

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 dmpowell@waitrose.com or david@powell8041.freewe.co.uk. Please note that w.e.f. 19 April 2008 the old LJEditor@aol.com address is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



We have seen pieces from the same die from time to time in these pages, but herewith a very interesting phenomena {Figs.1,2}; a piece of very simple design, plus another which appears to be from the same die but with some extra ornamentation added. They were found together and come from the Cirencester area, as also does Fig.3, whose exceedingly elaborate reverse design may derive from the double-headed eagle seen on, amongst other pieces, the Beati Regina leads of c.1575. Alternatively, Ted Fletcher thinks it might be an insect. The piece is very clearly dated; how good to see that “1725” so crisply rendered.



Figs 4 and 5, both uniface, genuinely do come from the same die. The wording seems to be something like “Half Pesos”, which has vague South American connotations, except that they were found at East Dean, near Eastbourne. Any suggestions would be welcome.

Fig.6 is a rather refined cross and pellets, the former with wedge shaped ends, within a twelve-spoked gre-netis; i.e. the filler is divided up into twelve segments. These seems to contain a mixture of pellets, wedges and diagonal lines, although not all are visible. The piece is very light, and derives from somewhere near Marlborough, in Wilts. Fig.7 is concave, with a moderately flat but not totally smooth uniface reverse; its height at centre is about 5mm, and it is therefore almost certainly a weight. The design strongly suggests the Commonwealth period.

Fig.8 is a game bird of some description; any ornithologists amongst you, please identify. Not a common type 18 variant, and one which suggests that lead tokens might have at one time featured in the administration of rural shooting events. Fig.9 is clearly a stag; perhaps it had a similar purpose. The piece is pleasantly reminiscent of the commemorative pieces struck by officina 5 to commemorate the millennium of Rome in AD 247. {By way of explanation, six workshops coined pieces depicting different animals, each of which were drawn from those featured in the games in the Colosseum}.



Fig.10 is another of those H-number pieces; so far we have seen H1, H3, H4 and H7. But what of Fig.11? Is that H2 in one quadrant with a routine cartwheel occupying the other three? If so, a most unusual combination. Next a cut half, Fig.12. just to remind that these do occur on leads {as also do quarters}; which presumably confirms that the piece had monetary value, rather than being a pass. Finally, an unusual but pleasant facing head bust, Fig.13, with a hint of the Parthian about it; however, no doubt the Ed-wardian penny and groat provided the original model.

Forgeais' Guild Pieces, part 2

No less than nine tokens here from the chapeliers {Figs.1-9}, who are not ecclesiastics so much as hat makers. St.Michael has secured this post as well as that of the balanciers {q.v}; how do they dish out the jobs in heaven? In Fig.1 he is wielding a



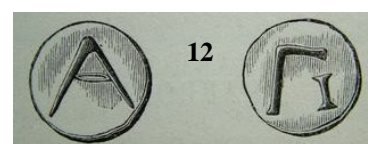
sword above his head, which suggests that in a few seconds time you might not have a head to put one of his hats on; but no, that is a dragon at his feet, and more likely to be the intended recipient of the blow. Perhaps the piece was struck on St.George's day off. Like the belt and bonnet makers last month, it uses the "tradesmen of Paris" formula. A precise date would be good, but lacking; Forgeais says 15th cent. The hat looks more like a bread roll, although on the remaining, mainly smaller, pieces it is more realistic. Fighting dragons can get a bit cramped when you only have 22mm to play with, and on the remaining large piece {Fig.2} St.Michael gets St.Germain in to help. The latter decides he would like a side to himself, so the hat has to go.



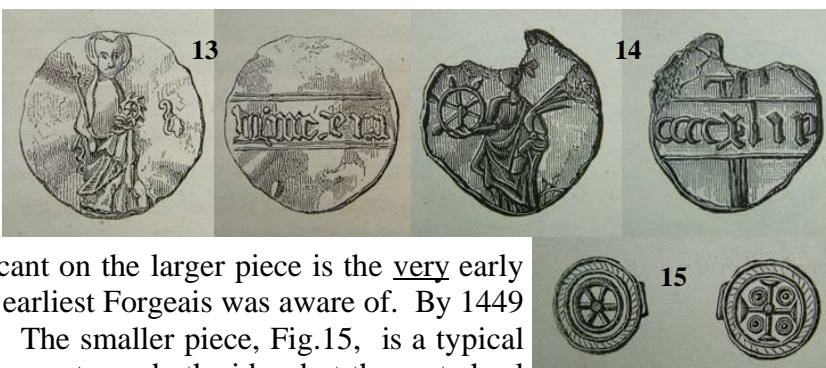
Saints Blaise & Louis are in charge of the charpentiers {Figs.10-12}; knock the "h" an the "i" out and you have its English equivalent. No problem with subject matter here; tools of the trade appear a-plenty, as also in two cases a date, one 15th cent and one 16th; Forgeais himself had difficulty in transcribing the precise form of the earlier one, despite its clarity. Tools take priority over saints on the smaller piece



{Fig.12}; what looks like an Allen key is probably some form of drill bit, or perhaps set-square.



The charrons, or cartwrights}, are the first in our list to have a lady patron; St.Catherine, chosen no doubt because of her connection with the wheel. She looks a little bit fraught on Fig.13, but given the origins of her story it is understandable if wheels did not have very happy associations for her. More significant on the larger piece is the very early date, 1412, only three years later than the earliest Forgeais was aware of. By 1449 {Fig.14} she seems a little more relaxed. The smaller piece, Fig.15, is a typical mediaeval double-grenetis specimen; common types both sides, but the cartwheel naturally one of them.



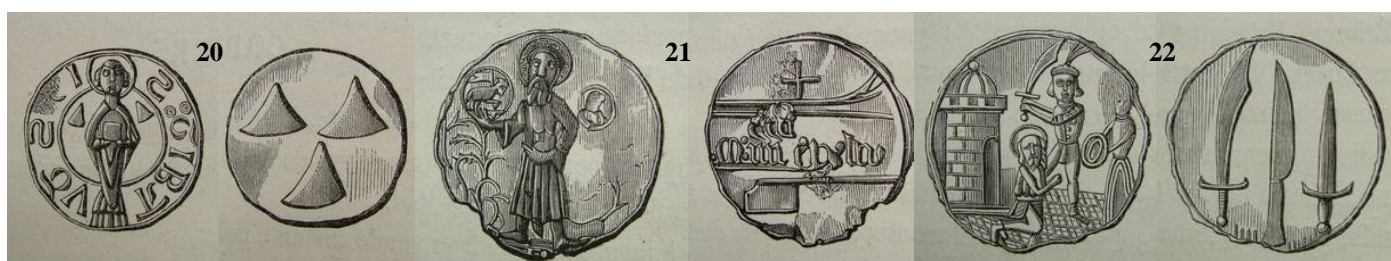
Another 15th cent piece from the chaussetiers, or stocking makers {Fig.16}, albeit undated; this time the produce of the trade, rather than the tools, clearly defined. Two more from the cordonniers, or shoe repairers {Figs.17-18}, of very similar style and date; the Virgin Mary bags the obverse, relegating the saints to the reverse, hence no room for any tools or their produce.



Corroier; I had trouble with this one, but I think it is probably the word from which we derive “currier” or tanner. My first attempt at translation came up with “proof-reader”, but the belt on Fig.19 is hardly compatible. Note the formula “to the curriers of Paris” on the reverse, which we have seen several times before; such pieces are clearly of approximately similar date, if they adhere to a common vogue.



I thought that corroyeur might be another rendering of the word just discussed, but apparently not; in Fig.20, St.Thibault is officiating instead of St.Jean Baptiste, and both the style and the reverse material is totally different. “Courier” is on possible translation which comes to mind, and is possibly consistent with Forgeais’ stated fact that the guild had their office situated on one of the Parisian quays; however, I am wondering whether those objects on the reverse could be leeches, used for bleeding, in which case something in the medical profession. 15th cent again but sorry, difficult to say anything certain about this one!



Coutellier, removing a few letters, becomes cutler. St.Jean-Baptiste has them to look after as well, and the first piece {Fig.21} has another very early date, 1444. Forgeais thinks that Fig.22 is even earlier, 14th cent, but my guess would have been 16th. The kneeling cutler looks to have offended, to the point of being in danger of becoming an ex-cutler, or even an ex-person; however, the display of wares on the reverse is pleasing, and not unlike what one might see on an English token of the 17th century.

The solitary piece of the éperonniers, or spurmakers {Fig.23}, is very plain; to the point that I wonder how Forgeais identifies it as such; a common double-grenetis, of types 1 and 14, which he says is 16th cent. That of the épinglers, or pinmakers, {Fig.24}, returns to picturesque description; three pins, simple enough, whilst on the obverse a rather harassed Virgin Mary appears to have lost patience with baby Jesus and is giving him an earful.



Finally this month the étuvistes, or bathkeepers {Fig.25}; the word translates as steamers, so we are talking here the mediaeval sauna. One sweaty customer depicted on the reverse, standing in something which looks like half a barrel; on the obverse, St.Michel calmly gets on with slaying another dragon whilst waiting for his client to finish. Perhaps the latter is St.George cleaning up after the last one?

I realise that these guild pieces of Forgeais are relative exotica compared with 17th-18th cent crude lead, and that the chance of digging one up here is relatively low; yet hopefully it is instructive to compare them with both our own mediaeval pewter and also with our own 17th cent tradesmens’ pieces. I trust that you will forgive me for allowing them to dominate a couple of editions whilst you get used to them; the rest will follow in due course, spaced out over a number of months in order to allow a balance of the different series. Don’t worry, we haven’t forgotten ordinary 18th cent English, there are plenty of those to come....

{to be continued}

A Pairing Puzzle



This is the numismatic equivalent of those word puzzles which you sometimes see, whereby your pair off all the words except one and see what is left. The pictures are the last of a batch kindly contributed by reader Mike Bonsor, and were taken off a group of slides which he formerly used for giving evening school talks. Most of them are likely to come from Cambridgeshire.

The variance in the colours is as interesting as that in the design, and reminds us that many different alloys were used in the manufacture of leads; not to mention the many different soils they can lie in getting patinated, waiting for us to find them!

I'll comment on a few, if not all. Figs 1, 2 show the variation of heads; both humorous, but mediaeval and one late. Shall I guess at 15th and 18th cents respectively? Fig. 4 is the most interesting of several lis, studded around as it is with pellets and beading. Fig. 20 is surely its partner, and looks like a second lis which has evolved into a plant; i.e. a type 4-18 hybrid.

Figs 5, 12 look rather finely designed for lead, the latter specifically; do we have a copper or tin intruder?

Next we come to Figs 8 and 13, again surely a pair; their depictions look like a mortar and pestle respectively, indicating a chemist; common enough on later tokens, but rare at the date indicated by this diameter. This is the piece of the group for me. Almost equally desirable is Fig. 9, paired with Fig. 10 by their sprue; tavern utensils, always pleasing, paired with a lis.

Figs 6, 7, 14, all of similar diameter to the small pieces just discussed, and therefore probably 17th cent, depict what appear to be a bucket, hare and line of candles respectively; all are subject matter which one could imagine on the main 17th century series.



Fig. 16 is a hybrid of two of the commonest types, cross and petals, and yet still manages to be interesting. The petals are not truly shaped, and there is a vague reminiscence of the quatrefoil framework of Canute's early 11th cent pennies. I will guess that Fig. 3 may be the other side.

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Finally, Figs. 17-19, the first two presumably a pair. Are they English? I have my doubts, especially about the first two, which are tiny even by 1500-ish standards, look concave, and are of no obviously familiar design. Fig. 19 might be; quartered geometrics usually go to the edge, but perhaps I see a faint grenetis.

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