THE TOKENS OF THOMAS HOLLOWAY

By R. C. BELL

Obverse:—The bust of Thomas Holloway facing left, with J. Moore on the truncation. Legend:—
Professor Holloway London.

Reverse:—Hygeia with flowing hair seated between two pedestals and facing right, with her right foot
resting on a stool. The pedestal on the left is surmounted by an orb and that on the right by a flame. A
serpent is climbing up this pedestal and drinking out of a cup held in Hygeia’s left hand. On the ground
at the right are the diesinker’s initials, J.M. Legend:—Holloway’s Pills and Ointment’ with 1857 in
the exergue.

Edge:—Plain.

A similar halfpenny-sized piece was issued the same year and the pair, illustrated above,
were reissued in 1858 with the new date in the exergue. (Samuel Nos. 298, 299, 302, 303 and
Atkins Nos. 347, 348, 349, 350.)

The diesinker, J. Moore of Birmingham, was a skilled craftsman of whom Timmins in
his Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District, London, 1866, p. 565, wrote:—‘Mr.
Joseph Moore of Summer-lane, is at the head of his profession; and as an artist and medallist
is hardly surpassed by the best of his predecessors, either in power of design or spirit and
skill of execution.’

These pieces have been regarded by some as medals, but they bear the name of the issuer,
are dated, and were used as currency in London; though the majority were sent to Australia
where they are regarded as having formed part of the early currency of the colony. They
were noted in Stainfield’s Catalogue of Australian Tokens, and also by Atkins in his Coins
and Tokens of the Possessions and Colonies of the British Empire, 1889, p. 381 under Miscel-
naneous. He noted that one of the penny pieces in his collection was countermarked Thomas
agent Geelong.

The proprietor of these pieces, Thomas Holloway, was born in 1800 in Devonport, the
son of a baker. The family moved soon afterwards to Cornwall and Thomas went to school
in Camborne and then in Penzance, where his widowed mother and his brother ran a grocer’s
shop. In 1828 Thomas went to London to seek his fortune and spent some years in France
before setting up in London as a merchant and agent. He bought the patent of a herb oint-
ment from an Italian and persuaded the senior surgeon of the Middlesex Hospital to use it
and to recommend its virtues. In 1837 Holloway advertised it extensively, but the cost of
newspaper space exceeded his profits and he was confined to Whitecross Street prison for
debt. On release he paid his creditors in full with an additional 10% for their trouble.
In 1840 he married Jane Driver, the daughter of a Rotherhithe shipwright, and started making laxative pills, mainly of castor oil and ginger. He and his wife worked from four in the morning till ten at night; Holloway himself taking his pills down to the docks to sell them to emigrants as a remedy against constipation on the long voyages in sailing ships. The pair lived very frugally over their shop, eventually moving to New Oxford Street. He advertised extensively in many languages; in 1842 the bill was £5,000, but by the end of his life it had risen to £50,000 per year.

Several shrewd speculations prospered and by 1870 he was the owner of valuable estates in Surrey and was able to finance two large philanthropic projects; the first a Sanatorium for insane patients from the professional classes. Thomas and his brother-in-law, Martin-Holloway, visited many mental hospitals in England and America, seeking ideas. In the new institution each patient had a room of his own and the public rooms were large, light and well furnished; concepts for the treatment of mental illness a hundred years ahead of the then current practice.

Holloway sponsored an architectural competition for the building, the winning designs being supplied by William Henry Crossland and John Philpot Jones, the latter dying soon afterwards; Crossland bore the main burden of supervising its construction (1871–85). In all Thomas Holloway gave some £300,000 towards the Holloway Sanatorium, Virginia Water. Before it was finished he had turned to a greater project as a memorial to his wife. In those days women had little chance of entering a University and Thomas proposed to build a College for Women at Egham, Surrey. He employed Crossland as his architect and sent him to study the French château of Chambord which served as a prototype for the Royal Holloway College, though the latter was much larger, formed of a double quadrangle 500 feet from east to west and 350 feet from north to south. The longer blocks contained sitting rooms and bedrooms for each of the 350 students and each group of six students shared a common room. Few alterations have been made to the interior furnishings of the college, and the elaborate interdenominational chapel is a late Victorian masterpiece, with its gilded ironwork, ivory-coloured reliefs on the sculptured ceilings, hanging lamps, painted walls and carved stalls of dark wood. Such was Holloway’s trust in his architect that he only made four visits during the four and a half years that Crossland spent on the site. The building was of red brick and Portland stone, with numerous sculptures by Fucigna.

Holloway spent over £32,000 for the college picture gallery, collecting works by such artists as Frith, Landseer, Millais and Copley Fielding; all of whom after a period of neglect are beginning to be appreciated for their true worth. In all this kindly and far-sighted man gave more than a million pounds to charity, gifts which have increased twenty fold in the intervening years. He died in 1883 and lies buried beneath a classic tomb of red granite in Sunninghill churchyard, but when his stone has crumbled the features of this Victorian individualist will remain on his tokens and his true greatness survive in generations of educated women.

REFERENCES

ATKINS, J. Coins and Tokens of the Possessions and Colonies of the British Empire. 1889.
SAMUEL, R. T. Tokens of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Bazaar Exchange and Mart, January 9 1889.
While this article was in the press Mr. W. Slayter kindly lent the writer a copy of the *New Zealand Numismatic Journal*, Vol. II, No. 39, Feb. 1964; containing the excellent article ‘Holloway’s Currency Tokens’ by L. Gluckman. Holloway’s pills contained:—Aloes 36·15%, Powdered ginger 36·15%, Powdered Jalap 12%, Cambogia 12%, and Hard soap 3·7%. They were sugar coated. Aloes, jalap and cambogia are purgatives; ginger causes eructation and relieves spasm of the bowel. The ointment was more complex and contained Lanoline, liquid paraffin, terebinth, yellow beeswax, cetaceum, oil of theobromine, amylmetacresol, rectified oleum picis and phenol. It was sold in pots bearing a portrait of Hygeia holding a child, and leaning against a pillar bearing the motto ‘Never Despair’.

An advertisement of June 10, 1857, proclaimed Holloway’s Pills as the best known remedy in the world for about 35 different diseases from Acne to Weakness from whatever cause.

Such glowing praise carried its own warning. It may be said in the self-styled Professor’s defence that if the pills did little good, they did little harm; which is unfortunately not true of all medicines; c.f. Ching’s Worm Lozenges, Dalton and Hamer, Middlesex 282; Bell, p. 45–6. The recent Thalidomide disaster underlines the possible harmful side reactions of even ethical preparations.

REFERENCES
