

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Readers' Correspondence

My thanks to Peter Munro, who comes from the Scottish Borders, for showing me this interesting little piece {Fig.1} found some years ago in Northumberland. It is approx 25mm across and weighs 15.25gm, which seems a little on the heavy side for its diameter, and thus implying that it is probably somewhat thicker than normal.



One thinks of other lead artefacts with which tokens are sometimes confused, like seals, badges and buttons, but there is nothing in the shape or design which suggests any of these. If a token, the size and weight would normally imply mid-late 18th cent but (i) the design is not a natural choice for that period and (ii) the execution of the piece is considerably better than most lead tokens of the time, which by that date was generally becoming rather poor. There is also a danger that it may be more modern than it looks.

The design which the horse most immediately reminds me of is that on the coins of Lithuania, but that is probably a coincidence. One question to ask is whether the horse and rider are military, gentry or agricultural; the horse looks a little too thick-set for battle, but maybe that level of accuracy is too much to ask. Neither is there the usual accompanying dragon to suggest that the rider is called George.

One possibility is that the piece is something to do with the activities on some landed person's estate, such as are described for Cumberland in Michael Finlay's recent book; in which case, the mounted horse will accord with the heraldic arms of the person concerned. Maybe a pass, allowing someone authority. It seems too well-worked a piece to be small change.

-:-:-:-



Thames mudlark Kim Skerten has found Fig.2 on the South Bank, near Gabriel's wharf. Not particularly old or pretty, but quite neat. It has the word SOTON on, which is no doubt short for Southampton, and is presumably a seal. The reverse is similar, albeit a little more worn. I've seen them before; anyone know whether they are peculiar to Southampton, or whether they can be found for other ports?

Another of Kim's finds, and rather more attractive, is Fig.3, found near Cannon Street. A delightful little fox; from the size, probably late 17th cent. It almost certainly represents a shop or pub sign; remembering that, in those days, when a larger number of people were illiterate, signs were employed by shopkeepers more generally, and not just by publicans. It was only in 1764, after a lot of complaints about injuries sustained due to decaying shop signs, that an Act was passed limiting them to their present use.



Had the piece been found in a rural location I would have suggested an alternative possible use in connection with the Vermin Act, not related to any business establishment, as per LTT_36; however, with a central London findspot, I think that that can be safely dismissed!

Crossed Keys

There are certain subjects which appear frequently on lead, and indeed on other series as well, which are clearly not stock types. We have commented on the wide range of series and time periods covered by hearts before; the Crossed Keys is another such design. Herewith a display of lead examples; for the record, reverses are as shown where not uniface, except for the rather dark Fig.2 whose reverse is similar to Fig.1 but slightly cruder.



The earliest of these pieces, Fig.1, is late 15th cent, with the similar but less finely-executed Fig.2 following on not long after. Fig.3 could well be around the mid-17th cent Williamson period, whilst Figs.4-6 represent the “ordinary” tokens of the 18th cent. These six are, at least, probably all English tokens, with a debatable ecclesiastical or commercial use in the case of Figs.1-2 and a more definite commercial use in the case of Figs.3-6. Bryant Lillywhite’s “London Signs” lists 62 known taverns called the Cross Keys in London alone, and there will be many more countrywide; so, Figs.3-6 are probably pub checks. The device has been around as an inn sign for a long time, and probably for as long as the oldest pieces shown here.

The literal interpretation is but one, however; there is also the possibility that the cross keys device may be symbolic and/or armorial. It is known to feature on the arms of a number of well-spread European towns and cities, and for all I know may feature in private heraldry, i.e. amongst the gentry, both here and abroad, as well. Additionally, the church may talk about the keys to the gates of heaven, or of life, and reflect that when it issues tokens. It is these double and triple potential meanings that make interpretation so complicated; with the crossed keys, and the heart, there are clearly different groups of people issuing pieces with the same devices but for very different reasons.

What about Figs.7-8? They are probably 18th cent, they look a bit grandiose for an inn and are quite possibly gentry pieces, passes or the like for use on an estate, although it is certainly not unknown for a country inn to be named after the owner of the big house on whose land it was built. In the latter case, the pub sign will probably either depict the owner or his arms. However, thought has also to be given to whether these pieces might not be displaying the municipal arms of some town on the European mainland.

Fig.9 is a known charity piece from somewhere in northern France; on its reverse it depicts St.Peter holding keys, hopefully not those of the wine cellar. It, like the others before it, is still a token. Fig.10 may not be; in the klippe style of the early 17th cent, cut irregularly by shears, it could be a token or a weight. It may be British, it may not. Crossed keys also appear on seals, although there appear to be none above; and what more natural, than that a town’s device should do so? Ged Dodd’s PeaceHavens site shows a good number for Riga {see <http://12121.hostinguk.com/baleXkeys.htm>}, and other examples should be expected.

So, if you possess any heraldic knowledge, and you see a crossed key piece in LTT which you think is urban or municipal, please mail in and tell us where you think it comes from!

French {Huguenot} Communion Tokens

For those of you who have never seen a French Huguenot communion token, they mostly look like Figs.1-3. Like their Scottish equivalents they are usually made of lead or white metal, and like their Scottish counterparts too they mainly conform, without totally eliminating variety, to a certain style. The three shown are fairly typical; a ring of wording or initials on the obverse, often enclosing an encircled pellet within, and most often a chalice, rather than the Scottish text, on the reverse. Flanking the wineglass, the bread is also often in evidence.



There aren't very many French communion tokens known; only a few dozen types are identified as such, all Huguenot, compared with well over five thousand in Scotland. As will be seen from the above samples, they are mostly fairly late; Fig.2 has a give-away date, whilst the slightly later Fig.3 has the familiar radial lines, caused by manufacture, seen on many mid-19th cent Kentish hop tokens. Hardly any of the identified pieces in the Huguenot subseries seem to be older than late 18th cent.



So what, you ask? Well, there were Huguenots before that; some of them came to England to escape persecution and.....wait for it.... A few of our own lead tokens occasionally share some of the same characteristics. How about Figs.4-5 {reverses shown} and the uniface Figs.6-7, for starters? The last-mentioned come from the same mould and were found together at East Dean, near Eastbourne; on the coast, and not exactly too far from France.

Figs.4-5 are trying to keep the identities of their central depictions fairly secret, but crosses {Fig.4a} and chalices {Figs.4b,5b} may be numbered amongst reasonable guesses. Figs.6-7 look the part; of this group, only Fig.4b misses the mark as looking suspiciously ordinary.



Another three candidates next {Figs.8-10}; two of them pretty crude, but all with the suggestive circle of letters. However, when you get over the other side....! Figs.8-9 have the 6-petal stock design, which admittedly has been proposed as being of ancient ecclesiastical origin; whereas, although Fig.10's design suggests a very standard commercial token, JC could just be a minister. We must beware of reading too much in to our interpretations, but equally we must beware of writing too much off. Maybe most of these are very ordinary pieces but, equally, it is just possible that one or two of them are the CTs of French emigrant communities who made their way over here. To finish, Fig.11 a would-be which finishes very definitely on the secular side of the border!



French Communion Tokens: Postscript



Since writing the previous article, Philip Mernick has kindly let me photograph three more specimens of communion tokens in his possession; see Fig.12-14 following. Fig.12 is very similar to what we have already seen overleaf, as also the reverses of the others; however, the obverses of the others have, instead of a mere ring and pellet at their centre, a much more coin-like design in mediaeval style {despite the fact that they are probably not much more than 200 years old}. Fig.13 has a penny-like cross and pellets; very simple, but delightful for its connection with antiquity. What Fig.14 depicts I am uncertain; it hints at the bottom part of a bust, but I am not convinced that the top half is that worn for the rest of a bust to be hiding.

Maybe this partial likeness to coins harks back to the days when some French ecclesiastical tokens had values in deniers and monks were paid for their services {see the articles on Arthur Forgeais' material back in LTT_34-35}, or when tokens were associated with the collection of church dues.

Like Scottish CTs, some French pieces have their church descriptions reduced to initials {Figs.1,12}, whilst others are fuller as in Figs.2,13-14. They give, of course, the name of the church, but in Figs.13-14 at least, one could easily imagine encountering, "moneyer A of mint B", in true olden style.

-:-:-:-

A Somerset Selection

Thanks to Paul Walker for kindly showing us this set of finds, all from one site adjacent to the village of Priston, in North Somerset, just SW of Bath; some very ordinary 18th cent tokens, accompanied a number of weights and figurines which the archaeologists apparently reckon are of similar date. Anyone with ideas as to what might have been going on there, please write in.



A Ticket to the Ball, or maybe the Village Hog Roast....

A rather unorthodox picture to commence the proceedings. The piece is a very ordinary Georgian cartwheel penny, machined flat; and before that it was probably a very ordinary cartwheel penny worn flat, for which reason I hope that you will forgive me for sparing you the obverse and reverse. No, the interest here lies slowly in the edge, which is neatly engraved: “Mrs ELIZABH W. STANHOPE, 16th SEPTEMBER 1841 **”. So what, you may ask; what can we deduce from that? Well, quite a lot, actually; not only can we identify the lady in question and conjecture her probable reasons for having issued the piece, but from there we can look ahead and think of other tokens, possible even in lead, which might have shared a similar use.



Two things stand out on looking at the inscription:

- To be married in 1841, Mrs. Stanhope must have been born c.1820 or earlier, at which time middle names were decidedly uncommon; and, where they did occur, it tended to be amongst the upper echelons of society.
- Certain forename initials tend to have a probability bias towards one sex or the other; for example, F/G/H all lean slightly to the male, and E/L/M to the female. Nowhere, however, is there any bias amongst the commoner British forename initials stronger than W to the male.

Genealogical research based on the above quickly suggested that there was one overwhelming candidate, namely Lady Elizabeth Wilhelmina Spencer-Stanhope, née Coke {1795-1873}, daughter of the first Earl of Leicester, who for most of her married life lived with her husband and six children in a large stately home, Cannon Hall, in Cawthorne, near Barnsley. It is likely too that she spent a certain amount of time in London. Mrs. Stanhope being in 1841 in the prime of family life, the piece is twenty years too late to be a love token and thirty years too early to be a momento mori {death memorial}, so there has to be another reason; a visiting card maybe, or an invitation to a social event such as a ball {think Downton Abbey here}, or maybe a security pass associated with the same.

-:-:-:-

After the great recoinages of silver in 1816 and copper in the years following 1821, there were many old coins around, dating back to 1662, which had either been demonetised or had been worn into near oblivion through too having had to provide too many years of circulation. The public had carried on using these through necessity, along with various tokens and foreign coin substitutes all greeted with varying degrees of acceptance; but with the appearance of new good coin in bulk these all suddenly became relegated to the back corners of cupboards as pre-decimal coinage has been in our own day. For those issuers still wanting tokens, for whatever reason, a few of these worn out coins found a second career through engraving or counterstamping; and in doing so, of course, they competed with lead. Maybe it was the ease of production through these means, in an industrial age, and the ready availability of people able and willing to provide the service, that finally put paid to lead as the preferred material of the local token.

It is therefore worth looking at what engraved and counterpunched pieces were used for in their early days, as a clue to what lead might have been used for before; and in addition to this chronological approach, one needs to think sideways also in terms of social communities who may have had common ground despite their vastly different backgrounds. No doubt the peasantry who made up the bulk of lead-token-using population didn't attend quite as many balls as Mrs. Stanhope, but they will still have had their social events and sports, even if administered in a rather different manner.