

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](mailto:dmpowell@waitrose.com) or [david@powell8041.freemove.co.uk](mailto:david@powell8041.freemove.co.uk). Please note that the old LTT Editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

## Picture Gallery

Figs.1-2, both uniface, are reckoned to be from the period when good 17th cent issues were starting to evolve into 18th cent grots; the first, depicting a man smoking a pipe, being dated by the mud layer to somewhere around 1680-1720. It is stylistically in keeping with such a date. The second piece, stated by the finder to be 17th cent, looks from the design as if it could well be; a diameter of 22-23mm favours later in that century rather than earlier; yet the depiction of a crossbow.... When did those go out? A little before, I would have thought.



Figs.3-6 were all found very near together in the same village somewhere between Ashford and Maidstone, with the first three clearly being standard design hop tokens by, presumably, the same issuer. If you thought having a scarce initial was a help, well, we haven't cracked it yet; anyone with any local knowledge who has come across any more OW pieces in the area, please mail in and let us know. Expected date is c.1780-1840, at a guess. Figs.4-5 look as if they might share an obverse die, and are slightly cruder than the neat Fig.3, which is possibly a subsequent issue. Rather confusing is that hop tokens series with sequential numbers {1,2,3,4,5,6} as opposed to {1,3,6,12,30,60} do not usually have values on, whereas Fig.4 has an "S", presumably for shillings, both before and after the numeral.

Fig.6 shows a common 17th cent token device, the sun in splendour; this piece is 18th cent, but it is good to see the design preserved reasonably well in an age when quality was generally deteriorating. The obverse, however, lets the side down.

## A Late Mediaeval Oddity

The piece on the right is chunky and 20mm across, very unusual piece given that it can be archaeologically dated to about 1450; its physical dimensions are those more typical of 250-300 years later, yet the Lombardic lettering, some of it retrograde, confirms an early date. Not that one usually gets much in the way of inscriptions in 1450. One side depicts what might be a malt shovel or baker's peel, such as occur when the commercial series gets into full swing in the 17th cent; yet the crescent moon and star would seem more at home on a Roman piece, on which they are not uncommon, particularly in the provincial series. If anyone can make out sense out of the lettering, please write in and let us know.



## Larger Pieces of the Early 16th Century

### London:

In our June and July issues, and subsequently in the Picture Gallery, we discussed London's 15th cent issues, typified by BNJ54 series M. It is clear that these are both numerous and very small; that they degenerate from fine to very poor artwork; and that they are replaced by a new generation of token, again very numerous, but without grenetis, sometime in the 16th cent. It is reasonable to think that there is a natural evolution from one to the other, which we shall examine; but first of all, to get them out of the main discussion, let us look briefly, this month and next, at some of the larger pieces which don't fit.

The early 16th cent is one of the more difficult periods to understand; with plentiful series before and after {BNJ54 series M and Q, respectively}, one would expect there to be a lot which one could definitely assign to it. The suggestion in BNJ54 is that there are a number of larger types, around the 19-21mm and occasionally even larger, contemporary with those post-grenetis pieces of 11-12½mm size which depict either Lombardic lettering or merchant marks. It labels these, collectively, series O.

I am not sure how much I like this allocation of the merchant mark pieces exclusively to the early 16th cent. Such marks were in vogue throughout the 16th cent and, although in decline, for a good way into the 17th cent. Williamson lists several dozen on the main series tokens of 1648-72, and I would expect the lead ones to be distributed across the 16th cent with some lingering into the 17th. As to the Lombardic lettering, that is fairly reasonable; it disappeared during the middle decades of the 16th cent and was largely gone by the 1550s. The obvious date to divide between early and late 16th cent is, however, 1539; the year of completion of the dissolution of the monasteries, after which there are few ecclesiastical tokens to mingle with the commercial.

Perhaps, if one joins the last of the degenerate series Ms with the earliest small non-grenetis types, one has a contiguous run; I propose to start looking at the latter in January. There remain the large pieces, approximately groat-sized, which BNJ54 attempts to divide as follows:

- {Subseries Oa} Tokens with reverse design based on the cross & pellets of the groat, but with a grenetis instead of an inscription, either in the form of shading or pellets; matching penny size pieces exist in some cases.
- {Subseries Ob} Tokens with inscriptions instead of grenetis, consistently around 19-21mm, and with their two sides depicting some combination of: subject matter such as:

{most commonly}	{occasionally}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crown</li> <li>• Tudor double-rose</li> <li>• Shield {various}</li> <li>• Ship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 or 6 petalled flower</li> <li>• Floral cross</li> <li>• Dolphin</li> <li>• Lis</li> </ul>

The latter, like series M before them, degenerate somewhat as time goes by.

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Fig.1 is a typical piece from series Ob, with a description which despite the good condition of the piece continues to defy me. Regretably I have no series Oa to hand, but I will show some of the provincial equivalents, which are very much in the same spirit, overleaf. Thin and pewtery, it weighs 2.07gm.



Fig.2 is a common piece which I cannot place with certainty, but which is probably of this period; the well known "4" symbol proclaims a merchant mark, indicating commercial rather than ecclesiastical origin. It has a radial rather than sloping grenetis, and a floral cross which feels contemporary with series Ob. At 3.38gm despite its lesser diameter, the piece feels chunky by the standards of the day.



Figs.3-4 are very similar in design but from their patinas very different in either their metallic construction or subsequent history. Common features include a dagger within an unusual thin radial grenetis on one side, and a cross and pellets within a very different type of grenetis on the other: wide, of a size which might have otherwise accommodated an inscription, with well-spaced pairs of radial lines in lieu.

There are different numbers of pellets, one in one case and three in the other, which no doubt holds a well-kept secret as to which piece is later than the other; but the most interesting feature is the pair of flanking symbols which flank the dagger on Fig.4. They look like the sort of scales which appear on the tokens of mid-17th cent grocers; or have I misconstrued? Opinions welcome. I would guess the “scales” are later.

Another piece of uncertain date, but not uncommon, is that illustrated by Figs.5-6. They are lead rather than pewter, and at 4.50 and 4.26gm respectively rather heavier than usual for their conjectured date. Also arguing against a 1500-ish date are the lack of a grenetis, the semblance on one piece of a beading which does not normally come in much before the 17th cent, and the fact that both are uniface. On the other hand they were found by a date-layer-conscious Thames mudlark, and depict the type of expanded cross which distinguishes one of the late developments of BNJ54 series M {see LTT\_51, June 2009, page 3, Fig.16}.



The birth of the inscription in subseries Ob, in what is known as “Black letter” Lombardic script, is an exciting new development. Granted, the inscriptions are not very readable and sometimes misspelt or abbreviated as well, and some of them are only mottos; yet here and there we have the first few examples of a British token which names a shop/pub or the guy who runs it.

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**Provinces:**

BNJ54 almost equates the provincial pieces of this period with the main body of Boy Bishops, i.e. all except late derivatives, and labels them series P; however, there are a number of smaller light-coloured pieces, some uniface, which fit well with the smaller London pieces of the period but may well be provincial. We will cover the latter in January.

Boy Bishops relate to BNJ54 London subseries Oa in that they are invariably based on the mediaeval groat or penny, although they may have an inscription {Fig.7} or grenetis; the inscription, where present, may be in either Gothic, i.e. Lombardic, or modern script. The inscription pieces tend to be early 16th cent and the grenetis ones, which also show a gradual stylistic decline, slightly later. Two examples of latter will be shown in a month or two when we deal with the larger pieces of the middle and later 16th cent.



The obverse of Boy Bishop pieces in almost all cases shows a mitre, with or without the facial features of a bishop underneath it. As Fig.7 is a penny rather than a groat I have magnified it, for easy reading; readers may be able to make out SANCTUS NICHOLAUS on one side and AVE REX GENTIS on the other.



As the series deteriorates the inscription gives way to the grenetis, but to a rather random one rather than the regular fine diagonals of BNJ54 series M. We start to see here the beginning of the long degeneration into the random rims and rim fillers which occur so frequently in the 18th cent.

Boy Bishops are a long and interesting series and I hope that one certain student of them who is far more knowledgeable on them than me will one day write a detailed history for us all to read!



## *A Thames-side Selection*

I hope that 18th cent enthusiasts will forgive me for what may seem a current obsession with BNJ54 type M, but having just written about that series in June/July as part of a chronological history it seems good to reinforce it with any more pieces which I can come across. Magnification factor 1.5 used on this page, as per most of our recent pictures of these early pieces; all are Thames finds.

Figs.1-2 show two standard type M pieces depicting the crossed double flails; the British Museum {BM} has three more, although only the single flail variety is known to BNJ54. Note that the obverse dies are not identical; there are varieties out there, suggesting a greater duration of issue than a mere one-off. The reverse is of the commonest type, i.e. ringed pellet, clockwise grenetis and expanded {seriffed} cross, and the weights of 0.53gm and 0.55gm are near the low end of the 0.50-0.75gm range for genuine, first-generation, pewtery type Ms of the 15th cent.



Fig.3 shows a rather more degenerate form of what at first glance might be another double flail, a pair of scissors or crossed keys; on closer examination I favour the latter. It has the single pellet and the plain cross, less common on the finer early type Ms, and loses the sloping grenetis in favour of a radial one. Moreover, it has a markedly higher lead content, a notable feature of the later and cruder look-alikes; the diameter has only gone up from 12mm to 13mm, but at 0.96gm it is significantly heavier. If a piece in the type M family weighs over much over 0.75gm it is likely to be later, cruder and more leaden.

Fig.4 shows a tiny piece, barely 11mm, which looks stylistically as if it may come from the same stable as Fig.3. Its most interesting feature is a letter B, of such a form that if rotated 90 degrees might look like a crown. I favour the B as being the original intention; probably for Beatae Mariae, one of several initials or sets of initials found on pre-Reformation ecclesiastical tokens by virtue of representing a particular service or religious office.

On a century or so now. Fig.5 is enigmatic; the obverse initials look modern even for the late 16th cent, possibly even for the early 17th, yet the reverse looks for all the world like a standing figure, sacrificing to his deity, on a Roman tessera. The manner of striking, with the metal flowing up evenly round the edges, even feels Roman; and yet, if one looks closely, do I see a jester's hat? Yet even so, surely this is the work of a designer who has seen Roman coins. This is not the first such piece we have come across; there is another in LTT\_24 {Mar 2007}, on page 1 at Fig.8. Has anyone else come across them? please write in. Figs.6-7 are a pair, possibly from the same die; depicting a merchant mark on one side and a crown on the other, they are tiny, 11-12mm, and probably mid 16th cent.



A very pleasant dated piece {Fig.8}, 1671 or 1672 depending on how you interpret the serifs on the last numeral, appears to depict a milkmaid churning; at 17mm and with a fine beaded edge, this feels not too far removed from the main 17th cent series. Fig.9, with the TF monogram on one side and date 1644 flanking what is probably an anchor, is more typical of its London predecessors; 14mm across and of very silvery-coloured pewter, there is another specimen in the BM.

