

# **Crowns, *Big and Small* by Anna Fong, LM# 97**

## **Crown Defined**

- Any world coin ranging in size from 36 mm to 42mm<sup>1</sup>
- Large coins issued by Great Britain that carried the denomination of One Crown<sup>1</sup>
- Any dollar-size coin (c. 38mm in diameter) in general, often struck in silver; specifically, one from the Great Britain and some Commonwealth countries<sup>2</sup>

## **Brief History of Crowns**

- 1486 Austria Guldengroschen
- 1497 Spain 8 Real ("Spanish Dollar")
- 1518 Germany Joachimsthaler ("Thaler")
- 1526 Great Britain Crown
- 1965 Last Great Britain 5/- crown minted
- 1971 Great Britain decimalizes coinage
- 1990 Great Britain revalues crowns at £5

## **British Origins**

- The crown, originally known as the "crown of the double rose", was an English coin introduced as part of King Henry VIII's monetary reform of 1526 with the value of 5 shillings.  
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## **Gold or Silver?**

- The first English crowns were minted in gold. <sup>4</sup>

## **First Silver Crown**

- In 1551 during the reign of King Edward VI, the first silver crown was produced. It was the first English coin to bear the date in Arabic numerals. <sup>5</sup>

## **Sterling Silver**

- For silver crowns, the composition initially adhered to the sterling silver standard (92.5% silver and 7.5% copper) established in the 12th century by King Henry II. <sup>6</sup>

## **Standardization**

- Since standardization of UK's silver coinage in 1816 a crown has, as a general rule, a diameter of 38.61 mm, and weighs 28.276 grams. <sup>7</sup>

## Debasement

- In 1920, the silver content of all British coins was reduced from 92.5% to 50%. Silver was eliminated altogether in 1947, with the move to a composition of [cupro-nickel](#) - except for proof issues, which returned to the pre-1920 sterling silver composition.<sup>8</sup>

## Face Value

- For most of its history there was no mark of value on the crown. From 1927 to 1937 the word "CROWN" appears, and from 1951 to 1960 this was changed to "FIVE SHILLINGS".<sup>9</sup>

## 5/-

- Prior to February 1971, the crown was worth 5 shillings, though the last 5 shilling piece was minted in 1965.<sup>10</sup>
- Five shillings was written as "5s" or, more commonly, "5/-". The symbol for the shilling was "s" — not from the first letter of the word, but from the Latin *solidus* (solid). The stroke, /, indicating shillings, was originally an adaptation of the long s.<sup>11</sup>

## Dollar

- In the early 19th century, a crown was sometimes called a "dollar," probably because its appearance was similar to the Spanish dollar.<sup>12</sup>
- The term "dollar" to refer to a crown appeared in the UK again in the 1940s. To ensure economic stability and political peace after WWII, key world currencies were pegged to the US dollar. As a result, £1 was fixed to \$4, so a 5/- crown was equal to \$1.<sup>13</sup>

## Decimalization

- Prior to decimalization, £1 was equal to 240 pence. There were twelve pence to a shilling, or twenty shillings to a pound.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a 5/- crown is one quarter of £1.
- After decimalization in 1971, £1 was equal to 100 pence. Thus, one quarter of £1 is 25 pence.

## 25 p

- After decimalization, new 25 pence pieces were introduced, though the value is not shown on the face of any of these issues.<sup>15</sup>

## £5

- From 1990, the face value of crown-sized coins was set to £5, probably in view of its relatively large size compared with its denomination, and taking into consideration its production costs. This change was understandable, though it has brought with it confusion, and the popular misbelief that all crowns are £5, including the pre-1990 ones.<sup>16</sup>

## Coronation Crowns

- Since George IV, crowns were generally struck in a new monarch's coronation year and up until the present monarch Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.<sup>17</sup>

## Modern Commemoratives

- With its large size, many of the later coins were primarily commemoratives.<sup>18</sup>

## British Sterling Area

- A group of countries, which at the time were mostly dominions and colonies of the British Empire (later the Commonwealth). These countries either used pound sterling (£), that is, British pound, as their own local currency, or else their own local currency was pegged to the British pound.<sup>19</sup>

## Crown Dependencies

- Isle of Man: 25p, £5, Crown
- Jersey: 5/-, 25p, £5
- Guernsey: 25p, £5,
  - Alderney: £5

## British Overseas Territories

- Bermuda: Crown (5/-)
- Falkland Islands: £5
- Gibraltar: Crown (5/-), 25p, Crown
- St Helena: 25p
  - Ascension Is.: 25p
  - Tristan da Cunha: 25p, Crown
- Turks & Caicos Is.: Crown

## Commonwealth of Nations

- Australia: Crown (5/-)
- Jamaica: 5/-
- Malawi: Crown (5/-)
- Malta: £5
- New Zealand: Crown (5/-)
- South Africa: 5/-
- S. Rhodesia\*: Crown (5/-)
- Zambia: 5/-

## For More Information

- **Coins of the UK (Tony Clayton)**
  - <http://www.ukcoinpics.co.uk/>
- **British Crowns**
  - <http://www.britishcrowns.com/>

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Coin Dictionary at <http://typesets.wikidot.com/coin-dictionary>
- <sup>2</sup>Glossary at <http://www.newyorkmint.net/headernavigation/customerservice/glossary/glossary.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup>Crown (British coin) at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown\\_\(British\\_coin\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_(British_coin))
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Five Shillings at <http://www.coins-of-the-uk.co.uk/fives.html>
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>11</sup>Pound Sterling at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound\\_sterling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound_sterling)
- <sup>12</sup>Dollar at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dollar>
- <sup>13</sup>Bretton Woods system at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bretton\\_Woods\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bretton_Woods_system)
- <sup>14</sup>Shilling (British coin) at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shilling\\_\(British\\_coin\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shilling_(British_coin))
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid. 3
- <sup>19</sup>Sterling Area at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sterling\\_Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sterling_Area)