

## Introduction

**Gun money** was an emergency issue of coins made by the forces of James II during the Williamite War fought in Ireland between the years 1689 and 1691. It was not quite the same as the emergency issues of the Great Rebellion of 1641 where besieged cities and towns melted silver plate and issued a small amount of coins for local use during the siege – this was a countrywide currency replacement in base metal with little or no value.

- The deposed king James II simply did not have the cash to fund a war when he landed in Ireland and he did not wish to antagonise his loyal subjects in Ireland by imposing tax increases.
- An adviser in Dublin suggested he issue coins in base metal (copper, brass or pewter) and “promise to pay” in silver coin following his expected victory. This adviser was Dr William Bromfield – a surgeon, financier, politician and, sometimes, spy. He proposed :-
  - a massive issue of base metal coins made from cheap and easily available scrap metal
  - he suggested a design with symbols that would make the coins ‘acceptable’ to the people
  - he also suggested that including the ‘month’ would “show how seriously the King took his promise to pay”
    - the date in months allowed for a gradual replacement,
    - plus allow soldiers to claim interest on their wages
    - the coins were designed very well and the ‘financial ruse’ worked
- **Since James lost the war, the promised exchange for silver never actually took place.**

There was shortage of base metal coins shortly after the Williamite Wars, so it is thought that the coins were allowed to circulate at much reduced values before the copper coinage was resumed.

- By the beginning of the 18th C, they had mostly been withdrawn from circulation.

The name “gun money” stems from the idea that they were minted from melted down cannon but we now know that many other brass objects, such as church bells, were also used. They were first struck from metal obtained from obsolete field cannons, thus the term “Gunmoney” — though, in time, any metal he could get was fair game and many were struck using bells, cooking pots, pans, and scrap. Later issues were reduced in size because of scrap metal shortage, and many pieces were over-struck on other tokens and coins.

Between the two mints (Dublin and Limerick) approx. £1,100,000 to £1,500,000 worth of *gun money* was struck between June 1689 and October 1690 – so, in theory, they should be quite easy to collect. There were three series:

- The first “large” series consisted of sixpences, shillings and half crowns (2½ shillings).
- The second, “small” series consisted of shillings, halfcrowns and crowns (5 shillings).
- The third, and final series, happened in Limerick where they “over-struck” halfpennies and farthings on the (by now) greatly de-valued gunmoney pieces.

Some of the second (small) issue were ‘over-struck’ on previously minted large issue pieces. Size, weight and metal (alloy) can vary but, as a rough guide, expect to see the following :-

- small shillings struck over sixpences (approx. 21mm)
- small half crowns struck over large shillings (approx. 25-27 mm)
- small crowns struck over large half crowns (approx. 32-33 mm)

Specimen strikings were produced in silver and gold for most months, and these tend to be extremely rare.



James II 1685-1691, Irish Gunmoney Small Six Pence 1689 Feb. in Silver. 3.92 g., 21.5mm., Edge grained rt., medal orientation. S.6583KK, KM.93a. Laureate Head of James II l. Legend reads clockwise inward around beginning at bottom l., IACOBVS . II . DEI . GRATIA. Rev. VI, for 6 pennies, over crowned sceptres, dividing script . R to sides. Date 1690. Script Feb. below in field. Around, beginning at top right clockwise, reading inward, . MAG . BR . FRA . ET . HIB . REX . A well struck Extremely Fine or better Proof with old tone and some lustre showing. Rare.



James II , Irish Gunmoney Small Shilling 1690 May in Silver. S.6582DDD; KM.100a. 3.83g., script May., Edge slant grained rt., Medal orientation. Laureate Head of James II l. Legend reads clockwise inward around beginning at bottom l., IACOBVS . II . DEI . GRATIA. Rev. XII, for 12 pennies, over crowned sceptres, dividing J R to sides. Date 1690 above all. Script May below in field. Around, beginning at top right clockwise, reading inward, . MAG . BR . FRA . ET . HIB . REX . A sharply struck Proof with luster showing through to a light grey and gold tone. Close to mint state. Rare.



James II 1685-1691, Irish Gunmoney Large Halfcrown 1690 Apr in Silver S.6579NN (Extremely Rare)

### **Pewter Money**

Pewter money is a rarer type of Gun money, manufactured out of Pewter, an alloy containing copper, antimony, bismuth and lead. Some of the coins had also a brass plug (see below on the horse's rump).



PEWTER MONEY CROWN 1690 with copper plug in Edge MELLORIS. TESSERNA. FATI. ANNO. REGNI. SEXTO Obv. IAC • II • DEI • GRA • MAG • BRI • FRA • ET • HIB • REX. King on horseback to left., sword in right hand. Rev. CHRISTO • VICTORE • THIVMPHO. The four shields of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, each crowned, arranged in form of cross; crown in centre : in the angles of the cross and cross the field ANO DOM 1690

- Halfcrowns and Crowns were issued in 1690 with the same dies as other gun money coins.
- Both these coins are extremely rare, along with a Groat struck in 1689 which is probably a pattern.
- Halfpennies and Pennies were also produced in 1689 and 1690, and less rare, although the 1689 penny is excessively rare.

### **Gold, Silver and Copper**

The gold, silver and copper Crowns were made from original 17th C dies but by Bolton for commemorative pieces to order in the 1800's and made to order & boxed in presentation case. As such, they were not contemporary pieces but are exceedingly rare and very collectible.

### **James II of England (1685-88) – an overview**

- Exiled in France during the English Civil War
- Succeeded in 1685
  - Immediately faced the Monmouth Rebellion (led by Charles II's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth)
  - His judges — most notably, George Jeffreys (the Hanging Judge) — punished the rebels brutally
  - To protect himself from further rebellions, James sought to establish a large standing army
  - By putting Roman Catholics in charge of several regiments, the King was drawn into a conflict with Parliament
  - Parliament was prorogued in November 1685, never to meet again during James's reign
  - James controversially allowed Roman Catholics to occupy the highest offices of the kingdom
  - Controversially, James accredited the Papal Nuncio and granted public offices to four Catholic bishops
- The Glorious Revolution
  - Threatened by a Catholic dynasty, influential Protestants began negotiations with William, Prince of Orange
  - On 30 June 1688 a group of Protestant nobles requested the Prince of Orange to come to England with an army
  - William of Orange arrived on 5 November 1688 – all of James II's Protestant officers defected
- Forced to abdicate in 1688
  - James attempted to flee to France, first throwing Great Seal of the Realm into the River Thames

- James was captured by Prince William of Orange but allowed to escape
  - James was received by Louis XIV, who offered him a palace to live in + a generous pension
- James's daughter Mary was declared Queen; she was to rule jointly with her husband William III
  - William and Mary subsequently granted their assent to an Act commonly referred to as the Bill of Rights
    - confirmed that James's flight constituted an abdication
    - confirmed that William III and Mary II were to be joint-monarchs
    - formally charged (and confirmed) James II with abusing his power
    - settled the question of succession to the Crown, i.e. no Catholic could ever be king (or queen) again
- France assisted James to land in Ireland in March 1689 \*
  - The Irish Parliament, unlike the English parliament, recognised James as the legitimate King
  - William was obliged to invade Ireland forthwith

\* James arrived in Kinsale on March 12, 1688 and was in Dublin on the last day of the year, March 24, 1688. The following day was March 25, 1689 – also known as Lady's Day.

- Until 1752, Britain and Ireland followed the Julian calendar, which had the year change on Lady Day, March 25.
- Confusingly, March 24, 1688, was followed by March 25, 1689
- Even more confusing is the fact that many historical dates of the period have been adjusted to fit with our modern format – so, unless we know (for certain) that the date was or wasn't adjusted, we cannot be certain about dates.

## What is so special about James II's Gunmoney?

The so-called 'gunmoney' of James II is one of the most rewarding series of Irish coinage to collect because of the volume of variations found. These variations range from differences in the legend (the text around the edges of the coin) to an ever-growing list of date variations.

The larger-sized coins were later re-used / re-struck as smaller-sized coins with higher denominations, i.e. the second series of gunmoney.

There were plenty of them about at the time (£1.1m to £1.5m's worth) and many were thrown away by Williamite soldiers (when they found some) or hidden by the Jacobite soldiers (hoping they would be of value later). They are, perhaps, one of the most common types of 17th C coins found today and every time someone is renovating a house, digging up a garden or widening a road or ditch, they seem to be found everywhere in Ireland.

- At the time, they were a pioneer of modern 'notional' currencies.
- Hitherto, monarchs had 'debased' the coinage (reduced the silver or gold content) to make their bullion reserves stretch further
- This was a completely new idea, i.e. a 'notional' currency based on 'a promise' to redeem the full value in silver.
- As such, they were a precursor to promissory banknotes

- Shortly afterwards, William himself allowed the Bank of England to issue such notes.

## The First Series

The first series comprises large coins, with subtle design variations for each of the two coin presses. **Dublin Mint** A mint was set up in Dublin at 23 Capel Street and this had two presses – the larger one nicknamed “James” after the king and a smaller one nicknamed “The Duchess” after the sister of the Duke of Tyrconnell. Tyrconnell headed up the Jacobite army in Ireland on behalf of James and, paradoxically, one of his two sisters married and became the Duchess of Marlborough – one of the generals on the Williamite side.

- The large halfcrowns and the sixpences were all struck on the “James” press
- The large shillings were struck on both presses.
  - The “Duchess” shillings have a set of pearls on the upper band of the crown (on the reverse side of the coin)
  - The “James” shillings have a foliated design on the same upper band of the crown

From the beginning, with the increasing shortages of base metals, it was suggested that a second mint be set up outside of Dublin so that alternative sources of scrap metal could be exploited. Athlone was proposed by the French ambassador but Limerick was chosen because it was convenient for scrap metal collection from both Connacht and Munster, in addition to being a convenient facility to import scrap from France. The “Duchess” press was re-located to Limerick and, from March 1690 onwards, produced about 10% of the overall monthly output – therefore the Limerick coins are much scarcer than the Dublin coins.

### Limerick Mint

- March 1690 onwards – produced large shillings
  - The “Duchess” shillings have a set of pearls on the upper band of the crown (on the reverse side of the coin)
- March 1690 onwards – large halfcrowns were produced in Limerick on the “Duchess” press
  - with a new and crude bust of James II on the obverse side of the coin
- May 1690 onwards – began to produce sixpences
  - The “Duchess” sixpences have the same set of pearls on the upper band of the crown (on the reverse side of the coin)

## Sixpences

Gunmoney sixpences are similar to the small shillings in design except that they contain ‘VI’ above the crown rather than ‘XII’. The sixpences all belong to the ‘large’ issue and no small sixpences were struck. *“They occur from July 1689 until October 1690 – the later dates are possibly spurious.” (Stafford-Langan)*



James II, Gunmoney Sixpence, July, 1689, wide date, laureate and draped bust left, rev crown over sceptres, month below, value above, J to left, R to right (DF 450; S 6583BB). Some light digs on bust, toned, about extremely fine and rare.



A spectacular mis-strike of the James II gunmoney sixpence – November 1689, KM93, VF, far off-center double strike, normal brown surfaces. An intriguing series, but few are so intriguing as this error.

### Dublin Mint – “James” press

- [1689 June](#)
- [1689 June + full stop](#)
- 1689 Jvne
- 1689 Jvne + full stop
- [1689 July](#)
- [1689 July + full stop](#)
- [1689 Aug](#)
- 1689 Aug + full colon
- 1689 Aug + superscript “t”
- 1689 Augt + full stop
- [1689 Sep + “r” above “p” \(silver proof / specimen\)](#)
- [1689 Sep + superscript “r” \(between “e” and “p”\)](#)
- 1689 Sep + superscript “t” + full colon
- 1689 Sep + superscript “t” + full stop
- [1689 7ber](#)
- 1689 7ber + full colon
- 1689 Oct

- 1689 Nov
- [1689 Nov + full stop](#)
- 1689 Nov + full colon
- 1689 Dec
- [1689 Dec + full stop](#)
- [1689 Jan](#)
- [1689 Jan + full stop](#)
- [1689 Jan + full colon](#)
- 1689 Feb + full stop
- [1689 Feb + full colon](#)
- 1689 Mar

## Large shillings

The large shillings require careful analysis because of the two presses involved and the different sets of dies for each press. The “Duchess” press accounts for less than 10% of the monthly output, so they were much scarcer at the time and more difficult to find nowadays.



James II, Gunmoney Shilling, 1689 Aug. (S 6581C)

### Dublin Mint – “James” press

- 1689 Jul
- [1689 Jul + full stop](#)
- [1689 July + full stop](#)
- [1689 Aug](#)
- 1689 Aug + full colon
- [1689 Aug + full colon + “t” above “ug”](#)
- [1689 Aug + full stop + superscript “t”](#)
- 1689 Sep
- [1689 Sep + “r” above “ep”](#)
- [1689 Sep + full stop + superscript “t”](#)
- [1689 Sep + full colon + “r” above “p”](#)
- 1689 Oct
- [1689 Oct + full stop](#)
- [1689 Oct + full colon](#)
- 1689 OCT
- [1689 OCT + “R” above “CT”](#)
- 1689 OCT + “r” above



- [1689 Oci](#)
- 8br
- 8BR
- [8BER](#)
- [1689 Nov](#)
- [1689 Nov + full stop](#)
- [1689 Nov + full colon + “r” above “v”](#)
- 1689 Nov + superscript “r”
- 9
- [1689 9r](#)
- 1689 Dec
- [1689 Dec + full colon](#)
- 1689 Decr
- [1689 10r](#)
- 1689 Jan
- [1689 Jan + full colon](#)
- 1689 Feb
- 1689 Feb + full colon
- 1689 Mar
- [1689 Mar + full colon](#)
- [1690 Mar](#)
- [1690 Mar + full colon](#)
- 1690 Apr
- [1690 Apr + full stop](#)
- [1690 Apr + full colon](#)

**Note:** March 1690 coins are scarcer, because this “month” is only one week long in this instance, i.e. the rest of March was at the end of the year and, by this time, the war was lost and production of gunmoney had ceased. **Dublin Mint – “Duchess” press**

- 1689 Jul
- 1689 Aug
- 1689 Sep
- 1689 Oct
- 1689 Nov
- 1689 Dec
- 1689 Jan
- 1689 Feb
- 1689 Mar
- 1690 Mar

**Note:** March 1690 coins are scarcer, because this “month” is only one week long in this instance **Limerick Mint – “Duchess” press**

- 1690 Mar

**Note:** March 1690 coins are scarcer, because this “month” is only one week long in this instance

## **Large halfcrowns**

This coin is a large gunmoney halfcrown (or thirty pence, hence the Roman numerals 'XXX' above the crown) which was issued by James II from about June 1689 until May 1690. This issue was superseded in April 1690 by a smaller coin of similar design which lasted until October 1690. The later coins were struck in Limerick as the Dublin mint was captured after the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690 and closed. The gunmoney halfcrowns occur in proof or trial specimens in gold and silver. The gold proofs are very rare and the silver ones are scarce.

#### **Dublin Mint – “James” press**

- 1689 June
- [1689 July](#)
- 1689 Aug
- [1689 Aug + full colon](#)
- [1689 Sep + “r” above “ep”](#)
- [1689 Sep + full colon + “r” above “p”](#)
- [1689 Oct + full colon](#)
- 1689 OCTr + full stop
- [1689 OCT + full stop + “R” above “T”](#)
- 1689 8r + full stop
- 1689 8BER
- 1689 Nov
- [1689 Nov + full stop](#)
- [1689 Nov + full colon](#)
- 1689 Dec
- 1689 Jan
- 1689 Feb
- [1689 Feb + full colon](#)
- 1689 Mar
- [1689 Mar + full stop](#)
- 1690 Mar
- [1690 Mar + full colon](#)
- 1690 Apr
- [1690 Apr + full colon](#)

**Note:** March 1690 coins are scarcer, because this “month” is only one week long in this instance

#### **Limerick Mint – “Duchess” press**

- 1690 Mar
- 1690 Apr
- 1690 May

**Note:** March 1690 coins are scarcer, because this “month” is only one week long in this instance

#### **Second Series**

The second series comprises smaller coins for each denomination – again, with subtle design variations for each of the two coin presses. The reason for the smaller sized-coins is related to a continued shortage of base metals and even importing obsolete cannon from Brest didn't alleviate the constant need for more. In addition, by April 1690 it was realised that the confidence in the base currency was slipping – partly due to the fact that all French officers and soldiers were being paid in gold and silver – not the gunmoney currency.

- in April 1690, the Dublin “James” press was producing crowns on the old halfcrownflans and remaindered coins
  - the Dublin mint closed down in July 1690 after the defeat at the Boyne
  - the Dublin dies were subsequently confiscated and sent to the Tower Mint in London
    - In the early 1800's Bishop Rawlinson and King George III used these dies to strike coins in gold, silver and 'good' brass for their private coin collections
- in April 1690, the Limerick mint began production of small shillings
  - to distinguish them from the Dublin (small) shillings, these coins had small flowers instead of stops in the legend
  - these occurred on the reverse, the obverse or both (collectible variations within the Limerick small shilling series)
  - they also display the initials “J.R.” (another peculiarity attached to the Limerick small shillings)
- by May 1690, the Limerick “Duchess” press was producing small halfcrowns on the old large shilling-sized flans
  - these can be distinguished from the Dublin small halfcrowns by the new and crude bust of James II
  - the Limerick mint continued production until October 1690

## Small shillings

### Dublin Mint – “James” press

- [1690 May](#)
- [1690 May + full stop](#)
- 1690 Jun
- [1690 June + full stop](#)

### Limerick Mint – “Duchess” press

- 1690 Apr
- [1690 May](#)
- [1690 June](#)
- 1690 Sep

## Small halfcrowns

### Dublin Mint – “James” press

- 1690 Apr
- 1690 May

- [1690 May + full stop](#)

### Limerick Mint – “Duchess” press

- 1690 May
- [1690 June](#)
- [1690 June + full stop](#)
- [1690 July](#)
- 1690 Aug
- [1690 Aug + full colon](#)
- 1690 Oct

### Crowns



This coin is typical example of a gunmoney crown (or 5 shilling piece) issued about May – July 1690 in Dublin and possibly until August or September 1690 in Limerick. Unlike other ‘gunmoney’ denominations the crown was not dated by month. There are a number of varieties of gunmoney crowns with variations in the division of the reverse legend and a number of different ‘horsemen’ on the obverse. Two pieces one with the sword pointing to the ‘E’ of REX and another with a ‘chubby’ horseman are actively collected as scarce varieties. Gunmoney crown proofs or trials occur in a variety of metals including gold, silver and tin – as already stated, these all are early 19th C re-strikes from the original dies. The proofs are all rare. The design of the gunmoney crown is very similar to the design used in the earlier (April 1690) white metal issue. However the earlier issue is made from much better quality dies and often has two copper or brass plugs in the flan. **Dublin Mint – “James” press**

- 1690

### Limerick Mint – “Duchess” press

- 1690

## Third Series

In 1691, when the Williamite forces were besieging Limerick, even small change had become scarce. Since the aftermath of the Battle of the Boyne, William had declared the gunmoney currency de-valued to a fraction of James II's declared 'promissory' values –

- the gunmoney halfcrowns (formerly worth 30 pence each) were exchanged/traded at 1d each
- the shilling (formerly worth 30 pence each) were exchanged/traded at ½d each
- the sixpence (formerly worth 30 pence each) were exchanged/traded at ¼d each
- by February 1690, all gunmoney was de-monetised completely, i.e. declared worthless

The result was that Limerick overstruck the old large and small 'shilling' coins as halfpennies and farthings.

- The designs comprised a bust of James II (obverse) and a stylised figure of Hibernia on the reverse
- This was the first instance of Hibernia appearing on Irish coinage
- All third series coins are dated 1691



Limerick coinage, Farthing and Halfpenny, both 1691, reversed ns in legends (S 6594-5). Both fine; the latter is overstruck on a Gunmoney Shilling, dated August 1689

**Other gunmoney varieties** This blog post is about the varieties in how the month is displayed but there are many other varieties of gunmoney coin design – most notably in terms of the James II bust and the legend (text around the edges of the coins). I will deal with these variations in due course.

## Conclusions and aftermath

Gunmoney was a complete and utter disaster for Ireland.

- The Irish were bankrupted by the system – essentially they were robbed.
- The French troops were paid in silver and gold and emerged unscathed financially.

- The Irish soldiers and their entourage that fled after the Treaty of Limerick did so as impoverished men and willing to work for anyone who paid them.
- Those who stayed behind were forcibly evicted from their land and deported to the West Indies – regardless of social status, age or health. Similar to the Cromwellian confiscations, their lands were given to Williamite officers as a reward for their service – or were systematically taken by a second wave of ‘adventurers’ like Speaker Connolly who manipulated the law to oust them.

Gunmoney was the first ‘regal’ issue of a completely base currency since the Late Roman period and the civil servants of Europe were quick to learn from this experiment. Keen to finance their country’s wars without excessively raising taxes, they took to replacing gold coins with paper money (banknotes). Despite deriding James’s “brass money”, William himself approved the setting up of the Bank of England in 1696 to issue promissory banknotes and national loans in an effort to solve the national debt crisis.

- in France, a Scottish Jacobite attempted to solve their national debt crisis by issuing shares in the Mississippi Company, which promised to repay the issue prices of the shares many times in the form of future profits
- James II’s failed system is the basis for our current financial system, i.e. the government guarantees the value of its promissory notes and coins.

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