THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY TOKEN

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Sarah Sophia Banks, the exemplar of the avid contemporary collector of the eighteenth century British token, relied on three published catalogues to put her cabinet into a semblance of order: Charles Pye’s Provincial Coins and Tokens of 1801, Matthew Denton and Thomas Prattent’s The Virtuoso’s Companion and Coin Collector’s Guide of 1795–97 and James Conder’s Arrangement of Provincial Coins, Tokens, and Medalets first published in 1798. ² The three works together provided a reasonable conspectus of the tokens available to collectors although each individually had its limitations.

Miss Banks was by no means alone in her dependence on these catalogues but what is perhaps surprising is that they continued as the token collector’s vade-mecums long after the feverish excitement of the contemporary collecting phase had subsided. Conder’s Arrangement, in particular, remained the standard catalogue for the collector for the best part of a century and so much associated was his work with the series that in the United States his surname was adopted as the generic name for a late eighteenth-century token. In part the absence of any successor literature of this kind reflected the considerable diminution of serious interest in trade tokens that attended the departure from the scene of the generation of collectors who had known them at first hand and had experienced something of the apparent frenzy that had attended their issue. Interest, of course, continued in trade tokens after the first flushes of enthusiasm but their comparative modernity coupled with their low denominational value set them — and even more so their early-nineteenth-century counterparts — apart as trivial curiosities of a less organised age; they could not claim the antiquarian cachet even of their seventeenth century predecessors.³ It is not surprising, therefore, that while the latter found some acceptance in the pages of the Numismatic Chronicle (first published in 1836 as the Numismatic Journal) there seems to be little or no mention of their successors. Nor is it strange that it was not until 1870 with the acquisition of the Freudenthal collection that the British Museum augmented its token holdings in more than a passing way since Lady Banks’ presentation of her sister-in-law’s extensive collection in 1818.

Apart from the private publication of Thomas Sharp’s Catalogue of the Chetwynd Collection in 1834, ⁴ limited to the pieces in the Grendon Hall collection and to a print run thought to be of no more than fifty-two copies no serious general overview of eighteenth and early-nineteenth century tokens was attempted until the 1880s when a series of descriptive notes appeared irregularly and

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¹ This paper: in focussing on the more significant contributions to the study of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tokens, is in no way intended to constitute a bibliographical survey; many excellent local studies, important for a full understanding of the subject, have, for example, been omitted. For a more detailed treatment see the bibliographies in Dykes, as in n. 2; Withers, in n. 15; and Mays, in n. 17 and also the two volumes of Harrington E. Manville’s, Numismatic Guide to British & Irish Periodicals, 1731–1991 (Archaeological) (London, 1993) and 1836–1995 (Numismatic) (London, 1997).

² Provincial Coins and Tokens issued from the Year 1787 to the Year 1801. Engraved by Charles Pye (Birmingham and London, 1801). A second edition (strictly a reprint from the original plates), entitled A Correct and Complete Representation of all the Provincial Copper Coins, Tokens of Trade, and Cards of Address, on Copper which were circulated as such between the Years 1787 and 1801 was published by the London coin dealer Matthew Young in 1819. A third edition, limited to twenty-three copies, was produced by Arthur William Waters in 1916 but the scholarly value of this rendition is reduced because Waters revised Pye’s notes and it is difficult to distinguish the original statements from the revisions; Thomas Prattent, The Virtuoso’s Companion and Coin Collector’s Guide (6 vols; London, 1795–7); James Conder, An Arrangement of Provincial Coins, Tokens, and Medalets issued in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies, within the last Twenty Years; from the Farthing to the Penny Size (Ipswich, 1798). There are a variety of printings of this work with differing appendices and a separate edition of 1799.

³ For a survey of these catalogues see D.W. Dykes, The Eighteenth Century Token (London, forthcoming).

⁴ Thomas Sharp, A Catalogue of Provincial Copper Coins, Tokens, Tickets, and Medalets issued in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries . . . in the Collection of Sir George Chetwynd . . . (London, 1834).
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anonymously in the Wednesday numbers of The Bazaar, The Exchange and Mart, a popular household magazine of the period containing medical advice, garden hints, fashion pointers and much else of more or less ephemeral interest to a late Victorian middle-class family.5

The author, Richard Thomas Samuel (1831–1906), at the time the London agent of a number of South Wales colliery companies, was interested less in the minutiae of the design of the pieces that had hypnotised D.T. Batty, the Manchester curio dealer, in his bewildering meander through the series a few years earlier and far more in their historical, heraldic or social interpretation.6 Samuel’s was a new approach and one of great value to an understanding of the tokens but his descriptions were padded out with a great deal of irrelevant and esoteric material and in the nature of the spread of his work he made mistakes which have been perpetuated by subsequent repetition. It was left to James Atkins (1837–1910), a retired upholsterer and cabinet maker with an amateur interest in botany (Pl. 13d), to signal the rapidly reviving interest in British trade tokens with the publication of his Tradesmen’s Tokens of the Eighteenth Century in 1892.7 Atkins’ work immediately superseded Conder’s Arrangement as the ultimate authority for collectors of the eighteenth-century token. Adopting Conder’s county arrangement it brought order to Batty’s misconceived efforts by listing virtually every variety of token known at that time. It had added value in essaying the almost impossible task of cataloguing eighteenth century evasions and providing an alphabetical list of the edge readings found on tokens. What it again lacked however were any illustrations to guide the collector or student but where appropriate it did provide cross-references to the engravings in ‘Pye’ and the Virtuoso’s Companion together with a concordance with ‘Conder’.

What Atkins did not attempt either was any commentary on the lines of Samuel’s earlier Bazaar articles. But there were others ready to remedy this omission and a vehicle was now available for them. Leonard Forrer had begun the Numismatic Circular, the house organ of Spink and Son, in 1892 and was soon giving space to British related subjects. Before the decade was out William John Davis (1848–1934) (Pl. 13a), an Inspector of Factories, already the author of The Token Coinage of Warwickshire,8 was contributing short notes on tokens and in 1900 Arthur William Waters (c.1869–1962) (Pl. 13b), a Londoner but now a book-seller and coin dealer in Leamington Spa, began an important series of articles on eighteenth-century provincial coins which were, in part, a precursor to his books on the tokens of South London and Middlesex.9 By 1904 Sydney Sydenham, a Bath antiquarian (1860–1913), had embarked on an invaluable sequence on the tokens of his home city based on his extensive collection of contemporary ephemera.10 All these authors were using contemporary local evidential material to establish accurate attributions and to bring some degree of scholarly interpretation to their subject. A year earlier Samuel Henry Hamer (1859–1930) (Pl. 12c), an engineer and lathe-maker from Halifax, had published a selection of the annotations the contemporary collector William Robert Hay had made in his copies of the 1796

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5 The notes appeared in The Bazaar between 29 December 1880 and 28 August 1889. The notes seem to have petered out in August 1889 although they were subscribed ‘To be continued’.

6 For Samuel see R.C. Bell, Commercial Coins 1787–1804 (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1963), pp. 303–6 and ‘Richard Thomas Samuel (1831–1906)’, BNJ XXXII (1963), 168–73. Bell says that Samuel contributed an earlier series of articles on Welsh tokens to the Swansea newspaper, The Cambrian. I have been unable to trace these and I believe that Bell’s informant must have had in mind notes contributed to the paper by George Grant Francis, the Swansea antiquary, in 1867–68 and subsequently reprinted in his The Smelting of Copper in the Swansea District (London, 1881).

7 Atkins’ book was published by W.S. Lincoln and Son, the New Oxford Street firm whose stock of some 70,000 specimens (‘in all probability the largest in the world’) formed the basis of the work.

8 Batty’s Catalogue of Copper Tokens published in twenty-nine parts between 1868 and 1884. Peck, said of Batty’s work, which spawned the cult of the variety, that he knew of ‘nothing more likely to produce insanity than a serious attempt to use this monument to misdirected energy’: C.W. Peck, ‘Eighteenth Century Tradesmen’s Tokens. An Introduction to the Series’, SCMB (September 1947), 348. (Peck’s illuminating article was reprinted in Seaby’s A Catalogue of the Copper Coins and Tokens of the British Isles (London, 1949), pp. 86–90).

9 Arthur W. Waters, The Token Coinage of South London Issued in the 18th and 19th Centuries (Leamington Spa 1904); Notes . . . respecting the . . . Eighteenth Century Tokens . . . of Middlesex (Leamington Spa 1906). His “Notes on the 18th Century Tokens” [under a variety of titles] began in SNC 9 (January 1901), col. 4413. Waters’ books encouraged the publisher William Longman to produce his Tokens of the Eighteenth Century connected with Booksellers & Booksmakers (London 1916).

10 Sydenham’s Bath Token issues of the 18th Century began in SNC 12 (February 1904), col. 7371. His collection of newspaper and magazine cuttings, now in Bath Reference Library, is probably the most extensive contemporary reference source for eighteenth and nineteenth century tokens.
THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY TOKEN EDITION OF CHARLES PYE’S PROVINCIAL COPPER COINS OR TOKENS AND THE VIRTUOSO’S COMPANION. ALTHOUGH HE DREW ATTENTION TO THEIR VALUE, HOWEVER, HIS RENDERING OF HAY’S JOTTINGS IN THE LATTER WERE NOT ALWAYS STRICELY ACCURATE AND IT WAS LEFT TO PETER PRESTON-MORLEY TO PROVIDE MORE PRECISE TRANSCRIPTIONS IN THE 1970S.¹¹

THE PUBLICATION OF ATKIN’S CATALOGUE IN 1892 WAS AN ALREADY CLEAR INDICATION THAT A SERIOUS INTEREST IN TOKENS HAD RE-ESTABLISHED ITSELF AND THAT A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT COLLECTIONS WERE BEING FORMED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF DEALERS SUCH AS W.S. LINCOLN AND SON, A.H. BALDWIN AND SONS AND JAMES VEIRTY. IT WAS NATURAL THAT WHEN, IN 1903, THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY WAS FORMED IN REACTION TO THE PERCEIVED NEGLECT OF MODERN BRITISH COINAGE BY THE ROYAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, A NUMBER OF THE MOST PROMINENT TOKEN COLLECTORS SHOULD HASTEN TO JOIN, AMONG THEM ATKIN, HAROLD B. BOWLES, RICHARD DALTON, DAVIS, JOHN DUDMAN, LIONEL FLETCHER, HAMER, WILLIAM NORMAN, WILLIAM SYKES AND WATERS TO COME FORWARD INITIALLY. HAMER, HOWEVER, WAS THE ONLY ONE TO PUBLISH IN THE SOCIETY’S NEW JOURNAL BUT HIS EXCELLENT ILLUSTRATED PAPERS ON PRIVATE TOKENS BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE VERY FIRST VOLUME.¹² OTHERWISE, THERE WAS ONLY A SURPRISINGLY PEDESTRIAN CONTRIBUTION FROM H. ALEXANDER PARSONS IN THE SECOND VOLUME AND NOTHING ELSE WAS TO APPEAR FOR OVER A DECADE.¹³


AS FAR AS THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SERIES AND ‘ATKIN’S’ WAS CONCERNED DAVIS, IN HIS INTRODUCTION, COMMENTED THAT ‘A LONG PERIOD MUST ELAPSE ERE ANY WANT FOR A RE-ISSUE OF THE BOOK IN AN EXTENDED FORM CAN MAKE ITSELF FELT’. HE WAS MISTAKEN. ALREADY TWO MAJOR COLLECTORS WERE


¹⁴ London, 1904.

¹⁵ Paul and Bente WITHERS, British Copper Tokens 1811–1820, including those of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (Lanffyllin, 1999). ‘Davis’ still remains important for early eighteenth-century Irish tokens, ‘Highland’ bracteates and the few nineteenth-century private tokens.

¹⁶ Leamington Spa, 1922.

setting about a new compendium that was to begin to bear fruit six years later. The Bristol businessman Richard Dalton (1854-1922) (Pl. 12d) and Hamer collaborated — Hamer writing the supporting notes assisted by Waters (without acknowledgement) — to produce what Peck described as one of the finest numismatic books ever published. In the manner of ‘Pye’ and the Virtuoso’s Companion Dalton and Hamer’s The Provincial Token Coinage of the Eighteenth Century was issued serially in fourteen parts with an appendix between 1910 and 1918. With virtually every token reproduced to a high technical standard in the text, it remains the standard work on the series. It says much for the editors’ application that, apart from minor varieties, very little of importance has been added to their catalogue over the years. If a criticism can be levelled at the catalogue it is that it is too exhaustive containing a great deal of material that is not strictly contemporary token coinage and accepting too readily mules, concoctions and re-strikes as primary material. ‘Dalton and Hamer’ may be faulted, too, in its supporting notes that are frequently inadequate and often confused. Eventually, in 1954, Waters by then, at 84, very much the doyen of the token fraternity was persuaded by Peter Seaby to produce a volume of Notes on Eighteenth Century Tokens. These are of great value but are not as full as, and in some instances at variance with, those he had contributed to the Numismatic Circular half a century earlier. They are also too dogmatic in the conversion of Charles Pye’s weights of tokens produced into actual numbers.

Most of the published research on eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tokens in the years following the appearance of ‘Davis’ and ‘Dalton and Hamer’ was concerned with their attribution. This is listed in the bibliographies appended to ‘Dykes’, ‘Withers’ and ‘Mays’. While much of this work is important four papers that have appeared in the Journal over recent years and have added considerably to our understanding of the series should be singled out for special mention: D.R.D. Edmunds, ‘The gold and silver tokens issued by John Berkely Monck, 1811–1812’; T. Stainton, ‘John Milton, medallist. 1759–1805’; and R.H. Thompson, ‘The dies of Thomas Spence (1750–1814)’ and ‘John Boxer and the nineteenth-century silver tokens of Kent’. Thompson’s meticulous analysis of Spence’s dies was adopted by John Brand (1931–90) when in his latter years he applied his keen numismatic talents to the study of eighteenth-century tokens, particularly of the south-east of England. Unhappily his work remains in manuscript but two of his papers especially, on the so-called ‘Brighton’ halfpennies and an illuminating study of the issues of Kent and Essex (read to the Society on 24 April 1973), deserve publication.

Two short papers on John Wilkinson published in Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin by the economic historian William Henry Chaloner (1914–87) in 1948, important though they were in themselves, tapped a reservoir of primary archival material that had hitherto received little numismatic attention since H.W. Dickinson had written his biography of Matthew Boulton in 1937. In subsequent years the Matthew Boulton Papers, then in the care of the Birmingham Assay Office and now in that of the Birmingham Central Library, have been used to great effect.
by Graham Pollard, David Vice, and Richard Doty, and to a lesser extent by the present writer.

Study of the Matthew Boulton Papers threw much greater light on the activities of the diesinkers, engravers and manufacturers responsible for the tokens. Pollard had led the way here but, of course, a detailed view of such craftsmen had years earlier been included by Leonard Forrer (1869–1953) with continental thoroughness in his monumental *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists*. Forrer’s approach was in more recent times continued by R.N.P. Hawkins (1917–87) in his equally massive – for a single volume – *Dictionary of Makers of British metallic tickets, checks, medalets, tallies, and counters*. These two works are essential starting points for any serious examination of the eighteenth or early nineteenth-century token producer. For all its felicities and complex arrangement Hawkins’ book is a vital business biography of the ‘brummagem’ coining industry. Added value is provided by the inclusion, as an appendix, of an abstract of J.P. Kent’s unpublished paper on evasions or medley halfpence delivered to the Society on 22 May 1957.

One development after the Second World War was an increasing interest in the contemporary social and industrial detail portrayed on the tokens. This, unconsciously at the time, harked back to one aspect of the provincial coin stressed by James Wright of Dundee (1768–98) in his outpourings in the journals of the period and the introduction he wrote for Conder’s *Arrangement*. Francis Donald Klingender (1907–55), the Marxist art historian, contributed a perceptive article to the *Architectural Review* in 1947, which brought this feature to a wider public for the first time. The economic historian Peter Mathias followed Klingender’s approach in his splendidly illustrated *English Trade Tokens* in 1962 and by George Boon (1927–94) in his equally attractive and accessible *Welsh Industrial Tokens and Medals* eleven years later. Where Mathias had supported his book with a general historical introduction only Boon’s small picture book included an authoritative note on each of the tokens illustrated – very much a case of *multum in parvo*. A more recent encyclopaedic excursion by Michael Mitchiner, covering the eighteenth and early nineteenth century among a vast array of much else, although difficult to navigate contains a wealth of background material – some of which, though, must be treated with caution – and, again, a plethora of excellent illustrations.

Both Mathias and Boon were writing for a general audience but little otherwise has been directed specifically at such a constituency or to encourage the young numismatist to develop an interest in tokens. In most instances the attempts that have been made have been jejune and have simply regurgitated assumptions made speciously respectable by repetition. Mention should,
however, be made of Robert Charles Bell. Although, in many instances, he has uncritically adopted the pronouncements of Samuel and the fallacious judgements of the American collector John R. Farnell, Bell has produced a number of well illustrated works – apart from the first, *Commercial Coins 1787–1804*, where the standard of photography is very inadequate – that have inspired in many an interest in British trade tokens.36

The eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tokens served as a currency substitute in two essentially – but not absolutely – discrete periods: the last decade or so of the eighteenth century and the second decade of the nineteenth. Government, it is said not altogether fairly, had created this situation by failing to provide a well-ordered medium of exchange especially in terms of silver. As some degree of palliative it did promote the issue of a token silver currency by the Bank of England by means of countermarked and then re-struck Spanish dollars. These were the subject of a rather superficial study by Maberly Phillips in 1900. Little of any consequence appeared for three quarters of a century until, following a thorough examination of the Bank of England’s archives, Eric Kelly produced an authoritative account.37 The foreign silver countermarked by private firms and tradesmen in the period had been tackled on a piecemeal basis during our period and some useful studies had been published in the *Journal* and elsewhere by Wilfred Arthur Seaby (1910–91), Samuel Arthur Henry Whetmore (1889–1971) and Harrington E Manville but the appearance of the Society’s third Special Publication by Manville in 2001 put the interpretation of these difficult coins on to a new plane.38 Manville’s book will be the standard work on its subject for years to come. With its publication and that of the Withers on the early nineteenth-century token it is heartening to be able to conclude this brief survey on a positive note and express the hope that the Society will succeed in promoting equally important studies in this area of its interest in the new century that is now beginning. Certainly, the auguries all indicate that, with authorities of the calibre of Thompson, Doty and Dyer still active in the field, there will be no diminution in the scholarly study and interpretation of the British trade token.

36 R.C. Bell produced five other handbooks on different topics in the token series between 1964 and 1987: *Copper Commercial Coins 1811–1819* (Newcastle upon Tyne 1964); *Tradesmen’s Tickets and Private Tokens 1783–1819* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1966); *Specious Tokens and those struck for General Circulation 1784–1804* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1968); *The Building Medalets of Kempson and Skidmore 1796–1797* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1978); and *Political and Commemorative Pieces simulating Tradesmen’s Tokens 1770–1802* (Felstowe, 1987).
