

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 Please note that the old LTT editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



A mixed bag this month, starting with a very unusual halfpenny-sized piece. The occasional lead renderings of regal halfpennies usually depict one of the Georges, typically George II, but here the lettering, probably too faint for you to read on this indifferent specimen, says that the portrait is of one John Wall; St. John Wall, no less. I'd never heard of the gent, but my good friend Google informs me that he was a Roman Catholic priest, born in 1620, who was hung, drawn and quartered in 1679 for promoting his faith in those troubled times. The reverse is a crown, and quite a well drawn one at that; as also is the head, for all its wear. So, what was this token's purpose? Commemorative? lead was not normally used for such things. Or a token issued by some community in which Mr. Wall was held in reverence? The date, too, is a mystery; the size and style trends of the time say mid-18th cent, but halfpennies had been out a few years by 1679, indicating that an immediate commemorative in that vein is not to be ruled out. Perhaps those familiar with portrait styles of the time may care to venture an opinion?

Fig.2 is a nice crisp mid-late 18th cent piece, although what exactly its obverse depicts. It is not badly executed in terms of engraving; the guy just couldn't draw in the first place. Maybe he should stick to things like trees which, as the reverse shows, are easier to draw. My guess for the obverse is an agricultural implement, but I'm open to your opinions.

Seals creep into these pages occasionally, although some might argue that they shouldn't; so, let's get a batch of them



out of the way. A big, late 18th cent example at Fig.3, with a fine curly monogram; you could imagine this on one of those king-size Kentish hop tokens. A Russian example in Fig.4, from the Cyrillic script; we've had these in LTT before, but this one has a rather thinner, finer script than most. I can't read the date, or even see one, but I'm guessing early 19th cent rather than 18th. Fig.5 is one of those pewtery seals out of Jeff Egan's book, in this case one which has escaped the river mud. This one is no.39; dated 1618, you will find most of the letters of "Colchester" inscribed on the rear.

Finally, an 18th cent bird piece, of type 18 {Fig.6}. There is rather a flurry of would-be legs and feathers, too many for liking; perhaps some of them are letters, in an attempt at inscription? Note the central boss to, to make the piece easier to pick up; or, if one is so inclined, to spin it.

Usage: Some Clues from across the Channel, part 1

One of the most frequently asked questions about crude lead is, “What are they used for?” In reply to which we have a few ideas and opinions {low-value coinage, passes etc}, but there is precious little to be gleaned from the pieces themselves nor, in Britain, has there been much written about the subject. We have therefore to look further afield; to the tokens of other metals issued in the 19th century, at one end of the timescale, or to the tesserae of the ancients a couple of millennia ago {as we did in LTT_20, Nov 2006}. These earlier and later views are useful...up to a point. We can get nearer the correct timescale by looking at the 17th cent main series, at the inscriptions they used and the subjects they chose to depict; and we can also do something which we have not done much before in these pages, apart from Forgeais {whose pieces are often as devoid of wording as our own}, and look at the issues of some of our nearer European neighbours. Which brings us, this month, to Belgium and adjacent countries.

Belgian méreaux, as the tokens over there are called, have a wide range of style and use, not all of which coincides with our own; however, some of it, mainly the simpler material, definitely does. It is not all in



lead, nor is much of it seen over here. Its big advantage over its English and French equivalents, however, is that has many more inscriptions; in short, it is much more likely to say what it is. In particular, a fair proportion of it was struck or cast to address particular social and administrative issues, mainly connected with poverty. We know that these same issues were relevant to this country but, apart from perhaps a few 17th cent town tokens which depict paupers, and a small number of 19th cent bread tokens from a few towns in the Home Counties. we do not know many pieces which were specifically poverty related. Yet is likely they existed; if Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges and Mechelen thought that tokens were the best way to address the logistics of charitable distribution, then it is likely that English towns did as well. With which tokens? our crude leads, I'll take a guess.

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References to Belgian méreaux are well scattered throughout various literature, some examples of which will be seen in the LTT bibliography. De Mey's Numismatic Pocketbooks 29 and 33, particularly, contain a large number, alongside a number of other specifically continental items such as obits, or memorial medals, which do not concern us; total, 1426. Not all of these tokens are in lead, but some are; and of those which are not, e.g. brass or copper, there are enough amongst them in lead style to interest us. De Mey is not very exciting to read, and there are few pictures; however, and here is a real plus..... he knows in most cases (i) where his pieces come from, and quite often (ii) what they were used for.



Looking after the poor, a task which from an early date fell to parish councils and other civil bodies over here, was, on the continent, much more visibly the province of the church; in consequence of which, their names are often to be found on pieces; either verbally, with or without abbreviation {Fig.1}, or pictorially, using a depiction of the saint {Fig.2}. Such things would have been as familiar to the locals as gods and goddesses to the Romans, or guild arms to our own 17th cent merchants. Figs.3-4 show an example of a church issuing named/initialled and pictorial pieces simultaneously. This isn't all very British, of course, but let us move on....

Figs.5-6 are part of a series of a number different values, yet with all the pieces the same physical size; the lowest is 1 and the highest 72, so one can imagine a range of common multiples rather along the line of Kentish hop tokens. De Mey states confidently that they are bread tokens, but 72 loaves represents one mighty hungry pauper. Hope he enjoyed the last one, and that it hadn't got too stale. More likely the numbers represent different weights; perhaps 1 is a bread roll. Even so, a loaf the size of 72 bread rolls sounds rather sizeable, although maybe not beyond credence, having seen the 18" discus which one of my friends purchased at his favourite French baker in London for £8-odd a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps only the large families got a 72.



Numbers can, of course, be enigmatic. Figs.7-8, both in white metal or pewter, with their low numbers and counterstamps, look, despite their exotic design, more reminiscent of communion tokens or passes; and indeed, who is to say that some such pieces do not have some exclusively ecclesiastical use. De Mey quotes a variety of numbers as occurring on the various pieces he lists, and some of the time, but not always, he claims to know the units that they represent. Most of the latter are monetary {e.g. stuivers, penning, deniers or sous} but some are physical commodities, such as loaves.

The presence of units of currency is probably related to the paying of monks, priests and the like, such as we previously discussed when talking about Forgeais' French pieces in LTT_34/35 {Jan/Feb 2008}; he makes frequent reference to the denier, in particular. The word comes from "denarius". We will come back to them later; let us stick with charity tokens for the moment.



Next, we have those pieces which have a letter on them, B being the commonest; it being assumed that it often stands for "Brood", "Brot" or the like; i.e. bread; however, there are no shortage of towns beginning with the same letter, Bruges in particular enjoying a period of mercantile prominence at the time that many of these tokens were issued. The copper Fig.9 is a fairly definite bread piece, whereas I suspect that the brass Fig.10, dated 94 {almost certainly 1694} is a Bruges town piece. B = Bruges or bread?



Some pieces do of course go the whole way, and have the name of the commodity on them; as witness Fig.11 in copper, dated 1816, and Fig.12 in white metal. Also associated with bread is the shell-like symbol illustrated in Fig.13, a 1759 piece from Caudenberg, a parish which is now a suburb of Brussels. Shells are not very commonly seen on British lead, but they are not totally unknown, and it would be worth remembering this connection when they are encountered.



The Disch S.Donas token of Fig.12 is one of a group of tokens which also includes “Vleesch” {meat} and “Hout” {wood} as well as “Brood”. The list of uses given by De Mey is impressive, and we will discuss them next time; meanwhile, I leave with these thoughts on the subject of usage from Dutch reader Alex Kussendrager, who has appeared in these pages before, has speculatively suggested the following interpretations of single-letter initials occurring on tokens from Leyden:

B = Brood = bread	M = Mededogen = compassion
D = Deken = blanket	T = Turf = peat
A = Aalmoes = alms	G = Gerst = barley
R = Rogge = rye {bread}	S = Smout = grease {oil/fat, used for lamps}

I would expect also one or two other commodities, such as wood; not sure about drink. What is “compassion”? A night’s lodging in a refuge, or a charitable token for more general use than most?

Alex has also mentioned the publication of a new book at the end of 2010, in Dutch, on “medals, poor man's-money and communion tokens used by the Lutheran Community in the Netherlands”. The title is “GESLAGEN VERBEEELDING: Lutherse penningen in Nederland”, by Harry Donga & Carel van den Berg {ISBN 9 789087 041755}. For those wanting a flavour of the sort of material covered, Alex has loaded a few pictures on his website at <http://www.loodjes.nl> ; these Lutheran pieces being just one of the options available under “**Loden penningen**”, which means, guess what:.... Lead tokens!.

P.S: To get an English version of Alex’s website put “Avondmaalsloodjes” and “www.loodjes.nl” into Google, then take the translate option.

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Introducing Miss Charity Coals/Coles....

Fittingly, alongside these discussions on charity pieces, one of the relatively few examples of an English piece in similar vein which declares its purpose. Charity Coals is not a female trader with her surname mis-spelt, nor is this a personal piece to be ranked along with the engravings commonly to be found on worn copper pennies. No, the piece is in good strong metal; I know not what exactly, but it is significantly stronger than your typical white metal or pewter. It is also finely etched, to the extent that, rubbing your finger over it, there is virtually nothing to be felt; and, moreover, on the back, are the arms of the Norfolk town of Kings Lynn. Above the shield is a serial number, 6, which will be the



number of the pauper selected as recipient of the indicated charitable gift.

How many such metal tickets there were, issued by the town for this purpose, one will never know; but an official token it clearly is. One town at least used high quality metal for its Poor Law administration; did others, or did most choose lead? Keep a look out for the lead equivalents!

