

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.



Readers' Correspondence

Seasonal greetings, everybody. My thanks to all the correspondents who have written in during the summer months and whose contributions have, due to my limited availability during the summer, not made it into LTT as quickly as I would have liked. We shall endeavour to remedy that now, and over the course of the next two or three issues. Let us kick off with some early material to start with; as often in recent editions, magnified 3:2.

The first of Dave Hiddlestone's Thames foreshore finds is as fine a BNJ54 type M as you could hope to meet {Fig.1}. BNJ54 type M is, by lead standards, one of the more finite and predictable types; and whilst it does have quite a few varieties, the number of basic designs is probably only of the order of several dozen. Rather interestingly, they include both ecclesiastical and secular subject matter, which throws up interesting questions as to why they were made and how they were deployed. Maybe they were used by ecclesiastical society for mundane matters of administration, such as paying people for doing different jobs {the nature of which might be reflected on the token}; alternatively they may have been interchangeable, with the design of no great consequence.



I will conjecture that the piece probably depicts the head of a cockerel, but a different bird or the head of a horse are other possibilities. I favour the cockerel; maybe payment for the guy who kept the monastery's chickens, possibly to be exchanged for real money at the end of week? BNJ54's seventy-three type M pieces include "bird" {no.19}, but as that is not one of the ones illustrated I cannot say whether their piece is the same as this one.

Some 17th cent now. Carl Berg reported Fig.2 as follows: "I happened to come across a weird coin, whilst walking in the forest (Denmark) with my better half. It was found atop a chipped off piece of old wood." Despite its findspot, the reverse looks very typical of a British 17th cent tradesman's token, perhaps a grocer's or a chandler's; assuming that one is prepared to discount more abstract and symbolic meanings of scales, which I am inclined to do. Any tradesman with whom the practice of weighing is associated is possible. The other side I cannot make out; I have turned it round and upside down, but still with no stand-out design suggesting itself. It looks as if it might have a pair of legs, with a few characters of verbiage straddling, but nothing is obvious. This side is very much non-typical, and the most obvious conclusion is that the piece is local but coincidentally employs a reverse much used in England. After all, they weigh things everywhere, presumably....?



Another pair of scales here {Fig.3}, this time from Lara Maiklem, and this time they are English; a beautifully crisp piece typical of Thames-side London in the middle third of the 17th cent. Maybe the device centre bottom on the reverse indicates the commodity which was weighed by E.S.



Three more now from David Hiddlestone, all again found on the Thames foreshore. Rare luxury {Fig.4}; a 17th cent lead with words! The piece is interesting and unusual is that it reads upside down from normal; i.e. instead of having the feet of the letters on the inside and reading clockwise, you have the feet of the letters on the outside and reading anti-clockwise. The letters Y PAVLS are visible, with a stop after the S. A personal name of the form PAVLS is possible, but the stop rather suggests that the S attaches to the PAVL, suggesting that PAVLSY, possible a shortening of St.PAUL'sY, is a place.



A look at Williamson suggests that there are three roads or lanes named Paul's something which contained at least one token issuer, and a fuller gazetteer might reveal more such locations. One of the three examples in Williamson happens to end in a Y, suggesting a possible fit: Paul's Alley, which is part of Paternoster Row. The only known issuer in that alley is one John Broome {London 2192}, which purportedly depicts a harrow, but the only picture of the piece I can find is not sufficiently clear to confirm whether that identification is correct or not; Williamson did not always get them right. This issuer's trade sign is clearly a crown.

Fig.5's two halves are in fact the same piece, shown at different stages of cleaning and against different backgrounds. The piece is of similar date to Fig.3 and shows an armorial device such as were very typical of both trade guild and, occasionally, family pieces of the times. Fig.6 also looks cleaned, and displays evidence of a complex merchant mark, flanked as they sometimes were by a pair of letters as well. Only one, an R, is visible to the right, but symmetry demands another to the left. An interesting depiction, even if time has ravaged it, but nevertheless very 17th cent token. The reverse, you would like to know? Sorry, two blobs; it is a button.

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Now from mystery to utter simplicity, but none the less interesting. Fig.7, found by Mark Austen in Bilsington, Kent, has the numeral "04". Not "4", but "04". The only usual reason for that is that it represents the last two digits of the date, usually in the era when dating was in its infancy and there was no danger of ambiguity; typically, late 16th cent or early 17th. So, if we go by that, this piece is 1604; except, it looks a tad more modern than that and it is 18mm in diameter, whereas in 1604 one might expect more like 13mm. Is this a very late example of the same phenomenon, with an intended date of 1704, or are we looking at a wide-flan issue of 1604?



Talking of which, you have seen Fig.8 before; a 22mm provincial piece of unknown origin, last seen in LTT_61. That has an even wider flan, but is of a known series. Issuer WC, date 1621, and four pellets which may indicate a value. Well, Tony Bateson has found another {Fig.9}, albeit with a different 1620s date and only two pellets, in Cotgrave, Notts. I'm definitely going for the "pellet = value" theory now. Thank you everyone, for a most interesting selection. Keep them coming!



Anyone for a Game?

Christmas is the time when many families gather together and play games, so what more appropriate than to look at some of the tokens which might have used for the purpose in the past. Mixed up in our lead tokens are a number of items which are suspected of having purposes beyond that of substitute money, and amongst them are some which are almost certainly gaming pieces; not just counters for betting or scoring with, but part of the game themselves. Our ancestors may not have had fancy pieces for their games, but they often liked playing them as much as we do now.



My thanks to Robert Mitchell for sending in Figs.1-2, which inspired this article. Note that the concentric rings of Fig.1 are not dissimilar to those which adorn many modern wooden draughts pieces today, and it is very possible that this was used for a very similar purpose. Like every piece on this page, Fig.1 is uniface; and like most of the other larger and heavier ones, {Figs.3-5} it has a very smooth surface. This throws open the alternative possibility that the game may have been one which required smooth sliding, or may have been a physical one like shove-halfpenny, rather than a mental one like draughts or its Viking precursor, hnefatafl. P.S.– that's not a typo!

Some board games require pieces other than the basic, like the king in draughts; however, the basic shape need not change, and if stacking of lead discs is a problem then the king can be formed by using a different and probably more elaborate design, as maybe in Figs.3-4. If there are several such pieces, as with the back row king/queen/bishop/knight/rook in chess, no problem; a sequence of designs is not beyond the crude lead manufacturer, although I must admit that I have not seen such a set, recognisable as such, in practice. Shown as Fig.6-12 below are a set of pieces from a modern wooden set for playing Xiang-Qi, or Chinese chess. There are seven different types of piece per side; the designs are but lines, and in some cases very simple; and in others, not very far off some of the British merchant marks with which we are familiar. My apologies if any of them are the wrong way round, but I haven't played for ages.



Guide to Figs 6-12:

- ◇ 6 = Chariot {Rook}
- ◇ 7 = Horse {Knight}
- ◇ 8 = Elephant {Bishop}
- ◇ 9 = Guard
- ◇ 10 = Emperor {King}
- ◇ 11 = Cannon
- ◇ 12 = Soldier {Pawn}

It may of course be desirable in some games to assign a numeric value or score to a piece, as is done in modern times with scrabble tiles; and whilst this may be implied by design, equally it may be specifically stated as in Fig.5. The style of the numeral on the latter suggests that it is probably

not that old, although the two small holes on each side are probably an alternative rendering of the value for the benefit of those players who were illiterate.



So far we have looked at one of the two main types of these probable gaming pieces; those which are moderate diameter {typically 20-25mm}, smooth and sometimes ultra-smooth reverse, even thickness and nice rounded edges. There is a second type: small and tapered, which is rather commoner. Figs.13-21 show a number of examples, in approximately descending order of cone height. These are less likely to be ultra-smooth on the reverse, although some of them may be {Figs.15b,16b}; the simple cross is the most common design, and Figs.13-16, which show it, are all decidedly pointed due to said cross being drawn in very high relief.

Figs.17-18 show a couple of cartwheels, both of which have slopy edges and a very smooth base. The design may be less raised, but all of Figs.17-21 feel rather dumpy for their size. Fig.19, interestingly, has a small arc joining two of the arms of its cross, whilst Figs.20-21 are smaller and more poorly executed pieces. Gaming pieces, or just extra-dumpy tokens?

Finally, there are a few square pieces around {Fig.2, see last page, & Figs.22-23}. These could be tokens, weights or gaming pieces, and ideas as to which are welcome. Compared to the other pieces in this article, Fig.22 is positively elaborate; given the lis, I would expect that it might well be of French origin. Square cross & pellets {Fig.23}? the design of the time most associated with small change, but does money have a monopoly of it? An argument could be put for any of the usage options above.

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An Unknown Badge {or two}

Robert, whose pieces started off the previous article, has also sent in Fig.24; it is a big beastie, about 50mm in diameter, so as the reverse is plain apart from four small fixture holes I won't bother to illustrate it. It is in very high relief as well, so everything argues in favour of it being worn, rather than used as a token. It looks as if it probably comes from some big estate or other. The question is: does anybody please recognise the heraldry? The piece was found a few miles SW of Carlisle, but the two token authors most familiar with that area have both been consulted and we are still drawing a blank.

Less enigmatic in its design is Fig.25, found by Alex Kussendrager. The findspot may be a more of a surprise, however: Amsterdam! It looks like a badge but maybe a seal, used in international trade.

