

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.freeserve.co.uk. Please note that w.e.f. 19 April 2008 the old LTTeditor@aol.com address is no longer active.

Happy Christmas to all Our Readers!

What more appropriate way for LTT to celebrate it than with this delightful tree-like object on the right; seven tokens still joined by their original sprue, roughly the shape of a small conifer in a pot, and probably of Yorkshire origin. Further, as a bonus, clearly dated.

Individual tokens with the protruding remains of sprue are not uncommon, but whole groups like this are almost as rare as the dies which made them. The spread of sprue around the funnel itself is also interesting, and beyond that the pieces themselves throw up such interesting observations:

- A variety of designs are cast from the same mould, whereas the normal practice in more formal coinage would be for all the pieces from one source to be the same. {This phenomenon may also be observed in other moulds previously shown in LTT}.
- Two different initial pairs, albeit with the same surname, are in evidence; perhaps brothers, cooperating together.
- A variety of different designs have been used, all broadly within our usual classification scheme, but with one or two unfamiliar variations.



All of which begs the question: why should anybody, or pair of people, want to produce so many different designs at once? For seven different purposes which could be distinguished, or for a single purpose for which the design of the token was irrelevant?

NOTE: The above pieces are shown magnified by a factor of about 1.2



The Passing of the Years

It has been our tradition in LTT the last two years to celebrate the end of the old year and the beginning of the new with some consideration of dating on lead pieces. This continues this year with a consideration this month of the oldest dates seen on British lead so far, and next month with a continuation of the photographic display of communion tokens shown in LTT_21/22 {Dec 2006, Jan 2007}, updating you on the designs of some of the dated lead CTs which have come our way since. Compare them with our crude



pieces and ask to what extent the clerics had access to engraving and manufacturing skills which the farmers and other rural folk didn't.



Seasonal Greetings !

The Dated Lead Tokens of Post-Mediaeval London

NOTE: All pieces in this article are magnified by a factor of 1.5 to aid visibility, on account of their being so small {typically, 11-15mm}. With the exception of the Figs.1-3 they are also slightly lightened, for the same reason; most in their natural state have the dark patina associated with Thames-side mud.

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A date, especially a genuine one of origin, always enhances any coin or token. There is naturally a little competition to see who can find the earliest, and the starting line for the better known English tokens is the oldest date stated in Williamson's main series: 1648. We all know that there were tokens before that, but how far back are they dated? Williamson mentions some municipal token-issuing experiments by Bristol in the closing years of the 16th cent, and says that one of the pieces was dated 1591. He implies that it might have been a one-off pattern. Let us investigate.

The first dated European coin was struck in Denmark in 1234. It was not repeated, and there were no further examples until one Flemish province and one German state struck pieces in 1372. Dated issues did now continue intermittently, and between 1424 and 1506 a dozen other countries joined the party. The latest date for which no specimen exists anywhere is 1453. All pieces before 1474 are taken to be exceedingly rare, but they did become increasingly prolific, and examples from Germany and Poland, dated in the early 1500s, particularly, can be picked up quite cheaply. In Britain we did not get to dating until 1539, and that was Scotland rather than England, on account of their closer political affinity with the Continent. England took another decade after that, and was one of the last European countries to adopt the practice.

Tokens, of course, don't have to follow the same habits as coins although, being based on them, it is logical enough that they might do. Forgeais, we have already seen, knew of trade guild and ecclesiastical tokens in Paris dated back as far as 1409; always in Roman numerals until about 1550, and in our familiar modern ones thereafter. Continental coins were using modern numerals, some of them {4,5,7,9} still in a state of evolution, from c.1460; note the "4" tilted over to look like a camping stool in Fig.1, on a Flemish double briquette of 1478. There are some further excellent examples of transitional numerals to be seen on the walls of Salzburg castle and on the excellently preserved tombstones adjacent to it, if anybody visits on holiday. However, by the time these numerals reached England, the final forms had stabilised.



There is a lead piece in the British Museum which purports to have the date 1512, with a little ornamentation over it; although at least one disbeliever, not prepared for a date that early, spent a long time trying to talk himself into thinking that the first digit, which looks like an inverted L with a very small crossbar, was actually something else. The diameter is 13½mm. After that, the BM has six other 16th cent pieces; a one-off with a large flan, RB over 1554, at a rather untypical 26mm which may indicate that it is provincial; four 12mm pieces dated 1545/49/56/74, and a slightly larger 16mm one of 1586. The pieces of the 1540s and 1550s, of which I have seen one or two other



examples {earliest 1540}, are remarkably similar; a simple date, and what I think is a person sitting on a throne, an incredibly complicated subject for a piece of this size, on the reverse. The later pieces are similarly plain on the dated side, bar differences of decoration. The other side of the 1574 piece is obscure, but the 1586 contains initials, VP, and pellets. I cannot recall their precise detail, but I remember them as being rather in keeping with the piece on the right.



I shall leave these early pieces for now, as I have a whole article concerning their conjectural use penned for next month; suffice it for the moment to say that there seems to have been a dated series in use for some purpose in London, and possibly struck most years, from about 1540 to 1586 {plus or minus a bit}.

There now appears to be a little bit of a hiatus, apart from an occasional one-off, until about 1613; after

which, a series of very well-formed pieces with the familiar triads and initial-pairs, starts to emerge. BNJ quotes an example of 1613 with an inverted triad, i.e. the single initial below; this being the older form, in which the wife was deemed subordinate and her initial placed below, whereas by the 1640s the form was more generally excepted whereby the surname initial took pre-eminence above and the spouses' two forename initials sat equally below.

One attractive BM piece of 1614, 12mm, has a TO monogram with the four numerals of the date arranged in a square round the O and sheltering under the T; however, most pieces to about 1640 content themselves with a simple statement of the date and nothing else, except perhaps initials. Figs.4-5, at around 19mm, are larger than most; the first comes from Cambs, and the latter may be provincial as well. Pieces along the lines of Fig.6-7 are more normal. Dates do not usually appear on pictorial pieces at this date,



because although the latter were in use a-plenty, statement of the issuer identity was often held to be paramount, in which case it was a choice, until technology got better or pieces larger, between date and picture for the other side.

Around 1640-42, a number of pieces were issued with the date in Roman numerals, as per Figs.8-9; various initial pairs are known on the reverse. Also pleasantly imaginative but rather ambiguous was Fig.11, from its style probably struck by WE in 1643 rather than EW in 1634.. Suppression of the first two digits of a date was common in early years by those who could not imagine a date 100 years earlier appearing on their pieces; an occasional feature on main series 17th cent tokens, it was practised on some countries' national coinages in the 16th cent.



Lead tokens were a subliminal coinage hated by the authorities but not really opposed with the vehemence which would have been the case had anybody presumed to strike in more robust metal. With the death of Charles I on 30 January 1648-49, such reticence disappeared; the world wanted to strike tokens in copper and brass, and did so confident that their new leaders would let them. Half a dozen such pieces dated 1648 made their appearance before the New Year of 1649 dawned on 25 March, not to mention undated pieces struck in the same period. Yet, lead tokens persisted, probably until the Restoration in 1660; they did not die overnight, and some issuers struck at different times in both lead and stronger metal. Williamson recorded some that he knew of, but there were probably many more Commonwealth-era leaden pieces than are credited, simply because the survival rate of lead is poorer.

Full length, horizontal four-digit dates on an otherwise plain field {apart from possibly the odd line} continue to appear in the 1650s, and are in evidence on a percentage of copper tokens of the same period but with a ring of issuer-identifying verbiage around. The favourite form on lead from c.1648, at least until 1659, becomes the 2x2 array, such as shown in Figs.12,18,19 and 27. It probably exists for every year. Here and there, however, some brave soul, aware of the extra artistic potential of David Ramage's fine artwork on copper, decides that he will make the attempt to introduce some on lead. TO in 1656 {Fig.17}, having freed up a side by combining initials and date, managed a horse head on the back; it looks rather like a chess knight. A blacksmith or publican, whose initials on the obverse have not survived for posterity, managed to work the date 16-55 to the side of his three horse-shoes {Fig.16}, whilst chandlers E. and I..S. managed in 1654 to get the date attractively



placed above the traditional string of candles so common in the main series {Fig.21}. Clasped hands {Fig.20}; another old favourite, around since Roman times but never over common; issuer AC added the date 1656 above, perhaps in expression of the desire for peace in those troubled times.



Figs.22-27 show more of the same; two dated pieces amongst them, but a selection of pictorial sides as well so that you may appreciate the sort of design and artwork which was current. This London-made token coinage seems to be orderly, as if the product of good manufacture within the limits of the material; which poses the question: who made it? Did Ramage make lead, or was it beneath him? Or were there several others casters and strikers, serving a wide urban community over the course of a century or more, about whose minting activities we are unsighted? Here we have considered only one facet of their design; we shall come to their lettering styles and pictorial work later, and then maybe view the subject again in a broader context.

Copper and brass tokens continued after the Restoration until 1672, but somewhere around 1660 lead seems to take a wholly different turn. Provincial lead has always been of a lesser quality than London, at least outside the main ecclesiastical cities, but from 1660 London lead seems to become as crude as its country counterparts. We shall examine this in due course.

Picture Gallery

The piece on the right was found by “Jacq” in the Faversham area of Kent. We are not sure whether it is meant to be a token or a jeton {I favour the latter}, so any suggestions would be welcome. She has very kindly enlarged the major side and provided a line drawing extraction of the inscription, so that may help.



Below, an interesting example of a die pair, {Figs 2,3} courtesy of reader Marcus Jones. They come from the Lakenheath area of Suffolk and, although the first is rather faint, it will be seen that the two are of entirely different shape. On the obverse, the initials “M” resides within a house, although the vertical beneath the house on the better piece has the effect of converting it into something resembling a modern bird-feeder. On the reverse, the sprig does not reach quite as much to the edges as if often the case. Technically, one should avoid shadow with photographs, but on the second piece, especially, Marcus has caught the evening sun to good effect.



Fig.4 also comes from Marcus, and he puts the suggestion that Fig.4, seemingly an ordinary cartwheel, might be a flag? Not that it ever occurred to me, and I doubt that type 3s were intended as flags very often, but who knows whether some small proportion of them were? The Union Jack was invented in 1606, although I don't know to what extent the peasantry were aware of its existence or meaning. There is an outer circle inside the rim, which is a little more squared off than many, and it is this particular which creates the effect... not to say, inspires the imagination! I will add, however, that there are no flags in Williamson's 17th cent series, and I am not expecting many in the 18th.