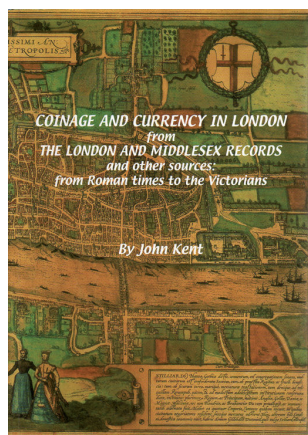


Coinage and Currency in London from the London and Middlesex Records and Other Sources: From Roman Times to the Victorians



John Kent

2005

Baldwins

Paperback

115 pages

illustrated throughout in black and white

£15

Reviewed by Geoff Egan

The numismatic history of London is a remarkably rich subject but it has hitherto lacked a readily accessible synthesis. The material that is available has tended to appear in scattered publications, including many archaeological ones which deal with finds from single sites. The most recent exception to this was Peter Stott's listing of the then known Saxon and Norman coins from the area (Stott 1991). Now, with the late John Kent's new book, a much fuller, detailed overview will reach a wide, general market as well as those with specialist interest.

The Romans are covered in only four pages (this includes a full-page illustration of an excavated group of forger's moulds). The real meat of the volume, with its emphasis on documentary

evidence as well as illustrations of individual issues, lies in the later period. Several important byways are explored alongside the mainstream history of the everyday coinage of Saxon, medieval and later London. Foreign issues used from time to time to supplement periodic deficiencies in the English coinage available, as well as some of the various tokens and counterfeits, provide a wealth of fascinating supplementary material. There is a chapter on crockards and pollards, the Continental medieval coins which imitated the English silver (sterling) pennies but in less pure silver, and infiltrated the everyday change in this country. The unofficial, late 17th-century token coinage, which was produced by private individuals who often gave their full address along with an image of a tool or product relating to their occupation, is also given detailed treatment.

The illustrations are well chosen to give the finest possible pictorial references to the subject. It might be easy for those new to the subject to think the items figured all to be of pieces from or found in London, but this actually applies only to a tiny minority. A brief look at the bibliography will show many antiquarian and other obscure references, back to the 17th century – the sure sign of a work gradually put together over a long period, in this case a working life.

This book is, as would be expected of its distinguished writer, an excellent history of its subject. It could only have come from the pen of one who had dedicated many years researching into obscure corners as well as the mainstream. For archaeologists there is another substantial book, yet to be written, on what the huge corpus of excavated numismatic finds can contribute to the history of London's coinage (a study that would give greater emphasis than here to the late prehistoric and Roman periods). It will probably be a long time before anyone is bold enough to take on the task of compiling that one.

Reference:

Stott, P 1991, 'Saxon and Norman coins from London,' in AG Vince (ed.), *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London 2: Finds and Environmental Evidence* (London & Middx. Arch. Soc. Special Paper 12), 279-325

Letter to the editor

Another cure for syphilis

I was very interested to read the article in the Spring 2007 issue of *London Archaeologist* about the "Osteological evidence of

mercury treatment of syphilis in 17th- to 19th-century London" by Fiona Tucker. She notes that not all cases of syphilis seem to have been treated with mercury. At the Old Operating Theatre Museum in Southwark we came across in *Pharmacopoei Pauperum* 1718 (compiled by Henry Banyer) the following recipe created by Dr Richard Mead (Physician to St. Thomas's Hospital) in the early 18th century to cure people suffering from venereal disease. Mead was a friend of the great Dr Johnson and not a quack or mountebank. The enclosed recipe was designed as a medicine for poor people who could not afford more expensive treatments. An alembic is a still to distil the essence of the mixture.

Readers of *London Archaeologist* might like to come along to the Museum to uncover more interesting medical curiosities.

Kevin Flude

Director, Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret
9a St Thomas Street
London SE1 9RY
open 7 days a week 10.30 – 5pm

SNAIL WATER

Take Garden-Snails cleansed and bruised 6
gallons,
Earthworms washed and bruised 3 Gallons,
Of common Wormwood, Ground-Ivy, and
Carduus, each one Pound and half,
Penniroyal, Juniper-berries, Fennel-seeds,
Aniseeds, each half a Pound,
Cloves and Cubebs bruised, each 3 Ounces,
Spirit of Wine and Spring-water, of each 8
Gallons.
Digest them together for the space of 24
Hours,
And then draw it off in a common Alembick.