

III.

NOTES OF SOME UNPUBLISHED RECORDS OF THE COINAGES OF
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Some unpublished records of the coinages of the reign of James the Sixth, are still extant in the Register House, and consist, in the first place, of the "Minutes of the Privy Council," extending in almost a complete series from the commencement to the close of the period. A few extracts from these are given by Lindsay in his "View of the Coinage of Scotland," but the most important of them have never hitherto been made accessible to the Scottish numismatist. It will be seen from the following descriptions that they supply nearly all the blanks which exist at present in our knowledge of the various series of coins of this reign. There is also a most important "Compt of the Cunzie" made by Thomas Acheson, extending from April 1582 to August 1606, and affording full information as to the dates of the various mintages and the amounts coined. Several of the wardens' books and registers of the daily work at the Mint are also preserved; and one interesting register, of the mintages from 1588 to 1592 has been discovered amongst the MSS. in the Society's Library, and I am indebted to Mr Joseph Anderson for directing my attention to it.

Besides the above unpublished Records there are several contracts, overtures, reports, and other papers of a miscellaneous nature, all relating to the subject before us.

It may be of interest to students of Scottish numismatics to point out

the more important results which an investigation of the above-mentioned documents has afforded, and for this purpose the following tables and descriptions are given. Beginning with the Silver Coinages we find that the James Ryall or Sword-Dollar was ordered to be coined by an Act of Privy Council in August 1567. This Act is given by Cardonnel, and is found in the Minutes of the Privy Council in almost identical terms. Lindsay's account of this coinage is full and correct, though some new dates have occurred since his time. We may, therefore, sum up the complete history of these pieces as follows, viz. :—

The Sword-dollar, originally called the James Ryall, was issued in 1567-68-69-70-71. It was authorised by an Act of Privy Council recorded in August 1567. The value at the time of issue was 30s., but this was subsequently raised to 36s. 9d. in 1578 by an Act of Privy Council. The weight was one ounce Troy Scottish, or $472\frac{1}{2}$ grains modern Troy, and the fineness 11 deniers, with the usual remedies for weight and fineness. The countermarks which occur were ordered to be put on in 1578 by an Act of Privy Council, when all the 30s. pieces and their parts were recalled to the Mint, tested, and reissued with a countermark.

We come now to the nobles (so called by Lindsay), though they were more commonly known as the Half-merk Pieces. These were authorised to be issued by an Act of Privy Council, dated 12th May 1572. They were coined during the first year at Dalkeith, as appears from a letter preserved in the State Paper Office, addressed by Sir Wm. Drury to Lord Burleigh,¹ and according to the author of the "Diurnal of Occurrents"² were only 6 denier fine, though it is worthy of remark that no mention of the fineness is made in the Act of the Privy Council, which is most unusual. The coinage at Dalkeith only occurred for one year, as in 1573 there is an entry in the Lord Treasurer's accounts of "xiiij^{li} xs. payit for carying and transporting of the haille necessaris and work lumis appartening to the cunzehous fra the castell of Dalkeith to the palice of Halyrudhous." . . . In 1576 the standard of fineness was raised to eight deniers, as appears from a contract entered into between the Regent and Abraham Petersoun, preserved in the Register House, and in 1579 it was recalled to the usual standard of 11 den. The Half-noble, or Forty Penny Piece, is exactly similar, except in value.

¹ Cal. State Papers, Scotland, vol. i. p. 343.

² Pp. 297, 298.

The next silver coins mentioned in the "View of the Coinage of Scotland" are the Thistle Dollars, or more properly the Two-merk Pieces of 1579, and in his account of them Lindsay falls into several errors. In the first place, he mistakes the weights used in the Scottish Mint for the modern English Troy standard; and in the next place, he confuses the coinage of 1581 with that of 1579. We may sum up the correct history of these two-merk pieces as follows, viz.:—

The Thistle Dollar, more properly known as the Two-merk Piece, was first authorised by an Act of the Parliament of Scotland on the 25th of July 1578. By this Act full power was given to the Privy Council to fix the type, weight, purity, and value. Accordingly, on the 18th September, an Act of Privy Council was passed, ordering a piece of silver to be coined of the fineness of 11 deniers, to weigh 17 deniers and 11 grains Scottish (or a little over 344 grains modern Troy), to be called the Two-merk Piece, and to have course for 26s. 8d. The half was to be in all respects similar, but current for only 13s. 4d. The usual remedies of weight or fineness were allowed. This coinage was further confirmed by an *Act of Parliament passed in 1579.*

The merk piece is exceedingly rare, though three or four are known. The dates 1578–1579 occur in the two-merk pieces, and 1579–1580 on the merk pieces. The coinage of 1581 was entirely different, and presents a series complete in itself. It seems that about the end of 1580 or beginning of 1581, in pursuance of an authority granted by Parliament, the Mint had been let to certain partners on lease. These appear from the Act of 1581 to have been Clark of Balbirnie, provost of Edinburgh; Napier of Wraithouses, Nicholl Edward, Harry Nisbet, Richard Abercromby, Robert Abereromby, and Thomas Acheson. Their contract was to have lasted for three years; but in 1581 the Act above noticed put an end to the contract, apparently on account of the unprofitable way in which the coinage was carried out. It appears that 211 stone 10 lb. weight of silver were coined into 16s., 8s., 4s., and 2s. pieces during this year; and it was ordered to be brought into the Mint, and recoined into the 10s. pieces of the next coinage of 1582. It is unquestionable, therefore, that the coins figured in Lindsay's tenth plate, Nos. 206*, 207, 207*, 208, were the coins minted during this lease of the Mint, and were a series of pieces quite distinct from the two-merk piece and merk piece of 1578–79–80.

This brings us to the coinages of 1582. The Act of Parliament above

noticed orders the coinage of 1581 to be recalled, and coined into 10s. pieces, 11 denier fine; and four to go to the ounce. From an entry in the Treasurer's account, it appears that Thomas Foulis was ordered by the king to prepare dies for this coinage from a portrait of the king drawn by Lord Seytoun's painter. An Act of Privy Council later in the same year allows the usual remedies of weight and fineness, which had been omitted in the Parliamentary Act, and orders the coinage to take place in Archibald Stewart's house in Edinburgh, owing to the ruinous state of the Mint beside Holyrood.

In March 1582 the Privy Council ordered the coinage of 40s., 30s., and 20s. pieces, in addition to the 10s. pieces formerly sanctioned. We may therefore sum up the history of these pieces as follows, viz. :—

The 40s. pieces authorised by the Act of Privy Council above noticed were struck at the Mint at Edinburgh in 1582, and perhaps later; and the 30s., 20s., and 10s. pieces from 1582 to May 1586. These coins weigh respectively an ounce Scottish, three-quarters of an ounce, half an ounce, and a quarter ounce, and were, 11 denier fine, with the usual remedies of weight and fineness. Their values were afterwards raised.

The next coinage was the Balance Half-merks and Forty-penny Pieces, which were authorised by an Act of Parliament in August 1591, and by an Act of Privy Council in January of the same year, and all the silver was reduced to 10½ denier fine, and re-issued in these pieces.

In 1593 the Mint was let for two years and three months to the Provost and Council of Edinburgh, and a new coinage of silver of eleven penny fine was struck in 10s., 5s., 2s. 6d., and 1s. pieces, with the usual remedies of weight and fineness.

The Mint was again let in 1598 to Thomas Foullis, goldsmith, for six years, at a yearly rent of L.5000. In 1601 a new coinage of merks was authorised by an Act of the Scottish Parliament assembled at Perth. These were to weigh about 104 grs., with the usual remedies for weight and fineness, and with half merks and forty and twenty penny pieces corresponding.

In considering the accompanying table of the silver coins, it is necessary to remark that the years of issue are not complete, as some of the Mint registers cannot now be found. The weights authorised by the Acts are subject to a remedy of two grains either way, so that the fractional parts may be practically disregarded.

Name of Silver Coins.	Dates of Issue from the Mint Registers, &c.	Weight authorised by Acts of Privy Council.	Value at the time of Issue, do., do.	Standard of Fineness, do., do.	
1. James Ryall, or sword dollar.	1567 to 1571.	472½ Grains.	30/	11 den.	} The Act of Privy Council authorising this coinage is given both by Cardounel and Lindsay. The date 1567 ought to occur, though not given in Lindsay.
Two - thirds James Ryall.	do.	315	20/	do.	
One - third James Ryall.	1568 to 1571.	157½	10/	do.	
2. Half merk or noble.	1572-3-4-5-7-80.	...	6/8	6 den. but raised to 8 den.	} This coinage was at first very base, but afterwards raised.
Half noble, or forty penny piece.	1572.	...	3/4		
3. Two - merk piece, or thistle dollar.	1578-9.	344½	26/8	11 den.	} The merk piece of this coinage extremely rare. The coins with crowned thistle do not belong to this coinage. 16th Dec. 1579.*
Merk piece.	1577-80 1581.	172	13/4	do.	
4. Sixteen shilling piece, with quarter, and eight parts of the same.	1581	...	16/8/4/2/	...	29th June 1581.*
5. Forty shilling piece, with three-fourths, half, and quarter of the same.	6th April 1582-3-4, and up to 10th May 1586.	472½ 354¾ 236½ 118¼	40/ 30/ 20/ 10/	11 den.	} There are frequent coinages of 40/ pieces mentioned in the Mint registers. 2d May 1583.*
6. Balance half merk.	1591-2-3.	...	6/8	10½ den.	
Half do., or forty penny piece.	1591-2.	...	3/4	do.	} The Mint register of these is preserved, and shows that they were coined from 1st Sept. 1591 to 1st Dec. 1592. 4th Sept. 1591.*
7. Ten - shilling piece, with five shilling, thirty pence, and twelve penny pieces.	1593-4-5-6-8-9.	94½ 47¼ 23	10/ 5/ 2/6 1/	11 den. do. do. do.	
8. Thistle merk, with half merk, forty penny, and twenty penny pieces.	1601-2-3-4.	104 52 26 13	13/4 6/8 4/4 1/8	11 den. do. do. do.	} Act of Parliament, vol. iv. p. 259, and Act of Privy Council, dated Dec. 1601. The Mint registers of this coinage are still preserved; the coinage continued till August 1604. 30th Nov. 1681.*

* The Acts indicated by an asterisk are from P. C. R. 1609-1610, p. 226.

Gold.—The first gold coins struck in this reign were the fine L.20 gold pieces. These were minted in November 1575 for the first time, and were to be one ounce Scottish Troy in weight, and were to have course for L.20 Scots. Some writers have thought these were meant as medals; but that they were intended for currency is evident from the account of them preserved in the “*Historie of James Sixth*,” p. 158, and from a passage in “*Melville’s Memoirs*,” ed. 1735, p. 251, where it is said that the Regent presented twenty-five of them to one of his friends, which he would hardly have done had they been struck as medals.

The next Act relating to the gold coinage has puzzled Scottish numismatists not a little. It authorises and describes a piece of gold to be 47 grains Troy in weight, and to be 21 carat, and to pass for 40s. This coin has never been seen, and the explanation of its non-appearance is found in one of the unpublished Acts of Privy Council, which alters both the type and the value, and substitutes the ducat of 1580 (called by Lindsay the bareheaded noble) in its place.¹

We may sum up the history of this coinage as follows:—

The Scottish ducat or bareheaded noble was coined on the authority of an Act of Privy Council, of date April 1580. It was to be 21 carats fine, $94\frac{1}{2}$ grains modern Troy in weight, and to be current for L.4. J. Gray was the engraver of the dies for this piece, as appears from an entry in the Treasurer’s account of a payment to him for them.

The next coinage of gold was authorised by an Act of the Parliament of Scotland passed in 1584, which ordered the issue of two pieces of gold, one to be six in the ounce, or $78\frac{3}{4}$ grains Troy (modern standard) in weight, the other to be $52\frac{1}{2}$ grains in weight. These were the pieces now known as the lion noble and the two-thirds lion noble. The one-third is not mentioned in the Act of Parliament which remits to the Privy Council to take order as regards the form, legends, and remedies of weight and fineness. Accordingly, in August we find an Act of Privy Council giving directions as to the type, and ordering the coinage of the one-third piece, with one grain in each coin for remedy of weight, and one-sixth of a carat as the remedy of fineness.

¹ A design for the 40s. piece has been discovered amongst the Hopetoun MSS.

Name of Gold Coins.	Dates of Issue from the Mint Registers.	Weights authorised by Acts of Privy Council.	Value at time of Issue, do. do.	Standard of fineness, do. do.	
1. Twenty Pound Piece.	1575-6.	Grains. 472½	£ s. d. 20 0 0	...	16th March 1576.*
2. Scottish Crown.	...	42¼	2 0 0	21 carat.	This coinage was authorised by Act of Parliament, but was cancelled by Act of Privy Council.
3. Scottish Ducat or Bareheaded Noble.	2d Aug. to 29th Nov. 1580.	94½	4 0 0 or 4 4 0	21 carat.	Act of Privy Council in April 1580 authorised this coinage, and Act of Parliament (III. 191) made it 4 guineas instead of pounds.
4. Lion Noble, with two-thirds (called the lion crown) and one-third of the same.	2d Nov. 1584 to 18th April 1586-7-8. ²	78¾ 52½ 26¼	3 15 0 ¹ 2 10 0 1 5 0	21½ carat. do. do.	The one-third Lion Noble is not mentioned except in the Act of Privy Council. 2d Nov. 1584.*
5. Thistle Nobles with the half.	1539 to 1596.	118 59	7 6 8 3 14 4	23 c. 7 gr. do.	The half is not known to exist, nor is there any mention of it in the Mint Register.
6. Hat Piece (or Four Pound Piece) with half.	1591-2-3.	...	4 0 0 2 0 0	22 carat fine. do.	The half, though authorised, is not now known, though from the Mint Registers it would appear to have been struck. 4th Nov. 1591.*
7. Riders, with halves of the same.	1593-4, 1598-9, 1601.	78¾ 39¾	5 0 0 2 10 0	22 carat. do.	Act of Privy Council in 1593. 4th Feb. 1593.*
8. Sword and Sceptre Pieces, with their halves.	1601-2-3-4.	78¾ 39	6 0 0 3 0 0	do. do.	Act of Parliament at Perth. The Mint Registers have been preserved, and show coinages in 1604. 30th Nov. 1601.

* The Acts indicated by an asterisk (*) are preserved in P. C. R. 1609-1610, p. 226.

¹ This raised to L. 4 in 1588.

² These dates are not given in the Mint Registers.

In July 1587 Parliament appointed certain commissioners to confer regarding the state of the money, and to consider a proposed new coinage of gold. Nothing seems to have been done, however, till the following year, when the Privy Council in September authorised the issue of a new gold coin, to be one quarter of an ounce in weight, and 23 carats 7 grains in fineness, with the usual remedies. Its current value was to be L.7, 6s. 8d. A half-piece was also ordered. The type is minutely described, and is now known as the thistle noble. The half is unknown, so far as I am aware, and no record of its coinage exists. The dies for this piece were executed by Th. Foulis, as appears from the Treasurer's accounts.

In January 1591 the Privy Council, following the sanction of an Act of Parliament of the previous August, ordered all the gold coins except the thistle nobles to be brought to the Mint, and there re-coined into pieces of 22 carat fine, to be current for L.4.

Billon.—An Act of Privy Council of 24th December 1583 orders the coinage of groats of threepenny fine of the value of eightpence each, and the half groat at fourpence, with the usual remedies for fineness. One hundred and thirty-five of these groats are to be in the merk, and double that number of half groats, with an allowance of eight of the groats, or sixteen of the half groats, as a remedy for weight upon every merk-weight. These are the well-known placks with the mint "Oppidum Edinburgi."

In consequence of the virulence of the plague at Edinburgh in 1585, the Privy Council on the 23d of June ordered the general and master of the Mint, with all the furniture, &c., to remove to Dundee, and there continue the coining of gold, silver, and alloyed money, and to put on the placks the legend "Oppidum Dundie" instead of the metropolitan Mint. In October another Act of Privy Council orders the Mint to be changed to Perth, in consequence of the appearance of the plague at Dundee, and the placks were ordered to have "Oppidum Perth" placed on them. I am unable to trace any placks with these legends, though from other evidence it is not unlikely some were struck at Perth.

In 1588 the Privy Council ordered the coinage of twopenny and penny placks. These are minutely described in the Act, and are called by Lindsay the hardheads (pl. 17, fig. 50) and half hardheads. The twopenny plack is to have the lion within a shield, though, as will be after-

wards seen, this type was changed to the lion without the shield. These coins were to be 12 grains fine, and 320 of the pennies were to weigh a merk.¹ In November the type was altered as above mentioned, and the lion with two dots put instead of the lion within the shield. This alteration was made because some avaricious and deceitful persons passed them as eight-penny placks.

The Mint Registers of most of these coinages are still extant.

The other billon coinages are given in Lindsay.
