

SUFFOLK TRADESMEN'S TOKENS OF THE 17TH CENTURY.

By THE EARL OF CRANBROOK.

Tradesmen's tokens were a money of necessity, issued by private individuals to meet a shortage of small change at periods when, for some reason or other, the Government of the day was unable or unwilling to make the necessary provision. Today we are so accustomed to our currency being of little value intrinsically, consisting merely of tokens representative of something of greater value than the individual coins, that we are apt to forget that the essence of all early coinage was its value as bullion and that until the end of the middle ages the commercial stability of a community depended very largely on the intrinsic value of its currency. In medieval times therefore not only was all sound monetary convention against the issuing of a token coinage, even for the lower denominations, but in England from the earliest times until the end of the 17th century, it appears to have been considered as being beneath the dignity of the Crown to issue coinage in any metal baser than silver. Consequently the coins of the lower denominations were always small, and, as the value of silver increased, became smaller and exceedingly inconvenient in use. Few silver coins of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in value were ever issued, so that there was not enough small change for the petty needs of the poor, though silver pence were sometimes divided into two or four pieces to make halfpence or farthings. As the halfpence were about the diameter of an ordinary cigarette, it can be imagined that even these, much more the quarters, were easily lost. There was therefore a constant demand for small change of a less inconvenient size and at the beginning of the 14th century the counters struck at Nuremberg and elsewhere on the Continent were in current use as small change. These were forbidden by statute in 1335, but subsequently must have come into use again since in 1404 the Commons petitioned the King to make some remedy for the mischief done to the poor by the want of small change and the general use of foreign coinage and tokens of lead. These latter seem to have been issued in great numbers and in tradesmen's accounts of the 16th century there are fairly frequent references to expenditure on lead and the making of tokens. These leaden tokens are very crude pieces, roughly struck and seldom have on them any indication of the name of the issuer or place of issue, so that they cannot be catalogued with any certainty.

No regal farthings were struck during the reigns of Mary, Elizabeth, James I or Charles I, nor during the Commonwealth. Elizabeth had patterns made in 1601 for a regal coinage in copper, but none was ever issued. James I had experienced the advantage of a copper coinage as King of Scotland, but instead of striking his own he sold in 1613 a patent to John, Lord Harrington, to strike and issue farthings in copper of a weight of 6 grs. Charles I granted similar patents in 1626 and again in 1635. All these farthings, known as "Harringtons" after the first patentee, were so badly struck and breakable that they were always unpopular, and since the issuers refused to change them they were finally universally refused and cried down by order of Parliament in 1644.

Subsequently small change again became scarce when tradesmen started to issue tokens, usually in brass, copper or bronze (rarely in lead or even leather). It is of this series that I treat.

The earliest date in Suffolk (as in all England) is 1648 and the latest 1671. In the following year they were all cried down by proclamation dated 16th Aug., 1672, when the first regal copper coinage was issued. This was of good value intrinsically being struck in pure Swedish copper at 20d to the pound avoirdupois. This proclamation seems to have been pretty well universally obeyed, though the city of Chester continued issuing tokens until 1674. The Crown took legal proceedings which, on the intercession of Sir William Williams, a burgess of the City and Speaker of the House of Commons, were stayed upon the offenders complying with the Act. Ipswich seems likewise to have had to obtain a pardon. After the suppression of the 17th century tokens regal coins in copper (and a few in pewter) supplied the needs of the nation throughout the reigns of Charles II, James II and William and Mary. On the accession of the Hanoverian George I a large issue of copper coinage took place, partly no doubt in order that the population should use the coins of the new and alien dynasty in preference to that of the Stuarts. During the reigns of George II and George III there was only one small issue of copper coinage between the years 1754 and 1797, so that another shortage of small change arose towards the end of the 18th century. Between 1782 and 1797 local tradesmen and others again issued tokens, but in the latter year large quantities of regal 2d. and 1d. pieces were issued and the tokens cried down. Halfpence and farthings were issued in 1799. These 18th century tokens were issued in great numbers partly to fill a real need, but partly to amuse the collectors of the day, for token collecting had become a fashionable pursuit. For that reason they seem to me of less interest than those of the 17th century. Dies were mixed in order to make varieties and these were often struck in small numbers to make them rare; one even has COLLECTORS TOKEN stamped around the edge and is considered a rare variety on that account. Libellous philatelists have imputed similar motives to certain of the Central American and Eastern European republics: Prentice of Bungay and Conder of Ipswich started the racket 100 years before.

A little later the shortage was of small silver and not copper, no silver money being issued by the Government between 1787 and 1813. The Bank of England was given permission to strike pieces of the value of 5/- and 3/- and eighteenpence, but again, as with the pennies in earlier centuries, even the latter was of too high a value for the needs of the poor. Silver tokens mainly of the value of 6d. and 1/- were issued by private individuals in 1811 and 1812, being cried down in 1813. A few copper tokens were issued during the same period, but seem to have had a much more local circulation than previous issues. Since 1813 successive Governments have issued sufficient coinage to satisfy the needs of the community and there have been no tokens.

Considering the severe, even barbarous, penalties which have been inflicted upon the forgers and clippers of authorised currency in all countries from the earliest times and the fact that the striking of tokens

has at all times been illegal, it seems curious that the practice should so often have been tolerated by the existing Government. To the issuers it must have been a profitable undertaking. The Parys Mountain Company, who worked the copper mines at Amlwch in Anglesea, coined several hundred tons of copper pence and halfpence in 1787 and 1788. None of these were ever recalled, the increased value of copper during the Napoleonic wars rendering them sufficiently valuable to be used as metal. Even without this inflation token issuing must have been profitable since considerable quantities must have been lost while in use and never presented for repayment. That they were repaid by the issuers is apparent on many of the tokens. A 17th century token issued by Ed. Broad at Southmolton in Devon has on the reverse :—

WHEN YOU PLEASE ILE CHAINGE THESE.

One of the Bury St. Edmunds 18th century penny pieces had inscribed round the edge :—

VALUE ONE PENNY AT P. DECKS POST OFFICE BURY, 1794

While a silver 1/- token of 1811 reads :—

PAYABLE. AT. W. SIZERS. WOODBRIDGE.

Apparently just as in the last century local bank notes passed freely from hand to hand where the private banks concerned were well known and trusted, so the 17th century tokens were willingly accepted locally. Whether this was so in distant parts of the country where the issuers were unknown it is impossible to say, but traders seem to have kept boxes with partitions in them to divide off the different tokens. A London token of the 17th century reads :—

O. RICHARD RICH IN LITEL = A bird on a sheaf of corn.

R. DRVRY LANE CHANGER = OF FARTHING.

The 17th century tokens were issued in almost every town or village of importance in the Country. Williamson in his 1889 edition of Boyne's "Tradesmen's Tokens of the 17th century" describes no less than 12,700 separate tokens, which figure, judging from my experience of Suffolk, will probably be raised to 15,000 by some future worker in the same field. In Suffolk they were issued in some 70 towns and villages, a few by the Corporation or Churchwardens, the most of them by tradesmen and other private individuals. There are three pennies, a good many halfpence, but the majority is made up of farthings. Those issued by individuals usually have on them the name of the issuer, of the town or village in which he lived, some indication of his trade or calling, or the sign of his inn, his initials, and often that of his wife's christian name as well. Many used the arms of the Guild or Livery Company of their trade without necessarily, as far as I have been able to ascertain, being members of the Company. The majority of tokens are circular like ordinary coins, a few in other shapes, square, octagonal and heart shaped. For some reason in Suffolk at any rate the odd shaped ones seem to be relatively less common than the round; they were probably more expensive and difficult to make and struck in smaller numbers.

There is one problem the solution of which has completely evaded me, though further search through some of the available records might throw

a certain amount of light on it. Who made the dies? It has been suggested that the troubles in London and the decay of the Court which followed the defeat and execution of Charles I caused the engravers of regal coins, seals, etc., to take up the making of dies for tokens. It seems certain that many tokens were struck in London and that it is for this reason that the names of both issuers and places were wrongly spelt, though others certainly, from their crudeness in design and execution must have been made locally. It is possible that some diemakers may have travelled from town to town designing and sinking dies in the various town and villages through which they passed. In some towns many of the tokens were obviously designed by the same person, *e.g.*, the peculiar 5 in the Sudbury tokens of John Edwards, John Hayward and John Jones, is obviously the work of one man. On the other hand two of Nicholas Dansie's Lavenham farthings are clearly by different die sinkers and in other cases one can see a similarity in design and mint-mark in tokens issued in different towns, and indeed in different counties, the Ipswich and Norwich town pieces are clearly made by the same die sinker. I believe that some of the Corporation, etc., records are worthy of further investigation. The Ipswich ones contain many references to the Town Pieces, but provokingly none to the actual die sinker though he must have made several dies: there are at least 6 die varieties of the Ipswich farthing. Town Pieces were issued in Beccles, Bungay, Lowestoft, Southwold and Woodbridge, while the Landguard Point Fort $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and $\frac{1}{4}$ d. were possibly issued by authority.

In the Gentleman's Magazine, November, 1757, there is a description of a press used for coining tokens; the mill, screw and dies being found in the house of the grandson of Edward Wood, who issued a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. token in Chesterfield. The use of the mill and screw at this date is interesting, anticipating by some years the introduction of this machine for the regular issue of regal coinage. Up to the reign of Elizabeth coins were always struck with the hammer, hence of course the derivation of the term. The mill and screw was first brought to England from France by Eloye Mestrell who started coining milled money at the Tower for Queen Elizabeth in 1561. Unfortunately he did not confine himself to working at his official place of business and for his Royal Mistress, was convicted of counterfeiting and executed at Tyburn. Whether post hoc or propter hoc the new process was not popular with the authorities, was little used after 1572 and discontinued entirely in 1575. The coinage of James I, Charles I and of the Commonwealth was all struck in the old way with the hammer, as were the first issues of Charles II. In 1662 came the final adoption of the mill and screw for the striking of the regal coinage, the machinery being erected at the mint by another Frenchman, Peter Blondeau.

Though it is difficult to be certain, particularly with some of the very rare ones of which I have only seen one or possibly two specimens and those in bad condition, I think that all the Suffolk tokens were milled. In whatever manner they were struck it seems that in many cases the dies failed or broke for there are a large number of die varieties. Sometimes we get a failing obverse die replaced, but the old reverse die kept on in

use: the reverse die may then fail and be replaced and in some cases the same process is again repeated. Nicholas Shepherd of Saxmundham seems to have issued a very large number of tokens and his dies failed repeatedly; as a result one can trace die failures through a series of no less than 11 different varieties of his farthings. A great deal of research remains to be done on these die varieties and indeed on tokens generally. Golding in his "Coinage of Suffolk" (1868) described 360 and Williamson (1889) 375 Suffolk Tokens. In a few years work I have seen or heard of some 462 and I have no doubt that longer and more diligent research would find many more. Similarly there is more work to be done on tracing the issuers themselves. English place names are often derived from natural features not unique to any one county, others from some British, Saxon or Danish word used by those races in many parts of the country. To take one of the commonest place-names, a token issued by John Smith of Stratford might have been issued in many places in England. Since they had in general a very local circulation, the discovery of this token at one of our two Stratfords or a neighbouring parish, could be taken as pretty good evidence that it was in fact issued there. If we only find from, say, the parish registers that a John Smith was living in the parish at that time, we should have some evidence, but if we find that in addition he married a May Jones and the token showed, as many do, that the initial letter of the name of the issuer's wife was M. we could look upon it as reasonably conclusive. Conclusive evidence of this sort is not always available. The parish registers only show those who were christened, married or buried and our John Smith may have come into the parish with his parents as a child, and died a bachelor away from home. That Smiths existed in the parish at the time is some evidence particularly if the name of the issuer is a more unusual or local one. By plaguing the local clergy—and indeed many in other counties—and by searching, or getting others to search for me, through other local records, I have been able to check up on Golding's and Williamson's lists to a certain extent and have found that a good many tokens ascribed by those two authors to Suffolk, really belong to other counties. There are still some doubtful ones the issuers of which I have been unable to trace.

As I have said the total now stands at 462, but there is still much work to be done. I hope that this article may encourage some members of the Society to take up this minor, but interesting, branch of numismatics.