

PEWTERERS' AND BRAZIERS' TRADE TOKENS

by Peter Hayward

In the Autumn 2003 Journal Norman Merritt drew attention to a pewterer's trade token that was not included in the list given on pp63-67 of Cotterell's *Old Pewter*. This was the farthing token of John Plummer, a pewterer and brazier of Grantham. 17th century trade tokens were the subject of extensive research in the 19th century, culminating in the publication of a very extensive list by Williamson in 1889-91. They were issued in virtually every village and town in England, Wales and Ireland, and there are no fewer than 18 counties for which Williamson recorded over 200 tokens. He records over 3,500 for London, 779 for Ireland, but only 92 for Wales and just 1 for Scotland.

Cotterell used the indexes in Williamson's work to compile his list in *Old Pewter*, and that was bound to lead to omissions because a token could only be recognised as being issued by a pewterer if the text on it said the issuer was a pewterer or if the token had some pewter-related emblem. Thus John Plummer's token is, in fact, recorded by Williamson, but as there is nothing on it to indicate that the issuer was a pewterer, Cotterell missed it.

Another one that was missed by Cotterell was John Kempster's, a London pewterer (OP2711A). This farthing token is struck with:

Obverse: JOHN KEMPSTER surrounding a lily
pot with three sprays
Reverse: LEDEN HALL STREET I E K



Figure 24. John Kempster's token.

Williamson records an interesting advertisement in *Mercurius Publicus*, No. 9, February 26 - March 5 1662, p141 that mentions John Kempster:

'Stolen March 2. in the night, out of the Stable of Robert Gowlet, of Sawbridgeworth in the County of Hartford Yeoman, two Carthorses: . . . If any can give notice to Mr. John Kempster Potter in Leaden-hall-street, next to the Kings

Arms Inne, they shall be well satisfied for their pains'.

The trade description 'potter' is an ambiguous one. As John Kempster opened shop it might be supposed he was a pewterer and that the term 'potter' in this instance must mean a maker of pewter pots. However, there is evidence that many earthenware potters were free of the Worshipful Company because they did not have a company of their own, and further that some freemen made both pewter and earthenware pots (private communication from Ron Homer). Thus we cannot be sure that Kempster was a pewterer. Williamson lists three other London potters who issued tokens: Ann Tayler of Aldersgate Street, John Hubbold of Cary Lane and George Caldwell (or possibly Godewell) of St John Street. However, at the moment we have no evidence that any of these was a pewterer. There may well be many other token issuers listed in Williamson, though, who were in fact pewterers but whose tokens give no clue to this.

Cotterell also ignored token-issuers who were recorded as braziers. We now know that the trades of brazier and pewterer were often combined in provincial towns, but of the six token issuers listed in Williamson who describe themselves on their tokens as 'brazier', only one has been identified as a possible pewterer. He is Edward Goble of Cork, listed in *Irish Pewter*. His token is struck with:

Obverse: EDWARD GOBLE OF surrounding a
castle between EG
Reverse: CORK BRAZIER 1672 surrounding a
brazier

The other braziers listed in Williamson are:
Edward Dawes of Bridgwater, Somerset (1657)
Edmund Lewis of Highworth, Wiltshire (1669)
Benjamin Rudkin of Walsingham, Norfolk (1669)
John Seawell of Skinner Row, Dublin (undated)
Richard White of Lewes, Sussex (1668)

These tokens came about because of government indecisiveness. In the Commonwealth period the value of silver had risen, making small denomination silver coins inconveniently small. The government kept talking about having base metal coinage - for example, a submission to the Mint Committee in 1651 suggested making farthings of copper or tin - and even got as far as

striking patterns in copper and pewter, but never actually issued any. In the end, the populace filled the gap by issuing tokens for small change themselves. Whilst most tokens were issued by traders, some were also issued by others such as mayors, chamberlains and churchwardens. They appear to have been accepted generally within the district, no matter who had actually issued them.

The majority date of tokens date to the very narrow period 1663-1671, though a few are as early as 1648. In 1672 the government finally got its act together, and there was a royal proclamation forbidding anyone other than the government from making copper farthings and halfpennies. The issue of tokens by traders and the like promptly stopped, except in Chester, where it continued to 1674, and Ireland, where it continued to 1679. Thus the suggestion in Ricketts that token no. 29 in Cotterell could be attributed to the John Abbott who became free in 1678 is unlikely to be right.

They were struck in copper, brass, bronze and, rarely, lead. They are mostly round (though there are exceptions), and in denominations of $\frac{1}{4}d$, $\frac{1}{2}d$

REFERENCES

- Cotterell, Howard H. *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks*, Batsford 1929
Hall, David W. *Irish Pewter*, Pewter Society 1995
Merritt, Norman *A Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire Pewterer's Token*, J. Pewter Soc. Autumn 2003 p39
Ricketts, C. *Pewterers of London 1600-1900*, Pewter Society 2001.

and 1d. Many of those issued in the provinces were actually designed and struck in London, and this may explain the frequent use of the arms of the City livery companies to denote trades. However, some were also designed and struck by itinerant workers. The fact that a limited number of people were engaged in making tokens probably explains the design similarities that can exist between tokens issued in widely separated places. There is a surviving description of the method of making tokens, which is reproduced in Williamson.

Tokens have been issued at other periods in British history. Lead tokens were issued in the early 15th century because of a shortage of small coinage, and right at the end of the 16th century Elizabeth I granted the City of Bristol permission to strike tokens (though it would appear that privately-issued tokens were already circulating in that city). The Worshipful Company have a 19th century one issued by the Bournemouth pewterers Carr, Gibbs & Son (*Supplementary Catalogue*, pp102-3), and Cotterell also lists a 19th century one (Robert Whyte of Edinburgh) which, unusually, was made of pewter.

Williamson, George C. *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century in England, Wales and Ireland, by Corporations, Merchants, Tradesmen, etc.* Original edition 1889-91; reprinted in 1970 by Burt Franklin of New York. 2 volumes.
Worshipful Company of Pewterers, *Supplementary Catalogue of Pewterware*, 1979