

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Please note that the old david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Living on the Edge

Many of our modern coins, not all, have a ring of beading around the rim; look, for example, at what surrounds the Queen's head on modern £1 or £2 coins. The beads are so small that we hardly notice them, and the {fortunately rare} numismatic equivalent of a geek is someone who goes into raptures about whether there are 136 or 137 of them around the edge of some particular specimen. Beads and dashes do have a history, however, they do occur sometimes on lead, and when they do they can occasionally be useful for dating. I do not here mean the wide band often filled with inscription, shading or other filler which forms the outer part of the main design, and for which I have coined the generic word *grenetis*; I mean the minutiae which are intended to form the very outer rim. They occur most frequently on series which are best ordered and finely struck; for example, if you look back at our earlier articles on the chronology of British lead, BNJ53 types A and C, issued in the 13th cent, are good examples {Figs. 1-6, see also LTT_123. Note: all pieces in this article are magnified 3:2.



During the next century or more there is then a gradual degeneration of style, and the beading largely goes. By the time we have another finely manufactured issue in the late 15th cent, in BNJ54 type M, there is a shaded *grenetis* incorporated as a main feature which effectively shuts out any chance or need of beading {Fig.7, latter evolving as per Fig.8}. The typical token diameter then decreases to a size of about 11-12mm where beading is not viable anyway, c.1500, and it is only when we get near the date of the main copper/brass Williamson series in the mid-17th cent that beading begins to make a reappearance.



There is occasional evidence of beading on lead around or just before the 1648-72 date of the main series, but the flans are still mostly 13-15mm and the size of any beading present is minuscule. It occurs on the finest of the London pieces {Figs.9-11}, which are reckoned to end c.1665 when the post-Restoration surge of copper halfpenny tokens finally kicked in. Fig.12 is one of a small band of large-flan provincial pieces of the 1620s and 1630s. The main Williamson series has beading of different types, which Michael Dickinson has described in his book on the series {1986, reprinted 2004}. I don't find them always very easy to distinguish, but Michael even believes that some can be assigned to certain date ranges within the 1648-72 period. He mentions the following types of borders as being used:

- ⇒ Round dots, i.e. simple beads
- ⇒ Diamonds
- ⇒ Oblong labels
- ⇒ Oval dots, sideways or lengthways
- ⇒ Cable pattern, thick or thin
- ⇒ Plain lines.



We will not detract from the subject of lead by getting into the fine detail here, but Figs.13-18 show a number of different examples.



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The main series tokens may have been banned after 1672, but in terms of design and production standard they set a marker as to how tokens should be. They were present in large enough numbers that everybody was familiar with them and what they looked like, and for the next hundred years many aspiring lead token issuers drew their inspiration and ideas from them. One of these borrowed features was beading; admittedly only on a minority of tokens, but frequently enough to be noticeable. The remainder of this article will now focus on how this feature, where present on lead, evolves.

Those leads which were contemporary with the main Williamson series nearly always have very neat beading, sometimes of the same quality as was present on the copper {Figs.19-24}. This beading is miniscule; a little wear on the piece, or an off-centre strike, and it disappears. It is quite easy not to notice it when concentrating on the main design. Fig.19 is a little enigmatic; its size suggests that it might even be pre-1648, but its beading argues for slightly later. However, not all manufacturers will have followed the same fashions at the same time.



As the 17th cent draws to a conclusion and the 18th dawns, the regularity of the beading declines, and reduces usually to either pellets or small radial dashes. Figs.25-34 do not look too far from main copper series days, but they are gradually beginning to wander further away.



{Continued overleaf}

As we move into the 18th cent, the trend continues {Fig.35-43}. Some examples are still quite neat, and Figs.39-41 still have quite a hint of mid-17th cent style about them, even if they are on the flan size of a later period. Fig.37 is of the exergual style which was starting to develop around 1700 or just after {see LTT_76} and shows evidence at the bottom of starting to reintroduce radial dashes as filler.



I am fast reaching the stage where I regret magnifying everything 3:2, but please forgive me; post-1700 pieces hardly need any enlarging, but as this is a comparative article covering the whole six centuries which the main body of British lead tokens span, needs must!

By the mid 18th cent, the radial dashes tend to become extravagant, elongated and undisciplined, straying much further into the main design than edge ornamentation was meant to. Very, very occasionally they are extended so far as to become part of the central design, rather than an intrusion upon it; as for example when they become the hair surrounding a face {Figs.45-46}. This takes us almost full circle, back to the mediaeval *grenetis*. Such examples, however, are an exception to the general trend, and merely a manifestation of their designers' artistic licence.



The 18th cent still produces some fine later pieces, as the young lady of Fig.44 and the industrial oven of Fig.47 show, and on both cases it is pleasing to observe that the maker has dealt carefully with both his edge beading and his subject matter. However, as artistic degeneracy set in towards the end of the series, manufacturers seemingly cared less and less for niceties like edge beading; sometimes they just include a hint of it as a token gesture, as in Figs.48-49. Some of these latter pieces look decidedly rough!



{Continued overleaf}



Figs.50-52 show signs of a ring of beads coming in from the edge and becoming larger, almost sufficiently so as to become part of the main design. Engravers throughout the 17th and 18th cent, especially the latter, had long been in the habit of inserting random pellets to avoid making the field look too bare, but this looks as if it might be something more deliberate. Whether it forms part of any evolutionary trend I am not as yet certain, but it can certainly be remarked that Fig.50-52 are almost certainly Kentish hop tokens, as some very similar pieces occur in Alan Henderson's book on the subject. Whether that is a dash under the numeral in Fig.50 to indicate a nine rather than a six, rather than a minor damage cut, I am not sure; sixes are more common, so I may have it upside down.

One might think that gentry pieces such as Figs.53-54 would have a greater refinement of detail, and hence be more liable to show features like fine beading; however, I am not aware that, with their lead at least, that is particularly the case. Something else to make observations on in the course of our travels!



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Readers' Correspondence



Fig.1, kindly sent in by Lucy Spoons, looks at first to depict a rather boring central line with a strong pellet above and below; or, if you turn it round to a certain angle, what to modern eyes looks like a division sign. However, rotate it so that the two pellets are in a horizontal line, and one will suddenly see that they are significantly off centre and form the eyes of a face, with the line as a nose! It is 12mm and, whilst of unknown provenance, is suspected of being from county Durham, with which Lucy's grandfather, who acquired it many years ago, had strong connections. I favour an early 16th cent date, although the 15th cannot be ruled out; the depiction has a hint of degraded late mediaeval about it.

No such doubt about Fig.2, from "Woodtech Paints", being a head or face. Strong beading & features, light colouring which displays them to advantage; delightful. The strong beading reminds me slightly of the small group of early 18th cent Berks/Wilts pieces which I mentioned in LTT_124, but I think that that is probably coincidence. From the style I could fancy a similar date for this one too; except that the diameter is a tad on the small side, which inclines me more towards late 17th cent. I am wondering from the headgear whether the guy depicted might be a Quaker. The Quakers date from 1648 and were seriously out of favour with the authorities until William III ascended the throne in 1689; whether they ever used tokens as security passes, which this one could be, I do not know. I doubt it, they were very open about their beliefs. The Quakers were very active in commercial business, due to some other professional avenues being closed to them, and as a result issued a disproportionately large number of main series 17th cent tokens. I feel that this could be another.

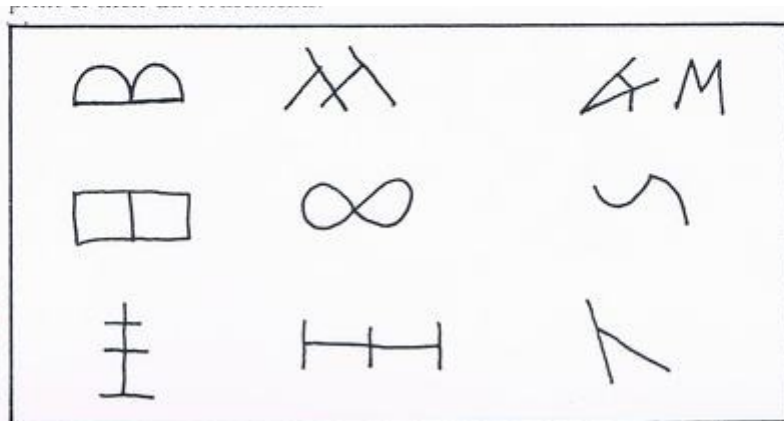


Farmers' Marks: A Rural Equivalent of the Merchant Mark

This article was inspired by a cutting {below} kindly sent to me by Tony Gilbert, who found it whilst having a clear-out of unwanted paperwork. It comes from page 114 of an unknown book, at the end of a chapter on surnames; but what the book as a whole is about, I have no idea. I therefore quote the adjacent annotation, without having any idea from what source it derives:

“A primitive type of heraldry is seen in the personal marks of farmers who could not write, but had to sign documents frequently. Those shown were used {in order} by the following, respectively:

- 1.1 Bartholomew Martin
- 1.2 William Rowbottom
- 1.3. George Males
- 2.1. Thomas Dust
- 2.2. William Bagley
- 2.3. Francis Seaton
- 3.1. John Craythorn
- 3.2. John Austin, senior
- 3.3. John Austin, junior”



On both crude lead and the 17th main series we are used to seeing the elaborate identification marks used by affluent city merchants for the same reason, but the above seems to suggest that, away from the big towns, more modest marks were similarly used by rural communities. It is entirely logical, but not surprisingly a practice even less written about than its urban equivalent.



Fig.1: Commercial 17th cent farthing showing merchant mark.

Fig.2: Lead token attempting to copy the idea.

Fig.3: Late 16c church token, for admin purposes; name as monogram in commercial mintmark style.

The area from which the above nine farmers come is unknown, sadly, although I somewhat suspect NW Hunts, adjacent to the Northants border, near Great Gidding; not that it matters too much, as there is no great reason for the phenomenon to be regional, even if perchance it was in practice. Only four of the marks, five at a stretch, have much correlation with their supposed issuers' initials, and one of those {M for W} may be upside down; and of these, only one, GM, is a serious attempt at a full pair of initials. The other four marks are purely random combinations of lines, mostly straight for ease of carving, should they be required for wooden chests as well as authorising documents.

These characteristics and proportions seem to sit very well with those of the more seriously recognised marks of the city merchants, who over the course of time increasingly use initials as components en route in the course of their evolution to genuine monograms and finally pure initials.

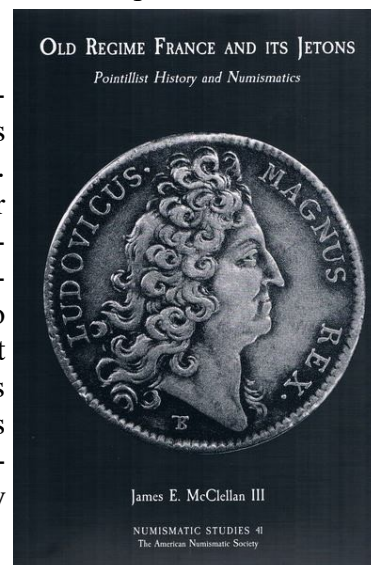
The net outcome of all this is that some of the strange marks which we see on lead tokens, and which we have wondered about before, may be these very farmers' marks. It will be difficult to tell them apart, but below are a number of pieces which might, or might not, fit into such a category.



More on the Mediaeval Use of Tokens

Most if not all mediaeval tokens, or *méreaux* as they are known in France, were struck by the Church, both in this country and on the European mainland. We have discussed some aspects of their use before, and what follows largely endorses this; nevertheless, it is often good to compare the same message from a different angle.

An American writer, James McClennan III, has recently {2020} published a rare English-language work entitled “Old Regime France and its Jetons”, a subject almost exclusively documented in French to date. OK, jetons were normally made in brass, copper or precious metal, their purposes initially for abacus-like accounting and later for honorific payment, all of which is outside the usual remit of this publication; however, in his opening overview chapter, McClennan deliberately sets out to distinguish the various other types of co-existent coinage to show what jetons are not. His discussion of *méreaux* only lasts five paragraphs {pages25-27}, but his succinct description of their use and purpose is equally relevant to English issues as to those of the country he is discussing. I have therefore thought it helpful to *précis* his thoughts by means of a number of extracts and observations:



Méreaux, minted locally and issued by local cathedral chapters functioned in several ways. They possessed a token monetary value, and were variously employed as follows:

- ⇒ They could be exchanged at appointed times for cash at the canon treasury,
- ⇒ They could be used as a voucher for a meal in the church refectory or for bread at the local bakery.
- ⇒ At mass, they were handed out to choir members as payment.
- ⇒ They were given to priests and brothers {monks} to encourage attendance at services.
- ⇒ They were given to those performing special services, or attending dean and chapter meetings involving the bishop and other senior clergy.
- ⇒ They were used for charitable purposes and given out to the deserving poor by the confraternity {brotherhood} associated with the local cathedral or parish.
- ⇒ Workmen, such as stonemasons, received them as payments for services.
- ⇒ They may also, possibly, have played a part in the topsy-turvy world of popular festivals {think Boy Bishops here}.

With so many monetary uses, it is not surprising that *méreaux* occasionally crossed the boundary between being a private token coinage of the church and being a generally-accepted local currency, a practice which so upset the civil authorities that they established a special monetary court in Paris in 1522 to deal with it. In one particular case in 1557, it was revealed that an entire town {Maçon} was equating certain local *méreaux* to double *tournois* and other official copper coins of the realm.

In England the issue of tokens for the above purposes ended abruptly with the Dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s, but in France *méreaux* lingered on in some of the central urban parishes until the time of the Revolution. In the Low Countries, they continued as church tokens similarly, albeit on a small scale, into the mid 19th cent.

In France, the *jeton* gradually diverged from the *méreau* and became a freeby-cum-status-symbol dished out to all and sundry, continuing in such manner until the time of the Revolution. Then, having gone its separate way for several centuries since the Middle Ages, the *jeton* confused the numismatic world by suddenly emerging from the numismatic tunnel in the 19th cent and lending its name to French tokens more generally, so that most modern issues are classified as *jetons de whatever*; for example, *jeton publicitaire* = advertising token, *jeton de monnaie* = value stated token, *jeton d'audition* = juke box machine token, and so on.