John Boxer and the Nineteenth-Century Silver Tokens of Kent

R. H. Thompson

In the standard catalogues by Davis¹ and Dalton² the only token of the early nineteenth century allocated to the county of Kent is a silver shilling naming John Boxer, Folkestone. The main purpose of this paper is to attribute to Kent two pieces from the main series of currency tokens of the second decade of that century, and to examine the position of a local token issuer; it does not seek to assemble all the nineteenth-century tickets, checks, or whatever which belong to Kent. At all stages of preparation it has benefited from the close attention and friendly criticism of Mr. John Brand, who has also lent tokens for illustrating and recording (JDB), and has consulted on my behalf the Curator of the Maidstone Museum, Mr. L. R. A. Grove, whose assistance also I acknowledge with gratitude.³

It will, however, be convenient to begin with a new silver token that came to light in the Cokayne sale of 1946, the catalogue of which may be rather inaccessible.⁴ The present whereabouts of the piece does not seem to be known, but fortunately Messrs. Glendining illustrated it in collotype, and through the courtesy of Mr. French it is possible to reproduce it here (Fig. 1).⁵ The dies may be described as follows, distinguished for present purposes by letter or number:

**Obv. A:** INVICTA (the motto of Kent) below a horse rampant within a shield (the ancient arms of Kent).

**Rev. 1:** KENT / TOKEN / VALUE / 12 PENCE / within wreath.

---

³ A version of the following was read at the National Numismatic Congress held in Margate in April 1972, and ably reported in *Coins*, vol. 9 (no. 7), July 1972, pp. 33–4, by its retiring editor, Miss Heather Salter.
⁴ Glendining & Co. Ltd., *Catalogue of the important sale of Tokens formed by the late Francis Cokayne, Esq., 1st portion . . . 17th July 1946 and following day*, lot 231, plate X; cf. *BNJ* xxv (II) 1947, p. 239.
⁵ For the illustrations I am indebted to the expert photography of Mr. Ray Gardner of the Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum.
That the authenticity of the piece was not in doubt is indicated by the price paid, £16. 10s. Its rarity, however, suggests that there was never a substantial production of this type which was brought to the point of issue. The details of the Kent token that has long been known (Davis 1, Dalton 1) are these:

**Obv. B:** JOHN BOXER FOLKESTONE / 1811 / CINQ-PORT-TOKEN on a scroll below the arms of the Cinque Ports, crowned.

**Rev. 2:** ONE / SHILLING / VALUE / within wreath. **Edge:** Obliquely grained.

**Weight:** BM, ex Frampton, 3·94 g. (60·8 gr.), ex Sarah Sophia Banks, 4·27 g. (65·9 gr.); JDB, 4·25 g. (65·6 gr.); RHT, 4·45 g. (68·6 gr.); DVG, 60 and 65 gr.

**Die-axis:** In these six cases, upright.

Reverses of the nineteenth-century tokens are often unremarkable. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that cataloguers have paid more attention to the obverse when allocating tokens to counties, and that it has not apparently been remarked before that a token placed in Dorset (Davis 12-13, Dalton 15-16, in silver and brass respectively) is from the same reverse die as Boxer's Cinque Port token (see Fig. 2). Distinctive features which leave the identity in no doubt are the disproportionately large E and G, the v punched in too low, and the stroke at the foot of the u. The coin may be described as follows:

**Obv. C:** COMMERCIAL TOKEN I-B-X-R / 1811 / bust to left.

**Rev. 2:** as above. **Edge:** Obliquely grained.

**Weight:** RHT (in silver), 4·60 g. (71 gr.); DGV (in silver), 68 and 73 gr.

**Die-axis:** BM (in brass), RHT, DGV (in silver), upright; JDB (in brass), inverted.

On the specimens seen, cracks near the bottom of the wreath on the reverse die occur with obverse C in silver only, and suggest the order of striking B2, C2 in brass, C2 in silver.
This die-link, however, is only one amongst many (see Fig. 3). On Dalton Dorset 17 (Davis —), which was also present in the Cokayne sale, obverse C is combined with:

*Die E:* *ENGLAND*-*IRELAND*-*SCOTLAND* & *WALES.* / LET COMMERCE FLOURISH / figure seated to right.

which also occurs on a Middlesex token (Davis 14–15, Dalton 15–16, in silver and copper respectively) with:

*Die 4:* LONDON TOKEN / ONE / SHILLING / PAYABLE / AT / S. LLOYD’S / BUCKLERSBURY / 1811

Furthermore, Davis Dorset 12 and 13, said to bear a ‘naval’ bust, are from the same die C as Davis Dorset 11 (Dalton 14), on which the bust is described as ‘military’—although Davis does, inconsistently, query whether the ‘military’ bust might be Nelson’s. This latter piece combines obverse C with:

*Die F:* DORSETSHIRE WILTSHIRE: & SHAFTESBURY / BANK TOKEN / arms of Shaftesbury.

which further pairs with this Dorset die (Davis 10, Dalton 13):

*Die 5:* FOR THE ACCOMMODATION OF THE PUBLIC / ONE / SHILLING / AT / SHAFTESBURY / OR S’ LLOYDS / BUCKLERSBURY / LONDON / 1811

There is a tendency to regard such complexes of linked dies as thoroughly bad, and every coin as damned by the mere fact of die-linking. The probability, however, is that any fraud was practised in the factory where a number of genuine issues were struck—the factory in this case, if Davis is right to attribute his Kent 1, Dorset 10–11, and Middlesex 14–15 to Thomas Halliday, being presumably either (Sir) Edward Thomason’s premises in Birmingham, or Halliday’s own. Indeed, both Davis (p. 71) and Waters

have found independent evidence of the existence of an S. Lloyd at the right place and
time (though not of his connection with the Shaftesbury Bank), and the latter is surely
correct to consider genuine issues Dalton Dorset 13 (Davis 10; F5) and Middlesex 15
(Davis 14; E4).

Die F, with the arms, one would prefer to consider an obverse, die 5 therefore, and by
analogy die 4, reverses, and therefore die E another obverse. In consequence, the coins
CE and CF look suspiciously like obverse mules. Both, in any case, are very rare; and
they are finally condemned by the fact that they are known only in brass. They were
not genuine issues, therefore, but artificial productions, struck perhaps as trial pieces,
perhaps as pièces de plaisir. In the same category may be placed C2 in brass, E4 in
copper, and the uniface striking of obverse C in brass (Dalton Dorset 18).

Once CE and CF are seen to be concoctions, obverse C with the bust of Nelson (?) has
no real connection with Dorset. Instead it should be associated with obverse B through
their common reverse. When this is done, the 'cabbalistic' letters I.B.X.R, which Waters
could not explain (p. 4), are readily interpreted as the name J. Boxer reduced to its
consonants (a common enough device). The pseudonymity of the die may, it is true, give
cause for concern, especially in view of the contemporary fabrication of tokens by muling
dies of different issues, and the production of fraudulent tokens with altered names to
undermine genuine issues. Yet obverse C has no separate reverse with which it was struck
in silver, and would therefore appear to have been sunk purposely to pair with reverse 2;
and it is not only die-linked but also connected by its legend with obverse B, which
nevertheless it does not imitate. On balance—given a John Boxer in Folkestone at the
appropriate time, and of this evidence will appear—one concludes that C2 was a genuine
issue. Why Boxer should have ordered at about the same time an explicit Cinque Port
token and a pseudonymous Commercial token is difficult to understand; one can
think of possible explanations, but in the present state of knowledge they can only be
speculative.

A potential difficulty in so attributing C2 is the sixpence classified by Davis as Not
Local 9, by Dalton as Not Local 14 (Fig. 4). This also bears a rather crude bust
(Wellington ?), part of the same obverse legend, and initials which could likewise stand

1 Pace Peter A. Clayton on p. 42 of his 'Henry Morgan, Token Manufacturer of Rathbone Place', in
Cunobelin, no. 13, 1967, pp. 36-45, plate IV.
2 The two brass specimens seen show no signs of
having been silvered.
3 The profile seems to be that of 'Nosey', and he
would fit well with Nelson (who does appear a likely
identification of the bust on obverse C). Although it
is hardly essential to show that he was honoured in
any specific locality, it is not irrelevant to note also
that Wellington was (briefly) M.P. for Rye in 1806,
and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports from 1829.
for John Boxer, further abbreviated for the smaller size. It may formally be described thus:

**Obv. D:** COMMERCIAL-TOKEN / bust right.¹

**Rev. 3:** SIXPENCE / 1811 between two branches of olive (?) / I B in swash capitals divided by a rose and shamrock intertwined. Edge: Obliquely grained.

**Weight:** JDB, 2-17 g. (33-5 gr.); RHT, 1-90, 2-02, and 2-27 g. (29-3, 31-2, 35 gr.).

**Die-axis:** JDB, RHT (2), DGV, upright; CAJ (now BM), RHT (1), 20°.

This sixpence and the shilling C2 might very well seem companion pieces; and so, indeed, they were originally catalogued by Boyne, under the heading ‘Without Names’ (244, 245).² Unfortunately, he added the note ‘of inferior workmanship; probably they were issued in Ireland’. Davis transferred the shilling to Dorset (though he made Boyne comment still on two previous tokens), but on the sixpence he added to Boyne’s surmise the suggestion that the initials might stand for the Irish Bullion Company, whose cipher appears on certain Dublin tokens (Davis and Dalton 4-7). In 1968 it was reiterated that D3 was ‘probably Irish’,³ and by 1970 this had hardened into the assertion that its locality was ‘almost certainly Dublin’.⁴

The types, however, bear no resemblance to those of the Irish Bullion Company, and the initials are not I B Co but I B. If it bears a shamrock, it likewise bears a rose, and could have been described with equal justification, for all its typological evidence, as ‘probably English’. Had the piece circulated in Ireland, one could expect that some specimens, and some knowledge of the fact, would have been retained in that island; yet the essentially nineteenth-century collection of the Royal Irish Academy contained no specimen,⁵ and Aquilla Smith (1806-90), writing only forty years after the silver tokens were outlawed, did not include it among the Irish tokens.⁶ If the shamrock, inferior workmanship, and the I B constitute the sum of the evidence for an Irish attribution (and no more has been offered), it is patently insufficient.

The correct attribution of the sixpence D3 is apparent from the provenance of a specimen, the obverse of which is illustrated in Fig. 4. It was found in Folkestone itself, some years before 1971, and sold to Mr. C. A. Jennings (the energetic organizer of the Margate Congress) ‘together with a number of inconsequential pieces of Geo. III etc., by a demolition worker in the Foord Road area’ (Foord Road being a continuation of Grace Hill, which was formerly called Rendezvous Street). It is pierced, the piercing having broken through to the edge and so perhaps occasioned its loss, but there is no reason why this should affect its value as evidence of locality; if anything the contrary, for such a piece is less likely to have been brought into Folkestone by (or for) a collector.

¹ Between T and o, o and K, K and E, appear small, irregularly shaped pellets, two of which have been read as stops. Clearly, however, intrusive, they are perhaps to be connected with the signs that the O of TOKEN was punched over an I.

² William Boyne, The Silver Tokens of Great Britain and Ireland, the Dependencies and Colonies . . ., 1866. The British Museum specimen of C2 in brass remains in the Non-Local section of the trays.


It was on seeing the note in Seaby's *British Tokens and their Values* that it occurred to Mr. Jennings that the letters IB might stand for John Boxer, and he brought his evidence to the 1971 National Numismatic Congress in Birmingham. It is commendable that he has since permitted his important find-specimen to be presented to the British Museum (where there was no example).

With the Irish attribution set aside, and with the find in Folkestone, one must conclude that the Commercial sixpence, so far from being a difficulty in the attribution of the Commercial shilling, should accompany it into Kent. Both are genuine issues of John Boxer of Folkestone; for, as already indicated, there is ample evidence of the existence of a man of that name. Indeed, the evidence is so suggestive for the character of a token issuer that it will be given at some length.¹

There was more than one tradesman in Folkestone around the turn of the century who bore the name John Boxer, the *Universal British Directory* of 1798 recording a butcher and a haberdasher. Neither, however, appears subsequently,² unless one was the John Boxer appointed postmaster on his marriage in 1803 to Mrs. Elizabeth Toes, the then postmistress.³ This man does not appear to have been active later than March 1810, when the appointment of George Stone as postmaster was cancelled after an anonymous letter had drawn attention to a trial and conviction of the latter in 1798.⁴ This leaves one obvious candidate for the token issuer of 1811.

John Boxer, son of Michael and Ann, was baptized on 29 August 1779. His father, probably the Michael Boxer admitted a freeman by birthright in 1778, and buried in December 1810,⁵ was a watchmaker, and the son followed the same trade. On 3 August 1803 John Boxer aged 24, watchmaker, of St. Martin in the Fields, Middlesex, married in Folkestone Ann Sandford aged 23, of the same town;⁶ and a year later John Boxer, watchmaker, of Long Acre, London, the son of Michael Boxer, was sworn a freeman of Folkestone.⁷ From February 1805 the name occurs in the Poor Rate books at Butcher, or Butchery, Row, and there he remained for nearly half a century, the Row being incorporated into Rendezvous Street in the eighteen-thirties.⁸

Throughout his life the token issuer described himself as watch (or watch and clock) maker, though the state of the trade was evidently not sufficient to keep his energies fully

---

¹ Except for the books on horology, the directories by Pigot and Bagshaw, and the *New Guide* of [1848?], the following six paragraphs derive from a visit to the Folkestone Reference Library, where Mr. C. P. Davies readily made available to me the file of information on the Boxers that he has gathered over the years, the volumes of photocopied extracts from a full set of directories covering Folkestone, and even an incidental reference in a cutting relating to another subject. He has been happy for me to publish the information, and the token-issuer is consequently much better documented than otherwise I could have hoped. I am very grateful to Mr. Davies.

² W. Finch, *An Historical Sketch of the County of Kent . . . with a Directory, 1803; the Maritime Imperial Guide* [c. 1807].

³ Postmaster-General, *Minutes*, vol. 22, no. 214D; I am indebted to Post Office Records for permission to use this information. The postmaster of 1803–10 is more likely to have been the haberdasher than the butcher, particularly since Richard Toes had been a linen-draper. (The postmaster appointed in 1842 was also a draper.) The senior John Boxer was, however, a watchmaker, according to a letter from Post Office Records to the Borough Librarian of Folkestone on 14 February 1966, but not according to the accompanying extracts to which it refers; in 1972 Post Office Records was unable to throw any light on this discrepancy.

⁴ Postmaster-General, *Minutes*, vol. 25, no. 405G.

⁵ Folkestone, *Common Assembly Minute Book*, 23 Nov. 1778 (p. 38); and extracts from the registers collected in the Boxer file.


⁷ *Common Assembly Minute Book*, 28 Aug. 1804 (p. 190).

⁸ Alternative descriptions were Church Street, Church Hill Street, and 'near the Market'.

---
employed. By 1790, if not earlier, complete movements could be ordered from 'garret-masters' in London, Birmingham,\(^1\) and elsewhere, the local maker fitting the dial and the case, etc.; and in the course of the nineteenth century the 'maker' became no more than a repairer and a dealer in timepieces which might nevertheless bear his name.\(^2\) Long-case clocks signed by Boxer (but apparently no watches) do indeed survive, one with Jn° Boxer Folkstone [sic] on the dial being actually in the Folkestone Reference Library. He may have been more than a dealer and repairer, however. Michael Boxer is numbered among the true craftsmen,\(^3\) and John was presumably in Long Acre to serve his apprenticeship. A former school-fellow of his son remembered 'Mr. John Boxer, the well-known “grand-father” clock maker ... we were in the habit of surreptitiously trying our hands at the lathe in Mr. Boxer's workshop'.\(^4\) He probably did not make his own dial-plate, springs, wheels, etc., but may have been a finisher: one who 'finishes or puts together the different constituent parts of a clock when made, and who has his profit from the sale of the machine'.\(^5\)

The profits, however, apparently did not satisfy him. On 26 March 1810, after the cancellation of George Stone's appointment, 'John Boxer, Junior, Watchmaker' was appointed postmaster 'in the place of Mr. Boxer'.\(^6\) For thirty-two years he remained postmaster, a job that was not undemanding, for the mail was dispatched to Hythe and Romney, and arrived from London, at half-past seven in the morning, and returned from Hythe and Romney, and was dispatched to London, at half-past six in the evening.\(^7\) By 1832 the coaches had lengthened the post office day to seven in the morning and half-past eight at night.\(^8\) Eventually, however, in spite of all his potential sources of income, Boxer got into difficulties, and in 1842 he was dismissed as postmaster for being in arrears.\(^9\) The time was twice extended for him to repay his debt, which he finally discharged in 1844.\(^10\)

Boxer's activities were far from exhausted by the post office. He is listed in directories not only as watchmaker 'fancy repository',\(^11\) but also as agent for the Norwich Fire & Life Office,\(^12\) as stationer (and preserved in the Boxer file in the Folkestone Reference Library is an 1832 receipt for stationery, signed 'J Boxer'), subscription reading rooms, etc.,\(^13\) as auctioneer and appraiser, and stamp distributor.\(^14\) His wife, moreover, may have been the Ann Boxer listed as a confectioner.\(^15\) In 1823 'Boxer, Folkestone' was one of the three publishers of The Sandgate, Hythe and Folkestone Guide ... to which is subjoined a brief history of the Cinque-Ports. On p. 108 of that work the penalty of his bond was £400. What the relationship was between the two John Boxers has not been ascertained.

1. It will be remembered that the tokens give a probable connection with Birmingham. A London connection has already appeared.
4. ‘An Old Folkestoner', letter in unidentified newspaper, 11 Oct. 1896, a cutting of which is kept in the Folkestone Reference Library under 'Folkestone Miscellanea'.
5. Abraham Rees, Cyclopaedia, or a New Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, 1802–20, s.v. 'Clockmaker'.
6. Postmasters' appointments and bonds, 1787–1849;
(and of the 1816 Hythe, Sandgate and Folkstone Guide) ‘the other [library], on a smaller scale, at the corner of Rendezvous-street’ may have been Boxer’s, which was afterwards described more fully: ‘The Library and Reading Rooms are conducted by Mr. Boxer; and although the library department is not a very diffuse one, yet it is, probably, adequate to the demand. The morning, evening, and provincial papers are here to be met with; likewise various articles of utility and fancy’.

After the withdrawal of the postmastership, however, this Folkestone factotum was reduced for a few years to describing himself merely as watch and clock maker; and one suspects it was in some desperation that in his old age he added ‘house and general agent’, and ‘auctioneer’. Indeed, Folkestone as a whole did not flourish in the first half of the century: ‘It had, in 1811, upwards of 500 houses, and a population of about 4,000 souls, which number has scarcely at all increased to the present time [after 1829]; probably from the commerce of the town being at a very low ebb.’ Boxer’s spring was at last unwound at the age of 73, his interment in the parish churchyard being registered on 13 August 1852. He is not known to have had any memorial, nor to have left a will. At some stage he might have remarried, for his wife is recorded in the 1851 census as Ann Susan Boxer aged 60—or was she so modest about her age as to understate it by ten years?

Waters (p. 6) designated Boxer’s Cinque Port shilling a ‘genuine trader’s token’ and noted only that his name occurred as a watchmaker (‘W. Boxer’ being a misprint). Although it is possible to point to other watchmakers who issued silver tokens, there are indications that several were not issuers by virtue of their watchmaking, and it certainly does not strike one as a trade that would itself generate a pressing need for small change. Its significance would appear rather that it was, for craftsmen who had served an apprenticeship, a depressed trade, undermined by the batch production of its ‘dishonourable’ branch. One may see Boxer as a skilled tradesman, driven by economic pressures into other lines of business in order to maintain an independent livelihood.

His remittance activities were surely of much greater significance than his trade in respect of his issuing of tokens. As postmaster, and subsequently as stamp distributor, and insurance agent, Boxer was a collector of moneys, which would have made him a source of small change at least, and in some respects the local banker. There were indeed other silver tokens put forth by postmasters, from stamp offices, and by insurance agents. Furthermore, with the post office (and later the stamp office) he was one of the leading figures of the district. The latter would involve him in a variety of legal, financial, and commercial transactions, and with the former he received and dispatched letters


3 Williams’s South-Eastern Coast Directory, 1849.


5 A New Guide to Sandgate, Folkstone [sic], Hythe, &c . . ., [1848?], p. 60.

6 Davis, Dorset 2; Dorset 4–7 (also a silversmith); Hampshire 27; Norfolk 6 (with a shoemaker cum grocer cum draper); Yorkshire 55, countermark 49; Yorkshire 57–74 (also goldsmiths/jewellers).

7 Cf. L. S. Pressnell, Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution, 1956, on the origins of country bankers: revenue collection (pp. 56–74); insurance (pp. 55–6).

8 Davis, Cornwall 8–9 (postmaster); Durham 1–2, see Waters, p. 4 (insurance agents, stamp office); Lincolnshire 11, see Waters, p. 7 (insurance agent); Norfolk 8–11 (stamp office); Nottinghamshire 1 (postmaster); Suffolk 7 (stamp office).
over a wide area, specified in 1832 as London via Dover, and Brighton, Bromley, ‘Cranbrooke’, Hastings, Hythe, Lamberhurst, Lewes, Romney, Rye, ‘Seven Oaks’, Tenterden, and ‘Tonbridge Wells’. It will be noticed that four of the Cinque Ports are served, and also the associated Ancient Town of Rye. One may readily see John Boxer, therefore, as the sort of person to whom others would look, or who might take it upon himself, to meet a widespread dearth in the Cinque Ports, or of commerce more generally.

It is suggestive also that he fulfilled at least three functions—post office, stamp office, and library—which afterwards were taken over by full-time officials of central or local government. At the same time it is true that on the grounds of cui bono, he must be under suspicion as the sender of the anonymous letter of 1810—although this might not be to the writer’s discredit were the crime known of which George Stone was convicted—and the considerations of personal advantage that may have led him to that act may have prompted his token issue also. The evidence is insufficient to decide whether Boxer was a man who would have seized upon token-issuing as an opportunity to profit from public want, the abuses of which compelled government to step in, or whether he was one who was more sensitive and responsive than government to local needs, and whose initiative and practical measures among others’ shamed it into carrying out its duty.

In conclusion, the early nineteenth-century tokens of Kent may be set out as they now stand if the arguments of this paper are accepted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Davis</th>
<th>Dalton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>AR County shilling</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Folkestone: Boxer, John (1779–1852), watchmaker, postmaster, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>AR Cinque Port shilling 1811</td>
<td>Kent 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>AR Commercial shilling 1811</td>
<td>Dorset 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>AR Commercial sixpence 1811</td>
<td>Not local 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ADDENDA**

1. Mr. D. G. Vorley of Sandgate, Folkestone, has kindly supplied details of specimens in his collection. It is possible to insert them all at their appropriate positions (DGV), except the weight of his sixpence, D3, which is 34 gr.

2. At just about the time that Boxer must have been dismissed, the following ‘observations well worthy of public attention respecting the causes which have assisted to produce so much irregularity and fraud’ appeared in The Kentish Observer, 7 April 1842, under the heading ‘The Salaries of Postmasters and their Clerks’: ‘although the Post-office is generally acknowledged to be a department of great trust and temptation, . . . the [annual] salaries of 552 . . . postmasters only average £49 10s. each, although they have to provide their own offices, and to defray all the expenses incidental thereto’.

1 Pigot, 1832-3-4.
2 An inheritance of money just at the appropriate time from his father and perhaps from John Boxer senior might have been a factor in enabling him to finance the striking of tokens.