

Collecting – Communion Tokens

Here follows illustrations taken from Scottish Pewter-Ware and Pewterers by L Ingleby Wood Published in the early 1900s. Also a few from a Private Collection photographed recently, some or all are repeated in the following two photos amongst others and with some views of the reverse.

Communion Tokens (some of this will be a précis - filched/plagiarised - from above book) –

The communion token was a small variously shaped piece of lead, pewter or brass given to the communicant some time prior to the Sunday upon which the Sacrament was to be dispensed and delivered up by him before he partook of it.

Translate

Prove yourself worthy – usually give the church enough of what money you have freely available and you will be allowed to take communion – (was it not ever so with religion – blessings for dosh!) (they might say you qualify if you know how to show a proper understanding – but a wedge of cash might do as well/ease your way) Before these arrived on the scene there was a printed card or ticket – very appropriate!

1580 in Edinburgh enough of the town council didn't get them to encourage them to abolish the use thereof – this naturally failed.

1603 the first record of pewter tokens used in Glasgow. (Brass and lead in use all about as well).

Sometimes lead bits cut and punch stamped – simply and roughly, - not such good designs for collectors!

They were later cast with molds by the pewterer. Or if a poor church (Kirk) the plumber would do his best.

In the middle of the seventeen hundreds there are records of pewterers being paid for making these.

Before a member of the Church could secure a token he had to satisfy the minister as to his religious knowledge and good character – his belief – knowledge and recital of the Lord's prayer – the Ten Commandments – even the shorter catechism. No person was allowed to take communion without first giving up his (or her – heavens! women too!) token – in the Presbyterian or Episcopalian Church.

Elders were given the tokens to distribute (a fine example of delegation!) but the Minister had to have final approval before anyone got one. If an undesirable got one (the minister didn't like him – he would have to withdraw - note ...he)...source of scenes in the Church!

A stranger moving into a parish would need a certificate of good character and knowledge (and money) before he could be given one. Religious fervour in the early 1700s gave special power to those distributing these tokens.

Dates on tokens can be misleading as found on front or back – usually back – were often added later when a new minister took up his work in the parish. Generally, “Ingleby Wood” says this should be assumed to be the case.

Tokens from the Episcopal Church may have a cross on them – not so for the Presbyterian Church – *at any time*. For the Episcopalians they are usually small, plain and modest

The letter D where found stands for *Donavit* and means the minister gave these for use in the church - these are often in a variety of simple but varied geometrical shapes – heart , triangle, diamond, star and others – heart shapes dating back to the middle sixteen hundreds in use for maybe a century after.

Ingleby Wood spoke of four thousand different tokens – whose use continued into the 1870s – but he says the designs became ‘**smug**’ (lovely word) some sixty years before.

After this there was a reversion to cardboard printed tickets – which was only a reversion to the order of things before these metal tokens!

Perhaps an interesting subject then for a collector – as they need not be expensive and identifying them can be an interest –

Reading - Borzinski - 'Communion Tokens of the World'
(out of print for ages – this website would like to buy a copy?)

And maybe -

'Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges' by Brian Spencer concerning the Museum of London's collection
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This website thanks Alex Neish - a leading pewter authority - for the following communication responding to a request for information regarding communion tokens.

SCOTTISH COMMUNION TOKENS

By Alex Neish

Scottish communion tokens were originally made in pewter though occasionally they are to be found in brass. From around 1820 when the established national Church was splitting yet again banal oblongs of white metal were pressed into service with a standard Biblical quotation. It was a considerable come down from the originality of shapes that had graced the earliest pewter examples that were decorated with the parish name or small religious symbols.

Those who have of late begun to collect a handful or two of the tokens would

be well advised to search these out as rarity will drive up their values. I know of only one London dealer in coins and metals who is able to offer a good selection. The most expensive are those that sailed to America, Australia and New Zealand when the church minister emigrated - and inside the Scottish tradition that all the communion elements belonged to him carried off the tokens and marked them for his new church

The tokens were originally issued to the church goers who had passed an exam into their religious knowledge and beliefs so even then they were prized items. Communion could not be taken without them. Today they are principally to be found in junk shops and the occasional antiques fair.

One of the problems in collecting the tokens is keeping them classified and under control. While living in Brazil my wife had devoted a great deal of time and effort to putting our collection of around 1,400 into order. They were laid out across tables in the main sitting room until our maid decided to sweep them all up into boxes and chaos returned. This was the final straw and I sent them all off to auction.

It was in any case already clear my collecting efforts would only be an "also ran" in the communion token stakes. A Protestant institution in Texas has the largest collection in the world. It runs to several thousand different examples and will never be overtaken





ABOYE



BUCKIE



CLATT



DUNKELD



DUTHIL



DINGWALL



EAGLESHAM



EDDRAGHILLIS



GUTHRIE



KILTARN



NEWFILL



PORTREE



REDGORTON



SNIZORT



STRACATHRO



TONGUE, LAIRG.



URQUHART



UNST



ABERDUR



AIRTH



BEDRILE



HUTTON



WEST LINTON



SHIRLING



BALMACLELLAN



BUTTLE



CAERLAVEROCK



CROMDALE



KIRKBEAN



OXHAM



LOGIERAIT
HONOR MURRAY
1681-1714



KIRKMICHAEL
RO. BISSAT
1720-27



KIRKMICHAEL
RO. ROBERTSONE
1727-87



FORBYCE
ALEX IRVINE
1718-47



KINNELLAR
JOHN ANGUS
1697-1723



DRON
JOHN GOLQUHOUN
1698-1727



FLISK
W. THOMSON
1697-1723



LARBERT and DUNIPACE



ST ANDREWS
LLHARDRYDE



STIRLING



HARRINGH
JOHN PINKERTON
1758-83



HARRINGH
GEORGE WRIGHT
1801-18



DELTING
JOHN BAPCLAY
1751-52



MELROSE



EDINBURGH



ST ANDREWS



PERTH



METHVEN

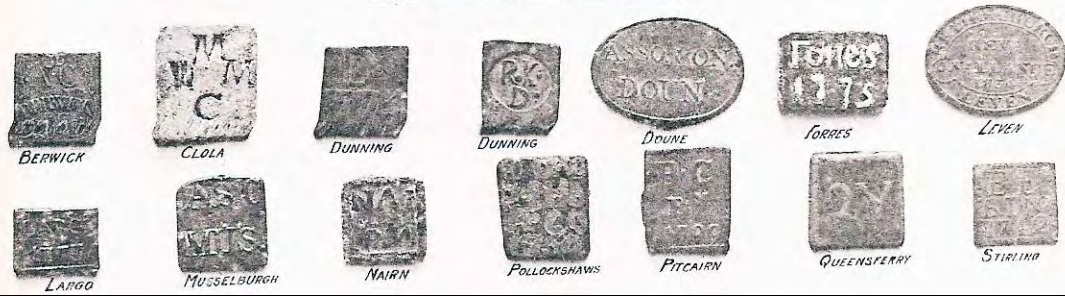


HADDINGTON

SCOTTISH EPISCOPALIAN



UNITED PRESBYTERIAN



REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN



BEREAN CHURCH



ORIGINAL SECESSION



FREE CHURCH



A mold for a communion token

