

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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.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

My thanks to Donald Sherratt and his colleagues at the Taynton Metal Detecting Club in Gloucestershire for providing all bar one of this month's pieces for our front page.. There is no scaling information for several of them, so I have standardised to an approximately common size.



Fig.1 is probably a seal; the design suggests maybe late Elizabethan or early Stuart. Fig.2, found by Taynton member David Mayes at Westbury on Severn, is also a seal; not obvious from the photo, but I am told that it is doubled over and thin, which is one of the classic seal formats. Its most attractive feature is the monogram, seemingly three initials, which are most probably those of the issuer and either his wife or location.

Quartered pieces with letters {Fig.3} are always pleasant, and we have already dedicated an article to them in LTT_83. The style of this one hints of a date somewhere near the border between Lombardic {Gothic} and modern lettering; maybe early-mid 16th cent. It looks fairly thin, and no doubt smaller than shown.



Fig.4 is a nice well-defined type 31 with inverted circles; a pleasant type, not over common. The strong central hub is a plus feature; very useful for picking the piece up when it is upside down, but I don't know whether that is intentional in this case. It looks mid-late 18th cent, as also do the next two. Fig.5 is an example of a cartwheel with unusually thick features; it almost resembles a ship's wheel. The cartwheel design is based on the reverses of the small mediaeval silver coins, i.e. penny, groat and halfgroat, a subject which will be discussed in some detail in next month's LTT.

Fig.6 is a humorous face, a pleasantly individual departure from the norm. Contrast with another item in similar vein, Fig.7, found across the other side of the country by Vic Paine at Seaford, in East Sussex; a "Picasso face" as he calls it. Very different type depictions, but amidst the amusement do notice that they both have a similarly sized-exergue; in the case of Fig.6, skilfully worked in to describe part of the mouth.



Taynton MDC have a website at <http://www.levumdetecting.co.uk/>, so do have a browse. Two other finds of which Donald has made specific mention are Iron Age silver units of the 2nd cent BC "monnaies-à-la-croix" type.... ..which for those who don't speak the lingo, translates in lead token terms as "cross and pellets". Well some of them have pellets, some the odd crescent or annulet, but all within the good old type 14 family.

Tokens with Multiple Issuers

Occasionally tokens are seen which have clearly have multiple initials on them. These clearly emanate from a group of individuals working together; either an association of cooperating traders or, in the case of town and parish pieces, a group of individuals who share some position of civil or ecclesiastic authority.



One of the best known examples in the Williamson series is a group from Alton, Hants which have a triad T/WW on one side and a further pair of initials, IH and either TB or LL, on the other. Between them, the varieties bear three different dates. An example is shown in Fig.1. Gavin Scott, who used to live in the town, kindly informs me that they are usually regarded as town pieces issued by an association of traders in the High Street or Market Place, most likely the following:

- ◇ I.H. John Hockley, mercer/tallow chandler, Market Place
- ◇ T.B. Thomas Braman, whose father was a weaver
- ◇ L.L. Lawrence Lamport, tallow chandler, High Street
- ◇ T/WW William Turner, father and/or son, shopkeeper(s) in the market place



Examples also occur on lead tokens; e.g. Fig.2, which shows four sets of initials which represent at least three different surnames. Is this the piece of a commercial cooperative, who wanted to show their customers that the tokens had a wider acceptance than in just a single shop, or who wanted to be spared the trouble of making a set of tokens, and in particular cutting separate dies, for each participating partner? Alton is a town, but our lead examples could operate at either town or village level.

Alternatively, some lead examples may also be to do with charitable distribution, in which case the initials would be those of the authorising officer; churchwardens, or the like. They are an interesting phenomenon, and worth looking out for.

Some examples of multiple initials have the surname initials the same, which raises an additional possibility; without ruling any of the above suggestions out, they could represent family businesses, for example, brothers, father and sons, or uncles and nephews working in partnership. Or even husband and wife combinations, where the latter felt she wanted a little more prominence than featuring in the bottom right-hand corner of a triad!

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From the Northants Evening Telegraph of 4 January 1902:

BREAKING UP CLUB HABITS: “The women of Perinton, New York, have determined on vigorous measures to control their husbands who stay at the club too late. They have banded themselves together in a club of their own. and have leased the premises immediately over the men's club. Each lady member has a brass check bearing her husband's initials, and when she wants to go home she drops her husband's check in a slot, and it falls down into the men's club below.”

Guess lead would have been pretty good for that purpose too. So, now you know what type 2s were for.

Town Tokens and Beggars' Badges

Following on from page 2, and the idea that some multiple issue tokens could be charity issues, another subject from the same stable: namely, beggars' badges. It is not LTT's normal remit to discuss badges, but as paupers in receipt of charity tokens were probably required to wear some sort of identity to prove their entitlement to them, a reference to beggars' badges is not out of place. Especially when some of them, once they have had their hasp broken off, can start looking very much like tokens in their own right anyway.

We have had an article on probable town and charity tokens quite recently, in LTT_99; herewith in Fig.1, another fine example which has come to light. It is in good condition, but pierced; for what reason the latter? To indicate that it has been invalidated, as has been conjectured frequently before, or to enable our pauper friend to carry a string of them round his neck, and by issuing in bulk enable the distributors to carry out their ministrations less frequently?



It has been suggested that Fig.2, which was apparently found near the mediaeval abbey at Sempringham, in Lincolnshire, is a pilgrim's badge dating from the 14th to 15th centuries. Maybe it is, for I am not versed in such things; but that "M" at the bottom looks interesting; it feels that it could easily stand for "Mendicant", which is the other word for beggar.

Most beggars' badges were specially made, and no doubt usually in lead; but an alternative option would be to avail oneself of a disused parish token and somehow amend it for the purpose. It could be engraved, counterstamped or snipped; provided that the locals knew what it meant, any of these would do. Fig.3 is a communion token {CT} from Tanadice, in Angus, which looks as if it may have been adapted for just such a purpose; and very sensible too, to be redeploing it constructively, although I guess one cannot discount the possibility that the beggar's badge use is contemporary with the CT use and that the parish had a few extra deliberately manufactured for the purpose. The parish letter, "T", is exactly what would have been wanted on a beggar's badge anyway. The marking below the date is not part of the piece, please note, but a remnant of the regrettable old collectors' practice of marking the catalogue number on in Indian ink. Please, don't do this!



Dated Lead Artefacts

Those of us who enjoy the artwork on lead tokens despite them being made of one of life's humbler and less durable metals will also enjoy seeing it on artefacts elsewhere. Not that long-standing examples occur with any frequency; those who could afford them chose gold, silver and copper for their decorative objects, and most folk had none at all. Maybe pewter once in a while, but that was usually as near as it got. So, good to see this dated armorial cistern in lead at the University Botanical Gardens in Oxford. Any more out there?



Sack Tokens

We continue this month our occasional look at series which might have had precursors in lead, in the hope of firing the imagination as to what similar activities some of our anonymous pieces may have been used for. Our subject here is the relatively little-known subject of sack tokens, of which there are a number of 19th cent examples in brass; mostly associated with Cornwall, but also known from isolated specimens elsewhere.



Why do sacks need their own tokens, you may ask? Surprisingly, they were big business in their own right, before you ever started putting things in them, to the point that there was quite a good market for those who felt inclined to steal the things. Yes, sometimes somebody did help himself to a whole bag of somebody else's flour or grain, which one might think more understandable; but apparently the habit of stealing empty sacks for re-use was sufficiently widespread that methods had to be devised to prevent it. The 19th cent press is found frequently quoting cases in its court reports; for example:

ROBBERIES - A man named GEORGE BIDDISON was committed for trial at Penryn, on the 15th ult., for stealing a quantity of sacks, the property of Mr. J. R. ROWE, miller, of Budock; and ELIZABETH WARNE, marine store dealer, at Penryn, was committed on the charge of feloniously receiving a quantity of sacks, the property of Mr. Rowe, and Mr. MEAD, miller, Penryn. Police constable GARRETT had occasion to search Warne's house for some sacks of the Devoran Railway Company, and he found there about two hundred sacks, about seventy-five of them perfectly new, with nearly twenty bales of pieces of new sacks ready for shipment. The pieces were mostly so cut as to destroy the names on them; but the names of Messrs. HARVEY, and Mr. HOSKIN of Hayle, Mr. MEAD, Mr. BLAMEY, Mr. ALLEN, and Mr. TEAGUE, of Penryn, could readily be made out. The policeman also found on the premises about two cwt. of nearly new canvass; about one cwt. of railway iron, connecting chains, spanners, &c., in good condition; a quantity of hemp, new rope, pieces of new copper, bones similar to foreign imported for crushing, &c., the property found amounting in value to about GBP150.

{ West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser. Friday 2nd March, 1855 }



Sack tokens are, effectively, deposit receipts whereby a miller or grocer took a deposit from each customer to whom he gave sacks and issued a token with the sack, which the customer could later use to redeem the deposit {less any agreed hire fee} on his next visit after he had emptied the contents. The Cornish series is quite small and seems only to cover the western part of the county, from Penzance up to about St. Austell; there are only about 40-50 known issuers, of whom no less than five are mentioned in the newspaper extract above. The owner of the stolen sacks, J.R. Rowe, was the issuer of Fig. 6.

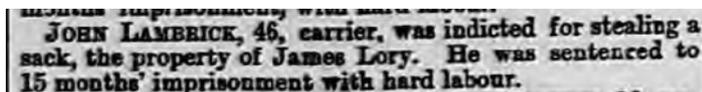


One of the commonest, and indeed the most picturesque, sack pieces is that of Samuel Thomas Tregaskis {Fig. 1}; however, they are not usually that fancy. Figs. 2-5, clearly by the same manufacturer, are uniface bars, in some cases, some circular beading; whilst Figs. 6-7, possibly by a different maker, have on the reverse just a bare statement of value as shown in Fig. 8. The dated ones are mostly c. 1865-1882, with genealogical analysis suggesting a start date around 1830-1840.

Some people, as will be seen, even made their whole living out of sacks, without ever putting anything in them:



...whilst, if you stole one, the penalties were not always that trivial:



The above examples again come from the West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser, and are dated 1874 and 1870 respectively. Fifteen months sounds a little over the top; William Nancoless's sentence of one months' hard labour, given at the Quarter Sessions in Penryn in 1838, feels as if ought to be more the norm.

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There are a few miscellaneous sack tokens from other parts of the country, but they do not seem to be stated as such with any frequency; Fig.9, from Ifield in Sussex, and Fig.10, from London's Spitalfields Market, are examples. The latter, from its decorative reverse, looks as if it might be a typical c.1850s product from the well-known London maker W.J.Taylor. Perhaps there were tokens issued which were used as sack tokens but not formally designated as such on the piece. However, Cornwall's need was not unique, so why did it devise a local solution which was little adopted elsewhere? Brian Edge's "Dictionary of Paranumismatica" suggests that the railways had their own sack-hiring facility which sufficed for much of the country, and that maybe it did not operate in Cornwall as satisfactorily as elsewhere; but whatever, sacks had been around for ages and the railways for a few decades. Which raises, the question: how were sacks dealt with before the railways came into being? OK, I think you know what I am going to suggest..... anything to do with lead, perchance?

It will be noticed that some, but not all, of the pieces above have a hole in, which presumably implies that some were used as currency and others tied round either a sack or, in the case of multiple values like Fig.10, a bale of sacks. Perhaps the choice was simply a matter of preference. Note also the value on that Spitalfields piece before we leave it; eight bob, for sixteen sacks. That is a tanner per sack. Hopefully that is a purchase rather than a rental price, given the above-illustrated rate down in Truro for comparison.

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The Portable Antiquities database makes mention of at least two seals issued by our community of Cornish sack tokens issuers, e.g. CORN-7B1C24, {<http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/557128>}, which I will let you look up for yourselves. There is also a poorer example, CORN-912B61, at <http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/507530> The PAS description for the first one reads:

“Cast lead two-part bag seal, used for flour, made up of two circular discs joined by a rectangular connecting strip with embossed lettering on both discs. The obverse reads: J.H. TREVITHICK & SONS above ROLLER MILLS HAYLE in three lines; and the reverse reads: ONE AND ALL with each of the three words aligned with the outside of an angle of an equilateral triangle, and an 'X' in the centre of the triangle. On one edge there are two smaller rectangular slots for a string to pass through the centre of the seal, and on the opposite edge there is one, larger slot.

John Harvey Trevithick (1807-1877) was the second son of Richard Trevithick, the famous innovator, and the grandson of John Harvey who formed the foundry Harveys of Hayle. J.H. Trevithick & Co. had a store, flour and grist mill in Harvey's in Foundry Square, Hayle, as part of the retail trading and milling company that also included the shipping line to Bristol, Cardiff and Liverpool, from 1852. So the seal probably dates from after this time and before 1890 when John Harvey Trevithick's second son Richard (1842-1930) formed a partnership with W. Hosken & Son and J.S. Polkinghorne to become the largest milling firm in Hayle: "Hosken, Trevithick and Polkinghorne", the initials of which "HTP" were to become a household word for flour throughout the west of Britain.”

All three members of HTP were members of the group of token issuers represented by Figs.1-7, and Hosken was also the issuer of PAS's second seal. So, we have the same people issuing lead seals and brass tokens, albeit perhaps not quite at the same time. Go back a few decades and maybe their predecessors were using lead seals and lead tokens? and maybe these lead seals, whatever the material of the tokens alongside them, doubled up as deposit checks.

If, before the days of brass sack tokens, there was a choice between seals and tokens, both in lead, for use as deposit checks, it just remains to conjecture what a lead sack token might have looked like. Fig.11 is the nearest I have been able to come up with, and there is no guarantee that the item depicted {which has a small loop at the top, please note}, is not a weight with a handle rather than a sack with string. It is quite late, probably early 19th cent, and hence not that much before the time of the brass pieces; the monogram indicating the name of the issuer, and the flanking letters “BK ST” possibly the location, e.g. Back Street. On the other hand, if the need for sack tokens had developed before lead went out of widespread use, there is no reason why they should have depicted anything relevant, other than optionally the issuers' initials, if the sphere of operation was confined to a small area in which no other tokens were in use.



Before departing the subject of sack tokens, pause to consider Figs.12-13. Engraved pieces are more often thought of in connection with love tokens, but these two both clearly indicate that their issuers are butchers, i.e. that they are trade pieces. Fig.12, more-



over, mentions two individuals in two locations which in the 18th cent would be regarded as far distant by any working person; namely Storrington in Sussex on the obverse, and London on the reverse. Probably Mr.Braby down in Sussex is the retailer and Mr.Edwards up in London the wholesaler; and if they dealt on a regular basis, presumably one of them would have a sack, or some other form of container, belonging to the other, which he would have for part of the transaction time to look after. All of which implies that engraving is another option for the needy local token issuer, although probably not available to so many as lead.