

Jersey Farthing Recoinage Correspondence, 1881

Overview

These fourteen documents form a complete administrative file recording the recoinage of Jersey bronze farthings into pence in 1881. Together they trace the entire bureaucratic journey from initial petition to final shipment, involving the States of Jersey, the Royal Mint, the Treasury, the Home Office, and the Lieutenant Governor.

The Story the Documents Tell

The Problem (January 1881)

The file opens with a letter of 3 January 1881 from **Edward Mourant** of Samares Manor, writing as President of a Committee appointed by the States of Jersey. Jersey had recently issued bronze farthings under an Act of the States, but there was simply **no demand for them** — the public wouldn't use them. The nominal value of the unwanted coins was **£280 sterling**. Mourant asked, through the Bailiff Sir Robert Pipon Marett, two precise questions: on what terms would the Master of the Mint recoin them into pence, and would the Lords of the Treasury issue the necessary instructions?

The Bureaucratic Chain (February 1881)

What follows illustrates Victorian administrative procedure beautifully. The request travels upward through layers:

- The **Bailiff** (3 Feb) forwards Mourant's letter to the **Lieutenant Governor**, Major-General Nicholson C.B.
- The **Lieutenant Governor** (4 Feb) forwards it to the **Under Secretary of State** at the Home Office
- The **Home Office** (9 Feb, signed by Godfrey Lushington) transmits it to the **Treasury**, asking their Lordships' observations

- The **Treasury** registers it as file **2771** and refers it to the **Deputy Master of the Mint**

The cover sheet — a Treasury minute paper — shows the bureaucratic annotation in the hand of an official identified only as "J.B.": *"Refer to the Deputy Master of the Mint for Report."*

The Memorable Aside

The most historically vivid document in the file is a separate clean copy of the internal Treasury minute by "J.B." It reads:

"It appears from the correspondence of 1876 that Jersey gave us a good deal of trouble; & in any arrangem't now made (if any) great care should be taken that the Island pays costs to the last farthing."

The pun — *"to the last farthing"* — is either a wry joke or a happy accident, but the sentiment is clear: a previous recoinage episode in 1876 had been problematic, and Treasury officials were determined not to be left out of pocket again. This note shaped the entire negotiation that followed.

The Mint's Report (17 February 1881)

The Deputy Master of the Mint responded in technical and financial detail. The key calculation rested on **weight**:

- A farthing weighs more than one-quarter of a penny
- Therefore, £280 worth of farthings, recoinied, would produce pence of a **higher nominal value** — calculated at **£336**
- This created a gross profit of **£56**
- From this, deductions were required: the Mint's charge of **10% on the nominal value** (£313.2.9, working out to approximately £31.6.3), plus carriage to and from Jersey (estimated at no more than **£5**)
- The **net profit** to Jersey would therefore be approximately **£17–18**

The working calculations in Image 7 — with crossings-out, revised figures in a circled inset, and marginal arithmetic — give a vivid glimpse of a Mint official working through the sums in real time.

Treasury Authority and Shipment (March–July 1881)

By **21 March 1881**, the States of Jersey had acted: the Treasurer forwarded **13 boxes of bronze farthings** via the London & South Western Railway, value **£260**, with a Bill of Lading, to the Deputy Master of the Mint.

(Note: the figure had dropped from £280 to £260 — it appears some farthings had been retained, or the original estimate was revised.)

By **21 July 1881**, the Mint wrote to Edward Mourant confirming:

- The farthings had been received and recoinced under authority of the Lords of the Treasury
- The equivalent pence had a nominal value of **£313.2.9**
- The coin was now ready for delivery
- The expenses of recoinage totaled **£32.18.2**

Mourant replied from Samares Manor on **23 July**, acknowledging receipt of the letter and enclosures, instructing the Treasurer to pay **£32.18.2** to the Master of the Mint's account at the Bank of England, and requesting the coin be shipped via the steamer "**Staperayder**" (or similar vessel) from the British & Foreign Steam Wharf, East Smithfield, London — which sailed to Jersey every Saturday. The boxes were to be numbered 1–16, marked **P.J.S.**, and addressed to the Treasurer of the States at the Jersey Banking Company, Broad Street, Jersey.

The final document (30 July 1881) from the Royal Mint confirms the 13 cases of bronze pence had been shipped aboard the "*Staperayder*" that day, in accordance with the request.

Key Themes and Observations

Administrative completeness. The file is preserved intact from initial petition to final delivery receipt — a rarity. Every link in the chain is present, including the internal Mint calculations and the Treasury minute.

The 1876 precedent. The "trouble.gif" document hints at a prior episode that the file itself doesn't contain. Jersey had apparently caused difficulties — probably over payment of costs — in 1876. The Treasury's institutional memory carried that grievance forward five years, directly influencing the terms imposed in 1881.

The profit mechanism. The financial logic of the recoinage is elegant: because farthings are proportionally heavier than their face value in copper relative to pence, melting and recoining them at the same weight produces more value in pence than the original face value. Jersey effectively gained free pence — though the Mint's 10% charge absorbed most of the windfall.

Edward Mourant as protagonist. Mourant of Samares Manor is the consistent human presence throughout — initiating, negotiating, instructing, and concluding. His handwriting appears in multiple documents. The file is essentially his administrative achievement.

Language and formality. The letters follow rigid Victorian epistolary conventions — "I have the honor to," "Your obedient servant," the careful use of third person in some documents. Yet internal minutes like J.B.'s are refreshingly candid. The contrast between public formality and private pragmatism is striking.