

“SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TOKENS OF
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.”

A NOTE ON LAMPORT OR LANGPORT.

BY HENRY SYMONDS, F.S.A.

IN the *British Numismatic Journal*, volume vii, page 282, and volume x, pages 319 and 323, Mr. William C. Wells, who is usually most careful, has described and assigned to the country parish of Lamport, Northamptonshire, certain tokens issued by John Browning, No. 57, and by John Weech, Nos. 58, 59, 59a and 59b.

I purpose to comment upon the claim put forward on behalf of the Midland county, and to offer some evidence which goes a long way, if not all the way, towards proving that Browning and Weech were in point of fact natives of the borough of Langport in Somersetshire. It will be convenient first to consider the respective place-names, secondly the reasons for the attribution, and lastly the reasons for preferring the Somerset town to the Northampton village.

As regards the name “Lamport,” it is sufficiently clear that this form of pronunciation and spelling was common to both places in the seventeenth century. I also find the west-country Langport written as Lamport in the records of the Plantagenet kings, and in the accounts relating to the suppression of Somerset chantries by Edward VI. A fragment of evidence is also derivable from the Commonwealth navy. The 50-gun ship *Langport*—similar to but smaller than the contemporary vessel *Naseby*—is described as the *Lampoort* on a drawing by

Van de Velde in the Boymans museum at Rotterdam.¹ Indeed, it is not at all impossible that a visitor to King's Sedgmoor who asked for the Langport road would hear the name spoken to-day in the style of three centuries ago.

I will now turn to such evidence as exists in favour of an attribution of these two tokens to the Northamptonshire parish. Mr. Wells frankly admits that the names of the issuers do not appear in the registers. This fact would seem to suggest caution to the author of a *catalogue raisonné* and to render desirable a search in other directions for proof of residence in the locality. Unfortunately the registers of Langport, Somerset, do not exist for so early a date, and therefore no inference whatever can be drawn from that source, but the inference from the books at Lamport, Northamptonshire, is obviously negative in character unless it can be rebutted by affirmative testimony from other documents. Mr. Wells does not produce any such testimony, and I am able to confirm his silence on that point by the result of my own investigations, which show, at present, that the surnames Browning and Weech were unknown in this part of Northamptonshire. That being so, the Northamptonshire case appears to rest solely upon the circumstance that William Boyne thought the tokens belonged to Lamport, and that the Editor of the second edition of Boyne's work was content to repeat the names in the old list without further enquiry. It is probable, of course, that neither Boyne, nor the Sub-Editor of the Northamptonshire section in 1891, was aware that Lamport was a vernacular form of Langport.

So much by way of criticism. I will in conclusion try to show good cause why John Browning and John Weech should be restored to their Somersetshire home, as I contend, whether the same be called Langport or Lamport. In default of any aid from the parish registers, the entries in which do not begin until about 1715, I will cite a few extracts from the Public Records and the municipal archives, as proof that two families bearing the respective patronymics appearing on the tokens were associated for a long period with the old town which overlooks the moors of mid-Somerset.

¹ *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. iv, parts 4 and 5.

The following names are those of Langport taxpayers at various dates, and the first figures represent the amounts of the assessments, the second the amounts which were received by the Exchequer¹—

39 Elizabeth, 1596–97.	
Thomas Weetche <i>in bonis</i> £3.....8 ^s .	
Thomas Browning „ £3.....8 ^s .	
13 Charles II., 1661–62.	
John Weech <i>in bonis</i> £3.....16 ^s .	
15 Charles II., 1663–64.	
John Weech <i>in bonis</i> £3.....16 ^s .	

When James I. granted a charter of incorporation to Langport in 1617 the name of Richard Browning was included in the first list of capital burgesses. In the year 1651 litigation had arisen concerning the two bridges over the river Parrett, and among the witnesses was John Weech, the elder, of Langport Estover, tailor, then aged 50 years or thereabouts.² In 1678 John Weech was portreeve, that is, bailiff or chief magistrate. In 1699 William Browning filled the same office, being succeeded in 1710 by Joseph Browning.

Among the signatories of the Association Oath roll in 1696 were John Michell, William Browning and John Bush.³ The first named of these burgesses was portreeve in 1667, when his initials were placed upon the town-piece of that year. William Browning was probably a son of John, the issuer of the token. The last named of the three men who swore fidelity to William III. had a strange career. John Bush had been vicar of Langport until 1662 when he was dispossessed under the Act of Uniformity. He married Mary Alsop, the daughter of a mercer in the town, and his token presumably denotes that he carried on a similar trade after his withdrawal from the vicarage.

An excellent history of *Langport and its church* was published in 1911 by the present vicar, the Rev. D. M. Ross, in which the families

¹ Lay subsidy rolls 171/322, 172/423, 172/426.

² Exch. Sp. Coms. 1651, Easter, Somerset 7.

³ Petty Bag Office, 233.

of Browning and Weech are frequently mentioned among the townsmen of the seventeenth century, and I am indebted to Mr. Ross's kind help for the following additional notes derived from Langport church books, other than the parish register.

Churchwardens' accounts, 1581 and 1618—

 Paid to John Browning for tylyng, xi^s viii^d.

 To Richard Browninge for 2 sacks of lime, ii^s.

Inventory of church goods—

 Received of John Browning and Willm Glover old wardins
 in the year of our Lord 162-.¹

In a rough and tattered note book of Christenings, communicants and excommunicated persons—

 1619. Nov. 4. John Hollway weddo (widower) and Jone
 d. of Wallter Browne.

 1619. Sept. 6. Wyllyam the sonne of John Browne.

I notice that Dr. Williamson's edition of *Boyne*, 1891, includes, in the Somerset section of that work, the token of John Weech, No. 177, a fact which might well have prompted some enquiries at Langport before the item was attributed for the third time to a Northamptonshire parish.

The wills or administration bonds of these two issuers are not in the Probate Court at Taunton, although both of the surnames occur in the calendar at various dates. It is probable that they will be found at the city of Wells, the probate records of which I have not yet searched with this end in view.

¹ The last numeral is illegible.



CROKER'S MEDALLION OF ANNE, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

DIAMETER, SIX INCHES AND SEVEN-EIGHTHS.