

# A HOARD OF ST NEOT'S 'LACE-MAKING' TOKENS FROM EYNESBURY

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AS a base-metal currency seventeenth-century tokens were not hoarded for their intrinsic value, and so are not normally found with silver coins.<sup>1</sup> Any hoards (strictly defined) will have been deposited in the period 1649–72, when the tokens could be expected to have future validity. Their contents naturally show a bias towards tokens of the district in which the hoard was put together; if this local bias extends to a contents purely from one issuer, we are brought very close to the original circumstances of emission. Eight hoards apparently of this nature have been noted previously (though others may be suspected), and they are listed below. None has been published completely, and the opportunity to make a proper record of such a hoard is therefore one not to be missed.

*Crowland* (Lincs.), 1744: 'vast quantities of Croyland farthings', which presumably means the Poor's Halfpenny of 1670 (BW<sup>2</sup> Lincs. 56), found in pulling down the wall of the abbey.<sup>3</sup>

?*Dorchester* (Oxon.), before 1900: fifteen undated tokens for William Brock and Robert Couldry (BW Oxon. 84) may have been a hoard.<sup>4</sup>

?*Haverhill* (Suffolk), before 1906: five specimens of John Boram's 1658 Haverhill token (BW Suffolk 147) must come from a hoard.<sup>5</sup>

*Horsham* (Sussex), 1826: 'a vast number' of Thomas Lucas's 1667 Horsham halfpenny (BW Sussex 104), found in restoring a house.<sup>6</sup>

*Pulborough* (Sussex), c.1880: 'a large amount' of John Allen's 1669 Pulborough halfpenny (BW Sussex 149), and 'the die in which they were struck', found in demolishing an old house.<sup>7</sup>

?*Redruth* (Cornwall), before 1889: 88 specimens of Anthony Cocke's 1666 Redruth tokens (BW Cornwall 69 and 70; Norweb 563 and 564), 'unused'.<sup>8</sup>

?*Tideswell* (Derbyshire), c.1949: sixteen specimens of a Tideswell halfpenny (BW Derbyshire 110/114), 'still in "EF" [Extremely Fine] condition'.<sup>9</sup>

?*Witham* (Essex), before 1936: 169 specimens of George Robinson's 1669 Witham token (BW Essex 351; Norweb 1429 and 1430), purchased in 1936 by the Colchester & Essex Museum.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One exception is the Spalding hoard of 1917, which contained 21 local tokens and a groat of Mary. T. W. Townsend, *Seventeenth-century Tradesmen's Tokens of Lincolnshire: the Issuers* (Lincoln, 1983), p. 58; I. D. Brown and Michael Dolley, *A Bibliography of Coin Hoards of Great Britain and Ireland 1500–1967* (London, 1971), ER5.

<sup>2</sup> George C. Williamson, *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century. . . ; a new and revised edition of William Boyne's work*, 2 vols. (London, 1889–91); cited as 'BW'.

<sup>3</sup> William Stukeley, *The Family Memoirs. . .*, [edited by W. C. Lukis], 3 vols (Durham, 1882–7), II, 307; quoted by Andrew White, *Seventeenth-century Lincolnshire Tradesmen and their Tokens* (Lincoln, 1980), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ashmolean Museum, *Catalogue of Oxfordshire Seventeenth-century Tokens*, edited by J. G. Milne (Oxford, 1935), p. 26, no. 86; Brown and Dolley, ER3 (but for '13' read '15').

<sup>5</sup> George C. Boon, *Welsh Tokens of the Seventeenth Century. . .* (Cardiff, 1973), p. 25, n. 40; *CH* 1 (1975), 398, as 'Unknown'.

<sup>6</sup> Williamson, p. 1174. He cites J. L. Warren, but the purported reference has not been identified; there is no mention of this hoard in James Lowe-Warren's monograph cited below.

<sup>7</sup> James Lowe-Warren, *Sussex Tokens issued during the XVIIth, XVIIIth & XIXth Centuries. . .* (London, 1888), p. 9; Brown and Dolley, ER12.

<sup>8</sup> Williamson, p. 106; Brown and Dolley, ER11; *SCBI* 31. *The Norweb Collection. . . : Tokens. . . : Part I. . .*, by R.H. Thompson (London, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Wetton, *Seventeenth-century Tradesmen's Tokens* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1969), p. 17; Brown and Dolley, ER10 ('Sheffield'). The hoard was purchased in Sheffield by Mr Wetton, but the identity of the tokens (since dispersed) is no longer remembered. Mr Peter Preston-Morley's experience of numbers of specimens passing through sale-rooms and dealers points to Edward Ashe's 1667 halfpenny (BW Derbyshire 110; Norweb 606).

<sup>10</sup> D. T-D. Clarke, pers. comm. 14 Aug. 1985; Brown and Dolley, ER13.

The new hoard was discovered in about June 1983 in the middle of a range of four (originally five) tenements, timber-framed and probably dating from the seventeenth century, which are now numbered 40, 42, 44 and 48 St Mary's Street, Eynesbury, St Neot's, Huntingdon, Cambs.<sup>11</sup> They were being renovated for occupation when, from the top of a beam at second-floor ceiling height and probably from within a foot, a number of tokens were brushed down. Some lay overlapping on the ground, and all apparently had been together on the beam, not in a cavity or container but stacked perhaps in one or two piles. Eleven pieces, believed to be the majority, were retrieved by the site supervisor, who is a member of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society; a twelfth specimen came back to him, having been cleaned up; three are known to have been picked up by workmen on the site, and others might have been swept up with the rubble. Of the strays two were acquired by Mr Jim Chapman of the St Neot's & District Artifacts Club, thanks to whom it is possible to include them here.

Fourteen tokens can thus be detailed. They are all halfpence issued by the Overseers of St Neot's, which is immediately adjacent to Eynesbury. St Neot's was (and is) a market town, and although overseers of the poor were officials of the parish, it is worthy of remark that their tokens refer to the TOWNE of St Neot's. No record of their ordering, circulation or withdrawal appears to survive;<sup>12</sup> consequently, the tokens themselves must be made to yield any information about their issue. On stylistic grounds they appear to date from 1664–66.

There are two types, one reading ST NEOTS, and the other ST EEDS. The place takes its name from St Neot, but the form *St Edes* is on record<sup>13</sup> from 1558 and 1648. Within each type the specimens in the hoard are all from the same dies; and both types use the same obverse die.<sup>14</sup> On this common obverse the letters T H E O S N and the lozenge stop (after THE) are the same as on the ST EEDS reverse, whereas different letters and pellet stops appear on the ST NEOTS reverse. The STEEDS reverse therefore came first, sunk from some of the same punches as the obverse and designed to pair with it. The types may be described in order as follows.

Type 1 (fig. 1); BW Hunts. 52; eight specimens, including one from Mr Chapman.

Obv. [mullet] THE-OVERSEERS-OF- around ...[THEIR|HALFE|PENY|...

Rev. [mullet] THE-TOWNE-OF-ST-EEDS around two female figures seated facing each other on chairs shown out of perspective, between them one lace-maker's pillow, and projecting from it several pins.

Weights in grams: 1.765, 1.570 (off-centre, 20mm), 1.544, 1.511, 1.494, 1.331 (off-centre, 21mm), 1.305 (off-centre, 22mm), 1.165 (concave, cleaned).

Metal and die-axis: yellow brass and 360° in all cases.

Type 2 (fig. 2); BW Hunts. 53; six specimens, including one from Mr Chapman.

Obv. as Type 1 (same die).

<sup>11</sup> They lie between the parish church and the site of another range of five tenements shown as Monument 4 on the plan in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Huntingdonshire* (London, 1926), p. 87; this site has been redeveloped.

<sup>12</sup> The Huntingdonshire Branch of the Cambridgeshire Record Office kindly reports that records of the St Neot's Overseers commence in 1673 only; and that the parish meeting book dating from 1655 contains no mention of the tokens.

<sup>13</sup> A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-names of Bedfordshire & Huntingdonshire* (Cambridge, 1926), p. 265; George Cornelius Gorham, *The History and Antiquities of Eynesbury and St Neot's*. . . (London, 1820), p. 202n.

<sup>14</sup> In 1820 Gorham (p. 144) knew of the ST EEDS type only,

his source being Thomas Snelling, *A View of the Copper Coin and Coinage of England*. . . (London, 1766), pl. ii.24. On p. clx of his 1824 *Supplement* (which was issued with an additional title page for binding the *History* in two volumes), Gorham corrected Snelling's 'two women spinning' (p. 14) to 'two women working at a lace-pillow'; and announced the discovery in 1823 of the ST NEOTS type, 'scarcely differing from the above (and yet clearly, by comparison, struck from another dye)'. By 1867 it had been realised that the obverses were from the same die, for the types were illustrated with a common obverse on a plate *St Neots Local Coins*, received at the British Museum in March of that year, and to be associated with Joseph Rix M.D., whose addenda to Gorham's *History* were received in August 1867. Williamson and Boyne merely referred to 'a variety', and the die-link does not appear to have been mentioned in print.

Rev. [mullet] THE TOWNE OF ST NEOTS around two female figures seated facing each other on chairs not obviously out of perspective, between them one lace-maker's pillow, without projecting pins.

Weights in grams: 1.770, 1.605, 1.523, 1.409, 1.303, 1.192.

Metal and die-axis: yellow brass and 90° in all cases.



FIGS. 1-3

The women in the central device are clearly sitting before a lace-maker's pillow of cylindrical type (Freeman, fig. 2.2), which was made of hessian or canvas stuffed firmly with straw, and was supported either on the lace-maker's lap, or on a *pillow horse* (of which there is no indication here). Around this was tightly pinned a parchment pattern, which the lace-maker had usually pricked out herself from a prototype owned by the lace buyer; and to fine brass pins at the head of the pattern a varying number of linen threads were attached, the other end weighted by bobbins on which the threads were wound, and of which the twisting and crossing produced the lace.<sup>15</sup> The problem with the device is the presence of two women apparently working on the same pillow, which is unprecedented. Wright described it as a 'peculiarity' of the St Neot's tokens; later writers have dismissed the representation as erroneous or ridiculous.<sup>16</sup> However, three explanations other than error may be considered. First, it seems possible though unlikely that the device is emblematic, with the women as much enlarged symmetrical supporters of the St Neot's substitute for arms. Second, the device might be a realistic representation in two dimensions of a three-dimensional scene, with two lace-women working on separate pillows placed one behind the other; when women worked lace together they chose to sit side by side, but they might not have had this choice in a workhouse.<sup>17</sup> Third, perhaps the likeliest explanation is that the device represents the teaching of lace-making to the children of the poor, for which there is ample testimony (see below).

The making of pillow lace, otherwise bobbin lace or bone-lace, introduced to England in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, was a considerable domestic industry throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the chief use for its product being the decoration of clothing, both for fashionable wear and, it can now be seen, as a luxury for the new

<sup>15</sup> Charles Freeman, *Pillow Lace in the East Midlands* (Luton, 1958), pp. 22-32.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Wright [of Olney], *The Romance of the Lace Pillow: being the History of Lace-making*. . . , second edition (Olney, 1924), p. 57; T. L. Huetson, *Lace and Bobbins: a History and Collector's Guide*, second edition (Newton

Abbot, 1983), p. 68; Jeffery Hopewell, *Pillow Lace and Bobbins* (Aylesbury, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> The Huntingdon Record Office again kindly reports that a workhouse existed in St Neot's by 1730, when a payment of rent for it appears in the Churchwardens' Accounts.



consumers. It appears originally to have constituted an alternative to unemployment for women and girls in particular, so that Thomas Fuller had found many children making lace who 'otherwise would be burdensome to the parish'. Once it had shown its value as a suitable occupation for the poor, it began to occupy a high place amongst the industries to be developed in parish workhouses. As early as 1596 the overseers of Eaton Socon (Beds.), across the Ouse from St Neot's, resolved to pay Goodwife Clarke for teaching the poor children to work bone-lace; and in Sir William Borlase's Marlow workhouse of 1628 twenty-four 'women children' were to be taught to make bone-lace.<sup>18</sup>

The counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire were one of the two main districts where the pillow lace industry developed (the other being Honiton). St Neot's was at the eastern edge of this district, but whether for its own output, or as an entrepôt for the lands beyond the Ouse, it was active in this industry. For example, in 1615 a Lincolnshire chapman bought two separate lots of lace from St Neot's men to sell at Stourbridge Fair; and William Wilson of Boston, chapman, on his death in 1666 owed £7 for lace to Nathaniel White of 'St Needs'.<sup>19</sup> This Nathaniel White may have been a lace buyer, like the token issuers John Rennals and Peter Reynoldes of Buckingham, James Brierly of Olney, and nine others in Buckinghamshire.<sup>20</sup>

The weights of the tokens in the hoard may appear to be irregular, equally so for both types; yet the weights of Gloucester farthings also range widely, even though a certain weight was specified.<sup>21</sup> The standard evidently lay not in the weight per piece, but in the number of pieces to be struck from a quantity of metal such as a pound. Placing the metric weights against units of grains, as used in the seventeenth century, it is possible to construct the following histogram (fig. 4); the number of specimens being too low to produce a

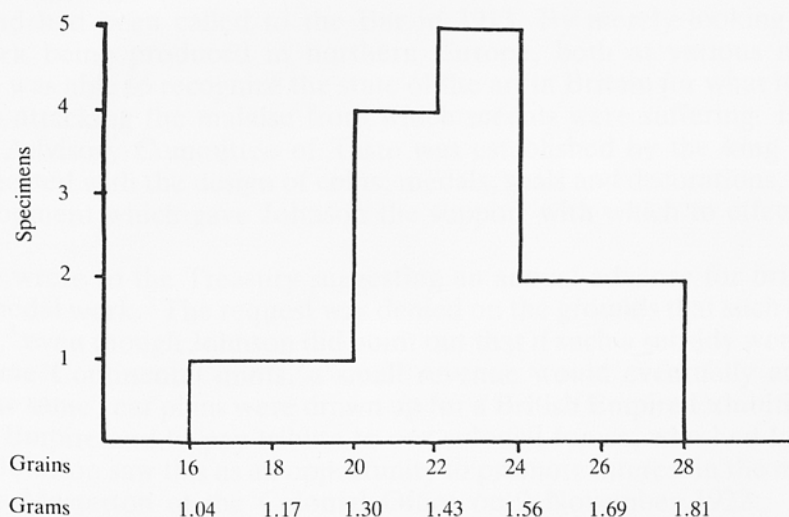


FIG. 4 Weight distribution of the tokens.

<sup>18</sup> Freeman, pp. 9–20; G. F. R. Spenceley, 'The origins of the English pillow lace industry', *Agricultural History Review* 21 (1973), 81–93; Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: the Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 65–6.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1984), pp. 98–9, 233–4.

<sup>20</sup> George Berry, 'Buckinghamshire lace-buyers and their tokens', *Coins and Medals* 18 no. 10 (Oct. 1981), 20–22; but note that both the John Rennals and the Peter Reynoldes tokens bear a strip of lace, not a roll of lace. The Huntingdon Record Office has found Nath. White paying tax on one hearth in St Neot's in 1666.

<sup>21</sup> R. H. Thompson, 'Gloucester Farthings, 1657–1662', *BNJ* 45 (1975) 77–91 and pl. vii, especially p. 90.

definite peak, another weight to hand, that of the only representative in the Norweb Collection (1.432g), has been included. From this it is clear that the halfpence were struck to a standard. It is less certain where that standard lay between, say, 22 and 24 grains, but on the analogy of another seventeenth-century base-metal series where specifications are known and a number of specimens have been weighed, the nominal weight is likely to lie slightly above the peak.<sup>22</sup> It looks as though a St Neot's halfpenny may nominally have weighed 24 grains; so that, if Troy weight were employed, the specification for the Overseers' 'lace-making' tokens would have been 240 pieces or 120 pence per pound.

In other respects production of the tokens was not regular. While they are consistent in metal and die-axis, type 1 in particular has some decidedly rough features. The flan diameter varies from 20mm (two specimens) through 21mm (four) to 22mm (two), one of these last being on a cracked flan. Across the range of sizes there are specimens struck off-centre (e.g. fig. 3). Type 2 is off-centre in only one case, and has a regular diameter of 21mm. Study of this hoard does, however, permit a general conclusion about seventeenth-century tokens at or near the point of release into circulation. Given that they were normally produced in London, it evidently has to be accepted that London production could include flans of varying diameter, cracked flans, and pieces struck off-centre. Such characteristics cannot be considered as necessarily diagnostic of subsequent local striking.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Michael Dolley, 'The weight-standard of the later seventeenth-century copper halfpenny Irish', *NCirc* 79 (1971), 198–200.

<sup>23</sup> See R. H. Thompson, 'Central versus local production

of seventeenth-century tokens', forthcoming. We must end by expressing our gratitude to Mr Mike Bonser, who not only made contact between us but also took the photographs and weighed the hoard.