

*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](mailto:mail@leadtokens.org.uk) Please note that the old [david@powell8041.freeseerve.co.uk](mailto:david@powell8041.freeseerve.co.uk) address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

## *Did the Anglo-Saxons have Lead Tokens?*

The answer to the above question is generally presumed to be “no”, apart from one very rare series of tokens struck from main-series penny dies between the late 10th and 13th cents and thought to be tax-related. Even most of those fall within the Norman period. Nevertheless, every now and then a piece or two crops up which threatens to test the conjecture. We have two such this month, kindly sent in a fortnight apart by Jonathan Goldberg and Lance Todd. Neither fit the commoner design patterns for crude lead, but that in itself does not mean that they are Anglo-Saxon.

Jonathan’s token {Fig.1} was found in County Durham, near South Church, on a site within a few hundred metres of a church with Saxon origins. The obverse {Fig.1a} superficially hints at the medieval groat layout but I think that that is probably coincidence. There are the usual two rings of filler/verbiage but the lack of a cross and the strong central hub stand out as being notable divergences from the usual groat layout. The spaced segments which



make up the outer ring are a normal enough feature, but the most interesting thing to work out is exactly what occupies the inner ring; whether it is genuine inscription, pseudo-inscription, pattern or picture-language. The reverse {Fig.1b} is equally mysterious. I have seen these hubbed circles once or twice before {not often} and have heard suggestion that they might be ancient, at least older than the normal run of British lead {c.1250-1850}, but without any substantial evidence. What does raise suspicion, however, is the diameter; early coins and tokens tend to be small, and 30mm is huge by the standards of the times. Gut feeling is that it may be a pendant, or some other artefact, with the small nick backing the idea that a clasp may have broken off.

Lance’s Fig.2, from Dishforth, North Yorks, is only 14mm in diameter but I have magnified it 3:2 for visibility. That is a more credible diameter for the period. The adjacent fields have previously revealed Saxon stycas and sceats, and Lance could not help but feel a likeness between the design of his piece and the latter. He remarked that one side {Fig.2a} looks like a cross with a banner in the middle and the second {Fig.2b} like a dragon monster looking back over its shoulder, both being common sceat designs from the Saxon era. The piece is about 2 mm thick.



My initial reaction was that Fig.2b was an inverted “S” rather than a serpent, with heavy serifing, but there is a problem with that. Magnified to the appropriate size, either side could feasibly be 18th cent; however, neither is 14mm compatible with that date nor is the early 17th cent, the only modern period when that diameter was popular, compatible with the design of Fig.2a. I have consulted a couple of experts, one on Anglo-Saxon coins and the other a very experienced mudlark, and whilst they are not certain, they too acknowledge that there are significant Anglo-Saxon sceat-like features. One of them remarks that degree of patination looks quite heavy for a 17th century loss, and that perhaps it could be a contemporary forgery of a sceat. That feels a more likely possibility; does anyone have any further ideas, or pieces, to contribute? See also overleaf, for a couple more pieces which ask the question....

## *A Display of Quartered Geometrics*

Type 12, quartered geometrics, most commonly refers to the set of inverted right-angles which remind one of the graining on a millstone, but it can also refer to any other design which has symmetry not catered for elsewhere in the classification system. Those pondering the Anglo-Saxon idea from the previous page may wish to query the ideas behind the last piece on row 4 and the first on row 5, at least one of which is arguably a hybrid type 12/14. The latter example, despite its size, feels very Anglo-Saxon in concept. Other pieces at the bottom of the page hint at a stylised sun, which would be a hybrid type 12/26, or games boards such as those used in noughts and crosses or Nine Men's Morris. Regarding the most conventional form of quartered geometrics, the millstone, may I thank Carol Jenkins for showing this gem of a piece top right, which is the only example I can recall seeing where issuers' initials have been substituted in one quarter.



## Readers' Correspondence



Thank you all in advance for another bumper crop of contributions this month, starting off with four 16th cent pieces, all about 12mm in diameter, which I have magnified 3:2 to help you appreciate them. First up, Fig.1, from Fraser Bailey, which feels contemporary with the latest and crudest Boy Bishops, i.e. late 16th cent; however, I am not sure it is one. The obverse depiction is probably a king, rather than a bishop, the two prongs on top of his head being a crown. The curve below looks like a pipe, but I have never seen a king shown smoking a pipe on a token and don't expect to. A tobacconist with the King's Head as his shop sign is ruled out by the fact that tobacco was not introduced into this country {reputedly by Raleigh} until a few decades later. However, it may well still be a shop sign, even if we don't know the issuer's trade. Turning over to the other side, MR could be his initials; against which could be argued that (i) people didn't usually put their initials in lower case, and (ii) Lombardic script, in which the M is rendered, had largely gone out by 1560. Shop signs were also scarcer before 1600 because of the tokens' limited flan size for accommodating them..

Matthew Hanwell's uniface Fig.2, found between Harrogate and Knaresborough on a site which has seen a Henry VI penny and some 16th-17th cent bagseals turned up nearby, shows one of the two early transitional forms of the letter A with the crossbar at the top. It is almost certainly mid or mid-late 16th cent. As to whether the initial stands for a surname or place, probably almost impossible to tell. If it was a Lombardic A then an ecclesiastical piece connected with the performance of the A {ve Maria} might just be a possibility, but that would mean pre-Reformation, and it doesn't feel that early. A for Alms, in connection with administration of the Poor Law, is also worth considering, and indeed quite a likely option. Parish officials often distributed tokens rather than real money to ensure that they were used for the right purposes, e.g. for purchasing necessities like bread and fuel, rather than ale.

It is sometimes difficult to believe that dates like "1582", on Fig.3, are what they say on the tin. Yet they can be, and we have already seen an almost identical example for 1579, with just slightly neater date, on the front page of LTT\_45. This latest one, from Glen Maguire, has a Nottingham provenance. 1581 is also known, and TC is thought to stand for "Town Coin" or equivalent. It would be interesting to know how many towns used them, or whether it was just one; so, if you find any more, please write in. Most of the 16th cent dated British lead seems to be of a generic nature, so thanks to Adrian Marsden, of the Norfolk Museum in Norwich, for showing us Fig.4, a fine specimen of one with personal initials.

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Fig.5a is enigmatic; is it even a token? Shapewise, it is irregular, and it has a bit of a shycok look about it. Peter Jenkins, who sent it in, thinks it has the look of an Edward I head about it, and asks whether it is of mediaeval date. There is certainly some likeness but, turn it round, always worth doing with ambiguous pieces, and all of a sudden you have what could be a pair of initials {Fig.5b}. If that were the case, we are probably talking 17th or even 18th cent.

The piece is pure lead, measures 17-20mm across and varies between 1-2mm thick. The metallic content and style do not look quite right for 1300, although of course the stylised head was used for another couple of hundred years thereafter. Tokens c.1300 were usually pewter, thin and of ecclesiastic origin; they did not usually picture royal heads. Purer lead issues do start in the 14th cent, but usually using simple geometric designs. I still don't feel convinced, but am open-minded. Any opinions?



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Another ambiguous piece which invites you to decide between two vastly different dates of origin is Dave Warren's uniface Fig.6, about 18mm across. He thinks it is reminiscent of an Iron Age {sometimes k/a Celtic} potin, English examples of which are almost invariably associated with Kent, and always considerably darker and more pewtery in appearance than the piece shown. Having said which, the design does feel a bit slightly odd, and those curls round the flanking pellets do have an Iron Age/Celtic feel about them. Are they eyes? If the usual size rules were applied for dating, one would be thinking late 17th cent and I will guess on balance that that is what it probably is, but I am not wholly at ease about it. The photo is probably the right way up, but don't guarantee it. "IE" could be a rake, were it not for the very clear break between the two; it could also be a pair of initials, but why would you turn one of them at right-angles to the other? plus, you still have those two curls. Again, ideas please! Unfortunately, I don't know the area of the findspot.

Another type of ambiguity frequently encountered is that of "token or seal?". Marius Carrick's Fig.7 has a design which is mouth-wateringly reminiscent of a 17th cent token, with clear evidence of what is probably a surname, LEN{n}OX to boot, but the side damage weights the probability heavily towards an alnage seal rather than a token; which, indeed, the seal experts confirmed it to be.



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The size and shape of Rob Turrell's tiny Fig.8 strongly suggests an early {17th cent} communion token, although that hint of a shield on the back is mildly unusual for a CT. However, I don't think that rules it out. The findspot area and exact size are, unfortunately, unknown. I favour IH {possibly for JH} being the minister's initials, rather than two thirds of the well-known Christian IHS acronym. Unfortunately IH {JH} are rather common initials for looking up in Fasti {list of ecclesiastic alumni}, but for someone who knows where it comes from it might just be worth a go. Maybe the arms are those of a sponsor, the parish's local bigwig who had the historic privilege of appointing IH to the living. Tall upright crosses had a tendency to indicate Episcopalian rather than Presbyterian origins. The piece is not in Burzinski, the latest {1999} standard reference work on CTs; but, like other lead, new ones are turning up all the time.

Fig.9, 12-13mm and from its diameter almost certainly 15th-16th cent, is another rather bizarre piece with some very odd depictions. The first side hints at a merchant mark, which tend to be from the 14th-17th cents with a peak in the 15th and 16th. So far so good, but the style doesn't seem quite right.; it feels rather mysterious, almost oriental. I'm not sure whether all the components are characters, or whether one or two of them are objects. The second side is a variant on a cross; voided rather than single-line, and off centre, like an upright cross. Nothing wrong with putting things in the quarters, either, not that I am sure what they are..... but again, not typical. One looks a bit like a frying pan, but almost certainly isn't; the other, possibly a ring or annulet. Yet another piece where we would welcome some guesses.



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For our last new piece this month, back to that transitional "A" mentioned on the previous page. Fig.10, contributed by Meredith Jarvis, is a neat little uniface badge measuring about 25mm across its widest point and 20mm along each side. It is almost certainly of very similar date to Fig.2, and at a guess "A" stands for alms, indicating a poor law piece hung round the neck of a pauper. Lucky for them in one respect that they were spared having to wear the hefty badges of later years!

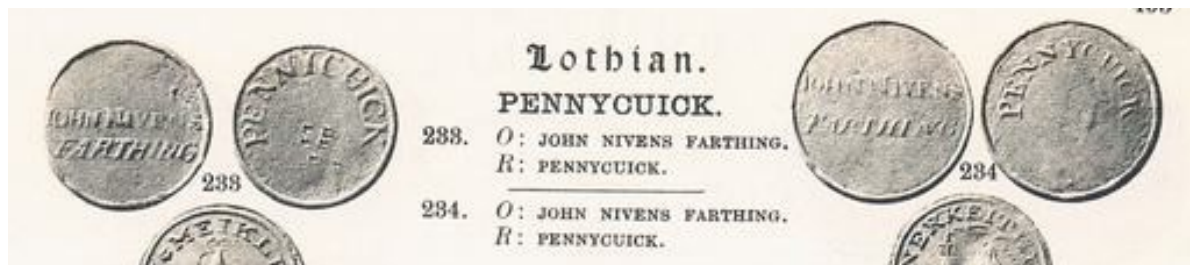
Finally, thanks to Philip Mernick for commenting regarding LTT\_142, page 3, Fig.2 {see Fig.11, here} that the sprue makes it look rather like a seal, but that despite that the reverse suggests a monetary use. It doesn't look like an alnage seal, and Philip wonders what a religious house might be making that needs a quality seal? BNJ54 type Ms, which this strongly resembles, are of notoriously high quality and hardly ever show sprue.



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## *The Issuers of Scottish Lead Tokens: Midlothian, other than Edinburgh and Leith, Part 2*

We conclude our survey of the Midlothian issuers this month with those of Penycuik, Dalkeith and Gilmerton. The introductory notes from the last issue again apply. There is but a solitary issuer from Penycuik.



### DH.Loathian.233/34 {Penycuik}

The surname is not Nivens, but Niven; the "S" possibly stands for senior. The following two entries occur in the Scotland's People death/burial records:

NIVEN	JOHN	----		M	12/05/1820	697/	40 392	Penicuik
NIVEN	JOHN	JOHN NIVEN	49	M	13/11/1824	697/	40 403	Penicuik

Only one of them has a Wills & Testament entry:

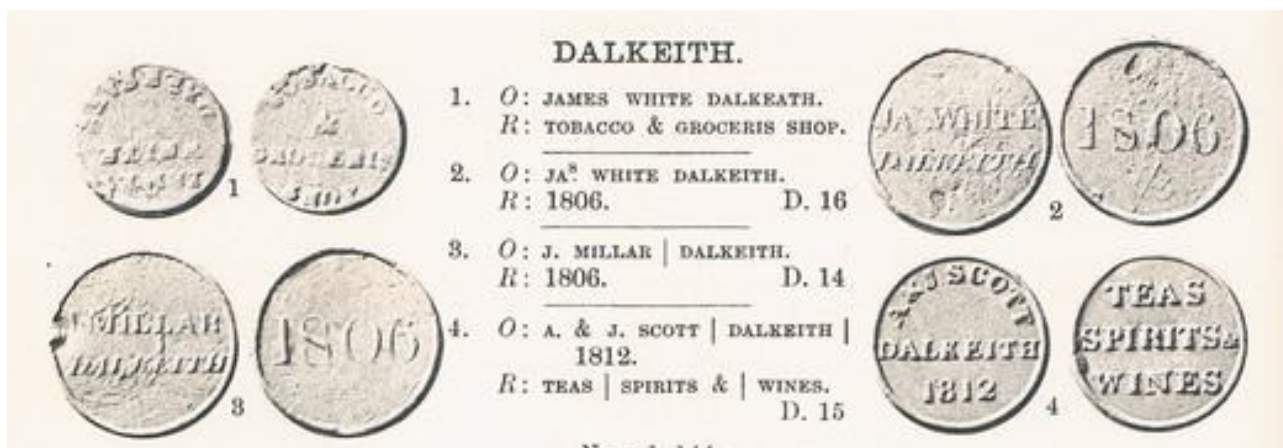
Niven	John	6/4/1821	Merchant in Penicuik	Inventory; Disposition; Deed of Settlement	Edinburgh Sheriff Court Inventories	SC70/1/24
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There are three John Nivens born at Penicuik, in 1743, 1775 and 1818. The first two are father and son and, being the only two adult John Nivens in Penicuik at the likely date of the token, may be reasonably referred to as senior and junior at the time of its issue. Their dates are therefore 1743-1820 and 1775-1824 respectively, and the elder is the issuer of the token. The John born in 1818 was the son of James Niven {1776-1827}, John junior's brother, a botanist of some note who spent some 16 years abroad {particularly in South Africa} gathering specimens for the rich and famous before returning to Penicuik c.1812 and resuming the life of a shopkeeper. An account of the family story may be found in the Peebleshire Advertiser of 25 October 1884, in the obituary of the youngest John, b.c.1818, who became a highly-respected and successful doctor in Edinburgh:

**Dr Niven was at the time of his death sixty-six years of age, and was born at Penicuik, where his father was a merchant. Mr James Niven, we are informed by Mr Jackson in his account of the parish, had rendered his name worthy of record as a traveller and botanist. In 1796 he was sent to the Cape of Good Hope, and in travelling its remote regions for five years sent home numerous new species of plants. On his return in 1803, after a stay of only three months he was again sent out by a company of amateurs, including the**

**late Empress Josephine of France. About 1812, Mr Niven returned to Penicuik, his native village, when he was married to Miss Alison Abernethy, daughter of a neighbouring farmer, and then he settled down as a shopkeeper. John, the subject of this sketch, was one of the children born of this union, and he had scarcely reached his ninth year when there befell him, in common with his brothers and sisters, a sad bereavement, in the death of their father, on the 12th January 1827, and on the 1st February, little more than a fort-**

Moving on now to Dalkeith, overleaf:



### DH.Dalkeith.1,2

The family is present in the Dalkeith registers from at least the mid-18th cent. There are three James Whites, as follows:

- ⇒ James I: b.early 1730s d.1784 Tobacconist
- ⇒ James II: b.1763 d.1836 Tobacconist
- ⇒ James III: b.1792 d.1874 Merchant/tobacconist

The first generation uses the form Whyte, the other two White.

Dalkeith did not become regularly incorporated in the Edinburgh directory until 1833/34, in which year the company is described as “James White & Sons, tobacco and snuff manufacturers, High Street”. Thereafter the James Whites appear regularly for some years, a typical later one, from 1850/51, reading “White, James, tobacconist, 1 High Street, Dalkeith”. This latter entry must refer to James III {1792-1874}.

James II is likely to have been the token issuer of DH.2 at least. Michael Dickinson believes that DH.1 is of slightly later style and might therefore have been issued by either James II or III.

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### DH.Dalkeith.3

There are two James Millars, father and son, with respective dates of 1767-c.1840 and 1812-c.1850 (?). The following is the Scotland’s People Wills and Testament entry of the elder, who was the token issuer.

Miller	James	24/11/1840	Tobacco manufacturer and merchant in Dalkeith	Inventory; Trust Disposition ; Settlement	Edinburgh Sheriff Court Inventories	SC70/1/59
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Their entries in the Dalkeith directory of 1833/34 are as follows:

- ⇒ Miller {sic}, James, tobacconist & grocer, High St.
- ⇒ Miller {sic}, James, jnr, draper, High St.

The surname is variously spelt.

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### DH.Dalkeith.4

There are plenty of Scotts in the register but little to narrow them down. A likely possibility for the issuers are brothers John and Alexander born in 1781 and 1774 respectively, but:

- 1) One would expect the first-named brother on the token to be the elder, and
- 2) In his death/burial record, dated 1840, John b.1774 turns out to be a shoemaker, which is not at that date usually a token issuing trade.

Regrettably, it is not possible to conclude much about these issuers at present.

**William Tait of Gilmerton, not in Dalton and Hamer**

The item shown appeared in Simmons sale MB71 as lot 252, weighs 5.50gm and is 20mm in diameter. Obv: W/Tait; Rev: Gilmn/1813 {both sides in script}.

The issuer had a son, also William {1809-1872}, who was a baker in Gilmerton in 1841 and thereafter in Edinburgh {Canongate} into the 1860s. The directories of the late 1830s speak of a William Tait being a victual dealer at Gilmerton, and this I suspect is William senior. I cannot, however, find him in the 1841 census.



William Tait senior, the token issuer, is recorded as being involved in an interesting court case in 1821, concerning the shooting of a boy. He was returning from Dalkeith Market on 18 January that year, when at Melville Castle Gate, he saw 2 men with guns. The following is an extract from one of his fellow witnesses' statements, which gives the gist:

“Declarant: Elizabeth Weir or Mitchell, Wife of Robert Mitchell Cattle Dealer and Publican at Gilmerton who being examined declares that on the evening of Thursday the 18th ultimo [January] Mr [William] Tait the preceding Declarant came into the Declarants house and two men along with him who were strangers to the Declarant and each of them had a gun when they came into the Declarants house.

Declares that she thinks it was about seven o clock when these persons came in and they stayed about two hours. That they had some gills of whiskey and the Declarant served them, and also her servant Elizabeth Deans. \_That they all three left the house together and the Declarant showed them out. Mr Tait being foremost and the two strangers carried their guns out with them.

That on one of the occasions when the Declarant was in the room where they were, she was putting one of the children to bed she lifted one of the guns from the side of it, but she cannot say whether it was a double barrellled gun neither can she say whether the other was a double barrellled gun. There was no dog with the men. That one of the men put powder in the pair(?) of his gun when in the house, but she does not think she would know that man. That he was a stout male bad ruddy complexioned and was wearing dark coloured clothes. That she thinks she would know the other one who was also dressed in black clothes and they were shabby, and he was of a dark complexion. That Mr Tait appeared to be hearty with liquor but knew well enough what he was doing and the other two appeared to be sober when they left her house.

Declares that a few minutes after these persons left the house when the Declarant was in her shop (she also sells grocery goods) , she heard the retort of two guns which from the sound she thought were fired at the north end of the town, being that nearest Edinburgh. That the retorts were so close after each other that there was not time for loading often between them.

Declares that fully an hour after Mr Tait had left the house with these men he returned and said that he had gone before them and that they had not come up to him and he mentioned that he had heard the retort of these guns and he also mentioned that some people had come and spoke to him about a boy being shot by the men that he had been in company with. Declared that before Mr Tait had returned Thomas Bain a Carter in the Village came to the declarants and said that a boy had been shot at by the men that had come out of her house and inquired if the Declarant knew them and she said she did not. And being shown the prisoner Robert Charlton, Declares that he is very like the man last described as having been in her house with Mr Tait and she thinks he is the same.”

The above from an online family history site, which can occasionally be very useful sources when there is a tale to be told, because sometimes the owner has delved deeper into the hidden archives than the record digitisers would normally put online.