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PLATE 6

Images by courtesy of the Royal Mint.

The reverse types of the new United Kingdom definitive coinage, 2008. Designed by Matthew Dent.
See pages 155-9.

SHORTER NOTES

The new reverse designs for the U.K. definitive coinage. *Barrie Cook writes:* In March 2008 a new set of reverses designs for the British coinage, the first for forty years, was launched at the Tower of London, ancient home of the Royal Mint (**Plate 6**). The launch sparked a moderate level of public and press reaction which has since rather dissipated, probably because of the slow rate of release of the coins themselves, which are entering currency through the normal timetable of issue and withdrawal. At the time of writing the current writer had yet to encounter an example in his own pocket, despite inhabiting a professional world of near-obsessive change-checkers.

The positive reaction was to some degree surprising; in one sense, because of the innate hostility to change – easily noted by veteran observers and historians of such affairs – that these matters seem to arouse in the most unlikely quarters. Another aspect that might have caused hostile comment was the nature of the designs themselves, restoring what can be perceived as the most traditional and non-modern elements of coin design, the royal shield of arms as currently embodied, to pride of place.

The numismatic usage of the royal shield of arms in Britain is a complex and ever evolving story, this being but the latest manifestation. The first shield of arms in the European tradition was employed by Louis IX (St Louis) in the 1260s on the kingdom of France's first gold coin, the *écu*, where it resided on the obverse side as the main dynastic and regal symbol. His younger brother Charles I of Anjou, king of Sicily, was the first to employ the royal shield as a reverse design, along with an obverse profile image of himself, in a short-lived and precocious precursor of the early modern standard combination. However, as a principal element of coin design in the medieval period, the royal shield was overwhelmingly used in pride of place as the main obverse design. The French *écu* design, revived in the mid-fourteenth century, survived as the principal image on French coins into the mid sixteenth-century, when portraiture came to displace it to the reverse. The long-lasting coins names *écu*, *escudo* and *scudo* all reflect this perennial dominance and it could easily have shifted to England, perhaps as the 'scute', the normal English term for the *écu* in the fourteenth century, as derived from the Latin *scutum*. However, things took a different turn and in England, when the royal shield entered coin design several decades later in 1344, it did so merely as a simple accoutrement of royalty. Throughout the later middle ages, it could be seen on the gold noble, hanging from the arm of the image of a mailed king, who raised a sword with his other arm. From the start it usually bore the quartered arms of England and France, the latter assumed by Edward III in 1340.

The place of the shield as the definitive reverse design of the early modern period, initially superimposed on the traditional medieval cross, was developed by the trailblazers of chivalric style and late medieval pomp, the dukes of Burgundy, in the fifteenth century, who shifted it from front to back, though it did continue to oscillate in position between sides for some time. Whether he took his cue from his

Figure 1: Robert III of Scotland, gold 'lion', 1390. Above (a), obverse; below (b), reverse. Shown enlarged. British Museum, CM 1843-0609.1.

neighbours in the Netherlands or else from allies in Spain and Portugal, who also were beginning to use the royal shield as a reverse design, that great numismatic innovator Henry VII applied it to the reverses of his new gold sovereign and also his silver coins beginning in the 1490s, where it would stay as a feature into the modern era. Henry also introduced the harp as a main design feature on his Irish coinage, though not yet in shield form: Elizabeth I was the first to take this step, as an element in the composite shield for her Irish coinage. Meanwhile, in the Scottish kingdom, the lion rampant shield made its debut to the coinage first, in English style, as carried on the king's arm on David II's imitation of the noble in about 1357. More lastingly, it appeared as a principal design in itself on Robert III's gold lion in 1390 (**Figure 1**), in imitation of the French-style *écu*. During the later sixteenth century, as in France, it gradually shifted to the reverse, giving way on the obverse to a royal portrait.

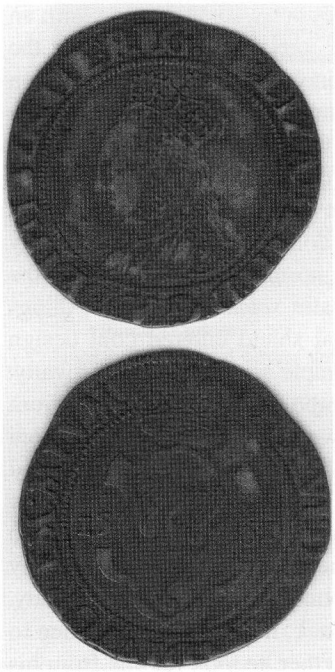

Figure 2: Elizabeth I, silver penny minted in Ireland, 1561. Above (a): obverse. Below (b): reverse. Shown enlarged. British Museum, CM E3037.

During the sixteenth century the shield remained dominant on reverses of the English silver coinage, but featured only intermittently on the gold – the first five-shilling crown introduced in 1526, was a version of the French *écu à la couronne* in the contemporary French and Spanish style (so 'shield', not 'crown', could have easily become a traditional British coin name), but with the shield transferred to the reverse and a Tudor rose on the front. For a while the gold of Henry and Edward VI featured the crowned shield in as very grand way, with lion supporters. The mid-Tudor period saw a definite move towards the definitive combination of obverse portrait and reverse royal shield across the majority of denominations, to reach its peak under Elizabeth I. Of course, the shield of the first

Elizabeth was very different from the current one – the English arms twice as today, but the arms of France rather than the modern Scottish and Irish quarters. (The loss of Calais shortly before her accession was a very sore point in England and the French title could not be ignored in this context.) Her Irish coinage used the Irish harp on a shield for the first time (**Figure 2**), though the chosen design showed three harps rather than the single one seen ever since. It was the latter version that James I and VI included in the main English version of the shield, while also (obviously) adding in the Scottish lion, with the combined Anglo-French arms in the other two quarterings. In his Scottish coinage, and that of his Stuart successors until the Act of Union, the Scottish lion rampant took the premier place instead of the lions and lilies and was also the duplicated quartering.

Probably the main defining and innovative feature of the version of the shield on the new reverse designs is the way that the quarterings are separated among the different denominations (**Figure 3**). The Irish harp and English lions meet harmoniously on the 50-pence, in contrast to the penny, where a lion hovers a little ominously over the harp; the Scottish lion is largely isolated on the twopence and has only a tangential presence (the edge of its border) on the unifying five-pence, where the quarterings meet. It might be easy to read some political symbolism into these, though perhaps not into the English lions' rear ends that mark out the 20-pence. Although the execution is modern and the conceit of the particular form of the shield's deconstruction across the range of denominations a novelty, the disassembling of the shield has been done before and was frequently in evidence from the later seventeenth century. The restored Stuarts used the separated shields in a cross shape from 1662, with a brief restoration of the full shield under William and Mary, and the Hanoverians retained it until 1787, though shifting to the full shield for their gold issues in 1727. In the mid-Victorian period, the separated shields made a comeback in fine style, on the Gothic florin and other higher-value silver denominations, while the gold had either the full shield or Pistrucci's St George, and Britannia ruled on the base-metal issues.

Figure 3: Elizabeth II, 5 pence (top) and 50 pence (below), 2008: reverses, designed by Matthew Dent. Shown enlarged.

Although the arms were beginning to be viewed as a national emblem for coinage, as much as a dynastic one, this took a long time to establish. The fluctuations of dynasty continued to have an impact, allowing the royal shield to continue its usual mutations in detail. Under Mary I the Anglo-French arms retreated to one quarter of the royal shield on her shillings, swamped by the complex Burgundian-Austrian-Spanish arms of her husband Philip of Spain. Under William and Mary, and William III alone, the lion of Holland joined the shield, though perched in the centre, rather than displacing one of the established quarterings. Although in one sense dictated by heraldic rules, these changes also accurately reflected firm political realities. However, under Anne, the arms of her husband Prince George of Denmark did not

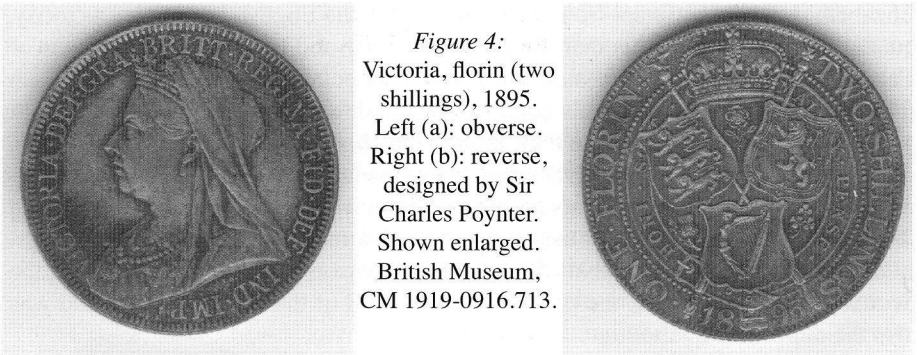

Figure 4: Victoria, florin (two shillings), 1895. Left (a): obverse. Right (b): reverse, designed by Sir Charles Poynter. Shown enlarged. British Museum, CM 1919-0916.713.

follow suit – perhaps things would have been different if any of their children had still been alive and an Anglo-Danish dynasty been firmly in the offing.

In yet another reflection of both heraldic form and political reality, the tripartite arms of Brunswick, Lüneburg and Hanover arrived on the shield with George I, forcing the combined Anglo-French arms to retreat to one quartering, with the result that for most of the eighteenth century the English arms were actually the least prominent element of the royal shield. However, in 1801, reflecting the new Act of Union, there was a readjustment and the arms of France were at long last removed, as part of a redesign of the form of the royal shield. The result might be viewed as a missed opportunity, since the resulting form now heavily emphasised the English arms, present in two quarterings, with the Brunswick arms now placed centrally and (from 1816) augmented by a crown, reflecting the change of the electorate into a kingdom at the Congress of Vienna. The Brunswick element departed again with the succession of Victoria and the resultant separation of the Hanoverian and British kingdoms; and the removal of the Brunswick arms from the centre of the shield following so soon after the French deletion left it at its simplest for centuries. The precedent of Queen Anne was followed and no Saxe-Coburg intrusion followed Victoria's wedding, despite Victoria's status as England's first queen regnant with surviving offspring, setting the pattern to be followed subsequently by Elizabeth II. An admirable, if short-lived, design of the 1890s on the florin and shilling separated out the (now just three) national shields once more, to produce a simple, well balanced and equitable image (**Figure 4**), but the English-dominated form of the shield has remained the more usual version.

The point of this partial and potted history of the royal shield's use on the national coinage is to emphasise both its representative role as national symbol and its tradition of continual change. This might bring into play one of the complaints that has been made of the new design: the absence there of any heraldic representation of the principality of Wales. This is hardly the fault of the mint or the organisers of the public competition that produced these winning designs, unless of course they can be blamed for having offered the shield itself as one of the possible subjects to the prospective designers. Maybe this might encourage some thought of change – traditionally the shield has carried the arms of the constituent kingdoms of the United Kingdom, currently England, Scotland and Ireland. However, the 'kingdom

of Ireland' was constituted in 1541 from the old lordship of Ireland by a heavily managed Anglo-Irish parliament for Henry VIII. Plainly this no longer exists in its historic form. A change in approach would not seem inappropriate, therefore, given the essential mutability of the royal shield across the centuries, and its capacity to respond to political realities as much as strict heraldic forms. Admittedly the arms of France stayed put for about three centuries too long after the loss of Calais, until the nineteenth-century monarchy at last decided to be sensible about its French claim, but perhaps another re-imagining of the purpose of the royal shield might be in order? After all, the arms of the duchy and electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg and its accompanying titles from the Holy Roman Empire were incorporated into the British shield design and coin inscriptions with no apparent problems, so the status of kingdom is anyway not a necessary factor here. The publicity for the new designs proclaims that the form of the shield has 'remained virtually unchanged since the reign of Queen Victoria', which does not address whether this is actually a good thing for such a potentially flexible and useful symbol.

It is perhaps unlikely that designer Matthew Dent's crisp, clean, stylistically somewhat retro creation will have a longevity comparable to Christopher Ironside's designs for the previous decimal reverses, but we will still have a long time to get used to them, as they gradually percolate into currency. For anyone with an interest in the processes of coin design, present and past, the British Museum and Royal Mint are producing an exhibition 'Designing change: coins of Elizabeth II' to run at the museum from September 2008 to March 2009.

Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum

The origin of the label and the maunch. *Paul A Fox writes:* In a paper on the origins of cadency, published in the last number of this journal, I stated that the label began as a ribbon with pendant strips which was worn around the neck, and possibly sometimes around the helm (*CoA* 3rd ser. 4 (2008), pp. 21-8, at 21). Subsequent research has determined that there are some twelfth-century literary references which shed further light on the matter. There are references to the tying of thin leather straps to the back of a knight's helmet at tournaments, designed to fan out behind when riding at speed: see David Crouch, *Tournament* (London 2005), p. 139. That such streamers might have pendant strips in the manner of a label appears to be borne out by two illustrations from Guillim's *Display of Heraldry* (first edn., London 1611, p. 39). He provides two examples which at first sight appeared quite puzzling, of labels borne on shields bendwise, as they might have appeared when the wind was not particularly strong.

Of the two examples, one (**Figure 5a**, over) is definitely very early, the seal of William son of William de Curli of Budbrooke, Langley and Norton Curley in Warwickshire. William de Curli senior in 1205 bought back his brother John's Warwick estates from King John for a hundred marks and a palfrey, after his brother had sided against the king and returned to his ancestral lands in Normandy: *VCH Warwicks* vol. 3, pp. 65-8; W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1st edn., London