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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@powell18041.freemove.co.uk. Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Moving into the Era of Paranumismatic Anarchy, Part 2: Late Degenerates

Last month we saw a display of “Mysteries”; pieces where someone was trying to execute a design and, although he sometimes did it quite well, we weren’t exactly sure what. “Late Degenerates” are the other way round; we know what the designer has in mind, but he just isn’t doing it very well. Most of these pieces are probably well into the 18th cent, and in the case of the larger one quite likely towards the end of it. Look and enjoy, if only for their limitations; at least we can assign most of them to types!



In approx type number order, we kick off with Figs.1-2, a couple of conventional petal types where the engraver looks to have been rather half-hearted. One has one side of each petal missing, and in both cases he appears to have run out of enthusiasm before completing the job. Not too much one can do with initials, I guess, although one might think twice about Fig.3 if one chanced to pick it up 90 degrees round. Is Fig.4 an initial, T, or a tool? a pick, perhaps. Your guess. Fig.5 represents the attempt of someone near-illiterate to reproduce the inscription of a main series 17th cent tokens, whilst Fig.6 looks like an attempt to produce either a cartwheel, or an angle-filled cross, by someone who just couldn’t get his bearings.



Fig.7 looks like a TV aerial but obviously isn’t; on a very small flan, it could be a mini-grid with just one horizontal held to suffice. Figs.8-12 are various degenerations and hybrids based on the lis-trident family, discussed to some extent way back in LTT_7. In all but Fig.10 the base of the trident is missing, and there the number of tines is not only not the usual three but also goes so far as to be indeterminate; one feels that the maker did not care, nor did he intend us to try and guess. Figs.8/9/11/12 all have the feature whereby the outer tines of the trident curl round, and in Fig.8 this mutates into a hybrid which is halfway to a cross. Fig.9 curls round the tines beyond C/inverted-C into full circles, whilst Figs.11-12, retaining the C/inverted-C reflection, omit the central tine and so turn the whole into what could be, debatably, an X. Almost certainly no letter X is intended, and looking at the whole one is left with the rather confusing question of how many of these related designs are evolutions of each other and how many are different intended designs. One thing is certain: all are common enough ideas.



A couple more cartwheels in Figs.13-14; the former tolerably regular, although with the appearance of a spider having spun a web around its perimeter. Fig.14 is a little off-centre; it is probably an inaccurate cartwheel, although there is some vague hint of the windmill about it, for those who have seen a genuine windmill on either other lead or a main series piece.

Figs.15-16 are probably anchors, although turn them upside down and one is left with the same quantity as Fig.3 earlier: letter, anchor, or other tool?

Figs.17-18 are crosses, with rather weak, scrawly filler; one of the reverse-angle type, the other a cartwheel based hybrid, albeit with the quarters clearly marked.



Figs.19-21 come into the category of frameworks. One does not know exactly what they are, and perhaps they depict nothing of any great importance, but they sometimes remind us of specific objects; in this case a cast iron fence in the case of Fig.19, and a girder bridge in the case of Fig.21. Fig.20 could be a prisoner looking through the door of his cell! All rather fanciful, maybe... but who would dare say with certainty that they are totally meaningless?

Fig.22 looks at first glance that it might come under the same category as Fig.7, i.e. very limited grid; however, there is just something a little more about this one which hints at pipes in the rack, as are sometimes found in the main Williamson series. Which begs the question: is that Fig.7 is as well?

Fig.23 is another cross with reverse-angle {i.e. chevron} filler; as robust in concept as Fig.17, of the same basic type, is slender and wiry. Fig.24 would have to classify as a type 14 cross, too, although it could hardly be conjectured that anything religious, or intended for division into quarters, is intended. North, south, east and west? Four of those sugar loaves, so familiar in the main series? The possible interpretations are endless, but perhaps the most likely possibility is the simplest: that there is none.



Figs.25-28 represent a variety of trees, crops and bushes, with Fig.27, set deep in a 45% exergue of earth, the pick. Fig.26: do we see a harvestable crop, wheat, barley or the like, or is that just an ornamented W? It is quite unusual. Fig.25 is the most degenerate; its identity as a plant is in doubt.

The "spaceship" type of Figs.29-30 has been commented on before; it could be intended as a fish, a flying bird, or even a degenerate type 1 petal. I will back the fish for the time being and so call it a type 19, but the other options are all feasible.



Fig.31 could be some agricultural implement, maybe a plough or a harrow, but by no means guaranteed. Fig.32 is maybe a nailer's piece, indicating some of his produce; the latter look more chunky than the more familiar crossed swords. Fig.33 could be industrial as well, although if a lis a better one than any of those shown on page 1; also dare one believe that that is a bird on the right-hand upright, like appear sometimes on the reverse of Roman denarii? Surely not on this humble piece...

The IXC combination of Fig.34 has been discussed before, under type 4 in LTT_7, but remains a mystery; is it an X in a container, in which case possibly religious, or just a plain W? It seems only to occur in this cruder period. Next a rare incuse token, Fig.35, which may be for use in connection with a warning beacon, either as an access permit or to indicate that one has activated it {think Armada or Napoleon here}; and finally Fig.36 which, given that they didn't have telegraph poles then, might be yet another pipe rack on it side!

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Common Elements in Glassware and Crude Lead Casting

As promised in December, further thoughts from Colin Brain, my co-author of the recent article on glassware depiction, this time concerning manufacture. My thanks to him for some interesting ideas on the subject of moulds, which are common to both lead token and glassware production. The following are three successive emails, over the course of about a week:

(1) Do you know if anyone has experimented with how much wear/erosion one gets on a mould when casting lead tokens, or how long a mould would last in production? I seem to remember that some original moulds still exist and these could give an indication of wear patterns. My guess is that the main wear could show at the edges of the cavities where the matrix for the pattern was chiselled out. Do you know if the folk who produced these tokens used a release agent to make it easier to separate the castings? It sounds very high-tech, but some glassmakers I know who have experimented with early production techniques have found that soot works very well. It is then only a question of holding the mould over a sooty lamp flame. They figure that when they find something that works well and makes life easier then they are fairly sure that it gets them closer to the way it was actually done in the past.

(2) It sounds as though separating the token from the mould was not a major problem, but I was surprised how quickly they could be turned out.

I spoke to our local glass makers about mould wear and they confirmed that the main sign of degradation they get in reusing non-metal moulds is spalling {i.e. flaking fragments} at the end of grooves or cut-outs. I notice that this has happened on the original mould illustrated in LTT_23. They sell replica glass at a number of re-enactor's markets and commented that some fellow exhibitors are known to use cuttlefish bones to carve moulds for pilgrim badges; therefore, they wondered if this would have also been the case for tokens? If your American correspondent {LTT_54} successfully used an epoxy mould then I guess cuttlefish would work OK.

(3) I have heard from two sources that cuttlefish was used by the original makers. Presumably it was fine grained and easy to work. A link I was sent to what is apparently a good example of the detail on reproductions is on: <http://www.lionheartreplicas.co.uk/shop/index.php> I am told that the some of the originals were even better.

The Use of the Word "Token" on Tokens

It is often assumed that most small tokens, where they had an accepted if unstated and unofficial monetary value, were the lowest coin of their day; in ancient Rome the quadrans, in recent Britain the farthing. In the main-series 17th cent period a value could be stated with impunity, because the pieces circulated with at least some measure of official blessing, but outside such periods people usually desisted from putting the name of the value on, because the implication that a piece was money might lead them into trouble with the authorities. Most makers of crude lead probably lacked the skill to put such a long word on, even if they could spell it, but its absence is also associated with other unofficial series such as the copper farthings of the mid-19th cent, which sought to protect their issuers by posing as advertising pieces.

The authorities certainly used the word, in their frequent complaints about the existence of unofficial pieces; what, however, did the word "token" actually mean to the ordinary people of the time, if anything? Or was it just coined by modern paranumismatists for anything which did not fall under the heading of orthodox coinage?

"HIS/HER HALF PENY" is encountered often enough on the main series 17th cent series, but just once every now and again someone expresses himself differently. Henry Stebbing of Woodbridge puts a Roman numeral "II" in the field {Fig.1}, but does not say two of what. Thomas Pearce of Dover, however, goes one further {Fig.2}: "HIS DVBBLE TOKEN". Very revealing; not a double farthing, but a double token; even though the size and date of the piece, 20mm and 1669 respectively, clearly point to it being a halfpenny.



One of the earlier 19th cent unofficial copper pieces, which are almost all farthings, is totally unambiguous: "Retailers Token" on one side and "One Farthing", plus date, on the other {Fig.3}. However, perhaps a civic authority managing a city the size of Glasgow thought that it could get away with that. Most of the individual traders were not so brave.



Up north in CT country, the word was clearly part of the daily vocabulary. CTs were part of the official ecclesiastical system, passes which constituted the recognised method of social control, rather than a subliminal currency which had to be used semi-furtively. There was no problem about using it on the pieces, although it appears fairly infrequently simply because there were so many other bits of information which were chosen in preference. A few examples are shown in

Figs.4-10; all 19th cent, with the exception of the first, which is of unusually early date for such a feature. You will notice that on Fig.4, from Peebles, "TOK" is abbreviated, because the piece is of cruder construction and, like many other crude leads south of the border, not many letters can be accommodated. It may be conjectured that, where the single initial T occurs on a CT, and cannot be otherwise explained {e.g. as a parish initial}, that it too may stand for "token".



Finally, a hop token {Fig.11}; these pieces of Thomas Gower of Woodchurch, Kent are the only examples I know. Notice the odd value "13". They come with all numbers up to 20, plus 30, 40,50 and 100. Some collectors like hunting down pieces with unusual values!

