Leaden Tokens Telegraph

Editor: David Powell

A Crown-sized Lead Piece

This magnificent crown sized lead piece, 44mm in diameter and weighing 32.48gm, has been found in West Berkshire, nr.Faringdon. It depicts a huntsman, dressed for the occasion, in the full flow of action; moreover, we have his name on the other side! The latter is a rare luxury, although there are a lot of John Collins, and he may still not be that easy to identify.

Having attempted several genealogical derivations in the last few LTTs, and as I am quite often receiving queries about origins, I thought that it would be appropriate to address the subject; which I am therefore doing in the later pages of this {slightly extended} issue, using Mr.Collins as a test case.

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Picture Gallery

The above will take some beating, but some of the following make a good attempt. First of all, Fig.1, a charming bird, kindly shown to me by Bryon Pateman. Apart from the fact that the bird exudes character, type 18s rarely have a date alongside the picture. It is 24mm in diameter and was found near Colville Hall, Essex. It has a rather strange finish.
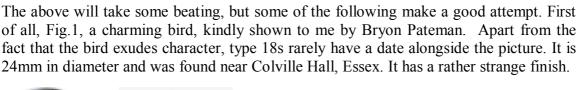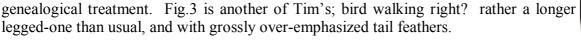

Fig.2, found in the Chippenham area by Tim Storer, depicts a remarkable piece of a type which I have not seen before; full face depiction and name as per a regal coin on the obverse, a very ordinary type 3 cartwheel on the reverse. The issuer's name is Philip Ponting; both forename and surname quite scarce, so this one is another good candidate for the genealogical treatment. Fig.3 is another of Tim's; bird walking right? rather a longer legged-one than usual, and with grossly over-emphasized tail feathers.

Danish reader Jørgen Sømod exhorts us as follows: "You should take a trip to Copenhagen, and I will show you more than 100 lead tokens and tesserae from Rome, the Byzantine Empire, England, Denmark etc. etc. Many of them are never published. Also many numismatic works from 5 centuries and in many languages, which are describing lead coins and tokens.". To whet our appetite he has sent Fig.4, reputedly Denmark's solitary communion token, dating from 1689 and from the Reformed Church in Copenhagen.

Finally, a request from a finds officer for help with the identification of Fig.5. It looks modern, unexciting and vaguely industrial; having said it is lead {possibly with a little tin}, and therefore comes within scope. The thing which looks superficially like a violin is probably a bolt, whilst the ball and chain suggests perhaps a lavatory flushing mechanism or the like. It might even be a component from a piece of machinery, rather than a token; although, after seeing the reverse with its various random depictions, I am less sure. Any ideas, please?

The History of Communion Tokens: Part 3

Denominational influence is evident on communion tokens from about 1740-ish, a few years after the First Secession in 1733. There were many splits and mergers, most due to theological disagreements amongst the leadership, and both people and churches seemed sometimes to change their allegiance with about the same frequency as Premiership football players do today. I don't want to get into the fine detail, other than to give a brief summary of what you might see what on the pieces, but to those who would like the background may I recommend as an online starter, "A Short History of Scotland", chapter 26 for the early period to 1689 {http://www.n-cyclopedia.com/scottish-history/Chapter-26--The-Restoration.htm}, followed by the Wikipedia entries for the various factions thereafter.

Pieces with K=Kirk on as per above {Fig.1,2,4} usually represent the established church, i.e. the Church of Scotland; however, you need to be careful where the initial of the parish name is K {Fig.3}, or a K is contained, which it is more common in Scotland than England. Many of the Kirk pieces also omit the K, and confine themselves to the parish name or some abbreviation of it {Fig.5-6}.

For the purposes of understanding the various denominational names and initials which appear on non-conformist pieces, the following major dates of formation and breakup {up to 1843} are pertinent; my apologies to those who think it over-simplistic, but it will do for a start.

- In 1690 a group broke away from the Kirk to from the Scottish Episcopal Church, which is approximately the equivalent of the Church of England north of the border. Pieces which have a cross depicted on one side {Figs.7-10} are typically Episcopalian.
- Another group, initially known as the Cameronians, also broke away in 1690; known from 1712 as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, their tokens are usually distinguished by RPC or some other abbreviation.
- In 1733, after a protracted period of ill-feeling lasting many years, a large number of people rebelled and broke away from the Kirk to form the Associate Church, which is recognised on tokens by the letters AC, or alternatively UAC, as per Figs.15-17 {U=United}. This was known as the First Secession; for some reason, the two in 1690 didn't count.
- In 1747 the Associate Church split into two factions, depending on whether they were prepared to accept the law passed that people in public positions should swear allegiance to the state religion currently in force. Those who did were called Burghers, the others Anti-Burghers; surprisingly, the terms appear only rarely on tokens {Fig.18}.
- In 1761 a further group broke away from the Kirk in a row over patronage. This was known as the Second Secession and the group which they formed is called the Relief Church; on their tokens the word "Relief" usually, but not invariably, appears in full {Figs.11-14}.
- In 1799 and 1806 the Associate Church's Burghers and Anti-Burghers respectively split over the same issue of patronage to form in each case two subgroups known as Auld Lichts and New Lichts respectively. These two terms seem never to appear on tokens. The more liberal New Lichts of each party decided that they could work together, and in 1820 formed the United Secession Church {USC}. The hardline Anti-Burghers Auld Lichts relabelled themselves the Original Secession

Church {OSC}, whilst the Burgher Auld Lichts eventually rejoined the Kirk in 1839. The term UAC, United Associate Church, was still heavily used in these years, particularly after 1820; although it is not always obvious, in an age when no-one seemed united about anything, who it referred to.

Some of these initials are occasionally used outside their obvious timeframe and, even with a good book to explain, it is very difficult to follow the various factions' chaotic movements. Sometimes a denomination established more than one church in a town, in which case qualifications such as 2nd, 3rd etc was made on the pieces to distinguish them {Figs.19-20}; and sometimes, differences of belief apart, churches formed in respect of particular communities such as Gaelic speakers {Fig.21-22} or mariners {Fig.23}.

You will notice that the percentage of pure lead tends to decline as time moves on, and that by the early 19th century alloys of pewter and white metal start to predominate; but not to worry, that is the history of most lead series which survived that late, and there remains some lead content in both.

The year 1843 is a major milestone in Scottish ecclesiastical history, and denominations after that date will be discussed later.

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Lead Tokens and Genealogy

I am frequently asked by correspondents to comment on the possibility of identifying lead tokens, whilst on Ebay one often sees adverts for them with such expressions such as "offers interesting potential for research"; therefore, I thought it appropriate to write something in these pages.

First of all, let me disillusion those who feel there is a high probability of success. The population of Britain during most of the lead token period was several million who, given that there are 26 letters in the alphabet, share 676 two-letter combinations of initials; of which, because the relative frequency of the initials varies enormously, a significant number are very rare. If your token has common initials, as most of them do, they are shared by thousands of people countrywide; and even within a parish, which typically has several hundred inhabitants and sometimes even a thousand or more, at any one time, you can expect quite a few candidates for the average pairing. Add to this that you don't always know

which date to look around, and that the pieces might have been dropped by someone from outside the area, plus the fact that lead tokens designers aren't exactly over-generous with their clues, and you will appreciate that the odds are stacked against you. I don't want to discourage you, but you need to be aware of the statistical chances before you start asking expectantly at your county record office for them to tell you who JB from a few miles north-west of Colchester was likely to be.

You can, of course, increase the odds somewhat in your favour by giving your researcher a parish of origin, and even more by stating the 6-digit OS reference of the findspot, but that is another story; I won't say that it will do the trick, but with evidence so sparse there is virtually no chance that anyone is going to make up the deficit if you withhold what little exists to start with .

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Genealogy is a fascinating subject which sits very well with other historical hobbies such as token collecting, and I would recommend anybody who fancies having a go to to buy or borrow an introductory book or two on the subject. I can't cover it in depth in a couple of pages, so I'll just outline some of the main parts of it likely to be relevant to the period of typical lead tokens.

Family historians start with the birth/marriage/death registrations {from 1837} and work them back in conjunction with the census {useful from 1841}. Lead tokens are nearly always older than this, so you need to go back into the next phase, i.e. parish records. The parish church theoretically held registers of all baptisms, marriages and burials back to 1538; usually listed, with a varying degree of efficiency, over the course of a number of volumes. In addition to this the parish was the unit of civil administration, and the registers were supplemented by a variety of other interesting document categories covering such things as land tax, tithes, charity, churchwardens' accounts, bastardy, and removal/settlement orders {just to name a few}. The last two relate to the fact that people legally belonged to one parish and one only at any time, which they were permitted to change according to certain rules, primarily relating to marriage and employment; in consequence of which, there was keen competition between parishes to dump on each other, if they could, anyone likely to claim social benefits.

Both the registers and the peripheral records offer scope for finding people for whom some details are known, although obviously the more the better. Do not take it for granted that they survive; damp, casual loss, fire, warfare, rats and clerical laziness are amongst a variety of reasons why many do not, and indeed only about 900 of England's 11,000 ancient registers have entries going back to the year when Henry VIII's Act for their provision was passed. When they do survive, there may be be gaps in them, and/or the entries may be chaotically ordered.

The registers are more likely to survive than the other categories, and also encompass everyone from the squire to the pauper. The other categories often relate to particular classes of people, some of whom are not likely to be token issuers.

County directories were issued every few years for most counties from about 1860; some exist earlier, but tend to decrease in detail as time goes backward, usually to the exclusion of the humbler tradesmen. The larger the town or city, the earlier such directories will exist, but expect the early ones to concentrate more exclusively on the clergy and aristocracy. Ditto the Victoria County History, a massive work commissioned in 1899 and still not complete; useful background to local history, but not much interested in us humble mortals.

A surprising amount of local history has been written, which one will not find out about unless one thumbs around and looks for it; which, in the days of the Internet, is much easier than it was before. Set Google to work!

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Handwriting is only an issue if you have to use original records, which it is fun to do once in a while to convey a sense of historical realism; however, many of the more frequently-used ones, particularly registers, have been transcribed. If you do consider using originals, handwriting divides into three categories, slightly overlapping:

- 1650-date: Modern.
- 1500-1650:   Secretary hand.
- Until 1500:   Mediaeval.

Mediaeval is usually in Latin, heavily abbreviated, closely packed and very small; i.e. just about everything conspires against you. Well-written secretary hand is, however, a pleasure to read and not over-difficult to master, although the earlier examples are often again quite small. In other words, you have a chance of coping, up to a point, back to the early 1500s.

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Do what you can on-line and then, with your how-to-do-it book to guide you, it is visits to reference libraries and county record offices if you want to go further. Chief amongst the sites which you will need is the International Genealogical Index {IGI}. This was created by the Mormons, who, because of their belief that you can save your ancestors by identifying them and retrospectively baptising them, encourage genealogy generally and, for a long time, were the only people to put much computing power into it. Don't knock it; whether you agree with their views or think that they are a load of rubbish, the IGI is online and free, so be grateful to them. Put "IGI" into Google, and you will quickly find yourself directed to http://www.familysearch.org/ ; note the "Search" tab at the top, and "IGI" as {currently} the fourth option down on the left. Let us try Mr.Collins from page 1, and see how we get on.

John, Collins {don't worry about spelling}, British Isles, England, Berks. So far so good, although Faringdon is very close both the Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire borders; our sturdy huntsman will not have stayed in one place his whole life, nor do we know whether our finder's "Faringdon area" meant in the town or five miles away. Faringdon is the nearest town, that is about all we can say. We'll worry about Oxon and Gloucs later if we need to.

"John Collins, Berks", produces 433 possibilities; not forgetting, of course, all the John Collins who are missing because the registers were deficient or because the relevant bishop/rector wouldn't give the Mormons access to include them. How can we narrow it down? Date. The piece doesn't have a date, so you've got to guess it from the style. Try early 18th cent. The squire was probably 30-40 or even more when he issued it, say, so you've got to go earlier than that as well. Next thing, the IGI date range only allows you plus or minus 20 years on any one search. Let's try 1660-1700, and 1700-1740.

Births and marriages of John Collins in Berkshire, 1660-1700 gives 61 hits, of which three {1660/71/72} are in Faringdon; try the same forty years on, and 1700-1740 gives another 55 hits, of which a further two {1727/30} are dead on. How many of those other mentioned villages could also be described as "near Faringdon"? and how many of those John Collins, even the ones who fit well, are squires rather than craftsmen, labourers and vagrants. It is your call how far you go with the process; you have to be realistic about your assessment of whether you have any real chance of getting there, or of whether the effort is worth it. I don't want to put you off, but I do want you to have a sense of the practicalities.

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Here I would have left any less well-to-do John Collins, but I felt I still had a chance. The previous piece from this finder was the Richard Jawde piece discussed on page 4 of the July issue, again described as West Berks, and suspected after analysis of possible coming from the Wantage area. The Collins piece had at one stage also been described as being "same area as last"; could "near Faringdon", also mean "near Wantage"?

A Google search on "John Collins Wantage" produced http://www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk/downloads/ TheManmade Landscape/TheManmadeLandscape.pdf , on page 26 of which is referenced someone who may be our man, and on having Betterton thus pointed out to me as a more precise location, "John Collins Betterton" produced a genealogical tree at http://www.berkshirehistory.com/gentry/database/ pedigree2.htm#2.INDI 6921.999.FAM2911.999.INDI6921.999.4322.0.

Have I got the right family? Some of the links are very tenuous, and the best I can say is that I think I have a good chance. Having said which, we lead tokens folks have long got used to living with uncertainty!