

# The 'Crown' Quartered Series B Groat - A False Start to Edward III's Fourth Coinage?

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It is surprising that the apparently unique example of the 'Crown' quartered reverse of the Series B Groat (***Hunter Collection, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow***) has merely become a footnote in the Numismatic record arising from Edward III's Fourth Pre-Treaty Coinage. This 'Crown Quartered' Groat is an enigma, an aberration if you will, diverging from the standard 'Trefoil of Pellets' quartered reverse; current since the inception of the Long Cross Coinage of 1247. What is perhaps even more surprising is that its' existence has been allowed to pass with such little comment.

L.A. Lawrence first described the coin in his 1926 Numismatic Chronicle article without significant comment - merely listing it amongst other Series B Groat varieties. This is perhaps a little surprising as the very next Series B Groat in his list he adds the comment 'Pellets altered from crowns?'. This factual statement contains the nub of a conundrum presented by these reverse designs.

As such it begs the question, 'What factors led to the change of the initial coin design'? Clearly, the innovative Crown in quarters design was suppressed and the traditional trefoil of pellets prevailed as the reverse design of choice. However, it is clear that the need to recut already prepared dies shows that this change must have occurred at a fairly late stage in the initial preparation of the new coinage.

At this point it is probably worthwhile describing the Crowns in Quarters Groat to indicate both the similarities and differences between it and the Trefoil of Pellets Groats which succeeded it.



Fig. 1 Series B Crown Quartered Groat. *Hunter Collection.*

The Obverse is indistinguishable from the other Series B Groats with open E's and the Crowned bust presented facing:-

**Obverse:**

Crowned bust facing within quadrilobe of nine arches; all arches fleured

**+EDWAR o D o GRA o REX o ANGL o Z o FRANC o D o hYB** - Annulet Stops (o), reverse barred N's with no contraction mark over the R of EDWAR.

**Reverse:**

Long Cross dividing two concentric circles with Crowns in the central quarters.

Outer Legend: **POSVI o D/EVM o AD/IVTOREo/oMEVM+**

Inner Legend: **LON/DON/CIVI/TAS**

Series B lettering - Open C's & E's, composite S in POSVI and TAS, reverse barred N's and Roman M's. North No 1142 (Var), LAL 1/1

Size 27 mm dia, Weight 4.43 g. (68.4 grains)

Acquired by William Hunter between 1770 & 1783 - no further provenance held.

Hunter Collection Ref No 'HCC Edward III 11'.

***Image, Metrology and Accession Data kindly provided by Hunterian Museum courtesy of Donal Bateson***

Lawrence's legend list ( '**The Coinage of Edward III from 1351' N.C. Fifth Series, Vol VI, Page 26 "Groats of London. Series B No 1"** ) inaccurately described the Obverse legend with the contraction mark over the R of EDWAR and this minor inaccuracy was pointed out by W.J.W.Potter ( *Num. Chronicle 1960 "The Silver Coinage of Edward III" [1] Page 142* ) - the image above, provided by the Hunterian Museum, shows that Potter was correct. For a better image see N.C. 1960 Plate X No 3 - 1960 image probably taken from a cast as the current digital photograph appears to show a considerable residue (Sealing wax ? on the obverse and creamy accretion in the reverse field) resulting in a lack of definition but the layout of the coin as described by Lawrence and Potter is clear enough.

The stand out features of this coin, in addition to the Crowns in quarters, is the position of the Mintmark Cross 1 at the end of the reverse legend following MEVM+. Whereas, the Trefoil of Pellets Groat commences with the Mintmark Cross 1 at the beginning of the reverse legend (+POSVI.....) and follows this formula from now onwards on all other Groats and Half Groats through to the Tudor Dynasty.

The Series B Groats, that were finally issued by the Mint at this early stage of the Pre-Treaty Coinage, were to become the standard design types with the Trefoil of Pellets reverse. However, as noted by Lawrence there is evidence to show that a second iteration of the Crown quartered reverse Groat was in the offing but the decision to use the Trefoil of Pellets design caused the die-sinkers to recut the initial reverse dies with pellets instead of crowns and thus reclaim dies that might otherwise have been scrapped. The Lord Stewartby Academic Collection Sale Part 4, 'Coins of Edward III to Richard III'(Spink) held on the 29th November 2016 includes an example - for description see Lot 1093.

The (Fig. 2) image below clearly illustrates the Pellets over-cutting Crowns:-



Fig. 2 Series B Groat with Pellets Over-cutting Crowns (Author's Collection)

#### **Obverse:**

Crowned bust facing within quadrilobe of nine arches; all arches fleured.

**+EDWARD:D:GRA:REX:ANGL:Z:FRANC:D:hYB**

Pellet stops, open E's, contraction marks over D of D(EI) GRA and over D of D(NS) hYB and the X in REX is the initial cross turned sideways.

#### **Reverse:**

Long cross dividing two concentric circles, quartered by trefoil of pellets.

The pellets over-cutting Crowns - particularly evident in the first (TAS) and third (CIVI) quarters.

Outer Legend: **+POSVI o / DEVM o A / DIVTORE / M o MEVM**

Inner Legend : **LON / DON / CIVI / TAS**

Annulet Stops, Roman M's, Reverse barred N's, Open E's & C's with composite S's  
North No 1142 (Var) LAL 2/2. Weight 4.27 g.

The commencement of Edward III's Fourth Coinage is dated to June 1351 with the appointment of Henry de Brisele and John of Chichester as joint Masters of London Mint. However, before the granting of the Indenture the new joint Masters had visited the Tower Mint to inspect the dies currently in use. As a result of this visit the *"report to the exchequer a committee of the treasurer and other members of the king's council decided to order **the cancellation of the old dies and the making of new dies** 'according to the ordinance of the mint (the indenture) then arranged'*. This cancellation refers the dies for Gold and Silver issues of the 3rd Coinage. M. Allen notes in MMME that *"it may be permissible to speculate the Treasurers committee discussed the designs of the coins as well as the need to have dies for the newly introduced Groat and halfgroat"* <sup>1</sup>

The initial Series A silver output of the mint, as designated by Lawrence, were the Pence issued from the Mint of London and the Ecclesiastical Mint of Durham. The limited issue of both Gold and Silver denominations in Series A were no doubt due to a combination of circumstances arising from (a) the reduction in Flan sizes to account for weight reductions owing to fluctuations in bullion value, (b) the reduction of Flan size leading to a commensurate reduction in letter (puncheon) sizes and (c) in the case of the Crown in Quarters Groat the departure from the traditional trefoil of pellets must have been too radical - *the earlier failed introduction of the Groat in Edward I's reign was still fresh in the official memory.*

The apparent haste with which the early issues of the Fourth coinage, appeared following the appointment of Henry de Brisele and John of Chichester, occurred barely a month following the award of the Indenture on 20th June 1351 (*M.Allen*)<sup>2</sup>. Immediately prior to Henry and John's appointment as Joint Masters of the Mint the position / contract was held by Anthony Bache and Nicholas Chone who held the post for a mere 14 months from April 1350 to June 1351. Their short tenure followed on from a failure and surcharge arising from the Pyx Trial in October 1349 leading to one of the previous holders being imprisoned and the other fleeing abroad with mint property.<sup>3</sup>

It seems inconceivable that the introduction of 'New' denominations (the Groat of four pence and its' Half ) could have been achieved in such a short timescale. Preliminary design work must have been carried out for the 'New' Groat and this could have led to the striking of 'Trial' pieces with the Crown quartered reverse. These would have been struck for the initial issue following approval - clearly this anticipated approval did not materialise and the issue was withdrawn but not before several examples slipped into circulation. This hypothesis is supported by the existence of the Groat from the Hunter Collection; which has been in circulation judging by the obvious signs of circulatory wear. The numbers slipping into circulation must have been minute as the Hunter example first appears in the late 18th Century and, despite the advent of metal detecting, to date no further examples have come to light.

1 CCR 1349 - 1354, 379 - 81; M.Allen MMME 2012, 82 - 3.

2 M.Allen MMME 2012, 82; incorrectly dated as July 1st 1351 by L.A.Lawrence 1926, NC Vol VI, 7.

3. CCR 1349 - 1354, 62 - 4; M.Allen MMME 2012, 82

Immediately prior to the commencement of the Pre-Treaty coinage, the Third 'Florin' Coinage, 1344 - 51 struck the first English gold and silver currency since the abortive attempt in 1257 during the reign of Henry III. From 1344 to 51 it took a number of re-adjustments to arrive at a stable weight for the Gold Noble and its' fractions and similar fluctuations occurred for the silver penny - reducing from just over 20 grains to 18 grains by 1351. The required denominations, described in the indenture, for the fourth coinage was for gold Nobles, Half-Nobles and Quarter-Nobles and included Groats, Half-Groats and Pence in silver.<sup>4</sup> Of these designated denominations from the first (Series A.) striking are the silver pennies from Tower Mint and the Bishop's Mint at Durham. The gold Nobles and Half-Nobles are mules with Series B (Obverse) and Series A (Reverse) - no true Series A gold coins are known - nor are there any silver denominations tariffed higher than the pence.

This apparent initial failure to manufacture the full range of denominations, outlined in the Indenture of 1351, is perhaps an artificial construct arising from the Lawrence's Classification of the Coinage. It should be remembered that Henry de B and John of C's contract ran from 20th June 1351 to 31st May 1355.<sup>5</sup> At the commencement of recoinage cycle it is perhaps better to regard the Series A, B and C as the developmental evolution of a single Series. W.J.W. Potter illustrated this in his 1960 reappraisal of the "Silver Coinage of Edward III" where the glaring similarities of Series B and C and the conspicuous muling of B/C leads inexorably to the conclusion of the contemporaneous nature of these issues.<sup>6</sup>

As Potter admitted, any attempt to clarify the sequencing of the early issues of the Fourth Coinage, and thus challenging the Series order as laid down by Lawrence, would serve little purpose and indeed would, followings its' wide use and acceptance, only confuse the issue. However, the existence of the Crown Quartered Groat and the modification of the early Series B reverse, from Crowns to Trefoils of Pellet, needs to be understood. The radical development of the English bimetallic Coinage, straddling both the Third and Fourth Coinages, needs to be considered in its wider European context rather than as an isolated and insular manifestation of economic activity.<sup>7</sup> In particular the coinage of the Low Countries struck at Namur between 1337 and 1345 (Demi-Gros of John the Blind of Luxembourg in alliance the Bishop of Liege and William I Count of Namur) points the way to the Obverse design of the English Groat and its half. While the Crown quartered reverse design is seen in the Anglo-Gallic Sterlings and Demi Sterlings of Aquitaine.<sup>8</sup>

4. L.A.Lawrence 1926, NC Vol VI, 7 - 10.

5. M.Allen MMME 2012, 178 Table 6.2

6. W.J.W.Potter. Num Chron. 1960 (Part 1) 138 - 41 & Lord Stewartby 2009 English Coins 1180 - 1551, 208.

7. D.F.Allen. BNJ 1945, 125 - 9

8. E.R.Duncan-Elias. The Anglo-Gallic Coins.1984, 78 No 56





Fig 3. Edward III Sterling of Aquitaine - Reverse: Crowns in Quarters (Elias 56). Image courtesy of A.G. & S Gillis *Ancient Coins and Antiquities*

These Continental prototypes may have a more direct link to the initial output of Edward's Fourth Coinage than meets the eye. The evidence is admittedly circumstantial at best but nevertheless the existence of the Crown quartered Groat in the Hunter Collection and the recut reverse die(s) excising Crowns and replacing them with pellets is mute testament to the following reasoned, if speculative explanation.

Firstly, employment and interchange of skilled mint workers from Europe both into and out of the English Mint establishment has been a common occurrence (Italian Mint Masters - transfer of William de Turnemire from London to Bordeaux in 1285 "to insure a better fabrication" for example. It has been speculated that the Joint Master of the Mint in 1351 'Henry de Brisele' is really Henry of Brussels?).<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the English Mint late in the reign of Edward II and in the early years of Edward III were contracted to and fulfilled substantial 'Export Orders' in support of the Coinage of Aquitaine.<sup>10</sup>

9. E.R.Duncan-Elias. *The Anglo-Gallic Coins*.1984, 43. D.F.Allen. *BNJ* 1945, 128. M.Allen *MMME* 2012, 379 - 80

10. E.R.Duncan-Elias. *The Anglo-Gallic Coins*.1984, 57. J.D.Brand *BNJ* 1976 (Vol 46) *Miscellanea* 78 - 9

The design of the Aquitaine Sterling (Elias 56), with the Crown quartered reverse, pre-dates the English Fourth Coinage and is roughly contemporaneous with the Third 'Florin' Coinage (1344 to 51).<sup>11</sup> As such the adoption of the Crown quartered reverse for the 'New' English Groat from such a source should not be too surprising. The Aquitanian and English Mint served a common master (Edward III) and the exchange of personnel and design ideas should be expected, particularly as the English Mint had considerably augmented the supply of specie to Bordeaux in recent years.

This cultural and material cross traffic could well have influenced the initial choice of the Crown quartered reverse for the proposed Groat. Thus the realisation of a broadly based spread of denominations in Gold and Silver stuttered into existence with the emergence of the Fourth Coinage as described by L.A. Lawrence. The certainties bestowed by Lawrence's classification of the initial Series A to C of the Fourth Coinage masks a potential 'False Start', as evidenced by the Crown Quartered Groat residing within the Hunter Collection. Thus the '*Pellets Over-cutting Crowns*' Groats breaks the silence and provides both further residual evidence of this late change of plan and coincidentally indicates the resolution of the '**Crown Quartered**' Groat conundrum.

11. Cook Barrie. 2020 British Numismatic Journal 'The Aquitaine Sterling Revisited' Para 4 Page 216.

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