

Coins through the ages

Coins exist to make the trade of goods and services easier. Coins are common archaeological finds across Wales, but until 1968 coins were only minted here very rarely.

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Iron Age

Ancient British coins were inspired by coins made by Gallic tribes which themselves were based on Ancient Greek gold staters.

They often show a very stylised horse on the reverse (tails side).

Welsh tribes did not mint their own coins but sometimes coins of their neighbours in England are found in Wales.

Ancient British coins are usually made of gold or silver, but sometimes of copper alloy.

Roman

Roman coins are easily identified by their realistic portraits in profile.

The reverses of the coins are varied, usually showing deities, events, personifications. They can be made of gold, silver or copper alloy.

Silver denarii are most common from the first two centuries of Roman occupation.

Copper alloy 'radiates' and nummi are very common in the 3rd and 4th centuries respectively.

Medieval

Medieval coins started to be minted in England in the 7th century.

They are usually identified by a cross on the reverse and the thinness of the metal. The obverse (heads side) usually shows a very stylised depiction of the King.

The medieval monetary system was based around the silver penny – all silver coins were multiples or fractions of the penny. Large denominations are gold but are very rare finds.

Post-medieval

From the reign of Henry VII coins show realistic depictions of the monarch on the obverse. Reverses often depict a shield, and later Britannia. Marks identify the denomination and the year of production.

From 1662, coins are milled – they are machine made, are truly circular and have decorated edges to deter clipping and counterfeiting.

Coins are silver and gold, but in the 17th century copper alloy tokens represent the smaller denominations.

Modern

During the 19th century coinage was based on the gold sovereign. The circulation of gold coinage ended with the start of the First World War. Silver coinage was replaced by cupro-nickel in 1947.

In the run up to decimalisation in 1971, the Royal Mint moved from Tower Hill in London to Llantrisant, near Cardiff, where all UK coinage is now minted.

The new pound coin has inbuilt security features such as a hologram.