

Editor: David Powell

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 Please note that the contact addresses advertised in earlier versions of LTT are no longer active.

View of The English Coinage, by a German Visitor in 1599

The following are the observations, concerning the coinage, of an early German travel writer, Thomas Platter, when touring England in 1599. Where his translator uses the word “symbol”, that means token; the copper examples he refers to possibly being those of Bristol, whose civic authorities had made an issue of copper klippe {sheared metal sheet} tokens in 1591. It is evident from the last few lines of his diary entry that Platter was aware of the need of lower denominations than were officially minted, but did not perhaps have time to appreciate the overall dearth of the small coinage which was necessary for everyday low-level transactions.

Matters of coinage and payment are in good order in England for the queen mints only coins of pure gold and silver, the smallest is a halfpenny of pure silver, and very tiny, and a whole penny is roughly worth 1½ German kreuzers. So that 2 English pennies are about 3 kreuzers. Accordingly the coins are an English ½ penny, 2, 3, 4, and 6 English pennies, which 6 make half an English shilling, equivalent to a frank in some parts, or 2 batzen 1 kreuzer. A whole shilling equal 4½ batzen. These are the eight different silver coins which I took back to Basel, other varieties I did not see

in England. And so soon as a new king or queen succeeds, all the old silver coins are called in, melted down, and the new king or queen's emblem struck on them, for which reason old English silver coins are hard to come by. If one buys to the value of less than a halfpenny, permission is granted to mint lead or copper symbols in one's own house, some 4 or 6 going to a halfpenny, and these symbols are given to the apprentices; when they have a halfpenny worth or more, they exchange and reckon up together so that nobody loses.

“These symbols are given to the apprentices” - to make, or as their wages? Some also, namely the authorities, might have queried “permission is granted....to mint....in one's house”. Here are some of the pieces which Thomas might have seen. Most of them would have been 11-12mm across, 13mm at the outside; so, let us hope that Mr. Platter, if he wished to take home any souvenirs of his visit, had sound pockets with no holes in. The Bristol pieces must have been a delight to handle, by contrast; klippe issues always vary slightly, but the piece shown is about 23x19mm.



Readers' Correspondence



First up this month, Fig.1 from Kerrie Masters, an attractive gentry piece in mid-18th cent style; although, at 20mm, of a size more popular several decades earlier. The obverse bust is probably meant to be that of the issuer, with his initials flanking; it hints at that of a Roman emperor, and may possibly be drawn from a piece of that period, but he is more likely to have been a farmer and/or estate owner. Shown are two different renderings, taken under different lighting conditions, because each emphasises certain features better than the other.

Lead tokens with birds on are suspected of being mostly concerned with either vermin control or the administration of shooting parties, depending on the species indicated; commoner birds suggesting the former, more up-market birds the latter. This one looks more like a game bird, which fits nicely with the likely status of the gent on the other side; hence, probably, a shooting association. It is probable that the tokens were issued at the rate of one per bird shot, and that the participants were then charged according to the number they bagged.

Another piece worthy of two renderings, because they suggest entirely different objects, is Giovanni Forlino's uniface Fig.2. The first, fig.2a, suggests a buckle whereas, turn it round, and Fig.2b suggests a window such as you might find in a modern {well, between the wars} semi-detached house. Being probably an 18th cent piece, it obviously isn't the latter, and quite possibly not the former either, although buckle maker has at least long been a well-known trade.

Still in the 18th cent, and similarly enigmatic, Adam Faulkner's Fig.3; what looks as if it might be a large lower-case "m" sitting on an exergual base, the latter feature so reminiscent of our pre-decimal coppers; however, look at it closely and one can imagine a man on a horse, the latter enjoying a nibble of something tasty on a tree! Amazing what alternatives a little rotation of magnification can suggest.

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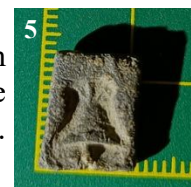
Something entirely different now, in the shape of Kim Powles' tiny {11-12mm} Fig.4, which for obvious reasons I have magnified. Like Fig.3, this triggers interestingly different responses. I saw it as a very pleasant and well-executed, mildly amusing, face constructed from simple geometric shapes; late mediaeval, c.1400. Nick Dodman, and I thank him for his additional thoughts, saw it another way:



⇒ "It looks to me to be an orb surmounted by a cross. Indeed rather simplistically executed, but hardly surprising given the tiny size of it. The implication being a Christian connection for its use."

So, does one of us have to be right and the other wrong? no, not necessarily. At this date, and for a piece this neatly made, Nick is almost certainly correct in his belief that we are looking at the work of a church-related issuer; nobody else interested in tokens had the money or facilities for production. However, even clerics and monks were not averse to indulging their sense of humour on occasion, and my suspicion is that one may have been doing so here by investing his piece with a double meaning.

Also in need of magnification is Fig.5, an attractive and delightfully clear 10x13mm Thames foreshore piece found by Reuben Cook somewhere near Vauxhall. Its shape suggests an early weight, although pictorial symbols are not very usual on such pieces. Maybe a bell was the shop sign of its owner, or his surname.



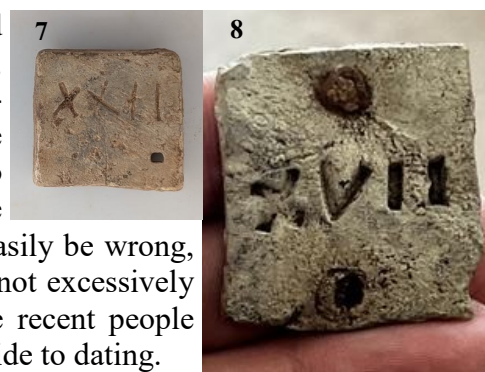


Moving on to larger pieces now, Eddie Burrows' Fig.6, which certainly looks like a badge, although for what purpose is uncertain; pilgrim is one option, but there are a number of others; e.g. beggar, security pass, charm to ward off evil spirits, just to name a few. I always like to see a pendant hole centrally related to the design, as on this piece; however, the implication is that, although Eddie seems to have depicted the piece right way up to my eye, the hole maker thought it should be rotated the other way round. The depiction is somewhere between a stylised flower and a candlestick. There looks as if there might be a significant amount of verbiage around the outside, but unfortunately it is unreadable.

On balance I favour the pilgrim badge interpretation. The piece is not a monetary token, for the style is far too early for the {1800-ish} days when tokens reached 40mm across.

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My thanks next to Stuart Woolger and Sean Hinksman, as indeed to all this month's contributors, for, respectively, Figs.7 and 8; very similar in concept, but very different in size. Both are uni-face, approximately square, and bear Roman numerals, but one has dimensions approximately twice the size of the other. No idea of age, but my gut feeling would be to guess somewhere around 18th cent., possibly even early 19th; however, I could easily be wrong, since not much to go on. They feel old to a certain extent, but not excessively so; Roman numerals have remained popular with many more recent people than the Romans, and are not, in isolation, a particularly good guide to dating.



Stuart's piece, the smaller of the two {Fig.7} is 17x17x2mm and 8.84gm in weight, whereas Sean's larger Gloucestershire find {Fig.8} is about an inch and a half square. The positions of the holes are different, however, and that may also provide some clues to their purposes.

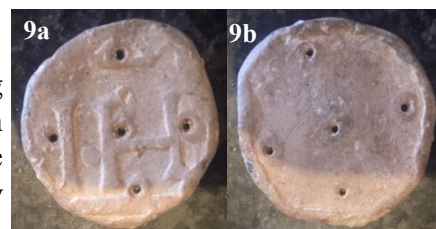
A weight is one of the first possibilities for consideration in each case, although weights do not usually have holes in them.. If XVII was a value, then dividing 8.84gm by 17 gives 0.52gm; there were some odd measures available in olden days, so if anyone knows whether that equates to anything please shout. The most likely reason a weight would have a deliberate hole or edge detractor in, apart from end-of-life invalidation, is if it was required to modify an approximately manufactured piece to a more exact measurement. An early pay/tool check seems therefore more likely for Fig.7, with the hole for suspension and the number representing a statement of either the weight or the owner's identity {e.g. his stall number at the local market}.

The same pay/tool check argument applies up to a point for Sean's Fig.8, except that:

- ⇒ It was found in a field which has previously yielded a few Roman sundries, arguing that the odds on a genuine Roman provenance are higher.
- ⇒ There are two strategically placed holes, rather than one random one.

The carefully-positioned holes, and the fact that the piece is larger. implies that perhaps they were for fixing rather than hanging; i.e. that the piece is a plaque. If so, what would you be numbering? Storage areas in a warehouse, stalls in a farm shed.... pews were numbered in a church, but would they descend to lead? Several options, and further ideas welcomed.

Talking of holes, to conclude, a very Kentish looking hop token dug up by James Venton in his back garden at Biddenden {Fig.9}, with the five holes almost certainly representing a value; interestingly, the 13th cent house next door was, in the 18th cent, owned by a family called Hanley. Whether they issued the token is, however, unknown.



Bread Tokens and their Use

The following series of 19th cent bread tokens from the Bedfordshire area are quite well known and, in the case of the Bedford and Biggleswade pieces, fairly common. There are other comparable pieces from a couple of London parishes; Fulham, and St.Olave's, Southwark {see overleaf}; the num-



bers, in each case, are thought to represent administrative subdivisions. How did this relief system work? The following extract from the East Kent Times and Mail of 31 August 1871, repeated in several local newspapers during the week following, hints at how these tokens might have been used.

KENT MENDICITY SOCIETY.

The above Society commenced working in the Easry Union district during the week ending 22nd April, 1871. The bread stations appointed by the committee, with the name and residence of the baker at each, are as follows:—

Deal.....	Mr. Thomson, 15, Lower Street
Sandwich ..	Mr. Batcliffe, Strand Street
Wingham ..	Mr. Wrake
Tilmanstone..	Mr. Backman
Nonington ..	Mr. Osborne, of Easole

During the thirteen weeks ending the 15th day of July, 792 vagrants have been relieved by bread tickets at the above stations, at a cost to the Society of £6 12s.; during this period subscriptions have been received from about 45 persons, varying in amount from 2s. 6d. to 10s., in addition to which bread tickets have also been sold to a somewhat limited extent. The Society up to the present time has not received the liberal support to which it is justly entitled; this may be attributed either to its existence not being generally known, or its object not being generally appreciated. To meet some of the difficulties attending the supply of tickets, the following have very kindly consented to receive subscriptions and dispose of bread tickets on behalf of the Society:—

Deal.....	Mr. Adkins, Lower Street, stationer
Sandwich..	Mr. C. Baker, Market Place, ..
".....	Mr. Prentice, New Street, ..
Ash.....	Mr. Dixon, ..
Easry....	Mr. Hudson, chemist
Wingham..	Mr. F. Kendall

Facilities being thus given for the supply of bread tickets it is much hoped that the Society will now be more generally supported. When it is known that nearly 2,000 vagrants were received into Easry

Union alone during last year, it surely becomes a duty for everyone, whether of large or small means, to do the utmost to get rid of this social pest. The Society being desirous that everyone should possess bread tickets, invites all to become either purchasers or subscribers; the main object in view, viz., getting rid of the professional vagrant, will most assuredly be accomplished, by giving bread instead of money; it is a well-known fact these vagrants seek for money only—if bread is given them it will drive them to pursue their calling elsewhere.

Dorsetshire, at one time infested with beggars, has been comparatively freed from them by the adoption of the above system; the Kent Society is now working with advantage in the Sevenoaks Union district—it has lately commenced operations in the Dover Union, and it is to be hoped before long all unions in the county will be working together to effect the same object, the public will then be saved from much imposition, the police from the trouble of detecting much crime and vagrancy; and idleness, no longer supported by indiscriminate almsgiving, will cease to become more profitable than honest labour. As a proof of the mode in which these vagrants tramp through the country, it may be stated that several Sevenoaks Union bread tickets have already found their way into the hands of the bakers in the Easry district.

The efforts of the few who have set the Society going in the Easry Union district now require backing up—the Society wants general support. Subscriptions of 2s. 6d., 5s., or 10s., will be gladly received, or bread tickets can be purchased at 1s. the sheet of twelve (or even less in quantity), if desired, at either of the places before named, or of George Spain, hon. sec., St. Bartholomew's, Sandwich, Easry Union district.



The article mentions various places in Kent and Dorset where the stated system was in operation, although no relevant metal tokens are known for them specifically. Perhaps paper tickets were used instead, in certain contexts some writers use the terms “token” and “ticket” interchangeably. However, there is nothing special about any of these areas which explains why they issue tokens and others not; the issues which they are attempting to address, namely hunger, poverty, vagrancy and petty crime, have all been with us since time immemorial.



Some local areas may be a little freer from such problems than others, but by and large they occur across the land. In earlier centuries than the 19th, before the days of well-made brass tokens like those shown, the situation was likely to have been worse rather than better. On the continent, too, bread token issues were even more obviously visible, issued either to the poor or in times of famine. Which brings us to the question: which of our crude lead pieces were used for the same purpose? because, surely, some of them undoubtedly were.

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Two Superb Lead Tokens from the 1640's

It would be good if all lead tokens were like these! Never mind, let us appreciate them whilst we may. Both comes from the Thames, and long may we be grateful for the preservative qualities of its mud.



The larger piece, unusually at 16mm a little above the average for pre-Williamson lead, is part of a small subseries which, uniquely amongst lead of this date, quotes its dates in Roman numerals. Struck for a variety of issuers and with various dates between 1640 and 1643, after which the manufacturer presumably decided that, with the growing number of letters needed to describe the date on a small flan, the design was no longer feasible. Another unusual feature for early lead is the pseudo-inscription of inverted triangles, a precursor of the time when, only a few years later, the edge was put to more constructive use. Maybe the triangles were by way of experiment to see if inscriptions were feasible.

The smaller pieces shows the typical 17th cent triad of initials. The delightfully-rendered cannon is a rare choice of shop sign, possibly hinting that perhaps IT/JT may have had his business in Cannon St.