Leaden Tokens Telegraph

Editor: David Powell

Picture Gallery

The first piece this month, courtesy of Dave Soulsby, was found near Bishop Auckland in Co.Durham {Fig.1}. At 30mm diameter this is almost certainly going to be 18th cent, but the execution is far superior to most pieces of the time. I presume that the central depiction is meant to be a bird, although he seems to have had rather a lot to eat and his tail/fin would look rather better on a fish. I guess he is meant to be a pheasant. In the background is a standing figure with raised arm. The combined effect of man and bird is rather confusing at first glance, despite the obvious quality of the piece, and it takes a moment to work out what belongs to what.

Fig.2 is a Thames find, and looks for all the world like a main series 17th cent farthing. At 20mm diameter, it would fit nicely into the 1660s, and it has a triad on the obverse; except, that the latter is inverted, which is normally on tokens a very early 17th cent feature, some while before the Williamson series got going. It reads probably RE, or possibly BE, with supposed wife's initials C or G below. On the other side is a barred A, again obscured by what looks superficially like an invalidation hole. However, let us move to the outside legend, which sadly appears to have the same bit worn on each side; namely the beginning and the end. It appears to read something like "Cotchinel" on both sides, with possibly another "I" to follow on one. So, what does that mean?

"IN" is frequent on 17th cent tokens between the name and location, which makes one speculate on the bits before and after. On the other hand "EL", possibly followed by I, could be the start of Eli, Elizabeth or some such; or alternatively EL followed by the Roman numeral IV. "Cotch" could be part of "Scotch", but maybe that is just coincidence; where else does one see "Scotch" in an inscription? Maybe it is part of a surname. Also, where do the triad initials fit in? All very mysterious, until one realise that "Cotchinel" is suspiciously like "Cochineal", a dye which some of us may remember our mothers using to colour iced cakes with in our childhood.

A look at Wikipedia reveals that cochineal has been around since the 15th cent, and that we imported it; so, this piece is…. a seal, attached to whatever contained conchineal was transported in. Maybe RE was the exporter, G was his town of origin, and A was the quality of the consignment. Alternatively, RE could be the customs official, G the port he worked at. Plenty of possibilities… and all the while, our piece has been trying to fool us that it was a 17th cent token! 17th cent, probably; token, no.

Lead Seal website: New Address

Request received from Stuart Elton that I let everybody know that his Bagseal website has now moved; please note that the new address is: "http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php". There are over 1200 pieces on it, well illustrated and commented on, so do please have a good browse. They include quite a few of the Baltic cloth seals and Jewish plumma discussed in LTT_82 {Mar 2012}. Illustrated here is another which has turned up since that edition was published.

Communion Token Manufacture and Usage, Part 2

In more modern times, a small number of 19th cent white metal pieces have serial numbers on them, the highest known of which must, in a reasonable statistical sample, be not far short of the size of the issue; which, in turn, will approximate to that of the congregation, although the church should no doubt have incorporated in its order, if it had any sense, enough to cover moderate losses and expansion. It is often possible, for some of these tokens with serial numbers, to pick up blank examples to which no counterstamp has yet been applied. The two most common examples of serial numbers are those of St.Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, dated 1847 and 1865 {Figs.1,2 respectively}, whose numbers run up to at least 1359 and 1970 respectively; conjecturally, the orders might well have been for 1500 and 2000. Figs 3,4 are Glaswegian examples.

It is not known whether each number was allocated to a specific person on the parish's electoral list or whether you got a random one each time, and it would be interesting to know whether the church officials thought it necessary to record each individual token issue on paper.

Table numbers are both more frequent and occur much earlier; I am not sure how early, but on rare occasions quite far back in the 18th cent. More than 700 different CTs carry them, nearly 10% of what Burzinski lists; sometimes struck as an integral part of the design, but more often separately counterstruck . Usually table numbers run from 1 up to a number determined by the size of the church, 13 being the highest I have seen; usually most numbers within the range can be found, up to the maximum for the issue, but exceptionally there are issues for which only certain numbers, typically at the upper end of the range, seem to survive. It has been conjectured that these numbers may relate to the extra tables and tokens which are only used in the case of exceptionally large attendance and that, these emergency token supplies being stored in a different place from the main supply, the two have had a different subsequent history; e.g. perhaps the main supply was buried when it fell into disuse, but the spares remained in a drawer somewhere and were forgotten about.

Moreso even than with serial number issues, blanks of table number issues are commonly found, in readiness for later table allocation when spares were needed; and, occasionally, secondary counterstrikes exist, presumably when the spare blanks had run out and there was a need to reallocate already stamped tokens from one table number to another. The implication of Fig.5 is that table 6 was not used all that often, and that table 2 was more in need.

One church only, at South Leith, depicted both table and serial numbers simultaneously {Fig.6}. Andrew Cunningham has observed that on all pieces seen to date the serial number on a piece for table N {N=1 to 7} is within the range (144N-143) to 144N, suggesting that the church might have ordered either 1000 overall or a gross per table, i.e. 1008. For those not mathematically inclined:

Table 1 = serial numbers 1-144
Table 2 = serial numbers 145-288
Table 3 = serial numbers 289-432
Table 4 = serial numbers 433-576
Table 5 = serial numbers 577-720
Table 6 = serial numbers 721-864
Table 7 = serial numbers 865-1008

Some parishes found it easier for practical reasons to group together, thereby also saving the need for each to have their own utensils; for example, Culross is known to have loaned its chalices to nearby

Saline in 1704, distributed its own tokens for use at Torrieburn in 1707, and to have had home fix-tures in both 1708 and 1713. In a massive 29-table service at Dull, Perthshire, the elders of Dull, Fortingall and Weems parishes administered seven tables apiece and Fortingall eight. No-one had enough chalices to service these big joint gatherings alone, and if an adequate supply of silver crock-ery could not be sourced from the participating parish group then it was not unknown for them to be hired in, as opposed to borrowed, from more distant parishes outside. At least, this is the position implied by Burns; perhaps the money was to be regarded as a deposit, but if so he does not seem to record any examples of the subsequent refund.

Fellow-believers from distant parishes were usually welcome provided that their own elders could provide assurance of their suitability in the form of their own parish's token, and at a large meeting the administrating elders could easily finish up with a collection of different tokens requiring return to their home parishes; which, if the parishes were widely-spaced and the communicants not trusted to return them to their own elders, could presumably present practical problems.

Abuses of communion token and card usage were not unknown, although how rare they were is un-certain. Examples include:

Passing off low grade coin, e.g. turners {2d Scots}, as CTs.
Using CTs from other parishes, whose precise condition of issue were obviously uncertain.
Bribing the minister or an elder to obtain a token. {Madderty, 1707}
Forgery, in the case of paper/card tickets.
Using someone else's ticket, e.g. a servant using his master's.
Reusing CTs retained from a previous occasion.

….adding possibly, if there were any numismatists around on those days, retaining a CT to put in one's collection!

Reuse of CTs at a later date was probably the commonest type of offence, as checking up on who had actually gone to communion after the tokens had been issued was quite a big job; rail as they might, even if the elders knew who the culprits were, there were always going to be the casual losses and the people who didn't know what they had done with them. Some parishes got round this prob-lems by having simultaneous sets of often similarly designed tokens with different shapes; whilst others retained their old issues for simultaneous use at some services whilst putting their latest into use at others. For example, South Leith in what were probably three consecutive half-yearly com-munion services used Burz.6322 {SLK, 1701} in July 1723, Burz.6321 {SLK, '94} in January 1724 and Burz.6320 {SLK, church} in July 1724.

By way of illustration, Figs.7-12 show same-design/different-shape pairs from Kilwinning {Ayrshire} and Port Glasgow {Renfrewshire}, respectively. The first is fairly early, c.1710, whilst the latter, which is perhaps in combining the shape feature with serial numbers, is rather later.

Whether the above use of different shapes for the same basic token is the only one is open to debate, as some are also of the opinion that, where there are just two shapes, these are for male and female communicants respectively. This may sound a rather pedantic method of applying some limited fur-ther control over distribution, but it should be remembered that in the second half of the 20th century, before the advent of electronic ticketing, some railway companies were still doing similar things with their season tickets, e.g. printing a diagonal line across the card tickets of females.

The elders also had cause to complain at intervals during the 18th cent about members of the congregation dumping foreign or bad coins in the collection, as well as passing them off as CTs; Dutch duits get a specific mention, implying that they were probably the most common. Some parishes, e.g. Dumbarton in 1698, endeavoured to overcome this by swapping over from collection cups to plates in order to make the contributions more publicly visible.

{to be continued}

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Lead as a Material for the Manufacture of Passes

The illustrated piece below {Fig.1} is a Ticket Porter's pass, issued by London's Society of Tacklehouse and Ticket Porters; the ticket in the name referring to this pass, which had to be worn by its owner and allowed him to trade as a licensed porter within the Society's jurisdiction. To quote Walter Stern's "The Porters of London", to which one should go for further details:

> "To counter the activities of impostors and intruders, the Society in 1838 altered the badge to a large metal shield showing the City arms on one side and the wearer's Christian name, surname and numbers, date of admission and stand on the other"

You are, therefore, now looking at one of those very badges, once belonging to a certain William Bourne, on which are stamped various dates, approximately annual, at which such a licence was renewed. The reverse is regrettably of not quite good enough quality to photograph, although the details are all readable bar the name of the stand {i.e. the particular place, e.g. market, where William practised} on the bottom. Unfortunately the surviving licensing records seem not go back beyond 1877 but, armed with the fact {noted on the reverse} that William was admitted to the Society of Tacklehouse and Ticket Porters in Dec 1833, one might hope to find him on the 1841 census at least, if not the 1851 one as well. Unfortunately, no luck as yet.; but then maybe William didn't actually used the phrase "Ticket Porter" when he gave the enumerator his profession. For the record, the piece is 55mm top to bottom, 54mm across at the top, and 58gm {i.e. just over two ounces} in weight. Fancy carrying one of those around all the time?

Such a piece as this is obviously (i) more elaborate that most passes and (ii) towards the end of the days of lead tokens; one would expect, before too many more years had elapsed, that brass might be the chosen metal; however, we are fairly certain that in earlier days some of our lesser crude lead was issued with the idea of the pass or permission in mind, and we need to look out for which those pieces might be. For starters, three likely reasons are control of trade, access to land and eligibility for charity. Yes, these pieces will usually be more modest, if they come from smaller organisations than the City of London or date from periods when control systems were simpler. Could the ones below, for example, be some such examples? and if so, from which of the above categories, if any, do they come?