

Editor: David Powell

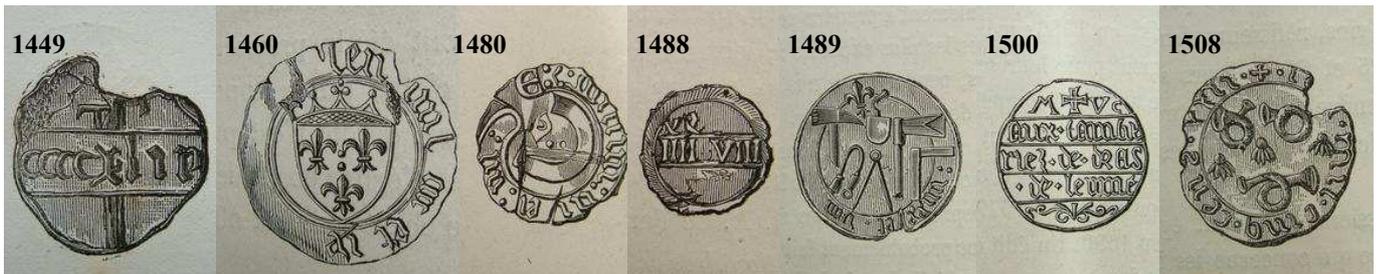
A free newsletter to all who share our interest in these fascinating and often enigmatic pieces. Please send the editor at least one 300 dpi JPEG scan, or a sharply focused photo print, of any interesting leaden token or tally in your collection. Send images as email attachments to LTJEditor@aol.com or dmpowell@waitrose.com

The Passing of the Years... and welcome to a new one!

Last year we celebrated with a display of dated communion tokens, commencing in the year 1692 and running forward to the year 1817. This year, with the help of our friend Arthur Forgeais, we do the same for his rather earlier French pieces. Why doesn't Britain have any lead to equal his earliest dates?



The métiers, as the trades guilds are called in France, are responsible for most of the largest tokens; and it is these, naturally, which are more likely to depict the date. Very few of the small ones, which equate more closely to our crude lead, have dates at all.



Note the styles: date across the middle {c.1409-1449}, date round the edge {1412, then 1460 onwards}, and multi-line text {1500,1550}. 17th century token enthusiasts may be able to identify with the latter, and also with those three horns, symbol of the pastrycooks.



At last, come 1550, modern figures! I like the simplicity and clarity of the five pieces in the 1550s and 1560s. The 1566 one is the first of a long series of ecclesiastical pieces spanning nearly 80 years; they have an article of their own overleaf, so I will not show any more on this page. Apart from the huge 1540 piece, which refers to a communal brotherhood, it is the only one here which is not trade-guild related. Few dated guild pieces after 1569; but those later pieces of 1630 and 1645; aren't they getting a bit sophisticated for us lead folks?

Happy New Year!





Some funny things you get written on tokens. There is a piece of Cologne, dated 1730 {not lead}, which bears the legend “Laetitia cum Bibite”. The meaning is “Drink ye with joy”, indicative of the relationship between God and man at its best, an outgoing effusion of generous, unfettered celebration. Those less charitably inclined might interpret otherwise; namely, that the delectable Laetitia was running an alehouse or a brothel, and wished to



encourage her clientèle to use her services rather than those of her rival ladies of the night. Similarly with these pieces, of which Forgeais illustrates a significant number in his Vol.3; all bearing dates between 1566 and 1642, although a wider range is possible than what he has chanced to find. Fig.1 is not a brothel token; there is no missing W, and the word “Horae” is meant, rather than “Whore”; the service of Hours, in English, just one of a number which make up the Roman Catholic day, and which on English medieval tokens are represented by initials. Likewise “Messe” is not payment for clearing up one, but rather for conducting the service of Mass and its administration of the sacrament {Fig.2}.

The French treatment is rather different; pleasing simple and clear in most cases, the name of the service and date of the piece, occasionally accompanied by the Virgin Mary and/or, would you believe it...a value. Very few leads have values on, in England or France, especially this early; but in this series a Roman numeral frequently appears, often accompanied by the letter D. D stands for denier; it derives from the Roman denarius, the “d” of “£sd”, and has survived to recent times as the dinar. A unit of currency, a word understood as such across Europe and the Near and Middle East; denier in one country, penny in another. So, what was the letter doing on ecclesiastical tokens in the 16th and 17th cent?

The truth is that priests and monks, as much as the rest of us, disliked getting out of bed at uncivilised hours to go to work, and that therefore it was necessary to give them some financial inducement to do so. They were paid piece-rate, with the less attractive of the day’s duties attracting a more lucrative wage.

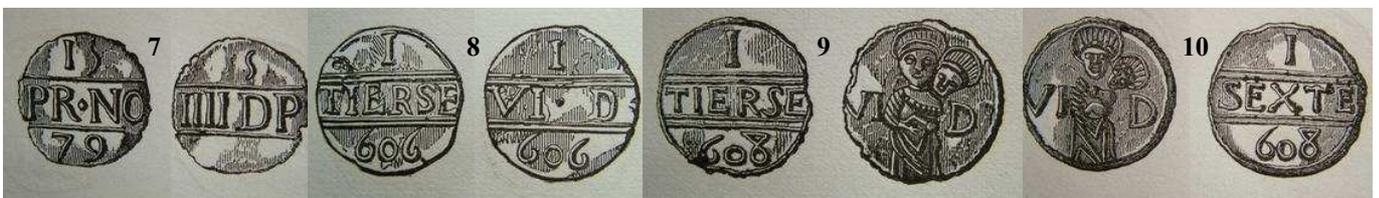


The services and their timings varied over the course of history a little, but were, roughly:

Matins,	Sunrise	None,	9th hour, 15:00
Prime,	1st hour, 07:00	Vespers	Sunset
Tierce,	3rd hour, 09:00	Compline.	Bedtime
Sext,	6th hour, 12:00		

There were also a number of special services; although I notice that on the pieces for these illustrated by Forgeais, no values are present. Whether that is coincidence I am uncertain.

No doubt some of the values were taken as read by the clergy of the time, causing some engravers not to bother stating them {Fig.3}, but enough of the pieces have them on to give a flavour. Starting with Matins, someone got a princely 12 deniers for performing it in 1566 {Fig.4}; for those who like their bed, paying a clerical assistant one denier in 1579 to do it for you was an option which you might occasionally afford {Fig.5}. Prime and None together in the same year were worth four deniers {Fig.7}; or was it four each, and the token was used for either? Tierce in both 1606 and 1608 was worth six {Figs.8,9}; as also was Sext in the latter year {Fig.10}. If done by the same guy who was the clerk at Matins in 1579, he may have looked back and pondered how his older colleagues had ripped him off in his youth.



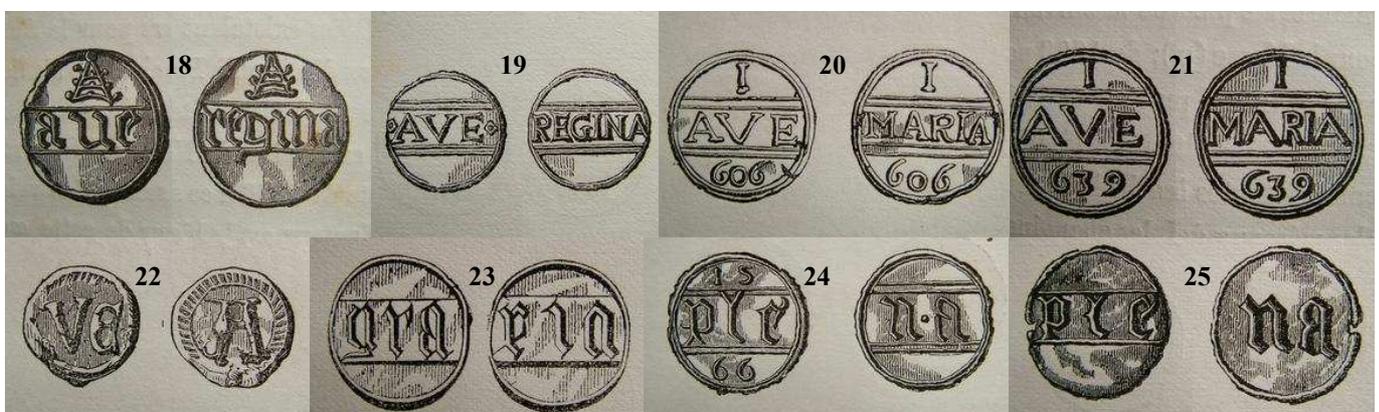


None in 1567 {Fig.11} refers to the name of service, you may be assured, not the amount paid for doing it, whilst compline in 1579 {Fig.12} was another four denier task. Vespers in 1632 {Fig.13} again states no value, as also Hours {Fig.14} in 1606. But which hour? Any specific? Perhaps it was a generic piece used in connection with several of the services which attracted similar value; e.g. those four denier, or fourpenny, jobs just seen.

A few more Horae, next, all without the Æ; obviously diphthongs were considered difficult to render.



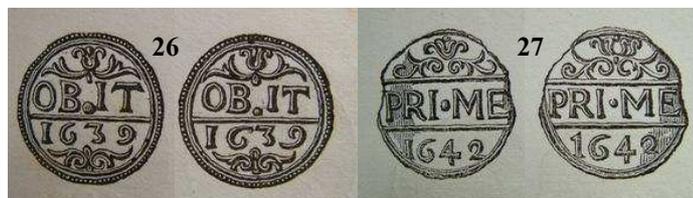
The letters DP, occasionally seen on pieces such as Fig.8 stand for “deniers parisis”, an indication that the denier was not valued according to a universal standard and that the local variant was intended. DF in Fig.12, however, may be a very different matter; Forgeais tentatively suggests “dies festus”, or feast day. Surely the only reason for having that on a token was that the going rate of payment was different from that of a normal day? Perhaps it required something rather special to induce a monk to remain in chapel taking services, putting the requisite tick in the ecclesiastical box, whilst his fellows were all stuffing themselves with plum pudding or emptying the wine-cellar.



A few pieces now for special occasions {Figs.18-25}, or perhaps for performing some secondary duty within a service such as a reading or chant. Forgeais lists some of these under headings such as Ave Regina, Ave Maria, Gratia, Plena; the last two illustrations, only, show a value.

It will be noticed that there are several styles amongst all these various pieces;

- that with the late mediaeval lettering, perhaps early 16th cent.
- that with dates in the 1560s and 1570s with the word or number across in a central band, and space above and below.
- the group of pieces dated 1579, which builds on this but has the date digits split 2-2 above and below.
- the type of 1606-39 which further develops this to split the digits 1-3 {one needs here to avoid reading the “1” as “one denier”}.
- finally an enhancement c.1640 which embodies some ornamentation {Figs.26,27}. The latter, incidentally, are the only pieces in this series of “service” pieces to have identical sides.



There may of course be other dates, and indeed we have to ask the question as to whether these pieces were issued every year or, like Scottish and other communion tokens, in one year every so often when a new priest took charge, or when size of congregation or wear of pieces dictated that a new set of pieces was practical. I incline to the latter opinion, that they were issued like CTs in occasional batches.

Forgeais' Vol.3 goes on to discuss other ecclesiastical tokens which were issued by specific churches for unknown purposes, or by unknown churches specifically for alms; these have quite a similarity of style with the above, and will be discussed next month.

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Picture Gallery

A miscellaneous collection this time, with two exceptions acquired as a lot and of uncertain origin. Fig.1 is a thin piece, 25mm diam, with the word "Castro" on it, indicating "castle"; but which? The reverse is a typical type 24; a number of miscellaneous marks, none of which seem to add up to much. Perhaps the piece is an overstrike on an older issue.

Fig.2 appears to depict parents and child walking or dancing around something which may be a maypole; on the back, either two people carrying a pole or, alternatively, two straw figures on a target. There is a hint of a cross worked into the design on this side, although I would still judge it basically a type 32. Could this be a fairground piece? I'll guess 18th cent from the size, which is 24mm.

Fig.3 is a typical cartwheel/cross {type 3/14} hybrid; on the back, a slender anchor, pointed at one end. It is 23mm and medium dark, probably a Thames find. Fig.4, 21mm, is more remarkable; a type 30 whose single figure is an unusual X in a box, rather like a filled-in voter's form. Fig.5

is one of the odd men out in the group; we know that it is Roman, and comes from Colchester. They are common in the area, and we have seen some before {LTT_21, Dec 2006}; however, this one is a better specimen and, for lead, has an unusual light brown patina. I wonder what else was mixed into the alloy?

Fig.6 is an approximately cut square, and at a mere 11mm, tiny. It shows the mark which today is associated with prisoner's clothing, pointing upwards, but which one might variously describe as an arrow-head or anchor. I will guess that it is c.1500 and has some official function, possibly in connection with taxation.

Fig.7. is scarcely larger, at 13mm, but depicts a most delightful type 17 leaf. There is a serrated rim around, and the condition is superb. It is probably c.1600 or even a little before, from the size, although it is lighter in colour than many of the pieces of that period. Fig.8, quite darkly patinated for a provincial piece, comes from near Newbury {Berks}. Type 23 is rare, and always to be fancied; this one depicts a church, as is evident from the cross on the protruding spire, rather than a manor-house or barn. It feels 17th cent and somewhat pewtery, although at 19mm it is quite large. The reverse is indeterminate, although arrows, pellets and cartwheels are all hinted at.

Fig.9 is another roughly cut square, this time 15-17mm; it has clearly been cut around with shears, and has a counterstruck design which consists of a cabled border within a square and the letters WR within. It is much more reminiscent of a communion token than any of the others it came with, and may well be one.



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