

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.freemove.co.uk. Please note that the old LJFeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LJT is no longer active.

Picture Gallery

Fig.1 is one of those occasional pieces where there is no casting of the design at all; a blank is made, and the engraver scratches everything on thereafter. 21mm in diameter and 6.68gm in weight, I have deliberately magnified it for effect, as the marks cannot be easily seen otherwise. The obverse is modelled along the lines of a groat reverse, with a central circle and two concentric rings which on the original coin would contain pellets and inscription respectively; whereas the second side imitates not an obverse, but a second reverse. Each side has a small circle at the centre of the cross, which does also occur on some coins. One presumes the piece to be late mediaeval, albeit quite large for lead of that date.



Fig.2 genuinely is large and chunky, and needs no magnification at all; indeed, it is a whopping 42.59gm. Presumably, from the smoothness of the blank side, it is a weight rather than a coin, even if it does have our standard stock-token six-petal as its primary design. The central indentation is interesting, on the reverse; it is dead centre, and the feeling is that a the point of a precision tool has been inserted. Certainly, as leads go, this is as perfectly round as they get.

Fig.3's two sides look as if they ought not go together. Firstly, an initial-flanked lis, hinting of a gentry issue, and probably dating not too far from around 1750; however, on the back, a rather heavy-looking, recessed design, consisting of an elaborate flower within a raised grenetis. Unfortunately we don't know where it comes from; the only pieces on this page for which we do have provenance being Figs.4-6, all found in the Newbury area. The Star of David is known from BNJ54 type M on, i.e. from the mid-15th cent, but whether it has any ethnic significance on an obviously crude provincial piece is open do doubt. It might, it might not; it could just represent the limit of some rustic's design skills, who had never heard of Judaism in his life. Fig.5 has a rather unphotogenic cock on the back, whilst Fig.6 is uniface.



Figs.7-9 all have typical petals on their reverses, not worth showing, but the variety of initial is interesting. That thin, scrawly CS {Fig.7}; quite neat, but one can imagine it is not much more than two scratches on the mould; there is no effort to engrave deeply. Then, rare luxury, a full surname on lead {Fig.8}! Good job, however, that Mr.Cook had a short name. Finally, a double-initial piece {Fig.9}; always a point of interest. Were TW and AW in partnership, father and son, two brothers, or unrelated? Or perhaps just a couple of church officials, charged jointly with administering the parish's charitable distributions?



Refreshingly Different



We continue our occasional practice of looking at pieces which, whilst not lead, looks as if they ought to have their lead equivalents. Pub tokens are a well-known 19th cent phenomenon, and at the top end of their range they have both a name {of pub and/or publican} and a value, as per Figs.1-2. They are mostly in brass. Occasionally, they indicate that they had some specific purpose, such as use in connection with a skittle alley {Fig.3}. Perhaps, for your ticket, you got a game with a pint thrown in; with others, perhaps it was just for beer alone. Whatever the precise reason, it does not concern us here; just the idea that, whatever it was, someone, somewhere, and perhaps at an earlier date, was probably doing the very same things with lead.



Descending the scale, before we reach lead, there are other types which we meet on the way:

- the anonymous brass piece, with design, for generic use {Fig.4}
- the initials-and-value-only brass piece, with no design {Fig.5}
- the counterstruck disk, in bronze or brass, which may or not be decorated first; some of these, such as the one by the well-known W.J.Taylor {Fig.6}, being quite attractive.



...and, finally, the thin brass pieces commonly known as Poor Man's Pub Checks {PMPCs}, illustrated in Figs.7-13. Figs.4-6 are coin-standard productions; only when you get to the thin brass counters used for PMPCs do you feel that you are handling something cheap and nasty. The cost of coinage at one of the private Birmingham or Sheffield mints, for that is where high quality pub checks usually come from, might well be beyond the reach of many a modest publican. In that case there were various options open to him:

- to use a stock token, employed by others, which would not require the expense of any private engraving {Fig.4}
- to cut down on the amount of fancy design and details supplied {Fig.5}

to use blanks and counterstrike them, in which case there was a sub-option, i.e. high or low-grade blanks {Figs.6,7-13 respectively}



All these pieces, however, are 19th cent, and some quite late 19th cent at that; what purpose did they fulfil, and did that same need exist before? What was so different about the requirements of the late 19th cent pub-goer and that of the early 19th cent, or even the 18th? Not a lot, I would guess; so, perhaps, in those earlier days, they used lead?



PMPCs date from about 1883 onwards, at which time they flooded on to the scene, and looking at the delightfully simple of reverses of Figs.7-13 the lead enthusiast ought to feel very much at home. RS at the Nag's head {Fig.8}, TW or JW at the Crown {Figs.7,9}; name signs, landlord's initials, sometimes a value. Or just something indicating a purpose, as witness the pipe and glass of Fig.9. Fig.13 is enigmatic; someone was in for a good evening, with 1s 6d of beer at 1880s prices. Perhaps it is a little later, but not much, for nearly all PMPCs have one of two obverses: Queen Victoria {Fig.14}, or the double-headed eagle {Fig.15}. Fig.14 is a good specimen, whilst Fig.15 shows the more usual effect of the counterstamping making its detrimental presence felt on the other side.

Fig.16 is a totally different type of piece "1 Kanna Dricka", it says; and yes, according to my good friend Google Translate, that is Swedish for what it sounds: "One can of drink". More over, the phrase on the other side translates, "Magic Cap, 1796". It is oval, rather than round {22x19mm}, with an arc out of one side; in other words, it is very like the thing which you pull off the top of a drinks can today, in 2010. However, it is made of good copper, well struck, and bears the date 1796 in fine period script. Did they have drinks cans in 1796? Now, find a lead one of those if you can....



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The Evolution of the Exergue on 17th-19th Century Lead

One feature introduced by the new regal copper coinage in 1672 was the exergue; that is, the construction of a small segment, usually at the base of the piece, separated from the rest of the design by a horizontal line. On coins this usually contains the date or, in the early 19th cent, some floral ornamentation; however, it is also copied on lead tokens, where perhaps it has a more varied history.

To commence, a farthing of 1672 to illustrate the theme {Fig.1}; you will notice that the exergue, and the numerals below it, are rather smaller than they came to be in later years. Some leads, probably of similar date or shortly after, attempt to imitate. They have a similarly modest exergue {Figs.2,3}, sometimes but not always with an often half-hearted attempt to copy the date; even where numerals are visible, there is often not space for four of them, due to lead being less amenable to fine work than copper. The main design on Fig.3 is probably a monogram or degenerate merchant mark.

In other lead pieces, however, a certain evolution can be seen: either the exergue doubles up, i.e. starts



appearing at both top and bottom, and/or it grows larger. Let us deal with the doubling up to start with. Fig.4 is a reasonable next stage, with II probably representing initials rather than a value {two farthings?}, plus thin exergue above and below. The exergues gradually widen {Figs.5-7}, and the introduction of filler is not uncommon, thereby producing a new series of designs, occasionally looking like type 13 structures, in which the exergue, although still there, is subsumed and largely loses its importance {Fig.6}.



It is not that exceptional for pieces to show up in which the top exergue is present, but not the lower one {Figs.8-9}. This looks a little ridiculous, especially as the date is often upside down relative to the initials, and vice versa, but it was clearly intentional. Perhaps the cause was down to limited literacy, as in the case of many retro-inscribed initials.

Regular single-exergue pieces did continue to appear, but the proportion of space occupied often intruded well above that occupied on regal coins. One of the features of exergue leads is that an above-average proportion of them are dated, and it will be seen from Figs.10-11 that it was not far in to the 18th cent before exergues were creeping up to 30-40%, even beyond. Sometimes there is an attempt to introduce design above the exergue, even if you cannot work out what it is {Fig.12}; whilst long-toothed edges, an exaggerated extension of Williamson series beaded rims, are another period feature which is sometimes combined with the exergue {Fig.13}.

Whilst these various characteristics described are not strictly chronological, and can occur in various combinations, there is a general trend. The simplest exergues continue to reside alongside the compounds {Fig.14}, and the Kentish/East Sussex hop token series is an example of one where simplicity is deemed to suffice, on the smaller values at least, until a very late date. A number of examples do occur in Alan Henderson's book on the hop series of ornate lettering, and whilst Fig.15 is of unknown origin I wonder whether it came from the same part of the country.



Figs.14 and 16 do have confirmed findspots, however: New Romney and near Arundel, respectively. By the late 18th cent we do have evidence of the exergue becoming a full diameter more frequently, i.e. dividing the piece into two equal or almost equal halves {Figs.16,17}. This theme then reaches its fulfilment in Kent & Sussex with pieces such as Fig.18-19, in which blank white metal pieces are struck in the 19th cent, with a line across the diameter, and counterstruck with issuer's initials above and value, now, rather than date, below. Square equivalents are also occasionally encountered {Fig.20}.

Fig.21, a common piece of Richard Kenward Ashburnham, shows that the double exergue survived in Kent until a very later period. This particular subseries is dated by its accompanying larger values to 1862.



Figs.18-21 alone, of the pieces illustrated here, are in Henderson; but one wonders how many of the others are amongst the precursors of those whom he lists. I would conjecture Figs.14-17 at least, and probably Fig.5 {from the neatness of its lettering}, but it would not surprise me if there are several others.