

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@leadertokens.org.uk Please note that the old david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Were Tokens used in Connection with Falconry?

Fig.1, found in Dorset and slightly oval, is some 21-23mm across and weighs 8.86gm. The reverse design is a crozier, which suggests that it is an ecclesiastical issue dating from before the Reformation, yet the size and weight are more what one would expect of the early mid-18th cent. The large bird of prey, whatever it is, also feels much earlier than that, and indeed the finder read it as having a 15th cent context. One is tempted to say that it is an eagle, because that is the large bird most frequently seen on coins and tokens as a symbol of authority and power, but I do not think that that should be taken for granted. On tokens we are used to seeing lots of different species, and that may be the case again here.

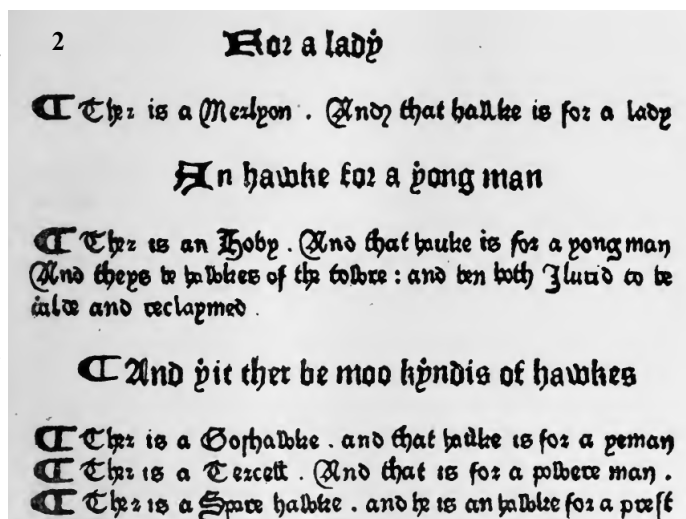


There are occasional large lead pieces in the mediaeval period which buck the trend. They may not have been used for the normal purposes of ecclesiastical payment and administration, so we need to try and find alternative reasons for them. One possibility which features large birds is falconry.

The Book of St Albans, published in 1486, is a work {by a female author, no less} which describes the pursuits of the aristocracy and goes into great detail about hunting, fishing, heraldry and, of course, falconry. It concerns itself with the welfare of the birds in no small detail, but there is also a section that describes which birds of prey are appropriate for which class of society. For example:

- ⇒ Baron: buzzard
- ⇒ Knight: saker falcon
- ⇒ Squire: lanner falcon
- ⇒ Lady: merlin
- ⇒ Young man: hobby
- ⇒ Yeoman: goshawk

Near the bottom of the list is an injunction that men of the church, who were expected to shun extravagance, would be expected to use a more modest species, namely, the sparrowhawk,



The bottom line of Fig.2 says as much in the writing of the day, which I appreciate is not easy to read; so, if there are any ornithologists out there amongst our readership, I would be very grateful to hear if they think Fig.1 might be a sparrowhawk. I suspect that this is a falconry token, used either as a pass or as a receipt in connection with the use or maintenance of the birds.

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A New Word for your Vocabulary: Numiscatist.

Definition: A feline who jumps up and walks across or sits on your tray of specimens just as you are trying to sort out the photographs for your latest article. Wonder why I had cause to think of that?

Numbers, Initials, Candlesticks or just a Pair of Socks?

My thanks to John Reeves' for this 20mm diameter piece {Fig.1} which appears to show something like an initial pair, "JJ", however, there is a problem with this interpretation. "J"s normally have a bit more of a curve on them than in the illustration, plus "J" for "I" tends to come in quite late in the 18th cent; whereas, by contrast, tokens of this size tend to be quite early 18th cent, even late 17th. Could the would-be "J"s be objects rather than letters? Swords {cutler} or stockings/socks {hosier} are a possibility. I can't imagine a sword-maker going so downmarket as to use lead. Nothing certain, of course, but I favour a good old pair of long socks, with a hosier as the issuer. They feature in the 17th cent main series, so can be expected to do so again in the 18th.



If "JJ"s can be confused with pairs of socks, so can "II"s with candlesticks. These days we regard an "I" just as a vertical downstroke, serifed at top and bottom according to taste. In the 18th cent some were not content with that, and inserted what seems a rather unnecessary crossbar in the middle. On occasion this can be quite extravagant, generating possible confusion with the grip on a candlestick. Figs.2-8 illustrate a few examples of the ambiguity:

- ⇒ Figs 2,5 definitely have an "I" because there is another letter of the alphabet accompanying, but change the second initial to an "I" and could you be so certain?
- ⇒ Fig.3 is fairly definitely a candlestick, by virtue of being surrounded by several other tavern utensils and consumables; notwithstanding which, it does still look like a large letter "I".
- ⇒ Fig.4 is along the same lines as Fig.3, except that the "I"/candlestick is a bit more ambiguous and the other parts of the design, particularly the scales, hint rather more at a merchant than a publican.
- ⇒ Figs 6-7 have no context whatsoever, so both options are open.
- ⇒ The "I" of Fig.8 appears to be flanked by two initials. It could be a surname flanked by two forenames in smaller type; it could be a candlestick, with the other letters the initials of an innkeeper who issued it when you went up to your room. So, again, both options possible. It could even be a very badly-drawn serifed cross on which two of the extremities had come adrift of their crossbars, although that seems rather far-fetched. The second side is equally enigmatic, and too poor to show; the choices being (i) the innkeeper, (ii) a loaf of bread by way of refreshment and (iii) a date or inscription. So, no help there!

Add to this the possibility that on occasion there is a need to render the Roman numeral "II" {= two} by way of value, as per Figs.9-10, and one may understand why the "JJ"s of this world used the odd serif or two to distinguish themselves!



Readers' Correspondence

First up, a nice little merchants mark piece, classification type 20, from Philly Gumbo {Fig.1}. It is only 13-15mm, indicating a date c.1600-50, but it is full of character, dare I say humour, so I have magnified it 3:2. for you to enjoy. Merchant marks were an early form of identifier, used in preference to initials in days when relatively few could read. Starting approximately in the mid-14th cent, they were most popular in the 15th and 16th. By the early 17th cent initials were definitely in the ascendancy, and this piece, with M-A flanking the mark, unusually shows both forms. It is clearly a transitional piece, and the diameter indicates precisely such a date. MA wanted to display his initials as was the modern practice of the time, but his business had probably used the mintmark for years and he wanted to make the link. Think company logo; merchant marks were the 14th-17th cent equivalent.



There were many merchant marks but very few of them are assignable; they do not lend themselves to indexing, and they died out several hundred years before the days of optical character recognition, by which time the names that you wanted to link them to were long gone. It is a pity that so few issuers were as considerate as MA in leaving us some small evidence of which mark was related to whom.

Forgetting merchant marks for a minute and thinking abstract art, you can almost imagine the above depiction as representing a forceful lady standing with her arms akimbo and expressing her opinion strongly to the world. Maybe the merchant had his wife jokingly in mind when he designed it. If so, it is a very clever piece of artistic humour.

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Trev Hooper's hulking great piece, uniface about 40mm. across and 4-5mm thick {Fig.2} has all the look of a beggar's badge, i.e. licence. They were deliberately made large, heavy and uncomfortable to wear in order to discourage people from applying for them. Normally a parish would number its licensed beggars from one up and that number would appear on the badge; at least that seems to be the practice in Scotland; see our earlier article on the subject in LTT_122, pages 3-6., where quite a few are illustrated.

England's beggars' badges seem to be less clearly defined and less written about. Parishes down south clearly had them, but the impression is given that they were less likely to name and number than in Scotland. Perhaps they didn't see the need. Whatever the reason, anonymity seems to be the order of the day, as exhibited in Fig.2's very faint edge-to-edge grid.



to avoid one parish's beggars getting mixed with another's? Probably, if every other parish within a few miles had agreed to abstain from that design; they had enough incentive, because social security, as we call it now, was on a parish basis in those days and each had to foot the bill for their own.

The back of Trev's piece is blank, and understandably for a badge; it would spend most of its time with its reverse against its owner's chest. However, it could be space for applying a number later, should the parish official wish.

Fig.3 is another thought provoking piece, this time from Mike Wells. It is about 24mm and probably about mid-18th cent. In one sense it looks like a hybrid evolution of two of the long-established stock designs: types 1 {petals} and 14 {cross}. However, it could very reasonably be argued that the design has a more modern origin and is taken from the four shields of the milled silver issue which was introduced in 1662 and still current at the time of issue. OK, the design of Fig.3 is only approximate, and no-one is going to mistake such a lead piece for a silver one; but the intention is not so much to deceive as to borrow a regal coin design as a symbol of authority.



David Harrison's Fig.4 looks late 18th cent, from a time when many tokens were starting to artistically degenerate. It is one of those intriguing type 9s, irregular geometrics, where you are invited to take a guess at what was going on inside the designer's mind. My own best guesses are as follows, but I am likely to be as right or wrong as anyone else:

- 1) if you twist this 20-30 deg anti-clockwise you could arguably get a rather portly friar or mayor standing up, in robes, with his head off the flan and his arms behind his back.
- 2) One could also argue that it might be a largish farm animal facing right, possibly with harness on. There is a pellet which could pass for an eye although the would-be ears may well just be two specks of dirt?



One subject which has been written about several times in these pages, and in particular when we covered the chronological development of English lead, is the mid-18th cent sophistication of the stock design {see LTT_86}; that is, building on the simple elements of some of the basic designs by adding what today we would call "bells and whistles". In Fig.5, we see how the old fashioned cross and pellet design has gradually evolved over the centuries with issuers making ever greater use of the angles for their initials, symbols or artwork. One little observation, however: its finder, Krzysztof Mgłosiek, comes from Łębork, which is in Poland. If the piece was English, its diameter would suggest a date near the end of the 18th cent, but of course practices vary from country to country and dating rules used here might not necessarily apply. Nevertheless, gut feeling says that it is not too far off that date. If any other European mainland readers find further example of lead pieces which share features with English counterparts, we would welcome seeing them, together with any suggestions regarding their likely dates.



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Fig.6 was found by Lee Marshall at Langham, just north of Colchester. Its several fragments indicate that it is not long for this world, and that further deterioration will soon put paid to it; which is a pity, because with its light colouring and clear lines it is a pleasantly photogenic piece. The issuer's initials, SV, or possibly SJ or SY, are just sufficiently offbeat to raise momentary doubts that that is what they are, but I think that is just artistic exuberance.

The head of a creature on the reverse, possibly a squirrel, suggests that a Vermin Act piece is likely. It is 18th cent, as also is Caleb Duckworth's piece from Seisdon, Staffs {Fig.7}. Again agreeably light for the benefit of the camera, its vague series of angled lines leave one wondering, but a bit of turning around suggests that most of the components are probably either "W"s or crops growing in the ground. One is left with the impression that if the issuer's forename had an initial with some curves in it then he might have had a bit of trouble rendering it.



Last up this month, a pleasant late-17th cent candlemaker's token courtesy of Tom Cottrell {Fig.8}. It shows the traditional triad, except that, interestingly, there are signs of the female initial having been modified in the mould, quite possibly due to the issuer having lost a first wife beginning with I or T and remarrying someone beginning with P. Plenty of younger-age deaths in those days, childbirth being a particularly common cause.

There are known cases in the main series where an issuer appears both single and married or with two different wives. Also, signs that the piece is just a little more casually executed than the main London ones; for example, note the slightly more slanted S, or the over-prominent pellets. Probably a different manufacturer, but the same idea and period. My thanks to all this month's contributors for yet again another interesting range of material.

Continental Counterparts, part 11: Sport & Gambling

Certain parts of the Continent, particularly Germany and Switzerland, have long held, at both regional and national level, a sporting event known as the Schützenfest; literally, a shooting festival. Doubtless at local level as well. We tend to think of public sporting events as a modern phenomenon, but Schützenfests have been conducted since at least the 15th cent and quite probably earlier. They are tests of marksmanship, using the weapons of their day; in recent time firearms, but earlier maybe crossbows. Think William Tell.

These events have their origins in the need to train militia for defensive purposes, and no doubt a competitive contest was a good way to generate enthusiasm. The Schützenfests of Germany and Switzerland have generated a considerable numismatic output over the years, which largely falls into three main types. Roughly they obey the Goldilocks rule: great big medal, medium-sized medal, and tiny little medal; not that these relative sizes are always adhered to, but the categories they correspond to are as follows:

- ⇒ Large, silver, thaler-size {i.e.crown-size} piece; these are the prizes for the winners.
- ⇒ Middle-size pieces, sometimes holed at the top, and made in a variety of metals; these are identity tags, indicating that one is a legitimate competitor or a paid-up spectator. In other words, someone who is entitled to be there {Fig.1}.
- ⇒ ..and then, the little ones, copper or brass, 20-23mm across {Figs.2-5}, are for what?



You can guess that, in a newsletter concerning with such modest things as lead, that it is these latter that we are interested in. Many of these smaller pieces are of copper or brass, a lot of them from the mid-19th cent at about the very time that Britain was producing tokens of the same size and shape in abundance. Stylistically they fit well with the unofficial farthings, so-called, of that time. So, what were they used for? They certainly weren't prizes. Procurement of shooting supplies, like shot and powder, is the most likely, and the wording on Fig.3 specifically suggests that. Fig.5 has the name of a particular organisation on it, that of either a shooting club or supplier, so maybe some had their own pieces. Could one or two be just further examples of the time-honoured drinks token; pub check equivalents, albeit in a specific context? True, drink and weapons don't mix, or shouldn't, but if you do all the shooting first and all the drinking afterwards? Fig.4 even has a numeral above the shield, VI, which {depending on location} could be the number of pfennig, kreuzer or batzen required to purchase a drink..... but equally, the number of shots to which its bearer was entitled.

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The requirement to defend oneself and one's country was a universal one, not peculiar to the continent, and in Britain in the late Middle Ages it was a requirement for all men of a certain age to practice their archery weekly after Sunday morning service. Prohibitions were put on the playing of cer-

tain other games, simply because they competed for the peasant's time and detracted from the amount of practice he could put in. On certain occasions of potential unrest, e.g. around the time of the Armada, militia were raised; each village, according to its size and wealth, would be required to nominate, and train, a local force. Did we too have competitive events to spur our local recruits on, with prizes to tempt them to try and better each other? It seems very feasible, but there are few records of it. Could not tokens, of lead, have been used either to record attendance or reward with refreshment?

There are occasional British leads with arrows on {Figs.6-10}; all are of early date, and correspondingly of small size, so I magnified them considerably for ease of viewing. Most are not very inspiring in terms of condition, but maybe they are the relics of the British archery events of their day!. Fig.10 is almost certainly the trade badge of an apothecary {chemist in modern parlance}, but alternative explanations for the others are difficult to find, unless bowyers and fletchers issued tokens in their day. By the time of copper & brass tokens the use of bows and arrows for military purposes would have become obsolete, so if they did issue it is only on the earlier lead pieces that we would expect to see them.



The difference between Britain and Europe, and the reason why they have modern shooting-festival tokens and we do not, is that most countries have chosen to let the tradition lapse; however, it sounds fun, so best wishes to those who keep it alive. As to what tokens and medals the Europeans might have had contemporary with our lead above, that also has probably been lost in the mists of time, although there are certainly known examples of ratzeichen which indicate that town councillors enjoyed private shooting sessions, and awarded themselves prizes, after a day's work. The latter come in the more grandiose category, however, like the other prizes, and are therefore beyond our interest here.



One early European piece which might possibly have a shooting connection, because it appears to depict a target, is Fig.11, from Goslar, in Lower Saxony. However, it also depicts a couple of dice, which suggests gaming. On the obverse, SPIEL-ZEICHEN = "Game token"; game of chance indicated, or sport. The reverse inscription, "DER EHRLICHEN SCHÜTZEN" = "Honest shooting"; take the very worn 370+ year old umlaut off, and it becomes "the honest protect". A nice bit of wordplay, but why both dice and target, suggesting that success is largely a matter of luck?

Tokens associated with gambling games, have existed from before the times of modern 19th cent brass pieces such as whist tokens, found in several countries, and England's imitation spade guineas; as also, have tokens which just wish good luck. Fig.12 is a Swedish piece from about the mid-18th cent. The obverse {heart} side of the token has an inscription which translates roughly "Protection against cheating" {i.e. for safety, use this token instead of cash}, and the reverse more obviously "Good and bad luck are interchangeable". It can hardly be imagined that the users of British lead had much to gamble with, but perhaps even they liked a flutter in their own modest way, maybe staking ownership of some trivial item on the outcome of an event. They wouldn't have deemed it worth recording, but they might have used lead tokens to do it.