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Please note that the old david@powell8041.freeserve.co.uk address advertised on earlier versions of LTT is no longer active.*

Readers' Correspondence

My thanks this month to Andrew Mein for sending in pictures not only of one of his Thames foreshore finds {Figs.1a,1b} but also the piece in situ before he removed it and cleaned it up {Fig.1c}. It sits there very innocuously and, whilst it is easy enough to spot when one knows it is there, it is an interesting reminder to those used to seeing pieces in trays and boxes as to how coins and tokens live in their native habitat

The piece is tiny, only 12½mm across, for which reason I have magnified it 2:1 so that you can see it. What it lacks in size and complexity it makes up for in ambiguity and the ideas that it generates. First, is Fig.1a a lis {type 4} or a crown {type 25}? i.e. does it have symmetrical wear down its flanks which convert one into the other? I will slightly favour that it does, but I could be wrong. A third and more facetious suggestion is that it is a man waving his arms, which I will dismiss.

If a crown, then that hints at issue by the proprietor of a pub or shop distinguished by that sign, C being the initial either of his surname or of the location it was in. He would probably have liked to have said more, but the 12½mm flan, normal for the late 16th cent, did not permit. That is my favoured interpretation, but there is another intriguing possibility. Could the crown be royal, and the C for {king} Charles? In peacetime, very unlikely, given that monarchs were fulminating against lead issues prior to 1613 and issuing private patents to their favourites thereafter, but in extremity during the Civil War the contestants might be driven to unusual measures to keep their supporters supplied. Or alternatively the C of the C and pellets not a C at all, but a crescent moon surrounded by stars?

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Martyn Gleaden, who contributed the would-be gamekeeper's token about which I wrote in the last issue, also sent in this interesting white metal, i.e. lead alloy, badge {Fig.2}. OK, it is a badge, rather than a token; its date is uncertain, and it is more elaborate than the pieces which usually appear in these pages, but its use is certain. Its rough edges clearly denote that it has seen the real world, that it was functional rather than decorative, and its clear depiction of hunting activities leave us in no doubt that it was some sort of pass for use in connection with them. It is a powerful reminder of connection with earlier lead tokens which depict hunting material, albeit in a much more basic way, and lends valuable support to the idea that they, too, were passes.

Figs.3-4 are two attractive little pieces found on the Thames foreshore recently by Steve & Rose Jump; they are barely 13mm across, so I have magnified them 3:2 for easier viewing. First the easy bit: the style and size says that they date from somewhere in the range 1539-1665, with 12-13mm hinting at just before 1600 as the most likely estimate. That is if they are tokens; if seals, as suggested by the damage top-left on Fig.3, then Pilson's law {that token size tends to approximate to that of the smallest coin of the time} does not then apply. Stuart Elton of the Colchester Metal Detecting Group has since kindly confirmed that they are in fact dyer's one-part seals, found almost exclusively along the shoreline that Steve & Rose were searching, and I refer you to the gallery on his excellent http://www.bagseals.org/ site for further examples.

The device on the first one, which I have not seen before, is either (i) a monogram of the issuer's initials, (ii) a fish-hook, or (iii) an anchor. Any of them are possible, and I would rather like it to be the fish-hook. The anchor is one of lead's commonest devices, but they don't usually look like this ; having said which, I am sure that there were different types of anchor around as well as the classical one.

If you came across the second piece without being told that it was a seal, the first thing to get your head around is the rather unsightly blob in the middle. The rest of it is a merchant mark, more of which in a minute, but the blob has either to be {i) part of a deliberate fixing which has been broken off or (ii) a piece of unwanted waste metal which got stuck to the main token during manufacture:

⇒ If (i). that argues for a badge or seal, but one does not usually bother to put a decent design on the same side. Any blob is usually on the back.

⇒ If (ii), it is possible that the findspot was a manufacturer's spoil heap, onto which he cast his defectives; in which case have another look, in case there are any more around!

The device which looks like a figure 4 but isn't, when attached to a monogram, is part of a merchant mark {type 20 in my classification system}. They are the precursors of initials and signatures, personal identification marks which can be drawn on things in the days when most people were illiterate. Due to the requirement to carve them on wooden containers quite frequently, they are often kept quite simple, with a predominance of straight lines over curved. By and large usage of merchant marks started up in the 14th cent and declined in the late 17th, the 15th and 16th cents being their heyday.

This particular merchant mark looks like little more than a 4 joined to two initials, GP or {retro-D}P, which are almost certainly those of the issuer. I would slightly favour GP as, although retro-initials are common enough on lead tokens generally, they tend not to occur much on well-executed pieces like this one.

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We haven't seen many Baltic bag seals in these pages recently, but herewith {Fig.5} a particularly nice crisp example found recently by Jim Leech near Nantwich, in Cheshire. Rarely, for anything in LTT, this one is actually in a catalogue; specifically, on page 51 of John Sullivan's "Russian Cloth Seals in Britain" {pub. Oxbow, 2012}, which along with Ged Dodd's PeaceHavens site { //www.peacehavens.co.uk/ } are the authorities for the series and explain the use of these pieces in much greater detail than I can.

These pieces tend to be found in a wide variety of locations, however, because people imported from all over; however, they are probably most common near ports and on the eastern side of Britain {both England and Scotland}. Such seals are part of a quality control system and/or an associated tax mechanism. 12 K is an indication of the quality of the cloth to which it was attached and LT likely the issuer of the certifying/authorising officer.

A pleasant little surprise from Andre Rogulski {Fig.6}, deriving from the East Midlands; I do not think that I have ever seen an owl on a British token before. 30mm and uniface, the date is fairly obviously late 18th cent. Pleasingly, though, the artwork is quite reasonable, and there is no sign on the first owl of the degeneracy which often creeps in as the lead era draws to a close in the early 19th cent. Is that a second owl on the right, however? He looks a bit of an after-thought, and not quite as well drawn, but he adds to the pleasure of the piece.

The owl is not a normal shop/pub sign, though I see no reason why it should not have been used as such; if so, the owner of the establishment might have issued a token depicting one.

Many of the other species of wildlife which occur on tokens are ones which might be regarded as potential vermin, resulting in an issue of tokens of payment to people killing them under the provision of the Vermin Act. However, it seems unlikely that owls would be nominated in that category, simply because they are so proficient at killing many of the small species which more obviously fit.

Finally, this month, I have been contacted by a researcher who is keen to see as many different specimens as he can of Fig.7 {20mm, magnified 3:2 so that you can appreciate the distinctive bust}. It is a known local issue, BNJ54 type P {no.42} associated with the Hunts/Cambs area of East Anglia. If anyone has found examples, please send in some pictures and I will pass them on.

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Nothing particularly remarkable in this collection of largely 18th cent piecea, sent in by Dave Lane, but always good to see a sizeable group of pieces together, especially if they came from in or near the same location. An interesting reminder here of the wide variety of colour which lead shows up in.

Continental Counterparts, part 8: Communities & Crises

We commence this month with token coinages issued by various controlled communities, such as that issued for a military isolation hospital set up by the Hungarians at Pest {the other half of Buda} to accommodate soldiers afflicted by the plague. Their German name is "Hausgeld des Pester Invalidenhauses", from which it is very easy to jump to the conclusion that "Pest" refers to the plague rather than the hospital's location! "C.VI" on the obverse is Carl VI {1711-40}, the Habsburg monarch of the time, under whose authority the pieces were issued. The tokens date from approximately c.1730.

Belgium issued internal coinage for five of its prisons in 1833 and 1841 {Fig.4}; each of the five had pieces valued 1,5, and 25 centimes. On one side of each is the phrase "Royaume de Belgique" and the name of the prison, and on the other side "Monnaie Fictive" {fictitious money} and the value. They may be issued by royal authority, and no doubt from the state mint, but "Monnaie Fictive" is token in anyone's language!

Also founded by the new Belgium of the 1830s were the Colonies de Bienfaisance. These were a step down from criminal jails, taking the form of forced settlements, typically agricultural, for the employment of beggars, vagrants & orphans. These also issued their own token currency, an example of which is shown at Fig.5.

What use prisoners and patients had for small change in such establishments may only be conjectured at, but it must also be remembered that the administration of such places, as well as the inmates, will have involved the handling of money. In particular, if you are occupying prisoners in the production of useful work, there is the need to buy in the raw materials and to sell the end-products when they have done it. It is certainly not impossible that the prison authorities traded with their mercantile contacts using tokens, using a periodic settling-up date such as was done in other industries. Belgium is not unique; we, as many other countries, have had workhouses and prisons for years. What did they use? Well, I think you can guess what I suggest might have been one of the possibilities….

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Many of our main token issues in England are responses to the dearth of small change, but on the Continent famine relief is a frequent cause of them as well. Over here, charity is given by the parish to those on poor relief, and usually takes the form of small change or essential commodities, a token which one can take to the baker, butcher, etc being an obvious intermediary. However, there is also the more general famine, affecting a much wider section of the population, caused by the failure of crops due to weather or war. Tokens could reasonably be used for the alleviation of this also, and it would not always be easy to distinguish between the two….especially if the tokens were anonymous lead!.

Europe had famines in abundance, and for the most part their remembrance does not survive too long into history, especially if yours was not the part of the world involved; however, Wikipedia will list them for you. Yes, we did have them here, in Britain, and there are one or two tokens; see Figs.6-7.

Fig.6 is from Belfast, and was issued at the time of the famous Irish potato famine of 1845, whilst Fig.7 is a lead piece of 1799 for an Edinburgh soup kitchen operating for reasons unknown.

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Europe had many equivalents of these tokens, amongst the commonest of which are the German bread tokens of 1740 {Cologne}, 1816/17 and 1847 {both Elberfeld}, illustrated in Figs.8-10. All refer to bread. The term Kornverein is essentially a Co-Op, and many cooperative ventures, whether to address emergency or just ordinary need follow thereafter. Figs.11-14 illustrate examples from French "Associations Alimentaires", i.e. self-help associations, of the 1850s. Each piece states the name of

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one of the several commodities which are on offer, usually one of "Soupe, Viande, Legumes, Pain, Dessert, Vin". Translating, that means "Soup, Meat, Vegetables, Bread, Dessert, Wine". Wine? you can get that on parish charity? You must be kidding. Perhaps by that stage we are getting away from coping with emergencies and more towards the Co-Op of today. Convert that list of commodity statements to an earlier century when most are illiterate and the possibility is suggested that different designs could represent different commodities; e.g. petals = bread, cartwheel = meat, grid = veg, etc. OK, almost certainly not, in terms of fine detail, but hopefully you get the gist.

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Finally, before we go, Fig.15 is a Swiss equivalent for the Edinburgh piece above, from a Berne soup kitchen. Remember those lead pieces depicting a pot sitting on a tripod, some of them issued 300 years before back in the time of BNJ54 type M. I wonder what they were for?

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Schnepfenheller

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Figs.16-17 are part of a small local German series from Isenburg known as schnepfenheller {Figs.16-17}, associated with the shooting of birds; specifically snipe, which they always depict, on the estates of the aristocracy. The usage of such pieces could theoretically be analogous to some of our British lead tokens, also depicting wildlife, which were conjecturally used in connection with the control of the countryside; however, the choice of major metals probably means that the German pieces had, at least partially, a different purpose. On a rich shooting estate, it could be that the clientele were charged by the bird, and that counters such as these were used to keep tally of them. Most schnepfenheller were copper, for normal use, although there were a small number of silver ones, struck for the clients as souvenirs. Beaters were also apparently given copper pieces as rewards for their services. Fig.16-17 are modern examples from the 19th cent, even extending into the 20th, but who knows what earlier equivalents were used, or where? and whether we, somewhere in the anonymous world of lead, ever deployed pieces similarly?