

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](mailto:dmpowell@waitrose.com) or [david@powell18041.freemove.co.uk](mailto: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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

## From Blackfriars to Southwark: a 17th Century Selection

The Thames never ceases to provide attractive tokens, both in terms of subject matter and consistency, and this month we feature a selection which were reputedly all found along the north bank in the short stretch between Blackfriars and Southwark bridges. They are consistent in terms of date, too, with nearly all of them belonging to the early or mid-17th century. One or two of them may just be from the end of the 16th. As pieces of that age are nearly all fairly small, I am going to magnify them 3:2.

The star of the show in terms of design is Fig.1, a rare example of a mid-17th cent lead token in full main series style; i.e. with a full central depiction, and further inscription around the edge of each side. They are rare because lead is not a good material on which to accommodate such profusion of detail, however, and when attempted the confusion is usually such that the normal, simpler pieces below are much easier on the eye. Anyway, let us have a go and see what we can make out:



**OBVERSE:** Dolphin or crescent in centre with what looks like SS below, but which on higher magnification turns out to be a clear 55; a date 1655 being implied, such abbreviation being fairly common on both coins and tokens in the early years of dating. The inscription, largely illegible, seems to start LIBERTA...

**REVERSE:** Tree, presumably an oak, hinting at Royalist sentiments, with issuer's initials ES flanking; around the edge an inscription, again partly missing, which appears to end .....HILARE

The inscription is almost certainly in Latin and a political sentiment, rather than any statement of the issuer's name or trade; although from the main series tokens, we know that this does not necessarily debar it from having any commercial intent. It may have just been pure political canvassing, but more likely the piece was dual purpose, and in my opinion the presence of issuer's initials supports that.



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The smallest pieces of this series are by and large the earliest. Fig.2, with issuer's initials DP on the other side which are too poor to show, depicts what looks like a shell but may be a hand, indicating that DP was a glover; at 11mm, it ought to be Elizabethan. Fig.3 is one of the only three uniface pieces in the group, and is also ambiguous; what is most probably an elaborate W but could also be a pair of inverted pyramids, although why one should depict pyramids I cannot imagine. On the basis of probability, I show it the way up I do. Figs 4-5 are odd pieces, crudely executed at a time when the quality of London lead was at its height. Fig.4's obverse has an attempt at a head so vague that it is little more than a large ringed pellet attached by a line {neck} to the outer circle, all with a pseudo-inscription around; thus crudely hinting at mid-17th cent style in design, and late 16th cent in size. The

reverse is at least recognisable as being armorial, i.e. classification type 16. Fig.5, by contrast, is much more modern in style; simple, clear, unusually delicate and delightfully down to earth. One can imagine its depictions, on a larger flan, in the mid-18th cent, but no, it is the size of 150 years earlier. Also, unusually for a central London piece of the time, it doesn't have any initials. Perhaps it is an incomer from elsewhere, with the fish, rare at any stage in lead token history, hinting at the trade with which it was connected.



Of the next group, Fig.6 at 12mm, is still small enough that it may just qualify for the 16th cent rather than the 17th. Bell founders are rare, although not unknown, there still being one in Whitechapel today; so, the odds favour this bell being a shop or pub sign. Fig.7, scarcely larger, depicts what look like light-bulbs but are probably the equivalent of the period; namely candles, indicating that TK was a chandler. Notice in passing the neat raised edge of Fig.7, and look at the slight differences in the style of the lettering; there are features like this which recur at this date, and which may be clues to differentiation between various unknown manufacturers. Or, alternatively, a set of red herrings designed to confuse us!

Merchant marks such as that shown on Fig.8 were the identifying abbreviation of choice before the use of initials came into fashion, but there is considerable chronological overlap and the presence of such a mark must not necessarily be taken to indicate that the piece is older. Their heyday was the 15th and 16th centuries but they were used well into the late 17th, London and Colchester being particularly noticeable for late examples. The size is early 17th cent, and that is an early date for such portraiture as appears on the reverse. It could date from anywhere up until about 1665.

Fig.9 is one of the few pieces which has no pictorial depiction, but its simplicity does not necessarily argue that it is older. The idea of splitting an initial triad so that the surname of the issuer is represented on one side and he and his wife's forenames on the other is essentially a 16th practice, forced by the smallness of the prevailing flans, but it did not necessarily cease when they got larger. There are quite a large number of main series 17th cent tokens which display nothing other than text and initials, so it is no great surprise to see examples here. The old barred A from Lombardic days was a matter of preference; it was probably in the minority by this time, but it survived occasionally until late in the century.

The reverse of Fig.10 looks like a pair of golf clubs but in the 17th cent a pair of pipes, indicating a tobacconist or an inn is indicated. The Isle of Man may have mischievously introduced golf as a subject on its 5p in the 1990s because coins of that size were commonly used as golf markers, but in 17th cent London, no! Figs.11-12 are the other two uniface pieces in the group, and it may be remarked that all three have very smooth backs; whether the effect of manufacture, or the Thames over time, one can conjecture. The crossbar of the H comes out better in the photo than when one has the piece in the hand; superficially, a faint crossbar reduces IH to the appearance of three tobacco rolls, which would be a more interesting reverse. Fig.12, a plant; a slightly odd choice for a piece of London origins?





The triad is generally thought of as a 17th cent creation, but in Fig.13 we have it on a 12mm piece; so, very early in the 1600s. The reverse, which looks like a crowned animal head at first glance, is probably armorial. I won't display my ornithological ignorance by attempting to identify the very pleasant little creature walking left in Fig.14, but take it that he is his issuer's choice of shop sign. The initials on Fig.15 display its visibly cruder artwork when contrasted with its predecessor, but the effect on the lively little dog on its reverse is delightful.

The use of armorial types in the main Williamson series of 17th cent tokens is very frequent, and can be found on the lead of the day; but I suspect only just before, in the 1640s, when flan sizes were starting to increase. I have seen a number of examples, all of which use the space above the top of the shield for either initials or date; once one has committed to the idea of a shield, there is not space for a lot else. Fig.17 is the once piece in the set which actually depicts a date, 1648, ; coincidentally, just about the year which I would expect to have appeared on Fig.16 had it been dated rather than initialled. Back to Fig.17, dates rendered in 2x2 square format from this era have been seen once or twice before, and presumably indicate one of the design choices offered by a particular maker. The range is approximately 1647-1660, all of which have been seen or are on record.

Fig.18, somewhat worn, depicts the sun in splendour, i.e. type 26. Selected no doubt as a shop sign by its issuer, an additional advantage if rendered with a strong central hub as this one is that, if inverted, the piece is slightly raised, enabling one to pick it up off the table or, if one is so minded, spin it round, more easily.

Fig.19, showing a plump wine flagon, is clearly a tavern piece; as possibly also the somewhat oxidised Fig.20, if the torpedo like object is a tobacco roll. It may well be the sugar-loaf much beloved as a depiction by grocers, although if so it is rather thinner than normal. Fig.21's reverse is possibly a King's head, issued by an establishment of that name, although the topmost part of the picture is not obviously a crown. Other type of heads are known: Quakers, for example, or Saracens {shop sign}, but it is not obviously either of those. Worth remarking in passing, by the way, that from what is known of token issuers' backgrounds, Quakers have a considerably higher representation than might be expected.



Finally, Fig.22, the one piece in this group with retrospective initials. It is also one of the largest, and I suspect that it might be just a little later than the others; 1650-60 at the earliest, and possibly even into the post-Williamson era of the late 17th cent.



## Communion Token Anecdotes in Books and Newspapers (3)

In the first article of this series we discussed the reasons why communion tokens {CTs} were sometimes refused to parishioners, and examples of the disputes arising. Last month we looked at incidences of burglary and other theft involving CTs. These are the two most frequently occurring subjects relating to CTs in the media, and this time I will aim to tidy up the sundries.

### LOSSES DUE TO FIRE

Church buildings were liable to accident just like anywhere else, and where fire occurred it is likely that most of the current CT issue would be lost, leaving it represented only by stray losses and thereby rendering the piece quite rare. Lead, being one of the least durable metals, would be amongst the first casualties. One such loss, recorded by the Dundee Courier on 11 May 1898, occurred at Kirriemuir:

“Yesterday morning an alarming outbreak of fire occurred in Kirriemuir Bank Street United Presbyterian Church. A little after nine o'clock smoke was seen issuing from the roof of the building, and so dense were the volumes of smoke in the interior that it was with considerable difficulty that the immediate seat of the fire could be discovered. All the furnishings were destroyed, and the Communion plate and church tokens wholly melted.”

### EXPRESSIONS OF CONTEMPORARY NUMISMATIC INTEREST

During the closing decades, more and more churches abandoned the tokens system and started issuing invitations by card. Collecting was probably frowned on whilst CTs were in widespread active use, except possibly by a few clergy on the quiet, but once they started going out of circulation in quantity it became more acceptable to preserve past memories by doing it. The Aberdeen Journal of 15 August 1894 records:

“The use of these tokens has now almost entirely if not wholly disappeared. They are rarely to be met with, except in the hands of collectors. A hobby for token collecting has become an amiable craze, and is quite as interesting as the collection of stamps or coins.”

Dealers were certainly stocking them by the 1890s. This report of a theft from a dealer's premises at Abercrombie Place, Aberdeen in July 1898 records his stolen items:

- ⇒ Two cash boxes
- ⇒ 15 gold coins
- ⇒ 117 silver coins
- ⇒ 308 copper coins
- ⇒ 87 church tokens
- ⇒ A number of articles of jewellery

By 1901-03, also, talks were being given and articles written for CT hobbyists. Moreover, CTs were even being forged for collectors! The most frequent targets of such activity was the popular 1678 Brechin piece, concerning which the Dundee Courier of 4 Sept 1903 writes:

“...the fast getting rare Brechin Communion token. They are now mostly in the hands of collectors - Unfortunately there are several clever imitations in circulation and collectors would require to be very careful in seeing they are not imposed upon. The writer had the privilege of seeing two of these fictitious specimens, and so nicely are they produced in every detail that it is only the expert that could discover the difference from the genuine one.”

The piece today is one of the commoner of the earliest dated communion tokens, and there are certainly several varieties of it. At this distance in time it may be difficult to tell them apart, but one may pre-



sume that probably at least one of these is an original and at least one a copy. Their diameters are around 22-24mm, making them larger than most CTs of their day, and almost coin-like in the hand; which may account for why they have become regarded as one of the landmark pieces of the series.

### ADVERTISING BY MANUFACTURERS

One would not expect to see any advertising way back in the days when CTs were mainly pure lead, of course, but surprisingly there is also very little by the three major manufacturers even when we get to the 19th cent white metal issues. These three are Alexander Kirkwood of Edinburgh, David Crawford of Glasgow and David Cunninghame of Glasgow; between them, they account for all but a handful of the CT manufacture from the mid-19th cent onwards.

They do all appear in trade directories, but without any mention of CTs that I have found to date.; mainly bare name and business address entries. In the papers, there are mentions of them in relationship to specific incidents, e.g. the report in the Edinburgh Evening News about the fire at Kirkwood's premises on 17 Sept 1881, and the rather more serious one back in 1824 at the family premises before Alexander set up on his own account. There are also reports of Kirkwood suing an apprentice for breach of contract {1892}, advertising for staff {1898}, and even being appointed an officer of the Caledonian Curling Club {1862}; but nowhere, to date, have I seen him, or Crawford, advertising to the public.

Herewith one Cunninghame advert, on the right, but not for CTs.

Worth noting, however, is the advert below from the Glasgow Herald of 12 April 1859 below, indicating clearly that there was a retail market in CTs. We think of 19th cent token issuers going directly to the manufacturers for their supplies, but David Robertson is clearly a middleman. From the church's point of view it makes sense: get all your requirements in one place, and let Mr. Robertson have the hassle of writing round and putting the order together. A lengthy advert in the Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser of 18 July 1851 mentions three other similar church stationers: Frederick Shaw, Dundee; James & Son, Perth; Paton & Ritchie, Edinburgh. - however, it implies that Robertson is the market leader, and does not say whether the others offer similar services. Interesting to observe, also, that communion cards, destined ultimately to replace CTs, were in use by 1859.



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