

# 17th C Tokens of London

CONCLUDING ARTICLE

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IAIN THOMSON has been awarded the Parkes Weber Prize for 1968 for an article on 17th century tokens. The prize which has been instituted through the generosity of Dr. F. Parkes Weber, M.D., F.S.A., is awarded annually by The Royal Numismatic Society for an original essay on any subject relating to coins, medals, medallions or tokens by a candidate of any nationality under the age of twenty-one.

THE use of signs to indicate trades, taverns and shops had developed some sophistication by the 17th century. In London, among the labyrinth of unnamed alleyways and unnumbered houses, signs were essential. They became very elaborate and ostentatious until the Commonwealth Government suppressed their display. The return of the monarchy prompted a resurgence of the system.

It was at this time that many issuers realised that a static door sign could only be seen by those passing by, but if it were displayed on a token it would circulate among more people. An interesting example of this can be seen in the following piece:

AT THE MITR IN CHEAP (a mitre)  
SIDE: FORGET NOT T.D.

These signs became so important as landmarks to customers, that when another trader moved into vacated premises, he would keep the sign even if it bore no relationship to his trade:

GOLDEN BALL IN LONG (a ball suspended)  
LANE MEALE SHOPP

Apparently, the Golden Ball previously belonged to a silkman and the fame of the sign probably induced its retention by the mealman.

Coinciding with the development of designs was an increase in the use of inscriptions, particularly those of a humorous or punning nature. For instance, one of the famous tavern signs of 17th century London was the Labour In Vain:

THE LABOR IN VAIN IN (two women scrubbing a negro or Moor)  
FLEMISHE CHVRCHYARD I.I.G.

Another example of humour and advertisement

on tavern tokens is to be seen from the following rhyme:

JOHN COX IN CHVRCHED ALLY IN  
SOVTHWARK HIS HALFPENY

THE PVMP RVNS CLEER Wh ALE AND  
BEER (a hand pump)



Puns, a popular form of humour in those days, were often made by the issuers on their own names. A certain Thomas Harbottle had as his design a hare and bottle, whilst Henry Cox portrayed two cocks on his token. The ultimate came from Edward Penny who was so sensitive about his surname that he preferred to use HIS HALF TOKEN rather than HIS HALF PENNY.

The spelling on these pieces shows that most classes spelt phonetically, or as they pleased. This is seen in the following random selection of inn names:

AT THE SEAVEN STARES  
AT THE WHIT HORS  
THE SINE OF THE HALF MOVN  
THE SHVGER LOFE  
THE HARTIECHOAKE  
AT THE BLEW BOORE  
THE CROS SHVFLES  
AT THE DEARY MADE  
YE BAGE OF NALES  
THE 2 WRASLERS

Direct advertising is to be found on many pieces, for example:

AT THE WARDROBE IS W. H. HEMP  
WORKE FOR THE POORE. W. H. FLAX 1653

One issuer shows that prestige was important to trade and proclaims himself:

WIL SLIDD SVTLER TO Ye GWARD (a bust)  
AT ST JAMESES HIS HALFE PENY W.I.S.

Another issuer unashamedly indicates his prox-

imity to a notorious tavern:

ROB THORNTON HABERBASHER  
HIS HALFE PENNY R.E.T.  
NEXT THE THREE BRVSHES  
IN SVTHWARK 1667

The tokens of the 17th century do not concern themselves much with religion or politics. Admittedly, comparisons can be made between the plain tokens of the Commonwealth and the more elaborate tokens of the Restoration but, as has been shown, advertisement played the most important role in design. However, a few patriotic legends appeared on several examples issued at the time of the Restoration, for example:

TOVCH NOT MINE ANNOINTED  
CHARLES II  
FEARE GOD HONOR THE KING  
W. (a bible) S. 1660

Further examples can be used to trace and confirm the details of other important historical events. This is clearly shown by the following two tokens issued by the same man:

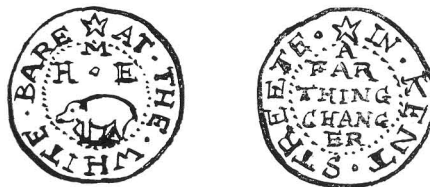
ROBERT HAYES AT YE COFFEE  
(a Turk's head)  
HOVSE IN PANIER ALLEY  
HIS HALF PENY  
ROBERT HAYES AT YE COFFEE HOVS  
(a Turk's head)  
IN BARBICAN FORMERLY IN  
PANNYER ALLY.

The first token was issued by Hayes before he was burnt out of Panier Alley in September 1666 and the second when he re-established himself in the Barbican. The new house seems to have attained some notoriety in 1672, when a man died during a brawl.

Although tokens from taverns and coffee houses form a large percentage of those issued, many other trades appear: BAKER, GROSER, MEALEMAN, COMFITMAKER, TRIPEMAN, POVLTERER, SALTER, CHESESMONGER, PASTRYCOOK, FISHMONGER, BVTCHER, HABERDASHER, MILENER, LETHER CVTTER, FLEXMAN, WEAVER, BODIS MAKEER, SOPEBOYLER, OYLEMAN, CHANLER, STATIONER, APOTHECARY, SEACOLE SELLER, GOVLD-SMITH, FARTHING CHANGER . . .

The occupation of farthing changer is interesting, as it shows that owing to the large numbers of tokens being issued in the late 1660's, people were required to act as intermediary exchanges between the shopkeepers who might have accumulated large numbers of tokens. This particular example was issued by W. M. at the White Bear in Kent Street,

Southwark, who, as an inn-keeper, was in an excellent position to provide this facility.



Most issuers were honest and redeemed their tokens when they were returned to them in the course of trade:

WITNESS MY NAME ABRAM LEWIS IN NEW STREET CHANDLER MEMOR I OWE YE BEARER OF THIS A HALF PENY.

The occupation of the issuers in a single street can be surprisingly varied. There were at least 60 tradesmen who issued tokens in the Strand, not only providing small change for their own transactions, but also for others in the street who did not issue tokens.

Tavern-keepers and coffee-house proprietors represented approximately 45 per cent of the trading population. A further 20 per cent were concerned with food and catering, 10 per cent with general trades, and 25 per cent unknown.

Inns were important centres of trade, because of the constant flow of custom, which encouraged shops to supply services for travellers. These were usually available within the courtyard and often conducted under the sign of the inn. Several of the shops in the Strand probably came into this category. It is also worth noting that there were few manufacturers who did not also retail their own products and few shopkeepers who were not in some degree manufacturers.

Thus the distinctions within the food and catering category—between the 4 grocers, 2 cheesemongers, 2 bakers, 2 mealmen, 1 cook, 1 poulterer and 1 confectioner—must be regarded as vague. This also applied within the general trades, which comprised 2 ironmongers, and one each of an apothecary, milliner, tallow chandler and a glass seller.

The circulation of these intriguing tokens was finally prohibited in 1672, when the first Regal copper coinage was issued. This consisted of half-pence and farthings, which were struck in sufficient quantities to obviate the need for any new tokens, although it is probable that the circulation of previously issued tokens continued for some years.

#### REFERENCES

1. William Boyne *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century* (1858), edited and corrected by George Williamson (1889-91), reprinted 1967. Vol. 2.
2. J. H. Burn *A Descriptive Catalogue of the London Traders, Tavern and Coffee House Tokens Current in the Seventeenth Century* (1855).