

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Readers' Letters

Reader Andy Jonson, has sent in some interesting thoughts on the piece {Fig.1} which originally appeared as Fig.6 on the front page of LTT_40 {July 2008}. Rather than my suggestion that the reverse is a poor attempt at a cartwheel design, he inclines to think, "that it is in fact, a very good attempt at designing a token to represent, on one side a man inside a treadmill and on the other a winding drum showing a coil of rope being wound onto it. I suppose this could have been a token linked to the building trade, where treadmills were used to lift men and materials into the upper parts of big buildings such as churches and cathedrals".



Looking at the cartwheel side in isolation, I'd say that certainly sounded a feasible alternative, although I would still think it likely that the designers had had slipped when describing the outer rim of a conventional cartwheel. However, looking at the second side, I feel I have to go along with Andy, whom I have therefore to thank for a fascinating idea.

My thanks also to John Theobald for sending in Fig.2, a rather interesting and for lead somewhat elaborate type 16 armorial piece from the Guildford/Hogs Back area of Surrey. Any heraldic experts out there who know what the arms represent, please let us know.



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Anybody speak Hebrew, please?

BNJ54 quotes two examples {S.227/8} of lead tokens with Hebrew inscriptions recovered from the Thames. Having had the good fortune to find one, does anybody please have any more idea than Mitchiner and his co-author of what the inscription might mean, and/or what the item/symbol depicted in the middle might be? It would be good to know whether it was a trade piece, or whether it was something to do with religious administration and worship. They are thought to be 17th cent.



Religious Tokens of the Ancients

We know that in Britain the Church issued tokens for a variety of reasons, amongst those known or conjectured being (i) pilgrims' subsistence, (ii) charity, (iii) payment of its own officials, (iv) passes to ensure that hostile outsiders were excluded and (v) administration of Holy Communion. Let it not be thought, however, that Christianity was alone in its religious use of tokens, or that they are confined to more recent centuries. The ancients employed them too, as witnessed here by Figs.4,5 which illustrate a lituus and a Christogram respectively. The lituus {Fig.4} was one of several religious implements which appeared regularly on Roman denarii, and one can imagine it being used in whatever was their equivalent of the communion service. The Christogram or Chi-Ro monogram {Fig.5}, so named because those are the first two letters of Christ's name, normally looks to our eyes like a capital P and X superimposed; the letters are Greek, and it is interesting to note that on this specimen the symbol appears retrograde. If not used as an early communion token, it might well have been used as a pass in those dangerous times.



Forgeais' Guild Pieces, part 5

This month we start with the paulmiers, or palmers in English, whom I think may be pilgrims; however, I stand to be corrected. Pleasant little picture of someone trying to behead his daughter {Fig.1}, so I think we can assume that the lady, and not her father, is the patron saint; unless, of course, paulmier is another word for executioner and the gent is their patron saint. We will assume not; there hopefully wouldn't be enough of them to need a guild. On that assumption, only the third time in the series that we have had a female in post. She appears again on the reverse, carrying her symbolic palm. Forgeais thinks 15th cent.



Plombiers-couvreurs were roofers rather than plumbers; the second word giving the game away. Whether they were solely concerned with roofing in lead or whether they also embraced tiling and thatching, I am uncertain. God the Father and God the Son preside, rather than delegating to any saints, whilst the reverse depicts tools and tiles in abundance. This guild was not founded until 1648, so these pieces, Figs.2-3, were presumably made soon after. Note the notch in Fig.3; we have discussed the possible significance of these as numbers or invalidation markers before.



The plumassiers, or fanmakers, also depicted a lady on Fig.4, the first of two rather different middle-sized pieces; who she is, Forgeais does not state. She looks as if she is flanked by two dandelions and about to embark on a game of bowls, but that is probably not correct. On Fig.5 she is replaced by two lis and a crozier, within a rather large and loosely constructed grenetis; but what both have in common is a spread of seven or eight feathers, or whatever, on the reverse..

Marchands de poissons translates as fishmonger. They are qualified "de mer" or "d'eau douce" which presumably means that there were separate guilds for those trading in sea or freshwater fish; why, I cannot imagine. Both pieces for the "poissons de mer" guild {Figs.6-7} depict God the Father and the Virgin Mary in typical 15th cent style; from the way that the former is holding his orb and cross, the impression is given that they are trying to creep round the house quietly on a dark night. The reverse is delightful, however; two exergues above and below a central date, with a variety of fish swimming around in each. The date is 1444 in one case, and 1465 in the other.

One of the "poissons d'eau douce" group is in similar style, although all the rest are small. The large piece {Fig.8} shows God the Father and the Virgin Mary again, looking perhaps a generation older; the impression is given that they are leaning over a fence admiring the view, until you realise that they are actually standing in front of it. There are a couple of goodly fish on the reverse, but they do not look as lively as their salt-water counterparts. Perhaps they are already on the slab rather than still swimming around. Forgeais thinks 14th cent, although my own guess would be 15th.



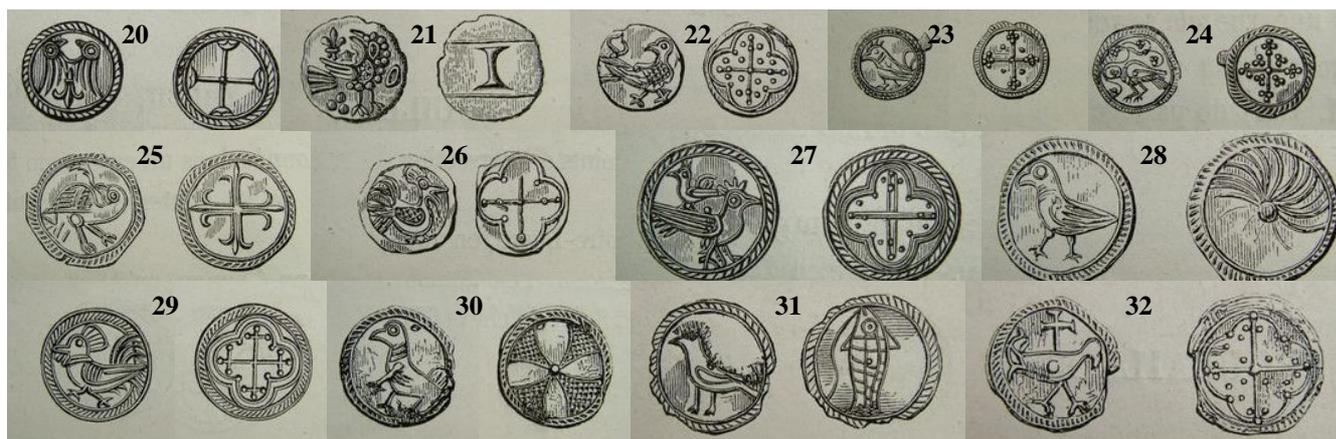


The remaining poissons d'eau douce pieces {Figs.9-12} are all small double-grenetis pieces of about 11mm diameter, which does not give much room for the poor little fish on the obverse to swim in. The reverses are all cross pattée and pellets.

The next guild are the potiers d'etain, or pewterers; literally, potters in tin. Would they number tokens amongst their works of creative art, or would that be too demeaning? Of all the guilds so far encountered, their styles as shown by Forgeais are the most varied; one can admire them, but there is to some extent a lack of common theme. Saints Fiacre and Mathurin officiate, but in a variety of postures; and, as one might imagine, the pewterers are keen on the reverses to show off their wares. Figs.13-15 look as if they might be by the same hand as the dated Fig.16, i.e. mid-17th cent. Fig.17 is decidedly offbeat; perhaps that was the 15th cent idea of modern art. Forgeais reckons it is of that age; the doodles, perhaps the residue of a Roman-numeral date, perhaps support the theory.



The poulailliers, variously keepers of hens or dealers in them, are another guild who, like the orfèvres last month, have a marked preference for small pieces; all those which Forgeais illustrates are on small flans in the 11-17mm range {Figs.20-32}. They show a chicken on one side and, with a few exceptions, a cross, often decorated, on the other. Do not write them off as uninteresting; the expressions of both are many and various, and in the case of the chickens often quite delightful. The latter look lively little characters, drawn by someone with a sense of joy and humour. Amongst the reverses of these 14th and 15th cent pieces which are not cross-and-pellets, note Fig.21 containing a "T", probably a numeral, perhaps indicating one denier, as per the ecclesiastical pieces discussed in LTT_34 {Jan}; Fig.28 showing a half-whorl, which might possibly be intended as a set of feathers; and finally, Fig.31 showing a fish on a line, which presumably indicates that one particular poulaillier had a second side to his business.



{to be continued}

Caught on the Hop

Die varieties always seem to be popular with the lead token fraternity, so we'll start with a few white metal, or should I say grey metal, pieces from, presumably Kent or East Sussex {Figs.1-2}. They'll have a little lead in them, but not that much. Found together, there are two of one variety and two of another; date, late 19th cent. The one with the more squat initials has a large 6 on an otherwise plain back, the other has nothing. They are not in Henderson.



If these don't turn you on, and I can't say I blame you, then how about Figs.3-4? This time they aren't die varieties, but they look as if they ought to be. They have nearly-similar dates, 1750 and 1752, in the same style of rather squiggly letter; surely they are from the same supplier? The issuers' surname initial is the same, but retrograde on one piece and normal on the other; the exergue is above the middle line on one, below it on the other; the lettering is a fraction finer on one than the other. Surely, if they were made by one and the same person, he could be more consistent? But no, he couldn't. One engraver copying another, possibly; but so near in time? Wouldn't you just employ the first chap? So, perhaps there were two of them in the same village or same workshop, maybe an apprentice working for a boss and being instructed to copy the latter's designs.

Figs.3-4 are not in the style normally associated with hop tokens, but they do have an East Sussex provenance. When you see the initials "IS", so neatly formed, you cannot but help think, "one shilling". "TS" on the other piece makes this unlikely; one presumes that he and "IS" were near relatives, perhaps brothers. If they had been working the same farm, would they have needed two separate supplies of tokens in the same year? Probably not, so perhaps they had adjacent farms; but again, all conjecture.

Fig.5 is clearly a 19th cent hop token, for the reverse depicting the value, five shillings, is exceedingly standard. Like Figs.3-4, it comes from East Sussex. What, however, of the obverse, which unusually for a hop token displays only ornamentation but no initials? Once again, it does not appear to be in Henderson.



Finally, Figs.6-7, again with similar origins. The first of them reads S, followed by VI; six shillings? Multiple values such as 24,36,72 and 144 {pence or bushels} did occur on some hop series, even if they are not as common as the usually preferred 30, 60 and 120. A 72 would normally have been rather larger than Fig.6, in the 19th cent at least, but a very standard 6-petal reverse, not shown, indicates that it was a century earlier. There are probably some issuer initials beneath the value, but they are not legible. This piece shows traits of both 18th cent crude lead and 19th cent hop; is it, therefore, one of the pieces which sits on the boundary?



Fig.7, uniface, is East Sussex likewise, but it has no trace of hop token characteristics; it is 18th cent crude through and through, albeit a particularly nice specimen. One might expect a cottage to be side- rather than end-on, and not to have its height so pronounced in proportion to its length; so is this a farm building, rather than a dwelling place, used to store.... what? Hops perchance?

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Shapes

I've come across a few odd shapes recently; things which one would think ought to be round, but happen to be oval or shield-shaped. Opinions, please; indifferent manufacture, or deliberate?

