

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

The Tinny Look, alias the Queenhithe Phenomenon



I first photographed Figs.1-5,10,11 for LTT several years ago but have never previously shown them; for the very simple reason that, although their designs are typical enough of those normally encountered on crude lead, they looked tinny. There didn't seem to be enough of them to suggest another series of any substance; just that, every now and then, someone was using a different metal and method of manufacture but was choosing for some reason to use the same designs.

Fig.6, kindly contributed by reader Dean Castle, is more of the same; as also Figs.7-9, which are more of the Blackfriars-to-Southwark group discussed in the last issue. Dean's piece came roughly from the same stretch of the Thames but across the river. All nine bar the last are uniface, with reverses often very smooth.



Not being a metallurgist, of having any access to people or facilities to analyse them, I merely dismissed them as an interesting sideline, until one day a short while ago when the owner of last month's batch, to whom many thanks for the observation, remarked that there was a particular goldy-coloured patina which was peculiarly local to a very small area of the North Bank around Queenshithe. Three and a half of his group of 28 pieces exhibited it, namely Figs.7-9 plus one more, to poor to illustrate, which was adversely stained across half of each side. These pieces were no less lead than the others, he reckoned; just that the particular soil or sediment in which they were lying was of a different chemical construction to the resting place of the others.

I would welcome any further observations or photographs, which support this theory {or otherwise}, from those of you whose knowledge of Thames finds and findspots is better than mine. For example, how wide is the date range of such pieces? Most of the above pieces are c.1550-1750; Figs.10-11 might just be earlier.



It is worth remarking, also, that main series 17th cent tokens come out of the Thames with very light colouration, and in some quantity {Figs.12-18}; and that whilst very light pieces are also found in other parts of the country, their frequency does seem to be much greater amongst Thames finds. I am not sure whether the reason is the same as for lead. Again, your opinions and experiences, please!

What is White Metal?

There seem to be two main metallic evolutions running parallel in the history of tokens:

- ◇ The harder metals: Copper to bronze, with brass always running alongside.
- ◇ The softer metals: Lead, to pewter, to white metal, to aluminium.

Some of these are pure metals in their own rights, but others are alloys. The terms brass and pewter are in common use by the population at large, but “white metal” is not. Without a numismatic interest, you might not have heard of it; yet it was used extensively for communion tokens {CTs} and medals, not to mention a number of advertising pieces and other tokens as well. So, what is it?



A chronological sequence of Communion tokens in various metals:
Pure lead {Fig.1}, pewter {Figs.2,3}, white metal {Fig.4}, aluminium {Fig.5}

My thanks therefore to Tony Gilbert and his brother Stewart, one an LTT regular and the other a metallurgy PhD, for talking about it and putting together the following explanation:

The so called “White Metal” for coin and medal applications will have been a very complex metallurgical alloy of:-

- ◇ lead or tin (cheap metals) as the major metallic component; say, up to 75-80% .
- ◇ 10-15% of antimony to impart hardness.
- ◇ Maybe a little cadmium, bismuth and zinc.
- ◇ copper, also for hardness, but additionally to impart some useful anti-corrosion and anti-tarnish properties.

Some of the lesser metallic components are actually impurities in the extracted ore, which are difficult or expensive to remove; in consequence of which. they are allowed to remain in the alloy and are not eliminated by the refining process.

Furthermore, pure lead and tin naturally form oxides on their surfaces with time, and are relatively soft, especially lead. The alternative for a piece of similar appearance being Silver, any means to make these relatively cheap alloys harder and more tarnish resistant is useful.

Most important however for medals is the ability :

- ◇ to cast the alloy easily with minimum product porosity.
- ◇ to cast at a relatively low temperature, perhaps 230 to 300 deg C
- ◇ to have good molten metal fluidity.

Low temperature casting results in less porosity in the product.

As a result a great number of “white metal” alloy compositions were invented and used, without knowledge of their precise alloy and impurity content. If the melt produced a good product, then great, but for sure, each melting pot production would have had a slightly different alloy composition, and by chance, some production runs may well have produced just the right chemical composition to be bright, shiny and yet remain corrosion / tarnish resistant with time.

{continued overleaf}

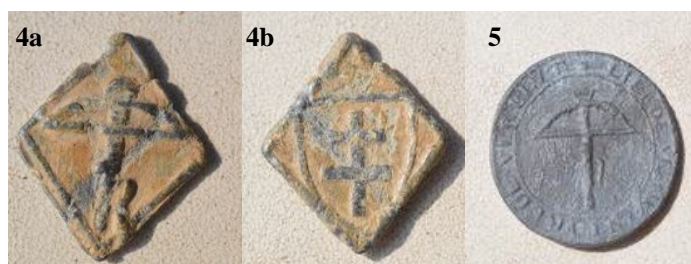
Summarising, there is no standard composition of white metal, but just a rough idea of what cocktail of metals works well together from experience; and, providing the maker does not stray too far from the norm, a decent product is likely to result. We have already seen in LTT_85, page 2 {Sept 2012} that there was an even wider variance in the lead and tin constitution of pewter CTs, and no doubt the precise constitution of brass was often determined by the nature of available scrap with which to make it; so, no surprise if there was not a rigid standard, although from the general appearance of white metal tokens, and the description above, it would seem that there was probably a lot less variance with white metal than with either pewter or brass.

Have a Shot at Guessing what These were Used For

My thanks to Belgian reader Redgy Dewulf for sending in some tokens which depict a category of subject matter not previously seen on these pages {unless they have got through as anchors}; namely, the crossbow. They all come from maritime northern France.



Jacques Labrot, in his book on jetons and méreaux, page 77 {see bibliography for full title}, talks about the pieces of the “arbalestriers” or crossbowmen and shows another very fine example. Redgy, whose French is no doubt far better than mine, says that Labrot regards these as tax pieces, which would certainly be a very good reason for their being. Most recent societies have had goods and commodities which they have deemed appropriate for specific taxation; and also others, of a potentially dangerous nature, for which a measure of control is thought necessary. In either case some proof of payment and/or license to use is necessary, which in modern days usually takes the form of



paper; but in far off times, when paper was rare and people who could read or write even more so, use of a lead token was a reasonable alternative. In other words, for the huntsmen and soldiers of 600 years ago, these could have been the equivalent of a TV licence today.

Redgy sent further crossbow examples other than those shown, so that I have now seen about 13 or 14 specimens in all, and whilst not all are photogenic, one thing stands out: apart from one five petal {Fig.1} and two uniface pieces {Figs.5-6}, all the other have armorial reverses.



Rowland Parker, in his excellent and very readable “Men of Dunwich” {1980}, based on research of early documentary sources, includes a 14th cent inventory of goods from a religious house in the vicinity. Dunwich was in Suffolk, at least until it fell into the sea, and Parker comments by putting in italics certain articles which it seems surprising or incongruous to find in a religious community. Amongst them: “*One crossbow, value 8d*”. So, don’t necessarily assume that the above pieces are secular.

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Redgy has sent in some other {mostly} late mediaeval material also, from Belgium and northern France, which I will illustrate on the next page. Some of them are stylistically fairly near British items of the same period, others are very definitely not; I will let you compare. As they come from

regimes and places with which most readers are not familiar I will spare you the fine detail of some of Redgy's notes and concentrate on the visual aspect, but if anyone is interested in the minutiae please ask. For a start, Fig.7: "Beware Paschal Lamb on Road".



Fig.8 is a delightful, chirpy little fellow of a bird with reverse to match; from a very ordinary cross and pellets an engraver has, by filling opposite pellets in and leaving the other two annular, contrived to make it look as if the piece is winking at you. Maybe it is just a question of uneven wear, but it is very effective. Fig.9 is another bird, clearly by the same manufac-



turer as Fig.8; it is good to pick up two pieces of this age and know from the style that they have a common source. Whether Fig.10 is by the same hand, I am not sure; I suspect it may be. It depicts a king's head and, whilst still somewhat stylised, one feels that a good attempt has been made. Fig.11b depicts what looks like a coffin with flames coming up, and a long cross sticking up through the middle, as per the paschal lamb of Fig.7 above; St.Lawrence, for example, was known to have been roasted to death on a gridiron. The issuer was probably a religious house whose dedicated saint died in such a manner. The reverse is rather poor; a hint of a cross made out of four spiked and gridded shields, which may just possibly be a head, two outstretched arms and a body.



Putting holes in pieces is another way of creating the illusion of a funny face {Fig.12}, although if you bore too many the original subject matter loses its interest. Button? Four deniers? A plant with main stem and two leaves just about appears through the damage. Lion rampant {Fig.13} is a fairly popular device throughout Europe, but Figs.14-15 both have some individuality. The first of these is a type 4/34 hybrid; I am not sure that I have seen spear with its head above a diameter like this before, and a pleasantly realistic spear it is too, looking sharp and ready for use. Fig.15 is how to get humour out of the type 4 lis/trident family; do you see a spearhead, or a pair of eyes and a dunce's cap above?



Redgy's selection included a number of anchors, albeit most of them not significantly different from their British counterparts; Figs.16-17 were the best. Amongst them was the very ordinary Fig.18; question, making allowance for possible wear lower left, is this (i) an L, (ii) a T, (iii) an anchor or (iv) a pick? Strange how even the most supposedly simple pieces can pose ambiguities! Likewise, Fig.19's arrangement of outwardly facing semi-circles may or may not be intended to be a cross.

Finally, Fig.20, a crude lead which apes the ship design, always popular, of mediaeval gold coinage. Most of us are never going to get any of the latter, so best settle for one in lead!

Revisiting the Doit/Duit: Part 1, Usage in Scotland

Way back in LTT_13/14 {Apr/May 2006} we mentioned as contemporary with lead coinage the use in Britain of Dutch duits and Russian denga, both copper coins of the 18th cent commonly found in this country by metal detectorists, especially in eastern parts. Conveniently fitting in with our present consideration of Scottish bakers' tokens and other items in the press, herewith these very interesting few paragraphs from the Caledonian Mercury of 25 November 1790:

“For some years a number of what are called doits, a copper coin current in Shetland only for one-eighth of a penny, have been brought into Shetland by the Dutch herring fishers who resort at Bressay Sound during the summer. There the Dutch barter with the country people and shop-keepers for the inferior sort of their stockings, etc.; and the country people again barter them with the shop-keepers for such trifles as they have occasion for, reserving always as many as is sufficient for the Sunday collections for the poor through the year.

Thus at the end of the year, the whole of these doits centre in the hands of the kirk treasurers and shopkeepers, who lately have found a very profitable outway for them, which is, by sending them to Leith and Edinburgh with the crews of the coasters fuelling from Shetland to Leith, who pass them there for farthings to the grocers, butchers, brewers and bakers. The profits thus made in this little branch are divided betwixt the adventurer and the persons who utter them.

The value of copper in a doit is not quite one-sixteenth part of a penny Stirling; so that, by this little cheat, those who take them in at Leith and Edinburgh, receive one-fourth value of the price of the goods they give in exchange. These doits have been coined in the different provinces of Holland, but are now forbid passing there; so that if the public are not aware, they will be plentifully supplied with doits for farthings in future.

It is supposed that from 30£ - 40£ Sterling value of doits go from Shetland to Leith annually.”



The above is further supported by this snippet from the Shetland Times of 10 December 1887, from an article discussing the etymology of local words:

Danish doit, a bit, and Dutch duit, whence English duit, and German deut are all from the same root, signifying a piece cut off, a small piece, a bit, and next small bit of money. Doits of half a farthing were in use here till about 60 years ago, and often figure in church collections as one, three or seven eighths of a penny.”

This gives us an approximate date for the end of such pieces as being c.1825, which tallies fairly well with the corresponding latest date for lead tokens in other parts of the country.

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Many years after, when all this nefarious activity was long past, the Dundee Evening Telegraph of 12 August 1926 looked back on it in a lengthy article, stimulated by a recently-published parish history. It has a leaning towards the ecclesiastical experience of bad money, but hints strongly enough at its presence in wider society, and its examples are drawn from all over Scotland. Herewith a number of wonderfully informative extracts from it:

“HYPOCRISY IN CHURCH CHARITY. BAD MONEY DROPPED IN THE PLATE OR LADLE. ABERDONIANS WHO TOOK OUT GOOD COINS FOR BASE ONES. SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAPH AND POST. In " The Story of Glenisla," just published, Mr David Grewar shows that what has been described, rather harshly perhaps, as the "widespread hypocrisy in church charity of our pious forefathers", had its exponents even in that secluded parish. If the church collections of bygone days were miserable in quantity they were still worse in quality. A very large proportion of the coin dropped in the plate or in the ladle was found to consist of bad copper money, obsolete or foreign coins, which were only worth their weight in metal. Any coin, in fact, that would not pass muster in the market was supposed be good enough for the plate.

The native money was scarce, and the trade with Holland brought into the hands of traders and merchants a good deal of Dutch money. By Dutch fishermen, several sorts of copper coins got furtive circulation in the community, although they were worthless in business. Most insignificant of all was the doit, the value of which was expressed in the proverbial expression, " Not worth a doit." It was of debased metal.- equal to a Scots penny, or the twelfth part of an English penny.

As showing to what extent the doit bulked in the collections, at Cambuslang in the course of ten years, there was no less than £84 2s 8d Scots of these worthless pieces laid in the plate or ladles, the old session clerk estimating that if each contribution was one penny Scots in the form of a doit, there must have been 20,190 acts of meanness and hypocrisy perpetrated within the parish Church.”

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“So universal was the practice of palming off bad money in the collection that Kirk Session records of these days teem with remonstrances and lamentations on the subject. At Hawick the Session desired the minister to exhort the people the next Lord's Day to forbear to mock God and the poor by casting in doits or any other money that is not current.

In the Glenisla records it is mentioned that the treasurer reported that he has many bad boodles {Scottish 2d, = sixth of a penny English}, which he could get exchanged by giving six of them for a halfpenny, and the Session, considering that they were but dead weight and of no service to the poor, agreed that he should endeavour to get them exchanged. This he did, and got £1 10s for coins which, had they been good, would have been worth £3.

Six years later a loss of £2 14s Scots on account of base money is recorded, while in 1773 another loss of £4 1s is recorded. Latterly these coins were sold by weight, for in 1774 we read: — "13 lbs. 3 oz. of bad copper sold to a founder in Dundee at £1 12s Scots. Special collections seem to have been much favoured as a means of disposal of bad coin.”

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“Every other year there was at Mauchline a sale of bad coppers when the contents of the kirk box were examined. The £49 19s 7d of base money found in the box in 1748 were disposed of at the rate of 7d per Dutch pound and they realised £7 17s 6d. A year or two later the price was raised by a penny a pound, but soon the market saw a glut of doits, and it became difficult, as may be seen from numerous Kirk Session reports, to get smiths to offer a price for them. For

many years the scandal went on unabated. In vain did the Synod of Aberdeen appoint its Moderator to talk with the officers of custom to do what they could to prevent the importation of base coin.”

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“These unworthy offerings were condemned by ecclesiastical courts; but rebukes and threats of ministers were unheeded. Yet the charge of committing pious fraud in dropping bad money in the plate sinks into insignificance before the accusation that country people in Aberdeenshire were in the practice of putting into the plate bad halfpence, and of taking out good ones.

When all efforts to dispose of the bad coppers on the open market had failed, the ministers proceeding to the General Assembly sometimes had a quantity put into their saddle bag or wallet in order to sell them to the shops in Edinburgh.

And should it happen that a parishioner was going over to Holland who had no objection to take a parcel of Dutch doits back to their native country, a store was made and added to his baggage, with directions to buy with the money goods which might be serviceable for the poor.

Careful sessions at other times utilised their worthless coins to buy death-bells to announce funerals or jugs to hold delinquents; but there is a finer irony in the expedient which sent the base money to be melted down to make cups for collecting the poor-money at the sacrament.”

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Whilst the exact exchange rate of the doit is a little open to question in these three widely time-spread articles, indeed from three different centuries, their general tenor is the same. One wonders to what extent the complaining clergy are being over-judgemental; were their parishioners genuinely taking the mick, or did they have little option? The official copper coinage of the day was a mess, and the man in the lane/street was met, depending where he lived, with different proportions of :

- ◇ Genuine coinage, much of it hopelessly worn into oblivion.
- ◇ Forgeries or imitations of the same.
- ◇ 18th cent commercial tokens.
- ◇ Illegally imported small change from abroad.
- ◇ Lead tokens

When a duit appeared in change, was an illiterate farm labourer really meant to be able to distinguish it from the many different designs being poured out by the Birmingham token manufacturers? Surely he would often regard it as just being a new variety of the same?

Well, there is an advantage with lead. You would be much less likely to confuse it with the various other categories, all of which are copper.

Next time we look at records of doit usage in England.

Surrey Mirror - Friday 20 January 1928

FOUND IN FISH A brass token, dated 1701, was found in a whiting by the skipper of a North Sea fishing boat. The whiting must have found the coin at the bottom of the sea in recent times, after it had been rolling about there over since some wreck two centuries ago. The token had no value except as a curiosity. It was never current money. A token was a coin issued a private person or civic authority, and arrangements were made exchange it for goods or current money. Many famous firms paid their workpeople like this, and some of the designs used were quaint.