A MYTHICAL SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
TOKEN OF CARDIFF

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Shortly before his death the late J. G. Milne contributed to this Journal an article on some seventeenth-century tokens which, while not listed in Williamson's second edition of William Boyne's catalogue, were included in the cabinets of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.¹

Milne pointed out in his paper that the nucleus of the university collection of seventeenth-century tokens had been formed by an eighteenth-century antiquary, Browne Willis of Christ Church, whose collection of English coins in 1716 was said by Thomas Hearne, the mentor of Oxford numismatists in the early part of that century, to have been the finest he had ever seen. Elsewhere Milne tells us that one of Browne Willis's early captures was an Oxford pattern crown of Charles I—probably the finest specimen known today—which he bought for 12s. 6d. from an old lady who had kept it ever since it was struck.² This, however, is by the way. Browne Willis's importance here is that in addition to his token collection he left at his death in 1760 a miscellany of numismatic notes at present catalogued by the Ashmolean Museum as Willis MS. 63 and contemporaneously described as 'Loose papers of our English coins bound up together as pickt up from & among my papers in this Book'.³ One of these papers comprises a note communicated by Francis Wise, at that time Sub-Librarian of the Bodleian, instancing a number of trade tokens that had apparently been shown to him. Among these tokens is a penny supposedly of Cardiff which had been shown to Wise by Mr. Richard Langford and was described in the following terms:

H
James Hughes in Cardiff 1668
I
J³

This particular token did not find its way into the Browne Willis cabinet but his failure to secure Langford's coin did not dampen Willis's already awakened ardour to seek a Cardiff issue.

³ Browne Willis MS. 63, originally in the Bodleian Library, was transferred to the Ashmolean in 1921.
In 1741 he presented his tokens to the university but Willis's numismatic interest was by no means diminished. Some time afterwards he recorded on page 112 of MS. 63 those Welsh tokens which he had already obtained and those he was still seeking.

All counties in England got Town and Traders Tokens of which are given to the University of Oxford. But in Wales only these few as yet procured so any Additional ones will be gladly purchased not one of Cardigan or merioneth shire of any place met with & in Pembrokeshire only a poor one of Haverford West & in Radnorshire only one of Prestegne.

- Co: Brecknock Hay & Brecknock
- Co: Glamorgan Swansey & Cowbridge
- Co: Carmarthen Carmarthen & Kidwelly

In North Wales

- Beaumaurice & Holy Head Co: Anglesey
- Conway & Bangor Co: Carnarvon
- Denbigh & Wrexham Co: Denbigh
- Caerwys & Northop Co: Flint
- Llanwillyn & Welshpool Co: Montgomery

- Co: Monmouth wanting Uske Newport Pontypool (much desired?)
- Chepstow Caerlen Monmouth & Abergavenny already got
- To apply to the Revd Mr. Harris Prebendary of Llandaff at Llandaff near Caerdiff South Wales
- Caerdiff Pembroke Nethe Radnor Knighton Crickhowell much wanted and desired.

Willis's proposed approach to the Prebendary of Llandaff, if ever it was made, proved to be of little avail as far as a Cardiff token was concerned. Willis, in fact, never succeeded in adding one to his collection. Langford's piece as described is quite unknown today and indeed the evidence of MS. 63 is all there is to support its very existence.

The original 1858 edition of Boyne, however, does include a Cardiff token (Boyne: Wales—7) similar in all respects, with the exception of its date, 1669, to the Browne Willis coin. Boyne though also lists under Cardiff a second coin (Boyne: Wales—8 and plate 37. 5), differenced from its partner in that the town name is spelt CAROVSE instead of CARDIFF. It is perhaps significant that the accompanying plate illustrates only the CAROVSE piece and in 1891 Williamson and his collaborators, unconvinced that it ever existed, removed the CARDIFF counterpart from the second edition of Boyne.

In their second edition the original attribution of the CAROVSE token was also called into question and with some reason it was given to Caerwys, a small town in Flintshire (Williamson’s Boyne: Wales—13). Caerwys is pronounced ‘CAROOSE’ and there is little doubt that CAROVSE is an English phonetical spelling of the town name, such phonetical spellings being, of course, by no means uncommon on seventeenth-century tokens.

Two specimens of the Caerwys (CAROVSE) token are known today in public collections —the Browne Willis token in the Ashmolean Museum and a second coin in the National Museum of Wales presented to that institution by Mr. L. S. R. Jones of Tonypandy. Both are dated 1669 as is Boyne’s—although one might presume that this last is none other than that from the Ashmolean.

The attribution of a token to Cardiff so exactly similar to that of Caerwys even to the extent of the initial of the trader’s wife goes beyond the bounds of coincidence and

1 According to Thomas Snelling in the Preface to his *View of the Copper Coin and Coinage of England*, 1766, ‘The first person that appears to have made a collection of these tokens, was the late Brown Willis, Esq., which is now in the Bodleian library at Oxford, and is the completest that has come under our notice’.
2 This is illegible.
3 See Fig. 1.
cannot be maintained with any degree of confidence whatsoever. Quite properly one might suggest that what Langford possessed was in reality a badly worn Caerwys coin, probably so worn that its date as well as town name was misread.

In conclusion, one further point might perhaps not be thought to be out of place: the mythical Cardiff token is a penny. While this denomination is common in north Wales—in Caerwys itself a surgeon, Thomas Wynne, also issued penny tokens in 1668 and 1669—it is quite unknown in the counties of south and mid-Wales.

My notes on seventeenth-century Welsh trade tokens, from which the foregoing is taken, were originally compiled some ten years ago and my thanks are due to Mr. Anthony Thompson who first drew my attention to the Browne Willis manuscripts and who very kindly transcribed p. 112 for me recently to check against an earlier transcription of my own.