

## The Patent Farthings 1613-1642

When James I came to the throne of England he restored the coinage of Ireland to a better standard with two issues, the first in 1603/04 and the second in 1604/07. These coinages consisted of shillings and sixpences.

After 1607 the Irish economy was again dependent on coinage of a purely English type circulating along with miscellaneous coinages from elsewhere in Europe. Most of these coins were circulating at somewhat below their issue weight and would not have been acceptable to re-export which had the benefit of ensuring their retention in Ireland.

On May 19, 1613 James issued a proclamation prohibiting private token coinage and granting John Harrington, Lord of Exton, a royal patent (after a number of other proposals had been considered) to produce tin coated bronze farthing tokens which were to be used throughout the realm. Lord Harrington and the king hoped to share sizable profits from this enterprise. The coins were authorized to be just six grains but the first products actually weighed only five grains. They were 12.25 mm in diameter, showing two sceptres through a crown on the obverse and a crowned harp on the reverse, so they are often called Irish coins but in fact they were the only English coins which were not authorised for circulation in Ireland between 1613 and 1622 - when they were finally authorised for use in Ireland as well.

Because of protests over the minute size of these tokens, the weight was increased to nine grains and made slightly larger - 15mm diameter - and without the tin wash. These copper coins, which displayed a crown and crossed scepters on the obverse with a crowned harp on the reverse, were extremely small and easily counterfeited. Of the three Harrington varieties, two were very small (12.25mm) and were plated with tin. The third variety was larger (15mm) and issued in copper without plating.

When Lord Harrington died in 1614 the patent passed to his son, who died soon thereafter, so the patent reverted to Lord Harrington's wife, Lady Anne Harrington. It appears Lady Harrington either sold or gave the patent to the Duke of Lennox for on June 28, 1614 the patent passed to Lodewiche, Duke of Lennox. The five varieties emitted during Lodewiche's life are called the Lennox issues. The Duke of Lennox became the Duke of Richmond, but died around 1624. Thus the Harrington and Lennox farthings date to the reign of James I (1603-1625). The Lennox Farthings can be distinguished from the Harrington farthings by the fact that in the legend IACO starts at the top (or in one case bottom) rather than just before. The patent title passed jointly to Lodewiche's widow Frances, Duchess of Richmond and Sir Francis Crane. This partnership began issuing farthings during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649). In all they minted eight varieties known as the Richmond or Royal farthings.

On June 20, 1634 the Duchess passed the patent to Henry Howard, Lord Maltravers, who began producing farthings in partnership with the same Sir Francis Crane. This partnership produced six varieties, in the same style as the previous issues, known as the Maltravers farthings. These coins were produced by the interesting technique of rolling a strip of copper between two rollers with the designs set into them, and at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge there is a strip of several of these coins which had not been cut out of the strip.

The public regularly protested that the patentees were profiteers producing extraordinarily lightweight coins that were frequently counterfeited. In fact, Maltravers refused to accept tokens of earlier patentees, stating too many counterfeits were in circulation. This caused great economic hardship on the poor who held the tokens. To stop counterfeiting Maltravers introduced a smaller and thicker coin with a brass plug in the center called a Rose farthing, after the image on the reverse which was changed from a harp to a rose and with a brass plug in the copper which was very difficult to forge. Seven varieties of Rose farthings were issued. During the period of the Commonwealth these coins were supplemented by a large variety of tokens issued by traders or towns.

In 1642 when the Puritans took control of the Parliament the coining monopoly was abolished and the minting of the patent farthings ceased. The official copper farthing reappeared in a larger form made by the Royal Mint in 1672, despite difficulties partly overcome by importing blanks from Sweden. It was produced annually until [1675](#) and again in 1679.

