THE TOKEN COINAGE OF WARWICKSHIRE WITH DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL NOTES

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The token coinage of Warwickshire with descriptive and historical notes by W. J. Davis

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BY

W. J. DAVIS

(Late H.M. Inspector of Factories).

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To

Sir Richard Tangye, K.B.

F.R.G.S.,

Whose name will be ever distinguished

in Birmingham

among the Pioneers of her Industry,

the Promoters of her Art,

and the Leaders in her progress

"Forward"

this Work is admiringly dedicated by

Its Author.

Advertisement.

THE increasing interest taken in that branch of numismatics which treats of tradesmen's tokens, and the love of the pursuit generally, have induced the Author to undertake to arrange, tabulate, and illustrate those of Warwickshire.

The advantage of confining research to a single county will now be undisputed. A compiler, native to the locality, and having naturally more special knowledge of it than a general writer on the subject could have, is enabled to add local notes of special value and interest; and in the following work every endeavour has been made to include all information that would serve to illustrate the main subject, without overloading it.

As Warwickshire enjoys the distinction of having issued more tokens than any county, except Middlesex, there needs no apology for putting forward its claim for separate consideration. Moreover, it will be conceded by numismatists generally, that for choice specimens of the art of die-sinking, both in execution and design, this County has no rival. The Birmingham and Coventry examples, especially, mark distinctly a "high art" period of coin engraving. In addition to our own public and private tokens, most of the rare and best wrought pieces of other counties were engraved and manufactured in Birmingham.

Among these may be mentioned those of the Yeomanry; many of the buildings of London, Bath, Gloucester, &c.; the well-known Badmington pieces of Gloucestershire; as well as many pieces of Middlesex, Devonshire, Cornwall, Kent, Lancashire, Norfolk, Hampshire, Sussex, Wiltshire, Yorkshire, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

New tokens, and unpublished variations of die and edge readings, together with others which have hitherto been placed in the non-local series, but are now traced to Warwickshire, with substantial evidence of the *locale*, are included in the compilation.

The plan of the work aims at being simple and comprehensive. Every token has its distinct number, but at the same time each variation of the principal piece can be seen at a glance. This will remove the objection which many collectors have to small letters after the numbers.

The plates are principally from specimens in my own collection, but the illustrations are enriched by the exceptionally rare and unique pieces from the cabinet of William Norman, Esq., Newcastle-on-Tyne. Mr. Norman has throughout taken the deepest interest in the work, aided in the description of new specimens, corrected many errors of former descriptions, and confirmed, by careful comparison, new varieties.

John Macmillan, Esq., of Edgbaston, has unreservedly placed his valuable collection at my disposal. John Henry Pratt, Esq., of Glasgow, Messrs. W. S. Lincoln and Son, Messrs. Spink and Son, and A. H. Baldwin, Esq., of London, have also, with that friendly intercourse, always a distinct and pleasant feature in the pursuit of numismatology, rendered willing help.

In research I have been favoured with the assistance of John Thackray Bunce, Esq., J.P., author of the "History of the Birmingham Corporation;" Sam. Timmins, Esq., F.R.G.S., historian of Warwickshire; Joseph Hill, Esq., editor of "Historic Warwickshire;" Walter Bowen, Esq., Clerk to the Birmingham Guardians; Dr. J. A. Langford, author of a "Century of Birmingham Life,"; Wm. Geo. Fretton, Esq., the antiquary of Coventry; W. Johnson, Esq., C.C., Bedworth, and T. J. Hill, Esq., of Tamworth.

Historical Survey.

THE following pages deal with the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which are popularly supposed to embrace the whole token period, inasmuch as no tokens of an earlier date appear to have come down to us. But there is historical evidence that such contrivances were in vogue as early as the time of Queen Elizabeth, viz., in 1574. Ruding says:—"The use of private Tokens for Money, which were stamped by inferior tradesmen, such as grocers, vintners, chandlers, ale-house keepers, &c, was at this time grown to such excess as to be the subject of frequent complaints. They were made of Lead, Tin, Latten, and even of Leather. Of these base materials were formed Farthings and Halfpence, to the great derogation of the princely honour and dignity, and at great loss to the poor, since they were only to be repaid to the same shop from whence they were first received."

The same author goes on to tell us that Queen Elizabeth, "for the ease of her subjects," on the withdrawal of the aforementioned base tokens from circulation, caused "Pledges or Tokens" to be made of "pure and fine copper," to pass current as halfpence and farthings. "And all persons were commanded to receive the same in all payments not exceeding twenty shillings—provided there should not be more than one Groat in value of such Pledges."

This would seem to have been the first issue of anything resembling a Copper Coinage, at least since Saxon times. After the Norman conquest the coins of smallest denomination had always been in silver. But later, in the reign of King James I., a renewal of the abuse referred to took place. On account of the continued scarcity of "small change," many private traders struck and issued farthing tokens in *lead*. Sir Robert Cotton computed that there were 3,000 in London alone, who "cast yearly Five Pounds apiece in leaden tokens." Therefore, the King, in 1613, granted letters patent to Lord Harrington (for a *consideration*, of course), to make a "competent quantity of Farthing Tokens of Copper," to circulate in place of the base leaden ones, which were prohibited. Ruding says they were circulated with great difficulty, and many refused to take them, notwithstanding they were "commended" by Royal proclamation.

This attempt to be rid of an old abuse gave rise to a new one. In order to get King James's new tokens into circulation, Lord Harrington had been enjoined to give 21 shillings of nominal value in tokens for 20 shillings in

sterling money. This, Ruding says, "did breed an inconvenience—because many for the gain of twelve Pence in twenty Shillings, would take the Tokens in great sums, and so with the same, and some money, pay handicraftsmen for their labour at the week's end." To meet this, a new proclamation was issued, ordering that the tokens should be freely exchanged backwards and forwards for their (nominal) equal value only, in silver money, and providing facilities for the same. This regulation would appear to have worked satisfactorily, for "in 1622," says Ruding, "a Proclamation was issued by the Lord Deputy and Council, at Dublin, in which was set forth the great advantage which his Majesty's English subjects had received from the use of them, and that his Majesty was pleased to establish the same in his Kingdom of Ireland," which had hitherto been exempt from the provision.

Charles I. continued the use of these farthing tokens, but returned to the practice of exchanging them in the ratio of 21s. for 20s. Consequently the abuse made its appearance again, and poor labourers were sometimes compelled to take their whole week's wages in farthings. It was therefore decreed that no one should pay above two pence in farthings to any other person at one time. The plentiful counterfeiting of such tokens, moreover, had helped to "breed an inconvenience," and the most stringent laws were passed against offenders. It was also ordered that the true tokens should be made with a small piece of brass in the centre, for better distinction. But during the confusion of the great civil war, matters seemed to have returned to their old unsatisfactory footing, and a "petition of the poor" was presented to the House of Commons in 1644, complaining that "there was no exchange for their farthings, to their great damage, even to their utter undoing."

Whether any measures were passed for relief does not clearly appear, but no further Government coinage of small money, for convenience of change, took place all through the Cromwellian period, and far into the reign of the second Charles. Gradually the practice revived of private traders issuing their own tokens, though it was contrary to law. "His Majesty, therefore," says Ruding, "commanded Half-pence and Farthings to be coined, which should contain as much Copper in *weight* as should be of their true intrinsick value respectively." These pieces were *ordered* to pass current; those of James I. having only been commended. It must not be supposed, however, that the coins of "intrinsick value" were as cumbrous as they would be now; for copper then bore a very much higher price. They were relatively cumbrous, because both public and private tokens were extremely insignificant in size.

Probably from the great profit attending such transactions, private traders still continued to issue tokens in defiance of the law. Several proclamations appeared prohibiting the practice, but without effect. In 1764 a last

determined effort was made to put it down by the prosecution of all such persons as should make or utter any Farthings, Halfpence, or Pieces of Brass, or other base metals, with private stamps. "From that time," says Ruding, "I have met with no further notice of these illegal Tokens."

This particular crop (so to speak) of private tokens—viz., those issued from the latter part of Charles the First's reign to the middle part of Charles the Second's—are what we have records of as belonging to the 17th century The Warwickshire Tokens of this period, treated hereinafter, extend in date from 1650 to 1671, but by far the greater part lie between 1665 and 1670. The dates of those *preserved* may not indicate exactly the relative numbers issued in each year, but they will form a criterion approximately correct. So also will the numbers preserved, as issued from each place, convey some idea of the relative importance of these places at the time. In the following list (p. 90) there are:—For Coventry, 45 tokens; Birmingham, 24; Warwick, 20; Alcester and Stratford on-Avon, each 15; Southam, 11; Tamworth, 2; Atherstone and Rugby, each 7; Kineton and Nuneaton, each 4; Brailes and Henley-in-Arden, each 3; Barford, Coleshill, Hemlingford Hundred, Kenilworth, Knowle, Pillerton, Shirley Street, Solihull, Tamworth, Tysoe, and Willington, each 2; and Coughton, Griff, Keresley, Lapworth, Merevale, and Meriden, each 1.

From these to the Warwickshire tokens of the 18th Century, there is a gap of more than 100 years. James II., in his troubled three years' reign, did nothing to meet the public want "for necessary chaing," except an abortive attempt to circulate a base Coinage in Ireland. Archbishop King says the metal of these coins was a "mixture of old guns, old broken bells, old copper, brass, and pewter," and valued at no more than three or four pence the pound weight." William III. redressed this among other grievances, and set himself to provide for his English subjects. *Tin* halfpence and farthings, with a piece of copper in the centre, were struck in great numbers in 1690-1, by the old device of granting patents to individuals for the purpose. Only two years after, Ruding tells us, "the number of half-pence and farthings, which were not worth above one-third part of their current value, were so increased by the avarice of the patentees, and so many of them counterfeited, that they were become an intolerable grievance, for little other money could be received, and that could not be put off again under two or three shillings in the pound loss."

A Committee of the House of Commons, in 1694, reported its opinion "that the Farthings and Halfpence to be made in future ought to be of English Metal, and of the intrinsic value, and to be coined by their Majesties *in the Mint*." This sensible resolution was not acted upon, though it was agreed to by the House; but a new patent was granted to Sir John Herne and others to "make Halfpence and Farthings of Copper," for seven years, at the rate