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 Please note that the old LTTeditor@aol.com address advertised on some earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

Funny Faces on British Tokens and Coins

Happy Christmas, everyone. This being the festive season, it seems a good time to collect together an array of some of the more amusing portraiture encountered on crude lead tokens:



We can admire and laugh, but it is rather less known that three hundred years ago two of the Royal Mint's top official engravers, with rather more skill at their disposal than the manufacturers of the pieces above, let rip with their humour on the official issues of the day. You would think that taking the mick with His/Her Majesty's coinage might not be quite the done thing; but do it they did, and did it very well.

John Croker, the Mint's chief engraver from 1706, was joined in 1729 by a young assistant engraver, John Sigismund Tanner. They worked together until 1741, when Croker retired, and Tanner then took over the senior role until his own retirement in 1768. Croker put together the coinage of George I, and did it conservatively enough; an example of the portraiture is shown at Fig.19, with



some fairly innocuous folds visible in the foreground towards the king's shoulder. Look, however, at Fig.20 as to what the pair of them got up to when it came to George II's coinage a few years' later! Compare the two pieces and note how, at 5 o'clock on the pieces of the younger monarch, they chose how to use that same shoulder space on the new issue. Behold, one gargoyle, variants of which can be seen throughout the four main silver values of George II's young head coinage.

Next up the copper of George II, which commenced in 1729. To what extent Croker was responsible rather than his young protégé is uncertain, but between them they designed the Rat Halfpenny. If you look at Fig.21 {slightly magnified} you will see that Britannia's clothing has been arranged so that it looks as if a rat is running up her leg. Never mind, what better to see off a rat than a cat; so turn the piece over and there {Fig.22}, top centre on the obverse, are two leaves of a wreath posing as a cat's ears, and a curl of hair describing its eye just below.



George II's so-called young head {he was 44 when it was introduced} was replaced on the silver in 1743 by an older version and, true to form, Tanner replaced the original gargoye with a slightly amended one, featuring a slightly greater depth of face and beard {Fig.23}. One might even be tempted to say that the gargoye, like the king, looks as if he has got older.

Whether such humorous indulgence got either of these gentlemen on the New Year's Honours List of the day I do not know, but an appreciative general public had their own form of award. Sir Robert Walpole in 1723 had had the shilling informally named after him in honour of his work in rescuing the country from the disaster of the South Sea Bubble {see below}, and the public were now likewise looking for a slang term to call the sixpence. So, John Tanner just happened to be in the right place, at the right time, to have his name preserved for posterity for another 250 years. Three hundred, by the time all those of us who can remember pre-decimal coinage have gone!

POSTSCRIPT: The South Sea Bubble burst in 1720, as a result of dubious financial speculation which raised the cost of a share in the company from £135 to £1000 over the nine-year period from 1711. Many people were in deep distress as a result, but Robert Walpole managed, by skilful management which included the confiscation of the South Sea Company's assets, to alleviate the worst of it. The result was that he was elected Prime Minister in 1721 and remained in office for longer than anyone before or after. What better to do with those confiscated assets, mainly gold and silver, than to turn them into coin? Most gold and silver pieces of 1723, and a few of 1722, were thus resourced, with a provenance mark SSC {South Sea Company} in the angles to indicate their origin. To the public these coins became symbolic of their deliverance and, the shilling being by far the most common, it came to be affectionately named a "bob", after the diminutive of "Robert", in grateful remembrance.



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Pellets, Pebbles or Bread Rolls?

We have discussed type 30 pieces, depicting pellets and nothing else, before; the main suggestions being that:

- ⇒ They are pointless doodles.
- ⇒ The number of pellets is an indication of value.
- ⇒ They indicate stars, and as such are just an unsophisticated version of type 26, celestial objects.

Reader Tony Williams has voiced a fourth possibility, that a few of them may be bakers' tokens, and that the would-be pellets are in fact meant to be bread rolls. No idea whether he is right, but it is certainly a suggestion worthy of consideration!



Christmas Clubs

The concept of saving up for a rainy day, or for a specific event, is not new. The idea of chucking a sum each week or month into the Post Office, bank or building society, in order to lessen the pain of a possible financial outlay when the time comes, goes back further than one might imagine. The organisation which we might trust with our money, or the amount put away, or the means by which we do it; yes, they change, but the concept, no. Some people might even have a special account, distinct from the one which they use for their everyday affairs, for the purpose; imposing a certain discipline on themselves, whereby some money is ringfenced and not allowed to disappear into the general pot. Here we look at some of the ways in which it was done in the past.



Some of you will have worked in offices where one of your colleagues collected small payments each week and there was a big payout in December, ready for the Christmas purchases. Perhaps some of you still do. Others will recall local shops doing the same; the grocer or the butcher, maybe. In those days, even for the older of our current readers, it will have been a paper record that was kept.

In the early 20th cent, and perhaps the late 19th, it was sometimes tokens which were used. In the heyday of brass tokens, benefit societies of various types seized upon the token as a way of receipting payments made towards sickness or burial insurance. These societies were often very locally operated, dealing with extremely modest sums. So, when Christmas started to be more generally celebrated in a manner which involved expenditure on items which could not merely be put aside during the year, local shopkeepers jumped on the bandwagon and started operating along similar lines. Many of them had long been deploying metal bonus checks as a way of tempting people with special deals, so the use of tokens was not wholly foreign.



Figs.1-7 show a number of typical examples. The first four state “Xmas Club “ or “Christmas Club” specifically. Fig.5-6 say “Grocery Club” and “Annual Grocery Club”, respectively, but despite the slight anonymity of purpose one feels that Christmas is more than hinted at. All these first six relate to grocers and state a value on the reverse, usually 3d, which seems to have been the popular weekly contribution; because of the sameness of design I have not illustrated every example. Fig.1, which alone manages to state all it wants to on one side, merely repeats it on side two. Fig.7’s issuer is a tailor rather than a grocer and the initials “CC” are again enigmatic, but as we are told that they are not those of the issuer’s name, “Christmas Club” seems the obvious interpretation.

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We now get to the questions: (i) when did this practice of Christmas Club tokens start and the corollary - yes, you’ve guessed it - (ii) did it extend back into lead token days? The gut reaction is probably “no”, on the grounds that lead tokens stopped quite early in the 19th cent and that the folk

who used them were almost certainly too poor to do anything other than live hand-to-mouth, let alone save up for special occasions; yet the existence of pieces like Fig.8, depicting the same two initials as Fig.7, makes it at least worth pondering.

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A quick look at that modern fount of wisdom, Wikipedia, suggests that the idea did not reach America until 1909. However, the British Newspaper Archive shows that Christmas clubs were active in Britain long before that, and indeed have a social side to them as well, for example:

“All the Year Round or Christmas Savings Club. —The second anniversary of the above club was celebrated on Friday evening last, at the Leopard Inn. Grove Street. About forty members sat down to a most sumptuous repast, provided by Mr. and Mrs. Merchant. After the cloth was drawn, Mr. E Dickinson, treasurer and founder of the club, was called to the chair, while Mr. R. Orme ably officiated as vice-chairman. Some excellent songs were sung by Messrs. H. Smithard, Thompson, J. Walker, &c., and a happy and convivial evening was enjoyed by all. This society numbers about fifty members, and over £200, the amount of their various savings, was distributed amongst them this Christmas.”

{Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal - Friday 6 January 1871}

This Club was Founded in September, 1844.
SERJEANT'S ORIGINAL ANNUAL
CHRISTMAS CLUB,
 AT No. 31, CLERKENWELL CLOSE.
C. S. SERJEANT begs to notify to his numerous Subscribers and the Public generally that his FIFTEENTH ANNUAL CLUB will commence on Saturday, August 6th, 1859. The Subscription will be as heretofore, 6d. per week for 20 weeks, for which each member will receive the following goods of the same first-class character as usual—viz:—

- 3 lbs. Best Valentia Raisins.
- 2 lbs. Best Patras Currants.
- ½ lb. Candied Peel (Orange, Lemon, and Citron.)
- 2 oz. Finest Mixed Spice.
- ½ lb. Finest Souchong Tea.
- ½ lb. Fine Gunpowder ditto.
- ½ lb. Finest Mocha Coffee.
- 1 lb. Best Loaf Sugar.
- 2 lb. Moist ditto.
- ½ lb. Packet Superior Mustard.

The goods delivered everywhere, free, by our Carra.
The Original Christmas Club is at
31, CLERKENWELL CLOSE, ONLY.

The advertisement on the left, in a local paper of 1859, shows that one such club, at least, was active by 1844, and also shows its condition of operation; however, one does have to note that it is a London example, with higher contributions and a more exotic range of products than most humble lead token users were likely to consume.

How payments were administered by the club representative receiving them I do not know, especially given that many of the latter would, in earlier days, be illiterate. They would

not be used to handling paper much, so that even if they were given the equivalent of an individual pass book, or a paper slip, they might have preferred just to trust their club's nominated clerk. Use of a token, however, might have given them something more tangible by way of receipt, and thereby lessened the likelihood of incidents such as the following:

“A Christmas Club Sensation.— A discovery was made at Chester on Monday, when the time arrived for the share-out to the members of the Christmas savings club. It appears that a young clerk had been entrusted each week with the duty of taking the club's weekly deposits to the Savings Bank, and always returned with the pass-book duly entered up. It was stated that over £300 was paid over to him in this way. On Monday, however, when the Treasurer of the Club went to the Savings Bank to draw the money, he was amazed to find that nothing whatever had been paid in. The clerk could not be found.”

{Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser - Wednesday 23 December 1908}

On balance, it looks as if “CC” on Fig.8 is more likely to stand for the initials of a trader, maybe something like Charles Collins, rather than Christmas Club, and that indeed such clubs were by and large too late for the lead era; however, that is less likely to be the case for bonus checks and benefit societies, both of which we shall discuss in future editions. Watch this space!

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Readers' Correspondence

My thanks to Phil Cole for clarifying regarding the piece found near the mediaeval abbey at Sempringham, Lincs, and shown as Fig.2 on page 3 of LTT_105: “It is a pre-reformation pilgrim's badge in the shape of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The reverse should be read "Stella Maris" i.e. the M is for Our Lady Mary, Holy Queen and Star of the Sea (often seen on such pieces).”, So, no “M” for mendicant as conjectured, and thus it is not a beggar's token.



Phil also contributed the piece on the left, an interesting early example of a 17th cent flower-knot depiction dated 1617 on the reverse. The previous owner told him that it may come from the Warrington area, but that is uncertain. The picture is a little blurred, and my apologies that it was not possible to obtain a better one, but I

wanted to show it as it is by some way the earliest example of the type that I have seen. The design is quite common on the mid-century main series tokens, of which an example, is shown alongside for comparison: Henry Gibbs of Pershore, dated 1666 {Williamson's Worcs.85}. Both are magnified 3:2, and note that the lead piece is one of the small number which measure around the 18-19mm mark, rather than the 13-15mm more normal for the time. Other examples of these large-flan pieces, which are possibly all provincial, have been previously shown in LTT_45 and 61.

Next up, the heavy-rimmed piece on the right from Alex Kussen-drager; it came from Friesland, in the Netherlands, but he has a gut feeling it might be English. The diameter is only 24mm but it is rather chunky: weight 12.04gm and around 5 mm thick. The obverse depicts what might be described as a thick, pointed blob, but which Alex thinks could be a ram; and indeed, I agree that that could be the case. Others might turn it round 90 degrees and see a pear, in which case a fruiterer's token. The reverse is very faint, but evidence of some numerals is in evidence; the first two being “54”, followed by either a “or a “7”. The “5” is well to the left, so there is no question of it being a date, and in any case it is stylistically 18th cent. Which leaves two options:



- ⇒ if the rightmost number is a “½”, then presumably 54½ has to be a measurement, the piece is a seal, and the owner a wool merchant.
- ⇒ if it is a “7”, it probably has to be a serial number, in which case it could theoretically be something like a pay check. However, how many businesses had 547 employees in the 18th cent?

Opinion invited, but we will record an open verdict on this one for the time being. My thanks to Tony Gilbert for his suggestion that the piece is possibly a bottle seal or plug, and to John Bromley for his that the picture might be an acorn in a cup. Any more ideas out there?