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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 mail@leadtokens.org.uk Please note that the old david@powell8041.freeserve.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.

More on Town and Almshouse tokens

My thanks to Stuart Woolger for sending in this nice group of AHTC tokens found in a small area, approx 1½ miles long by ½mile wide, in East Devon. These are only his own personal finds and he reports that other members of his group have found quite a few similar specimens as well.

Regular readers of LTT will be aware of my theory that these initials probably often stand for Alms House and Town/Token Coin, i.e. a municipal issue associated with the provision of charitable gifts under the provisions of the Poor Law. In LTT_99 we illustrated one such group known to have come from Portchester {Hants}, and it is gratifying to see another such collection from a different location.

Stuart informs me, moreover, that other types of lead tokens, or with different initials, are rarely found in the locality. This rather indicates that communal tokens issued by the local authority for Poor Law use were a normal part of the local culture but that personal ones, in that area at least, were not.

The findspot area consists of a number of fields surrounding a village and situated about four miles from the nearest small town of significant note. The question this arises: did the “T” of “TC” refer to the village or the town; i.e. was a mere village, which would normally in Southern England equate to a parish, large enough for such an issue in its own right?

Given that the local administration in those days was usually done by the parish, perhaps it was; and if so, and dependence on a larger municipality was not necessary, then maybe that indicates that “T” stands for “Token” rather than “Town”!

LTT starts the new decade with a series on “Continental Counterparts”, starting overleaf, in which we compare the local token issues of this country with those across the channel. Charitable distribution of essential commodities to the poor is one subject which looms large, even if not necessarily in lead, and we can expect to see frequent further mention of it. My suspicion is that AHTC-type issues are probably well spread throughout this country and probably others, and I would welcome hearing about other examples, like Stuart’s, which confirm it.



A Happy New Year to all our Readers!

Continental Counterparts, Part 1: Introduction

It is a long time now since “Clues from across the Channel” appeared in LTT_78, 81 and, having since discovered quite a number of other interesting sources relating to the token usage of mainland Europe, I feel that it is time now to review the subject again. Lead tokens are for the most part anonymous and anarchic, and in order to read any sense into them one has to look for contextual information. This we are frequently doing by looking at other British token series; for example:

- ⇒ Main series 17th century tokens provide an idea of who was issuing, why and what trades they practised; plus, what they chose to depict which lead manufacturers might copy.
- ⇒ 19th cent brass and white metal tokens of various series hint at what lead tokens might have been the precursor of, given that many of those same needs existed in the 18th and earlier centuries as well.

Looking at foreign tokens and series is but an extension of this. We have already in the last two issues seen tokens issued in connection with water distribution {LTT_134} and chimney-sweeping {LTT_135}, neither of which are known to feature much in British token usage; so, what else is out there? Before moving on from the two subjects mentioned, how about this nice German bracteate of 1646 {Fig.1}, a water token from Halberstadt, for starters?



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Europe has no series corresponding to British 17th cent tokens, but what it does have is an interesting array of odds and sods. Individual towns and states decide that tokens are the answer to one of their administrative functions, but nobody copies them on a large scale or countrywide. What does exist is often not very common or well-known. Only when it gets to later years, c.1800, does token use really catch on. There were French admirers of Wilkinson, Boulton and Watt, whose innovations inspired Britain's late 18th cent copper series, the Condors as they are known in the US; but their attempts to introduce such things in France in 1791, only four years behind us, were quickly stymied the following year by Napoleon. They were known as “Monnaies de Confiance”, which translate as “Money of Trust”, a very appropriate name for a token.



Fig.2: The Monneron, named after the brothers who were its chief issuer, was France's answer to the cartwheel penny. The five sol piece was about 39mm across and weighed around 28gm, i.e. nigh on an ounce, whilst there was a smaller two sols at 32mm. There were a number of other issuers of “Monnaies de Confiance”, or “Money of Trust”, but the Monneron pieces dominate.

Frankfurt had, for a few years prior to and up until about 1822, the Judenpfennige, a series of light-weight copper would-be pfennigs and heller which, like the British pseudo-Georgian-halfpenny evasions of 1793-96, endeavoured to keep legal by stating or depicting the ridiculous; mimicking small change in superficial appearance, whilst arguing to the law that the pieces depicting the likes of William Shakespeare, Alfred the Great or the Emperor Claudius were obviously too far from the genuine to be a serious attempt to deceive. The Judenpfennig's approach was to use fictitious denominations.

Fig.3: An example of a Judenpfennig, reputedly dated 1703, issued c.1810-15 and bearing a spurious value and date. The thaler was a well-known European denomination in the German-speaking world but the theler, one letter different, was definitely not.



Only post-1820, when the French “Jeton Publicitaire” came to parallel the “19th cent Unofficial”, and the German “Biermarke” the English “Pub token”, could European token issues be really said to have come of age.

That early European token issues are often fleeting and spasmodic does not, however, lessen their charm and interest; what they lack in quantity and consistency they make up in variety of style, and occasionally humour. Where else, for example, would you find a 16th cent numismatic meerkat? well, that’s not what the catalogue says that Fig.4 depicts, but it looks suspiciously like it. It is meant to be the arms of the German town of Wimpfen, although the usage, as often, is uncertain.



Over here we are used to 16th and 17th cent tokens being tiny, although there are approximate rules to which the better ones roughly conform; over there, size, weight and style know no standard and vary widely, often achieving appearances which in Britain would date them 100, even 200, years later. Quite frequently, too, there is the date to prove it. The two bracteates of Figs.1 and 4 above are life-size, 32mm and 23mm respectively, whilst how is Fig.5 for a 1546 brauzeichen, as pub/brewery tokens are sometimes known? It is 25mm and 6.72gm; take the date off it, and with British token knowledge uppermost in your mind, you might be tempted to place it as late as the early 19th cent. Such pieces are a pleasant, and intriguing, shock to the numismatic system!

A summary of a few of the unexpected European features:

- ⇒ Copper & brass tokens are in use by at least the mid-16c.
- ⇒ Most pieces are of fair size, even in the 16c-17c; relatively few are less than about 19mm, whilst 23-25mm or greater is quite normal.
- ⇒ There is some early use of white metal from at least the 16th cent in the Low Countries, as opposed to England’s dark pewter; and likewise some early use of cast rather than struck brass, from at least the 17th cent.

So much by way of introduction; next time we will move to discussion of more specific usage.

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Readers' Correspondence

First up, two examples of lead tokens from the very last days of their issue. On page 4 of LTT_92 we spoke about the late issue of tokens in the coastal regions of Co. Durham in the 1830s and 1840s, almost always featuring an anchor. Most of the findspots notified to me have been in the far north-east of the county, just south of Shields, but reader Terry Hanlon has kindly just sent in another example from a little further south, just outside Hartlepool. The picture is a little bit blurred, I am afraid, but you will get the general gist; these late Durham anchor pieces are notable for extra interest in two respects: there is often a rope attached to the anchor, and also quite often some extraneous information in the field in the form of date or lettering. On this example the latter takes the form of a “B” or “R”. A single letter, not a pair of initials; one wonders what it stood for.



Our other late example comes from the other end of the country, from Hampshire-based Jeremy de Montfalcon. It has a date, probably 1842, although the use of retrograde symbols could argue for 1824. If 1842, this is the latest date on a crude lead which I have seen this far south. The key is a moderately unusual device on British tokens; although it appears often enough on German copper, for armorial reasons. It is, however, an occasional pub sign.



Readers' Correspondence {continued}

Alex Kussendrager has responded to my article in LTT_134 with two further examples of water tokens from the Netherlands.



In Haarlem, tokens were in use as part of the system which allowed the brewers to collect water from the Brouwerskolk {water from the dunes}, which provided a much purer supply than the city water of Haarlem. They appear with the numbers 2, 3 and 4 on the reverse {Fig.3}.

In Amsterdam in 1828 bronze tokens were issued by the Company of Purified Water {Fig.4}, part of the so-called 'Versch Water Societeit' (Fresh Water Society). One may notice that they are very much modelled on the Paris design of twenty years earlier, discussed in LTT_134, and that their issuer was, similarly, concerned with providing improved water quality. It is hard to believe other than the earlier French initiative inspired the later Dutch one.

⇒ Obverse: Monogram 'C.F.', description "Onderneming van Gezuiverd Water" / 1828

⇒ Reverse: 'Amsterdam / EENE DRAGT {one carry} ; image of two water buckets.

The diameter of the Amsterdam pieces is 22mm, but I have magnified them as per those in LTT_134.

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Also from Alex, a small piece c.1500 from Oud Rilland {Zeeland}, although he says that similar have been found in England. This one is only 10mm, for which reason I have magnified it 2:1. Other examples have been seen around 22mm, but as to the function of a piece so small as this he is mystified. The size and style both suggest c.1500.



Pellet and radial-dash outer surrounds are par for the course at this time. I think that there is something in the middle on each side but I am not too sure. The best I can make out is what looks to be a mediaeval barred "A" on the left of one side which, if so, may be followed by another letter to the right. Anyone got a better specimen?

There is a little damage to one side, the nature of which suggests an original neat round hole for possible use as a pendant; however, this is hardly the size of piece which one would select for use either as an ornament or badge. If the hole were for stringing multiple pieces one would probably want it a bit nearer the centre, to lessen the risk of breakage, and if it were an invalidation mark the damage would presumably had to have occurred at the time of piercing as an obsolete piece would have been unlikely to have been subjected to significant further stress. So, what does that leave? a piece of local small change with its unstated value known only to the people of the time?

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On the left, a rather formalised cross and wedges with notably thick lines and outer rim, kindly sent in by reader Duncan Cooke. There is nothing remarkable about it at all, other than it was discovered in a field just outside Arbroath. Lead pieces in Scotland are usually communion tokens, not agricultural, so interesting to see that the latter at least exist. Readers up there, please let us know if you find any more! This one is 22mm and, I will guess, probably 18th cent.