

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 Please note that the old LTT editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.



Sorry, couldn't rustle up enough type 17s to fill the whole page, and some of them didn't look very fir-like anyway....

-:-:-:-:-

Drink and be Merry, as depicted on Crude Lead

I have long thought that the various drinking utensils which feature on lead tokens come in a various range of shapes and sizes, and that one day I might come across somebody well versed in such matters; which was why I was pleasantly surprised, and very grateful, to receive an email from Colin Brain, an authority on 17th cent drinking glass. Colin found LTT as a result of searching online for new material in his own field, and has since got interested in a related one of which he was unaware, whilst we have the benefit of his knowledge in helping to date the various type 11 pieces which feature drinking vessels. Moreover, that knowledge can also be used to some extent to help date the currency of whatever design occurs on the other side.

So, for starters, here is some glassware to compare with the tokens; and yes, I've magnified the token for effect, they didn't make them that size in the 17th cent. The glass on the right is usually called a mead glass, although actually used for white German wine.



I copied Colin as many type 11s as I could lay my hands on and invited his opinion on the dating. He thought that not all of them were glass, but that most were; for indeed, which of us laymen can tell glass from pewter or ceramics on a lead token? The following are the ones which Colin passed as glass, followed by his comments and notes; if you don't understand the former, please read the latter; and if you don't understand either, please consult our good friend Google, because he knows more about glassware than I do. Putting in Colin's name, plus "glassware", will bring up a good collection of appropriate sites.



Fig.	Bottle dating	Glass dating	Drink	Est date
1	Decoration too crude	Decoration too crude poss 16c		16c ?
2	Early	Late 16th C		Q4/16c
3	Early	Late 16th C		Q1/17c
4	Shaft & globe?	Flared bowl & foot, no stem	Wine	Q1/17c
5	Shaft & globe?	Flared bowl & foot, no stem	Wine	Q2/17c
6	Shaft & globe	Cigar stem? before 1665		1655-65
7	Shaft & globe serving			17c
8	Onion 1680-1725	Roemer / mead	Wine	Q1/18c
9	Onion 1680-1725	Early plain stem		Q1/18c
10	Mallet 1720-50			Q2/18c
11	Mallet 1720-50	Tall stem mid 18th C	Wine	c.1750

Colin's notes:

- Bottle and glass dating is recorded separately and demonstrates that the two are compatible in all cases (or that there is insufficient information available to detect any incompatibility). This means that the illustrations cannot be arbitrary but must have been deliberately done to depict glasses and bottles of the same age (presumably those current at the time of making the mould).
- Entries in the column 'drink' are based on the type of glass illustrated, where this is only normally suitable for one kind of drink
- The date is the estimated date for making the mould, normally in quarters and centuries.
- Only Fig.8 is supported by a reverse date, which is 170n {last digit illegible}.



:-:~:-:~:-:~:-:~:-:~:-:-

One fact which Colin is at pains to point out frequently is that glassware in early times was, not as might be imagined today, for the use of your typical pub ; by contrast, it was very much the province of the rich:

"Most ordinary people would never have seen some of the early glasses and bottles illustrated. These were definitely the province of the rich. There is a classic quote from 1586 "...wherein gold and silver most aboundeth, how that the gentilitie as loathing those metals (because of the plentie) do now generallie choose rather the Venice glasses, both for our wine and beere,..."

Where it is possible to tell, the glasses seem mostly to be wine glasses. For much of the period wine drinking was also mainly the preserve of the rich (e.g. Samuel Pepys).”

In other words, people used and displayed glassware primarily to demonstrate their opulence, only secondarily to consume fluid, for which latter purpose the metal tankard {Fig.12} was still very much the norm. The latter is surprisingly infrequent on tokens, and it would appear that wine rather than ale, the rich rather than the poor, are being catered for. This of course raises new questions regarding their use, for if it was not the drink of the ordinary people was being featured then it was probably not the ordinary people who were using them. After expressing his doubts about the most generally accepted theory:



“I have difficulty relating these particular tokens with coin substitutes, because the person receiving them in exchange for goods or services would then need to convert them back into money. Also, the illustrations just don't seem to fit with small value coinage. The most common message seems to be that these tokens are for a drink rather than a bottle or a glass. In this respect a modern equivalent is the beer token issued today at beer festivals. This suggests that they were issued for use in a specific location and were related to controlling access to drink, rather than directly paying for it. If the tokens were clearly for beer, ale or cider, then I could understand that they might have been for part payment in kind and exchangeable at the estate brewery, refectory or kitchen for a drink. However the illustration of expensive wine glasses and wine does not seem to fit well with this explanation. Thus it seems more likely that they were some of the things that you got in exchange for buying a group of things with a single payment (such as a night's stay in an inn with food and drink) or that regulated drink consumption in essentially social settings.”

Colin thinks he might have come up with a solution to their usage:

“I figured that if they were from a consistent series there ought to be some kind of archive reference to their function. Trying a number of combinations, "drink money" and "drinking money" seem the most promising in British History on-line and Access to Archives.

Although these terms go back to that least the 12th century, the bulk of hits were late 16th and 17th C. I have found a dictionary definition for "drink money" which is "a gratuity, ostensibly given to buy liquor for drinking to the health of the giver" which seems to sum up the references I found quite well. This seems to cover several different strands: one of conspicuous consumption - where an important visitor might pay out hundreds of pounds (in the 17th cent!) to servants of his host in drinking money to demonstrate his wealth. In another case a ships captain trying to get his ship fitted out complains about paying for "brandy and strong beer, and sometimes drinking money", to get the shipyard workers to work on his vessel. So there appears to be a whole spectrum of rewards, bribes, tips, bonuses and inducements covered by these terms. However, most references seem to indicate that there was an expectation that drink would be purchases with at least some of this money. The fact that the drinking money is seen as reflecting on the status of the giver would be a sound reason why they depict expensive wines and glassware. In the 18th cent with the advent of drinking clubs, I suspect this focus may have shifted to the token reflecting the identity and status of the 'club' rather than a personal donor. If this is the case then I suspect Figs.10-11 probably don't show mallet-shaped bottles as I had first thought, but actually show mallets and are thus of masonic significance. I was puzzled by the sharp corners on both of these if they were bottles, but this might be the explanation.

I have not found any explicit reference to drinking money tokens, but as far as I can see token usage would fit very well within the general umbrella of "drinking money".“

Food, or rather drink, for thought!

It cannot be guaranteed, of course, as to whether the drinking vessels depicted on the tokens are those appropriate to the time the latter were issued; most of the time they would be, I guess, but it is not impossible that there and there the engraver/issuer might have occasionally chosen, quite deliberately, to depict a wineglass which was out of period. It might come down to whether the owner wanted to portray his premises as a “nice old worlde pub like when our grandparents were young” {1590s} as opposed to a contemporary modern state-of-the-art gastro pub {1670s}....!!

Such an explanation might well go some way to understanding the likes of Fig.13, whose glassware Colin dates to c.1690, but whose diameter, if it were a monetary token would imply mid-18th cent. However, the piece is moderately slender, and has that certain London pewtery feel about it, which makes one wonder whether, despite the size, it is not far out. All of which would back Colin’s theory that maybe it was not monetary. It is certainly more grandiose than most type 11s.



-:-:-:-:-

The use of glassware knowledge to date tokens is one thing but, reciprocally, Colin is hopeful also that tokens may possible provide clues to unsolved questions in early glassware research. He remarks:

“A number of the bottle illustrations seem to predate established bottle dating information and so I suspect some of these are likely to be of considerable interest in their own right.”

For example, concerning Fig.14, he writes:

“I think the vessel is a bottle with quite a narrow neck, typical of those used from late medieval times. It is probably shown rather thinner than the later black bottles because the thickness of the glass walls would have been much less than these later ones and because it was probably made in colourless glass rather than the later dark green bottles. This is typical of the period when the use of glass was 'conspicuous consumption' {in modern parlance, swanking} in that the glass was very dear and also very thin and fragile, so that only the wealthy could afford to own it and use it.



I don't know if the necks were that narrow in practice. I have tried to find pictures of surviving complete examples and have not been successful. That may be because I am looking in the wrong places, or that they all broke in use as you suggest. Fragments of a bottle dating from about 1500 were excavated in London and the neck on this was approximately 2.5cm external diameter and 18cm long.”

-:-:-:-:-

One little oddity to look out for, although regrettably I have not got an illustration to hand:

“One or two pieces seem to have illustrations of winged insects on them and to date from the mid 1700s. There are a number of engraved 'Jacobite' glasses that mainly date from after 1745 which include engravings of moths or butterflies and as far as I know no one has come up with a satisfactory reason why.”

Colin and his wife have been also been writing on tokens themselves, and anybody able to lay their hands on a copy of Glass Circle News, Issue 127, Vol.34, No.3 will find another most interesting and information-packed article with plenty of facts and figures beyond those which I have given here. My thanks to Colin for his detailed and carefully considered contribution; it is good to share our different disciplines to mutual benefit. Hint: are there any ornithologists or agricultural historians out there?

-:-:-:-:-



Of those pieces which Colin rejected as likely not being glass, he thought Fig.15 probably ceramic, whereas Fig.16 {one of the small BNJ54 type M pieces, hence magnified 3:2 for visibility} is almost certainly metal. The latter is possibly a pitcher rather than a drinking glass, and being 15th cent is of course earlier than most of the material we are talking about here. Fig.17, similarly magnified because of its small size, is probably also metal; it is pure lead as opposed to pewter, and very possibly a mid-17th cent token in the normal sense, although there is just the hint of a Roman tessera about it; in which case, it would probably be one of what the catalogues call “sacrificial implements”, in this case the one used for the pouring of oil. Dare one think that a piece in such good nick could be that old?



From ancient religion to modern; communion tokens occasionally show the cup from which the eucharist is drunk, and on most modern {19th cent} examples this is obvious; however, get a worn lead CT from the 18th cent and this may be less so. Bread is bread and wine is wine, whatever used for, and one has to discern CTs from pub tokens. Fortunately, the square shape, or the presence of a text, often comes to our aid; but given only initials, some confusion might be occasionally possible, especially where the lettering is worn. The pieces shown below are in approximate chronological order:



- | | |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 18. Dalrymple, Ayrshire, 1742 | 24. Old Machar, Aberdeen, 1820 |
| 19. Dalmellington, Ayrshire, 1760 | 25. Wemyss, Fife, 1835 |
| 20. Carsphairn, Kirkcudbright, undated | 26. Edinburgh St Cuthberts, 1847 |
| 21. Carnbie, Fife, 1767 | 27. Edinburgh St Cuthberts, 1865 |
| 22. Dennino, Fife, 1779 | 28. Fyvie, Aberdeen, 1873 |
| 23. Glenisla, Angus, 1817 | |

---:---:---:---

To conclude, this lovely piece of Colin’s own {Fig.29}, with one rather special feature; it has, written on it, the purpose for which it was used! The piece is actually quite similar to Fig.2, but under the glassware three letters may be discerned: ALE!



Postscript: Since we put together the above, Colin has also contributed some interesting comments on elements of manufacture common to both glassware and crude lead. These are too lengthy to be included here, and have been held over until LTT_89 {Mar/Apr 2013}.

WANT BACK ISSUES ?
All back issues of LTT, and an index to them, are available at www.leadtokens.org.uk