Issue Eighty-Five

Leaden Tokens Telegraph

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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.freeserve.co.uk. Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

Picture Gallery

Fig.1, for which thanks to Alun Crighton, comes from Lyonshall, in Herefordshire, only a few miles from the Welsh border; quite far west, in lead token terms. A 40mm monster, it has to be approximately contemporary with the cartwheel pennies, or at least with the chunkier of the cooper tokens in circulation between 1787 and 1820; so, 1800, plus or minus a bit. However, the artwork is again good for the period, and shows the evolution of type 1 petal design into something more interesting and artistic. These compound petal designs are not uncommon, although more frequently they are of halfpenny rather than penny size; there will be a display on view shortly, when I resume my series on 18th cent development.

Fig.2, courtesy of Ricardo Muzzi, is reputed to be of 12th cent Crusader origin and to have come from a Syrian mint. It was found in a London market amidst a group of Islamic coins, but like many Crusader coins it is of a design which one could very well imagine over here. It is 22mm and weighs 3.4gm, which is significantly larger than our early British pewter tokens of the two centuries following. The obverse is cross and crosslets within grenetis; think of Henry II's Tealby pennies of 1158-1180, which employ a similar device {albeit with a slightly different crosslet}, and ask whether their design could be the origin. As to the reverse, well, that is a fine piece of type 16 heraldry in crude lead terms, and one to which English enthusiasts could readily warm.

Whilst on the subject of the Middle East and lead token look-alikes, may I draw your attention to Figs. 3-4; examples of one of the types of piece most frequently described on Ebay as "unknown token". They have dates in Western numerals, usually beginning with "12", but they do not look convincingly 13th cent, and indeed modern numerals would not be found at that date. They are bronze, which normally hints at modernity, but their reverse of shape, pellet and grenetis is fully in keeping with British lead; as also the centre line on the obverse, which is a feature of many Kentish hop tokens. The Arabic inscription, of course, gives it away; although to Western eyes the difference between that and the nonsensical characters which sometimes appear on crude lead may not be all that noticeable. So, to end the mystery, they are Moroccan copper coins, not tokens, typically of the mid-late 19th cent. The values are one, two or three falus, depending on size. Morocco at the time used the Muslim AH dating system on its coins, the conversion rules for which are roughly AD = 622 + 1.03AH, or AH = (AD-622) * 0.97 Dates 1287 and 1288 above convert to about 1870 and 1871.

For those of you wondering about the 1.03 and 0.97, they have shorter years than we do because their months are strictly lunar, i.e. from one new moon to the next, whereas ours are one twelfth of a year. An AH year is twelve AH months, which works out at only a little over 354 days; hence, they get through years a little faster than we do!

Note: New version of the LTT index now available on the website homepage.

Communion Token Manufacture and Usage, Part 3

Whilst the majority of dates on CTs are those of order, manufacture or first issue {all approximately the same}, some are undoubtedly foundation dates; not that this is always stated, with the result that pieces are found with apparent dates which are belied by the style; for example, typical mid-19th cent white metal pieces with mid-18th cent dates. Burns was of the opinion that in some cases the date was stamped on belatedly.

Whilst most tokens were lead in the early days, graduating increasingly to pewter and white metal alloys as time went on, various metals and production methods were employed. Glasgow followed one order for lead in 1593 by another for tin in 1603, not that one can now establish with certainty which some of these early issues were. Brass bracteates {Fig.1} are also known in the early days; although more a continental type of manufacture, there are also a few commercial bracteates known for Inverness-shire, a couple of them with dates c.1730. The bracteate CTs may therefore be of similar date, although one of them, bearing the initials of Alexander Garden of Aberdeen, is late 17th cent, and I am inclined to think that the others are likewise.

W. Ivison MacAdam, addressing the Royal Antiquaries of Scotland in 1880, comments about the metallurgical content of communion tokens as follows:

> "The metal of which the earlier tokens were made was lead, and from the years 1700 to 1745 this metal was almost exclusively employed, and until the year 1800 is commonly met with. In the West of Scotland, more particularly, tin was mixed along with the lead. The tokens made of mixed metals are in a fair state of preservation, retaining most of the sharp lines; by means of this alloy a more durable and fast impression was obtained than could be hoped for from a soft metal such as lead, and at the same time the colour is changed from a dull blue to a silver white. The metal tin is sometimes employed alone, but the tokens so obtained are never so sharp in the lines or as finely cut as when an admixture of lead has been worked with".

I presume that the alloy he means is what we would today describe as white metal. MacAdam goes on to describe the precise proportions for several specific tokens, from which it will be seen that the variation is very wide:

Burz.3580?	Kinross, 1747 {1749?}	62.74% lead, 37.26% tin	
Burz.4195	Leith New Kirk, 1776	37.01% lead, 62.99% tin	
Burz.4200	Leith North Kirk, 1816	52.04% lead, 47.96% tin	{Fig.2}
Burz.3646	Kilbarchan, 1783	19.37% lead, 80.63% tin	{Fig.3}
Burz.1466	Edinburgh Canongate, 1813	84.71% lead, 15.29% tin	{Fig.4}
Burz.3696	Kilmalcolm, 1819	46.31% lead, 53.69% tin	

In the lead period, casting {moulds} and striking {stamps} were both extensively used, and some of the more exotic designs are probably borne out of a desire to create a token which could be immediately distinguished from those of adjacent parishes when the two became mixed. Some ministers chose to put their own name/initials on their tokens rather than those of the parish, either so that they could take them with them when they moved post or, if they combined two incumbencies, so the to-

kens were equally acceptable in each community. The early form M/AB, M standing for minister and AB for his initials, is very rarely extended to M/AB/D; D thought to stand for donavit, indicating that the minister had financed the tokens himself.

At the other end of the CT lifecycle, three things were likely to have happened to the main supply for any church:

- They were melted down for re-use.
- They were buried, usually within the church precincts..
- They were stored for safe keeping, either locally by the church or centrally by the governing body.

Whatever happened, the whole of the main batch was likely to have been treated similarly, for which reason it is common to find all the tokens of one issue in the same condition, be it good or bad. Depending on the quality of storage, one issue may turn up invariably oxidised, stained or shiny; or worse still, almost invariably infected with tin pest, like one certain mid-19th cent white-metal piece from the Lanarkshire parish of Shotts. The latter are dated 1841 and come up on Ebay quite frequently; look out for them, and you will see what I mean.

It follows therefore that the rare pieces are those where the main batch has been recycled or buried, and only the stray losses survive; whereas the common pieces are those where the main batch has survived and got into circulation amongst the numismatic fraternity.

The common pieces include some issues where, the main batch having been kept intact by the local church until comparatively recently, the latter has decided to sell its ancient tokens off to boost funds. In the case of the English tokens, the combined issues of those churches which were still using CTs in 1900 were collected up in that year, or shortly afterwards, and were kept largely intact by the central authority until about 2002; after which, in the last few years, they have started to creep on to the market.

CTs are rarely mentioned in the contemporary media, but occasional references may be found in 19th cent newspapers to:

- Legal disputes between church members and their minister over the right to receive a CT.
- Losses of individual CTs due to pickpocketing and other petty theft.
- Deposition of CTs under church foundation stones, when reporting the relevant ceremony.
- Contemporary expressions of numismatic interest.

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It could have been made of lead…

Bone pieces have appeared once before in these pages, undated but thought to be c.1810, and from their Kentish origin almost certainly hop tokens; values 1 to 5 all exist, of identical design, with obverses and reverses as per Figs.1a,1b below. Fig.2 has recently come to light, and is clearly of very different use, if almost certainly similar age; the Mitre has, surely, got to be a pub. Both series are well associated with lead, and it looks as if bone was an alternative material to those who either had no lead to hand or favoured bone as being easier to work with. It would be interesting to know if the use of bone was exclusive to the far South-East, but regretably I do not know the provenance of the Mitre piece, which is 37mm across.

In Defiance of Pilson's Law

I have mentioned before the theory of mudlark Tony Pilson, that most small lead tokens intended to have monetary value approximate in size to that of the smallest coin of the realm then current. This is an invaluable guide when dating them, and yet, like everything else associated with lead, it is not invariable. There are always going to be oddball pieces, and also certain periods where subseries exists which do not conform. I am aware of two such groups in particular, apart from the one-offs.

The first of these is from the early 17th cent and distinguished by having a diameter of around 20mm, as opposed to the 13-15mm which is normal to London lead issues of the time; and indeed, there is one in the group illustrated {Figs.1-5} which, at 1575, is much earlier than this. They are thought to be mostly provincial. Four of the pieces shown are dated, the fifth has a shared find spot with one of the others.

The second group which goes noticeably against the trend consists of those end-17th and early-18th cent tokens, mid-18th cent even, which retain the approx 19-20mm diameter of most of the later Williamson series pieces {1663-72}, or even the 15-17mm more commonly associated with the earlier ones, rather than adopt the new 22-23mm introduced by the regal farthings from the 1670s. Whilst the latter is probably the norm, pieces bearing early 18th cent dates which are slightly below the size of a farthing are by no means uncommon, and until about 1720 they can, occasionally, be substantially below. Two dated examples of each of the three sizes are illustrated in Figs.6-11 below.

It is possible, of course, that the use of slightly lesser diameters was due to a desire to economise on material, whilst staying within the bounds of simulating a plausible farthing, halfpenny or whatever; yet two questions must be posed:

- How many of the undated pieces are we tempted to date too early because of their small size?
- How many of the post-1672 pieces which are full farthing size are in fact undersized halfpennies rather than full-sized farthings?

These are not always easy issues to answer, and it is to style which we must normally turn for help.

Finally, we come to a piece {Fig.12} which defies Pilson's Law as far as anything which as I have seen. I have deliberately magnified it by two, because it is tiny {10mm} and I want it to be big enough for you to appreciate. 10mm is the size of, or perhaps even smaller than, the very smallest of the London leads issued in the 1500s, when diameters were at their minimum, and yet…..stylistically, this piece is clearly c.1700-20, or even later! I raised the possibility in LTT_24 {March 2007; page 1, Fig.10} that there might have been minute pieces with values as low as 1/24 of a farthing, created to fulfil a need for small change, but there has since been no further evidence to justify discussing it again. Until this; why else would someone strike something so minute?

The previous owner, being into conventional coinage rather more than tokens, and therefore thinking more in terms of traditional heraldry, decided that the reverse design was a lion passant; however, I favour a fox.