

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 mail@leadtokens.org.uk Please note that the old david@powell8041.freeserve.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT will not be active after 31 May 2017.

Picture Gallery

To start with this month, a new 17th cent lead token {Fig.1}, with the style of a main Williamson series piece, but not in the Norweb catalogue and not previously known to either Robert Thompson or Michael Dickinson, the two most recent authors of major books on the series. New pieces in the main series continue to creep out, quite a few of them as the result of Thames mudlarking, to the tune of about 1500 items in the 128 years since Williamson was published in 1889. They will continue to do so, no doubt, but... not many of them are lead. This one, magnified 3:2 so that you can see its detail, is issued by Ri:H of Clonmel, and dated 1653. Partial anonymity, in that there is no full name, but from the fact that he issued four other known tokens {Williamson's Ireland 179-182}, one of which shows the same dolphin device, it is fairly obvious that the issuer is one Richard Hamerton.



The piece is only 14mm in diameter, but from the faint presence of "1D" at around 11-12 o'clock on the reverse it would appear to be, rather surprisingly, a penny rather than a farthing. Also, an issue date of 1653 gives it the honour, with two other pieces, of being the earliest dated Irish piece of the series.



Next, a lead forgery of an early Charles II threepence. The quality of the detail is worryingly good, which makes one think that the die was stolen, rather than being locally manufactured. Lead token moulds are sometimes made by sinking a genuine coin in something and then hardening it, but they don't usually come out this well. Fig.3 is an example of such manufacture, illustrating a pseudo-1806 George III farthing; but it is, as will be seen, paired up with a more normal home-engraved lead token reverse. By doing this, the issuer will have avoided any awkward questions of legality; he cannot now be reasonably be accused of aping a coin of the realm although, if he wants to pass it as such, he will doubtless do it heads side up!

Fig.4: is that a lady's head, or a soldier in armour, partnering an attractive fluttering bird on the reverse? It has a rather Roman feel about it; tessera, with a hint of chunky Alexandrian tetradrachm. No known providence, unfortunately, otherwise that would resolve it. It weighs 6.74gm.

Thanks to Robert Mitchell for this tiny oval piece {Fig.5}, original size, 12x10mm, but magnified for obvious reasons. Various hints of lis, animal or floral cross, depending on which way you turn it, but none of those ideas sound very convincing. Anyone who can add to them, please do. The reverse is blank, or almost so. I'll guess the date is c.1500-1550, although I have no idea whether the usage is ecclesiastic or commercial.



Picture Gallery {continued}



Another group this month from Tony Williams and friends' "All Things Lead". I also include one or two of their comments. The first few are all magnified 3:2 because of their small size.

17th cent main series tokens are probably the most popular of all British tokens series and it is always good to see one in lead {Fig.6}. I pass on the opinion of its owner, on which I can do little to improve: The reverse depicts a shield of arms, most probably those of the Worshipful Company of Grocers: *a shield with a chevron between nine cloves*. It is very unusual for lead token inscriptions to carry the full name of the issuer but, although not fully legible, the first two lines of the obverse probably read IOHN GRAY. The third line, G H T possibly represents a three letter place name abbreviation or, in view of the reverse arms, G for grocer followed by a two-letter one. I do not know its find spot, but one of Tony's group has conjectured that the issuer might be a John Gray who is known to have lived in Hythe, Kent, in 1657.

Fig.7 is more interesting for its style of manufacture than the design itself. I hate the effect of engraving using tiny dots as is occasionally done on copper love tokens, finding it unattractive and difficult to read; but when stippling, as it is called, is done using carved dashes like this, as is usually the case when attempted with lead, it is quite effective.

Fig.8 is a nicely formed uniface piece which I expect to be from around 1650-1680. Debatable, of course, whether Kent is a surname or a county, but I suspect the latter, in which case it neatly fits in as one of the seals recently discussed in LTT_107 and 111. Fig.9 is probably a weight, although one needs to bear in mind that cut copper coins tokens {klippe} were fashionable in Scandinavia from the late 16th cent to the mid 17th cent and, given that Bristol issued such pieces in the early 1590s, it is not impossible that this is another British token of similar period. The design was stamped on to a metal sheet which was then cut with shears.



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Fig.10 is an intriguing hybrid; possibly a type 4 lis, but with curved tines giving it more than a hint of an agricultural implement. It could even be a defective shield



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To some later pieces now, which are lifesize where I know what lifesize is. I haven't a clue what to make of Fig.11. Late 18th cent; spurious hints of the Orient, or possibly an attempt by someone illiterate at some pseudo-handwriting. Ideas welcome!

Fig.12, found near Worksop and at the side of the M1, is presumably a weight. rather than a token, but I have no size to confirm. The basic design is a double-headed eagle, but very cleverly worked to give the appearance of a bearded face.

Next is an unusual and very pleasant variant of pseudo-groat {Fig.13}, incorporating a five-petalled rose at its centre, found in the grounds of the now-demolished Wingerworth Hall near Chesterfield. Finally, Fig.14, found in Goole; a lead piece based on the Commonwealth silver twopence, but with some wording worked in as well.



Special Offers, 18th and 19th Cent Style

In recent editions we have looked at two still-current social phenomena, Christmas Clubs and insurance, and considered the role played by the token in earlier days. This month, continuing the theme, we move to the bargain offer, whether in the form of reduced prices or bonuses given as reward.

In the 21st cent, it is often “points on the card”; however, we haven’t had cards for very long. Bulk buying tempters like “2 for 1” and “3 for 2” have been around for a bit, and then there is always undercutting, maybe only for a short period, of what is considered to be the going rate. Largely fallen by the wayside now, but still popular in the youth of many readers, was the like of Green Shield stamps, which you stuck in books and, when you had saved up enough, traded in for goods, usually of a domestic nature, at some published rate, usually notified in the form of a booklet. If you wanted a big object rather than a small one, you just had to save up more books.

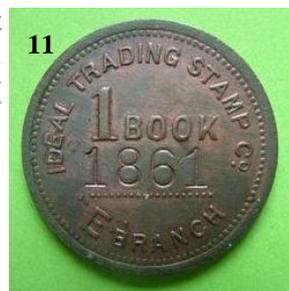
That was the 50s and 60s, and the likes of Green Shield {there were others} could be subscribed to by a number of traders, to whom the use of a central company was convenient if your business was small. Some companies preferred to operate their own schemes; when I was a lad in the 50s, we had Williams Brothers down the road. They preferred to give a “Divi”; a cash bonus rather than goods in kind, but people still thought in terms of an item having been obtained free, because it was bought with the “Divi”. Williams Brothers were still using tin bracteate tokens in the 50s, and their pieces {Fig.1} along with those of several other large issuers {Figs.2-5}, still survive in large numbers today. They will have been the first tokens I ever handled.



Go back another two or three decades, before the war, and the place was teeming not only with bracteates but also brass and, occasionally copper, or aluminium, from large issuers and small. The token manufacturers of Birmingham, Sheffield and Leeds did a roaring trade in a variety of pieces which sometimes chose to define the size of the bonus {small values} and sometimes the amount spent to obtain it {large values}; hence tokens of any value from a halfpenny to five or ten pounds can be seen. A selection are shown in Figs.6-10.



The sticker book phenomenon was already established in those days, too, and at least one company, the Ideal Trading Stamp Company, used tokens of value “one book” as an intermediary between physical book and gift {Fig.11}. I guess that that was to save on the posting and storage of stamp books which, once they had achieved their purpose, were hardly wanted by the trading company for posterity.



Most of the traders indulging in these schemes were grocers, or otherwise dealing in common domestic supplies, such as hardware, clothing or drapery. They were present in the 19th cent too, and many of the tokens with values on date from the later years of that century, but the further you go back the more you find that they are anonymous in terms of value, even though the issuer is still named. We are now in the realms of the so-called “unofficial farthing”.

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“Unofficial farthing” is a wonderful term, invented by the numismatic community in modern times, for a most interesting selection of small traders’ pieces dated between 1820-1900 {Figs.12-15}, to which should be added a number of further items of similar style and intent off both ends of the date range. The most common diameter, but certainly by no means always adhered to, was most conveniently the 23mm of the regal farthing. It was technically illegal to make your own and declare them as such, but if you happened to issue a bronze advertising piece which didn't actually use the word, who were you to blame if countless customers accidentally spent them in change, or if you were so public-spirited to buy them back at one quarter of a penny apiece?



The term is generally applied to items under 24mm diameter, although there are frequent pieces of similar style up to 32-34mm across and even occasionally beyond. One wonders why the terms “unofficial halfpenny” and “unofficial penny” have never achieved similar popularity.

Whatever their diameter, however, many of them are sheer advertising pieces, and need not concern us here. Those that wished to demonstrate that that was the case, made their pieces in a different metal, or of a different diameter, to the coin of the realm. Others were happy to leave the ambiguity unresolved and, by making the piece coin-size in coin-metal, let their pieces to play a dual role, advertising or money. There is however a third possible reason for their issue: use as a bonus check.

This theory is more than reasonable. OK, the piece may have no value on, as is normally the case with the “unofficials”, but if they all had the same value, and that value was well understood by the locals who frequented the shop, they didn't need to. There is a high correlation between the type of trader who issued bonus checks and the type who issued “unofficials”; grocers and tea/coffee dealers were the most frequent issuers, but they were popular with most other common categories of High Street shopkeeper as well.

Alongside the “unofficials” is another set of pieces, usually a little larger to accommodate their extra wording, which use some such formula as “N of these {typically 8} will buy you an ounce of tea”; or, if not precisely that, a near variation on it. The “N of these” pieces {Figs.16-20} centre quite precisely on the early 1850s, around the time of the Great Exhibition, which is also the most prolific period for the issue of unofficials.



Other tea companies, and noticeably the large London and Newcastle Tea Company chain, issued pieces which had value in terms of ounces {2oz, 4oz, 8oz, 1lb; see Figs.21-25} without any mention on the piece of exchange, although they are known to have issued books listing the goods for which these could be exchanged. They were the precursors of the stamp system already mentioned.



The London & Newcastle Tea Company started up in 1875 and the following newspaper adverts, encouraging use of their bonus system, date from 1885/86:

<p style="text-align: center;">WANTED.</p> <p><i>Advertisements of this Class are inserted as follows (prepaid): 18 words, 6d per insertion; 6 insertions, 2s 6d; 27 words, 9d per insertion; 6 insertions 3s 9d.</i></p> <p>WANTED, at once, a GENERAL SERNANT, not under 20.—Apply at 42 Waterloo Vale.</p> <p>5,000 PEOPLE WANTED.—Get your Portrait taken with the London and Newcastle Tea Company's CHECKS, by J. CHARLES, Photographer, 16 King Street, South S</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BY BUYING YOUR TEA FROM THE ORIGINATORS OF THE GIVING AWAY SYSTEM YOU CAN HAVE YOUR</p> <p style="text-align: center;">HOUSE FURNISHED FOR NOTHING.</p> <p>They are now celebrated throughout Great Britain and Ireland for the splendid value they give both in TEAS AND PRESENTS,</p> <p>Their Trade has increased so rapidly that they are now the LARGEST RETAILERS IN THE WORLD, and being able to buy in much larger quantities than any other Firm they can defy competition. A Present is given to every purchaser of Tea. A Check is given with every Quarter Pound of Tea.</p> <p>These checks Customers retain until they have sufficient to get any particular article they require.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE LONDON & NEWCASTLE TEA COMPANY'S BRANCHES IN IRELAND.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>BANDON—Bridge-street</td> <td>DUBLIN—64 Thomas-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CLOMBEL—55 Johnston-street</td> <td>Do. 8 New South City Market</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CORK—94 Patrick-street</td> <td>GALWAY—4 Shop-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do. 92 North Malbone-street</td> <td>KINGSTOWN—49 Lower George-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DROGHEDA—57 West-street</td> <td>LIMERICK—45 High-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DUBLIN—107, 108, and 109 Talbot-street</td> <td>LONDONDERRY—9 The Diamond</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do. 28 D'Alton-street</td> <td>SLIGO—51 Knox-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do. 27 Wexford-street</td> <td>WATERFORD—4 Broad-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do. 172 Great Brunswick-street</td> <td>WEXFORD—27 Main-street</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do. 46 Capel-street</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: right;">1686</p> <p style="text-align: center;">An Illustrated Catalogue, with List of Presents, can be had at any of the above Branches.</p>	BANDON—Bridge-street	DUBLIN—64 Thomas-street	CLOMBEL—55 Johnston-street	Do. 8 New South City Market	CORK—94 Patrick-street	GALWAY—4 Shop-street	Do. 92 North Malbone-street	KINGSTOWN—49 Lower George-street	DROGHEDA—57 West-street	LIMERICK—45 High-street	DUBLIN—107, 108, and 109 Talbot-street	LONDONDERRY—9 The Diamond	Do. 28 D'Alton-street	SLIGO—51 Knox-street	Do. 27 Wexford-street	WATERFORD—4 Broad-street	Do. 172 Great Brunswick-street	WEXFORD—27 Main-street	Do. 46 Capel-street	
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So, it appears not to be requisite for a piece to be a bonus check that the fact is actually mentioned on the piece; some of them do, others {notably the unofficial farthings} don't. Which, if it applies for brass and copper in the 19th cent, could equally apply for lead earlier. Not to say that it does, but it is worth a thought; some lead tokens could be bonus checks. Yet something else which could lie behind their anonymity!

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Back into the 19th cent, briefly; there was another way in which special offers could operate, if one was so inclined; instead of giving someone some money back, or a gift, for repeated purchases, one could keep the cost of the purchase or service at base value, then sell a supply of tokens for that value at a discount. As a small scale example, many pubs used tokens worth a few pence or halfpence. Let us say that the basic price of the deal on offer, a drink or two, or maybe a drink and a game of skittles, was 2½d. The landlord wanted you to come in several nights of the week, not just one, so he offered you five 2½d tokens {Fig.26} for a shilling; he got a more regular customer, you got a 4% discount. Perhaps that sort of thing went on in lead token days as well?

