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A GROUP OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY TRADE TOKENS IN MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

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An interesting assembly of seventeenth-century trade tokens makes up part of the numismatic collections at Maidstone Museum. They are a compelling group which prompted examination and recording. Not least by virtue of their diverse nature. The following paper goes some way towards shedding some light on the assembly.

It has not been possible to determine quite how this group came to be established. The facts, however, are that the repository in which they were lodged within the Maidstone Museum strong-room is clearly marked 'Hoard' and an enquiry has revealed that these are remembered by a previous curator of the collections as being discovered in Maidstone in a period between the wars (1918–1939). Confirmation has not been realisable from any documentary source. Nevertheless, the condition and make up of this group tends to reflect that of a hoard.

The group consists of ninety-three pieces, seventy-two of which include a reference to the issuer making a living as a grocer. Other businesses featured include weaving and innkeeping. Where given, the issuer's business is expressed either in the wording of the legend, or by the inclusion of the arms of the guild to which the issuer belonged, or both. For the grocers the arms of the Worshipful Company of Grocers of London is incorporated. The Grocer's Arms are described by Bromley, *The armorial bearings of the guilds of London*, 1960, 130, as:

- On a shield a chevron between nine cloves –

Notwithstanding these features the group is made up of tokens issued by at least 15 individuals. Eighty-four of the pieces were issued from businesses conducted in Maidstone. The remainder were issued from a variety of other towns. One is identified as a Scottish 2 pence issued by Charles I. Two unidentified pieces are not speculated upon.

The source of the few issues from towns other than Maidstone furthers the interest of the group. The details are that one derives from Chatham, a token issued from the Globe Inn. Three others are one each from

Harrietsham, West Malling and Sutton Valence. Two were issued from Essex. The Scottish two pence (The Turner or Bodle) is intriguing. James I began the issue of these Scottish copper coins in the late sixteenth century, and they continued to be issued through subsequent reigns until William III. They had a face value of two pence in Scotland but are known to have circulated as farthings in the north of England.

Speculating on the group as a whole, if it were set down at a time contemporary with the end of the use of the trade tokens, around 1672, then these could be part of the surviving stock of one of the named issuers, perhaps James Ruse since his tokens are the most abundant.

If this speculative theory could be shown to be true, the incorporation of the distinctive pieces, the Charles I two pence, the Essex pieces and the tokens from other Kent towns, could be argued as going some way to providing evidence for the range of acceptance of these pieces. It could equally be seen as evidence of the uneducated nature of the user, advancing the argument that the issuer relied on the recognisable shield arms to communicate the business and ownership of the piece.

A full inventory of the group is set out below.

Issuer	Town/County of Issue	Business/Arms	Qty
Robert Heath	Maidstone/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	5
John Hoad	Maidstone/Kent	Not stated/None	2
James Ruse	Maidstone/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	35
Richard Walker	Maidstone/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	10
Elizabeth Webb	Maidstone/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	1
William Web	Maidstone/Kent	Mercer/Grocers'	2
Stephen Weeks	Maidstone/Kent	Weaver/Weavers'	13
Richard Wicking	Maidstone/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	16
Francis Chambers	W. Malling/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	1
At the Globe	Chatham/Kent	Innkeeper/None	1
Robert Hovenden	Harrietsham/Kent	Grocer/Grocers'	1
At the King's Head	Sutton Valence/Kent	Innkeeper/None	1
Thomas Atbrooke	Brentwood/Essex	Not stated/None	1
Robert Purcas	Coggershall/Essex	Grocer/Grocers'	1
Charles I	Scottish 2d. 1632-1639 (a Turner or Bodle)		1
Unidentified			2

From the condition of the tokens it is evident that these pieces had circulated. Condition varies in terms of wear from poor to about very fine. Notwithstanding the wear pattern, the condition of the pieces is inferior due to the formation of verdigris on a majority of the specimens. Were the condition of the tokens better, or if improved by 'cleaning', then the number of the single issuers in the group, and other available examples, may be useful in determining information on die variations. This information could be helpful in estimating the size of such issues.

What the group does support is the perceived acceptance of the rarity of the individual issues. Taking the Maidstone content of the collection alone, experience has shown that the James Ruse, Steven Weeks and Richard Wicking issues are very commonplace, whilst the Elizabeth Webb and William Web pieces are issues of relative scarcity, and this is reflected in the make up of this group.

It is interesting to note the difference in the spelling of the surname Webb/Web. It is probable that these two issuers were related, yet the tokens reveal a spelling difference. Such variation is a common feature to be found in parish registers of the seventeenth century; it would not be unusual to find such a deviation in the name of father and daughter on a marriage consent record.

Token issuers of the seventeenth century were often prominent in parish affairs and something of the lives and duties conducted for the town of Maidstone by a number of the above issuers is laid out below.

Robert Heath issued an undated farthing token. He was Mayor of Maidstone in 1653, and Chamberlain in 1655.

John Hoad issued his farthing token dated 1657; he used a windmill as the device on the token which may indicate that he made his living as a miller.

James Ruse issued an undated farthing token. In the records of the Canterbury Marriage Licences is the following:

'James Ruse of Maidstone linendraper ba[tchelor] about 25 and Elizabeth Dabbs Maiden about 20 d[aughter] of William Dabbs s.[ame] p.[arish] cordwainer who consents at same March 1st 1621.'

In the 1664 Hearth Tax assessments Ruse paid the tax on a house with eight hearths.

Ruse was Mayor of Maidstone in 1648 and again in 1658, he was Chamberlain in the years 1640, 1641, and 1660.

Evidence exists to show that Ruse officiated as assessor of will inventories on at least two occasions. That of Amy Carkaridge (widow) PRC 27/18/40. He was also assessor for the will inventory of the token issuer Thomas Bond of Maidstone (grocer) PRC 27/19/68. On this occasion his co-assessor was Richard Wicking whose undated token issue features in the group here described. The sum total of Bond's goods was assessed at £624 02s. 10d., a substantial sum for the time. No mention is made in

the inventory of any tokens, yet Bond died in 1667 just one year after his farthing token issue dated 1666. It is intriguing to note that in spite of the short span of time during which Bond used his tokens they are not excessively rare. This may indicate that his issue was quite large in the first instance. It is possible that his tokens were used by another trader in the town.

Richard Walker issued a farthing token dated 1658. He acted as Chamberlain for the town of Maidstone in the years 1674 and 1675. His Hearth Tax assessment of 1664 was on a house with six hearths.

Elizabeth Webb paid the 1664 Hearth Tax on a house with five hearths.

This group of trade tokens has an inherent appeal, albeit a lack of documentary evidence, which has necessitated a degree of speculation as to their assembly as a group. It has also been necessary to speculate on other matters which are inferred by this group. In spite of this their existence as a body has prompted this discourse and the chance to forward something of the diverse numismatic perspective of seventeenth-century England.

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