EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ULSTER TOKENS

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IN the past there was a tendency to homogenise the numismatic history of the British Isles, disregarding the regional differences which can now be seen to distinguish each economic area from the other. Increasingly historians find such differentiation a source of active stimulation. Few subjects illustrate the benefits of a regional approach more clearly than token coinage. In the seventeenth century many of the tokens issued in Ireland were like their English contemporaries, made by the same manufacturers, using the same devices, but closer examination reveals differences as well as similarities. The usual denomination outside Dublin is a penny. Few issuers give a specific trade, preferring the simple, and not very helpful title, of 'marchant'. Even in urban areas, again excluding Dublin, most of these men can have had only a peripheral interest in shop or inn keeping, and the issue of tokens can be seen as being at one with ceaseless activity in an undeveloped economy, searching to raise and use limited capital. In the north of Ireland the tokens seem to have mixed with Scots and French pieces, and hence existed in a currency of petty coinage perhaps rather different from that of England, Scotland or other parts of Ireland. The reason for such diversity must be sought in peculiar economic and social circumstances, and its existence perhaps direct us to a re-examination of the reasons why tokens were produced at all, and to emphasise that their function cannot have been uniform across the British Isles and its disparate economies.

The seventeenth century, however, is not the subject of this paper. Here the object of study is that series of Irish tokens issued in the first half of the eighteenth century, which have received remarkably little attention. They form a discrete series, perhaps more easy to recognise than to define concisely. At present about twenty-nine different issues are known, the dates being 1734 (3), 1735 (5), 1736 (14), 1760 (2), 1741 (1), 1761 (1). Several are undated. The Maculla pieces of 1728-31 are excluded. It is hoped the reasons will become self-evident, but at this stage it is perhaps sufficient to observe that the date is earlier, the module larger, and the value lower than the Ulster tokens. Maculla's coins seem to be clearly and directly related to the controversy over Wood's halfpence, and to follow Swift's theories about the necessity of copper coinage with a low ratio between face value and intrinsic worth, even though they did not meet with the irascible Dean's approval.

With one exception the tokens which do concern us come from five of the nine counties in the province of Ulster, with a heavy concentration in Armagh, Antrim and Down. Twenty give their value as twopence, six as threepence. A single example may have been valued initially at a halfpenny, and then raised to a penny.

There is no similar token issue elsewhere in the British Isles, with the possible exception of the Scottish bracteates, which if not in themselves sui generis, are at least later in date and hence may have been inspired by, rather than influencing, the Ulster coins. The other possible comparison which springs to mind is with the coppers issued by Dr Higley of Connecticut in 1737-39, which may be another instance of the neglected numismatic links and similarities between Ireland and the British colonies of America. In spite, or possibly because of, their

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idiosyncracy, remarkably little has been written about the Ulster tokens. It will be argued below that much of what has appeared was based on fallacy and provides little enlightenment. Even James Simon, though ideally placed as a Dublin merchant publishing in 1749, one would think, offers relatively little. He lists only five of the twenty places of issue and promotes confusion by discussing them under the marginal year 1727, saying that ‘several persons in the North, and other parts of the Kingdom’ were responsible, and follows this scant mention by going on to Maculla’s tokens.1 Snelling, in his Supplement, was able to add to this, although bringing in the Scottish piece of John Gray and the Ballycastle coaling token as interlopers.2 Ruding further mystifies by placing the Ulster tokens under 1728 and saying that Maculla was inspired by their success to make his own.3 Subsequent lack of interest and considered analysis may be attributed to the scarcity of both coins and available evidence relating to them. Another cause worth consideration might be the preponderance of late eighteenth century tokens, avidly collected and studied since their issue. These arose out of circumstances entirely different from those of half a century before. At the end of the eighteenth century there was clearly both a growing need and shortage of petty coinage, combined with changes in technology and economic function. These later coins, moreover, may be said to define the concept ‘token’ for most people. To put it another way, all previous and subsequent tokens have tended to be examined in the light shed by their study. Interestingly, none of the series were issued in the north of Ireland and none of the early nineteenth century pieces in Belfast. Davis,4 whilst providing an excellent listing of the relevant pieces, was a victim of this confusion; in spite of printing a portrait of Aquilla Smith as a frontispiece to the appropriate section, he does not seem to have absorbed any of the wisdom the worthy Doctor promulgated in 1868.5

Historians seem to accept as a truism that there are many similarities between colonial north America and Ireland, particularly Ulster, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These may be summed up by stating that both were effectively colonies, established in similar form at roughly the same date, on the economic fringes, suffering more by prohibitions on competition than gaining by their connections with England. This is well illustrated by the respective coinages. Shortage of specie was endemic in both places, with more-than-tacit toleration of foreign coin and other expedients, most of which proved inadequate. Although there was a nominal Irish pound, from the reign of Charles II it was only given physical representation by a copper coinage. Halfpennies were issued in 1680–82, 1686–86, 1692–94 and 1696. These seem to have circulated at least until the end of the eighteenth century and are usually found in very worn condition. The rate of exchange from 1701 was a nominal thirteen Irish pence to the English shilling, a rate which survived until the amalgamation of the coinages in 1825, a date which might be regarded as surprisingly long after the Union of 1801. The effectiveness of both a fixed and floating rate of exchange can only be guessed at, but balance-of-trade pressures seem to be reflected by a deterioration in the quality of the circulating medium. This latter can be seen at its extreme in the shillings worn to perfect smoothness, followed by specially manufactured billon simulacra, speciously validated by spurious hallmarks, current in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. If shortage of coin was bad in England, it was sure to be worse in Ireland. The disastrous inflation which afflicted America can at times only have been avoided by a whisker. The over-valuing of gold against silver, although present in England, was magnified and led to further difficulties.

1 J. Simon, An Essay towards an Historical Account of Irish Coins... (Dublin, 1749), p. 3.
2 T. Snelling, Supplement to Mr. Simon’s Essay on Irish Coins, (Dublin, 1810), p. 7 and second additional plate.
4 W.J. Davis, The Nineteenth Century Token Coinage of Great Britain, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, in which are added tokens of over one penny of any period (London, 1904).
5 A. Smith, ‘On the Copper Tokens Issued in Ireland from 1728 to 1761’, Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, X (1868–69), 417–34.
Ireland’s first coinage of the eighteenth century was that produced by William Wood in 1722–24. The scandal of the contract aroused a storm of protest, all the more notorious because of the elegant articulation given it by Jonathan Swift. At this remove it is hard to judge just to what extent Swift is reflecting either popular or mercantile opinion, rather than exercising his own unique mixture of political animus and misanthropy. Many of the economic arguments match his political views of whiggish corruption and the need for more local manufacture. It may be that today we tend not to discount the routine vehemence of eighteenth century political invective, and suspicions are aroused unnecessarily. Whatever the case, Wood’s coinage rarely appears with an Irish provenance, the bulk having been exported to the more tolerant, or desperate, Americans. Regal coinage resumed in 1736, with halfpennies minted bearing every date up to 1755, bar two. Farthings appeared in 1737, 1738 and 1744. Mintage figures are known, with over 4 million halfpennies being made the first year, and these coins remain common. It might even be argued that Ireland was rather better served than England during this period. The George II halfpennies circulated heavily until well into the nineteenth century.

There is an obvious gap between 1724, the last date on Wood’s coins, and the time when the regal copper dated 1736 went into circulation. In Dublin this may have been partially filled by the penny of 1729 and halfpennies dated 1728–31, issued by James Maculla with a stated intrinsic value. Swift’s rejection of them was prompted by a view of the suitable profit from coinage and was probably unmatched by anyone involved more practically in the question. He proposed an even heavier petty coinage, produced under a committee of ten, including himself. 6 It is hard to judge if Maculla’s coinage had any actual economic impact, but it seems, in spite of a relatively large number of varieties, that it was on a small scale and that its effects were unlikely to have been felt directly outside Dublin’s economic purview. In the eighteenth century Dublin appears to dominate the rest of the country, but the very extent of ‘the second city in the empire’s’ urbanisation means that one cannot ignore the extent to which its economy functioned in a manner strange to the rest of Ireland.

Having briefly reviewed the background, one may perhaps turn again to the Ulster tokens. 7 All have an overtly promissary formula 8 not in substance different from that on the sort of paper notes put out by many merchants. The earliest dated coins are two Belfast issues of 1734, from William Johnston and William Ringland. Ringland issued both pennies and twopences. Johnston’s coin, represented by only two surviving specimens, declares itself to be a halfpenny, but the Ulster Museum specimen appears to be countermarked with a 13, which may indicate revaluation to a penny. The reverse legend is ‘II pay the bearer one halfpenny. W. Johnston. 1/2 per pound for this copper’ (abbreviations). Fletcher suggested, 9 and I find no reason to disagree, that this meant that the metal from which the token was made cost 1s. 2d. for a pound. It would not make much sense to offer that amount for a pound weight of the coins. This would seem to be a half-way stage between Maculla’s coins, valued by weight, and a fully token coinage, as represented by the rest of the series. There is a considerable difference in weight between the two specimens, that in the Ulster Museum weighing 106 grains and Fletcher’s recorded at 152, which might indicate some change in value during the period of issue. There is no reason to suppose that having gone to the expense of having a die made, a token issuer, having found his coins successful, should confine himself to the date stated. Aquilla Smith notes that a pound avoirdupois of copper would make 66 halfpennies at 106 grains each, leaving a margin for profit and manufacture of a 1s. 9d. 10 This ignores the fact that the coin is quite worn. One might be

6 J. Swift, A Letter on Maculla’s Project about Halfpence and a New One Proposed (Dublin, 1729).
7 They are adequately listed and illustrated by Davis.
8 Usually ‘I promise to pay the bearer [on demand]…’, but simplified by Smyth and Bowen to ‘I owe the bearer’. The variation used by Johnston is given and discussed below.
10 Smith, ‘Copper Tokens’ p. 422.
attracted to the simpler calculation of assuming a nominal weight of 115 grains for the putative penny, which would make a halfcrown's worth of coins from the pound. At whatever rate, if the probable cost of a die is included, and only a small number of coins made, a tariff of only a half or a full penny was not going to make much money.

Once the principle of a fully token coinage was accepted (assuming that after more than half a century the apparent success, at least for the issuers, of seventeenth century tokens was forgotten), there was no reason not to seek a much better return and everyone, including Ringland, moved to using twopence or threepence as the denomination after 1734. The existence of the coins dated 1735 indicates that the failure of penny and halfpenny coins was not due to competition from the regal coppers of 1736. If the desirability of any specific denomination is discounted, then obviously the higher the face-value and the lower the weight, the less risk is involved in the manufacture of a token. One may perhaps take higher values as indications of higher confidence in issue or issuer.

It is perhaps worth looking further in some detail at the 'Belfast Ticket', if only because it has received more publication than any of the other tokens. George Benn first brought it to notice in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, of 1854, and his views are worth repeating. The editor, Robert McAdam, gives a provenance: the coin 'was picked up by his [George Benn's] brother [Edward], many years ago, in London, out of the vast collection of that great coin dealer, the late Mr. Young of Tavistock Street . . .'. Benn feels obliged to spend almost a third of his note defending tokens as a worthy object of antiquarian study - 'if such a pursuit be laudable and proper regarding the inhabitants of Ninevah, of Athens, of Rome, or of London, we must by no means overlook the claims upon our attention of the very worthy and respectable citizens who lived and moved in the shops and streets of our own good town, two hundred or one hundred years ago, so far as we can be assisted by the inspection of the small change which was daily passing through their honest fingers.' Throughout Benn is determined that the tokens are connected with retail trade. 'The Mr. Johnston who issued this token, was most probably one of its inhabitants, and in his shop near the market-house, well stored with leather or linen, or meal and flour, or cloth or hardware, or all these, and sundry other commodities as well . . .'. In a further note in a later number of the same volume he states 'the motto and cognisance of Hugh Magarragh would better befit a belted knight or baron bold, than a person keeping possibly a dry-goods store . . . but, perhaps the Magarragh had a soul above buttons, as well as oatmeal, nail rod iron, and other base commodities'. Lionel Fletcher published his specimen of the Johnston token in the second series of the *Ulster Journal* in 1903, providing a much better illustration and a clearer interpretation of the legends. He suggests two possible issuers of the right name, 'Pipewater Johnston' and a baker, admitted free of the town of 1729. It is the latter who seems to have been accepted as being correct, the token even being referred to as a bread-ticket at times. My own view is that almost certainly Pipewater Johnston of Newforge was the issuer, and hope that this will appear correct in the context of the rest of the evidence.

The William Johnston here favoured as token issuer seems to have been a man of quite considerable wealth. In 1731 he was involved in a complicated series of transactions with Arthur Hill over the townlands of Ballylesson, Edenderry and Breda, plus fisheries on the Lagan. There were disputes and a total of £3,275 seems to have changed hands. This may

12 ibid, p. 29.
13 Benn. ‘Notices of Local Tokens issued in Ulster, No. 2.’, *UJA*, Vol. II (1854), 231.
14 Fletcher, op. cit.
15 The Town Book of the Corporation of Belfast 1613–1816, edited by R.M. Young (Belfast, 1892), p. 291. John Knox appears in the same list as the next entry, described as 'watchmaker'.
16 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (henceforth PRONI). D778/68A; D778/70. I am grateful to the Director for permission to cite the documents listed here and below.
not represent the full value of three prosperous townlands\textsuperscript{17} of good land, amounting to nearly 1200 acres, at least when measured in the 1830s by the Ordnance Survey. Only the next year he was leasing a further three townlands of nearly 2,000 acres from Viscount Massereen\textsuperscript{18} and in 1741 the consideration for the assignment of a mortgage was £1,447 13s. 5d.\textsuperscript{19} In 1745 he is named as a Collector of Customs.\textsuperscript{20} The soubriquet ‘Pipewater’ was derived from the grant of a lease by the trustees of the Donegall family of ‘all waters, rivers, brooks, wells and water streams adjacent and contiguous to the town of Belfast’ at a nominal rent of 20s per year for 41 years.\textsuperscript{21} The laying of pipes and associated works will have been a heavy expense and presumably Johnston was speculating against revenue from water charges.

From what we know of the other Belfast issuers Johnston, man of wealth, rather than Johnston, baker, would fit more neatly with the company. William Ringland was responsible for most tokens. There are the penny and twopence dated 1734 and a twopence of 1735. Several minor varieties exist of each and the coins remain relatively more common than the rest of the series. Unfortunately, comparatively little is known about Ringland, but we can say that he was admitted to the Dublin goldsmiths company\textsuperscript{22} and signed watches of about 1740.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly John Knox signed clocks and watches.\textsuperscript{24} Members of the goldsmith’s company claimed a monopoly in dealing in precious metals. No trace of Hugh Magarragh has been found in the available sources.

If Alex Morton and Samuel Mackie are added to those already mentioned, a total of four token issuers also signed clocks and watches. At first glance this number might not seem remarkable, but a closer look at the circumstances makes the coincidence more interesting. The responsibilities of the numismatist at the Ulster Museum traditionally include the clock and watch collection, as a result of the late Mr Seaby’s interest in the horology. He compiled the most extensive list of Ulster clock and watch makers, to which additions are still made. A search in this reveals that there were probably no more than fourteen men signing timekeepers in 1735, with perhaps fifteen or sixteen in 1740. Taken with the small number of token issuers the statistics are more remarkable. In the Ulster context ‘clockmaker’ often does not imply a working artisan. Many movements were imported from England or Dublin and cased locally to customers’ requirements. This is probably even more true of watches. The people whose names appear on movements or dials had to be prepared to lay out quite large sums in speculative stock, especially in the context of a small (though rapidly growing) regional capital base, and were involved with other businesses, often of a similar capital-intensive nature. It would appear that token issuing is similar in this respect. If nothing else the acceptability of a metallic promissary note had to be governed in a small mercantile community by the perceived ability of the named issuer to instantly redeem a single coin, or more probably, a large number.

The existence of the Dublin token issued by Ben Bowen rather disturbs the pattern presented by the other coins. It is undated, but it may be assumed, at least on stylistic grounds, that it appeared at a similar time to the rest. A slight\textsuperscript{26} caveat needs to be entered in that Simon fails to make specific mention of it, unless it may be subsumed under the ‘other parts of the kingdom’, contrasted with the North. Bowen is described as a merchant in a will of 1729.\textsuperscript{27} The specimens inspected have been in much better condition than the Ulster equivalents, Presbyteriam Congregation, 1712–36, death of a son, 1717.

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{17} The townland is an Irish measure of land, size depending (amongst other factors) on the quality of the land involved, but usually substantial.
\bibitem{18} PRONI D354/79.
\bibitem{19} PRONI D650/30 ff.
\bibitem{20} PRONI D562/434.
\bibitem{21} G. Benn,\textit{ A History of the Town of Belfast} (London, 1877), p. 487.
\bibitem{22} Funeral records of the First (Rosemary Street) Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast, 1712–36, death of a son, 1717.
\bibitem{23} An example is in the National Museum, Dublin. For permission to examine this, and the collection of tokens also under his care, I am grateful to my colleague Michael Kenny.
\bibitem{24} See note 15.
\bibitem{25} Dublin, Registrary of Deeds 6310842866. The will is dated 18th February 1729.
\end{thebibliography}
perhaps indicating a more limited circulation. The legend specifies that Bowen owes 3d sterling. This complication has some interest in that it may indicate an access to regal specie. Sums of money in eighteenth century Ireland seem to divide into those which are in money of account, or Irish pounds, and those which indicate actual cash, represented by physical coin. It would seem possible, therefore, that this piece relates to actual cash, but the Ulster tokens indicate money of account and hence perhaps a slight difference in function. One might further stretch the evidence and assume that the device of a hart on the token illustrates a connection with the butchery trade. Since meat tended to be exported from Ireland to England it could have provided the necessary cash to back the promise.

What then was the function of the rest of the tokens, and why were they issued for twopence and threepence? As already mentioned none was a sum as low as a penny other than Johnston’s and Ringland’s at the beginning of the series. The availability of official halfpennies from May 1737 and after should have relieved the pressure for very low-value coins. The probable lack of profit in the small denominations has already been indicated. Evidence indicates that the tokens were still successfully circulating after the appearance of the halfpennies, and perhaps much later. There are also the piece dated 1741 and advertisements dated 1739. Most of the coins survive in very worn condition. There is a need to find some gap in the currency, other than at the very lowest level, to fit the tokens, and to do this one must speculate as to their role in trade. Given the comparatively small area from which they originate this should also relate to factors specific to the relevant areas of Ulster.

Aquilla Smith in the 1868 explanation of the tokens quotes from Thomas Prior’s Observations on Coin in General of 1730. Prior was obviously a major source for Simon, who reproduces verbatim his table of foreign coins circulating in Ireland. Prior also wrote on the linen industry. Part of his argument, and one which was to have a very long run indeed, was that absentee landlords were draining all money from Ireland. The practical effect of this drain, rather than its macro-economic results, is what is of interest here. ‘Since we are in great want of halfpence and farthings, are almost stripped of all sorts of silver coin, and have very little of the small gold species among us, it has become very difficult to change moydores, in order to buy or sell any commodity: this want of change greatly embarrassed the dealings of poor people, and is a great obstruction to all sorts of business; so that at present we not only labour under great scarcity of money, but even what little we have is not half that use to us as it would be if it was divided into small pieces which could easily be changed.’

This picture is confirmed by Swift (if not influenced by him, although Prior seems to have been an independent thinker) in number 19 of the Intelligencer, published in September 1728. Of particular interest is that Swift, in an interesting bout of literary schizophrenia, takes on the character of a country gentleman from the north of Ireland, writing to the Drapier. Swift was a frequent visitor to the north, had been rector of Kilroot in Co. Antrim, and had close friendship with Sir Thomas Acheson of Gosford Castle, Co. Armagh, so his remarks may well be based on accurate information. ‘A. North’ of County Down proclaims that he has an estate of ‘above £1400 a year’, which having been let ‘for near twenty years’ the rents ‘until very lately, were esteemed to be not above half value’. Now, by ‘the intolerable scarcity of silver, I lie under the greatest difficult in receiving them.’ Typically for Swift, he points out that the problems of his character are trifles compared to what ‘the meaner sort’ undergo. A. North is ‘forced to employ tradesmen until their wages amount to a double-pistole or a moidore, (for

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26 Belfast Newsletter, 16th February 1739 and 13th March 1739, quoted by Davis.
27 Smith, ‘Copper Tokens’ (note 5).
28 T. Prior, Observations on Coin in General, with some proposals for regulating the Value of Coin in Ireland (Dublin, 1729).
29 T. Prior, An Essay to Encourage and Extend the Linen Manufacture of Ireland by Præmia and Other Means (Dublin, 1749).
30 Prior, Observations, p. 42.
we have hardly any gold of a lower value left us) to divide it among themselves as they can: and this is generally done at the ale-house, or brandy-shop; where, besides the cost of getting drunk, (which is usually the case) they must pay ten pence or a shilling for changing their piece into silver to some huckstering fellow, who follows that trade.32

From 1712 the official rate for a double pistole was £1 17s. 0d. and for the moidore £1 10s. 10d.33 'The poor men are forced to take up their oat-meal and other necessaries of life at almost double value'. The reason for this is that silver is relatively under-valued compared to gold, 'Whoever carries to England twenty-seven English shillings, and brings back one moidore of full weight is a gainer of nine pence Irish: in a guinea the advantage is threepence; and twopence in a pistole'.34 Prior provides a long series of calculations giving the actual and assumed values of various foreign coins, the margins by no means remaining consistent.35 In 1737 the price of foreign gold was officially reduced, the double-pistole to £1 16s. 6d. and the moidore to £1 9s. 3d. Simon in 1749 observes that the regulation was 'calculated with no other view than to preserve and keep at home the silver species current in this country', but thinks that it has failed:

'We have indeed guineas in greater plenty, than we had before, but generally so light, that whoever has a hundred of them, and thinks to have £113 15s intrinsic value, will often find, if he weighs them, that he has not in fact above the value of £106 5s. at a moderate medium; whereas if before the reduction of the gold he had an hundred moidores of full weight, he was sure to have £150, or at least £144 11s. 8d., if, according to Sir Isaac Newton's tables, they be intrinsically worth 27s. 9d. English, which in Irish currency is 29s. 11d., (though they are by this proclamation reduced to 29s. 3d., he therefore but loses £5 8s. 4d. on his £150, whereas he loses £7 10s. 0d. on his 100 light guineas; and £34 12s. 3d. (at moderate medium) of the real intrinsic value of the silver, if he keeps £150 in such English shillings and six penny pieces as are mostly current here.'

He goes on:

'The melting of silver has grown to such a pitch, that a new, or well-preserved crown or half-crown is become a great rarity, even among the curious; they no sooner appear than they disappear. What silver is now left, is some English Money, not worth melting, shilling pieces hardly worth ninepence or tenpence, and six penny pieces not worth a groat.'

He estimates that the amount by which silver was under-rated was £7 1s. 9d. per cent.36 One should remember, however, that the average annual mint production of silver in the years 1720–40 was 11,953 pounds. No silver was issued 1747–50, and in the next decade virtually none came from the mint except in 1751, 1757 and 1758. Admittedly mint production does not reveal the extent to which silver coin may have been available in the economy, since out-put has to be balanced with the export of silver and other drains. Nevertheless, one might diffidently suggest, allowing that English shortages were likely to be magnified in Ireland, that it seems possible, that although bad, the situation in 1734–41 will have been considerably worse later. One possibility is that the token issuers may have been 'huckstering fellows', changing the substantial gold coins (up to four pistoles). There seems little reason why this huckstering should not have been as prevalent in the south as in the north, and would fail to explain why the tokens seem only to have been successful within a limited area. As suggested earlier, it is possible that the period during which the tokens were issued may be rather longer than the dates themselves would indicate. There does not seem to have been any legislation, or specific enforcement, directed against them, and partial re-appearance in 1760 would also

32 Swift, Works, p. 358.
33 Simon, Irish Coins, p. 69.
34 Swift, Works, p. 359.
35 Prior, Observations.
36 Simon, Irish Coins, pp. 75–76. This may be compared with Prior's calculations on p. 14, which give the loss on £100 as £10 17s 5d, £8 6s 0d, £3 7s 7d and £2 17s 1d, on sixpences, shillings, halfcrowns and crowns, respectively. Although some of the dramatic fall in value can be explained by possible differences in methodology, there seems to have been a severe decline in the quality of available silver between 1729 and 1737.
suggest that they were ignored officially. The proclamation for the 1736 halfpennies inveighs against ‘Any persons presuming to make, vend or utter any other halfpence or farthings, or other pieces of brass or copper, or other base metal, or other than the copper money coined under the said patents . . .’. This sort of statement, allowing for the redundancy of much legal expression, is rather difficult to interpret, but certainly makes no specific reference to the Ulster coins, although the linen industry is specifically mentioned elsewhere in the documents. Even harder to reconcile with the surviving evidence is the declared aim of the authorities in preventing ‘further imposition upon the traders and poor manufacturers of this kingdom, by the uttering of false and base brass money, commonly called Raps . . .’ (the emphasis is mine), as no coins suiting the description have been encountered.

Returning again to the question of geographical distribution, it should be noted that the greatest concentration of issuers was along the Lagan valley. This was the centre of the linen industry and a spine of prosperity in the Ulster countryside. The prevalence of the linen in this area used to be attributed almost entirely to the presence of numbers of Huguenot settlers, but this opinion has been partially corrected by other evidence. The previous view was heavily influenced by Louis Crommelin’s self-publicity. Whilst it is true that an influx of French refugees promoted the trade, and led certain technical improvements, their seed was sown on fertile ground, in more senses than one. Linen had been important in the area since at least the middle of the seventeenth century. Again the southern bias of sources, and in particular Dublin, makes the woollen trade, suffering under terminal disabilities as soon as it was seen as a serious competitor to England, much more visible. Here one is hindered, as in so much else, by the particular scarcity of economic evidence from the first half of the eighteenth century. Linen exports quadrupled between 1720 and 1760 and there was a growth from £207,000 in 1730 to £426,000 in 1735 and £480,000 in 1741.

Trade at this level was capable of supporting a greater number of locally-based drapers, who also ensured the success of a growing number of weekly markets. Brown linen for bleaching was brought to market by weavers where it was bought by the drapers, ‘at the stone’. It was paid for in cash, as was recorded with astonishment by contemporaries. The security risk this entailed was circumvented by travelling in famously-convivial caravan from market to market and inn to inn. Whilst well out of the period under examination, it may be worth noting that evidence given to the 1804 committee of enquiry indicated that even in the midst of the war-time currency crisis, when the gold standard had been abandoned, gold was still in almost universal use within the linen trade in the north. Landlords, and possibly others with sufficient economic strength, were in some cases able to insist that payments were made in this medium. If a distinctive system was capable of survival in the economic extremes recorded by the committee, there seems to little reason to doubt that it could function sixty or seventy years earlier, when the evidence indicates that gold was much more freely available.

The sums involved in the first stages of the linen trade, whilst above retail level, still required the use of silver. The cloth was sold in webs of either 25 or 50 yards length, typically for about 1s. to 3s. 6d. a yard, both factors depending on the type of cloth. A weaver was thought to be able to earn 2s. 4d. to 2s. 8d. a day. The 1736 proclamation already quoted specifically says that the purpose of the halfpennies and farthings is ‘to remedy the many inconveniences which affected the trade, and particularly the linen-manufacture, of this kingdom . . .’, Aquilla Smith, with characteristic good sense, says that the tokens were

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37 Simon, Irish Coins, p. 177.
38 Simon, Irish Coins, p. 176.
39 Simon, Irish Coins, p. 177. Benn, History of the Town of Belfast, p. 466, records that of £8 8s. 8d. collected by the Third Presbyterian Congregation, 24s. 9d. was in raps.
41 Report from the Committee on the circulating paper, the specie and the current coin of Ireland; and also the exchange between that part of the United Kingdom and Great Britain (London, 1803–4).
42 Simon, Irish Coins, p. 172.
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required as sub-divisions of the shilling’, but thinks that the regal halfpennies put an end to them.43 There is also a contradiction in his interpretation of the newspaper advertisements put out by some of the issuers warning against counterfeits. These in themselves are surely an indication of considerable success. Smith takes it that the tokens were withdrawn from circulation at this point and full value given in gold or silver.44 If the shortage of silver or small gold in itself was sufficient to prompt the tokens, then surely it will have been more than an inconvenience to redeem all that had been put out in a short time. In any case, sudden redemption would have required every issuer publish the fact, whereas normal, slow encashment did not require any special arrangement. There seems no reason to believe that this (welcome) publicity was more than a reaction to the problem of forgery.

Further examination of some of the token issuers and their activities may give other clues as to their motivation. Benn, with some irritation, regrets that none of them indicated trade either overtly or by the use of a recognisable sign.45 This is not altogether fair. James Greer of Portadown not only proclaims himself ‘The Draper’ (perhaps in order to distinguish himself from some other Greer in trade), but also shows a roll of linen. The form used was shortly to become obsolete. Regulation insisted from 1762 that linen be rolled, or lapped, in a series of folds so that it could be easily examined throughout. Hugh Montgomery of Glenarm with a fouled anchor, and John Galloway of Portaferry with a ship in sail, were both merchants in small ports. Montgomery’s legend of ‘I live in hope’ shows refreshing candour. James Templeton of Stewartstown illustrated a market house, unlikely to be Stewartstown itself but an indication of mercantile trade, probably in linen, which has parallels with some seventeenth century tokens. Alex McClure’s peacock with ‘Youth and Beauty’ might give rise to some interesting, if improbable, speculation.

Edward Smyth of Lisburn is the token issuer about whom most is known at present.46 This is fortunate in several ways. For a start Smyth was a member of the established church, which most of the others certainly were not. Circumstances and institutions in eighteenth century Ireland make it much more probable that documentary evidence will have been created, and survive, about people of this religious affiliation than about dissenters or catholics, who were excluded from many official functions. Smyth was born in either 1700 or 1693 and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1721 with a law degree, becoming an honoury DLS in 1747.47 He was MP for Lisburn from 1743 until 1759. Appointed a commissioner for the militia in 1756 for both counties Antrim and Down, he was attorney-at-law for the diocese of Conor and registrar of schools for both Down and Conor. At his death he was able to leave three full and two separate half townlands, other land, including some in Ardglass with three small castles on it, various urban freeholds, his ‘old mansion at Derryagh’ and, with other smaller bequests, £1000. Settlement had already been made for his daughter. This prosperity was not just a phenomenon of his declining years. He had acquired property in Lisburn, then something of a boom town, from the break-up of the Conway estate. He leased 1800 plantation acres from Clotworthy O’Neill, all in the 1730s.48 Amongst all this there is no sign of direct involvement in trade, which indeed would have been seen as rather inappropriate for a man of his station. The device on his token is that of a gentleman’s crest, the restraint of which contrasts with the whimsy displayed on many of the others. Smyth does, however, appear on the peripheries of the dispute about stamping linen in 1762.

This survey does not by any means exhaust the possible sources about the token issuers, although there are several about whom nothing has been found. Others have names which

44 Smith, ‘Copper Tokens’, p. 419.
48 PROI T1035/5; D577/52–34.
cannot be deciphered from the surviving tokens. Excluding these categories, however, still leaves a number about whom sufficient is known for some valid deductions to be made.

The only man to leave any indication of his character is Joseph Wilson, who issued tokens in Lurgan, but later seems to have moved to Dungannon. In his declining years he claimed acquaintance with John Foster, later Lord Oriel and Chancellor of the Irish exchequer. In a rather odd letter of 1759 to Foster, Wilson reveals that he has built a small lodge, which houses himself, three nieces and, imminently, his nephew. He gratuitously offers the fact that he has £300 a year, but debts of £500, although his creditors ‘seem better pleased to have their money in my hands than their own’. Even more revealing, and perhaps a clear indication of a true presbyterian spirit, is his statement that ‘the miser who hides his adored gold receives perhaps as much pleasure from it as the prodigal who lavishes it riot.’

Also amongst the Foster papers is a printed document, unfortunately undated, which offers to communicate a new, better and (naturally) cheaper, method of bleaching. The possessor of the secret boasts that he has had three years experience ‘in a large concern’ which used it ‘in a very extensive manner’. Communication may be made with the inventor via Mr. Joseph Wilson, ‘who is fully informed respecting the method’. It would seem a reasonable deduction that Mr. Wilson was the proprietor of the extensive bleaching green referred to.

Reference has already been made to the link with clock-making. The clock business in Ulster was largely concentrated in Armagh during the early part of the eighteenth century, an indication of the settled and prosperous nature of the county. Clocks signed by Mackie of Richill and Morton of Armagh are relatively common in the context of the area and date. This in itself could signify a quite extensive business and presumably, a measure of prosperity. Both may be associated with the possession of capital. Another point of interest is the way in which the line of three annulets enclosing pellets on Morton’s coins echoes the similar design often found inside the chapter rings of his own, and other clocks of the period. It would seem not too far-fetched to suggest that both the clock dials (one part of the operation certainly produced locally) and the dies for these tokens were engraved by the same person or persons. The die-sinking style of this group is markedly different from that of the copper pieces. Also worthy of note is that, almost without exception, these silver tokens are found heavily creased, usually twice, evidently having been folded and then straightened. The most obvious reason for this to have been done is as a means of cancellation. Specimens with a central piercing have not been encountered, which might perhaps be taken as another indication that the partial defacement was an official cancellation by the issuer, rather than a means of taking a dubious and unacceptable coin out of circulation.

Of the remaining tokens many are uninformative, several existing in only one or two very worn specimens, from which it is impossible to make out much of either issuer’s name or place. Of those that are fully legible several of the names mean nothing at this stage. Mr. Seaby suggested, and I agree, that the token of Patrick Brown allocated to Bready, Co. Tyrone, by both Davis and Coins and Tokens of Ireland, should be given to Breda in Co. Down, now a suburb of Belfast. One really only has to change the reading of one letter to do this, as even if the final letter is a Y this would be a common enough representation of the probable eighteenth century pronunciation. The issuer’s name is not distinctive, and much hesitation need not be felt in rejecting the man of the same name who appears on a rental of 1737 from Castledawson, which, though in the north east, is on the wrong side of the Sperrin mountains for an association with Bready to be probable.

Similar uncertainly exists over James Adair of Ballymena. This is a common surname in the

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29. PRONI D526/2376; there is a transcript of a lease taken out by Joseph Wilson in Lurgan, dated 1720, under T97/1(303).
area, but no trace has been found of a James of even approximately the right date there. There is, however, plenty of information about James Adair in Belfast, who was leasing property extensively in the late 1740s, sometimes in association with substantial players in the commercial life of the town. James Adair appears in a list of linen drapers in a 1758 Belfast News Letter.\textsuperscript{52} If this is our man, then he was also a partner in the first Belfast Bank, founded with two other prominent Belfast merchants in 1751. The bank was wound up, solvent, in 1757, perhaps because of legislation passed by the Dublin parliament which forbade an individual to act as both banker and merchant. Its prospectus states that the usefulness of the bank "must principally depend on the circulation of notes". Even more revealing is the statement that "To accommodate dealers in linen cloth and yarn the Bank issues small notes, Twenty shillings in value, and from time to time collects silver and half guineas so as to be able to give linen buyers £5 of specie of every English bill of £100; so that they will have proper money to transact their business at markets without being compelled to give a premium for silver, a tax on linen buyers for many years. And as the people of the north are not used to a paper currency, they are informed that three-fourths of the money current in the west of Scotland is in small notes".\textsuperscript{53} That the offer of only 5\% in cash was worth advertising indicates how difficult things must have been.

The prospectus also reveals something about the circulation of money within the local economy. Linen (and other agricultural produce) was bought for cash at the markets, in the case of linen passed on for bleaching, then much of it exported, first through Dublin, but increasingly through northern outlets, pre-dominently Belfast, with payment being made in bills drawn on London. These were then cashed and the currency entered the system again, often to buy yarn and pay rents. The regional differences within the Irish economy are emphasised by the fact that, although banks had been well-established in Dublin from much earlier, the next bank in the north did not appear until 1787. There was no bank in Belfast from 1797 to 1804, a period of considerable growth. During the same time the rate of exchange between Belfast and London remained close to the nominal par of £108 6s. 8d., whilst the Dublin–London rate rose to £118.

Cochrane of Guilford features in the list of linen drapers mentioned before. Waring of Waringstown may also be safely associated with the trade, the village was right in its centre, and was producing work of the highest quality, notably a surviving large damask table-cloth marking the coronation of George II which pushed the frontiers of then-available technology.\textsuperscript{54} Galloway of Portaferry seems to have been a moderately successful merchant, as was Montgomery of Glenarm. There is a probate will of a man of this name from Larne (just up the coast) from 1778, but frustratingly it tells us very little of his wealth or trade.\textsuperscript{55} He leaves everything to his son, except for £500 and £250 to be invested in annuities for his wife and daughter.

This leaves an outlying group, both geographically and in terms of time, centred on Newtownards. Francis McMinn does not name a place, which may have significance in either indicating a certain prominence, or that his coins were only intended to circulate in a very local area. We now know him to have been based in Donaghadee, as that time a busy port for the short sea crossing to Portpatrick, used extensively for the northern mails. Typically, the information available now does not suggest he was a shop-keeper, but that he engaged in the sort of mercantile activity expected of a trader based in a small, active port. The tokens of Thomas Fisher of Newtownards are perhaps the commonest of the whole series, probably as the result of a nineteenth century hoard. There are several varieties, some of which used a

\textsuperscript{52} Belfast Newsletter, list of Registered Linen Lappers, 7th July 1758.  
\textsuperscript{53} Benn, History of Belfast, p. 466.  
\textsuperscript{55} PRONI D282/25.
number of dies. The town of Ards was an old settlement, revived by the plantation and then further enhanced, with the addition of ‘New’, by the local landlord, Hugh Montgomery. Not long after the date of the token Montgomery acted as host to James Boswell, who recorded his favourable impressions of the place. Fisher leased a number of properties in the town. There was a substantial and prosperous hinterland, but ultimately growth was limited by its inadequacy as a port. Proximity to Belfast and other rival centres probably did not help. In the 1760s, however, Newtownards was fast-growing and appeared to have great potential.

The other token of this period, dated 1761, was struck by John McCully, who helpfully declares himself to be a brewer and represents a barrel on the coin. The land around Newtonwards is more suitable for grain than much of Ireland and malting has only just ceased in the area. Of more interest and utility even than the declaration of trade is that, uniquely, there is literary evidence for McCully’s tokens in circulation. Richard Twiss went on a tour of Ireland in 1775 and as well as observing the sights took an interest in prices, manufactures and agriculture. On his way to the Giant’s Causeway, after observing a round tower on the road between Antrim and Ballymoney, he says ‘In these parts I found many copper coins current, which were struck by tradesmen; on one of them was inscribed, ‘I promise to pay the bearer on demand John McCully, 1761.’56 and goes on to quote Simon’s remarks about the earlier tokens. This is an extremely valuable piece of evidence. As well as giving confirmation that McCully’s tokens were circulating freely in an area at some distance, and with few direct links with Newtownards fifteen years after the declared date of issue, it also seems to suggest that at the very least McMinn’s and Fisher’s tokens were enjoying similar success and that perhaps some of the earlier coins were also still in circulation.

This has been a brief look at a series of tokens which have been strangely neglected for much of this century and which have been subject to what might be termed interpretation by default. It is obvious that much work remains to be done, but even at this early stage the evidence seems to indicate that these coins, issued during the first part of the eighteenth century in Ulster, were not a response to a shortage of copper coin, whether or not that existed, but an indication of a specific set of economic circumstances, which as yet we can only partially glimpse. There does seem to be a definite link with the linen industry in several cases, however, and overall with a group of vigorously entrepreneurial men. Such men are likely to have issued tokens in an active search for profit, or at the very least, in the belief that the activity would facilitate their businesses. Their actions are more likely to have been prompted by a perceived gap in the market rather than a desire to provide an altruistic service in the provision of small change. Benn’s vision of them as retailers doling out change from behind a counter can no longer be given any credence. Like most historical problems, it would appear that there is no single, simple answer. Once a few tokens were successfully put into circulation, with apparently no legal constraint, the idea may have seemed attractive to a wider variety of people than those initially involved. It is also probable that quite small variations in the local economy, both in terms of the availability of specie and in levels of trade, will have affected the attractiveness and viability of the coins. The ultimate answer, if such a thing exists, will lie not simply in numismatic study, but rather in further development in our understanding of the Irish economy, and particularly its regional variants, during the first half of the eighteenth century.

56 R. Twiss, A Tour in Ireland in 1775 (Dublin, 1776), pp. 91–92. I am grateful for this reference to my colleague Dr. V. Pollock.