

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



My thanks to Andy Muller for our first two pieces this month, both found in the Winchester area. Fig.1 show a large T sunk in a square frame; the size {18mm} suggests mid-17th cent, but stylistically it feels as if it should be earlier. Single initials tend to be most common in the late 16th cent. The similarly patinated Fig.2 has to be



earlier, by virtue of its Lombardic lettering; early 16th cent would be a reasonable guess. This is one of the very few English lead pieces seen which are tile-shaped; i.e. which might justify the name tessera, so beloved of the Romans despite the fact that most of their tokens were as round as our own.

Figs.3-5 come from Eynsham, Oxfordshire. The first is another piece which might well have qualified for last month's snippet on odd-shaped, particularly oval, pieces. The reverse is enigmatic; faint, wide bands which look half-heartedly struck, in contrast to the bold cartwheel on the obverse. Perhaps the bands are intended to be part of an armorial shield, probably of the local landowner. Fig.4 is unusual; a compact four-lobed petal with eight larger lobes around, describing a compound flower. There is nothing very obvious on the back, and the notch at the edge suggests that it might possibly have been a badge, possibly of a pauper; however, if so, the thread would have had to be quite thin, so much so that it would probably have been impractical. The notch might be an invalidation mark instead.



Fig.5 is a nine-spoked cartwheel, and illustrates the different manners in which our type 3s were engraved. Some people clearly carved a number of diameters in the mould {usually 2-4, giving double that number of spokes}; others started at the middle and worked outwards. This maker clearly looks to have combined the two approaches, starting with a diameter and then completing the two halves separately, giving an unequal number of spokes on the two sides.



Die duplicates and variations always seem to be popular with LTT readers, and Figs.6-7 appear courtesy of Brian Cavill. Found at Ogbourne Maisey, Wilts, their most interesting feature is the highly irregular distribution of the spokes in the cartwheel. The latter, its hub not entirely central, has seven variably-spaced thin segments on one side of the diameter and only four, all evenly spaced, on the others. IS or SI is probably the local farmer but the purpose of the L is uncertain. Very much mid-late 18th cent in style, these pieces are probably too late for the traditional triad.

Next up is Fig.8, thanks to "Danny", an ordinary enough but extremely neat cartwheel with superimposed circles on one side, but on the other a most unusual honeycomb, composed of a sextet of conjoined circles, with irregular geometric surround, in the background. Finally, Fig.9, believed to have been found in or near the River Wear; a typical chunky 18th cent product, 25mm across. We have seen this small cross on a T-shaped arrangement of lines before; is it, or is it not, a windmill?



15th Century London Cross & Pellets Tokens

This is not a series which I have been very attracted to....until recently. Having decided that the correct approach to an analysis of post-mediaeval British crude lead was to look at some of the best ordered series for clues which might lead me to a better understanding of the others, I immediately had two questions to answer: what are those series, and where does post-mediaeval begin?

The obvious choice of series seemed to be the London tokens from the period c.1540-1660 roughly described by BNJ54's classes Q and S. The start of these very closely coincides with the dissolution of the monasteries, so if there was a clean transition from ecclesiastical to municipal and personal issue, this would be very convenient. Certainly, the Church influence is largely gone by series Q, and it is likely that most of its charitable role would have been taken over by the various towns and parishes, so it just remained to check backwards to see if commercial influences were absent in earlier times; which leads to a very interesting observation: they weren't. There was a further series, also very well-ordered, in which church and secular interests appear to co-exist. I refer to what BNJ 54 calls class M.

The classic answer to the other question, where does post-mediaeval begin, is 1453, i.e. the fall of Constantinople. Class M, assigned by Mitchiner and Skinner in BNJ 54 to the period 1425-1490, straddles the boundaries both of date and influence; it starts in the church-dominated Middle Ages and finishes in a new, albeit slowly-emerging, era of changing initiative and fresh design.

Amongst the downsides of Series M are its extremely small diameter, never much outside the 11-13mm range, and the fact that it is often extremely dark. These two factors, plus wear, make it hard on the eye, which is why even some hardened lead enthusiasts choose to pass it by. To make it easier for the reader, please note that all photographs below are slightly lightened and magnified by a factor of 1.5.

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Series M as defined by BNJ 54, before the addition of complications resulting from Forgeais, may be described or subdivided by three design features, occurring in various combinations:

- Whether the cross is cross pattée {expanded ends} or plain and square ended. {Figs.1,2}
- Whether the diagonal lines of the grenetis shading run clockwise or anti-clockwise.
 ///// = clockwise, \\\\\\\ = anti-clockwise {Figs.1,2}
- Whether the angles between the arms of the cross contain:
 - (a) An annulet with a pellet in, i.e. a ringed pellet. - Fig.1
 - (b) A plain pellet.- Fig.2
 - (c) A trio of plain pellets.- Fig.3

...in addition to which, pieces {even from the same die} can be found in various alloys, presumably determined by the popularity and price of various metals at the time.: Figs.4,5 show two specimens with a higher lead content than that of the normal dark pewter. The twelve combinations of cross, shading and angle filling are not all equally common and, indeed, some may not occur at all. A larger statistical sample than BNJ provides is needed to be able to be more dogmatic about the proportions, but I will describe roughly what it says and ask you to take the figures with a certain pinch of salt.

The commonest form is subclass Ma {Fig.1}, with the ringed pellet: usually combined with the expanded cross and the clockwise ///// filler., it accounts for about two-thirds of all BNJ's examples. There are no examples of straight crosses linked with the ringed pellet, and very few anti-clockwise \\\\\\\ shadings.

Subclass Mb {Fig.2}, with plain pellet, numbers only about a quarter of Ma. Anti-clockwise \\\\\ fillers predominate, but not exclusively, and both types of cross occur in approximately equal proportions.

Subclass Mc {Fig.3}, with the trio of pellets, is smaller again. Anti-clockwise \\\\\ fillers looks as they may now occur invariably, but both types of cross again occur.

Initials do occur {Figs.6-8} but only sparingly and often singly; as one would expect, nearly always if not always in Lombardic form. The only example of a multiple letter seems to be the ecclesiastical “ihs” {Fig.8}, short for Jesus in Greek, and indeed it may be that many or all of the other examples are the initials of services {M=matins, H=hours etc}.



As to the rest of the subject matter, however, the topics are many and various, and a lot of later themes start to be represented, some of them for the first time. Figs 9-15 depict, respectively:

- 9. Eight petals.
- 10. Tent, or tabernacle.
- 11. Crossed keys.
- 12. A flail.
- 13. A shield.
- 14. A chequer board.
- 15. A bell.

Fig.16 is non-typical. It possibly evolves towards the end of the series, and depicts what BNJ calls an expanded cross in lieu of the main crosses illustrated by Figs.1-3. We, using our familiar lead token terminology, may be tempted to refer to it as a stub-ended four-petal; yet another design which repeats until the 18th cent, and of which we have not previously known the origin. BNJ54 calls it an “outline expanding cross”.



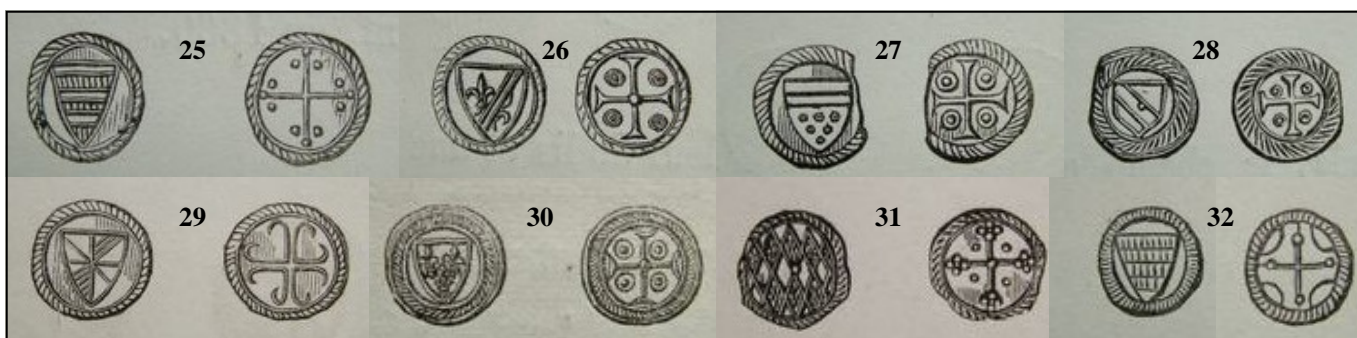
Class M has one further complexity; unlike most of BNJ’s other classes, it appears to have a significant overlap with Forgeais; in Vol.5 of the latter’s work, grenetis pieces with diagonal fillers abound. In other words, there appears to be a marked link between the 15th cent tokens of London and Paris. This is at first somewhat disconcerting, for a quick perusal of Forgeais will quickly show that there are many more cross types, and much more diversity of sizes than BNJ, which confines its listings fairly strictly to British finds, discusses.

11-13mm diameter is almost standard in England {specifically, London}, whilst it is distinctly bottom end of range in France {specifically, Paris}. Forgeais lists grenetis pieces of all sizes up to 20mm and beyond, although 13-17mm is the norm, still significantly larger than anything English. There are two or three dozen, however, which the authors of BNJ 54 go to the trouble of listing, which fairly nearly approximate to the English examples in character. Figs.17-24 show a group of pieces from Forgeais which at least feel that they might be English, apart from perhaps the narrowing of the grenetis in some cases; the reverses of some {Fig.17,19,21} definitely do appear in BNJ54, and the rest one feels might. Conversely, Figs.11,13,15 all appear in Forgeais.



So, there is some common ground, but not as much as first appears; both cities have subject types which are especially theirs. We need a reason; which BNJ kindly endeavours to supply, and which I heartily recommend you to read in its fuller detail.

To attain a standard of conformity, production needs to be under some sort of central control; which BNJ suggests could be best supplied by a trade guild, probably the pewterers. Now, we know that both London and Paris had trade guilds in abundance at the time, whose arms appear plentifully on tokens on both sides of the Channel; we only need free-flowing interchange of professional skills between the English and French pewterers to be the order of the day, and behold! we have a reason for the commonality of the tokens used. It seems very feasible, and I am grateful for the idea..



A group of Forgeais tokens, of fairly similar size to the English, but exhibiting more French characteristics, either in the variety of cross or the choice of subject matter on the other sides.

An analysis of Forgeais' tokens indicates some interesting traits. There appear to be different widths of grenetis: thin, medium and wide. The Class M English grenetis is wide by French standards, and nearly all of the French tokens which most closely accord to the English are wide; only occasionally medium, and never thin. The pieces which display more overtly French characteristics are split between thin {Fig.33} and medium grenetis, never wide. The grenetis of BNJ54's English pieces are also almost invariably very fine, i.e. with the $////$ or $\\\\\\$ closely spaced, whereas Forgeais shows quite a number in which it has coarsened {Fig.34}, i.e. in which the spacing of the diagonal lines is wider. It is quite possible that this later feature is a later evolution, on both sides of the Channel.



French grenetis have a much greater proportion of anti-clockwise $\\\\\\$ shading, also; it slightly predominates, whereas in England the clockwise $////$ form has a significant majority. There are also in Forgeais occasional occurrences of radial fillings, and pieces where the orientation of the grenetis on one side is not the same on the other, both seemingly missing in BNJ class M; also variable fillings, probably due to the inconsistency of the engraver.

From this an interesting suggestion arises; were there a limited number of manufacturers, all loosely under contract to a central authority, who each had their own distinguishing mark defined for them in terms of width and orientation of grenetis, cross type and angle filler? with perhaps one or two of them in business on both sides of the water, and their products in use likewise? Would the London and Parisian guilds have been able, in a period of frequent war between their two countries, to unite and work cooperatively in such a manner? A most interesting question to ponder.

Next month we will continue on BNJ54 Class M with a discussion on the range of obverse design types, which appears to be happily finite compared with most lead series, and also illustrate some more of Forgeais' grenetis pieces. It is my hope that they may be the start of an evolution which can be traced right through to the 18th cent.

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