

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 mail@leadtokens.org.uk Please note that the old david@powell8041.freeserve.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT will not be active after 31 May 2017.

Readers' Correspondence

Another lot this month from Tony Williams and Co., for which many thanks. I'll take a guess at the sizes, but most of them look 18th cent. First up, Fig.1, an irregular 5-spoked cartwheel in the shape of a "Chinese six", i.e. two of the spokes being formed by a single line across the width of the diameter, with two of the segments above and three below. There is also a hint of an internal ring trying to imitate a mediaeval penny, but it is decidedly half-hearted. I believe that Fig.2, if you turn it round, shows a line of candles and that the issuer is a chandler. It could also be a roasting grid, indicating a trade connected with food, but I favour the candles.



I had it suggested to me that Fig.3 was a bird, but that near right-angle is a hideous way of representing a living creature. However, I have seen them done like that plenty of times before and I am prepared to believe that that might well have been the original intention. However, another idea; turn it 30-40 degrees anti-clockwise and it might be a booted foot, indicating that the issuer was a cordwainer, i.e. shoemaker. The contours are much more appropriate to a foot and lower leg than they are a bird.

Fig.4 is another nice example of the complex mix of petals and circles which half imitates the classic British groat, as per the recent article in LTT_106, and would sit nicely there with the other pieces on page 4. Fig.5 is not so pretty; a mixture of pellets and other bits and pieces of not-sure-what. It does have a certain element of symmetry, however, if one rotates it so that its straight lines are upright. 80 degrees anti-clockwise rotation gives something remotely resembling a tree, but it is far from certain.

Figs.6-8 are in very pleasant condition and with a nice design, if unconventional for tokens. The first question which comes to mind is to ask if there is anything on the back which suggests that they might originally have been buttons, which are frequently decorated. An estate pass is an alternative option, and might not require there to be anything on the back. A weight is also a possibility, but they tend to be less ornate. If buttons, they are possibly from a servant's jacket. Fig.8 has two initials flanking, which if a button or pass would probably be those of whatever lord of the manor employed said servant. The design, similarly, is likely to be some visual symbol of authority, readily recognised within the jurisdiction of the estate concerned.

Finally, a rather bizarre piece {Fig.9} courtesy of Anne Smith, found on the southern Thames foreshore near the Surrey Farm. Obverse, a rectangle with triangles protruding inwardly from the midpoint, possibly to the extent of forming a cross, but superimposed on that what seems to be an incuse trefoil or clover leaf.



Rectangular boxes on tokens sometimes indicate tea chests, thus revealing the business of the issuer, but that may be coincidence. An Irish tea dealer? The reverse is probably a stylised sun.

Pennies from the Poorhouse

There are two major copper token series which appear but rarely in these pages; namely, the 18th and 19th century officials issued during the approximate periods 1787-99 and 1801-20 respectively. Thus called because the governments of the day officially tolerated them, they were a way of letting people other than the Royal Mint address the severe shortage of small change which caused so much practical inconvenience to the conduct of everyday trade; however, unlike the 17th cent series, crude lead and the later unofficals, few of them came from the small shopkeeper. Those who like the latter series, ourselves included, tend to be interested in local history, and in lives which were lived in a modest and unassuming way; people whom, in many ways, we see like ourselves, or at least our ancestors.

The big chunky coppers churned out by large factories, c.1811-20, with the name and pictures of said factories on them, seem therefore to many of us rather characterless; and likewise the many pieces which hide anonymously behind a monogram of initials, but do not tell you who they belong to. Who wants a plethora of druids' heads? Take your cape off, man, and tell us who you are!

Indeed, if one looks at the tokens of these series, they really are a rather mixed bunch. Large manufacturers; municipal issuers; political propaganda; even medallists striking for the new collectors' market which the new series, from 1787, spawned. There are a few genuine merchants' pieces in mid-19th cent unofficial vein, but in proportion to the whole series they are not numerous. Even worse, there are even medallists striking tokens in respect of pseudo-merchants who don't actually exist. At least that is one problem we don't usually get with lead issues; we can be fairly confident that, however worn, grotty, eroded and oxidised our specimen is, at least there was a real person behind it.

I mentioned municipal issues; that at least is starting to get a little nearer real people, if only in the mass. Why were they made? Some pieces give us a clue: "Pro Bono Publico" - for the Public Good. "For Public Accommodation", and the like; in other words, in order to be useful. Put like that, one imagines that they were issued by the local authority for the general use of all their citizens, in trade, to alleviate the coin shortage; as opposed to the administration of said authority's own administrative functions like looking after its own poor, sick, unemployed and otherwise generally needy.



Moving on to the latter, there are a few pieces in the 19th cent series which state unequivocally that they are the issues of the workhouse: Birmingham {Fig.1} and Sheffield {Fig.2} were large cities, Halesowen was a bourgeoning industrial town, whilst Tunstead and Happing {Fig.3} were two comparatively rural Norfolk hundreds who cooperated in issuing a common piece for what they called the Corporation House; a workhouse in all but name. Dublin, a few years earlier, had issued a piece in the late 1790s for its House of Industry {Fig.4}, yet another synonym for the same thing. This all leads us to a few observations and questions:

- ⇒ Workhouses in places large and small had certain similar needs, and examples across the range resorted to tokens as a means of administration. Did those that issued no copper tokens do so in some other way, e.g. by using lead ones?
- ⇒ Are the tokens used as internal money by the inmates, given as part of outdoor relief to paupers who were not inmates, or used for the payment of services to external suppliers who interfaced with the workhouse management in helping to make the place run?



We have already written in LTT about the use of lead tokens in poor relief, especially the TC/HA pieces {LTT_99}, and numismatically the above questions can be expressed by asking ourselves where pieces like Figs.5-6 fit in with Figs.1-4. Are the latter just a later expression of an earlier use, i.e. copper replacing lead as a result of the Industrial Revolution, or do they fill some fundamentally different purpose? I am not sure how many answers we are going to come up with, but at least we can have some fun exploring.



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<http://www.blackcountrybugle.co.uk/halesowenspike-tokens/story-20148921-detail/story.html> would seem to suggest that in Halesowen, at least, the tokens were for general alleviation of the coin shortage, and indeed this seems reasonable.. It is unlikely that internal money would be required; inmates were already getting enough off the parish, in the eyes of most overseers, and any work they did would merely reciprocate that gift rather than merit any further reward. If the money was used for the support of paupers outside the workhouse, then one has the age-old question of whether its range of use was limited, so that they could not do certain things with it {e.g. buy alcohol}, as I have advocated was the case with crude lead; and if it was limited, then the receiving merchants {e.g. bakers} would have to trade it back in the authorities without further use. If use was not limited, then the whole town of issue could gratefully use the pieces, including the pauper drinking himself to oblivion in the corner of the pub. Nothing to stop a workhouse pumping out monetary tokens like any other business, of course, provided that they were prepared to redeem it, but why would they want the trouble of being a general issuer? Is the issue just an ordinary municipal issue by another name?

17th cent main series tokens have a little to say on the issue, and are similarly enigmatic as to their purpose. The majority seem ostensibly to be town pieces, plain and simple, stating the name of the place and showing, typically, the town arms; as such, they convey the impression of being just useful small change, no doubt most welcome at a time when the latter had been in known short supply for decades, even before the country had started fighting a civil war. Figs.7-8, stating "For necessary change", come in this category. A few municipal pieces state on whose authority they were issued or owned, {Figs, 9-10}; the mayor, aldermen or portreeve in the examples illustrated and, once again, there is no reference to pauperdom implied.



Critical part of the inscriptions:

7. Gloucester {CG = city of Gloucester}:
"For necessary change" - Luke Nourse, named, is the mayor.
8. Evesham {BE = borough of Evesham}:
"For necessary exchange"
9. Wootton-under-Edge:
"Owned by the mayor & aldermen"
10. Langport:
"Made by the portreeve"



A small but significant minority mention the overseers, which is a different matter; this must refer to the overseers of the poor, even if, as on Fig.11, no mention of purpose or pauperdom actually appears. Others speak of, or even depict the poor and ailing, specifically {Figs.12-16}.



Critical part of the inscriptions:

- 11. Louth: "To bee changd by ye overseers of the poor"
- 12. Moreton Hempstead: "An halfpenny for ye benefit" / "of ye poor of Moreton"
- 13. Andover: "Help o' Andover" / "for ye poore's benefit" - cripple depicted.
- 14. Dover: "For the poor of Dover" - St.Martin & beggar depicted
- 15. Woodbridge: "The poores advantage"
- 16. Sherborne: "Farthing for the poor"

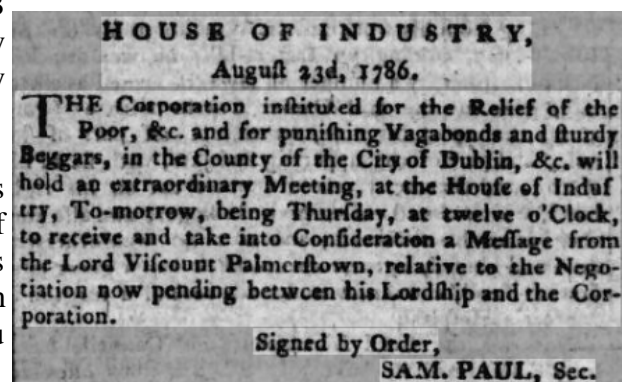
Surely not only the poor used farthings, in a day when wages were low even for the working? Did the town officials regard anybody who used farthings as poor, regardless of whether they were on parish relief or not? Hopefully not, but we are left with the same sense of ambiguity regarding 17th cent use as with the 18th and 19th cent ones above. My own gut feeling is that they were for general use.

It is possible, of course, that many local authorities felt the need for their own token money and simply came to a variety of different decisions over which part of their organisation was best suited for dealing with it; some choosing the overseers of the workhouse, others not.

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By the time of the industrial revolution, we have the possibility of looking at the newspapers to try to glean a little of how these workhouses functioned, and we will take as an example the Dublin "House of Industry" shown earlier as Fig.4 The date of issue may be taken to be around the mid-late 1790s and, according to the monogram, a chap called BOB was the authorising officer. I think we can probably take it that his name wasn't Robert, but a somebody O'Brien, forename unknown, looks likely.

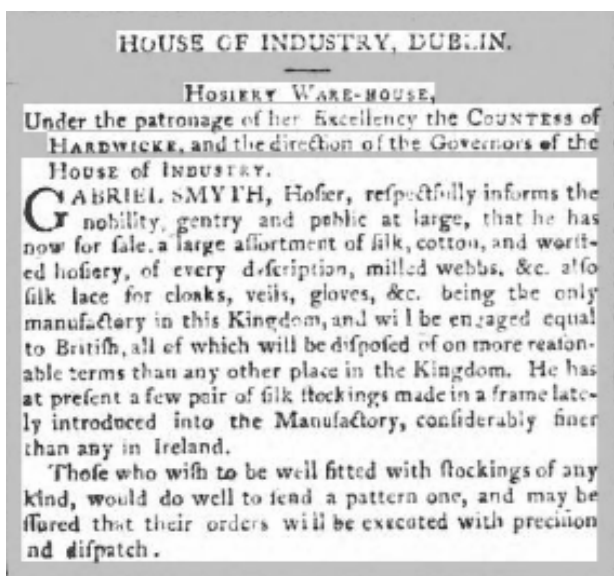
The basic purpose of the Dublin House of Industry is stated in this excerpt from Saunders's Newsletter of Wednesday 23 August 1786. Punishing vagabonds is hardly an activity which will have any great effect on the monetary need; the rest is more or less as you would expect.



Both inmates and those on outdoor relief would eat quite a lot, of course, and that would require paying for. From the Dublin Evening Post of Thursday 24 August 1797:

- ◇ “PROPOSALS FOR POTATOES FOR THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY, 7th August, 1797. The Acting Governors will receive Proposals for supplying, by contract, this House with Potatoes, to the 1st of May next; the consumption is two to three tons weekly. Security will be required for the due performance of the contract. Proposals to be sealed, and left with the Secretary before the 28th inst, on which day they will be determined upon. By order, THOMAS BYRNE”

There are other similar adverts inviting supplies of coal and timber, clothing and bedding. There are even adverts for schoolmasters, to educate the child inmates. However, it is hardly to be imagined that, given the scale of these contracts, copper denominations would feature much in their payment. Tokens are going to be for much more individual transactions.



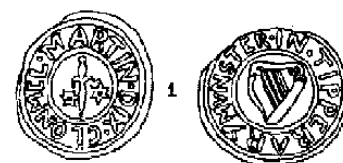
The workhouse inmates produced goods of various types, of course, and these had to be marketed. In the example of 1805 on the left, the contracting middleman, in this case a hosier, clearly does not regard himself merely as a wholesaler, but is content to deal in individual items. That clearly is getting much nearer using copper (or lead in other workhouses, if that is their choice); however, it does illustrate that a workhouse did, in the course of its duties, function as a business, making and marketing end-products for the population at large.

It is hardly to be supposed that cartwheel tokens were actually manufactured within the confines of the workhouse, but the idea that the latter could, like other traders, commission an issue is much more viable. Moreover, if a local authority wanted also to issue tokens for general use, as well as for the workhouse, it might well think that a single issue would suffice and decide that the board of overseers, as one of the more interested parties, were as good as anyone to supervise its issue.

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Another Useful Website: Irish Coins and Tokens

Those of you with Irish interests may already be aware of it, but there is an excellent website for Irish tokens, run by Barry Woodside, at <http://www.irish-tokens.co.uk/index.htm>. Specifically, though, he has reproduced an early work, “Catalogue of Leaden and Pewter Tokens issued in Ireland”, by Aquilla Smith, not otherwise available online. The material is mostly end-18th and early 19th cent in the style of Edinburgh lead farthings of the similar date, but there are a number of oddball pieces from other periods. To whet your appetite, this mid-17th cent piece from Martin Dix of Clonmel, which does turn up from time to time. I’ve magnified it, as the original is tiny!



Lead apart, the rest of the website contains some very interesting material from right across the paranumismatic spectrum, and I can recommend it as an easy way of looking at what Ireland issued and how its tokens compare with those of England, Wales and Scotland.