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*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.freemove.co.uk](mailto:david@powell8041.freemove.co.uk). Please note that the old LTT editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

## *Damaged Tradesmens' Tokens: Deliberate or Otherwise?*

In LTT\_29 {Aug 2007} I wrote concerning the reason behind the various malformations and mutilation of lead communion tokens, suggesting that one should consider a variety of positive motives beyond mere vandalism. I do so again now in respect of tradesmens' tokens, both those in the lead and the main 17th century series; many of the reasons are applicable to both types.

Where 17th cent main series tokens are illustrated, the numbers given are references to Williamson.

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Damage can take a variety of forms; amongst others:

1. Deliberate cuts across the middle
2. Deliberately placed hole
3. Randomly placed hole
4. Button-like pairs of holes
5. Straight flan clips
6. Curved flan clips
7. Deliberate edge nicks
8. Pincer clips
9. Random edge loss
10. Deliberate design modifications
11. Counterstriking



...in addition to which, deliberate holes can be of various shapes. I suggest that one of the most frequent reasons behind several of these categories is invalidation, i.e. the requirement to show that the piece is no longer valid, but let us deal with each in turn.

In addition to all the above, there are defects of manufacture, particularly in the crude lead series, some of which cannot always be easily distinguished from subsequent damage.

### **Deliberate cuts across the middle:**

Fairly non-controversial. We are all used to lead tokens where ploughs, spades and other agricultural instruments have severed a piece randomly {Figs.1-3, the first being Roman}, whilst there are also a sufficient number of more or less accurately halved and quartered cross-and-pellet pieces around {Fig.4} to know that the mediaeval practice of dividing pennies was continued, for whatever reason, by the later unofficial token-issuing fraternities. 17th cent main series tokens seem to be almost immune from this sort of damage, although I have seen one; whether by way of invalidation, or out of desire to create a half value, I am uncertain.

### **Deliberately placed hole:**

This implies that you have a purpose; perhaps that you want to use the piece as jewellery, or as a beggar's badge, that you want to provide facilities to hang it up, or that you want to make the pieces easier to carry {and not lose} by stringing them together.

Communion tokens are known to be occasionally used as beggars' badges, and hung round the neck; there is no reason why municipally-issued tokens, of which there are quite a number in the 17th cent main series, should not be used likewise, although I know of no reference to them having been. Nor is it impossible that civil authorities issued crude lead for similar purposes; but again, no significant evidence.

There could have been a requirement for workers passes to be hung up on a board, as indeed was normal with collieries' brass checks in the 19th cent, and even the 20th; no reason why that couldn't have happened in earlier years either. Fig.5 is the sort of piece which might result.



I do not think that there is very much evidence for stringing, at least in Britain; there are few tokens which are known to be holed on a regular basis, whilst there is ample evidence that most tokens did not need be holed at all. Fig.6 is a oriental lead token which probably had stringing in mind, and it is known or suspected that certain tropical countries designed their coins for that very purpose; however, it looks likely that the hole was part of the original design, rather than being punched out subsequently. That leaves jewellery. If you wished to adorn yourself, would you seriously choose to wear a 17th cent or a lead token, given the condition in which most of them were, or with a hole which did not display the design the right way up, as is often the case? Would you like, for example, to go around with Fig.7 hanging from your neck? Most holed tokens of this period are as worn as the rest, and if no-one was going to spend them as money after they had been holed, they necessarily acquired the wear before being requisitioned as jewellery; which, of course, overseers of the poor, making beggars' badges, might be less fastidious about.



**Randomly placed hole:**

This is one of the most interesting. If you don't care where the hole is, the implication is that you probably don't have a specific future usage for the end-product in mind; which in turn suggests that you might be thinking more about preventing usage. Georgian coppers are frequently punched or clipped with the intention of establishing whether they are genuine or not before returning them to circulation, and not without reason because of the enormous number of forgeries in circulation. Whether anyone saw value in forging 17th cent and lead pieces on any scale is debatable, although probably it happened a little.



We have already seen in LTT\_29 that there appears to be a fair amount of invalidation by clipping and holing in the CT series, and with the edict of 1672 banning local tokens it would be very natural to observe the same phenomenon on commercial copper, brass and lead; not to mention any other similar local and perhaps less well-known occasions when someone, somewhere, took a decision, at whatever level, to revoke an issue. On Fig.13, for example, it would appear that the mutilator was quite happy for the hole not to go right through; i.e. a punch-mark would suffice.

One feature worth mentioning, where a piercing is concerned, is the shape of the hole. Figs.7-17 show a wide range of hole types, from the basic circle through a variety of slits, triangles and quadrilaterals to some which are really quite elaborate. Why did the mutilator of Fig.14 choose such an exotically shaped punch? It can only be that he needed in some way to distinguish his work from those of others similarly employed.



All a question of probability, but my feeling is that anything hung, strung or sewn is more likely to be given a round hole, whereas odd-shaped holes are more likely to be for other reasons.



### **Button-like pairs of holes:**

Recycling of decirculated tokens would seem intensely practical to the impoverished of the 17th cent, and conversion of an unwanted object to a usable one would seem eminently sensible. I don't say that it happened on a large scale, but don't mock it; such appropriation of the coinage of the realm has happened in more recent time. India and Pakistan in the



1940s produced one-pice coins which were so similar to the shape and size of a tap washer that they were immediately decirculated and used as such, whilst the Isle of Man in the early 1990s decided that, as the 5p was the same size as a golf marker, they might as well depict two golf clubs on the reverse to illustrate the fact.

If you have a larger token and require a larger button, four holes is an option. I have seen it on lead {Fig.18}, but not copper or brass.



### **Straight and curved flan clips:**

Straight and curved flan chips occur on struck 17th cent main series pieces which are hammered out of a metal sheet rather than on cast blanks {Figs.19,20,22-26}; on soft crude lead, which is cast, curved edge damage is almost unknown and straight edge damage is mostly due to being struck by tools in the soil. The cause in the case of Fig.21 is debatable; it could be tool damage, it could be the way the mould was cut. If the damage is ancient, subsequent patination could hide the evidence.

Straight flan chips occur where the punch comes down on an edge of a piece of sheet metal during manufacture, resulting in a straight edge on the token; Figs.19-20 {Rutland 8 and Essex 150} are two 17th cent examples. An exceptional variation of this theme occurs where the punch comes down on a corner, resulting in two straight edges at right-angles, possibly separated by a curve in between; this is exceedingly rare.

Curved flan chips occur on struck pieces where two strikings of the punch overlap, so that on the second occasion the punch comes down on a piece of metal sheet already struck out by the first one, leaving an effect not unlike a minor eclipse of the sun or moon's disk. These are numerous; Figs.22-26 illustrate. Once again, rare compounds are theoretically possible, e.g. two curved flan defects or a curved and a straight.

### **Random edge loss:**

Both hammer-striking and lead-casting are precarious processes which can lead to results of random quality, including sometime a local weakness of the metal which causes the affected part of the piece to come away when exposed to wear and tear {Figs.27-28}. When casting, insufficient metal to fill the mould could be one such reason, or inadequately deep engraving another. Further damage can also occur after manufacture when removing sprue and cleaning up, e.g. filing edges to make them smooth. The makers of crude lead are much less likely than other numismatic manufacturers to worry about the precise physical quality of what they were putting into circulation.



In the case of lead, the damage thus done may be indistinguishable in some instances from that caused by vandalism or tool damage. With milled pieces or others well struck by a machine the results should be much more uniform, causing such damage hardly ever to occur.



Where a hole has been designed or subsequently inserted in a lead token for the purpose of hanging, perhaps for use as a badge {Figs.29,30 respectively}, edge loss can result if the use of force has caused the weakened metal in the vicinity of the hole to be torn off. It is possible that some supposedly heart-shaped pieces are thus formed, such as Fig.37 below, although one would expect the damaged edge to be jagged. Similarly, it is worth remembering that an apparently token-like object may result if a two-part seal is roughly torn apart.

Casting holes in lead up front as per Fig.29 was difficult to achieve satisfactorily and therefore rarely attempted.



### Deliberate edge nicks and pincer clips:

There is obviously some potential for pincer pieces, flan clips and straight edges to be confused with each other; either because a very small arc is very difficult to distinguish from a very small straight line, or because of the shape of the pincers.

The shapes of the edge nicks are various; In the 17th cent main series pieces shown, Fig.31 {Williamson's Surrey 9} has a very clean V-shaped nick and Fig.32 a rather more indeterminate one with some additional pincer damage the opposite side, whilst Fig.33 has a very thin and fine cut. At least one other specimens of Surrey 9 is known with near identical notching. Fig.34 shows a crude lead example of edge notching which appears to be deliberate.

### Deliberate design modifications:

Leads are occasionally encountered where the token was cast round but appears then to have been subsequently modified with clippers; Figs.35-36, where a heart shape appears to been intended, is an example. A leaf-shape has also been seen. As mentioned above, in some cases the intention may not be obvious; e.g. it may not be possible to discern whether a notch is a design feature, a metal weakness or an invalidation mark {Fig.37}; however, where there is evidence of symmetrical shape irregularity top and bottom, deliberate intent at the design stage must be favoured.



### Counterstriking:

Whilst some counterstriking, and in the case of lead, scratching, is undoubtedly vandalism, most of its occurrences on lead have a positive motive. In the case of many hop tokens and CTs, counterstriking is the final phase of production, adding the fine detail {such as table number in the case of CTs, or issuer and value in the case of hops} to any original shape and design; i.e. it was intended from the outset {Fig.38}.

The natural tendency is to assume that any initials thus superimposed are those of the issuer; however, it is not impossible that they are those of some weights and measures person from the local town, indicating his authority for their use.

Main series 17th cent tokens with counterstruck lettering are seen, but are very rare.

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## **Conclusion:**

....so, next time you see a damaged token, remember that the defect may itself be a little piece of contemporary history, and don't be too quick handing out the ASBOs !!