

THE SHIP HALFPENNY (1937 – 1970)

This Brushwood Coin Note is the first in the series and explores one of our favourite coins - the 'ship' halfpenny - the reverse was inspired by Sir Francis Drake's "Golden Hind." The design was created by Mr T H Paget OBE in 1937, and you will find his initials (HP) in the field below the stern on each coin.

The ship halfpenny design was issued into circulation between the years of 1937 and 1967, eventually being demonetised on 31 July 1969. However, a final ship halfpenny was minted retrospectively for 1970, but only issued in proof sets of that year. In 1971 the much smaller and less popular "new half pence" was then introduced as part of the new decimal coinage.



The original coin was not often called a 'half penny', neither was the plural said as 'half pence'. The usual pronunciation sounded like 'hayp-knee' referring to a single coin or 'hay-punce' in the plural, as for example in 'three halfpence'.

Manufactured in bronze, with a diameter of 25.4 mm (one inch) and a weight of about 5.7g, there were 480 halfpennies in a pound (£1). Before the reign of Edward I the halfpenny had been generally obtained by cutting pennies in half and was at that time, like the penny, originally minted in silver. Copper half pennies made their first appearance in 1672, and in turn were replaced in 1860 by the bronze version, of which the ship halfpenny is the final example of pre-decimal coinage.

KING EDWARD VIII

On the accession of **Edward VIII** the new reverse design of the bronze halfpenny was first produced showing the Golden Hind, the ship used by Sir Francis Drake the noted Elizabethan sailor. This version was however only made as a pattern in 1937 and never made it into circulation due to the abdication of Edward. Previously the Britannia reverse design had been used for the halfpenny since 1672. Had the Edward VIII halfpenny been issued, the obverse would have had the inscription: "EDWARDVS VIII D G BR OMN REX FD IND IMP"

KING GEORGE VI

The design based on the Golden Hind, having been established for Edward, was retained for the halfpenny issues of King George VI. There are a number of minor variations in the design from one year to another, which specialist collectors will be interested in. However, the changes did not take place during any particular year, and continued throughout the reign of George VI. The following pages describe the halfpenny variations that occurred throughout the reign of George VI.

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Type 1 Halfpenny - Issued from 1937 to 1948:

Obverse: King's head facing left, and text "GEORGIVS VI D: G: BR: OMN: REX F: D: IND IMP" around the perimeter >



KGVI Type 1 Obverse Design

Reverse: Ship (The Golden Hind) heading left, with "HALF PENNY" above, and DATE below. >



KGVI Type 1 Reverse Design

Type 2 Halfpenny - Issued from 1949 to 1952:

Obverse: King's head facing left, "GEORGIVS VI D: G: BR: OMN: REX FIDEI DEF." around. >



KGVI Type 2 Obverse Design

Reverse: Ship (The Golden Hind) heading left, with "HALF PENNY" above, and DATE below >



KGVI Type 2 Reverse Design

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QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The halfpennies of Queen Elizabeth II continued (as for George VI), using the same Golden Hind design by T H Paget on the reverse and with the new Queen's portrait by Mrs Mary Gillick on the obverse. However, extensive variations in design continued throughout the reign of Elizabeth II, with at least three obverse and eight reverse variations listed in the literature. Later issues exhibit yet further variations than identified here and these will require additional research:



QE2 Type 1 Reverse Design

Obverse Types: Queen facing right

Type 1 Obverse: Text around the perimeter "ELIZABETH II DEI GRA: BRITT: OMN: REGINA F:D: +" Portrait of the Queen is less well defined than later issues. Cross above the Queens head points between border beads. (As found in 1953 mint 'plastic' sets)



QE2 Type2 Obverse Design

Type 2 Obverse: Text as Type 1. Better defined portrait. Cross points at a border bead. (1953 circulation issue)

Type 3 Obverse: "BRITT: OMN:" omitted from perimeter text. Sharper portrait. (Issued from 1954 to 1967)



QE2 Type 3 Obverse Design

Reverse Types:

Type A Reverse: Ship measures 19.2 mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. (1953 - 1954)

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Type B Reverse: Ship measures 18.5mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. Long border teeth. Foremast flag more strongly hatched (1954)



QE2 Type A Reverse Design

Type C Reverse: Ship measures 19.0mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. Small border teeth (1955 - 1956) >



QE2 Type C Reverse Design

Type D Reverse: Ship measures 18.75 mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. Border teeth further apart (1957 'Calm Sea') >



Type E Reverse: As D, but from 1957 onwards the sea is of a more wavy design. (The so-called 'calm sea' 1957 variant is considerably less common than the wavy sea design.) (1957 - 1958) >



QE2 Type E Reverse Design

Type F Reverse: As E, but ship measures 19.0 mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. (1958) >



QE2 Type F Reverse Design

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Type G Reverse: As F, but the border teeth are shorter (1958 -1959 & 1963)

Type H Reverse: As E but ship measures 18.8 mm from tip of mainmast to base of sea. (1960 and 1962)



QE2 Type H Reverse Design

There are thus 10 obvious collectable varieties so far up to 1958 with multiple types appearing in these years:

- 1953 (2 types)
- 1954 (2 types)
- 1957 (2 types)
- 1958 (3 types)

Those for 1957 are the most distinctive variations. (Calm sea vs rough sea.)

No halfpenny coins were issued dated 1961, and after 1963 it is clear that some further die changes took place. For example, the 1967 obverse has two types; 'narrow rim' and 'broad rim', referring to the width of the outer edge border. The broad rim variant is less common than the narrow rim version, but so many 1967 coins were minted that it is unlikely to be as rare as many claim.



QE2 1967 Broad Rim variant (on top)

The last circulating halfpennies were dated 1967, although a proof dated 1970 was retrospectively minted. The halfpenny coin was demonetised on 31st July 1969, so the 1970 coin was in fact never legal tender and can only be found in 'Last £sd' proof sets issued to commemorate the final £sd issues. Consequently the 1970 dated coins are quite scarce, whilst those dated 1967 are the most common, having been produced in greater quantity than normal to bridge the 4 year gap until decimalization in the UK.



QE2 1970 Proof (Final Issue)

The final page of this Coin Note summarises the numbers of ship halfpennies issued into circulation for each of the years of its minting. Output dipped to its lowest in the years of 1951 & 1953, and reached a peak during the final 4 years of production (1964 - 1967).

(The decimal "new half penny" was introduced with decimalisation in 1971, but it was not particularly well liked at the time, being very small and easily dropped. The decimal half penny continued in circulation until it was demonetised in December 1984, by which time it had become more expensive to produce than its face value.)

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SHIP HALFPENNY CIRCULATION FIGURES

George VI (1936 to 1952)

1937	24,504,000	plus 26,402 Proof issue
1938	40,320,000	
1939	28,924,800	
1940	32,162,400	
1941	45,120,000	
1942	71,908,800	
1943	76,200,000	
1944	81,840,000	
1945	57,000,000	
1946	22,725,600	
1947	21,266,400	
1948	26,947,200	
1949	24,744,000	
1950	24,153,600	plus 17,513 Proof issue
1951	14,868,000	plus 20,000 Proof issue
1952	33,278,400	

Queen Elizabeth II (1953 to 1970)

1953	8,926,366	plus 40,000 Proof issue
1954	19,375,000	
1955	18,799,200	
1956	21,799,200	
1957	43,684,800	'Calm Sea' variant is scarce
1958	62,318,400	
1959	79,176,000	
1960	41,340,000	
1961	None Issued	
1962	41,779,200	
1963	45,036,000	
1964	78,583,200	
1965	98,083,200	
1966	95,289,600	
1967	146,491,200	
1968	None Issued	
1969	None Issued	Halfpenny demonetised
1970	None Issued	Proof issue only (100,000)
1971	Decimal New Half Penny introduced (1,394,188,250)	

Acknowledgement is made to The Royal Mint; the website of Mr Tony Clayton; the 2006 Coin Year Book published by Token Publishing; and Spink & Sons Standard Coins of the UK, 2006 as valuable sources of information referred to during the research of this fact sheet.

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