

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@powell18041.freemove.co.uk. Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Picture Gallery



My apologies to those of you who have written in and who, due to my having to go bi-monthly for a bit, have had to wait to see their material in print. My thanks to you all, and herewith this month a number of small early 17th cent pieces which, as usual in recent times for this subseries, I have magnified approximately 3:2. First up, this batch of Thames pieces from Mark Jennings:

Fig.1 shows what looks like a man holding initials, IE, although quite possibly it is intended to be just a merchant mark. There are a number of pieces like this where initials appear to be embodied in a merchant mark, and it may be that they should be regarded as being transitional between the two. The reverse, not illustrated because of its poor quality, shows a duck.

Fig.2 is intriguing. The reverse looks like a bird standing within a wheel, but it is actually a pair of hands and a clock face. In case you are not convinced I will magnify it even further, with another recently-found piece for comparison; see overleaf. Williamson lists four in the main 17th cent token series, but it is a scarce device, and one which it is a delight to see here in crude lead.

In Fig.3, "31" is hardly a value, and my first reaction was that it is a date, (16)31 being implied. I have another piece which depicts the numerals "33" atop a woolpack. When dating was in its infancy, a number of European coin series employed two-digit dates during their first hundred years, it being assumed at the time that they were not as yet ambiguous; having said which, a number of earlier British leads are known which depicted four numerals alongside. The earliest English lead I am aware of which depicts modern numerals is dated 1539. Against this argument, for a date, however, the piece is decidedly thick, which usually implies a weight; but if so, what a bizarre value. Perhaps the value of the weight was known but not stated, and 31 was the registered number of the trader. Who knows?

Fig.4, which has letter RL on the reverse, depicts the arms of the worshipful company of Vintners or Dyers. Some, however, might mistake it for a humorous face!

Fig.5 depicts a simple reverse, a crescent moon, and is known with other initial-triad combinations. These 13mm pieces of the early 17th cent are part of quite a sizeable series, many of them probably struck by the same few manufacturers, and repetition of reverses is, as in the main Williamson series, worth looking out for.



Fig.6 is the two-initial equivalent of Fig.5, and as frequently happens has a pellet above and below to fill out the space normally consumed by the triad. One may presume that CC was unmarried, but there are known cases, notably at Wells in the 17th cent series, where users are known to be married but departed from tradition by leaving their wife's initials off; e.g. Som.305 Matthew Irish, who with his wife Elizabeth features a number of times in the early baptismal records of Wells St.Cuthbert's. Williamson comments on it being strange that none of Wells' issuers are apparently married.

There aren't many pieces depicting a cross which come across as humorous, but Fig.7 is one of them. Mark saw an M and W in the design, which could also pass as an insect or a man wildly waving his limbs around. I guess that the MW is the best of the bunch as far as ideas go, but I am not wildly convinced about any of them; nor is it quite the normal form of a merchant mark. Note also the shape, which is semi-polygonal; either someone cut the piece to shape afterwards, or just wasn't skilled enough to make a round mould.



Before moving on, I'll just put that clock, {Fig.2} magnified, alongside another specimen {Fig.8}. The first is 13mm and early 17th cent; the second specimen is lifesize, and probably end-17th cent or early 18th. Both come from the Thames. Note, however, that if you just spread the uprights of those Roman numerals out more evenly, you might just think that you were looking at an ordinary piece with a radial-dash grenetis, with maybe a defective cross in the middle. Given that radial dashes are not always spread that evenly anyway even by those who intend to do so, you will see that there is a certain grey area to be negotiated when trying to assess what is a clock and what is not.



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Continuing from the back page of the last issue, my Belgian correspondent Hendrik would welcome anyone identifying Fig.9, which he thinks is probably from Ypres but is not sure. For comparison, Fig.10 definitely is. The piece is almost certainly ecclesiastic, although possibly associated with the distribution of charity rather than internal administration. The inscription on the reverse is either five letters or two pairs of letters flanking a chalice; possibly a phrase something along the line of "ιχθύς" which equates to "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour". The "ihc" on communion tokens is analogous.



Fig.10 is definitely a known "méreau de bienfaisance", i.e. charity token.



My thanks also to Hendrik for sending in a picture of a real live type 35 {Fig.11}, to quote my classification system; a type coined when we examined Forgeais' work back in LTT_33 {Dec 2007} and felt a need to create a new type for the "Halfbeard", an exclusively continental design, it would seem, which involved two halves within an outer grenetis and, in the lower half, a series of vertical lines. I believe that it is the first time that I have actually seen one.

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Manufacture: More on Cuttlefish Bones

Colin Brian's interesting comments on manufacture in LTT_89 {Mar/Apr 2013} have provoked the following response from our modern-day lead token manufacturer Peter Goebel, who wrote about his own experiments in LTT_54 {Sept 2009}:

A soapstone mould will make hundreds of castings with next to no deterioration. I have made 200 of my "lead tokens" so far and the mould is still in good shape. Cuttlefish bone takes a fine impression...a coin placed between two pieces and squeezed really hard will give you a rather soft mould that will still give you 6-8 perfect castings, and many more not so great. Good for a counterfeiter. Remember metal is molten...hot, when cooled and solid it shrinks a bit. If you are gentle, a mould should last a LONG time.

The Leaden Gatherings of a Numismatic Omnivore

The selection below was formerly part of the accumulation of a numismatic omnivore who, whilst primarily pursuing his main interests, picked up all sorts of things, including lead amongst many others, in passing. His interests were many and varied, including some parts of the world, and some centuries, which many enthusiasts do not reach. In other words, this group represents a wide variety of provenance and period; i.e. it comes from all over the place, including possibly abroad. Find locations are known only where the previous owners, usually metal detectorists, noted them and passed them on.



Note up front that all items in this article are to scale, with no deliberate magnification. I will start with the large and work down in size, which probably means working backwards in time as well.

Fig.1 is a piece not uncommonly found, and I show another earlier one {Fig.2}, which depicts a military rider and horse both looking rather smart. In fact, a little too smart for most crude lead. They have a fair resemblance to the even more common and quite well known 18th cent official {Condor to those of you in the US} token of Hull, shown at Fig.3. The latter is conveniently dated 1791, and I am inclined to conjecture that the two lead pieces are not far off that either. I have even seen a lead one with an attempt at a date in the exergue; but, as frequently happens, the latter was not readable. Fig.1 has a 6-petal reverse, Fig.2 is uniface. On the obverse, Fig.1 differs notably from Fig.2 in one particular; namely, that it has a heart to top left behind the rider's back. The presence of hearts continues to mystify us; they are found on tokens of many different types, including commercial ones, and clearly they are not all ecclesiastical and not all love tokens.

Fig.4, which looks superficially like a bag of coins carried swagman-style in a sack {imagine the guy with his pole walking away from you}, is another old type; deriving from the sailing ship on the back of late mediaeval gold, it is often associated with things like tax and weights & measures. The piece is rather pewtery, which often tends to suggest London; perhaps its use was a tax token. Date uncertain; the design suggests 15th-16th cent, the size rather later. I favour the early 16th, but I could easily be wrong. The piece is one of five in the group which come from near Faversham, in Kent.



Back to the 18th cent now. A couple of fleur-de-lis next {Figs.5-6}, including one of the scarcer five pronged variety; indeed, the pair show something of the contrasting level of detail which often attaches to this very common type. Fig.7 is a marked gentry piece, almost certainly showing the arms of its issuer, and Fig.8 probably likewise. Any conjecture that the latter depicts a lavatory pan and lid is probably fanciful. Another of the Faversham pieces is Fig.9, which depicts a ladder, or more probably a stretcher, and could be a carrier's token. Several main series 17th cent tokens depict two men portering a load using one of these.





Fig.10 is the last gentry piece of the group. A stag on the reverse suggests that this might be a permit issued to a participant in a hunt, or the like. There are at least five initials on the obverse, possibly a conventional husband/wife triad plus those of one other person; they are not as well described as the stag, and one wonders who they belong to. They are more easily explainable on humbler pieces, where they might relate to the officials of church or town responsible for distributing charity. One of its previous owners conjectured that it was a beater's pass.



Some more modest material now, but none the less interesting if one observes that Figs.11-13 are all struck by the same manufacturer, for three different issuers, and have the same reverse. For such a trio to survive as a group is most pleasing. They come from Steyning, in West Sussex; as also does Fig.14, depicting some large domestic quadruped, almost certainly a horse, cow or bull. 1723 is quite a late date for a filled grenetis, although this one has almost degenerated to a rim. It is likely that its three companions, Figs.11-13, are of similar date.

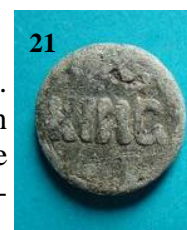


Getting smaller and earlier now, but Fig.15 probably still makes the 18th cent; although small, 17th cent pieces are rarely shrouded in such abstraction as this. You might not know what they depict, but they will, if not a stock design, at least they will depict something. Two initials, presumably, plus ?? Fig.16 is probably an A, although a trestle table could be argued, whilst Fig.17 looks as if could be a set of knives. Could the issuer be a cutler, or an innkeeper? If so, he does not trouble to identify himself on the reverse, which is uniface. These pieces, Figs.15-17, are all the size of late main series 17th cent tokens, c.1665-72, and will be contemporary or slightly later. Fig.18 looks slightly earlier, but from its crudeness is probably not. The obverse is somewhere between a merchant mark and a shield, probably the latter, but the reverse is, like that of Fig.15, one of our "irregular geometrics".



Fig.19 is a neat little mid-17th cent piece from the type 4 lis/trident family, whose chief merit is its pleasing execution and condition. Fig.20 is rare, however; we do not often get square or rectangular tokens; rather surprisingly, as they would obviously be easier for manufacturers of limited means and skills to make. We can call the design a St. Andrew's cross, although I doubt whether it was intended as such. At 15x13mm, it is probably early 17th cent.

Fig.21, depicting the word "KING" on the front and nothing on the back, is an oddity. It feels altogether too chunky {7.09gm} and too modern for the mid-17th date which its 18mm diameter would imply, and I suspect that it may be 19th cent. Is "King" the name of the issuer or the name of a gaming piece, e.g. as in chess? It is worth consider-



ing that maybe smooth lead discs of this sort could have been an alternative to games players who could not afford a conventional set of pieces.

We come now to the very smallest pieces, and the tiniest one of the lot is the most remarkable. Fig.22 is both a major anomaly and a remarkable piece of



manufacturing skill, and I will leave it to the end as a finale. Meanwhile, Fig.23 is a very crisp, clean little BNJ54 type M, concerning which we have written about in some detail before {see LTT_51/52/54}. It is mid-late 15th cent, and this one depicts a hawking bell, which is distinctive from the ordinary church bell used more commonly. Now you know what they look like lifesize! In the earlier articles I have magnified these pieces, but here I have kept the same scale throughout for comparison.

Fig.24 is the immediate precursor, or possibly contemporary companion, of Fig.23; namely, BNJ54 type L. I started LTT chronological series of article with type M, because my main purpose was to look at the evolution from then on in, and to understand where our more common modern lead fitted; but the early period, types A to L, make an interesting story also, and I hope when I have reached the end of the story in the 19th cent to cycle round and revisit these earliest pieces, probably sometime in 2014. For the moment, take it that these 13mm pewter pieces, with a variety of simple shields, represent just about the commonest manifestation of BNJ54 type L.

Fig.25 has a hint of 17th cent main series about it, with a ringed design and surrounding pseudo-inscription each side; at 15mm it could be 1650-ish, and the plant would certainly be in keeping, although the stubby cross feels just a touch earlier.

The group contains what I think are just a couple of foreign pieces. Fig.26 depicts what could easily pass as a milkmaid, but bears an uncommon resemblance to the Virgin Mary as depicted on various continental trinkets, even in quite modern times. I do not know what Fig.27 is, but I suspect that it might be a pellofa. Never heard of them? Neither had I, until quite a short while ago. You might even get a whole article on them sometime, should I ever get my rather meagre linguistic skills around the relevant book sufficiently to get an idea what they were used for and how. Pellofes are basically the local coinage of Catalonia, and lead ones specifically that of Mallorca. Any detectorists and mudlarks taking a holiday in those parts, please keep a lookout!



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We now return to the star piece, Fig.22. I have magnified it here by three, with a ruler beside it. It is a mere 10mm across, possibly nearer 10.5mm, but not more; for the non-metric, 0.4 of an inch. In the days when unofficial lead was at its smallest, in the 16th cent, 11mm diameter was the norm, and very exceptionally 9mm or 10mm can be found. However, the design of this piece is too modern. The obverse is a very neat example of the type of double exergue which was emerging at the beginning of the 18th cent, and which we discussed in an article in LTT_76. The previous owner thought that the reverse depicted a lion rampant, but I favour a fox. What fineness of detail to find on such a small piece, on both sides; we have to admire the skill of the man who made it, and yet, why on earth did whoever instructed him, c.1700-20, opt for such an inconvenient size?