

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 or david@powell8041.freeseewe.co.uk. Please note that the old LJEditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LJT is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



A couple of foreigners in our group this month, just to demonstrate that other countries have some fine lead tokens. The US and Canada do not have very many, but those who emigrated from this country took their practices with them and that included.... Guess what! making crude lead tokens. Fig.1 is a fine specimen, depicting the head of a gentleman who looks as if he is tolerably well to do; we have to guess his age from his dress, and I will guess the mid-late 18th cent. On the reverse of the piece, which is 24-25mm in diameter, there is what looks like an artificial leg, but might just be an ordinary one meant to indicate that the gentleman is a hosier. An anomaly, therefore; it hints of a gentry estate piece on one side and commercial use on the other. Lead tokens rarely reveal their secrets simply!

If Fig.1 was from a long way west, Fig.2 is from a long way east. W stands for Wroclaw, in Poland, and the shield on the other side depicts the city arms. Its previous owner believes that it is a tax token, although unfortunately I do not have the foreign literature to prove it.

Nearer home, something very different, a thatched cottage or house {Fig.3}; a relatively scarce design which would have been very attractive had it weathered better. The level of detail is high for lead, and the mould engraver has, in his enthusiasm to do a good job, been a little too ambitious in how much he included. The value on Fig.4, beside it, gives some suggestion of the piece being a seal or weight; the symmetry of those two prongs at 4 and 8 o'clock is notable, and it certainly wasn't worth £12! It weighs 4.49gm, if that figure is significant to anybody. The back is largely smooth, with just the slightest hint of a central pellet to raise it off the ground, thereby enabling someone to pick it up more easily.



The large cut half of Fig.5 comes from the Portsmouth area and is 30mm across. An heraldic eagle on one side and cross and crosslets on the other; how very mediaeval, and yet this is of a size which is normally associated with the 18th cent. Cut halves, also, are usually thought to be early rather than late; as also the grenetis, which contains pellet-beading instead of the more usual shading. We are left with the question: (i) early piece, vastly oversized or (ii) late piece, employing the design of several centuries previously? I favour late. The condition, the quality of the engraving and the size all ensure that there is still a lot to enjoy; this is indeed one of the more attractive cut halves.

Some of our readers enjoy seeing die pairs, and in Figs.6-7 we have two pieces which exude Common-

wealth origins; they have the giveaway wreath, which dates them to the 1650s. D/LG is presumably the usual triad of issuer's and wife's initials, whilst the three crowns on the reverse are presumably his business sign; interesting to know that they were permitted, in a period when the monarchy was suspended! However, the most unusual feature is that the lighter of the two pieces has, just above the L, a counter-stamp consisting of a 2,Z or N {anybody's guess which}, raised within an incuse, crown-shaped shield.

Fig.8 feels as if it ought to be a Kentish hop token, except that it was found in East Anglia, the country's other great centre of picker's tokens. A 25mm dated piece of 1778, the detailed depiction of a plant on the reverse is quite delightful. Readers are invited to guess what it is. Equally pleasant is the little bird of Fig.9, waddling to the right with the sun on its back; at 19mm diameter, this could be any time from the late 17th cent onwards. Fig.10, strongly engraved but crudely drawn, is another agricultural piece, probably depicting a plough rather than a crop-picker's basket, although the meaning of the strong vertical lines above the main subject is uncertain; as also the many striations on the back which, although they don't amount to anything identifiable or easily photographable, occupy the entire surface. One of the more interesting type 0? sides, if there can be said to be such a thing; perhaps some people felt that they had to carve something on the mould for the second side, even if it was only random grooves!



Fig.11 is clearly modern, from its lettering; we don't include very many of those in LTT, and I don't even know what country it comes from. What does COB stand for? Cobalt, if a foreign mining token? or maybe cobbles, if British? The term is usually thought of in terms of road surfacing, but was also used for coal. 19th cent Co-op tokens are known with values such as "1 cwt of cobbles", so no reason why such pieces could not have been made, perhaps for a different organisation, in lead. "19" might, for example, be the number of the local pauper to whom a group of parish overseers were distributing charitable relief. Alternatively, perhaps no.19 was a member of a gang of paviers who were tasked with surfacing a street, and who were required to use tokens in some manner to indicate the number of loads they had laid down or requisitioned from central supplies. Nineteen sounds rather large for a gang of road-makers; perhaps it was for an individual's 19th load; he handed no.18 in to get it, handed it back to et no.20, and got paid at the end of the day according to what number he was currently holding. As with most of these, who knows?



---:---:---

The Oriental Equivalent of Crude Lead

The attractive pieces below may all come from the Far East and be described as tin, but they look and feel kin to our own crude lead issues; one can imagine our own rustic issuers and manufacturers having sympathy with them.. Figs 1-3 are typical lead thickness and double-sided, figs.4-9 are thinner and uni-face. You may notice here shades of type 1 {petals}, 16 {shield}, 18 {bird}, 19 {animal} and 26 {sun}; not to mention a very local rendering of type 2 {initials}!



Forgeais' Guild Pieces, part 8

We conclude our survey of Forgeais' guild pieces this month with those of the jurés-crieurs and marchands de vin, i.e. quality controllers and merchants respectively, of wine. Six small flan pieces and two medium-small from the former {Figs.1-8}; but note, most of them do, and all of them could, come straight out of BNJ53-54! In other words, we suddenly have a considerable overlap between what Forgeais is reporting from the Seine and what others are finding in the Thames. One explanation, obviously, is that if these pieces were associated with the wine trade, the perhaps London was the place where some of the French wine was going to, and that these piece fulfilled their function, whatever it was, at both ends of the journey. Could one further conjecture that most of Forgeais' small flan pieces were associated with trades in which London was a player, and that the large ones with trade more exclusively French? Perhaps hasty to jump to such a conclusion, but it is worth a thought.



Anyway, we have some old friends here, so let's meet them. Figs.1-2 are straight-forward BNJ54 type Ms, discussed in LTT_51/52 {June/July 2009}; even the crosses look English. But why the bell? Forgeais suggests how the royal wine-taster, having done his duty, might have used such a bell to declare the fact to the world, or such of it as were within earshot; to me this seems rather tenuous, although undoubtedly there were many such symbolic acts of whose origins we are now imperfectly aware. Could it have been an ecclesiastical, rather than royal or commercial, bell? The same can be asked of most of the pieces in this section, and I shall keep an open mind.

Figs.3-4 are fair enough, a jug or ewer for holding the wine, and Figs.5-6 a glass, or chalice if you are thinking ecclesiastic, for pouring the wine into. The crosses are various, exotically French in Fig.3 and conservative English Type M in Fig.4; but whether the drinkers wore a mitre, a cowl, a suit of armour or a peasant's cloak we have no idea. Forgeais agrees with BNJ on the date for all of these: mid 15th cent.

Fig.7 is a 14th cent piece, one of a male-and-female pair previously discussed in the type 32 article on page 2 of LTT_20 {Nov 2006}. The gentleman depicted has usually been taken as a pilgrim, pausing for refreshment as he trudges, his travelling bag over his shoulder, on his weary way; now we have Forgeais posing a counter-theory, that he is an official taster. However, why would you stand with a bag on a stick over your shoulder to do that? Surely you would sit down and relax and, if you were working under a government anything like our recent one, write a 56-page health and safety report?

The reverse on Fig.7 is an expanded cross of a type similar to that occasionally seen on degenerate type M evolutions c.1470-1500, but BNJ53 agrees with Forgeais in confirming that the design was in occasional use, sometimes with additional ornamentation, a century earlier.

Fig.8, also considered by Forgeais to be 14th cent, depicts a gent rather fancifully holding out a barrel in one hand at shoulder height, which I would have thought would be a sure way to either strain a few muscles or get cramp; however, our friend AF thinks that the pose is a gesture of bonhomie, inviting the assembled company to drink. Somewhat along the lines of the Roman clasped hands, intended to say, "we are all mates, aren't we?". Five minutes before stabbing the other guy in the back, of course.

The castle shown on the reverse of Fig.8 may be the building in which this mediaeval pub check was designed to be used; however, Forgeais does double-list both Figs.7 and 8 under "Méreaux Fiscaux", i.e. tax pieces. Along with, it must be said, a number of other pieces depicting a similar towered building. Once again, I will keep an open mind.



With Figs.9-12 we are back to the larger-flan pictorial pieces which, for the most part, have dominated this series of articles. These are the pieces of the wine merchants, rather than the testers, and St.Nicholas is the chap assigned to ensure that all goes well. On Fig.9, smartly toggged up, he appears in almost identical pose on both sides of the piece, blessing the vine and the barrel on one side and the ship which carries the finished article on the other. This leaves little room for the poor fellows who responsible for the farming, picking, producing, barrelling, coopering etc, and their three representatives are stuffed into a barrel for lack of anywhere better to put them. Hopefully they had a good swig of their product first, to ease their obvious discomfort.

In Fig.10 a fairly youthful St.Nicholas appears again in similar pose, except with the addition of a few spikes to the top of his crozier which suggest that he might wish it to double up for use as a weapon. No doubt this was how he kept his labour force producing on time and to budget. One of the latter, no doubt feeling that life was getting a bit cramped inside the barrel, has climbed out and sat on the outside. Forgeais thinks they were “enfants”, rather than adult professionals; i.e. children, and from their size they could be, but why would you have children on a wine-merchant’s token? I don’t know what the drinking age was in 16th cent France, but if they are children then they look just a tad young to be on wine.

Fig.11 depicts an older St.Nicholas who, having beaten Churchill to the two-fingered salute by about 400 years, is beginning to look rather blasé about the whole process. The inhabitant of the barrel who had the temerity to creep out last time has been put back in place, but has managed to get one leg out over the edge again. As with the last piece, the name of a hospital is given on the reverse; so whether the wine was used for the doctors’ Christmas party, or found convenient for use as anaesthetic, is anyone’s guess. I believe “l’hospital” probably had a rather wider meaning on those days, so we will give St.Nicholas and his mates the benefit of the doubt.

Finally, a similar hospital piece, Fig.12, in which the only difference is that St.Nicholas appears to have a plaster on his thumb, probably in consequence of having partaken too freely and either (i) cut his hand on his wineglass or (ii) bitten himself whilst helping himself too enthusiastically to the nibbles. I’ve realised now why St.Nick needs a crozier: to keep himself upright.



-:-:-:-

All that Glitters is not Lead

There are some pieces which feel that they ought to be lead, but aren’t. Take this pleasant little piece on the right, for example; it looks the correct colour, although in fact it is a very pleasantly patinated piece of copper. It is 13mm {I have blown it up, so that we can enjoy the detail}, and it has the sort of delightfully crude bird which we are in the habit of seeing on our type 18s. It is slightly bent, as many of our leads are; in fact is just a touch concave, as some Celtic pieces are prone to be; and finally, it is uniface. Perhaps the condition is just a little too fine to be realistic, but if that rectangular thing top right was a sun it would look just the part. Now to reveal: it is a 2 pe from Cambodia, issued in approximately 1847. Yes, that’s a 2 pe rather than a 2p, and no, it doesn’t entitle you to two visits to the lavatory; although, of course, that might have been about what it was worth.

