This Coin Note covers another favourite British coin, the Brass Threepence, minted for some 30 or so years, between 1937 and 1970. Coming after four centuries of silver threepence coins, this was the last and very different threepence design prior to the eventual demonetisation of the value in 1971. The new coin design originated from the brief reign of Edward VIII, but it was not until the reign of King George VI that it became legal tender and entered everyday circulation.

Strictly speaking the metal of this coin is Nickel-Brass rather than normal brass, being an alloy of 79% copper, 20% zinc & 1% nickel. The new 'threepenny bit' was the first British coin to be made from this gold coloured alloy and was also the first noncircular coin to be introduced into our coinage. Having 12 sides, it was dodecagonal in shape, with a diameter of 21mm across the flats and an eventual weight of 6.8g.

The first threepence coins to appear in British coinage came during the latter part of the reign of Edward VI in (1547 – 1553) as a small circular coin minted in silver, equivalent to a quarter of a shilling and weighing only around 1.5g. The silver threepence continued to be minted (although intermittently) through four centuries until the 1930s. By this time however, and in London in particular, the small size of the coin had become unpopular, whilst at the same time the equivalent three bronze pennies were too heavy and cumbersome should the existing coin be discontinued without replacement. This was the situation that prompted the creation of the new brass threepence; a coin design originally planned for introduction into the coinage of King Edward VIII.

However, despite the unpopularity of the existing silver threepence, it surprisingly was not discontinued until some years after the introduction of the new brass threepence. Consequently, between the years of 1937 and 1945 both styles of threepence coin were minted and issued into circulation as legal tender. The 1945 silver threepences were however recalled shortly after release and melted down so that only a few of the original 400,000 survived, thus making it a very scarce coin. After 1945 only brass threepences continued to be issued into circulation, (although the silver threepence is still minted for issue in the special ceremonial Maundy coin sets to this day).



Edward VIII Reverse



George VI Reverse



Elizabeth II Reverse

The name "threepence" was pronounced differently across the country, being variously called a 'thruppence', 'throopence', 'threppence' 'thruppnee bit', 'throopnee bit, or 'threppnee bit.' Some people also remember the term 'joey' being used. However this name was actually more closely associated with the silver threepence coin and more correctly originated as a nick-name for the Groat, last produced in 1888 and equivalent to four pennies. (The term 'joey' was an association to Joseph Hume (1777 - 1855) who was an government authority on finance during the early the 19th century.) The value of the threepence was indicated as "3d" when appearing in text.

KING EDWARD VIII

It was during the reign of Edward VIII that the idea of the new brass coin was conceived and trial pieces having various thicknesses were minted for evaluation. T Humphrey Paget designed the new portrait of Edward VIII, and the reverse side incorporating the thrift plant designed by Frances Madge Kitchener. (Paget's initials HP can be seen on the obverse just below the truncation of the effigy.)

The depiction of the thrift plant was a pun on the concept of saving; a strong government message of the time. The early threepence pattern design incorporated a more natural-looking style of thrift plant than the stylised version later adopted by George VI. The early lettering of the reverse in a more gothic styling was also not carried forward into the eventual circulation coin.

Patterns were struck on 12-sided nickel-brass flans to test the reaction of interested parties, including vending-machine manufacturers. Trial pieces were produced having a diameter across the flats of 21mm and diameter across the corners of 22mm, and in three thicknesses: 1.75mm, 2.0mm, & 2.5mm. The die axis for these coins was \\ \cdot\. The thinner patterns were found to be unsatisfactory because they caused the operation of slot machines intended for use with a sixpence or shilling, and so the thickest dimension was therefore eventually decided upon.



Edward VIII Pattern Reverse designed by Madge Kitchener

Some of these pattern pieces were inevitably not returned after trials and found their way into circulation. (They are extremely rare and a value of £32,000 for an uncirculated example of these pieces was suggested by Spink in their 2006 (41st Edition) Coins of England.)

Threepence coins from the official sets of Edward VIII coinage, (that were prepared but not issued), have a modified reverse using the same design as that adopted by George VI and a few of these sets did survive.



Edward VIII Pattern Obverse Portrait facing left by T H Paget

KING GEORGE VI

The new design of nickel-brass threepence was finally introduced into circulation alongside the silver threepence with the accession of King George VI in 1937. It was based on the Edward VIII design having 12 sides, weighing 6.8g, and measuring 21mm across between the flat edges, but the thrift design on the reverse had become simpler and more stylized by this time. The 12-sided coin design and its thickness made the coin easy to identify and it quickly proved very popular.



George VI Simplified Reverse Design



At first the coins had sharp corners, but from 1941 a more rounded die collar was used, as failure of the collars was occurring too frequently at the mint. In 1948, and from 1950 onward, sharp edged collars were used again.

The years of 1942 & 1943 saw the largest annual quantities of brass threepences minted during George VI's reign; production exceeding 100 million coins in each of these years during the time the silver threepence was being phased out. (The latter years of silver threepence production from 1942 onwards were not issued in the UK and destined for colonial use only.)

The brass threepence mintages of 1946 and 1949 were extremely low, with uncirculated examples of these two scarce dates being valued by Spink at around £300 each in 2006. The 1949 coin had the lowest mintage and typically attracts a higher price than the 1946 when in top condition. No coins were minted in 1947.

Proof coins were issued in 1937, 1950 & 1951. Whilst the majority of proofs were minted in bright finish a few exist as matt proofs and these are very rare. Surprisingly, examples of the normal circulating 1950 & 1951 coins in FDC uncirculated condition, are worth significantly more than their proof equivalents.

The die axis for all King George brass 3d coins was ↑↑.

Obverse Type 1: 1937 – 1948

King's head facing left, with text "GEORGIVS VI D: G: BR: OMN: REX F: D: IND: IMP." around. Initials HP below truncation.

Obverse Type 2: 1949 - 1952

King's head facing left, with text "GEORGIVS VI D: G: BR: OMN: REX FIDEI DEF." around. Initials HP below truncation.

Reverse:

Thrift plant with 3 flowers centre with "DATE" in numbers below and "THREE PENCE" in text above flowers. Sharper corners used from 1937 to 1941, 1948, 1950 onward.

More rounded corners on coins of 1942 – 1946, & 1949.



George VI Obverse Type 1



George VI Reverse (1942)



George VI Reverse (1945)



George VI Reverse (1946)



George VI Obverse Type 2



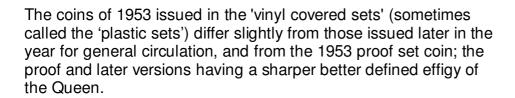
George VI Reverse (1949)



George VI Reverse (1952)

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

On the accession of Queen Elizabeth II, the reverse design of the brass 3d coin was changed to depict a 'portcullis royally crowned'. The new reverse was designed by William Gardner and his initials W G are visible below the portcullis gate. The obverse carried a new portrait of Elizabeth engraved by Mary Gillick.



Whilst the nickel-brass metal alloy of the threepence remained unchanged, in 1958 and 1966 some coins are understood to have been struck on cupronickel blanks, and in 1961 some are believed to have been struck in error on Hong Kong 10c blanks.

Brass 3d coins were struck for circulation each year in the Queen's reign until 1967 when the largest number of coins was minted. Approaching 152 million were produced dated 1967 to bridge the gap prior to the introduction of decimal coinage in the UK whilst the Royal Mint was moved to Wales. (Some of these 1967 coins were actually minted at a later date but still carried the earlier year designation).

Proof issue threepences were officially issued in special sets for the years of 1953 and 1970, with these generally carrying a higher current market value than normal issue coins, although uncirculated examples of the 1958 3d in particular currently attract slightly higher prices than the proofs because of the low mintage that year. The 1970 proof was unusual in that it was actually issued after demonetistion of the brass threepence and was included as part of the 'last £sd set'.

Extremely low numbers of proofs from other years do also exist in special presentation sets given by the Queen to visiting VIPs and, for example, a proof 1958 3d that must have originated from such a set has been sold by Spink.

The die axis for all Queen Elizabeth II brass threepence coins was $\uparrow \uparrow$.



Elizabeth II Obverse Type 1



Elizabeth II Reverse (1953)



Elizabeth II Reverse (1958)



Elizabeth II Reverse (1967)



Elizabeth II Reverse (1970)

Obverse Type 1: 1953

Queen's portrait facing right with text "ELIZABETH II DEI

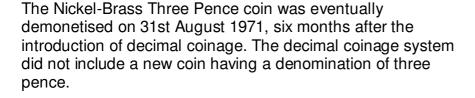
GRA: BRITT: OMN: REGINA F: D: + "

Obverse Type 2: 1954 - 1970

Queen's portrait facing right with text "ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA REGINA F: D: + "

Although a new design of royal effigy had been created by Arnold Machin for use from 1968 (for the new decimal coins then being introduced), the 1970 proof threepence retained the original Gillick portrait.

Reverse: "THREE" "PENCE" in text either side of a 'portcullis royally crowned' . Date in numbers below the portcullis. The initials W G of William Gardner are visible at the bottom of the portcullis gate.





Elizabeth II Obverse Type 2

ANNUAL NUMBER OF THREEPENCES ISSUED

	George VI	(<u>1936 – 1952</u>)	
Brass	1937 1937 (Proof) 1938 1939 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1950 (Proof) 1951 1951 (Proof)	45,707,957 26,402 14,532,332 5,603,021 12,636,018 60,239,489 103,214,400 101,702,400 69,239,489 33,942,466 620,734 none issued 4,230,400 464,000 1,600,000 17,513 1,184,000 20,000 25,494,400	
Silver	1937 1937 (Proof) 1938 1939 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1945	8,148,156 26,402 6,402,473 1,355,860 7,914,401 7,979,411 4,144,051 1,397,220 2,005,553 one known	(Overlapping silver 3d years for reference)
Brass	Elizabeth II 1953 1953 (Proof) 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966 1967 1970 (Proof)	(1953 - 1970) 30,618,000 40,000 41,720,000 41,075,200 36,801,600 24,294,500 20,504,000 28,499,200 83,078,400 41,102,400 51,545,600 39,482,866 44,867,200 27,160,000 53,160,000 151,780,800 100,000	

Acknowledgement is made to: The Royal Mint, the coin website of Mr Tony Clayton, the 'Coin Year Book' series published by Token Publishing, 'Coins of England' by Spink, & 'The Face of The Realm' by John Wall as key sources of information referred to during the preparation of this fact sheet.

