

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.freemove.co.uk. Please note that the old LTFeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTF is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



Some very pleasant and rather unusual pieces this month, beginning with the large rectangular piece top left {Fig.1}; 31x24mm, and weighing just under 15gm. It certainly doesn't look like a commercial token, and 19 is not exactly the sort of value you would expect to encounter. I fancy it being a beggar's badge, or rather, perhaps we should say beggar's pass, as it doesn't have any fastening or protrusions. Nothing on the back whatsoever, although what does not show in the photograph particularly is that the piece is noticeably concave. HF is probably a parish name; the provenance is East Anglia, so it is just a question of looking around for a double-barrelled one in that area which begins with HF. Higham Ferrers, possibly? Date probably 18th cent, possibly early 19th; those familiar with lettering styles will be able to guess more accurately, and are invited to comment.

Fig.2 is also 18th cent, but delightfully well made and preserved; a simple star design, with each quarter veined, like leaves. Again uniface, and 24½mm in diameter it weighs in at a reasonably heavy 10.74gm and comes from neat Wootton Bassett, Oxon. Continuing the theme that not all 18th cent leads are rubbish, Fig.3 depicts what appears to be a plumed bird on one side and a tree on the other. Both designs are more elaborate than the average rendering and, piece in this condition, the effect is very pleasing.

The previous owner of Fig.4 was fairly confident that it depicted the badge of the Boys' Brigade; however, the latter was not formed until 1883, which seems rather later in the 19th cent than I would have otherwise thought this token to be. It is 28mm in diameter and heavy, nearly 31gm in weight; as to its purpose, I have no idea. If anybody used to be in the Boys' Brigade and can throw light on it, please do. The reverse is uniface, apart from a faint oval.



Figs.5-6, both uniface and obtained from different sources several years apart, are clearly part of the same series; notwithstanding the difference in the numbers, they are of almost identical size. Perhaps they are seals, and 12 and 18 the lengths of the cloth? Fig.7 is one of these degenerate pieces whose seemingly meaningless lines seem to defy interpretation; but flick it round 90 degrees, and do we not have a shield? Finally Fig.8, like Fig.7 exhibiting significant sprue from the moulding duct; nothing much to be said here, except that some D-I-Y-ers could never get things straight!

Readers' Correspondence

Fig.1, contributed by Tom Redmayne, was found near to the village of Saltfleet in Lincolnshire, is about 13½mm across. It is an attractive piece; with the two shields as per the coinage of the Cromwellian period, plus several letters of the word COMMONWEALTH clearly visible around them to boot, neatly dated to the 1650s. It is not wholly possible to eliminate it being a seal; but the edge is tolerably even, and I am inclined to favour it being a token. Tom helpfully describes the findspot as follows: "The site is about a mile from the coast and close to what was an important trading port and a navigable river. No other commonwealth objects have surfaced so far, but several Charles I coins have been found in the area, including some minted at the Tower under Parliament rather than under the King."



Fig.2, from Jon Bennett, makes up abundantly in interest what it lacks in quality. It is 28-30mm across and 1mm thick; I suppose after the previous Commonwealth piece I should have magnified it to preserve scale, but I thought it would dominate the page too much if I did. Jon comes from Southend, but has had the piece since childhood and cannot remember where he acquired it.

The key is in those two shields which, together with the outside rim, seem to be mimicking the Commonwealth high silver {sixpence, shilling etc} of the 1650s. The heraldry is not right, however, as the right-hand piece should depict a harp; so, either the maker did not care about the fine detail, or, possibly, it is simulating some continental coin which has heraldry closer to what is shown. The small square between the lower parts of the shield also inclines me along similar lines; it reminds me of something, but I can't quite recall what.

In a genuine Commonwealth piece there would be some attempt at wording, in English rather than Latin, round the edge; however, this shows none, apart from the four would-be numerals at the base which may be spurious. The third one, which looks like a camping seat, or 4 tilted at 45 degrees, is in fact the old form of the Western figure 4 in use until the late 15th cent; however, that is probably a red herring, as the piece does not feel anywhere near that age, and in any case Roman numerals would usually be preferred in the 15th cent anyway. Quite commonly crude lead manufacturers imitated things without having much idea what they were copying, other than that designs of certain types were vaguely associated with money.

The second side shows a slightly elaborate version of the mediaeval cross & pellets design originally borrowed from the Edward I penny; however, there are multiple pellets and some ornamentation, with could be confused with pseudo-inscription, round the outside. The usual partner for a Commonwealth two shields type is a wreath, and, as our continental neighbours sometimes use more flowery reverses on their crude lead than we do, I am wondering again whether it could be foreign.

It could be an attempt at forgery, although I do not feel it is good enough for that; and in any case the reverse is clearly token design rather than coin. I will guess that its usage was probably as substitute money, without being certain, and estimate the date at late-17th cent; having said which, designs lingered on in the folk memory for years and sometimes redeployed for local use many years after the date of the original. It certainly doesn't feel like a pass, and whilst the design is rather nearer a jeton, they tended to be struck in something rather more tinny, not lead.

The beauty of the piece to me lies in the attempt of someone, probably with little skill and/or few tools at his disposal, to design something based his own visual knowledge and experience of other pieces. The fact that the design is very good on one half of the flan and totally illegible on the other almost certainly means that the casting, i.e. the alignment of the two moulds, was uneven; another problem which, I would imagine, an amateur would often struggle to get right.

Leads of the Late 17th Century {continued from last month}

Last month we looked at a selection of the various initialled obverses which occurred in the decades immediately following the main 17th century series {example, see Fig.1}, and tried to approximately place and date them according to the evidence available. This month it is the turns of the reverses. None of the pieces shown is larger than 20-21mm in diameter, so on size alone they could be anywhere from the Williamson period onward.



Fig.2 is quite finely cast, despite its simple subject matter; I'll guess therefore that it is probably late 17th cent rather than 18th. Pellets don't occur on main series 17th cent tokens, but grapes do; also, exceptionally, counters used by the financial folk in the reckonings. I'll stick my neck out and suggest that these are probably meant to be grapes, even if they do just look like pellets. The issuer will probably owned some pub or other business premises of that name.

No shortage, either of business names amongst the other pieces either; even today you could happily drink in The Globe, The Bell, The Gate, The Crown, The Feathers, or The Prince of Wales, whose feathers they are {Figs.12,15-18}; using such utensils, when you got there, such utensils, flagons, glasses and the like, as are depicted in Figs.21-23. All of these could quite happily appear in the main 17th cent series, and I suspect that most of them date from not that long after. One or two of them, e.g. perhaps the finely drawn gate, could perhaps even be contemporary. Whilst on the subject of Fig.16, that looks like one of those nice neat wedge-shaped clippings which you get on mediaeval silver, when certain naughty people helped themselves to a bit of bullion off each piece handled. Surely no-one would ever bother to do that to lead? Invalidation mark, perhaps, if not just a metal flaw.



The bell of Fig.20, with its surrounding pellets, beaded irregularly-shaped edge and slightly larger diameter, feels a little later; not much, just a little, and I could be wrong. Early 18th cent, perhaps. Likewise Figs.4-6, two of which have radial-dash edges. Their subject matter, two plants and a sun/whorl, is mid-17th cent enough, but the rendering feels as if it has moved away from that period.

Fig.9 is a face, which we do not normally see on the main series 17th cent tokens other than as part of a rendering of the sun; which could be the meaning here, if the inner band of dots were interpreted as rays, were it not for the fact that Fig.20 is the other side of the same piece. "The Sun and Bell", sounds rather unlikely, so perhaps it is just meant to be a face. Profile heads, also, do not normally appear on earlier tokens; at least only those of kings and bishops, not those of rustic Mr.A.N.Other with a pipe in his mouth, like Fig.8. Could this be the brainchild of some local who, noticing such a design on the obverse of his loose change, thought that he could copy the theme?

The tools and products of trade were a common theme of the main 17th cent series, and none more common than the chandler's row of candles {Fig.3}, which continue on to the smaller crude lead of the post-1672 period. Surely candles were still made the same way a hundred yrs later? yet the de-

sign is not so much met on the larger pieces of the late 18th cent. Perhaps we should look out for the theme in these latter years, disguised like others behind poor execution.

There are still some well-drawn pieces around c.1700, several of the above testify. Figs.7,19 both express a desire for artistic elaboration, but nevertheless they feel a little post-Williamson. Noticeably they are amongst the least perfectly round of the group, and the only two which show evidence of sprue. Fig.10, meanwhile, is precisely the type of sailing vessel which adorns many a 17th cent main-series token, and in outline at least can compete with any of them. Sensibly, the engraver knows the limitations of his medium and does not try to get too ambitious with the fine detail.



Moving on, Figs.24-27 look just slightly cruder than the average mid-17th cent piece; the exception being possibly Fig.24 which, if it was not uniface, one might think was of that period. Fig.27 looks like a rather spirited reindeer, of the type which one is more accustomed to meeting on Christmas cards than tokens; on the reverse is a radial-dash rim surrounding a triad, in fairly neat style but with larger than the usual mid-cent latters, which suggests that some date c.1680 might not be too far out. Fig.26 hints at the beginning of the trend for tokens to keep one guessing, which they do even more as the 18th cent progresses; is it a set of Prince of Wales feathers, or a candlestick?

Figs.28 and 29 are shown with their obverses; the first with fairly neat lettering but a spaced pellet rim, which is clearly not too much after the Williamson main series period. Hearts have been discussed before; they appear in the main series, although the presence of the optional arrow, or even occasionally two, becomes more frequent in later years. Here there is not only an arrow, but a slightly shaky one. Fig.29 is slightly unusual, depicting as it does an initial in a frame; not a theme common on either main series or earlier lead. The reverse is very neatly drawn, but what it illustrates is uncertain. Maybe a late attempt at a merchant mark, which with one or two celebrated exceptions {e.g. certain copper coins of the Far East c.1800}, scarcely survived beyond the 17th cent. A few pellets are creeping in, so let us guess c.1680-1700.

Finally, what of the myriad of small pieces depicting stock designs? some of which certainly have the diameters typical of this period {Figs.30-33}. Petals, cartwheels, lis, anchors, crosses & pellets; they come in many sizes and varieties, and some of them clearly are of this mid-late 17th cent date which we are interested in here. Ebayers not uncommonly describe them as mediaeval, and certainly the cross & pellets is borrowed from that period, with Short Cross, Long Cross and Edwardian pennies being known to all and sundry; however, I would suggest that many are not quite as mediaeval as they seem. Mitchiner & Skinner, in BNJ54, imply that there are relatively few before the Elizabethan period. As usual, no set rules with lead, but I suggest as a guide:

- Date most likely to be determined by the size compared with that of the smallest small change in regular use.
- Stock types probably preferred in areas where there was no geographic proximity to established manufacturers, or where cost minimisation was seen to be a major factor.

WANT BACK ISSUES ?

Back issues, and an index to them,
are available at
www.leadtokens.org.uk

WANT TO READ MORE ABOUT LEAD TOKENS AND TALLIES?

Buy Treasure Hunting Magazine
where you'll find articles on LT&T topics occasionally published.