

Editor: David Powell

A free newsletter to all who share our interest in these fascinating and often enigmatic pieces. Please send the editor at least one 300 dpi JPEG scan, or a sharply focused photo print, of any interesting leaden token or tally in your collection. Send images as email attachments to LJEditor@aol.com or dmpowell@waitrose.com

A Sussex Selection, part 2

More of Ron Kerridge's pieces, this time of less certain origin, but still probably Sussex with the exception of the first two; less certain because the detectorists who found them threw them in a bucket without recording them, before Ron could encourage them to better practices. Hint, hint! I have also felt obliged to magnify every thing with the exception of the Thomas Sloman piece, due to the small size of many of the pieces. Take it that the three-letter pieces and the bell are the size of typical 17th century copper tokens, i.e. 15-17mm diameter, and scale accordingly.



Figs.1-2 are Wiltshire pieces, precise location uncertain, and are both uniface. Apologies that several of the pieces are so dark, but that is often the way with lead pieces which ape the 17th cent main series {Fig.3a}, and with late mediaeval pewter such as suggested by Fig.5a. The latter depicts a merchant mark, albeit not a very good one. Fig.4a is more typical of the irregular geometric designs of later crude lead, but is well cut; I will guess at 17th cent from the size and colour, even though the design is more 18th. Looking at the reverses of the same three pieces, Fig.4b possibly represents the rays of the sun, whilst Fig.3b is an animal and Fig.5b either rake or a comb of candles. More likely the latter, indicating that the issuer was a chandler. So we have a reverse {Fig.5a} which hints at 17th cent and an obverse {Fig.5b} which could be 15th-17th cent; therefore, revise original estimate to the right.

Fig.6 is more easily dateable; under the legs of the hart, if not easily readable, is the number 1731. IB, Fig.7, looks older, and is cut almost like a crude weight. How come, if many of these pieces were designed and cut crudely, that so many of them have good shape?

Figs.8-9 both have three initials, but Fig.8a has them two-on-one instead of vice versa. The reverse gives it away, it is quite definitely Roman! with, to note, the pleasing addition of a letter or two. Do I spot AVG, short for Augustus, the senior emperor's official title? The Romans were far more coin-like in their token production, and the standing figure could well be imagined adorning one of their official issues. Fig.9 is standard mid-17th cent, but a very nice one; note the crisp rendering of the bell, and the good strong rim.



Figs 10a, 10b are not the same piece; they are two different specimens of the same type struck from the same die, and with them comes a very interesting question. The obverse, Fig.10a, is again a bell; perhaps deriving from the same source as Fig.9. But what of that very clear numeral, 24? With the idea that many pieces were issued at this time for small change, and that denominations were required below the level to which the official coinage descended, Ron proposes the idea that these tiny pieces, around 9-11mm across, were perhaps one twenty-fourth of either a penny or a farthing. If they were six to a farthing, i.e. twenty-four to a penny, then a 10mm diameter might be about the right proportion when put alongside a 15-17mm copper farthing; and also, there being so small would explain why so few have come to light until the advent of the latest modern metal detectors. A theory only, but I like it. At last, a piece which might show some new light on this enigmatic series. Anyone else out there come across them?



Fig.11 is a meant to be a large animal, possibly a horse, except that the designer, with only about 13mm at his disposal, decided to truncate the poor animal's legs. It may have come out of the same metaphorical stable as Fig.3. Likewise Fig.12 looks like a W with two well-struck but rather indeterminate initials above; or have I got it upside down and it is an M over a row of candles? Possibly the same chandler as Fig.5?

Fig.13 is a simple but very well struck and clear Lombardic lettering piece, with two initials on one side and one on the other; date c.1500, certainly not much after 1540-50. We usually see one letter at this date, not two. Could this be the precursor of the three-letter combination beloved of the 17th cent issuers; i.e. surname initial on one side, forename of husband and wife on the other? Let us guess that IE might be John/James and Elizabeth, or the like; quite a probably combination. Seems a bit early for this sort of thing, but....

Figs.14-17 are a number of unremarkable type 28 mediaeval pewters, none of whose reverses were sufficiently photogenic to record; they are of earlier date than the last and, as will be seen, of very different metal. Fig.18 depicts a rather more ornate initial than usual, and one which I am sure an expert in script could date more precisely than I. My guess is late-16th cent or 17th; the style could be later {from the monograms which appear on 18th cent European coins of the period}, but the size does not look right.

Thomas Sloman, Fig.19. Luxury of luxuries, when did you last see both forename and surname in full on a lead, rather than white metal, piece? The reverse is blank. It was found on Worthing beach, although Ron informs me that Sloman is rather more an East Sussex than a West Sussex name. Yes, names have regional biases, and they can be worth studying for clues.....and yes, you guessed it, there are quite a few Thomas Slomans around.

To finish, a delightful couple of pieces; first Fig.20, eagle with heart {or is it a couple of initials?} above, known to come from Berkshire; and finally, would you believe it a clock {Fig.21}, complete with hands. More modern than all the other pieces shown, it would appear, but what was its purpose? Ted Fletcher informs me that he thinks it is a toy, albeit still possibly 18th century. My thanks again to Ron for allowing us to put on this superb and varied display.

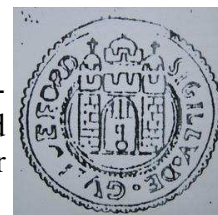


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Plea for Information

The attached drawing is of what is believed to be the only known specimen of a Guildford bale seal; however, nobody knows where the original now is. Documents are known which refer to its existence, but we are not sure of its size. The date is believed to be c.1600, at which time Guildford's cloth was renowned abroad for its quality, the usual destinations being the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. Seals would normally turn up in the area to which the goods were exported, rather than the location from which they came, which is probably why we find Baltic rather than British ones over here.

Matthew Alexander, curator of local history at Guildford Museum, would welcome hearing from any LTT readers who might know of the whereabouts of such a piece; he would like a photograph for a major exhibition which is being planned, as well as for a paper which he is producing for Surrey University. Anybody out there able to help, please?



Correction:

Reader Andrew MacMillan has pointed out that I mistakenly attributed the 1714 communion token on the front page of the Dec 2006 issue to Flisk, Fifeshire, whereas it is actually from Newbattle, Lothian. The Flisk piece of the same date appeared on page 3 of the Oct 2006 issue.

The History of Communion Tokens: Part 1, The Early Days

Communion tokens {CTs} are a fine series with, in their early days at least, all the variety and individuality that we are accustomed to seeing in locally manufactured lead. Compared with other token series they have a distinctly idiosyncratic usage and purpose, and one which which some of our readers may not care for; let not that worry you, but just enjoy them for their history and artwork. There were nigh on a thousand parishes out there in Britain alone, plus non-conformists, all with a need to mint and for most of their time with no central mechanism for doing or controlling it; the recipe for a veritable numismatic feast!

It would not be fair to dwell on CTs overmuch in LTT, as many of our readership are detectorists from south of the Scottish border who have not much chance of finding them; yet their story is worth telling, and I will therefore intersperse it, perhaps in alternate months, with articles on other subjects. Over the New Year I showed you a selection of the dated pieces, by way of introduction; now for a little of the tale behind them.

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CTs are believed to originate with the Huguenots in the early 1530s and were thereafter adopted by certain Calvinistically inspired groups in this country c.1560; the leaders of whom, being strict in their beliefs as to what constituted right and wrong, wished to impose a control mechanism to ensure that those they deemed unworthy were not allowed to partake of the Communion meal. They were used to a limited extent in a variety of European countries, including England and Ireland, but it was in the Presbyterian churches of Scotland, where their use became almost universal, that they are predominantly associated. They may be found for almost all of Scotland's 901 ancient parishes, or for towns within them, and also wherever Scotsmen went abroad; for example, there are significant numbers also in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. We will confine ourselves here mainly to the United Kingdom.

As far as CTs are concerned, the English/Scottish border may be considered as being somewhere just south of the Tyne, as most of Northumberland, plus a number of other locations in the extreme Northern counties of England, conformed to the Scottish practice. Below that line, CTs only tended to occur in those English {and very rarely Welsh} towns which Scotsmen could reach easily by ship. These pieces are also mostly late, not much before the end of the 18th century. A number of scattered early pieces do exist for England, but they are not well known, nor do they appear to constitute any recognisable series.

If Calvin made any firm edict in 1560, as is suspected, the tokens bear little evidence of it; although many of them are thought to be early, there is so little written about them that, barring knowing the find location, not much can reasonably be said. Continental pieces often depicted the utensils of the communion meal, but no Scottish piece aspired to the fine artwork of Fig.1 {this specimen possibly a fake}; they often had just one letter on, presumably the initial of the parish, and mostly remained that way for the best part of a century. Most are lead and regularly-shaped, although Fig.2 is cut from sheet brass.



The Communion service has, over the years, generally been regarded with rather greater reverence in Scotland than elsewhere; it is not held every week or two, but only a very few times per year; perhaps once or twice, certainly not more than four. The service itself would be the climax of a whole weekend of solemn preparation and celebration, starting as early as Friday or perhaps even Thursday evening. During the weeks before, the elders of the church would go round visiting their members, examining their knowledge and lifestyle {ugh!!} and, if they liked what they saw, granting the token of admission to their feast. If you had been a naughty boy, no token.

There was another reason, too; one of security. In days such as those of the 17th century Covenanting period when one party's way of showing Christian love to its rivals was to tie their opponents' womenfolk to stakes in the Solway Firth at low tide, it was advisable to have some protection. Pieces were therefore used as identification to prove to others that the bearer was a genuine adherent and sympathiser rather than a Government or ecclesiastical spy.

.....to be continued {with more pictures next time!}

Picture Gallery

A pleasing batch of seven to start with, all with their own very distinctive characters. Fig.1 looks like someone has bent about four metal rods round each other, but as they don't obviously represent anything we had better settle for type 9, irregular geometric. Fig.2 also teases us as to where to place it, although type



4, lis {or Prince of Wales feathers}, is dominant; albeit on a pedestal, suggesting a candlestick, which would make type 27 a near runner-up. One of the most interesting type 4s I have seen, especially when enhanced by a couple of initials. Fig.3, a mere type 2; but with style, the way those arms and legs stick out all over the place. Fig.4, another lis on a pedestal, as far different from Fig.2 as it is possible to get; or is it a chap with his legs splayed, arms akimbo, advertising himself almost arrogantly to the world? Again, with flanking stars to ornament, rather than mere pellets.

Fig.5, a crown, and hence type 25; clear, well cut and pleasantly individual. It looks as if someone has stabbed two small knives in from the top, as if in to a pin cushion, but doubtless this is the designer's unusual way of rendering the crosses which usually appear on the horizontal band. Once more, flanking ornamentation, this time small crosses. Fig.6 is undoubtedly a tavern piece, type 11. They had some strange shaped containers in those days, but their variety adds to our interest; on the piece shown, a curved handle may be seen to top left, joining the upper and lower sections. Finally Fig.7; did they have helicopters in those days? These pieces all came as a batch, and I know not whether they were all found together, but even the type 1 is interesting. Solid petals, or propeller blades, with, unusually, a central hub joining them.

Fig.8, to the right, was not part of the same batch, but whilst on the subject of tavern utensils it seems so appropriate to mention it. Some 32mm across, in the usual dark lead of London, it contains not just the usual one or two utensils but a whole range. There is a sturdy beer mug at 6 o'clock, a flagon at two and a fine wine glass at twelve, plus a pipe with bowl at 8 o'clock and stem running horizontally to the right. Is that a candleholder in the middle?



The crossed Vs of Fig.9 are quite common, but are they just a type 2 rendering of a "W" or are they something more? Opinions welcome on this. Two good type 5 anchors to follow {Figs.10,11}; one with a strong ring, the other small, uncharacteristically dwarfed by elaborate coins of rope. Both feel like London pieces, as also does Fig.12, a piece with a very mid-17th century feel except for one thing; its diameter is only 13mm, compared with the usual minimum 15mm of its copper counterparts. Perhaps it is earlier? The initials on the back are a sturdy IC, with somewhat pelleted ends.



Bells, which fall under type 27, seem to be quite common on these type of tokens. Fig.13 is of similar diameter and probably similar vintage, but very much less attractive. Its three-pelleted main design hints at something like a knuckle-duster, although it may in fact be "SR" retrograde; i.e. a type 2, with unusual lettering style. Its reverse depicts a prominent pellet over some indeterminate object



which might be a dog, but which is too vague to guess. Finally, my thanks to Bill Swainston for Fig.14. We'll be nice and call it a shield, type 16, rather than an irregular geometric; the centrepiece seems a distinct object, and is not fully round.

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