Issue 169 **Leaden Tokens Telegraph** Jul/Aug 2025 Page 1
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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Please note that the old david@powell8041.freeserve.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

A New Type of Spangle?

In the beginning, was the spangle. Well, in terms of the main British series of lead tokens lasting six hundred years; it comes first, and leads on quickly to all that follows. You've not heard of spangles? Well, perhaps that is not very surprising, because there are not many of them, and those that there are are mostly so tiny that they easily get lost and so fragile that they easily get broken. In Mitchiner and Skinner's two long chronological articles in BNJ53/54, when the curtain opens on the catalogue following their preamble, there is BNJ53 type A, colloquially known as the spangle, to greet you.

In that they have a distinctive shape, spangles, defined by their upper section and its two holes, thought to be for sewing on to garments, are unlike anything in the token series which follows. They are almost a shock to the numismatic system. Debate remains over whether spangles were an unofficial form of money or a form of pilgrim badge or pass, but in favour of the monetary argument:

⇒ There is a very close correlation between the mid-13th cent BNJ53 type A and its immediately following type C, in terms of depicted subject matter and quality of execution. Both suggest that the Church is the obvious issuer.

⇒ The natural choice of size for a badge or pass, to identify the bearer, would be a lot larger.

Figs.1-6 show a range of sizes in descending order. Fig.1 at 22x17mm and 1.15gm is rare, and about as large as they come, Figs.3-5 are more typical. Fig.6 is only 12x8mm and weighs 0.22gm. These type A spangles are invariably pewter, and extremely fragile; not surprisingly, the spur at the top, or part of it, frequently breaks off. Why such an impracticably small size was chosen for many of the earlier tokens is anyone's guess, and evidently BNJ53 type A was not around for too long. Whether the related type C with its standard 18mm diameter was an attempt to produce a more satisfactory replacement, or served a different purpose, is uncertain.

One can imagine that the pieces might be prepayment for board and lodging en route when undertaking a pilgrimage; maybe each design represented a different boarding house and, having procured the necessary tokens in advance, the pilgrim sewed the entire set in order on his tunic before starting out, for security, and then cut them off for payments at intervals as each hostelry was reached.

My thanks to Christine Layzell, therefore, for kindly showing me what appears as if it might be a lead, rather than pewter, equivalent {Fig.7}. It has four sewing hooks, rather than two, although two of them are broken, and what might be either an "I" or a candlestick, in the centre. A candlestick, representing payment for the provision of light, would be an eminently reasonable interpretation. Has anyone else, please, seen the like? Perhaps this is a little later, 14th or even early 15th cent, when the use of pure copper as an alternative to pewter had started to become more common.

Readers' Correspondence: Feedback from last month

My thanks to Tony Gilbert for some feedback regarding last month's beacon token article {page 1}:

⇒ Wooden-fired iron baskets were used on hill-tops. Where there was a town wall or castle available and suitable, and at the correct height, etc., then pitch-fired iron pots were erected, and sited on top of iron poles.

⇒ In the beacon shown in the 17th cent token on page 1 {Fig.3} the two 'sticks' at 11.00 and 14.00 represent ladders for climbing. These kind of short ladders were in use up to the 19th century for accessing railway semaphores, and in modern days can sometimes be seen fixed to mobile phone masts.

The following extract from the Somerset Quarter Sessions records of January 1626/27, relating to an area to the south and south-west of Bristol, gives some idea of the geographic frequency of beacons and the arrangements for manning them.

⇒ "Ordered that the tythings or parishes of Witcombe, Ubley, Compton Martyn, West harptrey, Henton Bluett, High-littleton and Paulton shall constantly keepe Watch and Ward upon all occasions [at Comand] att the Beacon att Dundry And that in like manner the Tithings and pishes of Midsomer Norton, Emborowe, Chilcompton, Stone Easton, ffarington and Cameley shall watch at Ryborrowe Beacon And we do further order and thinke fit that the Inhitants of Chewton shall continue the watch att the said beacon at Ryborrowe "

It would appear that a group of parishes, maybe six to eight, would have collective responsibility for manning each beacon, no doubt according to some rota drawn up between themselves, and any related tokens would no doubt be part of this. For instance, if the cooperating parties were several miles distant from each other, it might be necessary for their representatives to identify themselves to each other; or alternatively, the tokens may just be payment for labour or fuel.

Tony also feels that Fig. 3 on page 2 is reminiscent of the design of English touch pieces, which traditionally depict the angel St. Michael; in which case, Fig.3 might be some kind of associated alms token. I am open minded on this, but it is a reasonable suggestion, and a couple of illustrations from an article in BNJ_50 {1980} on the subject are shown alongside for comparison. Your opinion as to whether the gent in question looks more like a saint or a soldier! For the full article, see https://www.britnumsoc.org/publicns/bnj-articles-by-year

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Readers' Correspondence: New Items

First up this month, from Kath Horobin, a piece which looks like, and others suspect of being, a Cantian {Kentish} potin; except, it comes from Staffordshire. These, which I have written about before in LTT_97-98. date c.100-30 BC and have a diameter which tends to gently decrease from 19-20mm to 13mm over that period. This one is near the top end of that range. The designs tend to be very degenerate mutations of those used on the European mainland a couple of centuries or more earlier, but modified and simplified so much by time and culture change that the originals are no longer, or barely, recognisable.

In favour of Kath's Fig.1 being one of these Kentish pieces, also, are its sloping edges; potin moulds tended to be made this way, deliberately, so that the pieces when cooled would slip out of them more easily. They are not usually uniface, however, nor does Fig.1 correspond closely with any of the 26 examples illustrated in Van Arsdell's standard reference work on Iron Age coinage. I am just wonder-

ing how a Kentish piece would end up in Staffordshire at that date...but not to say it wouldn't! The other possibility is that we are looking at a token dated c.1700, depicting either a simple armorial shield or an object such as a spade. A piece of what period would have a greater chance of being uniface but much less of having the sloping edges. Intriguing, arguments either way; I am slightly inclined to favour the potin, but certainly not sure.


2

Andy Bijsterbosch's thick and chunky Fig.2 probably has to be a weight; its diameter looks too large for a token even by the standards of the cartwheel period. Other purposes, such as a gaming piece, are also possible. As to the appearance, I guess that it represents what the maker thought was the best way of doing it given the skills and equipment available to him. It looks as if he might have been thinking of converting each of the eight arms of the cartwheel into a cross but ran out of patience after three; which, given the time required to do the job, I can understand. As to whether the crosses indicate any religious motivation or whether the design was just chosen because it looked typical, is anyone's guess; I favour the latter. Church pieces were not normally made in this manner, but then neither were weights.

Accommodating Clock Faces on Small Tokens

Below, a fascinating clock token {Fig.3}, found by Ivan Lili Karamanovi in Kent. My first reaction on seeing it, before appreciating that most of the characters were numbers, was that it had a passing resemblance to the Jewish plummas discussed on the front page of LTT_82; however, that is a coincidence, it is far larger and heavier than those. Also, the characters do not look particularly Hebrew.


3

It is difficult to fit the twelve numerals of a clock onto a cast token of maybe some 27-28mm across, but this manufacturer has made a very good effort. The 7,8 and 9 are clearest, and help to establish the orientation and put everything else into context. The 6 is lost to the end of the minute hand but there are attempts at most of the lower single-digit numbers, even if some of them are partly retrograde or slanted sideways. The Y-like thing pointing somewhere between the 1 and 2 is the hour hand. I will guess that 10,11,12 and 1 were left to last, by which time the mould engraver, running out of both patience and space, resorted to mere pellets instead. In the main Williamson 17th cent series, the Oxford clock token of Joseph Knibb is just about the most sought after piece of the lot. Even he, with the greater granularity of artwork possible on copper, left one of his numbers out.

As an aside to this, it is worth remarking that certain of the numerals 0-9 took different forms in their early days. This does not reflect much on coins and tokens, because the forms had more or less stabilised by the early 1500s, at which date very few coins were dated, and even when they were, Roman numerals were often used. As an example, Fig.4 shows a double briquet of Flanders, dated 1478 and minted in Antwerp; you will notice that the 4 looks as if has fallen over 45 degrees and finished up bearing a passing resemblance to a portable camper seat or an upside-down Greek gamma. The numeral 7 sometimes behaves similarly, falling over sideways to become an upturned V, and variants of 5 and 9 are also occasionally in evidence. By the time that tokens start to become dated this evolutionary mutation is fairly well over, but it is worth bearing in mind.


4a


4b

For those interested further in this subject, may I recommend anyone visiting Salzburg to ascend the hill to the castle and look at some of the most excellently preserved outdoor tombstones of the same period, or for numismatic context, read Robert Levinson's book on "The Early Dated Coins of Europe".

A Hundred or Two

Many of the lead tokens relating to Poor Law relief were issued by the parish, whose officers sometimes, but by no means always, put their initials on them by way of indicating authority. There are quite a few examples amongst the main series of 17th cent tokens whereby an issue was put out on behalf of a town or village, which is what a parish usually represented, but with a relevant official stating his name/initials and/or position on the token. Several examples of mayors {Figs.1-2}, constables {Fig.3}, overseers {Figs.4-5} and portreeves {Fig.6} are illustrated below.

It may be presumed this same phenomenon extended to lead issues in some places, but that because of that metal's lesser capacity for accommodating data, the names of both the official(s) and the location (s) were likely to have been reduced to initials. This in turn means that the chance of confusion with a commercial piece is greater, but the possibility should nevertheless be borne in mind.

Less known, and rather faded into oblivion in modern times, is that there was another administrative unit, other than the parish and the town, called {in most counties} the hundred. One or two counties had their own alternative names for it , but the idea was the same; there were certain facilities which every parish needed , but which were best provided collectively; in other words, to avoid wasting resources by each parish reinventing the wheel. The workhouse was a good example of this; you only needed one for every 10-12 parishes, typically, rather than one per village, even if most or all of those villages were represented amongst the inmates.

So, if villages, parishes and towns all issued tokens, why not hundreds? Was not that another area in which groups of parishes might band together, to mutual administrative and financial advantage? The answer is an undoubted yes, for there examples in the main series, shown below. Thomas Watkins of Barton Hundred {Gloucs, Fig.7} states his name and, via guild arms, his trade of tallowchandler, whereas Edward Taylor of Hemlingford Hundred {Warwicks, Figs.8-9}, chooses to depict his own portrait, once facing and once in profile. The facing bust on the earlier piece looks not unlike that of the king on a mediaeval penny!

There was no reason for Watkins to depict his guild arms, if he was issuing small change on behalf of the community, although parish and other civic officials usually doubled up as tradesmen and would not have been averse to the opportunity of a bit of free advertising for their business. Taylor seems to have concentrated on providing a portrait which might have been meant to enable you to recognise him in the street, and his earlier depiction is somewhat reminiscent of another more famous Edward three centuries earlier. Maybe someone took exception to the pseudo-royal visage and told the later Edward to change it. to something rather less king-like.

Dog Tax and other Licensing Tokens

1

Fig.1, discovered by Andy Lodge in Essex, inspires some interesting thoughts. Apart from the fact that there is no pendant hole top centre, as one would expect, this has features common to licensing badges. Some of these badges go back sufficiently far in history that they could reasonably be struck in lead; and indeed, as artistry and quality of production were often not held to be of great importance for such things, lead might in earlier years have been a likely choice.

The common features which mark the more developed of these type of pieces are:

⇒ a statement of the precise year to which the licence refers.
⇒ a serial number or equivalent.
⇒ irregular shape, to distinguish from those issued in adjacent years.
⇒ identification of the issuing authority, or individual, which the letters at Fig.1 might provide. HW could easily be the name of a place or person.

Andy's piece has all of these, so it just remains to try and work out what, exactly, was being licensed. It may have been permission to engage in an activity, like portering in a market or in the docks, or it may have been permission to own something, such as a dog. Both types of licence have histories which go back to the early days of the 19th cent, if not the 18th or earlier.

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Governments have always looked for ways to make money and have often alighted on the idea of taxing objects and activities which are quite innocuous and which there is no obvious reason to discourage. The keeping of dogs was one such and, after much contentious debate during the last four decades of the 18th cent, the taxing of dogs was finally introduced in Britain in 1796.

Metal dog tax licences {as distinct from dog tags, which merely link the dogs to their owner and addresses} are usually fixed to the animal's collar, and have been widely issued in many parts of Europe, and the United States; often at municipality {town} level, or in the US at county level, with the result that there are potentially umpteen series of them out there. The more modern ones tend to be rather uninspiring, but the early ones are usually quite attractive, as shown by Figs.2-10 below, which illustrate a number of German examples c.1875-1910. Most of them have no statement of value; where they do, as in Figs.8-10, that means that there was a tiered taxing system, with different amounts being paid for different categories of dog.

2. Berlin
3. Frankfurt-am-Main
4. Frankfurt-am-Main
5. Frankfurt-am-Main
6. Hamburg
7. Köthen
8. Munich
9. Munich
10. Munich

Figs.11-12 show a couple of more modern examples, from Doorn, Netherlands {Fig.11} and Ghent, Belgium {Fig.12} respectively.

Now to something very different: Andy Williams' Fig.13, a rough old piece of lead with a counterstamps all over it.. The damage at the bottom suggests that it might just be a seal, but whether seal or licence, those indentations, however imperfectly applied, bear the symbols of various authorising officers. The mark at 3 o'clock looks as if it could just have been made with a chisel, but the one at 10 o'clock is finely cut, enough to know that it is not meaningless. The other two marks are intermediate, but clearly show something. Most likely they are either consecutive licensing marks or the approvals of quality control or customs officers.

Fig.14, a City of London Ticket Porter's badge, previously shown in LTT_84, illustrates this concept more clearly. It has been reissued at approximately yearly intervals, in August, September or October, from 1838 to 1845. It was apparently normal practice in this case to carry the licensee's name, admission number and admission date on the back, but theoretically the back could also have been used for further counterstamps, as has been done in the case of Fig.15, a copper example of uncertain possibly foreign provenance. Not of suitable shape for use as a pendant, it would almost certainly have been carried rather than hung. It would appear that here there were two stamps applied every year, one a date and the other an authority indicator: either letter pairing, monogram or symbol.. The piece being much smaller than Figs.13-14 above, space ran out much more quickly even with the dates 53-58 {probably 1853-1858} reduced to two digits; so that, in {18}59 the counterstamper was forced to resort to using the back.

Finally, Nicola White's Fig.16, which some of you may have seen on one of her "London Live" mudlarking programmes back in August., and which she has very kindly allowed me to reproduce here. It clearly has five DDMMYY dates on the reverse,, even if overlapping and not very neatly applied. Once again one has to guess which century is referred to; I favour a 20th cent date {1952-54} on basis of style and Nicola a 19th cent one {1852-54} on basis of findspot context, but neither of us feel certain.

The obverse is an absolute jumble of characters and gives no idea as to who the issuer might be. The dates are rather randomly spread for a licence. If it was a dog tag for an animal used by some official organisation, e.g. a guard dog, then the dates could represent something like successive visits to the vet; however, that is rather clutching at straws. Whether "1 TON" on the back means what it says I do not know, but if so then we are probably talking about a piece relating to a cargo and the Port of London control mechanism through which it passed.

Many thanks, everybody, and, next time you see a piece covered in odd marks or numbers, think licensing! A question to leave you with; why does Fig.17 have two holes rather than one? Do you attach it to a dog, or to its kennel/box?