

*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[david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk](mailto:david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk) address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

## Readers' Correspondence



A little bit of catching up to do on your contributions this month, but there are some very interesting ones amongst them and I thank you for them. My apologies that personal circumstances have from time to time prevented me from giving LTT as much time as I would like, in consequence of which some of them have been held back for longer than I intended. I'll start in the 16th cent, magnifying the early pieces 3:2 for obvious reasons, and gradually work forward. Katherine Piper's Fig.1 is a very early example of the fine post-Reformation pieces which sprung up from 1539 onwards and gradually evolved, in both size and design, through to c.1665. It is nevertheless very early within that period, for it exhibits Lombardic lettering, which was all but gone by about 1560. There may be two initials on it but, because of the size they have to be accommodated one each side; so, one cannot tell which way round they are.

Next up, the delightful but tiny Fig.2 from Dave Hammond, pleasantly light and photogenic. The obverse is obviously a pub/shop sign depicting the Queen's Head, from that mid-late part of the 16th cent when there were plenty of queens around. The reverse looks like a merchant mark, that precursor of issuers' initials from the days when not many people could read; the 15th/16th cents were their heyday. I favour a shop rather than a pub, on the basis that merchant marks were what they say, and probably not much used by publicans. It is only since 1764 that pubs have had the monopoly of painted signs that we are used to today; before that, many more commercial premises used them as identifiers.



Along similar lines, and barely any larger {11-12mm} is Sean Clarke's Fig.3, an early post-Reformation piece, probably mid or mid-late 16th cent. The diameter says that it can't be much later than that.. The long neck of the swan is possibly a little reminiscent of the pelican on mediaeval pewter, but that is probably coincidence; the swan was a popular tavern/shop sign of the time. WG will have been the proprietor.

Less in need of any magnification, because it is already of good size {19mm}, is Mark Iglesias' Fig.4, BNJ54 Type O, no.30; one of those early 16th cent "black letter" pieces whose greater diameter come as a welcome relief at a time when all other lead seems to be miniscule; I have, however, rendered it to the same scale for the sake of comparison. The inscriptions on these are usually genuine, but notoriously difficult to read; however, the shield will be that of the issuer, or his professional guild, and the rose his shop sign.



Next up, from Nicola White, is Fig.5, shown both as cleaned up and as found; it is amazing how differently pieces present when exposed to different lighting conditions and turned round to different angles! It shows the evolution of the main London series which starts post-Reformation, and of which Figs.1-3 above are much earlier members. Nicola's piece is around 14-15mm, which implies

something not much before about 1630-50, and by that stage the increasing flan sizes have allowed the inclusion of three initials rather than two. On the obverse, the usual standard format: A is the issuer's surname initial, R is his forename initial, G his wife's forename initial. On the reverse, possibly clasped hands, a symbol of friendship; these occur on other classes of antique as well, such as pottery, and I know of at least one person who specializes in collecting them generally. However, look closely at the lighter picture, Fig.5c, and you will see a series of radial scratches not readily visible on the darker piece. What I think might have happened is that an issuer with the sun as his shop sign might have tried to turn the original design into a sun by inflicting a series of radial scratches. If they hadn't been approximately radial I would have suggested that it was random damage intended as a set of invalidation marks, but somehow the design feels both orderly and deliberate.. Would anyone really have gone to that much trouble just to deface an obsolete piece?

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With the passing of the 16th cent, I can return to unmagnified pictures; mind you, not that you would think so, to look at Amy Shipley's Fig.6, a Nottinghamshire find, 25mm across and 4.9gm, is truly large for its period. There are a number of early 17th cent provincial pieces whose common theme has not yet been found, but which tend to hail from the East Midlands or East Anglia, and which buck the general trend regarding flan size, but even most of those are only about 19-21mm. The reverse of this one is very similar in both date and design to the two pieces shown at the top of LTT\_138, page 6. Wear prevents us seeing much of what is happening on the obverse, although proofreader Tony Gilbert has suggested that, if inverted, a standing figure is one possibility. There are signs also of initials flanking.



More typical in terms of early 17th cent size are Fig.7-11. Julian Spybey's Fig.7 is simple enough, with its makers' initials and date, 1616, below, but dates are still quite scarce that early. Next up, a trio from Giovanni Forlino, all Thames finds, the other sides of two of which were too water-worn to show. Fig.8 is a lamb, frequently deployed as a shop or inn sign, whereas Figs 9-10 show the hardware of eating and drinking more specifically. The shapes of the glass and flagon on Fig.9 are well defined, and for those of you finding any such piece may I remind you of the article by glassware expert Colin Brain in LTT\_87, published way back in 2012, in which he and I worked together to explore the possibility of dating tokens from glassware or vice versa.

Fig.10 has what are probably two initials straddling what to 20th/21st century minds looks like an eye-hook, but is probably a frying pan. Whether this indicates an eating-house specifically is uncertain; it may do, but Bryant Lillywhite in his book on "London Signs" quotes a number of examples of the frying pan being used as a shop sign more generally, especially amongst ironmongers. It is also not uncommon on the main 17th cent copper/brass series either.

Fig.11, from Alessio Checconi, is a fascinating piece, one in which its issuer is at pains to express his opinions on the troubled times of the 1640s, in which decade it was almost certainly issued. "Pax" on one side, the Latin for "Peace", and the scales of Libra, urging balance and moderation of attitude, on the other. Small lead flans do not offer much scope for the expression of sentiment or belief. Copper is easier to work detail on to, and expressions of political support {usually for the Royalist cause} are occasionally found on the main 17th cent series; but expression of views on lead, and especially exhortations of peace, are even rarer. Contrast, Fig.12, a copper Royalist recruitment medallion of 1643, which depicts the symbols of both war and peace, the sword and the olive branch, and shows the head of Charles I on its second side. Perhaps our issuer decided he wanted his say, too.





Fig.13, from Tony Quigley, found on a rural farm in Lanarkshire, is highly unusual; Scotland is often considered to have been better provided with official small change than England, in consequence of which there is not much lead north of the border other than communion tokens. That's a thistle in the middle. The piece is clearly based on the Scottish copper bawbees and bodles of the late 17th cent {the latter also known as turners} and is an attempt either at a forgery or a token. Lead token manufacturers drew their design inspirations from various sources, and copying coin of the realm was popular because it conveyed a vague sense of authority; provided that you didn't do it too accurately, you could argue that the end-result was a token rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive.

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Now to the 18th cent....well, probably. Bevan Wright found Fig.14 on the same field as an Anglo-Saxon penny, and wondered whether the two were linked. It is an unusual design, which does have a vague Anglo-Saxon look about it without being totally convincing; plus, the size is more that of an 18th cent token, much larger than one would expect an Anglo-

Saxon one to be. There is a possible hint of runic or pseudo-runic script, but it doesn't run all the way through, and if you turn the piece upside down you could have a plant protruding out of a pot. However, I think it is probably the right way up, from the look of the "R" on the right. The two flanking characters don't feel that ancient; maybe the "2" is a retrograde "S", and SR are the issuer's initials. Figs.15-16 show two pieces of the Guild of Hammermen {as they are known north of the border}, or blacksmiths {if you live further south}. Both are Scottish examples, but there are numerous examples of blacksmiths' arms on the 17th cent main series for England, and I feel on balance that the device on Bevan's piece is probably theirs; however, the presence of Saxon material in the same field certainly argues a little for other options to be considered. For the record, Fig.16 was previously discussed in LTT\_129 and is in Dalton & Hamer, on page 454, as "Not Local.10".



With a slight hint of the hammer, but almost certainly just a "T", is Evan Lewis' 25mm piece from Stanton, North Gloucestershire {Fig.17}. Little "m", big "T", or is that a small version of a capital "E" on the left, turned round 90 degrees.? If the latter, why would anyone want to do such a thing? The clue is in the small balls on the end of the would-be E's arms, and the fact that the middle arm is just fractionally longer than the other two; it is a pawnbroker's symbol. Whether "T" is the initial of the pawnbroker, or an indication that it is a town piece rather than an individual one, is uncertain.

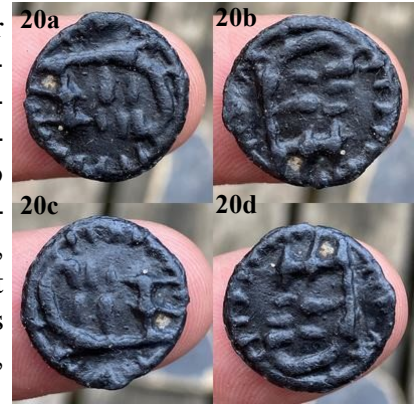


Portraiture, presumably of the issuer, is one occasional pleasant feature of mid-late 18th cent tokens, and often quite well executed. For those in the know, dating can sometimes be attempted from the clothing style, but the gent in Nick Thorpe's Fig.18, from North Warwickshire {near the Leicestershire border}, lacks any such finery and looks very down-to-earth. The assumption is that many of these pieces depict country squires and that they were for use on their estates, to grant the holder permission to do something or go somewhere. The average commercial issuer would probably not be too bothered about people knowing what he looked like.



Another attractive style of the same period, late 18th cent & early 19th, is the use of script such as in Chris and Simon Weller's Sussex find {Fig.19}; with the larger flan sizes of that period, fuller names, provided you aren't called something too long, becomes a viable option. Usually the names are too common to succumb to non-ambiguous genealogical research, although knowledge of either the findspot or date may help. This piece is presumably a pub token, as it is scarcely to be thought that so well-known a person as Lord Nelson would issue a token in his own right, and those who know the area have conjectured that it may originate from Hastings, or possibly Brighton.

The later stages of the 18th cent are renowned for producing a number of enigmatic pieces whose subject matter cannot be conclusively determined, and whose resolution is an interesting and occasionally amusing puzzle to attempt. Fig.20 is one such, again from Alessio Checconi, who has kindly photographed it all four ways round. There is no doubt as to the quality of the piece, it is well made....but, you just cannot work out what the maker has in mind. Top left could be a firearm, top right a stylized Roman head, based on the find of an early 4th cent follis; bottom left could be a sleigh, for carrying goods. A pipestand is another idea. More suggestions, please!



Another 18th cent phenomenon is the reuse of mediaeval or other older designs, no doubt stimulated by the finding of earlier pieces in the ground. Joanna Espley's Fig.21 is one such; the mythological figure {griffin?} on the reverse looks more modern than the ornate cross on the obverse. My thanks also to Julian Spybey



again for showing me Fig.22, a piece which strives to look late mediaeval but does not convince. For a start, at nearly two fingers' width it is far too large to be a token of that date, whilst the nonsensical pseudo-inscription looks far more elaborate than those born merely out of ignorance. It is too flimsy to be a button and there is apparently no sign of any connector on the back. I am wondering whether it might be the work of "Billy and Charley", two notorious mid-19th cent forgers of small antiquities. Plenty about their activities on Philip Mernick's website at <http://www.mernick.org.uk/B&C/>, if you care to have a look.

Also from Julian is Fig.23, an item which is more obviously a button; something which I would not normally show here, except for the obvious token-like depiction on the other side. We have spoken before about these pieces with outer grenetis {shading} and crossed with filled quarters in the middle, suggesting that they are either workhouse pieces, in the case of lettered filling, or associated with the Vermin Act, in the case of birds. Either way that makes them tokens issued by the parish, so one might guess that this could be the button from a parish-supplied workhouse garment.



Petal and cross pieces with pellets in the angles and nothing else, like Dale Lewis' Fig.24, are notoriously difficult to date because, due to their simplicity of design, they were popular choices for unskilled engravers over a very long period of time. This one from its size looks to be quite late, 18th cent,



with the obverse; a mini-cross and pellets mounted on what might be a tower but might just be the sprue channel down which the metal flowed during manufacture. One might try and guess whether something like a windmill or flower is intended, but without hope of reaching any conclusion.

Finally this month, Fig.25, a fine depiction of a village church courtesy of Sam Spiers; presumably that of Wilmington, East Sussex, as the piece was found in the immediate vicinity, but you are invited to compare modern online pictures of the building and form your own opinion. This is not communion token country, so in the absence of any issuers' initials it is most likely a village token, for communal use, with the church being used as an appropriate symbolic depiction. A few decades ago, in the mid-1950s, when small villages still had their own picture post-cards, but such cards were starting to go out of fashion, it was often the one of the church which was the last to survive.



## Those Oddball Leads may be European Weights....

One new book title recently is “The Coin Weights of Europe”, by Paul and Bente Withers of Galata Press. More details on their website at <https://www.galata.co.uk/coin-weights-of-europe> but, whilst a lot of the material is outside the normal realm of interest for British lead token enthusiasts, there is a significant amount of lead in it, amongst which you might just find a few of those oddball pieces which don't seem to fit anywhere else. Such as, for example, some of those shown in the first two pages of the article in May/June's LTT\_151; and indeed, from page 37 of Vol.2 I learn for the first time that Fig.7 from that article, reproduced here on the right, is a mediaeval French bullion weight.



Brass was often preferred to lead for weights because its greater durability ensured more prolonged accuracy, but hopefully there is enough on the cover illustrations below to whet the appetite; not only are there some lead pieces, but also some simpler brass ones which feel that their depictions might easily translate to lead. May I suggest that straight-sided pieces with a formal lis on are, in particular, well worth a look.



Before we leave, readers may be interested and maybe amused to compare the king on the bottom right of the front cover above with the heads on two pieces below. The first, according to the Withers, is a French or Italian half-teston(e) weight of, probably, the 16th cent., whereas the other two tokens are British, in white metal, and of not too ancient a date; probably 19th cent, possibly even 20th. They are quite commonly found, and are assumed either to be follies or card tokens, used for either scoring or gambling. In favour of the latter theory, a trefoil may be found above the head of the first piece and a heart to the left of the face on the second; so, assume that the gents in question are meant to be the knaves or kings of clubs and hearts respectively. Anyone who finds one with a spade or a diamond, please let us know. The “club” symbol on a pack of cards is very similar to what is known as a lis in other contexts, and the lis was the national symbol of France; so, could we have come full circle?

