

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Some Mysteries Solved

The pieces on the right, showing a Commonwealth-like wreath, were originally shown in LTT_64 {July 2010}. My thanks to Dutch correspondent Alex Kussendragger for writing to enlighten us that the three



crowns are the Swedish arms and that LDG stands for **Louis De Geer** (1587 - 1652). The latter, originally from Liège, was a merchant and industrialist who became particularly well known for his establishment of the metal-working industry in Sweden. You may find out more about his very eventful history by looking up his Wikipedia entry on Google.

Tony Gilbert has kindly written in too with some suggestions about some of the items shown in our recent articles on late degenerate pieces. He thinks that Fig.2a on LTT_88 page 1 {left} might be a gargoyle, which follows on neatly from our numismatic imp at Lincoln last month, whilst Fig.21 on LTT_89 page 2 {right} is possibly a timber log on a trestle. I believe that the latter idea is certainly very plausible; suggesting, perhaps, that the token could be a pass or tool check for a carpenter; or maybe a payment check in a manufacturer's shop, used perhaps for indicating completion or delivery of one unit of work, in the same way that farm pickers were awarded a token for one bushel of hops. Interesting; no reason why agriculture should have a monopoly of such payment methods.



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Lead Token Chronology: Your Ideas Welcome, Please

Over the course of the last few years we have been trying in LTT to work out a chronological structure for British lead tokens. By and large I am sure that we are on the right line, although from various correspondence and observations it would appear, possibly, that by hindsight adjustments need to be made in two particulars, namely:

- ⇒ that perhaps more of the common stock type tokens are earlier than has been suggested.
- ⇒ that Pilsen's Law, which relates the typical token size to the smallest coin of the realm at the time, may not operate correctly in the late 17c/early 18c because the mid-17c main series size looks now as if it continued to be favoured by quite a number of issuers.

I propose to look at this in LTT sometime in the middle of next year, but in the meanwhile your views on either subject will be very welcome.

Christmas Edition:

Please note that, as last year, there will be editions of LTT in both December and January; so, please remember to look out for our Christmas special next month!

Paranumismatic Obesity, Part 2



Following last month's article on 19th cent tokens and their tendency to chunky cartwheel size proportions, it seemed appropriate to illustrate a few more oversize tokens which have come to light since our earlier article on paranumismatic obesity in LTT_49; having said which, few of them show much sign of having been of that period. The large TG piece at Fig.1, 44 mm and 41.82gm, shows more sign of the exergual developments associated with the early 18th cent {see LTT_76}, and indeed is probably a gentry piece; however, it is uniface and, whilst well-formed, rather lacking in the grandeur and flamboyance often associated with such issues. Perhaps TG was a gentleman farmer, although this is larger even than a crown-size hop token. It is, however, about right for a ten shilling or 120 bushel hop token, which is the largest denomination known to Alan Henderson.

Heart-shaped tokens are traditionally associated with the 17th cent main series, but it is difficult to put a token of this size at that date. This is the most convincing case of a deliberately-designed heart-shape lead that I have seen; elsewhere a nibble here, a tooled edge or a bit of dubious mould-cutting there, but little to suggest that anyone was really serious about heart-shaped pieces. This one, 37x35mm and 21.21gm, is probably 18th cent, with a hint of initials amidst the pellets; on the other side, where one would expect it to show its class, nothing.

Fig.3, 37mm and a relative lightweight at only 20.07gm, is a very different monster. Finely cut by skilled metalworkers, I will conjecture that it was made for, and used by, a bellfounder; and, quite probably, made out of bell metal too. I do not know how many bellfounders there were in England who might have had the initials TB; Thomas Bilbie of Chewstoke in Somerset was one, but the provenance of the piece is not known. I would quite like it to have come from Bilbie, if only because he was the chap who sued my five-greats-grandfather in 1786 because the latter was churchwarden of a parish which was tardy settling its repair bill. However, no grounds for such hoping!



At 54mm and 106.99gm, Fig.4 is probably just about the biggest crude lead piece I have seen. Who WC was I have no idea, but with the telltale numerals 16 above the swords and 85 below, I will conjecture that it is a recruitment piece, or security pass, connected with Monmouth's rebellion. If the latter, the purpose would have been to distinguish to his comrades that the bearer was friend rather than foe. Fig.5 shows a known copper recruitment piece of Charles I, dated 1643, for comparison; the option offered on the reverse by the sword and olive branch being understood as peace or war, respectively. With two swords on the obverse of Fig.4, may we assume that the plant on the foliage on the reverse is that of an olive?

From complexity to utmost simplicity; George Asting, possibly Hasting or Hastings in modern parlance, chose to put nothing on his token {Fig.6} except his name. The reverse is blank. George is quite likely a landowner. Although quite large at 45mm and 33.10gm, the piece is fairly slender; which hints at mid-18th cent date rather than later.



Seal matrices {Fig.7} rarely appear in these pages, but I thought that I should include one for comparison. The nearest English lead tokens in terms of design are the early 16th cent black letter pieces of BNJ54 type N, discussed in LTT_81. This piece may be contemporary but is quite likely a little earlier, probably 15th cent, as indeed a lot of them appear to be. The common ground between the two is the Lombardic inscription round the edge, whilst a major attraction is that they are amongst the first coin/token-like objects to carry the name of the merchant for whom they were issued. Phenomenally difficult to read, but nice to have the option!

Finally, a real unknown {Fig.8}; I'll guess it may be continental, but am not sure. Whether the "8" is a value or a weight is uncertain; if the latter, eight whatever equates to 39.64gm. Ideas welcome!



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Barbarous Radiates: The Late Roman Equivalent of Crude Lead?

Lead does not have the monopoly of crude design and execution on English tokens; many years before our familiar series started in the late 1200s there were, back in late Roman days, what were known as barbarous radiates. Shown overleaf are a number of examples, magnified approx 3:2, which I think readers might like to compare. I think most will agree that the name is not inappropriate.

OK, they are not lead, and the best of them are of a passable standard of artwork; but then, likewise, so is the best of crude lead. They are a controversial series, in that the experts have disagreed on where they fit into our history. Debate rages, some of the options put forward being:

- a. that they are a degenerate coinage of the 5th cent, the best that the locals could manage after the Romans had cleared out of Britain, with all their various machinery of government, in 410. This argument could be supported by the fact that some of the known copper coinage of the remaining empire at the time is of about the same standard.
- b. that they are a degenerate unofficial token coinage of the late Roman period, e.g. the mid-late 4th cent, designed to compensate for the fact that smaller values were required than the official administration actually provided {as is one of the theories for our own crude lead}.

- c. that they have some ceremonial function, such as votive offerings, and were not in general commercial use.
- d. that, whatever their reason for being, their date of issue is very soon after the various coinage which they seek to emulate. I understand that this is now the favoured theory, possibly in combination with "c".



The obverses show typical emperors' heads and are usually of a better quality than the reverses; sufficiently so, that it may be that genuine coins were used for making the dies. For that reason, I have not shown very many, only a couple which look a bit more DIY {Figs.1-2}. The three Roman subseries on which the reverses are clearly modelled are:

- The Gallic Empire pieces of 260-274, particularly those of the Tetrici during the last three years. These tend to depict traditional Roman gods.
- The early Constantinian small coppers, c.320-330, which have a new range of subject matter, like camp gates and fire altars {Figs.3-4}
- The Fel Temp Reparatio series of 348-358, which depict various scenes of soldiers subjugating captives {Figs.5-6}.

Note that these are a different series from the Roman lead series which we call tesserae, which for the most part stem from the Mediterranean and are probably a nearer equivalent to the modern crude British lead with which we are familiar. Yes, LTT has shown one or two lead pieces of probably ancient origin found near Colchester, but these radiates are far more numerous and far better known, if not as yet better understood. It has even been suggested that, being copper, some of these pieces are subliminal issues struck by an semi-official mint, in the same way that European mints strike non-circulation issues for commercial reasons today. Imagine, perhaps, a temple placing an order?



Those familiar with Roman deities may care to speculate on the various identities depicted in Figs.7-18; in, I would suggest, roughly increasing order of difficulty as you work left to right. Suggestions welcome, particularly for the bizarre Fig.18. Notice, amongst this little collection, Fig.17 lurking away in the top right-hand corner; this is not a separate striking like the others; it is a minute piece of a real coin. Can you imagine chopping a real coin up into several subcoins like this, as if using the metalworker's equivalent of a pastry cutter? Why would you want to? besides which, the mediaeval idea of cut quarters and halves was much easier. Perhaps that was the way pieces like Fig.17 were made; quartered, and then trimmed round to make a circle. If so, the job was done remarkably well. Much easier to attempt, however, with lead!

Letter from America: Observations on Roman Lead

We occasionally include an extra page or two at the rear of LTT, usually where somebody has written in, on matters which are of a more academic nature than some of our readership are accustomed to. We nevertheless welcome the rich variety, and invite you to read on or not as you are minded. My thanks on this occasion for the following contribution from Bill Dalzell, who is one of the few American collectors of ancient leads, and who has written in as follows:

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I initially became interested in these enigmatic pieces while studying archaeology in college. Eventually, I wrote my undergraduate thesis on the subject, focusing on the role the tesserae played in the ancient economy, as I believe the vast majority of them had a monetary function.

My study failed to find any substantial evidence of lead token use in Roman Britain. There were only two pieces that could reasonably be attributed to the Roman era. A lead bearing the legion L•IIA (*Legio Secunda Augusta*) was found in the frigidarium of the legionary baths at Caerleon. The second, with a bust of Hercules and the reverse legend SC (presumably the common *Senatus Consultum*) was sold in CNG E204, lot 121 and was apparently found in Hertfordshire in 1990. Reading through back issues of LTT brought the possibility of additional issues.

Determining whether a particular lead piece is Roman can be challenging, particularly in Britain, where the tradition of lead tokens continued until the late 19th century. Three main criteria are useful in determining issuer and use: types (what is on the piece), fabric (the overall shape and feel of the piece), and find spot. At first glance, any one of these would seem sufficient to assign a token to a particular period. But things are much more complicated. For starters, some of the most common types, such as floral patterns or letters, occur across the centuries in a variety of different regions. Combining these types with the fabric associated with a Roman issue would lend more certainty to an attribution. And yet, the cast issues of the city of Rome were, in a wonderful case of convergent evolution, produced using almost identical methods to those of 17th century Britain. Finally, there is the find spot. While this is certainly an invaluable piece of information, it is not infallible; if a single legionnaire or travelling merchant drops a single token from his pocket, that piece is now found away from its place of issue. There is evidence of this happening in the east, with an Egyptian issue found in excavations in Caesarea Maritima and incorrectly attributed to that city (cf. Ringel, J. 1988. "Literary Sources and Numismatic Evidence of Maritime Activity in Caesarea During the Roman Period." *The Mediterranean Historical Review* 3 1: 63–73)

With all this uncertainty, how can we ever tell? Let us start with types. The appearance of either of two quintessential Roman commercial deities, Fortuna, with her rudder and cornucopia, and Mercury, with his bag and caduceus, is an almost sure sign of ancient production. A duo or trio of letters is also a common type in the western Roman empire and would not be out of place for a hypothetical Romano-British series. Unfortunately, this may be hard to pinpoint, as similarly grouped letters are extremely common on later tokens.

While on the subject of types, a word of caution to those attempting to extrapolate the circumstances of the issue based on the design: we know so little about these pieces that any such attempt would be a fool's errand. Inferring issuers' names is near-impossible as many Romans shared a combination of only a handful of names and only in the most obvious cases, often with support from epigraphic evidence, has Rostowzew expanded the legends to full names. And since the tokens probably monetary, imagining what donative they could be used for is usually nonsensical. In Robert Graves' short story, "The Myconian," a philosopher from Myconos attends a chariot race in Rome and catches a lead tesserae being distributed from the emperor. It shows a ship on it, so the startled provincial is to receive an entire merchant vessel as a gift! Phrased like that, does the use of tesserae solely as donative redemption tickets not seem fantastical?

Returning to the art of attribution, the fabric of the piece is very important as well. Generally, only tesserae produced in the immediate vicinity of Rome would be cast; most other regions struck their leads. Spanish and Southern Gallic leads tend to be uniface pieces struck on small (12-14mm) flans, usually without any sort of ornamental border. Eastern Gallic issues were struck on both sides on broader flans and often have a beaded border, sometimes even naming a city or region. What would a Romano-British piece look like? Presumably, it would adopt a method of manufacture and style from another token issuing region. Britain had close trade ties to both Western Gaul and Northern Spain, but I have as yet been unable to identify any major series of tesserae originating in these areas. What we can say for sure is that any Romano-British tessera would be struck in lead, likely only on one side.

Finally, the find spot of a coin, often the one sure piece of information, can itself be easily misinterpreted. The only thing it can tell for certain is that a single piece was once lost in a particular spot. In addition to possibly having been brought to the area by extenuating circumstance, find spot gives no firm chronological data. The fact that the field usually produces Roman era objects is certainly notable and strongly suggests an early date, but it is not definite.

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On the purportedly Roman pieces in your enjoyable publication:

- - LTT Jan 2006, p. 1, fig. 2 - Draped bust right, wearing Phrygian cap (Atis?) / Bird right. (rev. illustrated LTT April 2006, p. 4, fig. 4-5)
- - LTT Jan 2006, p. 6, fig. C-D - Hippopotamus standing right; X above / Blank
- - LTT May 2006, p. 3, fig. 9 - Frog, seen from above? / Blank. I agree in the attribution to Asia Minor, but most likely dated to the 1st-3rd centuries AD
- - LTT Sept 2006, p. 2, fig. 5. - ROM/ VLA / Clipeus; A A/ C S. An issue from the city of Rome. Rostowzew 1478; München 243. A common type in museums, attributed by Rostowzew to one "Romula Agas(iae?)"
- - LTT Nov 2006, p. 1, fig. 5 – (see Feb 2007)
- - LTT Nov 2006, p. 1, fig. 6 – Cybele or Mên seated left, holding transverse sceptre and patera / [Blank? Reverse not illustrated]. Figure is wearing calathus indicative of Tyche or Cybele, but has the crescent shoulder decorations of Mên. Find spot would be important information.
- - LTT Nov 2006, p. 1, fig. 7 – Victory flying left, holding wreath [and palm frond?] / [Blank? Reverse not illustrated]. Perhaps Egyptian. I cannot get a good feel of the fabric from the image.
- - LTT Nov 2006, p. 2, fig. 8 and 9 – Mitchiner, *Jetons* p. 71-73, attributes this series to the Brittonic kings of post-Roman Britain. Unfortunately, his assessment of the original finds smacks of wishful thinking. Discovered in fill with Roman and Norman coins and artefacts, he essentially assumes that, since there is nothing from the Anglo-Saxon period, these must date to then! Obviously this is faulty reasoning. The potin composition of the metal, albeit with a significantly greater percentage of tin, suggests an earlier manufacture, likely by someone related to, if not directly descended from, the earlier Celtic coin-making tradition. We should keep an open mind until more can be learned. For this particular type, see Dix, Noonan, & Web (27 September 2011), lot 2789.
- - Feb 2007, p. 3, fig 10 - A fake, published in David Hendin's *Not Kosher*
- - Feb 2007, p. 4, fig. 13 – Three grain ears / [Blank? Reverse not illustrated]. I agree, likely Roman. Find spot would be interesting.
- - Feb 2007, p. 4, fig. 14 - Emperor riding left; border of pellets within linear border / [Blank? Reverse not illustrated]. An amulet. Note the traces of a loop at around 12 o'clock on the obverse
- - Feb 2007, p. 4, fig. 15-6 - As Jan 2006, p. 1, fig. 2. Fourth century context is curiously late for monetary tesserae. Again, there appear to be remnants of a loop at 12.
- - Mar 2007, p. 1, fig. 8a-b - A further issue from the city of Rome. Minerva standing facing, head right, holding spear and shield; AV to left, G to right / HE/ R. Rostowzew 853; Munich 181. Rostowzew expands the legend to *Herculanei Augustales*, a iuvenis (military related youth organization).
- - Nov 2007 - p. 1, fig 1 - A Roman era issue of Oxyrrnchus in Egypt. Helmeted bust of Athena / Nike flying left on globe, holding wreath and palm frond. Milne 5291