

Information Sheet

Numismatic Series No.3

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY LINCOLNSHIRE TRADESMEN AND THEIR TOKENS



INTRODUCTION

"I haven't got a brass farthing". How many times do we hear this expression, and how often do we stop to think what it means? Obviously it means something of the smallest possible value, but most people would be surprised to know that the phrase goes back more than three hundred years!

It all started with a shortage of small change. So much has the value of money declined that many people today can hardly be bothered with the smaller coins such as new pennies and halfpence, and we tend to rebel at a handful of small coins. Three hundred and more years ago a penny represented a substantial amount — in terms of wages it might be equivalent to a pound today — but in terms of prices perhaps rather less. The average person in 17th century England could — and did — live a great deal more economically than we do today.

In the Middle Ages no doubt a large proportion of the population lived out most of their lives without the use of money at all, pay being in the form of food, clothes, and a roof over their heads. Silver pennies cut into halves and quarters were probably sufficient for any transaction which required the use of cash. By the 17th century, however, increasing prosperity meant that more people needed small change for everyday use, while the official silver coins failed to meet this need in both value and quantity. Copper farthings were issued under James I and Charles I by various private individuals who shared the profits with the King, and attempts were made to issue official copper coins, but the Civil War put a stop to this.

In the absence of a usable quantity of small change the people who needed it most took matters into their own hands; people such as shopkeepers, publicans and craftsmen, together with City Corporations and Overseers of the Poor began to produce vast quantities of small brass or copper tokens with values of a farthing, a halfpenny, or more rarely a penny, stamped with their names, trades and the place of issue. In the British Isles over 12,000 different types of token were struck between 1648 and 1672 and in Lincolnshire alone there

were 300 different types by some 240 different people and organizations.

The tokens tell us much more than appears on the surface, however. From the names and trades we can follow up the issuers in other records and find out where they lived, what they did, and what property they owned. In fact the tokens can be a key to all sorts of new information about life in that period.

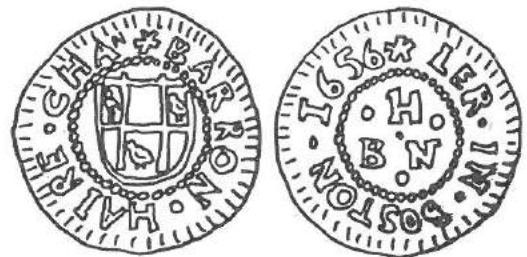


TOKENS

One of the many Lincolnshire tradesmen who struck such tokens was a man named Barron Haire, of Boston. His token reads:

obverse BARRON.HAIRE.CHAN.
 (in the centre) The Tallowchandlers' Arms

reverse LER.IN.BOSTON.1656
 (in the centre) B.M.H.



This token had the value of a farthing. When a customer had a sufficient number of these he would take them to Barron Haire's premises and receive in return the appropriate legal coin. So much for the token, but what about the man?

The three initials on the token are those of the issuer and his wife. In this particular case they suggest that Mrs. Haire's name began with an 'M' — in the 17th century this is very likely to be Mary — but another version appears to give an 'N'.

The Tallowchandlers' coat of arms on the obverse and the fact that he describes himself as a chandler show that Barron Haire was involved in the making of candles, an important and useful task in the days before gas or electric lights. Candles were used by all levels of society though many of the poorer people had to make do with evil-smelling rush lights dipped in fat.

By chance we know something of Barron Haire's circumstances: when he died in 1677 an inventory of all his goods and belongings room by room was made by four of his neighbours. His property was then valued at £65, about average for the date.

The inventory tells us that 'in the work house' was:

'one Copper, a parcell of Candle weake,
 & the work toolles

while 'in the Shopp' were:

'all the Earthen waire in the Shopp
 Beaswax hogshead, & vinegar
 Skails & weights & a wyre graite
 Counters & Shellfs in the Shopp
 A leadon Scarsterne (cistern?) & oyle,
 One Barrell & a firkin of Soape

Like many another tradesmen of his day this chandler found it unwise to rely on his trade alone: probably his wife kept the small shop to tide them over hard times.



Among the Lincoln tradesmen to be immortalized by trade tokens was Henry Wanless, the innkeeper of the 'Two Dolphins'. This inn stood in Eastgate for several centuries, near the Cathedral, and was a favourite calling place for farmers from villages to the north-east, until it was pulled down after closing in 1890. Latterly it was known as 'The Dolphins'. The token reads:

obverse HENRY. WANLESS. Two Dolphins
reverse IN. LINCOLNE. 1669. HIS. HALF. PENY.



Wanless was born in 1635 and baptized at the church of St. Margaret-in-the-Close, now demolished. He died in September 1679. His brother was also an innkeeper, with an inn on the Great North Road.

After his death Wanless' goods were looked over by four of his neighbours, who went round from room to room, appraising and valuing as they went. As they named the rooms in turn we can begin to build up a picture of this 17th century inn, which was no doubt in origin a mediaeval building and somewhat humbler than its successor which was pulled down in 1892. Fifteen rooms are named; the Beddchamber, Hall Chamber, Little Clossett in the Hall Chamber, Hall, Great Parlour, Little Parlour, Boarden Garrett Chamber over the New Roome, Kitching Chamber, Kitching, Stable and Chamber over it, Cellar, and Passage. There was also a 'Stable over the way'. Strangely for an inn the only drink mentioned is 'halfe a hogshead of ale' together with five 'emptie hogsheads with the horses they stand upon': — no wine etc. at all.

The Hall Chamber was by the sound of it a rather cosy room with an iron grate with andirons (fire-irons) and brass bosses, one little table, two leather chairs, three stools, some small pictures, the hangings of the room (this was before the days of wallpaper) and window curtains of green baize. In the Kitchen, as one might suspect, the main items for use of guests were kept. Many of the poorer visitors ate and sat in the Kitchen, which was usually very large as a result. Here we find seven pewter dishes and a dozen and a half of plates. No fewer than nine pewter chamber pots were there to serve the other needs of the guests, while four pewter, four brass and three iron candlesticks stood ready to light them to bed.

As well as food and beds an inn of this date needed to provide stabling for horses, and so in the stable we find racks and mangers and a load of hay. Another stable containing an old grey horse presumably served the innkeeper.

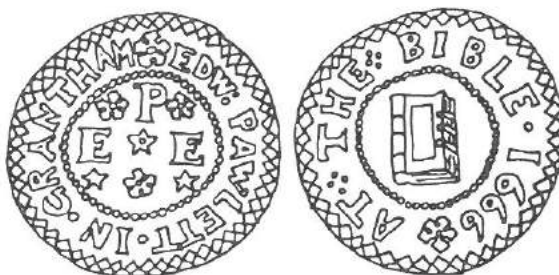
Despite its position in the Cathedral Close the inn has seven pigs and a number of fowls in the yard, scavenging for what they can get.



In Grantham no less than nineteen different tokens were issued in the 17th century, including four varieties belonging to the Overseers of the Poor. One rather unusual trade represented was that of bookseller; possibly the token was designed to advertise as one would not usually expect a bookseller to need much small change.

Edward Pawlett had his shop at the sign of The Bible. His token reads:

obverse: EDW.PAWLETT.IN.GRANTHAM. E.E.P.
 reverse AT. THE. BIBLE.1666. A book with clasps.



The three initials in the first line are those of Pawlett and his wife, whose name was probably Elizabeth. Most booksellers' tokens bear the symbol of an open book, but bookselling was not always their only trade. Many were publishers in their own right and frequently joined together in bringing out books which they could not afford to publish as individuals. Perhaps one of the main sources of income for a man such as Pawlett would be political and religious broadsheets and tracts. The 17th century was an age of great interest in these subjects and pamphlet wars were carried on between opposing factions: the ending of the Civil War did not end the arguments and with no newspapers as we would recognize them and no television or radio people relied on cheap broadsheets to keep them abreast of the latest news. Garish productions, sometimes illustrated with cheap woodcuts, also described the execution of criminals and their last dying speeches.

It is a pity then that although we have the inventory of Edward Pawlett's belongings, taken after his death in 1686, all the information that we are given about his stock in trade is:

'Bookes apprized at £150.00.

As this represents a very great deal of capital investment it would be nice to know what those books were: it is possible that somewhere his catalogue survives, or even books with his publisher's imprint.

His house consisted of a large Hall, a Best Chamber, a Chamber over the Shop, a Garrett, a Cellar, and a Kitchen, as well as the shop itself. It was probably a narrow building with a gable end to the street with three storeys and a cellar, with stabling in a yard behind and the shop approached directly from the street. The contents are those of any moderately well-to-do family of the day; an array of pewter, a fireplace with spits and other cooking utensils in the hall (the kitchen was a smaller room for storing and preparing food), and a long list of sheets and pillowcases made by the womenfolk. Although he lived well Pawlett perhaps allowed too much credit: we find:

'Debts Good £23.05s.00

Debts Desperate £30.00s.00'

In other words about a sixth of all his possessions, both goods and capital, was still owing to him at his death.



We cannot always believe what appears on a token. Many tradesmen appear as mercers, suppliers of cloth and sewing materials, when in fact they were simply general grocers. The difficulty arises from the fact that hardly anyone in the 17th century did just one job: life was too uncertain for that. They tended to describe themselves by the trade they would like to be known for, even if a large part of the annual income came from a shop.

We have already met one tallow-chandler; now we find another one, under a disguise, whose name is William Scortreth.

obverse WILLIAM.SCORTRETH Three Doves
reverse OF.ALFORD.1667 W.S.



Scortreth was born in 1617 and died in 1678; a certificate survives to say that he was buried in wool (a method of supporting the sagging English wool-trade of the time). He was a churchwarden and sidesman at Alford parish church in 1673 and 1675. In 1664 he was described as a tallow-chandler, despite the three doves on his token which would suggest that he was an innkeeper. He was buying at this date a piece of land 'on the North side of Croft Pingle in Alford' from Edward Towthby of Towthby (now a farm just to the west of Alford). We can mentally visit Scortreth's shop shortly after his death, with the aid of the inventory of his goods drawn up by friends and neighbours. A very well-stocked shop it is too, as we pick our way through the piles of hardware; — harrow-teeth, frying pans, four stone of nails, handsaws, lanterns, candlesticks, pattens, locks and hinges — while behind the counter are pins and cards, scissors, and other mercer's stock, mixed up with tobacco and three boxes of pipes, tubs of sugar, and dozens of other miscellaneous items. Then we see the tools and stock of the chandler's trade: wicks, three tubs of tallow, and the finished candles themselves. These seem to have been moved into the shop from the Chandlehouse which now contains twelve tubs, one copper, a kettle, a trough, and 'ye Case' which is probably the candle-mould.

Up the street is another shop called 'Brough Shop' which is perhaps a recent purchase from someone of that name: its stock is very similar to that of the other, but less in quantity.

In the dwelling-house we visit each of the ten rooms in turn, beginning at the Hall and ending at the scullery and 'Chandlehouse', nothing the presence of a good stock of homespun sheets and 'forty yards of hempen cloth'. Scortreth was either a widower or bachelor; the female servants have been hard at work on their spinning and weaving. In the fields are eleven sheep and three loads of hay, which serve to demonstrate from how many sources a man might make his living in those hard times.



Not only tradesmen supplied the want of small change in the 17th century. All sorts of official bodies saw their opportunities as well. The City of Lincoln produced its own halfpenny to be 'changed by the Mayor' (see cover picture) and most of the other major towns in Lincolnshire did likewise.

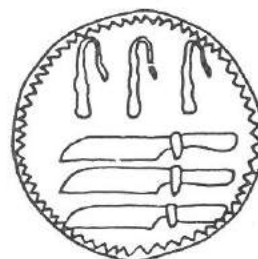
The life of the poor at this date was not quite so desperate as it was to become in Dickens' time. There were no workhouses and no such institutional misery. Relief of the poor was looked after at parish level, and vagrants were passed on from parish constable to parish constable until they arrived home to become a burden on their own people. Like the parish constables the Overseers of the Poor were amateurs, elected each year from among those who had the time, the wit, or the standing to serve. Their job was to provide 'outdoor relief' in

the form of work — weaving or washing were favoured ideas — or in the form of a cash dole. Frequently the Overseers paid the dole in tokens, which then became a sort of local currency. The same idea can be seen today in the use of transport tokens issued to pensioners by local councils.

At Crowland in the heart of the Fens the Overseers of the Poor produced a particularly splendid token. It reads: —

obverse THE POORES HALFE: PENY OF
CROYLAND 1670

reverse Three whips and three knives.



The whips and knives on the reverse of the token need some explaining. Crowland began life as a settlement long before the Norman Conquest when St. Guthlac arrived from Thorney to set up his monastery here. He is said to have arrived on St. Bartholomew's day in 699AD — the three knives were a symbol of St. Bartholomew's martyrdom — and the saint later answered his prayer by giving him a whip to drive away the evil spirits that lurked around the place; perhaps the native inhabitants of Crowland?

At all events this crest was taken by the Crowland Abbey as its coat of arms in the Middle Ages and later on the town took it over. It was therefore a natural symbol to place on the token. In earlier times huge numbers of model knives were given away each year on St. Bartholomew's day to all the townsfolk, though few seem to survive. (Lincolnshire Museums would like to hear from anyone who has one).

William Stukeley, the famous Lincolnshire-born antiquary, visited Crowland a number of times in the 1740s when parts of the Abbey were being pulled down. He was very distressed to see the destruction going on, but on one visit in 1744 he recorded:

' in pulling down the wall of the church (the former Abbey) this summer they found vast quantities of Crowland farthings'.

He seems to be referring to the Overseers' halfpence but it is clear that someone had been hoarding them up, and where safer than in a hollow in the church wall? After 1672 they would have been illegal and valueless, and not worth searching for.

SOURCES

A. Smith. *A Catalogue of the Town and Trade Tokens of Lincolnshire issued in the Seventeenth Century*. 1931

Rev. W.C. Lukis. *Stukeley's Diaries and Letters* Vol II: 1883 (Surtees Society vol. 76)

Exley Collection. Lincolnshire Library Service, Lincoln Central Library

Abell Collection. Lincolnshire Library Service, Lincoln Central Library

Wills and Inventories. Lincolnshire Archives Office

The Coin Gallery at the Usher Gallery, Lincoln, displays an excellent collection of trade tokens

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LINCOLN

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