

Commonwealth Half-Groat (2-penny piece), 1649-59

The last of three civil wars ended in 1651 with the defeat of the heir to Charles I at Worcester. King Charles himself had been beheaded in January 1649 and was, they believed, the last King of England. A new coinage was needed to show that England was now a republic, that Parliament was in command and to kick start the economy after the Wars.

A silver set was issued - Halfpenny, Penny, Half-Groat, Sixpence, Shilling, Half-Crown and Crown. They carried the shields of the Cross of St George inside a palm and laurel wreath on one side (obverse, in place of the King's head), and on the other side (reverse) the twin shields of England (cross of St George) and Ireland (a harp).

The smaller coins (half penny, penny, half groat and groat) do not have any inscription; the larger ones have in English, not Latin, 'The Commonwealth of England'. Neither do the smaller coins carry a date, only the number I (one penny) or II (2 pennies or half groat).

The new, plain coins were mocked because the twin shields looked like an old-fashioned pair of padded-out knee-breeches or pantaloons from the Jacobean period thirty years before.

At the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the coins were recalled and melted down, but many of the smaller denominations stayed in circulation or were kept as souvenirs or tokens of hope of a return of the republican experiment. Certainly by 1680, many veteran royalists were cynical about the sacrifices they had been asked to make for a Crown which was not worth it. 'The old King deserved what he got and this King deserves the same and is unfit to govern' warned Brome Whorwood of Holton House in 1684.

It is not known where in Wheatley this was found, but the hole indicates that it was later used as a token.