

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

South Yorkshire finds, continued from last month



Some more 18th cent pieces this month from Tony Williams and friends in South Yorkshire, continuing on from the last issue. Fig.1 is very simple, but a nice neat rendering, and it looks as if the maker has taken some care over it. It is basically part of the cartwheel family, i.e. type 3; think a more conventional cartwheel, add an outer circle and radial grenetis, then bring the grenetis in so that it occupies a substantial part of the field. The end-result is almost like a ship's wheel. A perfectly reasonable artistic development of a basic type; or alternatively, the numismatic equivalent of "more than one way to skin a cat".

Fig.2 is enigmatic, but I favour a large bird, probably a goose; however, the tail isn't 100% convincing, and Tony thought he could see people. Maybe neither is correct; that is the beauty or non-beauty of these pieces, depending how you look at it. There is a star, centre top, which, whilst maybe meaningless, is probably a crude rendering of the sun.

Fig.3 is in much nicer condition, and a stylistically-interesting rendering. It is an exotic five-petal, type 1, in which the five curves which form the petals have each been shoved over a little so that they create a lot more overlap. For more of the same, see the article on "Sophistication of the Stock Design" in LTT_86. Fig.4 is a fairly poor specimen of a running horse but I have thrown it in because of the likeness to Iron Age silver, a series in which slender running horses like this one were a much beloved theme.

The initial reaction to Fig.5 is that it is a type 4 trident and if so a good sturdy one; you could imagine ramming it in to a bale of hay. However, there is no shaft to this pitchfork and, given that there is also a slight line top right, I am wondering whether a shield is intended, with top left having slightly gone off the edge of the flan. Degenerate design, probably later 18th cent than some of the others.

The obverse of Fig.6 was too poor to display, but it looked like there was a date on it, the second digit being a 7. That would make sense, since weight, style and diameter all hint at early 18th cent. There are articles on heart pieces in LTT_48 and LTT_65, but no consistent pattern has yet emerged as to what the specific reason was for the frequent selecting of such a choice of subject on several different token series. Hearts appear on love tokens, occasionally on CTs, and certainly on commercial tokens as well, both lead and main 17th cent series, despite the heart being only occasional as a shop sign. The scalloped edge decoration of Fig.6 is slightly unusual, and again hints at the same period of sophistication as mentioned when discussing Fig.3.

Fig.7 is a seal. A very elaborate shield; this level of detail very occasionally seen on main series {Williamson} 17th cent tokens, but not often. Much more common on coins. I am not an expert on heraldry, but I think it is a standard 17th cent British shield, with the first and fourth quarters themselves quartered.



17th Century Seals from last November: Some Answers!



A big thank you to reader Paul Cannon, who has kindly provided some detailed notes on nearly all the 17th cent pieces shown on the front page of last November's LTT_107. I have shown the items again above, retaining the original numbers, so no Fig.1 or 2 this time, we start at Fig.3. Before we start, Paul makes use of extensive references to two works by the late Geoff Egan, who was the foremost authority on this subject:

- ◇ “Provenanced Lead Cloth Seals “. This was submitted by Geoff for his PhD thesis in 1987, referred to below as **Egan Thesis**.
- ◇ “Lead Cloth Seals and Related Items in the British Museum” {British Museum Occasional Paper 93, pub.1994/95}, referred to below as **Egan BM Catalogue**.

Please note that the thesis is available free on-line at <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1349956/> The catalogue has been mentioned in LTT several times before and is already in the LTT bibliography. The thesis will be in the next edition, and my thanks to Paul for making me aware of its existence. Here are his notes:

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I think a lot are definitely cloth seals. Most are from ‘four-part cloth seals’, so called because they are made up of four discs. When these break apart, whether intentionally or by the action of corrosion in the ground, the two inner discs (numbers 2,3) can appear to be uniface lead tokens. For a discussion of this, see http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=545.

3. + : BERKS : around TD

This Berkshire alnage seal contains the initials of the unidentified alnager ‘TD’, 17th century. For a parallel, see Egan Thesis, p59.

4. CAR / SAY / 1667

This seal relates to a type of cloth here referred to as carsay i.e. kersey. Egan BM Catalogue, no.199 gives the following, "A distinct, late seventeenth-century series of seals gives the name of a kind of textile ... carsay - i.e. kersey. Seals in this series have a date in the 1660s to the early 1680s. Kersies were a common kind of cheap, woollen cloth widely produced in England, notably in Devon, Hampshire and Yorkshire." For a parallel, see http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=4729

5. Heraldic lion above 88

This is one disc from a very large series of post-Restoration four-part seals which incorporate monarchs' heads. There is a great range of heraldic devices used along with the subsidy rates in pence. I think I can just make out the 1 of ‘1½’ which is no doubt above the lion. This is one of a particular subseries all apparently dated (16)88. An example is recorded in Egan BM Catalogue, no. 36.

6. & 15. BVCKS.OX[-----] around WH

I presume both these are the same ‘seal’. It is unusual to have the names of two counties on the same cloth seal though the same person often controlled the alnage for more than one county/area. I know

of no parallel to these. I am not sure they are cloth seals.

7. Three Lions Passant Guardant

These heraldic lions are placed within a rope border and were the old arms of England. A very wide range of heraldic devices were used on cloth seals and I am fairly certain this is a 17th century example but I can't find a parallel to the design. It seems to be from a lozenge shaped cloth seal.

8. EXON around PW (WP)

This cloth seal relates to Exeter in Devon. The initials, which may represent WP or PW are those of the alnager at the time. Square/lozenge shaped. Many examples are known; for example, see Egan Thesis pp 72-74 and http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=5034 . The same initials/monogram are known for several counties.

9. + COM YORKS around TG

I am sure this is a cloth seal relating to the county of Yorkshire. The initials 'TG' are no doubt those of the alnager at the time. Several similar examples are known if not with these initials, e.g. see <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/552813>

10. COM . SVSEX around BWG

This is most likely a cloth seal for the county of Sussex. Few examples are known for the county. I can't find a parallel though with these initials.

11. DORSE[T ---] around crowned double rose

There is little doubt that this is a cloth seal relating to the county of Dorset. Again, this is a county for which few seals are recorded. The crowned rose is not uncommon on cloth seals.

12. *GLO[ST]ER 1668 around IIII above R.N

One of a series of dated cloth seals for Gloucester (Gloucestershire) containing Roman numerals and the alnager's initials RN. Examples are known with RN and III; IIII & VI which is thought to be the duty paid in pence. Stuart Elton has identified the initials as probably being those of Sir Richard Napper who was 'farmer of the said aulnage in the county of Gloucester and Bristoll' by the 1650s. For other examples see http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=21411, Egan Thesis p.122, and http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=12384

13. S.BOTOLPHS around WH

{Ed: This is a communion token, but not in the usual Scottish sense. Since LTT_107 I have also been researching this one myself, so I will combine Paul's findings with mine overleaf}.

14. Design on this is clearly based on a cross with a pair of initials in centre, possibly a P or R and another letter with ?single letters in the quarters. My hunch is that its not a cloth seal.

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A big thank-you also to Stuart Elton's excellent www.bagseals.org site, mention of which has appeared in LTT a number of times before, and which has provided a number of the examples which Paul has quoted above. I recommend you to give it a good browse from time to time.

LATE NEWS: Since writing the above, reader Stuart Adams has found this very fine specimen of an Essex county seal on the right. It is approximately 10mm square, but I have magnified it so that you can enjoy it. The date, 1614, is rather earlier than most of those overleaf, which tend on the whole to be mid and late-mid 17th cent. Stuart is the author of "The Essex Collection", an excellent book on the tokens, tallies and medallions of his native county; so, if you know any more about this one, or have any other Essex pieces of interest, he is on stuartjadams2015@gmail.com and would be very interested to hear from you. If they are lead pieces, please copy us in!



16th-17th London Communion Tokens

Following on from the previous article, Paul and I are both pretty certain that LTT_107, page 1, Fig.13 {shown right} is a communion token; however, not in a way that has been previously spoken about here in connection with the Scottish churches. The Scottish issues are predominantly concerned with various aspects of social control and the practical on-the-day aspects of administration, whereas the English ones of this early period seem to be targetted more at using paid entrance to communion as a revenue-maker to finance the church and its activities. This is discussed in detail on an excellent website at <http://tokenbooks.lma.cityoflondon.gov.uk/manual/introduction.php#iv>, which provides a fascinating study of early CT usage in certain London churches, based on original records.



Paul has spoken to one of the above website's authors and learned that there were four St.Botolphs in the City of London, namely at Aldgate, Aldersgate, Billingsgate and Bishopsgate; of course there are other St Botolphs across the country as well. WH was probably the initials of either the minister of the time {most likely} or the authorising parish officer {less likely}. From the Oxford University alumni book {<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/alumni-oxon/1500-1714/pp748-784>}, accessed via British History Online, I learnt of the existence of one William Hutchinson, rector of St.Botolph Bishopsgate from 1584 to 1590, whom I would imagine is our man.

One can but wonder how many others churches there were which functioned similarly. After the Reformation most lead tokens were commercial, but BNJ54 lists {as minor type Qb} a group of eleven Elizabethan tokens which are clearly ecclesiastical. Fig.2, with a monogram reading "St.Thomas", is one of them {ref. BNJ54 no. Q.15}. It is uni-face. Fig.3, found on the north bank of the Thames in the Blackfriars-to-Southwark area, is an unlisted piece which probably falls into the same category. The wineglass hints first at a tavern token, until one sees the small upright altar cross in the background. The reverse is curious; as faint as the obverse is bold, and hence too poor to photograph, it hints at an off-centre cross, possibly crossed staves with a couple of vague initials, and a conjectural V, followed by a definite C, in two of the angles. The V could be a heart; heart-C meaning "love Christ"? Alternatively, perhaps that is all too fanciful and ?C is merely a merchant whose piece conveniently provided a flan for restriking. Undertypes are not unknown on lead tokens.



The BNJ54-Qb pieces have little in common with each other apart from a tendency to have one or other of the obvious pictorial depictions. Some of them do not even have that, so, given that there are plenty of merchants with the same initials as Jesus Christ, it is not necessarily going to be easy to tell church and commercial pieces apart. Personally my favourite so far is William Hutchison's St.Botolph piece above, which I like for its {presumably coincidental} similarity to 17th cent main series design.

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A Staffordshire Selection

The 18th cent group on the right, again thanks to one of Tony Williams' group, come from somewhere around Stafford; significantly, rather further north and west than most of our reported material. They are clearly by the same maker, and have a certain individuality of style. Any guesses as to what Fig.2 is trying to depict? an irregular geometric, if ever there was one. The crosses on Figs.3-4 look as if they have been superimposed, but it must mean just a deeper carving of the mould; indeed, Fig.4 suggests a conventional cross, with a floral one at right angles, and then a third, short, stubby one on top of that. Anyone else with multiple examples of a distinctive local style, please write in and let us know.



Communion Token Anecdotes in Books and Newspapers (2)

In the last issue we discussed the reasons why communion tokens {CTs} were sometimes refused to parishioners, and examples of the disputes arising. This month we look at CTs which feature in reported crimes and their associated trials.

BURGLARIES

Church premises were often situated in quite isolated, vulnerable places and were inevitably targeted from time to time by the criminal fraternity. Bags or boxes of CTs were often included amongst the items discovered by the thieves in the course of their searches on these occasion, with mixed results. CTs were usually of little use to them, but if the contents of a bag felt money-like then the burglars would sometimes take the lot without examining it first, as per this example of a burglary in Largo, Fife in Nov 1844, reported in the Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser of 2 May 1845:

“Robert Brown Wilson and John Balsillie, from Kirkton of Largo, in Forfarshire—accused of stealing a ploughshare, with which they broke open the Session House of the Parish of Largo, and from which they stole a wooden box, containing two leather bags, in which were 7s in copper money and 2s in silver money; as also five linen bags, containing three hundred and ninety-eight communion tokens. They both pleaded guilty of the first and received sentence of imprisonment in Cupar Gaol for six months.”

Concerning the burglary of the session-house overnight at Barony, Glasgow, on 17/18 Nov 1860, the Newcastle Courant of 23 Nov reports :

“Between Saturday night and Sunday morning, the Barony Church (Rev. Dr. Norman M'Leod's) Glasgow, was broken into by thieves. They next entered the Minister's room, in the session-house, from which they abstracted 2000 communion tokens, a bottle and a half of port wine, half a bottle of sherry wine, half a bottle of brandy, half a bottle of whisky, a small looking-glass, one or two brushes, and some other miscellaneous articles, including a few base copper coins.”

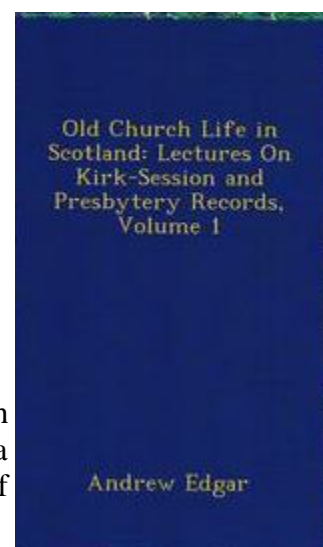
...to which a similar report in the Fife Herald adds:

“...and some wine, towels, brushes, &c. No books, however, were taken away.”

All of which throws interesting light on various people's sense of priorities and values. What was the church doing with such a range of beverages anyway? it certainly wasn't with the aim of offering parishioners a choice of tipples on Sunday. Leaving crime for a minute, Andrew Edgar's "Church Life in Scotland", published in 1885, quotes the beadle's communion expenses at St.Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, in 1687:

“To the Kirk, 9 pynts wyne and 2 pynts ale, - - £8 6 0
 Mr. Hepburn (Minister), 4 pynts wyne, - - 3 12 0
 John Wishart (Trecantor), 2 pynts wyne, - - 1 16 0
 Elders and Deacons, 4 pynts wyne, - - - 3 12 0
 William Byers (Beadle), 2 pynts wyne, - - 0 18 0
 The Officers, 3 pynts wyne, - - - - 2 14 0
 The Baxter, 1 chopin wyne, 2 pynts ale, - - 0 13 0
 Ane pynt of ale to the man yt drew ye wyne, - 0 2 0”

A Scotch pint is nigh on three imperial pints, and a chopin is half a Scotch pint, so in modern money that is 88½ pints, most of it wine. That is quite a lot of booze, folks. OK, I know that St.Cuthberts was one of the largest of the big city churches, but.... Let us hope it was for more than one service.



Back to crime, the Barony thieves obviously made off with their stash and looked at it later. Two thousand metal tokens have quite a considerable weight, so imagine the miscreants' dismay when, having struggled home with them, they found that the bag did not contain coin of the realm after all. As is also expressed in this report by the Aberdeen Journal of 24 November 1847 concerning a recent church burglary at Inverness:



“On Monday week, before daylight, the session-house of the North Church, Inverness, was forcibly entered by a thief or thieves, in search of the money collected on the previous day. The prize was found, and the parties at once decamped. The bag was weighty; and no doubt the spoilers, oppressed with its weight, as they carried it off, rejoiced in the anticipation of beholding the coin. We can picture them cutting the strings of the bag and pouring the whole shoal of shining coins before them upon the table; but, alas! they had only carried off 300 pewter sacramental tokens!”

If the CT box or bag was examined before being carried off, there was a good chance that the thieves would write the contents off as being useless, in which case they would be left behind; as happened at Edinburgh St.Cuthberts, when it was burgled on the night of 28-29 August 1887:

“A box containing a quantity of Communion 'tokens was pulled out to the middle of the floor, doubtless in the hope that the box contained money, but in this the thieves got a disappointment.”



One career criminal, Alexander McGregor, specialised in burgling churches and manses; there are a number of reports of his activities c.1885-86, and again around 1893. The following report in the Dundee Courier of 26 July 1893 relating to recent burglaries at Dunning and Amulree, and an attempt at Path of Condie, neatly sums up the nature of his activities:

“Some seven years ago M'Gregor was apprehended on a charge of church-breaking at Ladybank, Fife. Numerous churches, session houses, etc. were broken into about that time, and he was ultimately sentenced to several years' imprisonment. After being committed to prison the church-breakings ceased, and there seems to be little doubt that he is the manse-breaker who has been moving about recently in various parts of the county. On Friday forenoon a bag with a quantity of church Communion tokens in was found in Garvock Wood and handed over to the police.”

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PICKPOCKETING

Ladies often carried their CTs in their purses along with their money, in consequence of which isolated specimens were often among the items recovered by the police when apprehending pickpockets. CTs were often oval or rectangular in shape, which lowered their capacity for being passed off as money, and hence reduced their desirableness to a thief. However, in the 1850s the well-known London manufacturer W.J.Taylor was stupid enough to make a few churches some silver and silver-plated CTs which were the exact size of the newly-introduced florin. This was asking for trouble, of the nature reported in Reynolds' Newspaper on 1 February 1857:



“On Monday, a young woman with a child at her breast, who gave the name of Franciska Weszniska, and said she was a native of Warsaw, was charged with stealing a purse, containing some silver and a "communion token," during the service at Dr. Cumming's chapel on Sunday morning. From the statement of the complainant, a married lady named Cole, it appeared that the prisoner entered the pew in which she was sitting, and took a seat close by her side. Some time afterwards, on feeling in her pocket for her purse, in order to take out the token (which resembled a florin somewhat in appearance, and was usually given to communicants), complainant discovered that it had been stolen.”

{to be continued}