

*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 [LTJEditor@aol.com](mailto:LTJEditor@aol.com) or [dmpowell@waitrose.com](mailto:dmpowell@waitrose.com)*

## The Taste of Hops

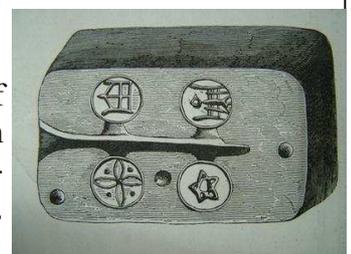
Following our recent articles on Kentish and East Sussex hop tokens articles, herewith a display of the mid-19th century pewter and white metal pieces which followed the purer lead of the early days, illustrating the type of design which was typical of the time, especially for the larger values.



This is followed up overleaf by a modified version of the talk given by Duncan Pennock to the London Numismatic Society in 2005, and which he has kindly given permission for me to reproduce here. Duncan is resident in the Kentish hop-farming area and his article contains more detail about the social background of farming and token usage than I was able to in the earlier articles.

## Coming soon.....

We hope next month to start exploring the fascinating but little known work of Arthur Forgeais, a Frenchman who researched and wrote about lead tokens in the third quarter of the 19th century, when they were even less fancied or understood than they are now. His material is mostly from the 13th-16th centuries, but gives superb insight into the origins of many of our own English pieces.



## *Hop Tokens: Some additional notes, by Duncan Pennock*

### **BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL HISTORY**

My introduction to hop tokens as a series came when I moved down to Kent and visited a coin shop in Canterbury. My wife queried the function of a small group of lead tokens stamped with initials and the odd numeral, which could at best be described as ugly, crude, cheap and in no way pleasing to the eye. They became an introduction to a fascinatingly diverse series from which fresh examples are still emerging.

In England for a period of around 200 years an alternative currency flourished in Kent and Sussex. The tokens (known locally as hop tokens, tallies or checks), highly localised and seasonal, predate and survive the 18th century Conder series of tokens, in which examples also appear. The tokens, issued in exchange for each bushel of hops picked, include elaborate examples portraying oast houses, the Invicta horse of Kent, family Coats of arms, hop pokes and hop bines; other examples display only the initials of the grower. Tokens were cast from lead, lead alloy, bronze and silver, punch struck on lead, copper, tinned iron or iron, manufactured by Midlands die sinkers, carved from bone or printed on paper. Denominations started with crowns, shillings and pence, moved to numerical equivalents, 1, 6, 12, 30 and 60 and evolved into almost any sequence conceivable, including decimal, 100 years before the regal coinage caught up. Fortunes were made and lost on growing hops, tragedies and disasters were frequent, outbreaks of cholera were common and in one instance were reputedly commemorated on a series of tokens. Vicars grew hops and issued tokens, also many a vicarage stands today raised from the additional hop tithe levied on the farmer, a vast 16 shillings an acre in 1841. Napoleonic prisoners of war appear briefly producing tokens around 1810 and research into the pickers and their lives uncovers our prudish Victorian ancestors involved in temporary marriages for the 6 weeks of the picking season.

As with any token series, hop tokens represent a window into social history. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century the growth in demand for hops and subsequent expansion of the hop gardens had outstripped the available local labour supply of farm workers and itinerant gypsies. This shortfall was met by an annual influx, almost an invasion, of hop pickers, predominantly resourced from the East End of London in the case of Kent and Sussex and from Birmingham in the case of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The Kent and Sussex pickers would initially have made their way down to the hop fields by horse and cart or boat down the Medway, but with the coming of the railways, that became the main transport medium, to the extent that special hoppers' trains and even tickets, sponsored by the Hop Marketing Board, were laid on by the Southern Railway.

The influx of pickers was so large, consisting predominantly of women and children, that the schools in the East end of London were emptied; indeed, the hopping season is rumoured to have been the original cause of school holidays. Living conditions were crude and initially comfortless but Church Missions and parliamentary enquiries eventually improved the lot of the pickers, including purpose built hoppers' huts being provided for accommodation. Conditions and morality still failed to meet Victorian standards of that time with overcrowded huts, mixed sex occupation and "Hoppers Marriages" lasting for the approximately six weeks duration of the picking season.

A combination of developed higher yield of hop plants, lower concentration of hops in beer, cheap imports and blight all served to effectively bring the hop growing Industry of Kent and Sussex to a close. A few small, scattered hop gardens exist, some producing for ornamental purposes, but most UK production is now in Hereford and Worcester. More recently, the increased demand for real ale has led to hops being planted in Suffolk.

### **THE TOKENS THEMSELVES**

For each bushel picked the farmer would reward the picker with a token, which at the end of the picking season could be exchanged for cash. This generally facilitated the farmer's cash flow, and also had the desirable effect {from the farmer's point of view} of keeping the pickers from moving on; although the tokens did become known as the currency of the Hop Lands, having an equivalent cash value in the local

shops and pubs, and hence acquiring a little more versatility than originally intended. Two early advertisements for hop pickers suggest that remuneration of between 1d and 3d a bushel might then have been typical.

With the exception of one specific early issuer, hop tokens were issued in Kent and Sussex in significant quantities between around 1780 and the early 1940s. The token values were initially monetary, i.e. penny, sixpence, shilling, halfcrown and crown. By around 1820 to 1830 this series had become replaced by equivalent values in bushels, i.e. 1,6,12,30,60, although almost any numerical sequence you can think was used, i.e. 1 to 10, 1 to 12; 1,5,10,20,50 etc. Series of 1 to 4 or 1 to 5 are often found in East Kent.

The conversion rate from bushels into cash depended upon the quality & quantity of the hops picked, i.e. whether or not there was a glut etc. Under extreme circumstances there was the odd year when the hops got ploughed back in, rather than sold.

The tokens themselves were initially made of lead; cast at first, but later there were also punch struck tokens, although the farmers used whatever came to hand. Later tokens of lead alloy were used, being more durable. Punched tin predominated in East Kent, and in one case an old church bell is reputed to have been used. Some paper examples exist, usually for the highest values (e.g. 120 bushels), but in the case of Scott of Hunton, a complete series of paper values from 1 to 12 bushels has survived. Early tokens would have had the farmers name or initials and their value on; some later tokens, from about 1835, became more ornate.

Many pieces would have been produced by the local blacksmith. A few known manufactured pieces exist, some from makers as far away as Birmingham, but the major source of the high quality white-metal Sussex pieces of later years was the local Comports Engineering works at Northiam. By the mid 20th century, where increased literacy made their use acceptable, the tokens had largely given way to pickers books. These recorded the picker's name, their basket number (in East Kent), and the number of bushels picked on a daily; also, it quoted the rules and regulations associated with the picking industry.

## USAGE

The tokens were also often used in conjunction with tally sticks (Latin "Talea" = "rod"); notched pieces of wood 9 to 12 inches long, like a flat ruler, split into 2 pieces and numbered. The tally man retained the larger piece and the picker the smaller, every 5 bushels being represented by a notch cut in both sticks, which obviously had to match.

Farmers all seem to delight in their individuality and the range of methods used to manufacture the hop tokens and the sequence of values on the tokens issued reflects this. Certain overall trends do however emerge; a comparison of postcards from different places shows some of the major differences between the regions and answers some of the anomalies encountered in the range of values of tokens issued. An attempted correlation between the quantity of hops grown and the number of issuers for Sussex, Mid Kent and East Kent seems to show far more token issuers from Sussex than Mid Kent.

An interesting picture seems to emerge when looking at the use of the tally sticks and the known hop token issuers from different areas of use. There appear to be three of the latter, with proposed explanations of their practices, as follows:-

1) An area, predominantly Mid Kent, where the tally stick recorded all quantities of Hops picked, the issue of any token would have been superfluous. This fits the picture recorded in 1838 by Lance "*The Hop Farmer*" describing tally sticks.. *about 16" long, 2" wide, ¼" thick but one half thick at the end where it is fitted by various bevelled cuttings to the piece kept by the pickers. These two pieces numbered and fitted in such a way that no other one will correspond; being put together a notch is filed across the edge of both for every bushel and when twenty is counted on one edge it is cut off and a single notch is cut on the other edge.* Acworth (*Hop-Pickers tokens No 1 by the Rev R.W.H.Acworth, MA Page 159 Journal of the South Eastern Agricultural College Kent No 40,14th July 1937.*) quotes the hop tokens first being introduced to supplement tally sticks so this region might best be described as one where the hop token never

