

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 Please note that the old LTT Editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

## Those Jewish Plumbas: All is Revealed!



We have discussed these pieces briefly before, but I am grateful to Ira Rezak for the following explanation of the inscription, and for giving some clue as to their use. My thanks also to Howard Simmons, for putting me in touch with him.

“In Yiddish they're called *plumbas* (ie "leads") and they are definitely some sort of kosher seal. The way the pictures show the text, the right side has three Hebrew letters: aleph, bet, dalet (ABD) which stands for *av bet din* ("Chief of the (Rabbinical) Court"). the left hand side is less distinct but almost certainly says dalet, kuf, kuf (DKK) which stands for *de kehillah kedosha* ("of the Holy Community" = ie of the town). The city being referenced is not given, but presumably it was obvious to those local users who respected the validity of the kosher mark. It is probably from Amsterdam, or another Dutch export site, and likely dates to the late 18th or early 19th cent.

The letters in the centre are different; I recognize at least three differing letters, and these no doubt represent different suppliers of whatever the merchandise was.”

Ira goes on to show an illustration of one such plumba in its original form, with the following further comment:

“...{the piece} was found in some eastern English coastal port, I forget which, but still shows the more complete butterfly shape that would have allowed this to be attached by compression, probably to a string around the product. What the product was is not clear to me, the likeliest candidates are wine, cheese or meat.”

There are also some other specimens on Stuart Elton's excellent "Ourpasthistory" site, both with and without the joining spur; go to "<http://ourpasthistory.com/Gallerya/main.php>", then just put "Jewish" into the search parameter. A similar explanation of their use is given there, except that the use is assumed to be in connection with the London meat market, the Continent not being mentioned. Both sources agree on 18th cent as a likely date, although BNJ54 {1984} features two specimens in with its type S lead tokens, which are mid-17th cent.

Perhaps all three sources are right; that the continent exported Kosher meat to London, and that such trade was flourishing throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. That issue perhaps we are uncertain on, but at least we know to call them plumbas rather than plummas from now on!

## Readers' Correspondence

Time this month for a catch-up on readers' contributions, and my thanks to all of you who have sent in pictures of their acquisitions or come up with helpful comments about pieces mentioned in previous articles. First up, this little group from Gloucestershire-based John Bromley.



Fig.1 is the best of a trio of identical pieces, depicting a description “Dondon” or “Donton” on one side and a lis on the other. All from the same mould, they weigh in consistently at 7.8gm and are 21-22mm across. One of the others, although in worse condition overall, confirms “Donton” over “Dondon”, probably now rendered “Downton”; a more plausible candidate for either a surname or location. Found near the Abbey, perchance? Date, 18th cent.

Always nice to see die pairs, especially when, as in Figs.2-3, they have some difference of colour or wear to show their individuality; unlike the trio of Donton pieces, both were good enough to illustrate. Fig.3 looks like a cartwheel with mildly-raised alternate segments; Fig.2 shows greater relief and, thereby, reveals that these segments become a cross. A pleasant hybrid; the diameters are 23-24mm, weight around 7.3-7.4gm. Again, 18th cent. The two pieces were found about ten feet, and nearly a year, apart.

I have taken the liberty of magnifying the cut farthing and cut halfpenny {Figs.4,5} to around 3:2, as usual. The farthing is 8mm along its edge, the cut half 21mm along its diameter; although, in the latter case, one may debate what it is actually a half of. Somebody appears to have given up on cross & pellet manufacture way, leaving much of the field blank; in addition to which, the flan is rather oversize for an exact coin imitation anyway. Fig.4 looks to be a cut quarter made from a design which was never meant to be quartered anyway; it has some other design, perhaps floral {or an omega?}, and lacks any cross to facilitate the division. The size and weight of both pieces is typically late mediaeval, and in view of their degeneracy I will conjecture a date later in the 14th-15th cents rather than earlier.



Next up is Fig.6, one of two similar examples found by Peter Stewart on a market gardening site in the village of Badsey, Worcs. An indifferently drawn hybrid of petals, leaf and shrub, the diameter is 15mm; hence probably 17th cent, although stylistically it looks later. A stub mark reminds one that lead is very easily damaged by heat, and hence not the ideal metal for serious coinage.



Another West Country item, thanks to Andrea Herbert, is Fig.7, found in Tetbury, Gloucs; yet a very different one, whose shape reminds me more than anything of the pre-1868 Japanese coinage. The character looks oriental at first glance, too, but is in fact a Lombardic H. It measures 20x11mm, weighs 3.2g, and is approx 2mm thick; which is deep indeed for a token of this size. Opinion favours it being an apothecary's weight.



Across to the other side of the country now, to hop country; Figs.8-9 {overleaf}, sent in by Chris Hall, were found in Plumpton, East Sussex. Fig.8 looks like a Henderson series hop token by virtue

of its lettering style, whilst Fig.9 might be intended to depict a plant. OK, that's a lis at the bottom; but what about all the ornamentation? Perhaps the designer has started off with a lis as a way of providing the stem and lower foliage, and then built the rest of the plant on top of that. Or perhaps I'm just being unjustifiably imaginative, and it really is a lis and a load of meaningless design after all. Whichever, the hop gurus, Messrs. Henderson and Pennock, haven't previously seen either of them. Fig.8 is probably late 18th cent or early 19th; Fig.9, being anonymous, a little earlier. The larger one is 20mm, the smaller 15mm, and both are uniface.



Also from the same way of the world is Fig.10, uniface and found in Lenham parish, which is between Maidstone and Ashford. At first it looks a fairly ordinary single-letter piece, with the G retrograde; however, the size and style strongly suggest 18th cent, and by then single letters were less common. OK, maybe G stands for the initial of something other than personal initials {e.g. a trade}; however, why not a sickle? A reaper's token; that would be very logical, in prime agricultural country. Either a tool check, acting as a receipt for equipment borrowed by the labourer from his employer for the day, or a receipt for a unit of work.



LTT reader Tony Gilbert has pointed out to me that, in my article on cross-channel token usage in LTT\_78 {Oct 2011}, I showed a piece {Fig.11 both there and here} which appears to have a date 1816 on one side and 1817 on the other. He therefore quite reasonably asks whether they really are the same token, or whether I have shown one side of each of two different ones. Answer: they genuinely are opposite sides of the same piece!

Another single-letter piece {Fig.11}, this time from John Gough, who has featured several times in these pages before. This one comes from Coddington, Notts, and is again uniface. The M appears to have a rather fancy, possibly mediæval, look about it; however, at 29mm across and nearly 33mm high, that seems unlikely. It is 3mm thick and 17.8 gm in weight so, however, used as a token, it is unlikely to have been very popular with its owner. More likely, with those dimensions, it is a weight or pass.



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## Baltic Bale Seals: A Recap

Not very often that a new book on lead-based numismatic material appears, but I am delighted to report that Dr.John Sullivan's long awaited book on Baltic bale seals is shortly going to be available. It will be good to have some idea of the detailed structure of at least one of the series which appears in these pages! The publisher is Oxbow, and I believe that the current estimated release date is 28 Feb.

You have seen some of these pictures before, but in order to whet your appetite I will display here a



sequence of pieces in approximate chronological order by way of recap; you can then work your way through them with the aid of John's book, if so minded, and note what features change when. I can also strongly recommend the Colchester metal detecting site, which has a much larger range than the handful which appear here: <http://www.colchestertreasurehunting.co.uk/baleseals.htm>



Of the twenty-one pieces depicted above and at the bottom of page 3, nineteen are double-sided; the 1747 {Fig.1} is uniface, whilst the reverse of the 1759 {Fig.4} is too poor to reproduce.

This will be one of a number of predominantly pictorial displays which I have planned for LTT, aimed at enabling comparison of a number of similar pieces on a single page. Next up will be those type 14 crosses which have enigmatic characters in each corner, in the hope that someone can work out what a few of them are.