17th Century Lead Tokens in Main Copper Series Style

By and large the main copper and brass token series of 1648-1672, as defined by Williamson and others, evolved from the best of the London-made lead issues which preceded and had themselves been developing since the end of the Reformation in 1539. There was, however, a certain overlap, both chronologically and in terms of style, and it is interesting to ponder those pieces which sit on the boundary, showing features of both series.
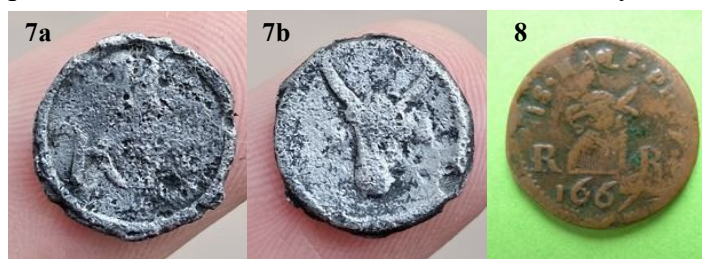

Figs.1-6 are good-quality examples of these pieces from London {Figs.1,3-6} and Southwark {Fig.2}:
⇒   Fig.1: RH of the Dove in the Horseshoe, Finch Lane, Cornhill {W.1033a} - dated 1653.
⇒   Fig.2: Richard Smith at Horselydown New Stairs, Southwark {W.267a}
⇒   Fig.3: A/RI of Green Arbour Court, dated 1649
⇒   Fig.4: K/IA {John Keeling} of Distaff Lane {see LTT_132, pages 2-3}
⇒   Fig.5: P/TM of Doctors Commons
⇒   Fig.6: Christopher Flower, dated 1648

Figs.1-2,6 are fully main-series style on both sides, but on lead; Figs.4-5 are typical lead style on the-obverse but main-series style on the reverse, whereas Fig.3 is a hybrid which, whilst hinting at main series style, conforms to neither. It appears to be dated 1649.

A number of token issuers did so more than once, either because of additional need or a change in personal circumstances, and on occasion lead was selected on one occasion and copper or brass on another., usually later. Rollo Sparkes' Fig.7, found on the south bank of the Thames, is a probable example; the initials are debateable, but look likely to be those of Richard Roberts of the Bull's Head, Southwark, who issued main series Southwark W.80 {Fig.8} in 1667; or, given that the piece is about 13-14mm, implying a date in the 1630s or 1640s, maybe his father before him. Fig.8's other side contains a description, including the issuer's name, but as often is the case on such pieces is too poor to show.

To finish off this section, Figs 9-10, two Irish examples issued by Richard Hamerton and Martin Dix of Clonmel, Tipperary. The date on Fig.9 is 1653, which equals the earliest known date of an Irish copper piece in Williamson.

Readers' Correspondence

First up this month, a pleasant, evenly but lightly patinated piece {Fig.1} from Ton de Goijer. Pieces of this shape tend often to be weights, but the edges, not shown, show it to be a pipe seal; two of them, opposite each other, are smooth, whilst the intervening ones are open. Both sides are slightly ambiguous as to what they depict; one might be a boat with a mast, an anchor with a truncated handle, a drinking/powder horn or a cheese cutter, whilst the other could be a city entrance gate or an old-fashioned Gothic "A". If I didn't know about the edges I would somewhat favour the weight, as stylised ships often appear on these, with the "II" below being a value rather than a piece of ornamentation; however, the edges rather seal it. Sorry, no pun intended.

I would also go for the "A" over the gate. Ton thinks that it might be from one of the old Hanseatic trading cities, like Zwolle or Deventer. However, the only Hanseatic city which he can think of which fits an "A" is Arnhem.

Allex Kussendrager's https://www.loodjes.nl/ website is a good first port of call for this type of Dutch or Belgian material.. It is in Dutch, but there is an English guide to it in App.D of the LTT bibliography.

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Allex's website proved invaluable when it came to identifying Fig.2, notified by Mark Turner, who has previously produced some interesting communion tokens {CTs} and is based near the coast a little north of Aberdeen. This piece, 22mm in across and weighing 9.12 gm,, is nowhere near being a communion token. Allex identified it as a Dutch beacon token from Bieningen aan 't Spui (South-Holland)

with a value of 24 stuivers, and was excited to see it because he had never come across the piece with that particular value on before. So, if you find things near the east coast which don't seem to fit, especially in the vicinity of a port, start thinking about where sailors might have come from, what they might have had in their pockets and what might have washed up on the shore from where.

Two pieces next from Steve Jenkins. Fig.3, uniface, found in Aston Tirrold, Oxfordshire, is an unusual, but very pleasant design. It is probably early-mid 18th cent, although on account of the 20mm diameter I somewhat favour early rather than late. Even end-17th cent is not wholly impossible. As to the depiction, it is attractive without it being obvious what it is. My two best guesses are:

⇒ An attempt to render the double-headed eagle design of the Elizabethan counters {c.1574-1614} discussed in LTT_120, pages 2-4. Issuers frequently drew on earlier designs when seeking inspiration for their own.

⇒ A shop/pub sign. Bryant Lillywhite's "London Signs" notes nine examples of "The Swan with Two Necks" in London alone, most of them active by the date of this piece. One or two establishments of such a name issued copper tokens, e.g. Williamson's Southwark 1, in the 17th cent series. There will no doubt have been other examples in the provinces.

Fig.4, from Cirencester and also uniface., is 17mm and, with sprue each side, provokes discussion briefly as to whether the protrusions are part of a fitment; however, I favour it being just a token. The design is basically a simple cartwheel with radial surround, except that the manufacturer has decided to embellish his very ordinary design by replacing all the straight lines with curves. A very pleasant variety.

The obverse mould of Bazzadig's Fig.5, an Oxfordshire find, was made by stamping a coin, in this case an 1806 George III halfpenny, into something soft which was then allowed or encouraged to harden. This is an occasional but not very effective technique used throughout most of the 18th cent and slightly beyond; it is easier to do than engraving a design into something harder, I guess, but the results rarely come out well. On the token the design comes out retrograde, of course, which doesn't matter too much, but the imprint is always weak. Monarch's heads are the most usual design used selected for this treatment but Britannia has also been seen. The overriding concept behind this approach is, by conveying some sense of officialdom, to enhance the validity of the piece in the user's mind.

On the reverse, the grid is a common reverse and easy to carve; however, the superimposition makes the piece slightly unusual. It looks as if the maker might have used the same technique as on the obverse, cut his grid into the soft material and then used a number stamp, 88, to add variety. There are signs from what I can see of the edge that the piece has been made in two halves and then clamped together like a seal, which is another occasionally used technique..

Following on from this, Mark Malyon's big chunky Fig.6, made along similar lines; however, it is a very different type of piece, and for a very different purpose. The coin has been impressed as previously, but then someone has subsequently scratched a whole collection of lines on the resulting object; whether intended as additional design or as end-of-life invalidation marks is uncertain. Lower-left may be observed a protrusion, in the centre of which is a crud-filled hole, from which the object may be suspended by a string; so, it is a badge of some sort. Given its overall weight, appearance and crude execution, a beggar's badge is not unlikely. Beggars were sometimes licensed to operate under certain conditions, but for obvious reasons life was not made too comfortable for them, to discourage the lifestyle; one of those conditions being that they had to wear a large, heavy and chunky identity tag round their neck. Such badges were not meant to be either comfortable or attractive.

Another probable beggar's badge next up {Fig.7}, 40mm across, found by David Hamilton in North Yorkshire. The design on this occasion is produced by stippling, a specific type of surface scratching also favoured by the manufacturers of love tokens made on behalf of early convicts bound for Australia. If it was a token one might argue whether a star or the sun was intended, in which case that would be the issuer's shop sign, but, as with Fig.6, no-one would worry much about design on a beggar's badge provided it was locally identifiable. They are sometimes numbered, but that is up to the local parish's method of administration; some might not think it necessary. Both pieces probably date from around 1800, plus or minus a bit. Identify the coin used for Fig.6 and one might be able to estimate even closer!

It Looks Obvious… or Is It?

We feature this month two simple but interesting pieces which show well-known symbols, one seemingly Jewish {Fig.1} and the other Masonic {Fig.2}. They may well relate to those social groups or to individuals connected to them, but whether that conclusion is invariable is certainly open to debate.

Fig.1, courtesy of Des Perry, is a river find. It looks 18th cent, but knowing the diameter might help confirm. Whilst the Star of David undoubtedly increases the possibility that the user is Jewish, there is another, much more probable, option: that A.N.Other, wanting to make a token but having no great skills, just chose a nice easy design which was straight forward to carve; like a triangle and a superimposed inverted triangle, which is what a Star of David is.

The issuer's profession is indeterminate; agriculture is one possibility, but there are plenty of others. Whilst the phrase "farmer's token" is definitely too often used, it should nevertheless be said that farmers and market gardeners did use tokens for two specific purposes: (i) for making interim payments to pickers, which were then accumulated and converted into cash later, and (ii) as deposits for containers used for conveying produce to market. LTT has already discussed these usages on several previous occasions, e.g. LTT_31 {hop tokens} and LTT_105 pages 4-6 {sack tokens}. Large numbers of pickers' tokens and market checks are known in brass or white metal in the mid-late 19th cent or even {in the case of market checks} the early 20th, so it is not unreasonable to expect that they will have existed in lead in earlier days, given that the reasons for their issue were both longstanding.

Grey Duff's Fig.2, about 30mm across, unsurprisingly stimulated plenty of debate when it appeared on the "All Things Lead" Facebook group {to which I recommend you, if you are not already on it}. It is in fact the top of an artefact, shaped a bit like a bottle top but with some sort of iron fixing inside; however, looking at the top alone it looks so like a token that one can imagine discovering one with the same or similar depiction. At first glance we could be looking at compass and set square, a well-known Masonic symbol, suggesting that the piece may be a pass or some such used by that organisation. However, there are other possibilities:

⇒ The depiction is indeed compass and set square, but that the issuer is a member of the carpenters' guild, which uses similar symbols {see below}. If so, he may or may not be a mason.
⇒ We are looking at a simple Roman numeral, XX {twenty}, with a pellet on top; but, because of the flan size, there is no room to separate the pellet from the letters.

Carpenters

The most favoured suggestions for the nature of the object were weight and seal, with the iron being used to make up to the desired amount; however, neither seemed particularly conclusive. The arms of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, as rendered in Michael Dickinson's 17th cent book and supported by various sites online, seem to include compasses only and omit the set square {Fig.3}. So, is the set square the critical feature which distinguishes freemason from carpenter? doubtless the carpenters need to use one frequently, whatever. Fig.4 is along the lines of Grey Duff's piece, except that it has a name and date on one side plus a value, 8 Schillings, which is an entrance fee or annual subscription, on the Other. It is what the Germans call

an amtzeichen and the Dutch a gildepenning; individually engraved pieces, usually in brass, which relate to trade guild membership. Heinz Röhl's catalogue of Lübeck tokens lists quite a number very similar to this, for various trades, and that is the city I suspect it comes from.. His two would-be carpenters both feature set square as well as the compass…. but then I suppose, one could argue that he might just have got some masons mixed up with his tradesmen!

Why a Court Jester needs Tokens

The piece on the right is German in origin, although there is nothing in particular to indicate that that is the case. It depicts a pleasantly well-struck merchant mark, the alternative to initials as a personal identifier before the days of widespread literacy; which, in isolation, suggests a 15th or 16th cent date, possibly 17th. It is 19½x22½mm and weighs 1.69gm, shown here magnified 3:2, and sheared from metal plate.

OK, the piece is copper, but one feels that the concept could very easily translate to lead. What, however, is its purpose? No issuer's trade is stated, nor a value; neither does its shape make it feel very monetary. A weight, owned or authorised by the owner of the mark, is probably the best guess if thinking of British counterparts. However a little help from Wolfgang Hasselmann who, on page 576 of his "Marken und Zeichen Lexikon" {i.e. paranumismatic dictionary}, introduces us to the concept of Hofschützler-Gefällemarken. In case you wanted to know what a Hofschützler is, here is Wikipedia's take on the matter, translated into English:

Hofschützler-Gefällemarken

Lüneburger Gefällemarke für ein heute unbestimmbares Gefälle aus dem 17. Jahrhundert

⇒   A court artist {Hofschützler} is the type of artist who, since the Renaissance, served as a servant with privileged status (often with the rank of valet) at the imperial, royal, princely, and episcopal courts of Europe. As a painter (court painter), architect (court architect), musician (court musician), or poet (court poet), he fulfilled his master's representational needs.

⇒   The "court freedom" exempted the artist from the still often existing urban guild regulations . In addition to his direct artistic activities, he was assigned a variety of other services (e.g., preparation and decoration of festivals, educational duties, library administration, travel escort). As a rule, he was under the supervision of a small number of servants. Similarly to the courts, wealthy cities, primarily in northern Italy, also employed artists. For example, the Republic of Venice appointed Giovanni Bellini as the official painter of the republic in 1483. In some Upper German cities, the status of "city painter" existed, with citizenship and an honorary salary.

Hasselmann's own write up, again translated, takes a slightly extended view of the matter, agreeing that the Hofschützler was a privileged court official but suggesting that his range of possible professions might be slightly wider than implied above:

⇒   In contrast to bourgeois master craftsmen, who were only allowed to practice their trade after obtaining permission from the council of a city or other city, following an examination of their personal qualifications, the Hofschützler (exempted from the court protection), who were under the personal protection of the respective local sovereign court, were able to pursue their craft unhindered without citizenship. Hofschützler were found in almost all branches of trade and commerce; to practice, all they had to do was to pay a certain annual fee to the sovereign's rent fund. This payment was acknowledged with the Hofschützler fee stamp, which had to be submitted to the sovereign's office in due time as proof of payment. Failure to comply with this payment deadline meant that the court protégé was removed from the list of privileged persons, which was always tantamount to expulsion from the city, as they did not possess citizenship. As late as 1795, there were approximately 11 court protégés among Munich's 176 trades, such as pub landlords, hairdressers, coffee shop owners, bricklayers, shoe repairers, and peddlers.

Now you know what the first half of a Hofschützler-Gefällemarken is; the Gefällemarken bit is the fee stamp mentioned, i.e. our token. It is a mainland European concept, but who know whether such token usage existed in England, and/or used lead? Keep your eyes open for pieces which might fit.