By the term obsidional money of Charles I. we mean the money of necessity, or "siege pieces," issued by the beleaguered authorities during the various sieges of the reign, when supplies of the regal currency were cut off. This make-shift money bore but slight resemblance to the latter, for it was roughly made from gold and silver plate, or bullion, in various shapes and sizes bearing merely a device, or inscription, to guarantee its intrinsic value in circulation. The device usually assumed a crude representation of the castle, or gate house of the town, and the inscription generally named the place of issue and the value of the piece.

Such issues in England have been attributed to the sieges of

Carlisle
Colchester
Newark
Pontefract
Scarborough
Beeston Castle
Lathom House

It has often occurred to me, and I am sure it must have occurred to many who have studied the history of the times, that siege pieces, as money of necessity, could only have been required for circulation within a populated district, and therefore that their issue necessarily implied that the town, as well as the castle responsible for it, was
within the defended lines. Such money was required for purposes of barter and traffic with the merchants and traders within the town, and that is why its purity was always maintained and its intrinsic value certified upon it. The suggestion that it was ever coined within isolated fortresses for the payment of garrisons, shut off from the outside world and its magnetic attractions for disbursement, may be brushed aside, for if anything more was required by a soldier from his own chief than a mere certificate or voucher for his pay, the gold or silver weighed out to him in specie would have been just as useful and acceptable to him as a handful of these discs of metal, which at the most were only legal tender within the confined space of the beleaguered lines—in his case the bare walls of the fortress itself. Hence all the expense and trouble of the preparation of the dies, of the cutting and weighing of the metal, and of the striking and issuing of the money would have been a means without an end, for at the beginning it was pieces of plate, and at the end it remained but pieces of plate.

We will now consider shortly the attribution of the coins with these suggestions in mind. For their full story I would refer to Dr. Nelson's most interesting treatise on "The Obsidional Money of the Great Rebellion" from which I have ventured to select my illustrations and much of my information. It is unfortunate for my purpose that the blocks for the Scarborough issues, and some of the others, were only lent to the Society for illustration of his paper in the second volume of this Journal, and, therefore, as will be noticed later, I am obliged to refer to them there.

The following is a brief summary of the siege pieces as at present attributed, and the conditions under which they were issued:

Carlisle.—The city was besieged from October, 1644, to June, 1645, and the coins bear its name.

Summary of the Siege Pieces.

Colchester.—The town was beleaguered from June to August, 1648, and its name occurs on some of the money.

Newark.—The town and castle were included in successive sieges in 1645 and 1646, and all the coins bear the name of Newark stamped upon them.

Pontefract.—Both town and castle shared the siege of six months, which ended on March the 22nd, 1649, and the coins are identified by the initials, P.C., of the castle.

1 This design is still familiar to us in the "Pontefract-" or "Pomfret-cakes" of liquorice, but probably in both cases it was adopted from the corporate seal.
Scarborough.—The siege of 1644–5 enclosed both town and castle, and on some of the coins the name Scarborough is engraved.

Beeston Castle.—An isolated castle on a hill in Cheshire defended for the King during 1644 and 1645, to which is attributed a large series of coins bearing a device believed to represent the gate-house, but neither name nor initial.

Lathom House.—A great domestic fortress in Lancashire, then of mediaeval date, deeply moated and defended by walls two yards thick surrounding a central tower and flanked by towers at the angles, the scene of the famous defence by the Countess of Derby from February the 28th to May the 27th, 1644, and again, by the Earl's Constable from July to December the 6th, 1645.¹ No very definite reason for the attribution of money to Lathom has been offered and neither name nor initial is in evidence.

Of the above list of seven besieged fortresses, five, namely, Carlisle, Colchester, Newark, Pontefract, and Scarborough, included the towns, and in every instance the coins are identified by the names, or initials, of the towns or castles being stamped upon them.

¹ I am indebted to Miss H. Farquhar for this date, gleaned from another Diary of the siege.
The remaining two, Beeston Castle and Lathom House, were isolated fortresses and in neither case was there any attempt at name or initial upon the coins attributed to it. This fact alone gives pause to thought, but a little direct evidence is worth much theory.

During the Jacobite Rising of 1745-6 a series of tracts and memoirs of the Carolean Civil Wars relating to Lancashire and Yorkshire were reprinted and dedicated to the “Gentlemen Tradesmen and Others” of these two counties, and amongst them are the Memoirs of James, Earl of Derby, including “A true and genuine account of the famous and memorable siege of Lathom House.” The latter is a most graphic diary of the siege and there is a ring about it not unfamiliar to our ears to-day, as for instance—

In about five weeks the enemy finished their new line, and they run a deep trench near to the mote, and there raised a very strong battery, whereon they placed a large mortar piece (sent them from London) from which they cast about fifty stones of fifteen inches diameter into the house; as also grenadoes of the same size, alias bomb-shells, the first of which falling near the place where the Lady and her children with all the commanders were seated at dinner, shivered all the room but hurt no body.

Presently we are told that a sally was made by the garrison and—

They assaulted the enemy’s trenches with so much bravery that, after an hour’s sharp dispute, they made themselves masters of all their works, nailed up and overturned all their cannon, and those they found upon carriages they rolled into the mote, and brought the mortar piece into the house; and continued masters of the enemy’s works and trenches all that day.

And so the siege continued intermittently for nearly two years.
But the passage in the memoirs which immediately concerns us is this—

There was amongst the soldiers [of the garrison] about £50 in money, but of no use at all to them but to play at span counter with; they lent it to one another by handfuls, never telling or counting any. One day one soldier had all, and the next another, till at last all their sport was spoiled, the enemy at the gate stripped them of every penny, and turned them out to the wide world. When the house was given up, there were but 209 foot soldiers in it; and of all their horses but five left alive, the rest being all eaten up.

Span counter, also called farthing counter, was a game not unlike the old shovel board for which the crown and half-crown pieces of Edward VI. and Elizabeth were so popular as Shakespeare tells us, and like it was played upon the long oak tables so characteristic of the furniture of the day. The coins were thrown from one end of the table at a mark near the other end, and the throwers of the pieces within a span of the mark—whence the name—divided the rest of the spoil. Shakespeare refers to it in "Henry VI.,” where we read—

Tell the King that for his father’s sake, Henry V., in whose time boys went to span counter for French crowns, I am content he shall reign.

If my readers agree with me that the foregoing quotation leaves no room for doubt that the attribution of the coins to Lathom and Beeston is no longer tenable, the question remains—to what place must they now be assigned?

The series hitherto credited to Beeston is considerable and comprises silver pieces stamped with eleven different values, according to weight, varying from sixpence to two shillings. In general design, namely a fortification, with the value stamped below, struck upon a piece of silver roughly trimmed to an irregular square or parallelogram, it closely corresponds with the Scarborough issues. Another feature common to both series is that whereas at other places the money either
conforms in value with the regal issues or represents multiples of the shilling or its fractions the sixpence and ninepence, the so-called Beeston money and the Scarborough issues were cut first, then weighed, and their value stamped upon them according to the haphazard result of the scales. Nothing of the kind occurs elsewhere in England. Dr. Nelson, in his paper, records the following varied denominations, here tabulated for comparison—

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It will be noticed that read together the two columns suggest a single rather than a dual issue, for except in the regal denominations of the two-shillings, shilling, and sixpence, there is no duplication save the sole exception of the 1s. 3d. which, like the Newark and Colchester ninepences, is fractional of the regal issues.

There is, however, far stronger evidence of the identity of the two series, namely:—

A peculiarity of the “Beeston” issues is that the Roman numeral “1” is always dotted. To dot the numeral is most unusual, and the only other instance known to me occurs on the Scarborough pieces. Compare our Figs. 4, 5, and 6 of “Beeston” with Dr. Nelson’s Fig. 24 of Scarborough, vol. ii of this Journal, p. 310.

The numeral and its dot at “Beeston” were cut on the same punch, as evidenced by the fact that on our Figs. 4 and
6 the dot has been stamped over the lower portions of the letters S and D respectively, thus breaking their lines. We notice exactly the same evidence on the Scarborough shilling, Dr. Nelson, Fig. 24.

The same numeral at "Beeston" is always trifurcated at the top—a very remarkable ornament for the period, and especially for obsidional money. The numeral on the Scarborough shilling, Dr. Nelson, Fig. 24, has the same elaboration.

On the "Beeston" coins the letter "S," for "Shilling," is of curious form, terminating in a fork, or fish-tail. It is inverted on our Fig. 4, and on Dr. Nelson’s Figs. 9 and 11, but correct in other cases. The same form of the letter "S" occurs on the Scarborough shillings, Dr. Nelson, Fig. 23, etc.

The punch used for the letter "D," for "Pence," at "Beeston" seems to me to have been the same iron used at Scarborough. The comparison is best shown by Dr. Nelson’s Figs. 13 of "Beeston" and 20 of Scarborough. Also the letter "S" on both series is so nearly identical that I think it discloses the work of the same hand.

These many coincidences can have but one meaning, namely, that the "Beeston" siege pieces must be transferred to Scarborough to fill up most of the gaps in the already multifold denominations of that town’s series.

The money tentatively attributed to Lathom, see Dr. Nelson’s Fig. 35, is of too indefinite a character for me to offer any serious suggestion, save that in shape, workmanship and design it is of Inchquinn character. I think that it is certainly Irish.