Seasonal Communion Token Display, part 2

We see in the New Year by completing the display of Scottish communion tokens begun last month. Some features of note on this page include:

- An early diamond-shaped token, which is fairly unusual. There are a number of odd shapes in the series, although most of them tend to be of later date.
- Several cases of toothed beading, which also often indicates a date quite early in the 18th cent.
- Two pieces with rather non-typical fancy script, possibly by the same engraver {panels.5-6(i)}, dating from c.1810-20.
- One simple counterstamp, in late 19th cent Kentish hop token style {Panel 7(i)}; probably the latest piece in the group.
- A use of the IHS monogram in Panel 7(ii), indicating Episcopalian {Scottish equivalent of the Church of England}, rather than Presbyterian, origins.

Seasonal Greetings to all our Readers!

Panel 1:	Panel 3:	Panel 5:
Fordyce, Banffshire	Rathen, Aberdeenshire	Longforgan, Perthshire
Kirkmichael, Perthshire	Urquhart & Logie Wester,	{two sides of same piece}
Saline, Fife	Ross & Cromarty	
Selkirk	**Panel 4:**	**Panel 6:**
Skirling, Peebles	Delting, Shetland	Dull, Perthshire
	Dunning, Perthshire	Liff & Benvie, Angus
Panel 2:		
Wick, Caithness	*CT Manufacture:*	**Panel 7:**
Urquhart, Inverness-shire	*Article on page 4*	Urquhart, Inverness-shire
Yetholm, Roxburghshire		Turriff, Aberdeenshire

Smaller Pieces of the 16th Century

NOTE: In order to preserve comparison with the larger pieces discussed elsewhere in this series, the small pieces in the remainder of this series of chronological articles will be displayed lifesize rather than scaled up 3:2.

Probably Provinicial:

The pieces on the right are mostly of unknown origin and have rather a miscellaneous feel, yet they are undoubtedly 16th cent, mostly early 16th cent, in style. Several of them show Lombardic lettering, which one would not expect to encounter after about 1550-60; indeed the trasition from Lombardic to modern was gradual, according to individual taste, and some engravers were employing it in England two or three decades before {on the continent, sometimes even earlier}. The light colour and general feeling of leadness, rather than pewter, suggests provincial provenance, although presumably not all London's pieces ended up patinated by the Thames' wonderful preservative mud, nor was East Anglia devoid of mud of similar quality.

Figs.1 and 8 display crosses and may therefore be ecclesiastical pieces issued before the dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s. The double-letter pieces, possibly displaying forename and surname initials for the first time, have a greater chance of being commercial; whilst the single-letter pieces are ambiguous, potentially representing the initial name of either an ecclesiastical office or a person. As the norm for the later 16th cent London commercial pieces overleaf is either one letter on each side or a letter on one side and a specific item of subject matter on the other, whilst these tend all either to be uniface or to have a stock design variant on the reverse, I favour these being ecclesiastical and/or provincial; for example "h" may stand for "Horae", Latin for the Roman Catholic service of Hours; however, the early 16th cent is the most enigmatic period of issue, and rather than speculate too far I will move on to the series which are better structured.

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Definitely Provinicial:

The pieces shown in Figs.10-11 have already been discussed in LTT_49 {Apr 2009}, are known to come from Thetford, and are thought to be municipal {TC conjecturally = Town/Token Coin}

London and Provincial dated series:

Very few lead tokens are dated in the 16th cent but there are two probable series and a number of oddments. I shall not discuss these in detail as we have already spoken about them at length in LTT_45 {Dec 2008}, but for fullness I will reproduce the picture before moving on to the more usual undated pieces. The precise date ranges are uncertain, but the first {Fig.12} is known for various dates in the 1540s and 1550s whilst the other is usually dated in the 1570s and 1580s. Both series may have been continuously issued for some years, although I imagine that it will be sometime before enough finds are dug up to demonstrate a contiguous set.

Fig.12 is definitely London and has an uncertain reverse, probably a monarch sitting on a throne. I think that I may have come across 1539, but certainly nothing earlier; i.e. I am not aware as yet of any pre-reformation pieces of this type. I am not sure about the provenance of Fig.13; I presumed it to be London, but its colouring is light, and the "TC" bears an uncanny resemblance to the small Thetford pieces above.

Main London series of the middle-late 16th century:

In BNJ54 terms this is series Q, specifically Qc,Qd and Qe. The defining feature is the normal appearance of some form of individual identification, either initials or merchant mark, and an 11-13mm diameter. 10 or 14mm pieces but rarely appear, and anything larger than the latter is probably bordering the next century. BNJ54 seems to favour the merchant marks being earlier in the century and the initials later, but given that merchant marks were at their height of usage throughout the 16th century and continued in gradually declining numbers until quite late in the 17th, I am reluctant to go along with the theory. Many of the population were illiterate and in order to cope with that, designs rather than letters or wording were often preferred on both tokens and trade signs. Some later 17th cent main series tokens were large enough to offer both simultaneously, but on the tiny pieces of the 16th cent it was a stark choice of design or initial; hardly ever more than two of the latter, sometimes monogrammed, and often only one. Occasionally the desire to include a second initial caused it to fill up the second side, but in that case there was no room for the sign; you had to use your space wisely.

I am inclined to think that most of these small and usually very dark pieces are post-Dissolution, i.e. >1539, and that, whilst the merchant marks {Figs.14-17} may be from any part of the period, those with modern letters {Figs.18-20} are definitely from the second part of the century. A small number of the letters are in Lombardic script {Figs.21-22}, which was nearly obsolete by c.1550-60, and the number of such types around does not seem large enough for them to have been issued for very long.

BNJ54 seems to ascribe hardly any shield tokens to either half of the 16th cent, which is surprising in view of the fact that guild shields appear so frequently on the main series 17th cent series; however, there are significant numbers of very small shield tokens {usually 11-12mm rather than 13mm}, which BNJ54 considers Late Plantagenet {c.1425-90} and puts in series L. The reverses on these are pictorial and often fairly degenerate, although not unattractive; possibly an evolution of subject matter deriving from the old Winetavern days. I will discuss these separately on a future occasion.

Most other pieces which depict neither mark nor lettering are probably earlier rather than later, and may be the immediate precursors of those which indicate definite identity. It will be noticed that they often show a head {Figs.23-24}, recognisable in some cases as that of Henry VIII and even on occasion accompanied by his initials. I will guess a date c.1525-50. Fig.25 looks ecclesiastic, and maybe it is, but both the modern initials straddling the cross, and the dog, make the piece late 16th cent at least. It could even be early 17th.

Figs.26-30 show some more of the reverses which start to make their appearance. The trophy, which pairs with a merchant mark obverse, looks the earliest. I would guess that the animals are probably all late 16th cent; as also the pestle and mortar, which traditionally suggests an apothecary. The first signs here of tools of trade, so numerous in the following century; we are starting to see the more modern reverses evolve.

The rose and crown piece on the right {Fig.31}, is presumably more likely to be late in the century because of the association of the rose with Elizabeth I; whether out of loyalty, or to indicate a pub of that name, is anyone's guess. Perhaps both. It is one of the few pieces of this period not to have an identity in the form of either a merchant mark or an initial, but one feels that its subject matter belongs to this period. It could be that its message was to celebrate and advertise Elizabeth's occupation of the throne.

More on Manufacture: CTs

Following last September's article, herewith some illustrations of various methods used for communion tokens. The first illustration comes from Thomas Burn's 1892 work, "Old Scottish Communion Plate"; the source of much of what others have written about CT users and usage, it is not the dull reading that the title might suggest, and I hope to return to it anon.

Fig.1 shows a pair of moulds from the Fifeshire fishing village of Crail, dating at a guess from the mid-late 18th cent, with a pair of pins incorporated so as to assist alignment. Note the ducts at one end of each, through which the metal flowed; one can imagine other crude lead using the same method. Fig.2 below depicts a near-identical token from neighbouring Anstruther Easter, almost certainly produced by the same manufacturer using the same technique.
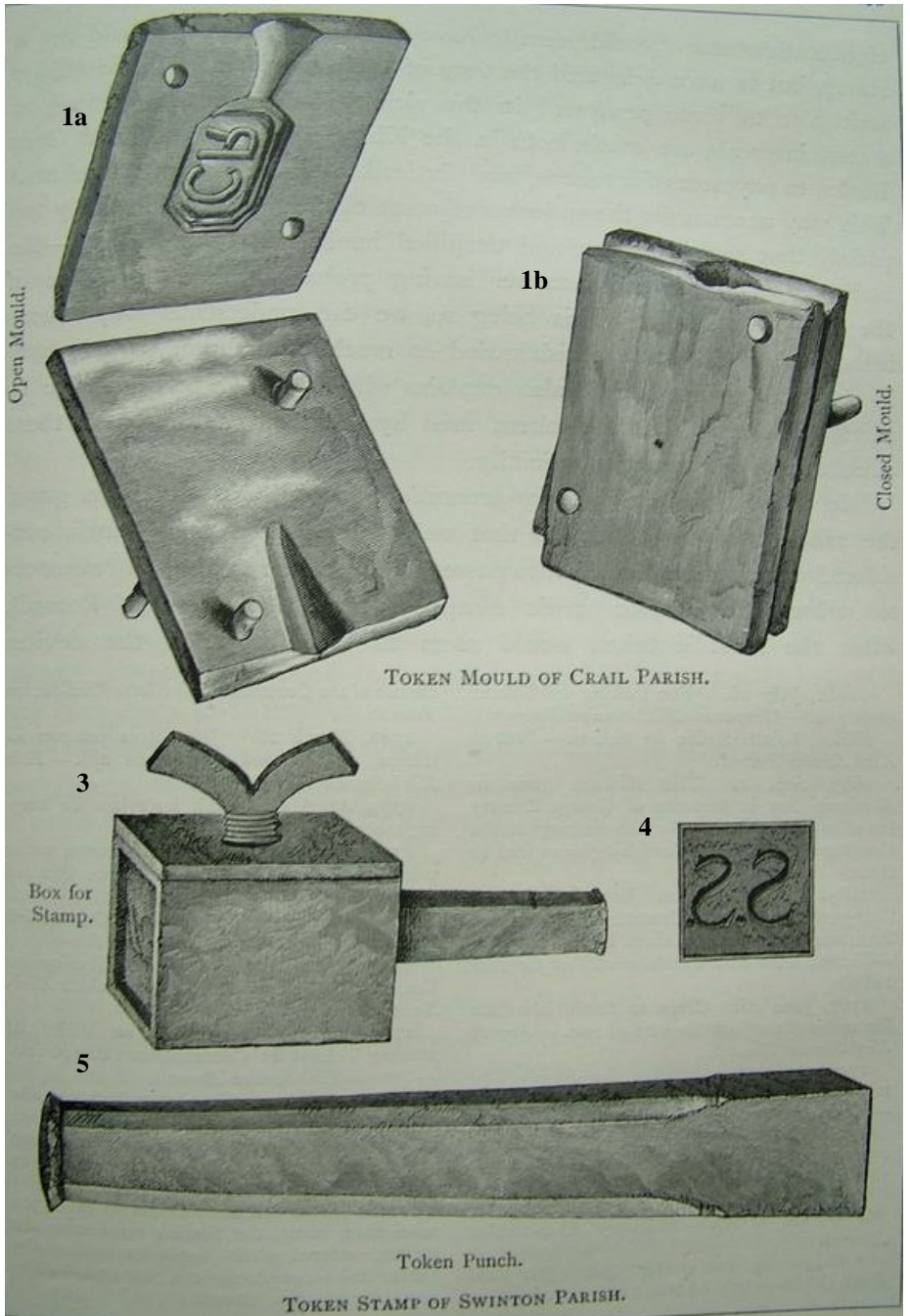
Fig.3 shows a screw box, used for stamping table numbers and the like on a token inside.

Casting and striking were both used extensively in CT production, and figs.4-5 shows the token and related punch of Swinton, Berwickshire, probably relating to its issue of 1761. A few other punches of various shapes, including one with a wide rectangle on the end of a shaft, have been seen for various dates up to c.1820.

TOKEN MOULD OF CRAIL PARISH.

TOKEN STAMP OF SWINTON PARISH.
Token Punch.
Box for Stamp.

Finally, from the white metal period, one of the dies of Alexander Kirkwood and Son of Edinburgh, one of several big-city engravers to feature strongly in the CT manufacture of the mid-19th century {Fig.6}. This 1844 piece, from Coldstream, Berwickshire, is typical of the period, and no doubt the octagonal cross-section of the punch was deliberately designed to fit into a slot and thereby keep it still whilst striking. The parish-specific die would be the upper of the two; the lower would contain a verse of scripture which, being equally applicable to one parish as another, could be left in place for use as part of several consecutive orders.