of BRIT;FR | 9 | mm. anchor; bottom fleur breaks inner circle and points between S and P | Brooker 727 |

²⁵ Sharp 1984, Fig. 4; Sharp 1989.

TABLE 2. *Continued.*

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obv.</i> | <i>Rev.</i> | <i>Remarks</i> | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--|--|----------------|
| | H | mm. anchor; crown contained within inner circle; bust breaks inner circle at RIT of BRIT | 8 mm. anchor; bottom fleur contained in inner circle and points to S | Brooker 728 |
| Hammered: first issue | | | | |
| | A | mm. anchor; contraction stops | 1 mm. anchor; pellet stops | Brooker 736 |
| | F5 Tower | mm. triangle (over anchor); contraction stops | 2 mm. triangle (over Anchor?); pellet stops | Brooker 530/1 |
| Hammered: second issue | | | | |
| | B | mm. anchor; lozenge stops | 3 mm. anchor; lozenge stops | Brooker 737 |
| | F5 Tower | mm. triangle; contraction stops | 4 mm. triangle (over anchor?); lozenge stops | |
| | C | mm. triangle (over anchor); lozenge stops | 4 mm. triangle (over anchor); lozenge stops | Brooker 738 |
| | C | mm. triangle (over anchor); lozenge stops | 5 mm. triangle; lozenge stops | |
| | C | mm. triangle (over anchor); lozenge stops | G1 mm. triangle; pellet stops | Brooker 739–40 |
| | D | mm. triangle; lozenge stops | 5 mm. triangle; lozenge stops | |
| | G1 Tower | mm. triangle; contraction stops | 4 mm. triangle (over anchor); lozenge stops | Brooker 540/1 |
| | G1 Tower | mm triangle (over anchor); contraction stops | 5 mm. triangle; lozenge stops | Brooker 542 |

Pieces of Fine Work

These coins were defined in Sharp's 1977 article as the product of superior workmanship, being neater and often with fuller legends than other coins, and on very regular flans which were possibly machine made. Many of the coins have a proof-like quality. It should be noted here that shillings do exist of superior workmanship that are not struck on polished machine-made flans. Equally there are shillings struck on polished machine-made flans that do not exhibit superior workmanship in the preparation of their dies. An appropriate note has been made against entries in the accompanying updated table of coins (Table 3) where, in the opinion of the authors, special care has been taken in preparing the dies or flans to produce coins worthy of being considered as of Fine Work.

The reason for producing these coins remains a mystery. Are they presentation pieces or trials for the regular coinage? They occurred quite frequently when a major design change took place (see Fig. 19) but not always. For example, to our knowledge C1 and G1 shillings do not exist in Fine Work. There are a number of unresolved questions about these coins. Why was only one Fine Work halfcrown produced and a limited number of sixpences? Who produced the machine-made flans on which many of the coins were struck? Nicholas Briot was producing his first milled coinage of 1631–2 contemporaneously with the Tower Mint C2 currency coins, but were his flans used? Some of the Fine Work coins were produced in volume, for example C2/4 and D2/1 shillings. Several dies were produced for these coins with small design changes featuring the inclusion of pellets or sometimes the absence of stops altogether. Some die designs of the Fine Work coins were not adopted for the regular coinage, for example, B5 mintmark anchor and C3 mintmark plume shillings. Issues such as these last two shillings and also F5 shillings occur with no apparent logic.

Shillings of exceptional workmanship were also struck on well prepared hammered flans during the Civil War when Parliament took control of the Tower Mint (see Figs. 20–22). Again this is something of a mystery, and another one to add to the various unanswered questions regarding these coins that have come under the umbrella of 'Fine Work'.

TABLE 3. Pieces of Fine Work

| <i>Sharp</i> | <i>Mint mark</i> | <i>Source</i> | <i>Remarks</i> |
|--------------|------------------|---|--|
| A1/1 | lis | Fitzwilliam Museum | Possibly not a machine-made flan |
| A2/1 | lis | British Museum | |
| A2/3 | lis | Brooker 392 | |
| B1/1 | cross calvary | British Museum | Possibly not a machine-made flan |
| B2/1 | castle | private collection | |
| B2/2 | castle | Dix Noonan Webb Sale 75, 26 September 2007, lot 39 | |
| B5/2 | anchor | private collection | |
| B5/2 | heart | Brooker 436 | |
| B5/2 | plume | Brooker 443 | Possibly not a machine-made flan |
| C2/4 | plume | Brooker 454–5 | |
| C2/5 | plume | Dr E. Burstall sale, Glendining, 15 May 1968, lot 298 | |
| C3/5 | plume | Brooker 467 | |
| C2/5 | rose | Dix Noonan Webb Sale 75, 26 September 2007, lot 49 | |
| D1/1 | harp | Brooker 471 | |
| D2/1 | harp | Brooker 473 | |
| E2/2 | bell | Brooker 489–90 | |
| E2/2 | crown | Sharp 1977 | |
| E2/2 | tun | Sharp 1977 | |
| E3/2 | tun | British Museum | |
| E2/3 | bell | Brooker 491A | |
| F1/1 | tun | Brooker 514A | |
| F5/1 | anchor | Brooker 529 | |
| G2/2 | eye | Spink Sale 163, 15 May 2003, lot 48; Brooker 557 | Not a machine-made flan |
| G2/2 | (P) | Fitzwilliam Museum; British Museum | Not a machine-made flan |
| H1/1 | sceptre | Brooker 566A | Not a machine-made flan |
| H2/2 | sceptre | private collection | Polished flan but not of exceptional workmanship |



Fig. 19. Sharp Group A1/1, obverse and reverse mintmark lis, Fine Work. (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.)



Fig. 20. Sharp Group G1/2, obverse and reverse mintmark (P), Fine Work. (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.)



Fig. 21. Sharp Group G2/2, obverse and reverse mintmark eye, Fine Work. (Private collection.)



Fig. 22. Sharp Group H1/1, obverse and reverse mintmark sceptre, Fine Work. (Private collection.)

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