

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Happy New Year....



Well, chaps, for a lead token enthusiast this is probably about as near Happy New Year as it gets. My thanks to the delighted new owner of the above for kindly letting me have this picture of a late 15th cent BNJ type M mould, or something very soon after it, found on the north bank of the Thames near Blackfriars some ten to twenty years ago. If a genuine first series type M with very fine diagonal shading, the date is probably c.1460-90; if the shading is either coarser, or radial, then maybe a few years later but not a lot. This one looks to be showing early signs of stylistic degeneracy, but not excessively so; hence, I'll guess around 1500.

The notch is presumed to be part of the system whereby this reverse mould was aligned with its other {obverse} half..

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Another Balloon Piece?

My thanks to Marion Talbot for this 25mm piece found in Huntingdonshire, which she thinks might be a hot air balloon {see the earlier example in LTT_98}. Stylistically it does feel 18th cent, maybe late 18th cent, which it would need to be for her to be right. My own first thought that it might be glassware, or a toadstool, but when I showed it to correspondent Colin Brain, who has previously helped to date items depicting glass utensils, his reply was inconclusive:

“My best guess is that the token aims to depict some kind of distilling vessel. The top part is called the alembic and bottom part the cucurbit. I have never seen that shape of alembic before, but the cucurbit looks normal. If so it could well depict glass. I have no real suggestions on date, since cucurbits like this were probably in use for something like 500 years. The alembic may narrow the date range. If I am correct in guessing what it is supposed to be, the alembic shape appears relatively sophisticated and thus perhaps later.”



Readers' Correspondence

Some more contributions this month from Tony Williams' "All Things Lead" group, for which many thanks; however, he informs me that his contacts increasingly come from far and wide, and that a South Yorkshire provenance cannot any longer be assumed. Both sizes and origins are therefore unknown except where stated.

First up, the triangular piece {Fig.1} made from what look like a fragment of something else. An unusual form of reusage, if that is what it actually is, but the quality of the counterstamping is quite good. Two different sets of initials, so possibly the issuers are a business partnership, or a pair of churchwardens. So, possibly a token, although if there was any sign of the two halves having been compressed together, a tag or seal is an option.



Somewhat in the same vein is Fig.2, found in Nottinghamshire woodland. It is of quite good quality, even if you can't recognise what it depicts. The shape is interesting; cuts created by tool damage in antiquity, as opposed to recently, can be quite nice because the cut has had time to patinate and does not therefore appear out of line with the rest of the piece. It could of course be one of Ted Fletcher's beloved shycocks, deliberately made to be stood up for target practice. The design is neatly symmetric and does not obviously make you feel that there is a bit missing.

Whilst on the subject of re-use, Fig.3, from Bentham on the Lancs/Yorks border, appears to be a counterstamped lead token. Multi-stamping of hop tokens on change of issuer occurs in a number of cases in the late 19th cent, with the newcomer marking his initials on his predecessor's pieces, whilst counterstamping of worn-out cartwheel pennies was another popular way of making home-made tokens in the early 19th cent, particularly by cutlers and other metalworkers. It would be interesting to know what the true size of the piece is, for the undertype with its triad of initials is more typical of the 17th cent, maybe implying 15-20mm. The practice of overstriking, however, and the style of doing so are more typical of the 19th cent, and the pieces selected for doing it usually halfpenny coin size or larger because of the amount of space needed to accommodate the message. Maybe this is a reused pay or tool check, issued by a guy called Smith who has succeeded the original owner of the business, to employee no.126.

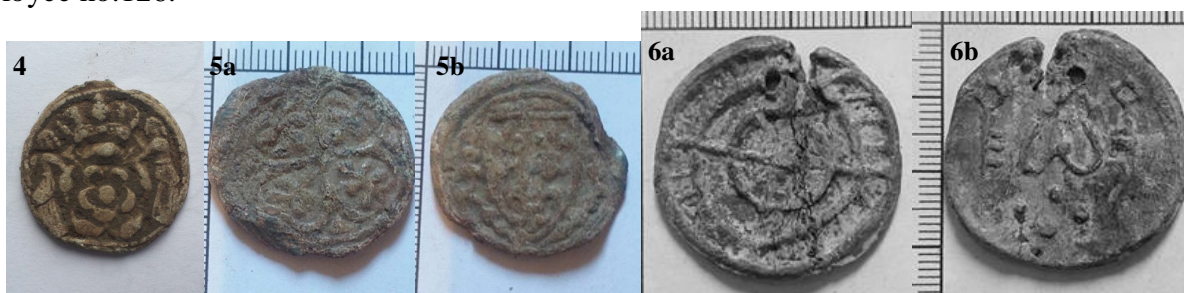


Fig.4, with its standing figures at the sides, is a most unusual variant of the Beata Regina and allied lead counters of the mid-late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period, c.1574-1614; Mitchiner suggests that the crowned rose dates to after 1590. It was found near Strensall, N.Yorks. Also not technically a token, but likewise well worth its place here, is the jeton of Fig.5, which sits well with those shown on the front of last November's LTT_114.

Fig.6 is another of those pieces which, like Fig.3 above, hints at different periods on back and front. The obverse is a standard pseudo-groat design of decidedly degenerative execution, not that I like it any the worse for that, but the size is distinctly 18th cent, as also is the style of the reverse. Keys and hearts both remain enigmatic subjects but, given the damage at 12 o'clock, is it too fanciful to think that they speak of the entrance to married life, and that the object is a pendant for a newly-wed bride? Cheaper than a wedding ring. Hearts and keys appear commonly enough on unholed tokens, of

course, so no absolute guarantee that the piece was made to be jewellery from the off. If a token, the damage could just be an invalidation cut.

A couple more 18th cent pieces before we go on to some earlier, smaller material to finish with. Fig.7 is a very pleasant hybrid with a central ornament, within circle, used in conjunction with the outer part of a standard type 1 six-petal array to produce a sun. The effect produced is almost that of a comic face, although I am not convinced it was intended to be. Perhaps the issuer ran a pub or shop called "The Sun". Moving on to Fig.8, the unusually tall, slender, upright bird highly reminiscent of the peacocks which appear from time to time on Roman pieces commemorating deceased former emperors and empresses, and indeed even occasionally on 17th cent main series tokens. Probably coincidence, but interesting.



Moving on to the smaller pieces now, which I have deliberately magnified 3:2 for increased visibility. Chubby-Chops of Fig.9 is clearly intended to be Henry VIII, even if its manufacturer didn't have quite the artistic skills of Holbein. Be wary, however, of assuming that it is mid-16th cent. Yes, the 15th-16th cents were the heyday of merchant marks, but they still persisted well into the 17th cent and, from the diameter, 14mm, the early 17th cent is indicated. Again, the issuer will have had some premises called the Kings Head, as indeed did many issuers of the mid-17th cent main series tokens.

It is very difficult to definitively identify incuse pieces like Figs.10-11. They nearly always seem to be very light-coloured. The square and rectangular shapes are more indicative of a church communion token or weight than a trade token; although if a church token, as hinted at by the cross, in the English sense {internal administrative tax} rather than the Scottish {moral policing}. I would hazard a guess at 16th and early 17th cent respectively, although stylistic instinct says that Fig.10, at least, could be earlier.

Fig.12 is a standard, well-formed triad-format piece of the early-mid 17th cent, although I haven't seen a harp on the reverse before. It was probably made in London by a central manufacturer but, whilst one may conjecture the possibility of an Irish customer, the Harp was an occasional English pub name. Fig.13 is of the same period, but not quite as well produced, with II presenting an ambiguity as to whether it stands for issuer initials or a value. Lead pieces were most frequently farthings, the item is not of a size to suggest a multiple value, and issuer identity is the first thing which users need to know; so, I favour the initials.

Fig.14, back to life size now, is even less well made. It looks like an inverted crown on the reverse at first glance, until one sees the hook at the top, which might have made the royal head rather sore. The picture is probably therefore a pair of scales, and the issuer a grocer or the like. The piece is typical of the way the mid-17th cent token degenerated artistically after the Williamson period, although this example still looks quite slender. I would fancy that it is c.1700.



Fig.15, although well-defined, is so regularly uninspiring and simplistic that one wonders whether it is even a token. It is very late, end 18th cent, even 19th; could it even be part of some item of equipment? If a token, the politest guess at its depiction is that it could be a tea caddy, as tea dealers' copper checks depict them regularly from the late 18th cent; however, I would imagine that most of the clientèle were too upmarket for lead!



Lead Tokens and The Truck Shop

The Glasgow Herald of 29 October 1858 contains an interesting account in which lead tokens feature as part of the truck system. The plaintiff, Andrew Simpson, had been a stone dresser in the granite quarries of one Alexander Hume of Craræ for about fifteen months and, after being dismissed for reasons unstated, but assumed to relate to a disagreement over truck payments, took the latter to court. The precise nature of the grievance does not concern us here, other than to observe the use of lead tokens and the role they played.

The principle of the truck shop is that a large employer provides convenient shopping facilities for his workforce near to hand covering a whole range of products and services, but the downside is that he usually enjoys a monopoly; which, if he is unscrupulous, he may exploit. There is often no geographically viable alternative, and indeed, in some instances, the employer will have taken steps to make sure that that is the case.

The basic situation in *Simpson v Hume* was explained:

- ◇ “The employer keeps a large store for provisions on the premises, and has also the only inn within seven or eight miles. He pays every three months, but furnishes the men with a variety of lead tokens indicating the value of the work done, on which he advances goods from a store kept by him, and supplies whisky before the pay-day; when, of course, the workmen only receive cash for the value of the balance of tokens produced by them. “

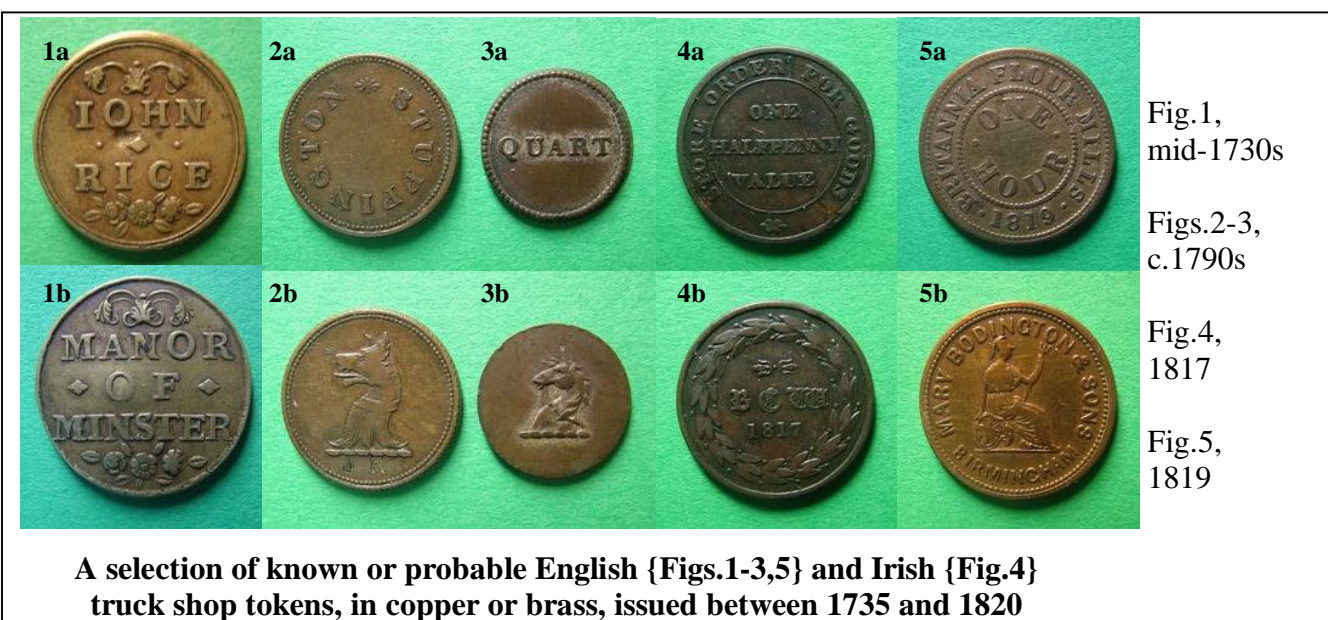
The parties, in arguing over the particulars of one of Simpson’s debts, viewed these tokens as follows:

Employer {defendant}:

- ◇ “The tokens are merely used as "tallies" for the work, and not as coin, The same practice is carried on at Gartsherrie and many other large works around Glasgow, where it could scarcely escape notice if it was wrong. “

Workman {plaintiff}, via an agent:

- ◇ “The tokens are used by the employer not merely as "tallies”, but to save the latter the necessity of keeping separate accounts against the workmen for the goods and whisky advanced by him on credit. The object of the Truck Act is to prevent workmen being defrauded by their masters keeping stores and supplying them with provisions, possibly of an inferior quality and at higher prices; and by the provisions of this Act, the workman is entitled to receive and claim full payment for the work done by him in the current coin of the realm. Whether the tokens or " tallies" can be produced or not, he is entitled to prove, by the defender's books or otherwise, the amount of work done. “



Hume's tokens are not known; or if they are, they are likely not to be recognisable either from everybody else's truck tokens or from some lead issues relating to other purposes. The truck system was not a 19th cent invention; just how long they had been around is shown by the title of George W. Hilton's standard work on the subject: "The Truck System, including a History of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960". In other words, right back into very early lead token days. Not was it confined to Scotland; it was just as frequent in other part of the British Isles. Which begs the question: how many of our other leads are truck shop pieces?

One which might be is this piece {Fig.6} of James Farie of Farme, 1800-76, who developed a profitable coal mining business on his family estate in Rutherglen, a village which has long since been absorbed into the city of Glasgow. The bottom line of the inscription reads "24 CWT COALS", i.e. a wagon load, and the date is very much contemporary with Hume's pieces above; assuming that the counterstamp is a date rather than a serial number, which it is believed to be.



A number of other known or suspected truck tokens are listed in W.J.Davis' "Tickets and Passes", but these are mostly 19th cent or late 18th; several are illustrated at the bottom of the previous page, and again below. Before that, however, it is very likely that many of them would have been lead; and amongst our many specimens of that metal, who knows which?

Going back to Alexander Hume for a minute, the Glasgow Herald article speaks of "a variety of lead tokens". Why? It is tempting to think that these might have been different values, and probably most of them were; but more likely they related to different services, the value of which may or may not have been different. I once saw a set of five 19th cent copper pieces with the same armorial device on one side, indicating a landowner, and a variety of different tradesmen's professions counterstamped on the other; blacksmith, paviour, mason and the like. Looking back at James Farie's colliery piece for a minute, it was probably the reward, as yet unconverted into real money, for cutting, loading and delivering a wagon-load of coal; but had the company farrier shoe'd a pit pony, the inscription on his token would probably have been different.

Translate this back to earlier days, and it is likely that the various professions on an owner's estate would have been distinguished by some of the many varied depictions and doodles known on lead piece, to be interpreted in a manner known only to the locals of the time.



Some Irish {Figs.7-9} and Welsh {Fig.10} truck shop tokens from the 1850s and 1860s