

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 Please note that the old LTT editor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Readers' Correspondence

An attractive piece of heraldry to start with this month {Fig.1}; clearly English heraldry, but found in Southern Holland by local detectorist Bart de Kreij at a site which has produced a variety of other 16th and 17th cent objects. It is 42mm in diameter and uniface, and to me looks early 17th cent. Although without any obvious sign of being a seal rather than a token, I think it must be; far too large for a token of this period, and although I can't find it in Geoff Egan's book on cloth seals it is of a type that that is the first place I would look. Ideas welcome.

Fig.2, kindly submitted by David Roberts, very clearly is a seal, and quite a modern one; the "2"s to my mind are not dissimilar to the numeral encountered on a Maundy twopenny from the Victorian Jubilee Head issue on, i.e. from 1887, and indeed I would incline to reckon early 20th cent. I have no idea what the two numerals of "2/2" mean, other than it is certainly not a two and twopenny piece, but I would suggest that some combination of attributes such as quality {class}, weight {per unit} and weave is likely, with each having their own classification system. For example, "2/2" might be something like "second class, moderately tight weave".



David also produced this fascinating piece {Fig.3a}; uniface, 26mm, and probably early-mid 18th cent. At first glance it looks pretty ordinary... except that we both saw different things in it, and even now I am not sure which of us is right. A typical lead token enigma! David's interpretation was:



"It appears to me that it shows a two-masted sailing ship facing right in light relief. A rough outline of the hull can just be made out at the bottom."

{continued overleaf}

Note from the Editor

My apologies that LTT has had to go bi-monthly for a bit, but I have had a number of serious domestic problems which have combined to prevent me doing much work on it, and which may continue to do so for several months to come. Just to assure you that the newsletter is very much alive and well, and that I have plenty more pieces to illustrate and ideas to share, so please bear with me; when I am free of the problems of probate, house clearance, renovation/disposal, ailing relatives and burst water tanks, I hope that service will return to something like normal. Meanwhile do please continue writing in with contributions and queries, and I will try and answer them as soon as I can.

I propose for the moment to publish new issues at the beginning of odd-numbered months, but do please look out at the start of the intervening even-numbered ones just in case I have managed to knock together a mini-version, perhaps a Picture Gallery, as an interim measure.

I personally couldn't see the ship; to me it looked like simple initials ID {big crossbars and central pellet were very much the order of the day for I in the 18th cent}; or, if you turn it upside down, as in Fig.3b, {retro-P}I or {retro-P}T. Yes, the I and D, if that is what they are, both extend up beyond where they should; but given the standard of lead token engraving of the time, that is not necessarily a firm argument against. However, I definitely see David's point; there are a couple of interesting notches on the left-hand character which don't quite ring true on an initial, whilst that would-be D/P makes a wonderful billowing sail. All of which turns a very ordinary piece into an interesting one. You don't get that with coins, or even with most other species of token; if they are dull and boring to start with, they stay dull and boring!

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Another enthusiastic correspondent in recent weeks, keen to remind me that we in Britain don't have the monopoly of interesting leads, is Cristiano Ancilotto, a metal detectorist from Venice. Detecting and mudlarking are very much alive over there, apparently, as witness the following pictures. I am



afraid I don't have much information on the relative size and scale of the various items, but this should give you an idea. There seems to be a bias towards weights rather than tokens, but there may be some tokens amongst them. Merchant marks are clearly in evidence, and were presumably in use at a similar date to what they were over here. My favourites are the castle {Fig.6} and the irregular geometric {Fig.8}; the latter, I guess, might be of slightly later date.

Cristiano has also expressed an interest in learning more about lead token cleaning, and has recommended the following technique for pieces affected by what he calls "lead cancer", also known as tin pest over here:

"Put the piece in a glass with distilled water and 10 % vinegar acid, then brush it with a soft toothbrush; repeat the entire operation maybe two or three times. Next wash it in a solution of distilled water and ammonia (5%), and then wash it very well with just distilled water alone {no ammonia}. After that, put it in a glass with just pure alcohol, and then dry it close to an open window (no sun); finally protect it with liquid paraffin (or vaseline), using a little brush"

Not my subject, I am afraid, but I pass the info on in case people care to try it. Certainly, I avoid tin-pest affected pieces like the plague, and have binned one or two over the years which I should very much have liked to keep. A way of saving them safely would certainly be most welcome.

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Broadway resident Hannah Shaw found Fig.11 in her back garden and discovered LTT whilst trying to research it online. Lots of HTs in even a moderate-sized parish, of course, but I do like that little set of scales, which it is what I think it is, under the initials. The design appears quite commonly on the main series pieces, and at 19mm diameter this would fit in perfectly in the 1660s or thereabouts. Later pieces would most often just have the initials, and the presence of this extra clue is a definite plus. HT will almost certainly be a local Broadway trader, or from nearby, and probably a grocer; crude lead tends to have a much more limited circulation than the main series. For those of you who haven't visited Broadway, it is a wonderfully picturesque village, on the side of the Cotswolds, with lots of black & white timber-framed houses; an idyllic setting for a 17th cent token.



My thanks to all the contributors mentioned above, and my apologies to those of you whose pieces I have not yet had space to include. More next time!

Communion Token Manufacture and Usage, Part 1

This is the first of several articles based predominantly on the now little-known work by Rev. Thomas Burns on “Old Scottish Communion Plate” {Edinburgh, 1892}; which, in addition to its primary subject matter, also speaks at some length on CTs and is an invaluable source of communion token anecdotes taken from old parish records. I should also like to acknowledge with gratitude the various fascinating titbits of CT information and history given to me by LTT reader Andrew Mac-Millan over the years, some of which are invariably going to weave themselves into this article as I discuss the various issues raised by Burns.

Many early CTs are made of lead, and it is hoped that some of what is said about issue sizes, manufacture and cost may apply to crude lead more generally; or, at least, give some clues. It is also planned that there will be a couple of articles on Celtic potin issues in LTT, shortly after the end of this series, which will further discuss cast coin and token manufacture.

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The first mention of communion tokens in Scotland relates to St. Andrews, which features frequently in the earliest references, in May 1560. Strangely, written cards, which ultimately replaced CTs three centuries later, featured in these first few decades alongside tokens to provide a double-passport to communion. It was the opinion of the early post-reformation authorities that there was a need for an element of personal ticketing, in the form of a personal card listing:

The name of communicant.

The name of the examiner.

Date of service for which communication was authorised.

...however, in the days before readily available cheap printing this meant handwriting, which could be forged, and hence a metal passport, which could not, was quickly deemed a necessary supplement. Some people might think that it was between a person and God whether he took communion; but the Presbyterians were control freaks and prided themselves on begin so; like some governments nearer to hand, they had to regulate everything. Ministers and elders pored over their parish rolls for hours before every communion service, and woe betide even an elder who gave a token away without the minister’s permission.

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The first thing to be observed on reading Burns or any other history of the Scottish church is that the latter was a society riven by never-ending disputes, whether doctrinal or political disguised as doctrinal, in consequence of which there were a large number of splits and mergers, both at local and national level, according to who supported the various contending views. These differences were pursued with considerable animosity by leaders who for the most part had king-size egos and, contrary to their externally-professed doctrine, a belief in their own infallibility. The word “tolerance” and all its derivatives were anathema, if indeed they ever entered their vocabulary at all; and, in consequence, attitudes to ecclesiastical disputes were very much “winner takes all”, with the loser and his followers often ejected to go and worship next Sunday in whatever field or barn they could find.

The latter, at least, was the usual approach when two or more factions were at war within a single church; there was also a second type of dispute, when the parishioners were more or less behind their minister but the latter’s management decided for reasons of their own to evict him. There are known cases where the congregation responded to the ejection of their minister by boycotting church attendance en bloc, or by organising sufficiently hostile resistance that his unwanted successor required an armed guard to get him into, and maintained in, the pulpit.

How does this affect CTs, you may ask? Easy: certain of the church’s possessions, namely the church plate, the communion tokens, the parish records and the lectern bible, were regarded by the

disputing parties as trophies of victory, to be grabbed and held on to regardless of whether they maintained possession and control of the building and the meetings within it. I personally know of one example of a pew bible which was wrenched out of a lectern clasp in 1708 and has since been successively passed down to the senior surviving member of the family for 300 years. For the last fifty years it has been in the southern hemisphere.

The above is also no doubt a major reason why Scottish parish registers lack contiguity and generally have a much lower survival rate than their counterparts south of the border, but that is another story.

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Burns helpfully quotes some examples as to how many cups and tokens the parishes used, and in some cases also how much they cost. The following rural examples of purchases suggest that the average issue was typically several hundred tokens; a number not dissimilar, incidentally, with the suspected size of commercial 17th cent tokens issues down south.

- Meigle, 1762: Burz. 4557 2 cups, 393 tokens.
- Kingoldrum, 1781: Burz. 4842? 2 cups, 407 tokens
- Greenlaw, 1722: Burz. 2686 700 tokens
- Minto, 1706: Burz. 4857? 600 tokens
- Shotts, 1643: Burz. 6280? 800 tokens
- Cairney, 1764: Burz. 4568/9? 316 tokens
- Tain, 1753: Burz. 6798 300 tokens
- Creich, 1706: Burz. 1655 500 tokens



Cities required more; St.Andrews placed an order for 2000 tokens in 1590, whilst Glasgow required 4000 in 1664. In the latter case, however, it is believed that there was some recycling, which indeed was a frequent fate for old CTs; that, and burying, almost always within the church precincts, were the most common methods of disposal.

As to the cost of manufacture, Burns records the following; unfortunately, the records only occasionally mention the order size as well, or break down the cost between labour and materials. It seems, however, that the latter was trivial in comparison to the former.

- Orwell, 1712: £1 0s 0d
- Orwell, 1719: £1 11s 6d
- Orwell, 1727: £1 16s 0d
- Moneymusk, 1681: £4 0s 0d
- Rattray, 1689: £3 0s 0d {inc. cost of metal}
- Forgan, 1707: £2 8s 0d
- Kemback, 1709: Burz. 3953 £4 0s 0d
- Creich, 1706: Burz. 1655 £3 3s 4d Scots, specifically stated.
- Ballingry, 1723 Burz.5031/5845 £1 6s 8d
- Tain 1748: Burz. 6797 £0 14s 6d {12/- for the pewterer, 2/6 for the lead}
- Tain 1753: Burz. 6798 £4 0s 7d for the 300 tokens above
- Cairney, 1764 Burz. 4568/9? £3 0s 0d for the 316 tokens above
- Cults, 1706: £3 4s 0d
- Portmoak, 1718: Burz. 5697/8? £3 0s 10d {£3 for casting and 10d for materials} “or 1000 tokens, instead of the usual 700”

It may be noticed that quite a number of these tokens are not now readily identifiable in Burzinski, and may in some cases relate to issues now wholly lost from memory.

In some cases, more frequent issues of CTs will have been ordered than were needed, for ministers, like monarchs, were often keen to see their own name, or at least, initials, on their coinage. Burns cites Rev.John Moon, of Newtyle as one such; appointed in 1825, he refused to use the tokens of his

predecessor Rev.Robert Smith {Burz.5256}, notwithstanding that the latter had only been in use since 1819, and put the church to the expense of purchasing a new set {Burz.5257}. Mr.Smith's set would hardly have worn out in six or seven years, but his successor would have viewed the idea of using tokens bearing the name "Revd R. Smith" with about the same enthusiasm as Oliver Cromwell, attending a hypothetical Trial of the Pyx in the mid-1650s, would have appreciated finding the phrase "Carolus Rex Dei Gratia" on his newly-minted coins.

Some ministers flaunted their titles {e.g., Rev.Dr} and even their degrees on their tokens, as if they were using them to display their Curriculum Vitae to a prospective employer. There were, of course, some ministers who were a little less egotistic, and when one finds no issue for a minister the question remains as to whether he was content with the existing tokens inherited on his arrival, or whether he did issue and his own tokens have yet to be found.

{to be continued}

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Lettered Quarters: A Recap



Another in our "Survey the Scene" series begun last month, whereby we put up a spread of pieces of one type so that we can compare what we have seen and gathered over the months. This time we feature the most interesting Lettered Quarters series, whereby the standard cross and pellets type evolves over the centuries with the pellets becoming, in turn but not necessarily in any particular order, stars, wedges, triangles and letters. Intermingled amongst them, one finds too a variety of other material, e.g. crowns {Fig.1}, birds {Fig.15} and even possibly masonic symbols {Fig.14}.

It is the letters, however, for which one would most like an explanation. There are not that often four upright letters; sometimes there are three plus one at right-angles {Fig.7}, at other times three plus a symbol. Tony Pilsen has a theory that AHT/C may stand for something like Alms House Token/ Coin, and that there may be other such abbreviations associated with similar use. Certainly these four letters are amongst the most frequent initials on these pieces, so it is a good theory. Equally, however, there are other letters and variants in evidence; so, please, do let us know what other combinations you see, and what you think they might stand for!