

This coin is a British crown, worth, at the time,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a pound. The design of this crown features a portrait of Queen Victoria on the obverse, known as the “jubilee head” design<sup>1</sup>. The obverse is artwork of Saint George, the patron saint of England, slaying a dragon. This coin design is reminiscent of many one would see today—the arrangement of a sovereign on the obverse and a cultural image on the reverse directly connects the ruler to the country’s economy

Stamped over the queen’s image is a simple phrase: “VOTES FOR WOMEN”. This attributes the act to the members of the women’s suffrage movement, a movement that gained traction in the late 1800s. Similar coins with the same message have been dated as late as 1916, just two years before women were given the partial right to vote<sup>2</sup>. Each coin was hand-stamped with stamps one would commonly use for jewelry making or labeling. Coins were common, and, if pocket change was pooled together, could be acquired in mass quantities. The countermarking is also a more private form of protest, and the coins could be distributed inconspicuously.

Although countermarking was a far less risky form of protest than previous methods employed by suffragists, it was not without consequence. Defacing legal tender was—and still is—illegal. Other coins from this period have been found with other, non-suffrage countermarks,

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<sup>1</sup> “1 Crown - Victoria (2nd Portrait) - United Kingdom” Numista, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces11102.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Neil MacGregor, host, “Suffragette-defaced penny.” A History of the World in 100 Objects (podcast), October 2010, accessed May 3, 2024,

<https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/suffragette-defaced-penny/id351096296?i=100008820953>

and were usually accepted by merchants regardless of their wear<sup>3</sup>. However, tying this countermark to the suffrage movement may have led to arrests because of heavy government opposition to the movement<sup>4</sup>. It is unknown if any of these coins made it to official circulation, but it would have had a difficult time in doing so. Despite this, defacing currency, something that is known to travel throughout a country, was a good way to spread a propaganda message.

Suffragists employed many forms of civil disobedience and protest as they fought for women's right to vote. Their efforts were fully recognized almost 30 years after the minting of this coin in 1928, when the Equal Franchise Act gave women the exact same right to vote as men had at the time.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hockenhull, "Stamped All over the King's Head: Defaced Coins and Women's Suffrage," *British Numismatic Journal* 86 (2016): 238–45, [https://www.britnumsoc.org/images/PDFs/2016\\_BNJ\\_86\\_10\\_Stamped.pdf](https://www.britnumsoc.org/images/PDFs/2016_BNJ_86_10_Stamped.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Hockenhull.

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