

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 dmpowell@waitrose.com or david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk. Please note that w.e.f. 19 April 2008 the old LTJEditor@aol.com address is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



This month's issue is dedicated to British mediaeval pewter. My thanks to John Dunford for this fine display of Thames finds, all very darkly patinated as is always the case with any pieces which have spent a few centuries hiding in the Thames mud. All very small too, for which reason I have magnified everything in this issue by 1.5 to increase visibility; pieces of 11mm diameter do not make for good viewing, if shown at their real-life size.

Many of the pieces shown here are of very simple style, but the thing which immediately strikes the eye in many cases is the quality, particularly the clarity, of the finish. They are all probably from the period 1490-1660, and none more than about 15mm across. Amongst those which stand out are:

- ◇ Fig.1 looks like a communion token, but may not be; CTs didn't have the monopoly on square shapes, although Williamson lists only about 25 pieces out of 12700+ in the main 17th cent token series. It is somewhat lighter in colour than most of the others, with one exception.
- ◇ Fig.6 displays a nice ATF monogram, probably an triad of initials, and shows {albeit faintly} the only date of the group on the reverse: 1644.
- ◇ Fig.7 looks like a lead version of those 17th century tokens issued by pubs called the King's or Queen's Head.
- ◇ Fig.8 borrows a design beloved of the Romans; one could almost imagine it being a denarius. It is of markedly light colour for a Thames find.
- ◇ Fig.9 looks like a irregular geometric within a grenetis, but type 9 doodles are mainly a post-Restoration feature. Are those letters, rather, than filler, within the grenetis?
- ◇ Fig.10, which has a most unusual representation of the triad of initials; one wonders which component is which. One feels that R ought to be the surname, but at that date K is much commoner as a surname initial than a forename one.
- ◇ Fig.11 is a rose, I think, therefore probably Elizabethan.
- ◇ Fig.13 shows an unusual cross. Is Fig 14 a ship, a crown or a candlestick?

A question worth pondering; when did two-letter initials, rather than one, come in? Guess, late 16c. These pieces are all after the introduction of the surname, which is predominantly a 13th-14th cent phenomenon.

{continued on page 5}

Can you Date a Lead Token by its Size?

One of the first questions which is invariably asked about a lead token is how old it is. This is frequently difficult to answer, although the main clues are size, alloy {i.e. % of lead} and style. There are many overlaps of all of these and one can rarely be dogmatic; however, one can look at the dominant trends. Here we attempt to do that for size, availing ourselves of the very useful body of data in BNJ 53-54, frequently mentioned in these pages.

The Mitchiner/Skinner articles of BNJ 53/54 endeavour to break down the body of lead tokens pre-1675 into a number of groups, of which I will consider here only those large enough to generate a passable statistical sample. Some of these will be illustrated as we talk about them. The failure to continue the BNJ53/54 article up to around 1800 is disappointing; at the point where it finishes, the series is about to break into a great new phase heralded by the advent of regal copper, yet the BNJ version of the story appears to peter out. For many detectorists, used to handling chunky crude lead, and not located near the main findspots of mediaeval pewter, the 1670s is just about where it starts.

A statistical breakdown of the % diameter distribution, including a statement of the averages for each type, is squirrelled away in the appendix on page 6. We recognise that not all our readers like such things, although I trust that the table may be of some use as a measure for assessing your own unknown pieces.

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The main 17th century tokens series is one for which there is much more data available than any of the others. Looking at it for clues, we both reach a few conclusions and encounter a few problems:

- Both undated and dated pieces were issued throughout the entire date range 1648-1672, but from the style it would appear that the former predominated in the early period and the latter in the later. In other words, the dated pieces are on average later than the undated ones, so that the statistics provided by the dated ones alone are not typical of the series as a whole.
- From the dated pieces, it would appear that the diameter of a non-municipal piece was normally 15-16mm until about 1660, thereafter increasing gradually to about 18mm in the mid-late 1660s and 20mm at the end of the period.
- Municipal pieces largely disobey this rule, in that most town farthings were struck the same size as a merchant's halfpenny, rather than his farthing; which, if one disregards, could distort the statistics. There are thus two major subseries determined by municipal and private issues

So, we cannot make too many statements about micro distribution within the series, but just look at it as a whole; knowing that there are certain factors which inhibit our striving for greater accuracy. Which brings me to the point; many of the BNJ series will be similarly afflicted, the only difference being that we do not know what the distorting factors are.

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The Mitchiner & Skinner groups discussed here, and mentioned in the table at the back, are roughly as follows. I have eliminated a few for which the samples are statistically inadequate, and have generally intended to simplify; some may feel overso. For those who want the extra detail, I strongly recommend the BNJ original. Herewith a quick summary, reinforced with a little photography {NOTE: All pictures magnified by a factor of 1.5}

Group C: Beaded border pictorial tokens {London, c.1200-1250}

- Typically pewter composed of about 45-65% tin and 35-55% lead; average diameter about 18mm, a figure which is not achieved again until the 17th century. Beading sometimes minimal. Typically 0.8-1.2gm; they feel large for mediaeval.



Group D: Pictorial tokens, main series {London and Dublin, c.1250-1307}.

- Pewter again, approx 55-65% tin and 35-55% lead, but no beading; less deviation in the alloy than group C. The diameter is also much more consistent; the diameter is usually in a very narrow range, 15-16mm. Pilgrims, bishops, monks, stags, paschal lambs, bears, pelicans, cocks and double-headed eagles all feature amongst the subject matter. Mostly 0.6 to 0.9gm.



Group F: Late pictorial tokens {London, c.1307-1350}

- Many designs continued from above, but on average cruder. This group subdivides into:
 - ◇ Fa1 better style pewter. 14-16mm, 58-70% tin, 30-42% lead.
 - ◇ Fa2 poor style pewter. 15-17mm, tin/lead split anywhere from 25:75 to 70:30
 - ◇ Fb1 & Fb2: pure lead. 12-16mm.

Group H: Geometric tokens {London, c.1350-1435}

- These are fairly consistently pure lead, 14-15mm diam, and around 1.0 to 1.5gm in weight. They include many of the standard types: 6-petals, cartwheels, millstones and the like. Forgeais' tax pieces with turrets and ships sometimes feature amongst them.

Group L: Late Plantagenet tokens { London, c.1425-1490}

- Mostly lead, a few pewter. This group subdivides into:
 - ◇ La small neat pieces; tiny, 11-12mm diam. Usually 0.8-1.0gm, but sometimes less.
 - ◇ Lb again neat, but thin with broader flans; mostly 12-13mm, but a few up to 16mm. Again mostly 0.8-1.0gm, but some heavier.
 - ◇ Lc very broad, thin flans; 14-17mm.
 - ◇ Ld large thick tokens; mostly over 14-15mm diam, and with weights up to 2.7gm



Group M: Cross & pellets tokens {London or Paris, c.1425-1490}

- The heyday of the grenetis, or type 28 rim; almost always, on this series, with radial shading which, apparently, can go either clockwise or anti-clockwise. Almost all lead, and very small; 11-12mm, and mostly 0.5-0.8gm. There are at least fifty-odd designs known on the obverse, mostly single objects but also a number of initials. Letters to look out for include A, B, D, E, H, I, M and Y. Illustrated are temple, keys and M, in addition to the standard reverse.

Group O: Early Tudor tokens {London, c.1490-1545}

- Some pure lead still but a greater proportion of pewter. Divides into five subclasses:
 - ◇ Oa types simulating the groat or penny, and sized appropriately.
 - ◇ Ob types with pseudo-inscriptions around the rim. Larger: 18-23mm, mainly 19-21mm. Possibly contemporary with the boy bishop series of the provinces.

- ◇ Oc/d/e. Lombardic single letters & designs, particularly merchant marks.
9-17mm, in most cases 11-12mm and about 1.0-1.6gm.

Group P, in part a provincial equivalent of Group O, mostly consisting of the well known Boy Bishop pieces; a complex but fairly easy to distinguish subseries which I do not therefore propose to discuss further here. Their sizes tend to correspond to the pennies, half-groats and groats of the times.



Group Q: Elizabethan tokens {London, c.1558-1603}

- Still a surprisingly high proportion of pure lead. Modern {post Lombardic} single letters, in abundance to the point of dominance; some pictorials. Very much as Oc/d/e above, and still averaging 11-13mm; I am not sure that I always see the difference. Mostly between 1gm and 3gm.

Group R: Provincial Elizabethan tokens {Bury St.Edmunds & others, c.1558-1603}

- Notably large for this period {14-27mm., typically 16-20mm} mostly pure lead; subject matter indicates evolution from the boy bishop series P above.



Group S: 17th century lead tokens {London, c.1600-1672; I would guess mostly pre-1648}

- Many very well-formed pieces, mostly pewter rather than pure lead; typical size moves up to 13-15mm. Double initials tending to take over from single, and an emergence of the mostly commercially-based subject matter which dominates the main 17th century copper & brass series. Feels very much like a precursor to the latter. Cannot find any triad of initials in BNJ 53, but would expect them to emerge c.1620-40. Similar weight to group Q.



Group U: Third-quarter 17th century tokens {mainly London, c.1650-1675}

- Fully contemporary with the main copper/brass series, in lead or pewter, and with the typical size moved up to 15-17mm. Weight well varied, 1.5gm to 5gm, because of the greater variety of alloy.

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I am grateful to Tony Pilson, an experienced London mudlark of 30 years' standing, for the following thought-provoking observations:

- At any period of lead token issue, the commonest pieces usually approximate in size to the current smallest coin of the realm.
- Pieces of London origin are, until 1700 at least, nearly always of superior manufacture to those of the provinces; in consequence of which, the London series are going to be easier to define.

- London issues were probably well-organised over a long period in the 16th and 17th centuries, with other manufacturers fulfilling the type of role associated with David Ramage and the main 17th cent copper series during the 1650s.

Writers on ancient Rome have equated lead tesserae with the quadrans, and readers are invited to use the appendix on page 6 to test the hypothesis for English mediaeval. It would certainly explain why later lead tokens are large and chunky compared with their predecessors; they seek to emulate the farthings {and perhaps in some cases halfpennies} issued post-1672.

I am highly inclined to go along with Tony's theory, and look forward to exploring it further in due course.

Picture Gallery, continued from page 1



Herewith some more of John Dunford's London lead to complete the page, which I presume from their size and style to be mostly later pieces; apologies if they look massive, but I have retained the 1.5 size multiplier throughout this issue for consistency. In doing so, it helps illustrate how small those early pieces really are. Notice that they are significantly less well executed than those on page 1.

Fig.1 is fascinating; there is no person, but it looks like one standing at the wheel of a ship. A pair of well-splayed supports, leglike, transform four stars and a ring into a jaunty boatswain. Fig.2, RP flanking what may be a tree, or is it just a design? Would a London piece have depicted a tree? Fig.3 is almost certainly a tavern piece, but with utensils more upright than on many; to the knowing that might be a dating clue.

Fig.4 provides a rare example of a crude, rather than a well-formed, crown; one presumes therefore that it is more likely to derive from a pub called The Crown, rather than from any official Elizabethan authority. Fig.5 reveals, just, the canister of the tea merchant; thus the subject matter stops it being too early in the 17th cent, and the size too late.

Figs.6-8 are more or less stock types, cartwheels & crosses, although the crossed maces of Fig.6 and the objects in the angles of Fig.8, one of which looks like a pair of scissors, are an interesting departure from the standard. Finally Fig.9, an example of type 31: "Single shape, perhaps repeated": the square is not the commonest seen. The smallest & earliest of the group, it is probably an example of one of the cruder BNJ53/54 subtypes.

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Appendix A: Distribution by Diameter of Lead Tokens
{to be read in conjunction with the article on Pages 2-4}

Diam mm	C		pewt		lead		main		O/b	O/cd	Q	R	S	U	Cu	lead
	1200	D	F	F	H	L	M	17c							18c	
	1250	1307	1350	1350	1435	1490	1490	1648							1672	
	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	1672							1820	
	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du	Lo/Du
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
10.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	19	38	0	4	16	0	1	0	0	0	0
11.5	0	0	0	0	0	8	29	0	11	5	0	2	0	0	0	0
12	7	0	0	2	1	19	27	0	30	16	0	10	3	0	1	0
12.5	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	0	13	3	0	4	2	0	0	0
13	0	0	0	4	6	16	4	0	7	14	0	23	5	0	1	0
13.5	0	0	0	2	6	4	0	0	0	2	0	5	2	0	0	0
14	0	2	17	19	29	7	0	0	9	8	4	25	11	0	2	0
14.5	0	2	4	9	14	1	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
15	0	20	54	45	29	7	0	0	2	5	4	16	16	18	4	0
15.5	0	16	4	7	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	0
16	0	55	13	10	7	5	0	0	4	3	4	6	28	21	6	0
16.5	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
17	11	1	8	0	1	3	0	0	0	2	4	2	13	5	7	0
17.5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	0
18	59	0	0	0	0	4	0	3	0	3	22	1	7	9	8	0
18.5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	3	15	0	3	12	12	0
19.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	45	0	1	11	1	0	16	15	0
21	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	13	0	1	4	0	0	14	11	0
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	11	0	0	5	9	0
23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	0
24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	5	0
25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	0
26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	2	0
27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0
28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ave mm	17.7	15.7	15.1	14.7	14.6	13.0	11.5	20.1	12.1	13.1	20.0	13.9	16.2	18.1	0.0	0.0

Notes:

The shading indicates the peak for each group. The series defined by the two last columns were sampled without being measured in half-millimetres like those in BNJ, hence the intervening zeroes.

Conclusion:

With the exception of Boy Bishop and other series which attempt inscription round the rim {i.e. BNJ 53/54 types O/b, P and R}, and tend therefore to be larger, it would appear that there is a fairly definite trend for the other pieces over the centuries which can be followed, and which may be of some limited use in endeavouring to date uncertain pieces.