

IDENTIFICATION FEATURE



A RICHARD II YORK PENNY

During the first period of the reign of Richard II, from 1377 to 1390, there were three mints producing his coins, London, Durham and York. The output from both the London and Durham mints was low and these coins are, therefore, much rarer than the York coins where the minting was carried out on a much larger scale.

Initially, the coins minted at York were all from good quality London-made dies and the coins all had English titles RICARDVS REX ANGLIE (no French titles). They had either a lis or a cross on the breast and later coins of this type had a pellet above each shoulder. They also all had a small saltire before the CIVI in the reverse legend.

As the demand for coinage grew and the output from the mint at York struggled to get new dies from London, they began to manufacture dies locally. At least a dozen of these local dies are known for the obverse. They were all very crudely made with coarse depictions of the King and sometimes blundered lettering. What they did, however was to copy the later London dies and include the pellets above the shoulders and the saltire before CIVI along with the English titles on the obverse.

Even with these extra dies to help out, however, the demand for pennies was so great that the dies were nearly all used well beyond their normal lifespan and, in most cases, were kept in use almost to destruction. This accounts for the damage to, and very poor quality of, many of the York pennies and the difficulty in reading them and making accurate ID's. Many people think that they are good coins that have been plough-damaged or ruined by fire or chemicals, but a lot of them were coming out of the mint in that state!

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So, to this month's ID. Below is an example of just one of those Richard II York pennies struck from locally-made dies.



It is coarse, badly struck and the bust in particular has a lot of damaged areas due to this being struck from an old die that was, itself, damaged and probably near to being scrapped.

Taking the obverse first, we can read the first part of the name of the king fairly clearly as RICARD. This means it has to be Richard II or Richard III (Richard I coins have the name HENRICVS on them). The giveaway here, as already mentioned above, is that you can just make out a pellet above the right shoulder, on the left as you look at the coin, so Richard II.

The reverse seals it. The quatrefoil in the centre of the reverse cross is used only at York and on some Irish coins and one from Durham, but the reverse legend ends in RACI, the end of the full legend CIVITAS EBORACI, city of York. The saltire is also there before CIVI as discussed earlier so this is, indeed a Richard II, first period York penny from local dies and dating from 1377-1390.

Tom Redmayne: 24/05/2012