

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.

Welcome to 2018



1a Happy New Year! I haven't found any lead tokens celebrating the festive season yet but this little brass piece is not too far off. Christmas cards are generally held to have been introduced in 1843 and Fig.1 is probably very near to that date.



The beehive is meant to be symbolic of the hive of industry, i.e. our large towns and cities after the industrial revolution. It starts to appear on the copper tokens of the 1790s and thereafter on various pieces both official and unofficial until about 1850. Swansea used the device on their town token of 1832 but there are several individual examples as well. There were few holidays in those days and I guess that our piece was meant to wish prosperity rather than relaxation. From known dated specimens it would appear that the last regular use of lead tokens was only a few years after 1843, so probably little chance of finding a beehive on lead, but please keep looking!

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2 Some tokens, like people, are of a natural happy disposition; so, what better than to choose one or two such to welcome you into 2018? Fig.2 is the "sun in splendour", an emblem favoured by Edward IV at a time when shop signs were probably still in their formative stages, and probably therefore a frequent choice when selecting one. Rays of light travel straight, of course, but the engraver of this piece has allowed himself the artistic licence of making them wavy, hence conveying vibrant brightness and energy. Add a face to the sun and it becomes personal. This is a happy chappie.

Even the most humble and ordinary of pieces can show cheerfulness and humour if cleverly executed. You wouldn't think you could do that with a cross and pellets, would you? So, extend the pellets sideways a little, to make it cross and arcs, which makes the design halfway to that of the goat family. One of those arcs becomes the mouth of a smiley face, whilst the eyes twinkle with benevolent good humour {Fig.3a}. However, turn him through 45 degrees and he looks a tad quizzical {Fig.3b}.



WS, still clad in his clown outfit, looks as if he might be a little worse for wear after seeing in 1714 in style {Fig.4}, whilst the young lady in Fig.5 seems also to be enjoying herself, even if her thuggish looking companion is somewhat less amused. Perhaps he is fed up with waiting for her; she seems oblivious, and in no hurry to go home. Meanwhile, Fig.6 looks down with disapproval over the whole lot.



Multiple Choices: Some Enigmatic Pieces

Thanks to Andy Goldson for Fig.1: weight 2.6gm, thickness 1.5mm and diameter 14mm, found in an arable field in South Norfolk. The style feels mid-late 17th cent, with the size favouring somewhat the earlier end of the range.



The main point of discussion is whether the item depicted is an initial, Q, or an object, e.g. a tie; note, that there is a faint second arm, which argues in favour of the latter. I slightly favour the Q, which could be the first letter of the issuer's surname; however, it could also stand for Quart, and be a token of entitlement for a supply of ale or cider provided, by his employer, to thirsty agricultural labourers in the field. I have heard say that, during the course of a long working shift, field labourers could get through a gallon of liquid a day whilst trying to rehydrate.

There is a 19th cent example of this, although not in an agricultural context, involving some tokens which show an hourglass flanked by a date {1855 or 1869} on one side and the letter P{int} or Q{uart} on the other. As will be seen from Fig.2, they are essentially a pub token issued by a brewery. Engraved examples of Pint and Quart, using worn-out old Georgian halfpennies, have also been seen; so, it is perfectly feasible that lead tokens bearing the single letter P or Q could be drink-related as well.



If a one-armed rather than two-armed object, I would have guessed at something like a frying pan or a baker's peel {a flat shovel for getting bread in and out of the back of the oven}; however, the latter usually have the handle depicted, and I would also expect some issuer's initials.



Fig.3 was found by mudlark Tom Bland on the Thames foreshore near Cannon Street. It is only 12mm across so I have magnified it 3:2. What is “24” on the obverse? The possibilities are a date, a weight or a value. If the last, it could be a fraction of a penny, i.e. a sixth farthing; not wholly impossible, in days when people earned very little and money went a lot further. If a weight, it may equally be 1/24th of something; in German states it was not uncommon even in the 18th and early 19th cents to see a large number on a coin indicating that it was a fraction rather than a multiple, using the formula {for example} “24 Einen Thaler” to mean “1/24 of a thaler” {Figs.4-5}. Numbers as large as 192 were known. So, it could have happened on tokens as well, as a method of convenience when “1/24” might, on a 12-13 mm flan, have taken up too much space. Reader Tony Gilbert suggests that apothecary weights could also have been similarly designated.

Could it be a date? In the late 16th and early 17th cent, many parts of Europe were still in their first hundred years of regular coinage dating, hence leaving off the first two digits would not be seen as creating any serious ambiguity. The phenomenon occurs on a variety of official coinage from various countries, mainly of small denominations, as well as on tokens. Poland and the Scandinavian countries are particular examples which come to mind.

In Britain, Scotland issued its first dated coins in 1539 and England in 1548. The practice was intermittent, and only on certain denominations; in England, it was only on sixpences after 1582, and they ceased being dated in 1630. There was again



some intermittent dating during the Civil War period, but the practice did not become universal on English regal issues until the milled coinage was introduced in 1662. Even some of the later Williamson main series tokens let the “16” slip {Fig.6} if they wanted a bit more space for advertising!

Reader's Correspondence

A far cry from the last page, and rather less controversial in terms of subject matter, are the set of pieces shown in Fig.1, part of a group of twenty or so similar items found, all within a very short distance, by Ken Rive on Jersey. He remarks that monetary lead tokens are not normally found on the island, and suggests that the date is probably c.1400-1600. My gut feeling is that they are gaming pieces, used for hnefltafl, chess or some such board game, along the lines of those discussed in my article in LTT_101; by which I mean pieces actually used as part of the game, rather than gambling chips.



It is worth noting that the number of pieces found is of the same order as those which one might expect in a single set, which further supports the theory; for example, draughts requires 24 pieces, chess 32, and the various versions of hnefltafl not that many more. Maybe the larger ones are the queens or equivalent, and the commoner small ones with crosses on are the pawns/foot soldiers. The distinguishing feature of {presumed} gaming pieces, which looks to be present here, is the extent to which the design is raised, enabling them to be more easily picked up during the course of play.



From even further across the seas is Fig.2, found by Steve Sharkey on a farm near Morganton, North Carolina, who would welcome any further ideas on it. By way of background information, he mentions that the Spanish spent time there in the mid 1500's and settlers from Europe arrived in the area in the late 1700's.



The symbols on the first side {Fig.2a} seem to be many and various, some of them possessing a likeness to various things which is probably coincidental. The most striking of them is what appears to be a rower midstroke, which is quite impressive. The same feature is slightly similar to the Durotrigan Iron Age pieces described as "second geometric" {Fig.3}, because nobody knows what is actually depicted, although my conjecture is that the design is meant to be an attempt to copy the seated/throned figures which appear frequently on other ancient series., notably from the Middle East. However, the American piece shows a marked bending of the legs, so I think that that meaning can be discounted.

The second side is a little more hopeful. In LTT_83 I wrote about lettered quarters, and I would think that this might be something similar. What the letters stand for, however, might well be rather different in North Carolina to mainland Britain. Moving on to the shape, the hole could be either:

- ⇒ a pendant for hanging, which is more likely to imply a badge or pass than a token
- ⇒ an invalidation mark, i.e. a deliberate inflicting of {frequently random} damage to show that the period of use of the item has passed, as discussed in LTT_59.

One would not normally pierce a valid token or coin intended for monetary use, although some primitive societies have done so, or even incorporated a hole into the initial design, for the purpose of stringing together; either for convenience of carrying, or to create larger denominations whilst only actually manufacturing a single value piece. Chinese cash are one example, but there are certainly others.

Holes made for pendants are usually pierced neatly, whilst those made for invalidation purposes are usually {but not always} less well shaped and rougher. I would on balance favour this piece being an estate pass, workhouse/beggar's badge or something similar, but a monetary token is certainly not to be ruled out. Both the size and artistic degeneracy are consistent with an 18th cent date, if judged by British standards, but that may not be appropriate across the water.

Early English Lead & Pewter Tokens: Introduction

Since LTT_51 {mid-2009}, these pages have contained a variety of articles which have sought to follow the chronology of our English crude lead tokens from the early-mid-15th cent right up to the time in the early-mid 19th cent at which lead issues were largely abandoned. The starting point, BNJ54 type M, was arbitrarily selected because it was felt that attention should be directed at those rougher, cruder types of token most frequently found by metal detectorists and about which relatively little is known or has been written; i.e. those in most urgent need of some attempt at classification. I refer, in particular, to those leads later than about 1665, vague and anarchic in many respects, at which point the articles in BNJ53/54 give up.

I had to go back earlier than the 17th cent, of course, to describe the background from which these later pieces evolved; and in doing so I went as far as type M, partly because that just about covered the start of commercial {rather than religious} token issues, and partly because type M was a very disciplined and finite series which was easier to get one's head round than most. Had I started any earlier, I would have spent several issues covering material which many folk, especially those in the provinces, rarely see.

That is not to say, however, that earlier pieces than BNJ54 type M do not exist, or that they are not interesting; as those of you with Thames-based interests, in particular, will be well aware. It will come as no surprise to learn that BNJ54 type M is preceded by most {but not all} of types A to L, and it is time now to go back, redress the balance, and remedy the omission. There will therefore now be a series of articles where we work through these series and discuss the features that link them.

Summary of types:

- ⇒ A,C,D,F,G,H,L; some of them are subdivided.
- ⇒ B,E are oddball pieces outside the scope of the main sequence which we are discussing here.
- ⇒ J,K are letters which the authors of BNJ53/54 did not use, presumably they were writing both of their articles simultaneously and wanted to leave themselves some flexibility of classification.

One or two of these types have already been introduced before, briefly, when discussing dating by size in LTT_42.

{PLEASE NOTE that all illustrations in this series of articles will be magnified 3:2, in common with earlier practice where smaller pieces were discussed}.

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Type A {Spangles}

BNJ53 type A, also known as spangles, have already been discussed quite extensively in LTT_48 {page 3} and LTT_55 {page 2}. I shall not therefore repeat myself overmuch, other than to summarise the main characteristics of the type and describe how it fits with types C/D/F/G/H following.

The essential features of a spangle are:

- ⇒ Artwork: High quality engraving and production.
- ⇒ Metal content: High quality pewter; typically 30-55% lead, and nearly all the rest tin.
- ⇒ Size: No standard established as yet.
- ⇒ Unique design, in which a tab containing two neat holes is provided above the main design for the supposed purpose of attachment or suspension, probably the former.
- ⇒ They are also invariably uniface, as there is no point in having something on the back of them if the owners are just going to sew them on to their clothes or other material.



To get the general idea of this, see Figs.1-7. In descending order of size, they cover the whole range of magnitude; Fig.1 is as large as they come, and Fig.6 as small. The former is 22x17mm and weighs 1.15gm, the latter is 12x8mm and weighs 0.22gm. Fig.7 is an example of what happens when the attachment tab breaks off, as is not infrequently the case with such delicate pieces.

The Church would almost certainly have been the issuer, and one or two of the designs {e.g. the Paschal Lamb} reflect this; indeed, they were probably the only organisation outside secular officialdom capable of affording and mustering the resources necessary for such high quality production. The date of issue is thought to be about early-mid 13th cent.

Debate rages over whether spangles were an unofficial form of money or a form of pilgrim badge, with those taking the latter stance arguing both that the pieces were too small for practical use as small change and that you would not want to be forever sewing money to your coat. Having said which, there was some physically very small coinage of the realm circulating in those days, and if spangles were used as money then sewing was probably just about the only way not to lose them. We will leave folk to their discussion and not add to it; here, I want to focus on design and evolution.

Likewise, I do not want to comment further on the suggestion that bismuth, mercury or antimony were used in minute quantities to harden the pewter alloy, in all series through from type A to type N. Certainly many pieces are very dark, which is a feature of pieces containing some of these elements; but they are not all so, and the Thames mud in which many of them have long lain might also impart a very dark patina. To those who are interested further in this aspect, I recommend BNJ53.

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Type C

BNJ53 type C is the high point of early pewter token usage and production. The pieces are clearly contemporary with type A in terms of the high quality of their metal and artwork, but whereas type A feels rather peripheral these give much more the impression of being a general issue. Spangles are quite scarce, these are not.

Type C pieces are very consistently sized, at about 18mm diameter, and, unlike type A, they are very rarely uniface. They also have a distinct beaded border, like the spangles above, and for that reason are collectively known as beaded border pictorials. Figs.8-14 illustrate a number of examples.

At this stage there often seems to be one major pictorial side and one lesser one, which lend themselves to being called obverse and reverse respectively {Figs.9,11,12,14}; however this is not invariable. Fig.8 seems to have two minor sides, Figs.10,13 two major ones. Unlike some lead tokens series, the choices of subject depictions seems to be fairly finite, sug-





gesting a well-ordered issue. There are some type C choices of subject matter which have not yet been seen on type A, although this may just be a reflection on the known pieces and their relative rarities. Known pictorial types in use by the end of type C include:

Angels	Grids	Paschal lambs
Bishops	Kings	Pelicans
Buildings	Letters {A, R+}	Pilgrims
Cocks	Lions	Shields
Crosses	Lis	Spread eagles
Geometrical patterns	Monks	Stags

The significance of letters A and R {the latter always followed by a cross, the former not} on pieces such as Figs.8,9 is unknown; both are common, but no other letters seem to appear in the same way. When we get to type M, it is known that some later pieces bore letters which were the initial letters of ecclesiastical services, but this looks unlikely to be the case here.

BNJ53 type A and C pieces have generally been found in London, with occasional examples in Paris; their geographic distribution is certainly very limited. Pilgrimage has been suggested as supplying the primary need for such money, with the pieces being accepted at certain church-sponsored hostelries; however that may be only part of the story. The date of type C is thought to be c.1250 to about the end of the reign of Edward I, i.e. 1307; compared with type A, which is supposedly early 13th cent..

Lead and the Licensing Laws

TAX ON CATS: “Of the many German municipalities which have long threatened to levy a tax on cats, Munich is the first to carry the threat into effect. In future poor puss must wear a collar with a metal check and number, similar to those worn by dogs, or she will fall a prey to specially organised cat-catchers. The new measure, it is stated, is in defence of singing birds, and also in the interest of hygiene and the citizens’ nocturnal repose.” {Dundee Evening Telegraph of 25 July 1911}

In different ages society has seen fit to tax various things, e.g. dogs and cats, which can be tagged, and alcohol and televisions, which cannot. Almost universally there is a proof of payment, or a licence, which may take various forms. Before paper and the electronic, metal tickets or tags were often the norm; and as we know with commercial tokens, different metals were favoured according to date, place and the level of access to technology. We may not always know who saw fit to impose licensing on what in the 18th and earlier centuries, but we can be sure that, like today, they had their {sometimes quirky} rules at all levels, both local and national. For which reason, bear in mind that a few of our crude lead tokens may be the licences of their day. The most likely candidates are those showing an armorial shield, potentially signifying the licensing authority, and those depicting the item licensed.