

THE WREN FARTHING (1937 – 1956)

This Brushwood Coin Note is another in our series covering favourite British bronze coins; the Wren farthing, minted for some 20 years during the reigns of 3 monarchs between 1937 and 1956.

Manufactured in bronze, with a diameter of 20 mm (approx 0.8 inch) and a weight of about 2.8 grammes (0.1 ounce), there were 4 farthings in one penny, (thus making 960 to the pound (£1)). Farthings in earlier times had been made from a series of different metals, firstly silver, then copper, tin, copper again, and then finally the harder wearing bronze from 1860 until the last issue of farthing in 1956. The bronze of the wren farthings was made up of 95.5% copper / 3% tin / 1.5% zinc.

The name farthing originates from the word 'fourthing' or 'feorling', which linked with the fact that the first farthings were derived from pennies cut into four pieces. Farthings had existed since the days of Oliver Cromwell when they were made originally in silver and for over 250 years the image of Britannia was firmly established as the reverse of the farthing. However in 1937 the Britannia reverse of the Farthing gave way to a new image of the British Wren (Fig 1). The new design, created by Harold Wilson Parker was introduced on the accession of King **Edward VIII** in 1936. Examples of the 1937 Edward VIII farthing are exceedingly rare as these never entered into circulation following the abdication of Edward.



Fig 1: Wren Reverse Design

KING GEORGE VI

The Wren reverse first came into normal circulation therefore after the accession of King **George VI**, and there were two variations of Wren farthing issued during his reign.

Type 1 Farthing - Issued from 1937 through to 1948:

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

Reverse: Wren image facing left, with date above and "FARTHING" below.

Type 2 Farthing - Issued from 1949 through to 1952:

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

Reverse: Wren image facing left, date above and "FARTHING" below.



Fig 2: KG VI Obverse - Type 1



Fig 3: KG VI Obverse - Type 2

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QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The wren design continued for the farthings of **Elizabeth II**, and during her reign there were a number of variations of design. For example, two obverse types and two reverse types for the year of 1953 farthing exist.

Obverse Type 1: Upper arm of cross above Queen's head points at a border bead. M.G. (Mary Gillick) initials are present but extremely indistinct and difficult to see.

Obverse Type 2: Upper arm of cross above Queen's head points between two border beads. M.G. initials are slightly more distinct and the queen's head is sharper than Type 1.

Reverse A: F of "FARTHING" points between two border beads.

Reverse B: F of "FARTHING" points at a border bead.

However, it is not clear whether this actually results in four different coin variations, as claimed in some references, since our limited research suggests that Obverse Type 1 is always associated with Reverse A, and similarly Obverse Type 2 with Reverse B, thus resulting in only two coin variations. Obverse Type 1 appears to be less common than Type 2 although not considered rare. (Some references have also suggested that the 1953 'plastic encapsulated' sets are more likely to contain Type 1 farthings, but again our investigations suggests both Types are fairly common in these sets.)

For 1953 only, the obverse inscription was:

"ELIZABETH II DEI GRA: BRITT: OMN: REGINA F: D:."

However, from 1954 the obverse inscription was changed to:

"ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA REGINA F: D:"

From 1954 onwards the edge beading dots on the reverse side became longer, with some coins also having a broader reverse rim width.

In its latter years of circulation the farthing became little used, and at one time the main use was in the purchase of bread where, after the Second World War, English law determined the price. (The standard pound weight loaf cost an amount involving an odd halfpenny, so a half pound loaf of bread required an amount with an odd farthing...)

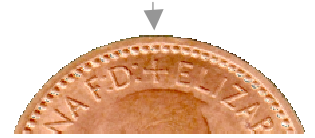


Fig 4: QE 2 Obverse - Type 1



Fig 5: QE 2 Obverse - Type 2



Fig 6: QE 2 Reverse - Type A



Fig 7: QE 2 Reverse - Type B



Fig 8: Longer Edge Beading

THE WREN FARTHING (1937 – 1956)

The last farthing was minted in 1956, a year when the fewest number of wren farthings were issued. Fewer than two million farthings were minted that year, whereas in 1943 the wren farthing had hit the peak of its annual production when 33 million were minted.

Proof issue farthings were issued in sets for the years of 1937, 1950, 1951, and 1953, with these generally carrying a higher current market value than the normal issue farthings. Of the non-proof farthings, uncirculated examples of 1938 and 1956 currently carry the highest market value, reflecting the low mintage. The farthing was eventually demonetised at the end of 1960 and taken out of circulation shortly afterward.

ANNUAL NUMBER OF WREN FARTHING ISSUED

George VI (1936 – 1952)

1937	8,131,200
1937 (Proof)	26,402
1938	7,449,600
1939	31,440,000
1940	18,360,000
1941	27,312,000
1942	28,857,600
1943	33,345,600
1944	25,137,600
1945	23,736,000
1946	24,364,800
1947	14,745,600
1948	16,622,400
1949	8,424,000
1950	10,324,800
1950 (Proof)	17,513
1951	14,016,000
1951 (Proof)	20,000
1952	5,251,200

Elizabeth II (1953 – 1956)

1953	6,131,037
1953 (Proof)	40,000
1954	6,566,400
1955	5,779,200
1956	1,996,800

Acknowledgement is made to The Royal Mint, the coin information website of Mr Tony Clayton, and the Coin Year Book series published annually by Token Publishing, as amongst key sources of information used in the preparation of this fact sheet.