In the Spring of 1821 Matthew Robinson Boulton, busying himself with the provision of a mint for the East India Company in Calcutta and the engagement of suitable staff for its installation and operation, received a letter [Fig. 1] from the die-sinker and medallist John Westwood, junior.

Fig. 1

Note
This sketch of John Gregory Hancock and the brothers, John and Obadiah Westwood, and their relationship in the manufacture of eighteenth-century tokens formed the second part of my 1999 Presidential Address. The original text has been slightly extended and footnotes have been added but it still pretends to being no more than a sketch.

My thanks are due to Birmingham City Library Services for allowing me to quote from the Matthew Boulton Papers and to reproduce material in their care (figs. 1, 2 (text), 6, 7 (text) and 10). Mr Nicholas Kingsley, the Birmingham City Archivist, and his staff have been unfailing in their assistance as has Mr Paul Taylor of the Local Studies and History Department.

I am grateful also to the Trustees of the British Museum for their permission to reproduce the illustrations in figs. 4 and 5; and to the Smithsonian Institution in respect of fig. 9.

Abbreviations

1 MBP: 261/73 (26 March 1821).
Westwood, born in Birmingham in 1774, had spent his formative years there but since the turn of the century he had lived in Sheffield, then Lichfield, and latterly London. Not for the first time had this talented artist fallen upon hard times. Now middle-aged, Westwood had decided to give up his decaying business of engraving dies for medals and box lids, and, as he put it rather lamely, he was ‘disengaged’.\(^2\) He had, however, heard a rumour that the Birmingham entrepreneur was ‘preparing a compleat [sic] Mint to go Abroad’. Should Boulton thus need the services of ‘a person competent to undertake the management of the Mint, or, An Engraver to accompany it’, he was anxious to register his interest, for he had no ‘objection to take either department if sufficient inducement offers itself in the terms to be given’.

In the event Westwood’s importunate approach received no encouragement from Soho, but what is more to our purpose here is what he wrote in introducing himself to the younger Boulton:

You may recollect the name of Westwood. My Uncle, the late Mr John W. was well known in Birm\(^n\) as a general Manufacturer and maker of Medals & Coins. The original Copper Tokens made in the years 88 to 92 were wholly made by him & your Father [my italics].

Even though these words were written years after the events to which they refer, it is surprising to find that Charles Pye in the 1801 (quarto) edition of his *Provincial Coins and Tokens*\(^3\) attributes to the Westwood family as manufacturers – John, senior, his brother Obadiah and the latter’s son, John (the writer of the letter) – a mere handful of tokens all of which fall outside the period specified in the letter: to ‘J. Westwood’ the original [1786] ‘Monogram’ pattern for Thomas Williams’s ‘Druud Tokens’ [Plate 1, 1; D&H: Anglesey 1]; to ‘O. Westwood’ a halfpenny (1794) for James Lackington, the London bookseller [Plate 31, 4; D&H: Middlesex 351]; and to ‘Westwood’ (without initials) the Sherborne halfpenny (1793) of the banking firm of Preter, Pew & Company [Plate 44, 7; D&H: Dorset 7] and the ‘Washington/Ship’ halfpenny (1793) [Plate 51, 10; D&H: Middlesex 1051].

Pye, admittedly, refers to the younger Westwood’s fraudulent copies – of the ‘Monogram’ Anglesey penny and the Southampton ‘St Bevois’ halfpenny, for instance – and his specious pennies, halfpennies and ‘half-halfpennies’ based on genuine tokens, but only to castigate them in his ‘Advertisement’ and the ‘Observations’ to his ‘Index’.\(^4\) But these concoctions are irrelevant to our immediate problem: the conundrum of reconciling the younger Westwood’s claim that the legitimate tokens of the period 1788 to 1792 were ‘wholly’ made by his uncle and Matthew Boulton with what is traditionally regarded as the authoritative contemporary account of mainstream eighteenth-century token-making, certainly as far as Birmingham is concerned. After all Matthew Boulton’s son, even after the lapse of thirty years, would still have been only too aware of the elder John Westwood’s business ventures and it would not have served the nephew’s current interests to be shown to have been too much of a liar.

At this point one should perhaps pause to see what Pye actually has to say about the tokens produced in Birmingham between 1788 and 1792. Apart from the strikings attributed to Thomas Williams and then to Matthew Boulton (which, except for his coining for Williams and Wilkinson, are verifiable from the Matthew Boulton Papers), and a few, from 1791, given to Peter Kempson, William Lutwyche and William Mainwaring, all are credited to ‘Hancock’.\(^5\) And, if one is to believe Pye, ‘Hancock’ – the die-sinker John Gregory Hancock – was a manufacturer of tokens on

---

2 Young Westwood had twenty years earlier (29 January 1800) tried to dispose of some of his dies to Boulton’s father on the ground that his business was then ‘so very indifferent’ [MBP:261/72]. His medallic work effectively came to an end in 1821 with his medal of Sir Robert Wilson [BHM 1168]; there is no reason to associate BHM: 1317 (1827) (or BHM: 928 (1817) with Westwood.

3 Provincial Coins and Tokens issued from the Year 1787 to the Year 1801, engraved by Charles Pye, Birmingham (Birmingham, 1801).

4 Reference is made to some of these pieces, for which John Westwood, junior achieved contemporary notoriety, in the ‘Observations’ to the ‘Index’ while the ‘Advertisement’ chose to warn collectors how ‘Mr. J. Westwood, junior, late of Birmingham’ had copied ‘the Monogram Anglesey penny, Southampton halfpenny, and several other tokens... To the ingenuity of the same person the public is indebted for a series of half halfpence, as he has called them, and some halfpence and pence – the prototypes of which are genuine halfpenny tokens’: Pye, as in n. 3, p. 4.

5 William Mainwaring (ob. 1794) was not a manufacturer as such: a token engraver he worked for Lutwyche who bought his dies after his death: William Robert Hay quoted in D.W. Dykes, ‘Who was R Y? Searching for an Identity’, *BNJ*, 67 (1997): 120.
a considerable scale producing, during this period, at least twelve series of provincial coins totalling many tons of copper and hundreds of thousands of tokens. Taking them in date order the 'proprietors' of these tokens, as Pye describes the issuers, were:

- John Wilkinson - 6+ ton (1789–92) [Plate 48.3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10; D&H: Warwickshire 424–30, 432–8 and 448–52];
- Roe & Co of Macclesfield - 11 ton (1789, 1790–92) [Plate 36, 1 and 2; D&H: Cheshire 9, 10–15 and 16–59];
- Walter Taylor & Co of Southampton - 'a few specimens' (1790) [Plate 45, 1; D&H: Hampshire 84];
- T & A Hutchinson of Edinburgh - 10 ton (1790–92) [Plate 18,3; D&H: Lothian 23–30, 31–7 and 41–6];
- Jonathan Garton & Co of Hull - 5 ton (1791) [Plate 23, 6; D&H: Yorkshire 17–21];
- Thomas Worswick & Son of Lancaster - 5 ton (1791–92) [Plate 26, 2]; D&H: Lancashire 9–28);
- Richard Paley of Leeds - 5 ton (1791) [Plate 26, 3; D&H: Yorkshire 43–52);
- Thomas Clarke of Liverpool - 10 ton (1791–92) [Plate 27, 4 and 5; D&H: Lancashire 61–78 and 95–9];
- John Kershaw of Rochdale - 2 ton (1791) [Plate 43, 1; D&H: Lancashire 140];
- John Morgan of Carmarthenshire - 5 ton (1792) [Plate 13, 5; D&H: Carmarthenshire 5–7];
- Samuel Kingdon of Exeter - 5 ton (1792) [Plate 19, 6; D&H: Devonshire 1–3];
- William Absolon of Yarmouth - 5 cwt (1792) [Plate 50, 1]; D&H: Norfolk 51–2].

But should Pye's catalogue be taken at face value? Remarkable as this is, it is not absolutely free of error; no pioneering work of this kind, commanding such a wealth of detail, ever can be. Nevertheless, for Birmingham manufacture the engraver-editor could bolster up his own not inconceivable knowledge with the advice of at least two major local collectors and the testimony of individuals directly connected with the token-making business, including Hancock himself. Pye's evidence, therefore, is not to be dismissed lightly. Yet was Hancock, acknowledged to have been a masterly engraver of tokens - Thomas Sharp, for example, deemed his productions as 'pre-eminent' among those of the Birmingham die-sinkers producing tokens for general circulation - also a manufacturer of tokens and on such a large scale? For, if one accepts Lutwyche's production figures, quoted by Sharp, as something like 103,000 halfpennies to the ton this would mean that, in a period of less than three years, Hancock produced well over six and a half million tokens.

Despite the recurrence of his name in Pye's catalogue, Hancock is now, like so many of his fellows, an elusive figure. A recent commentator has maintained that he was a die-sinker and stamper with a family toyman's business in Hospital Street, Birmingham between 1780 and 1800. Responsible among other things not only for tokens and quality medals but also for the petty loyalist medalets signed I H & Co. These are notions, though, that do not really bear critical examination.
A more plausible suggestion is that Hancock was related to Robert Hancock (1730–1817), the mezzotinter, who, in the middle years of the century, was an engraver with the Battersea and Worcester porcelain works. While this idea has its attractions, since Robert Hancock is said to have come originally from Staffordshire and there are vague hints of possible family connections, it may arise simply from a confusion of names. For, in reality, John Gregory Hancock was the son, probably the younger of two brothers, of quite another Robert Hancock (1714?–92), also an engraver, but long associated with the enterprises of the Boulton family.12 Not unnaturally with such a background, both John Gregory, born about 1750, and his brother William were apprenticed to the hardware manufactory of Boulton and Fothergill in 1763, shortly after its establishment and the year before its move to Soho.13

John Gregory is said to have maintained his links with Soho for some time after the expiration of his indentures. William, obviously well-regarded by the manufactory, was persuaded back to Soho from Sheffield as a head of the plating department in 1775. He was still there in 1783.14 But about this time the two brothers set up businesses on their own account in Birmingham, William as a 'plater' and John Gregory Hancock as a die-sinker.15 By 1783 the latter had made his entry on to the numismatic scene with the issue of his 'Joseph Priestley' medals which were advertised in Aris's *Birmingham Gazette* on 4 August of that year [Fig. 2].

Fig. 2. Hancock's Medal of Dr Priestley [D&H: Warwickshire 32 & 33; BHM: 251]

appear to have lived in Hospital Street until his last years; there is no obvious evidence of there being an inherited family toy-man's business, a suggestion which may arise from the quite separate activities of Hancock's brother William, or to associate with Hancock the royalist medals signed 'I H & Co' (treated in R.N.P. Hawkins, *A Dictionary of Makers of British Metallic Tickets ...* (London, 1989) pp. 22–23).

12 Robert Hancock's death was reported in Aris's *Birmingham Gazette* on 20 August 1792: ‘Last week in his 79th. year, Mr. Robert Hancock, formerly of the Soho Manufactory, near this town’. He might be the engraver, shown in the directories as resident in Summer Hill and then Moat Row in the 1780s and 1790s. If so his continued appearance at the latter address in John Ward's 1798 *New Birmingham Directory* is explained by the fact that this publication was simply a reissue of his edition for 1792. The entries, however, may equally refer to Robert Hancock, the mezzotinter. For the latter, see C. Cook, *The Life and Work of Robert Hancock* (London, 1948 and Supplement 1955).

13 MBP 236/103. The original indentures which have not been traced, were dated 24 June 1763.


15 Charles Pye, *A New Directory for ... Birmingham & ... Deritend* (Birmingham, 1785), p. 33. William continues as a 'plater' in subsequent directories until Pye's directory for 1797 where he is described as a 'toyman'. It may be that it is William's later activities that have given rise to the notion of there being a family 'toy' business.
Surprisingly, in view of his later prominence as a die-engraver and medallist, the 'Priestley' medals seem to be Hancock's only authenticated numismatic productions until his involvement with the new provincial coinage of the Parys Mine Company four years later and Thomas Williams's manoeuvrings for a national coinage contract. In this latter context Hancock engraved dies for a pattern guinea and for the pattern halfpenny designed by Williams's friend, Samuel More, the Secretary of the Society of Arts.16

There are the unfinished uniface flans for the so-called trial 'halfpenny' of Samuel Garbett [Fig. 3] which Matthew Young is said to have attributed to Hancock. The portrait is, certainly, redolent of the die-sinker's style. It seems unlikely, however, that these anomalous pieces predate the Anglesey issues as some have suggested. The more credible explanation is that they were produced by Hancock as trial specimens in the 1790s and rejected by Garbett whose attitude to tokens was, to say the least, guarded. Miss Banks, for instance, did not acquire her specimen until 1798 and, bearing in mind her acquisitiveness and acquaintance with the personality depicted, it would have been surprising if she had not obtained it very much earlier had it been available. Interestingly enough its first catalogue appearance is in Conder's *Arrangement* published in the same year.17

Fig. 3. The Garbett 'Trial Halfpenny' [D&H: Warwickshire 125]

To find out more about Hancock one has to resort to the Birmingham trade directories of the time. He first appears in Pye's *Directory* for 1785, described - presumably, in the way of these things, at his own instance - as a 'Modeller, Die-sinker, and Chaser' in Bartholomew Row, Birmingham. Two years later, now removed to 45 Edmund Street, he is shown, more simply, as an 'Artist'. This was to be his standard directory designation, though at a variety of addresses, until his final appearance in Chapman's volume for 1803, now at last resident in Hospital Street.18 It is as an 'artist', too, that he is described in the notice of his death in Aris's *Birmingham Gazette* for 11 November 1805:

Saturday, sennight [i.e. 2 November 1805], aged 55, sincerely lamented by all the friends and patrons of genius, that admired artist, Mr J G Hancock, of this town.

Five years earlier when he had essayed a private token or medal for himself it was an impression of an artist-engraver's studio that Hancock chose to portray on an unfinished proof [Fig. 4]. According to Sharp it represented an interior view of Hancock's own workshop. 'To the workboard a vice is affixed, and near it an engraver's cushion; to the right of the window, in the distance, is seen a whole-length anatomical figure, and a female torso on a pedestal, with a large cast of a head resting against it, occupies the foreground'.19

16 Forrer recorded a bronze uniface (obverse) pattern guinea of 'Spade type', signed 'HANCOCK', which would presumably date from c.1787 and be connected with Williams's campaign for a national coinage contract: Forrer as in n.11, VII, pp. 414-15; For the More halfpenny see C. Wilson Peck, *English Copper, Tin and Bronze Coins in the British Museum 1558-1958* (London, 1960), pp. 238-9 and plate 15, 929.
17 Sharp, as in n. 8, p. 121. Miss Banks recorded the acquisition date of her Garbett 'halfpenny' as 26 February 1798 in her token catalogue [Sarah Sophia Banks], Ms Catalogue of Coin Collection, VI - Tokens, p. 25: BM. Department of Coins and Medals, Add. MS 19, James Conder, *An Arrangement of Provincial Coins, Tokens, and Medalets*, ... Ipswich, 1798, p. 222.
18 The directories show Hancock, described as an 'artist', at Snowhill from 1791 to 1798, Summer Lane in 1800 and 1801, and Hospital Street in 1803.
19 Sharp, as in n. 8, p. 29. Miss Banks states that this piece was 'intended by Hancock for his private token, such as it is there are only six': [Sarah Sophia Banks], as in n. 17, 'Private Tokens'.

From such scraps of external contemporary evidence one must conclude that Hancock saw his public image as being that of an artist – a modeller and a die-engraver. And, going right back to the 'Priestley' medal, although this has the bold obverse legend 'I.G. HANCOCK F[ecit]' the implication of the *Gazette* advertisement is that it was Thomas Phipson (1738–1807), the New Street refiner and metal-roller, who was responsible for its actual striking.

Phipson, whatever the standard works may say, was not an engraver himself, although he had already branched out into medal making, cashing in on the popular euphoria that had greeted the acquittal by court martial of Admiral Keppel in 1779.20 A decade on he produced Simeon Moreau's Cheltenham medal celebrating George III's recovery from illness, from dies, once more, by Hancock [*BHM*: 301]. As a prominent Unitarian Phipson may well have been the inspiration behind the Priestley medal – its sponsor as well as its manufacturer. In 1794 he made sure that the public was left in no doubt as to his responsibility for the medal struck to commemorate Priestley's departure for America [Fig. 5], but by now Hancock, who must have engraved the obverse portrait, would anyway have been rather chary of associating his name too openly with the radical philosopher.21

---

20 Paul Withers, 'A Medallie Feud', *The Medal*, 18 (1991), 31. Phipson's 'Keppel' medal has not been identified from among the several versions produced at the time.
21 If Hancock's few attributed political tokens or medals truly represent his views he – and his pupils, Jorden and the younger Westwood – were 'King and Country' supporters, opposed to Priestley's radical philosophy, especially after the Birmingham riots of July 1791: cf. D&H: Warwickshire 34 (? Hancock) and Middlesex 829–830 (by Hancock and Jorden) although the trials Warwickshire 333 and Cheshire 60 are favourable.
To return to the question of Hancock’s tokens and the younger Westwood’s letter, Westwood had put particular emphasis on the period down to 1792 since his uncle had died in the March of that year. Pye tells us, however, that Hancock continued manufacturing tokens for another three years. These were the strikings for:

Salop Woollen Manufactory of Shrewsbury – 5 ton (1793) [Plate 44, 2; D&H: Shropshire 19–22];
Hawkins Bird of Bristol – 1 ton (1793) [Plate 10, 4 and 5; D&H: Somerset 88–9];
Sharp and Chaldecott’s Chichester version of their halfpenny – 1 ton (1794) [Plate 4, 3; D&H: Sussex 19–20];
The Thames and Severn Canal Company of Brimscombe Port – 3 ton (1795) [Plate 10, 2 and 3; D&H: Gloucestershire 58, 59–61]; and
‘JB’ of Foundling Fields, London (1795) – 3 cwt. (1795) [Plate 29, 6 and 7; D&H: Middlesex 303–5].

The ‘JB’ tokens, demonstrably inferior in quality of production to what had gone before, if elegant in the simplicity of their design, were among the last, according to Pye, that Hancock was to manufacture himself. The year 1795, therefore, marked a significant watershed for the die-sinker who was henceforward to be employed by other manufacturers to engrave dies for their commissions or speculative ventures; the metal roller Thomas Dobbs, Peter Kempson and, at the turn of the century, his old master Matthew Boulton. And as tokens ran their course his work became increasingly medallic and of remarkable quality.23

What brought about this change in Hancock’s circumstances to cause him to abandon the large scale token manufacture that Pye predicates for the years 1788–95 and return to his more restricted, if artistically assured, trade-skill of die-sinking? And reverting to our original question, how does all this tie in with John Westwood, junior’s letter? But first one should perhaps try to establish what is known about the Westwoods.

John Westwood, senior (1744–92), and his younger brother Obadiah (b. 1747 [NS]) were both immigrants to Birmingham from Bilston in Staffordshire.24 Little, otherwise, is known about their early life but there is good reason to believe that John Westwood began his Birmingham career as a seal and copper-plate engraver and he is described as such in Sketchley’s directory for 1767, resident at the Bear and Ragged Staff in Bull Street. He is credited with a number of book illustrations including the plates for John Baskerville’s folio Bible of 1769–72, the frontispiece to Myles Swinney’s ephemeral magazine, the British Museum or Universal Register [1771] [Fig. 6], and an engraving of a fractured leg in the Medical Miscellany for 1769.25

As a medallist, and we must be talking about the same man, he engraved the dies for commemorative pieces for John Wilkes’s Middlesex election victory in 1768 [BHM 113–14], the visit of

22 The Salop Woollen Manufactory appears to have been a flannel mill operated by the firm of Cook and Mason at the Isle on the Severn just upstream from Shrewsbury. In 1795, according to Arthur Aikin, it was the ‘greatest undertaking’ in Shropshire flannel manufacture: it continued in operation until the 1820s: Arthur Aikin, Journal of a Tour through North Wales (London, 1797), p. 17; Barrie Trinder, The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 138. I am grateful to Mr Tony Carr of the Shropshire Records and Research Service for this information.

Hawkins Bird was a grocer; Thomas Chaldecott, a cutler and silversmith; and Thomas Sharp, a mercer. Miss Banks noted the issuer of the ‘Foundling Fields’ halfpenny as ‘Burton. London’: [Sarah Sophia Banks], as in n. 17, p. 78. It seems most likely that this was James Burton (1764–1837), the developer of much of the Foundling Hospital estate in the 1790s, and that the tokens were issued in part-payment to his workmen.

23 For Dobbs: D&H: Middlesex 239–41 [1800], which is certainly of Birmingham origin.

24 John Westwood, senior, was baptised in Bilston parish church on 27 August 1744 and Obadiah on 28 February 1746 (OS); John Westwood, junior was baptised in Birmingham (St Philip’s) on 31 May 1774. Forrer (as in n. 11, VI. pp. 458–9) is unreliable on the Westwoods’ biographical details and conflates their oeuvre.

Christian VII of Denmark to England the same year [BHM 130], Garrick’s Shakespeare Jubilee celebrations at Stratford in 1769 [BHM 136] [Fig. 7] (and a Birmingham Theatre ticket based on the same obverse die in 1774 [D&W: Dramatic Tickets 7–8]), and George Whitefield’s death in 1770 [BHM 149]. It has been plausibly argued, too, that he was also responsible for the Resolution & Adventure medal of 1772 [BHM 165] and other, probably abortive, work for Boulton and Fothergill.26

26 Arthur Westwood, Matthew Boulton’s ‘Otaheite’ Medal (Birmingham, 1926), pp. 2–3; L Richard Smith, The Resolution & Adventure Medal (Sydney, 1985), pp. 8 and 12 where reference is made to Westwood’s engraving for Boulton and Fothergill of projected medals ‘for Mr Banks and Dr Solander’ in 1772. I am indebted to Mr David Vice for drawing the latter monograph to my attention.

Unfortunately BHM does not distinguish between the productions of the two John Westwoods but nothing after 1774 can be plausibly attributed to the uncle.
Westwood issued his ‘Shakespeare Jubilee’ medal from Newhall Walk [Fig. 7]. Already die-sinking and metal-stamping may have been taking precedence over copper-plate engraving for by 1770, joined now by Obadiah at 37 New Hall Street (probably the same address), he could describe their business as that of ‘Dye Sinksers and Coffin Furniture makers’. Westwood issued his ‘Shakespeare Jubilee’ medal from Newhall Walk [Fig. 7]. Already die-sinking and metal-stamping may have been taking precedence over copper-plate engraving for by 1770, joined now by Obadiah at 37 New Hall Street (probably the same address), he could describe their business as that of ‘Dye Sinksers and Coffin Furniture makers’.27 Birmingham manufacture of coffin furniture – brass mountings, handles and ornaments – had been revolutionised by a die-stamping invention in 1769 and Obadiah quickly took advantage of this new development.28 By the late seventies, now removed to Great Charles Street, the brothers’ paths had begun to diverge, Obadiah to concentrate on his coffin furniture, decorative stamped metal-work and button making, and John, in association with William Welch, the copper factor and Anglesey agent, to branch out into the merchandising of copper and brass, and, in due course, to gravitate into metal rolling for the trade on a fairly large scale.29 Both brothers were inventive characters. Obadiah, for instance, was granted a patent in 1786 for a catch-all method of ‘making trays, waiters, card-stands, caddies, dressing boxes, bottle-stands, ink-stands, coat, breast and other buttons, frames for picture and other things, mouldings, and ornaments for rooms and ceilings and for other purposes’ by stamping treated textile pulps.30 John Westwood has been credited with the invention of a new form of cannon but this must be a garbled reference to John Wilkinson’s famous patent of 1774.31 Much more importantly, he was justly responsible for the patenting of a method of ‘hardening and stiffening copper’ by graduated cold rolling in 1783.32 Westwood’s association with Welch had brought him into contact with Thomas Williams, the managing partner of the Parys Mine Company, and he now became even more closely linked with Williams who adopted Westwood’s rolling methods at his Holywell

---


28 R.A. Church and Barbara M.D. Smith, ‘Competition and Monopoly in the Coffin Furniture Industry, 1870–1915’, EsHR, XIX (1966), 621.

29 Westwood, as in n. 26, p. 10; in addition to button-making Obadiah Westwood was also involved in the production of popular medals: Withers, as in n. 29, pp. 29–35.


31 Westwood, as in n. 26, p. 10; Patent Specification 1063, granted to John Wilkinson 27 January 1774.

manufactory. Westwood’s invention, coupled, in some way, with a process for making copper bolts patented by William Collins, another associate of Williams, paved the way for the Anglesey entrepreneur to gain a virtual international monopoly of copper sheathing for ships in the last decades of the eighteenth century.33

The Williams and Collins connection led, in turn, to Westwood’s becoming a key figure in the team involved in Williams’s attempts to secure the contract for a regal coinage and the production of the ‘Copper King’s’ tokens. Westwood is said to have minted the ‘Monogram’ Anglesey penny, engraved by Milton from designs conceived by Collins and perhaps Samuel More in 1786.34 This is quite likely but Westwood’s own capability of striking a large scale quality coinage at this time would have been minimal and Williams’s production coinage, the dies for which were engraved by Hancock, was embarked upon not later than the new year at Holywell, where Williams had quickly installed at least one coining press alongside his rolling mills and cutting out presses.35

What was actually happening at this time is totally obfuscated by the absence of any credible archive material. We are dependent on the papers of Matthew Boulton, Williams’s rival for a national coinage contract, and the rumours of the latter’s machinations that constantly assailed the Birmingham entrepreneur. What we can divine amounts to little more than informed hearsay, but in all the jockeying for a national coinage contract, Hancock’s name is constantly linked with that of Westwood. In March 1787 Boulton, in something of a panic, told Samuel Garbett that the Birmingham manufacturer, Richard Ford, had introduced Westwood to King George III and had shown the king some Anglesey pennies: ‘Westwood and Hancock the dye Graver speak publicly of their going to reside in the Tower very soon to manage the 2 Coinage. Hence it appears that Williams seems sure of the contract... Williams (I was told yesterday by Wilkinson) hath got several presses at work at Hollywell & is making pieces for himself and for Wilkinson’; Hancock’s engraving of ‘Wilkinson’s head’, he noted at much the same time, was ‘cutting by Westwood for a Coin to be circulated’.36 Two months later Boulton was edgily telling Garbett that Williams had ‘articled with Hancock and he is going to Hollywell’. He had, as he confessed to Droz, ‘no Artist who is capable to engrave a head’ for Williams had ‘already hired the 2 best Die Engravers in England [Hancock and Westwood] in order to prevent other persons from benefit by their service’.37

While there is no absolute evidence, it seems not unreasonable to assume that Westwood, with Hancock as die-sinker, oversaw Williams’s production of ‘Druid’ coins both at Holywell and Birmingham when, after little more than a few weeks, his coining operations were transferred to the Midlands because of its better distribution potential.38 After all, Williams, although he had cut copper blanks for the Dutch East India Company, had no experience of striking coins previous to his ‘Druid’ venture.

It was a happy situation that was to continue for another two years. Seventeen-eighty-nine, however, not only saw revolution in France; it also witnessed a total reversal in Westwood’s fortunes. In that year Williams, facing up to the reality of there being no government coinage contract in the offing but secure in his overall control of the copper market, decided to abandon the actual manufacture of coin to his arch-rival Boulton, minting machinery and all.39

35 MBP: 148/63: (Matthew Boulton to Samuel Garbett, 28 March 1787).
36 MBP: 148/56, as in n. 35; MBP 378/63 (Coinage Notebook 3 (1787–8), p. 14 (14 March 1787)).
37 MBP: 148/97 (Boulton to Garbett, 22 April 1787); MBP: 28 (Boulton to J-P. Droz (draft), 12 June 1787).
38 The transfer to Birmingham probably marked the end of the ‘B’ issues of ‘Druid’ pennies. By the beginning of May Boulton had heard a rumour that Williams was employing a coining press belonging to a person in Birmingham: it would not be fanciful to believe that this was Westwood organising the change-over: MBP: 309/59 (Draft to John Vivian enclosed in Boulton to Garbett, 4 May 1787).
39 For this episode and its implications for Matthew Boulton see David Vice, ‘The Soho Mint & the Anglesey Tokens of the Parys Mine Company’, Format 33, 3-4.
Westwood, perhaps privy to Williams's intentions, had, in the meantime, committed himself heavily to the purchase of new coining equipment. Ignoring Boulton's advice to buy Williams's presses, 'as I knew it would be injurious to Westwood to get new Presses made', he had spurned Williams's machinery — 'the worst presses he ever saw' — and, bereft of the latter's patronage, soon found himself over-stretched in his copper-rolling business and financially vulnerable just at a time when copper prices were wildly fluctuating. By September 1789 he was, financially, in a parlous state. By December he had become bankrupt and as a result a number of respectable, supportive Birmingham businessmen including John Hurd, Boulton's partner in his copper enterprises, had caught severe pecuniary colds.40

Yet, bankrupt as he was, Westwood somehow continued in business as a 'roller of metals' and, after a false start, as a coin maker on his own account. He had committed himself to the production of halfpennies for the Cheshire copper and brass manufacturers, Roe and Company, and their associate mining firm at Cronebanc in County Wicklow. For a while his affairs were in total disarray and, as yet, without sufficient plant of his own, he had to subcontract his Cronebanc commission to Boulton. An agreement to strike halfpennies for the Southampton naval contractors and brewers, Walter Taylor and Company, was cancelled after a small production run [Fig. 8] and appropriated by Boulton as was a tentative arrangement Westwood had made through the Birmingham merchant Thomas Venables with the Glasgow woollen drapers, Gilbert Shearer and Company. It was not to be long though before Westwood, ever the survivor, had got his act together again. Perhaps through the helpful dilatoriness of Hancock he retained the commission with Roe and Company for their first Macclesfield halfpennies - the 'Beehive' tokens - which, it was rumoured, he had to have struck in London although they may well have been made on his own now newly-installed presses in Birmingham.41 At any rate by the Spring of 1790 Westwood had struck another tranche of halfpennies - the 'Charles Roe' halfpennies - for Roe and Company and had undertaken to coin for Wilkinson. As Boulton informed Garbett on 29 March,

The Macclesfield Co have lately ordered of Jn° Westwood an addition of 25 Tons to the 21 Ton lately issued by them (36 to the pound) & those of this last order have the Head of old Roe upon them....

Mr Jn° Wilkinson hath likewise ordered a certain number of Tons of his 1/2 pence with his own portrait upon them to be fabricated by Westwood.... As to Taylor's coinage of Southampton, I believe, I have for the present put a stop to it. He had positively ordered them of Westwood, the Dies were prepared, & specimens struck off but the execution being retarded by Westwoods Bankruptcy, Mr Taylor applied to me.42

Fig. 8. Westwood's Southampton Halfpenny, its pseudo-heraldic reverse reflecting the naval contracting and brewing interests of Walter Taylor and Richard Moody [D&H: Hampshire 84].43

---

40 MRP: 150 (Boulton to Thomas Williams. 24 May 1789). Westwood's bankruptcy as a 'caster of metals' was gazetted on 1 December 1789: The Times, 2 December 1789.
41 David Vice, 'The Cronebane Token of the Associated Irish Mine Company', Format, 42, 2-6. Hurd was the source of the rumour of the tokens being struck in London.
42 MRP: 150/132 (Boulton to Garbett, 29 March 1790).
43 Two dozen of these tokens were sent to Walter Taylor on 5 January 1790 when Westwood was still striving to retain the contract: Richard G. Doty, 'Matthew Boulton's Tokens for Southampton', The 'Conder' Token Newsletter, II, 1 (15 August 1997), 19.
44 Walter Taylor (1734-1803) was a naval contractor and blockmaker and Richard Vernon Moody (d. 1792) was a banker. In addition to their primary interests they were co-partners in a brewery concern. I am grateful to Mr A.J. George of Southampton Archives Services for this information. For Taylor see J.P.M. Pannell, Old Southampton Shores (Newton Abbot, 1967), pp. 51-72.
Within two years John Westwood was dead and, even if he had done little to clear his debts, he had established his coining business to the extent that it could be taken over by his brother Obadiah as a going concern. This is made explicit by another source. In the spring of 1793, Thomas Digges, an American government-confidant with English business interests, reported to Thomas Jefferson, the United States Secretary of State, a scheme he had uncovered to procure a contract for the coining of American cents in Birmingham. Though his informants were ‘close & secret as to who the die sinker was, where coined &c’, he discovered that these coins – the ‘Washington/Eagle cents’ [Fig. 9] – had been manufactured, through the agency of William and Alexander Walker, Birmingham merchants with American trading interests, ‘at Mr Obadiah [sic] Westwoods (a considerable maker of these kinds of money, and that his die sinker Mr Jn’ Gregory Hancock (one of the first in this place ‘tho with the Character of a dissipated man) and a prentice Lad Jn’ Jordan, very Clever in that line, had executed them & still hold the dies’. 45

Fig. 9. Obadiah Westwood’s Pattern Cents [D&H: Middlesex 1049–50] ‘... the President’s head, not a bad likeness, & tolerably well executed’. 46

Digges’s exposure of the activities that Obadiah, and presumably his brother before him, were engaged in and his reference to ‘these kinds of money’ – copper currency and its token substitutes – tends to bear out, at least in general, the burden of the younger Westwood’s letter to Matthew Robinson Boulton with which we began this address. Evidently the brothers operated on a comparatively large scale but, if so, and here one returns to our original conundrum, why is there only the most exiguous mention of either Westwood in Pye’s catalogue and why are all the tokens that one would assume to have been struck by them attributed to Hancock whom Digges refers to as Obadiah’s die-sinker? Even the diligent William Robert Hay briskly sniffing out the coineries of Birmingham and grangerising his catalogues with the information he unearthed makes no mention of the Westwoods’ apparently substantial business. 47

The explanation must lie in John Westwood’s bankruptcy and, perhaps, too, in the dubious nature of his character and that of his brother; a factor of some significance in a town where business might be sharp but was dominated by some degree of rectitude at its higher levels which were all too conscious of ‘Brummagem’s’ reputation in matters of coining. 48 To Boulton,

---

44 John Westwood’s death was reported in Aris’s Birmingham Gazette on 12 March 1792: ‘On Friday night [9 March], Mr. John Westwood, a very ingenious mechanic of this town’.


46 Digges to Thomas Pinckney [the American Minister in London], 6 April 1793: Thomas Jefferson Papers, as in n. 45.

47 Hay was in Birmingham in September 1796, admittedly after the Westwoods’ large-scale coining operations had ended, but he had discussions with a number of people intimately connected with the token-making scene including John Stubbs Jorden: Dykes, as in n. 5.

JOHN GREGORY HANCOCK AND THE WESTWOOD BROTHERS

Westwood was 'an ingenious Shabby Fellow, associated with Counterfeiters of Coin & Engraved Glasgow Bank Notes'; someone whom, he told Wilkinson, he was not prepared to compete with, someone, he confided to his notebook, who was 'not fit to run a mint'. It is not surprising that Westwood's bankruptcy and fall from grace should be perceived as a just desert to a career of questionable integrity. There is more than a little inwardness in Pye's almost apologetic reference to him in his Description of Modern Birmingham where he 'considers it no more than an act of justice, to observe, that the manufacture of copper bolts, for fastening the timbers of ships together was invented by Mr John Westwood, an inhabitant of this town'. That there was no reference to the latter's major concern in copper rolling or to his coining activities, may well have reflected his townsmen's understandable wish to forget Westwood.

Our riddle begins to resolve itself through another Gazette notice which Obadiah Westwood placed in the newspaper on 19 March 1792 [Fig. 10].

O

WESTWOOD cannot omit this Opportunity of returning Thanks to the Encouragers and Customers of his late Brother, John Westwood, nor delay fuliciting them in his own Behalf for their future Favours, as he intends to continue the Rolling of Metals in all its various Branches as usual.

That Part of the Business wherein J. G. Hancock had a Concern with John Westwood, such as Coining of Metals, &c. &c. will be carried on with its usual Spirit. — At the same Time, O. Westwood wishes to inform the Creditors to the Estate of John Westwood, deceased, that their recent Demands shall be immediately liquidated by him.

N.B. O. Westwood also gives this Notice to Merchants, Factories, and the Public in general, that he still continues carrying on at his own Manufactory his former Trades of Cabin Furniture Making, the new invented Picture Frames and Gladys, Borders for Rooms, &c. as well as all Sorts of Stamped Comodes and Brass Work.

Birmingham, March 19, 1792.

John Westwood, senior, had died ten days earlier but by the time of his death his debts had not been discharged — indeed, despite Obadiah's expressed intentions they were not to be settled for another year and then only on the basis of the payment of a very small dividend to his creditors. For Obadiah the advertisement was a 'damage-limitation exercise' calculated to retain the confidence of his brother's remaining customers and the faith of his creditors. For modern numismatists its importance lies in its reference to what was clearly an established and ongoing business partnership between John Westwood and John Gregory Hancock. What the nature of this partnership or 'concern' was will probably never be known. The most likely explanation is that it was an arrangement of convenience arising out of Westwood's failure, which provided the cover for him to continue his coining activities. To the contemporary observer Hancock was thus seen as fronting the enterprise to the extent that Pye could record the die-sinker as the principal of the firm

49 MBP: 378/51, as in n. 36, p. 17 (26 March 1787): Boulton's words about Westwood's fitness to run a mint were in the context of the latter's expectations of Thomas Williams winning a national coinage contract: neither 'were capable of conducting such a Manufacture as the Mint ought to be'; MBP: 357/40 (Boulton to John Wilkinson (draft), October 1790).

50 Charles Pye. A Description of Modern Birmingham (Birmingham, 1823). p. 4

51 For Westwood's coining debts in regard to Roe and Company see Vice, as in n. 41; Westwood's insolvency did not merely relate to his coining debts but the detailed nature of his crisis of liquidity is not now apparent.
for the benefit of posterity while John Westwood and then his brother were the de facto manufacturers. The answer to our conundrum must be therefore that both Pye and the younger Westwood were telling the truth.

The obstacles that Digges had had to overcome in tracking down Obadiah Westwood's coinery arose, in some measure, from the Walkers' suspicion of his being an American government agent. But the whole Westwood coining operation was, in itself, a suspect one that did not bear too close an examination; Obadiah was little better than his brother and Hancock himself was evidently not above reproach. Although much more research has to be done on the subject it is plain that, from the beginning, the counterfeits (or at any rate a high proportion of the more plausible ones) and the "muled" pieces that dogged the consortium's large output of commercial tokens were actually struck in house; the Westwoods were, in fact, bypassing the legitimate 'proprietors' who had commissioned them and forging the latter's issues for their own direct profit. It is hardly surprising that the younger Westwood, brought up in such a counterfeiter's kitchen, should have devoted so much time to the specious fabrications that he foisted on a gullible public as token collecting took on the proportions of a mania; with his background such work was second nature to him.

Within two years of his visit, however, the Westwood enterprise that Digges had come upon had been wound up. By 1795 large-scale token production had already become a thing of the past. Now the call was for comparatively low-volume issues to meet the demand of local shopkeepers, and new, thrusting, manufacturers like Kempson and Lutwyche were better placed to meet and to foster this market. When Hay visited Birmingham in the September of 1796 he found that 'Hancock had given up the Business as had Jourdan [sic] who had gone into a Manufactory for patent Window Frames'.

By the time that Pye had put out the plates for the second edition of his catalogue the Westwood's coin-making business had been defunct for a lustrum and more, Obadiah was concentrating on the manufacture of his coffin furniture and picture frames, and John Westwood, junior had departed for Sheffield to pursue his craft there as an engraver and medallist. Only Hancock was still left as a ready witness of the Westwoods' activities and, no doubt, in contributing to Pye's publication, he would not have wished to underplay his own part in their token venture. And, captive to the evidence made available to him, Pye would have accepted the partial story that he was told which subsequent generations, not unnaturally, have accepted.

In the decade remaining to him Hancock's reputation as a die-engraver was enhanced to a considerable degree by the medallic work he executed for Kempson but that was all over by 1803. One suspects that his health had been questionable for some time. Digges thought him 'dissipated' as early as 1793. With the exception of the posthumously-reworked obverse of BHM 613 no medals listed in BHM subsequent to BHM 550 [1803] can be attributed to Hancock. Hancock's son, John Gregory Hancock, junior (bap. 6 January 1792), an infant prodigy credited with the engraving of several private tokens at the age of eight or nine, presumably died young. In 1834 Sharp failed to trace him although George Barker, a supposed sponsor of young Hancock's work, was still very much alive. The John Gregory Hancock who took out a patent for an 'elastic rod for umbrellas' (Patent Specification 5440) in 1826 was a cousin, William's son.