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 Please note that the old LTJEditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of *LTJ* is no longer active.

The Passing of the Years

As last year we are seeing in Christmas and the New Year with a display of communion tokens from Rev. Thomas Burns' "Old Scottish Communion Plate" {Edinburgh, 1892}; this month's selection shows some of the more ornate early pieces. Some articles on the manufacture and usage of CTs, based in part on Burns' book, will appear later in the year; including some clues regarding the size and cost of issues, which may apply to crude lead more generally.

A
Happy
New
Year
to
all our
Read-
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Black Letter Inscription Pieces

I've already mentioned these early 16th cent pieces briefly in LTT_56 {pages 2,3}, where I referred to them under BNJ54's typology as subseries O(b); however I did little more than mention the "Black letter" Lombardic script in which these earliest of British lead token inscriptions were issued. It is generally recognised as being extremely difficult to interpret, even by experienced amateurs, but from what some of those inscriptions say it is obviously an extremely worthwhile task to attempt. Not all the wording is standard official and ecclesiastical formulae {although most of it is}; we are talking here about some of the first tokens in Britain to quote the names and business addresses of ordinary traders. What is more is that, although scarce, they often seem to be in extremely good condition.



Herewith three pieces to practice on; I've been kind, and magnified them to a factor of about 1.9, to make it easier. The originals are little more than half the size shown, and almost always very dark. Meanwhile, when you want a break from this month's quiz, here are a few examples from BNJ54 to whet your appetite as to the sort of personal inscription you can find on some of these pieces:

- O(b).20 "Asiden Pier at the Borsers H" = Beside the pier at the Boar's Head.
 O(b).26 "Monker Cantesbouri" = The Canterbury Monk {tavern}
 O(b).34 "Athe Prewns on the Sautre" = At the Prince on the Jumping Horse
 O(b).41 "William Hedlem fit in Chepe{side}"

Not much, but it is a start; from these, the ideas behind the very personal 17th cent tokens were born. I've never heard of a pub called "The Prince on the Jumping Horse"; it's a bit of a mouthful, but it sounds better than going to have a drink, or even worse, a meal, at "The Prunes"....

For those of you still trying to solve Figs.1-3, the favourite phrases were

- "In Domino Confido" = In God I trust
 "Ave Maria Gracia Plena" = Hail Mary, full of Grace

Both appear on one of our three examples; I will leave you to work out which; answer at bottom of page. And no, I haven't a clue what the other two say, because I'm not very good at reading these things either; please email in and tell me. Finally, does anyone care to wonder how Fig.2 acquired the shape it has? It is in good nick, so it is not wear. It has to be a casting flaw; it was accidentally made that way when one of the vents in the mould became blocked with solidifying metal. Ted Fletcher reckons that a mischievous maker might have slipped this one between two perfect castings, allowing only the good side to show when he traded them on as three valid tokens. Like people hand you dud quids nowadays. The miracle is that Fig.2 ever survived for us to discuss; normally a piece like that would finish up on the spoil heap.... but then some folks dig up spoil heaps!



Answer to quiz: Piece 3 is the one with the two quoted ecclesiastical inscriptions.

Usage: Some Clues from across the Channel, part 2

My apologies for the delayed appearance of this article, which was originally intended for November to follow part 1 in October. We look now at the range of uses mentioned by Jean de Mey for some of the 1426 pieces mentioned in his book on Belgian méreaux; they seem rather miscellaneous, and occasionally amusing, but some of them are quite interesting.

Municipal authorities:

Some of these issues were for paupers, beggars and other more indeterminate charity, but pieces for the following specific commodities are mentioned:

- Bread, burning {wood?}, coal, fat/grease, grain, peat.

Similarly, there are pieces for, or issued by, the mayor, which may be for similar use. There are also for the use of the following rather strange cross-section of professions:

- Advocates {i.e. lawyers}, firemen, merchants, surgeons, garbage collectors {!!}.

There were also pieces issued in connection with a communal town mill.

Ecclesiastical Authorities:

Again, pieces for charity and aid of various descriptions, including tending the sick; however, rather fewer basic commodities:

- Bread, meat, wood and, rather amusingly.... peas or beans!

Contrastingly, though, a wide range of use in connection with internal activities:

- Professions: Porters, clothiers and dressmakers.
- Specific duties: Baptisms, funerals and communion services



Above: A group of French méreaux, used by monasteries and other ecclesiastical organisations either for the administration of charitable distribution or for their own internal transactions, like paying priests and monks to carry out certain services. Although these examples are brass and copper, they are very much of the same family as many of the lead pieces discussed in De Mey and in Forgeais Vol.3; concerning which see LTT_34,35 {Jan, Feb 2008}, where we have talked about them before. Note that all five bear a value, in deniers, so they were definitely used as money. They are all dated: respectively, 1526, 1595, 1634, 1665 and 1710.

It may seem odd to see trade-related pieces in an ecclesiastical setting, but monastic communities required feeding and clothing like anyone else, and I presume that it was in connection with this that they were intended.

There were also pieces issued as beggars' and pilgrims' badges, plus a significant number of others which I do not quite understand, but I presume to be either passes, status symbols or in connection with more general duties and roles.

Guilds:

There are an extensive number of guild pieces struck, and many of the professions are the same as in the English 17th cent main series, but these do not seem to be monetary. I am guessing that they may be membership passes.

Other secular organisations:

Ferry tokens; tax tokens; hospital tokens.
Admission tokens and passes of various descriptions.



Individual:

Memorial obits; i.e. death memorials. These have no English equivalents, so I do not propose to dwell on them.

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Where does this leave us? Some of these uses are obviously very strange to our British eyes and hence difficult for us to relate to; however, it would seem that, wherever normal everyday activities are referred to, such as trade and poor law administration, we have potentially common ground. We can be particularly grateful to de Mey and for the range of commodities which he mentions as relating to charity, which is wider than we might have anticipated; so, that crude lead you dug up the other day may yet prove to be an English pea or bean token!

A Communion Token, or a Charity Piece?

My thanks to Dutch reader Tonnie Wolf for sending in this picture of a piece which he found whilst metal detecting in Holland. I was wondering whether it was a communion token; "ihs" commonly appears on them, although the crucifixion, pictured on the other side, does not. Logical enough that it should, however, or so I thought; although Andrew Macmillan, who wrote the foreword to Burzinski, the current standard reference work on CTs, disagreed with me:



"I see a sun and a moon on either side of Christ. I do not think this is a communion token. Communion is to do with the Last Supper rather than the Crucifixion. It is some sort of religious medal obviously, and maybe supposed to be a reminder, but I cannot really help you with a positive identification. Is it Protestant or Roman Catholic? Could it be a charitable piece, like a bread penny?"

There is a strong argument for some British and other lead tokens being pieces of this sort; for, as we have seen elsewhere in last month's issue and this, their Belgian equivalents are better understood and provenanced, often containing initials of commodities or even, indeed, the name of the commodity itself. Brood/Brot is the commonest word encountered on European charity pieces, but there are other examples.