

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](mailto:dmpowell@waitrose.com) or [david@powell8041.freeseewe.co.uk](mailto:david@powell8041.freeseewe.co.uk). Please note that w.e.f. 19 April 2008 the old [LTJeditor@aol.com](mailto:LTJeditor@aol.com) address is no longer active.

## Picture Gallery



An interesting little group this month from the area of Eynsham, North Oxfordshire, displaying an interesting variety of size, design and patina. Two quite light uniface pieces to start with. Fig.1 shows four central balls superimposed on eight rather more elongated blobs, which is a reasonable way for a designer of limited resources to go about depicting a flower. Fig.2 is a 9-spoke cartwheel, probably originally intended as an eight, except that the top half didn't go according to plan; there are five segments to the lower half's four, and one or two of them don't quite make the central hub. With one or two of the miscellaneous pellets also attaching themselves to the ends or sides of the upper spokes, one could almost imagine that the designer had a lis or flower in mind.

In Fig.3 he very definitely did; but there isn't a central spoke! It is a good, strong design, with those three robust pellets beloved in early 17th cent London, but has anyone seen a two pronged-lis before? Fig.4 is another good attempt at a flower; two eight-pronged sawtooth shapes, superimposed on and dominating a delicate cartwheel. This engraver probably had more skill than the rest, apart possibly from that of Fig.5, who has skilfully used the wide entrance to the mould to generate a stag's head out of the flow duct. The rest of the design seems meaningless until you realise that it constitutes antlers.

Fig.6 is a neat if fairly standard eight spoked cartwheel, enhanced by two well-defined circles; until you notice the different curvature on one side, and ask whether it was coincidental or deliberate. First reaction is the standard one, that it is uneven striking, but I have seen too many rounded and squared pieces in recent weeks to assume it automatically.

Fig.7 I have photographed twice, deliberately. See it displayed as in Fig 7a and you have a vaguely lis-like object on the top of a shaft, with a cross or two below; a churchwarden's staff perhaps? But then tilt it round 45 degrees as in Fig.7b and that bottom cross becomes the "4" figure so associated with merchant marks. Are we now looking at what merchant marks became, later in the process of evolution when most folk memory regarding them had gone? Fig.7 has some vague resemblance to an object, but perhaps even further down the line the merchant mark of the 17th and earlier centuries, type 20, became the irregular geometric, type 9, of the 18th. They were certainly never prevalent at the same time.

Also included in the batch is Fig.8, based on the BEATA REGINA and GOD SAVE THE QVEENE pieces of the 1570s, except that it is half size; shown here correctly-sized, so that you can put it into the context of Figs.1-7 above, and magnified so that you can see what is actually going on. I always assumed, perhaps wrongly, that these were London? That damage at the top; perhaps it was a pendant, based on a token but not a token at all. The letters on the original would be ER for Elizabeth Regina; however, on this piece they are not far from FP, with just the vaguest hint of a lower crossbar on the F and no diagonal whatsoever on the F. However, if it was a local copy from an original on which the initials were worn, it is of a very reasonable quality. A beggar's badge, perhaps? although one



would have thought that those would be larger, to achieve greater prominence. Alternatively, perhaps it was just an enterprising farmer or tradesman who, realising that his own initials of FP did not look so different from ER, took a fancy to the BEATA REGINA design and decided to jump on the bandwagon.



Finally, before we leave Eynsham, Fig.9. Very ordinary designs: somewhat botched version of a type 12 quartered geometric on one side, although quite attractively so; plain type 14 cross within a spaced radial grenetis on the other. Unremarkable except: we normally think of the stock designs occurring on pieces with a rather larger radius than 13mm. This tends to hint that, whilst the major stock designs were issued in profusion in the larger-flan days of the 18th century, they also occurred in times when radii were a lot smaller. I will guess that this one is not so far from the 1570s date mentioned for Fig.8.

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Which leads nicely into Figs.10-13, all Medway finds, shown here alongside Fig.9 again for good measure; all around the 15mm mark, with Fig.12, apart from its sprue, down to 12mm. Figs.10-11 are the type of floral piece which goes into type 17 {plants and trees}, rather than type 1, whose petals are more stylised and almost always reach to the edge. Fig.10 even has a hint of a stem whilst, interestingly, Fig.11 has three small slits in it which suggest that somebody was trying to turn it into a face by superimposing eyes and a nose on what were obviously petals. Fig.12 is ordinary in the extreme, and of a lighter alloy than its companions; but Fig.13 has a Lombardic letter on it {probably C, or if inverted, D} and must be mid-16th cent. The reverse shows a shield with a upturned V-shaped band on it, unfortunately too worn to illustrate.

So, we have London sized pieces in the provinces; did they come from London or did the locals, even back in the 16th cent, make their own?

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## Town Tokens

The 17th cent main series contains quite a number of municipal issues, particularly for certain southern and south-western counties. We may therefore ask: how many of our crude leads come in that category?

The small 12mm pieces on the right, identical in basic design but from different moulds and with significantly different patination, come from in, or very near, Thetford. They depict the letters TC on one side and a square, upright cross on the other; in both cases, within a grenetis of pellets or wedges. The initials are in modern lettering, but the cross is more solid and regular than your average provincial type 14; in short, they have a bit more of a look of authority about them than most crude lead. My guess is that they are probably late 16th cent or thereabouts.



What, however, does TC stand for? Town Coin? Thetford Coin? The initials of some official charged with the disbursing of charity? Or are we on the wrong track altogether, and TC is just a local tradesman? I guess not the latter, because of the cross; which suggests again, perhaps the issuer is ecclesiastical rather than municipal? Would that lettering style have been in use before the dissolution of the monasteries? It looks later. Many questions; keep looking for other answers and clues. Ideas welcome!



The piece on the left looks as if it is trying to say something as well. It came from the Thames, it is lighter probably 18th cent. One way up it looks as if it might spell out "HILL", except that the bottom of the H is part missing and the 5-like character top left looks unconvincing. The other way up, it looks as if it might be "TTSM", which is more promising. Town Token, and SM the disbursing or authorising official? More examples, please!



# Paranumismatic Obesity



1

Obesity is a fashionable topic at the moment; the Government is trying to make us all feel bad about ourselves. Has it occurred to you that there are some pretty hunky specimens in the token world as well?

A few weeks ago I acquired a 63gm uni-face piece {Fig.1} and had to resort to my wife's cooking scales to weigh it, as my fine-tuned numismatic ones only run to 50gm. Why does somebody need 44mm just to tell you his initials are IK? In 1600 he would have settled for not much more than a quarter of that, or a sixteenth of the surface area, for the same purpose.



2

The size it was {above}.....

....and {below} the size I thought it was going to be!

The only previous time I had to use the cooking scales was when I bought off Ebay what I thought was a nice little lead token with a floral picture on {Fig.2}, superficially rather like a burning bush CT, without reading the sizing information properly. The vendor had mentioned it, I just didn't really pay it much attention. I finished up the proud owner of a raised leaden object 37x44 mm and weighing 89gm {3¼ oz}, instead of a token, it was actually a lead weight used by a florist for holding his wrapping paper down. I've come to rather like it, although it doesn't fit in any of my token storage containers. I'd rather do that than the other way round, finishing up with puny 9mm diameter toy money.



3



4



What might be the various possible reasons for using a heavy piece?

- A weight is the most obvious. Old weights can be the most odd sizes, due to some of the measures which they represented having got lost in history. Weights would often be quite smooth, although they would not necessarily need to be.
- A token with local monetary value might need to be large if it was important to recognise it as a big value at the upper end of a series, but not otherwise. The same arguments apply as for scoring counters above.
- Passes: There would be no point in making a pass large rather than small, other than for trying to persuade people to return it; in the same way that hotels today make their keyfobs large and uncomfortable to carry around, in order to try and dissuade people from walking off with room keys at the end of their stay. Perhaps there was already some of that thinking by the 18th century; if it is big, you are not so likely to lose it? You couldn't just post keys back so easily then.

- A gaming piece might be used in one of the following several ways:
  - ⇒ Scoring/gambling counters, in which case different sizes could be used for each value. High values would not necessarily need to be large, if a different depiction {numbers being obviously the best} were used on each piece. However, some people might equate large size with big money, and thus demand big pieces. The peasantry wouldn't have that sort of money to gamble, and the suggestion is often made that, life being so hard, they didn't have much time for mere games. If they didn't, then would the gentry be willing to use lead money, with all its lower-class connotations?
  - ⇒ A piece used for picking up and placing as part of the game, as in draughts, chess or one of their older variants. Some of the small, conical type 14s are used for this. Many games of this type required only very few different types of each pieces, often only one or two for each side, and it is unlikely that size would be either necessary or desirable. Quite apart from which, if you had more than a couple of different shaped pieces to produce, carving wood rather than moulding and shaping lead would probably be easier.
  - ⇒ A piece used for sliding as part of the game. Sliding games vary from shove-halfpenny at the low end to curling at the high end. I visited a museum whilst on holiday recently, and they were using a curling stone as a door stop for the front entrance. It was quite a significant weight to pick up, I assure you. Perhaps there were some intermediate games in the same family where, for example, pieces were slid along floors? That would require a weight rather larger than your average shove-halfpenny disc. Such pieces might need to be smooth for best performance, and there is certainly no point the piece being anything other than uniface.. However, a double faced piece would still slide after a fashion, if you weren't too fussy about the fine tuning of your skills.
  - ⇒ A piece used for throwing as part of the game. However, why make anything for the purpose? Why not just chuck stones?

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I favour the weight or the gaming piece when the reverse is mirror smooth but, that apart, there will however, always be people who think that big is beautiful and best, so perhaps a few issuers made big tokens just because they liked them, or because they gave them a sense of their own importance, whether such size was needed or not. Notwithstanding, many of these 30gm+ beasts are anonymous!

My thanks to reader John Bromley for Figs.3,4,6, all found in the Wolverhampton area, and for stimulating this article.



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