CHARLES WYATT, MANAGER OF THE PARYS MINE MINT: A STUDY IN INGRATITUDE

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Although much has been written concerning eighteenth-century trade tokens, our knowledge concerning the people who took part in their production remains meagre. We know all about Matthew Boulton, of course, thanks to the survival of his papers and to the fame he earned as Watt’s business partner, as a member of the Lunar Society, and as the person responsible for renewing Britain’s official copper coinage. But concerning the other persons involved in token making we know very little, if anything.¹

That we should appear to know little about the man who ran the most productive eighteenth-century token operation of all is particularly unfortunate. I refer not to Thomas Williams, the famous owner of the Anglesey Mines (who was the brains behind the Parys Mine Druids), but to Charles Wyatt, whom Williams hired in June 1787 to manage the mint where most of the Druid tokens are supposed to have been struck.

Who was Charles Wyatt? According to Colin Hawker he was a former Boulton employee as well as the son of John Wyatt, the gifted inventor who, among other things, was the first person to spin cotton by mechanical means.² And that is all that the numismatic literature has to say about him. But thereby hangs a rather long tale!

Although John Wyatt (1700–66) is now frequently credited with the invention of cotton-spinning using mechanical rollers, his name continues to be overshadowed by that of Richard Arkwright, whose ‘Spinning Jenny’ succeeded commercially where Wyatt’s invention failed. Wyatt’s priority might have gone altogether unrecognized had it not been for his sons’ effort to straighten the record. In 1817 Charles’s brother John, then editor and publisher of The Repertory of Arts, Manufactures, and Agriculture, asked him to supply an account of their father’s invention. Charles obliged him with a brief note, which John published the following spring, little more than a year prior to Charles’s death on 11 June 1819.³

According to Charles his father first conceived the idea of spinning mechanically around 1730, and had constructed a working model of his spinning device in 1733. He then went into partnership with a foreigner named Lewis Paul, who promised to help him to finance the commercial development of his invention, but who instead ‘made offers and bargains which he never fulfilled, and contrived in the year 1738 to have a patent taken out in his own name’. In 1741 or 1742 Wyatt and Paul built a prototype cotton mill, powered by a gin turned by two asses, on Upper Priory Street in Birmingham. The mill failed for want of adequate capital and was sold in 1743.

A larger-scale mill was later erected in Northampton, but it, too, failed to prosper. Making a fine display of modesty on his father’s behalf Charles observed that ‘To pretend . . . that the original machinery, without addition or improvement, would alone have produced the prodigious effects

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Richard Doty and to David Dykes for their suggestions.


which we now behold, would be claiming improbable merit for the inventor, and degrading the talents and sagacity of his successors’. Nevertheless he believed that ‘the author of the humble establishment at Birmingham . . . ought at least to be acknowledged as a benefactor to his country’. Charles went on to note that his father also invented the compound lever device for weighing loaded carriages, the first of which had been erected on Birmingham’s Snow Hill.  

Charles ended his memorial by recalling his father’s indebtedness to ‘The late Mr. Boulton’, a man too eminent and too amiable to be mentioned without esteem and regret, nor on my part without affection, [who] set a high value both on my father’s attainments and virtues: for it was universally acknowledged that he had the happiness to give a lustre and an interest to his genius and his knowledge, by the purest probity, the most unaffected humility, urbanity, and benevolence.

Indeed on 29 November 1766 Boulton, John Baskerville and several other Birmingham notables attended John Wyatt’s burial in St Phillips Churchyard, where Wyatt’s tombstone can still be seen today.

In truth Charles’s praise for Boulton only hints at the extent of his and his father’s indebtedness to the man, while concealing altogether the utter ingratitude Charles had shown him, on more than one occasion, when he was still alive. Although Charles states that his father was ‘much injured by the experiment’ on Upper Priory, he supplies no further details. In fact the ‘experiment’ and some later schemes landed Wyatt in debtors’ prison on no fewer than four occasions – in 1740, 1741, 1747 and 1756. In early 1760, facing bankruptcy again, he sought the aid of his friend and Snow Hill neighbour, Matthew Boulton:

Feb. 9, 1760

Sir

I am upon the Brink of Ruin, even this Day may compleat the Business except I can be assisted by my friends with about 20£ . . . .

I am Sorry to give you this trouble but if I attempt to Speak to this purpose the Subject choke one.

I am father of a young family in an age too old for general approbation yet would I fear leave them out of the power of ill will to reproach them with their father was a poor whimsical old fool etc. etc. or the Widow deserves no better for yoking with such a Scatterbrain old enough for her father.

I am attempting the general State of affairs and if annihilation must be . . . . am afraid shall prove insolvent.

Your very affectionate humble Servt

John Wyatt

Boulton did much more than spare the man twenty pounds. He made him a foreman at his Snow Hill workshops, while taking on his two sons, Charles and John, as apprentices and treating them, following their father’s death, as if they were his own.

John Wyatt III (b.1752) proved a model apprentice who, after his initial term expired, was given regular employment by Boulton, first as a clerk and then, between 1776 and 1779, as Boulton and Fothergill’s London agent. Afterwards he went abroad on at least two occasions on Boulton’s behalf, to Paris in 1784 and to St Petersburg in the winter of 1799. The latter trip saw him playing a minor role in the task of erecting Russia’s new steam-powered mint, his assignment supposedly having been that of ‘dealing with’ Birmingham architect William Hollins. At the time of his Russian adventure John was also publishing and editing The Repertory of Arts and Manufactures, which he founded several years before.

Charles was a horse of a different colour. Most apprentices served seven-year terms, usually begun at age fourteen, though some indentures specified a terminal age, which was usually

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4 Charles estimated at the time he wrote that the number of mechanical spindles in use in England exceeded five million.
5 An anonymous late nineteenth-century work, John Wyatt, Master Carpenter & Inventor (London, 1885), p. 18, credits Wyatt with another invention that was to prove of far greater import even than that of the mechanical spindle, to wit: the ball bearing! Here again Wyatt’s priority has been overlooked, with credit going instead to Philip Vaughan, who secured the first ball bearing patent some decades after Wyatt’s death, in 1791.
6 MBP 375/214.
8 Robinson, as in n. 7, pp. 15–16. Although Hollins is sometimes credited with having designed Russia’s new mint, it appears that he was only among the first of several architects involved in the project. Richard Doty’s thorough study of Boulton’s Russian mint project (Soho Mint, chapter 2) mentions neither Hollins nor John Wyatt III.
Although Charles began his apprenticeship in 1760, at age ten, he would have been of little use to Boulton, or to any other factory owner, for several more years, and it appears that his original term was not to expire until 1774. Sometime prior to the autumn of 1770, however, Charles fell in love with his first cousin Jane ('Jenny') Wyatt. Jenny was one of the seven daughters of Charles’s uncle Benjamin Wyatt (1709–72), who had seven sons as well, five of whom became distinguished architects. Charles was determined to marry her, even though doing so meant violating the terms of his indenture.

Apart from the fact that marriage itself was forbidden by the terms of most indentures Wyatt had been made to understand that his cousin did not wish to be married to a mere apprentice. He therefore determined to break his bond with Boulton, so as to go into business on his own: 'I have conceived that it is possible', he explained to his master in a nervous and rambling letter, 'to cut files by a Mill & I believe with more expedition & accuracy than the present Method'. The rest of the letter consists of a lengthy but mealy-mouthed apology, part of which reads,

Such extraordinary indulgences of generosity as you have shewn me through the part of Apprenticeship I have served, demand an unwearyed exertion of my Abilities in your Interest at the time when they are reasonably to be supposed best capable of showing the gratitude that actuates them. [However] I must beg leave to Say the simple Truth before you though it may perhaps induce you to alter any opinion you have formed of me.

Being of every Capacity have their sensations & Passions... some of these have led me to conceive that particular esteem for Jenny Wyatt of Blackbrook which I do not blush to own, constitutes for me all that we are apt to call Happiness... let me assure you S: it does not appear to me as perfect but chequered with misfortunes & disappointments which flow as consequent to the Life of Man, yet these reflections I must confess have not enervated my hopes of success in a Scheme which nothing but objection made by her (& such of her Friends as know my attachment to her) to my present state of dependency, could induce me to enter into, not only because I believe it will be attended with some inconvenience to you, but that it will also be thought to have [the] appearance of ingratitude, yet I cannot but hope that [the] liberality of your thoughts will ascribe it to the real cause & not give it the appellation of a Crime, which I should hold in equal detestation with the worst of my failings.

Boulton talked Charles out of his file-cutting scheme, instead putting him (along with his brother) in charge of the main buildings of the Soho works and who renovated and enlarged Soho house. Eventually his cousin and Jenny’s brother James (1749–1813), the famous architect for the Oxford Street Pantheon (who would later become known, rather unfairly, as ‘The Destroyer’ for his renovation of Windsor castle), suggested that he join him in London to try his hand at ornamental interior painting. On 16 October 1771 Charles wrote Boulton to say that he was taking James’s advice, and to apologize yet again for biting the hand that fed him:

To talk of quitting your Service after I have received such benefits from it, seems indeed to carry an Air of ingratitude. [Y]et what must I do? Indeed Sir (whatever faith you may put in my words), my situation is distressing. Gratitude draws me on one side & (I must say) Love on the other. Compassion only can pardon or palliate the fault of the choice that results from the latter. Justice must be silent. It is not the effect of a bad heart but a weak one if you will allow that, it is all the alleviation I can expect to my uneasiness & will give me reason to hope, that you will exchange the name of ingratitude for weakness, when you speak or think of.

On the back of Charles’s letter Boulton sketched his reply:

When I took you on apprentice my view in your favr extended further than ye expiration of your indentor [sic] but those views cannot avail anything now. You have long withdrawn your self from under my Wing, you have launched out your plan of Life & there remains nothing now to be done but to pursue that plan with vigour. It is not in a way that I can serve you or I should be inclined to do it.
According to John Martin Robinson, although Charles went to London he ‘failed to find satisfactory employment’ there, as a decorative painter or otherwise. By early 1773 he had, ‘like the Prodigal Son’, returned to Soho, where, on 4 February, he penned another plaintive note to Boulton, who was in London at the time:

Sir,

You cannot be more displeased than I am ashamed of troubling you so often upon a subject too painful to me to last long. You put no faith in more words. I do not want any more than common charity will allow to one who has not been accustomed to helping his Heart. It is then a pain to me which I think you have no idea of to find that my efforts to please you are yet ineffectual. I cannot find that I am a Dastard but I own your so frequent reproaches discourage me. They might have a less or a different effect if the value I set on your good opinion was not inseparable from my happiness or if the consciousness of having done all that my situation and capacity would allow did not make me think you would do me less injustice to be more satisfied with me. I mean not to exculpate myself entirely for I know some of the effects of my management have been dissatisfying and unprofitable. These effects have given me the more uneasiness as I entered this business from my own choice from a self persuasion that I might be of more service to you in than in my former. If I have been deceived it has been the fault of my judgement the errors of inexperience and not from the want of inclination. The influence over my Mind of an attachment which is of infinitely more consequence to me than the utmost views of Interest may I believe have contributed mostly to the loss of your favour. I ought in this to have been guided by your council. But every one of my Age does not do as he ought or I might perhaps have made a better use of that kindness which has had more of the nature of a Father than of a Master. However the plan of business you proposed to me if you now think me capable of managing it, will I hope afford me the means of conciliating your Esteem. If you are persuaded that your business as it now is suffers in reputation and diminishes in profit; if I find it impossible in my present situation to cure myself of that inattention which may be the cause of it; if it appears upon tryal that the benefits of the new plan will maintain a small family and if I feel that all my utmost for business seems bound up in that; should you not think it prudent for me to be married after that tryal? It is a step on which the welfare of my whole life depends and therefore wants the advice of greater wisdom than my own. My impatience for that undertaking must be the basis of it I hope no unfavourable omen to the amendment of

Your most obliged Servant
Chas. Wyatt  

Boulton evidently relented, very generously putting Charles in charge of Soho’s button-making division, at an annual salary of £100. Although this was only half as much as Charles had hoped to earn in London, it was apparently enough to satisfy Jenny, whom Charles finally married at Wexford that August. Charles appears to have performed his new job well, for in 1776 he had advanced yet another step, becoming a partner in Boulton & Fothergill’s silver, inlaid gold, and ornamental button division.  

What might have been a happy ending for Charles Wyatt was spoiled when, a year later, he felt obliged to quit Soho again, precipitously, for London. This time he was hard pressed to protest against his actions being labelled a ‘crime’, for those actions, if not actually criminal, certainly had the appearance of being so. Just before he left Charles had been accused of competing with his own partners by secretly acting as an agent for his brother Jack and brother-in-law Thomas Dobbs, who had quietly set up their own button-making business. More seriously, Charles had been charged with amassing and pilfering over £500 worth of gilt waste from his firm.  

In London Charles sought the aid of his cousin William – Jenny’s oldest brother – who some months later recalled, in a letter to Boulton, how Charles had

applied to me in the most distressed manner for assistance, that you seem’d determined upon his Ruin &c I did not flatter him for I told him a Man with a Grain of Judgement wd have seen the situation he stood in and have been cautioned against the Ill treatment to you, that if he would change places with you I thought, he would judge differently and perhaps with no more tenderness than you did.  

15 MBP 375/19.
16 Quickenden, as in n. 12, p. 356.
17 Years later Dobbs, who ran a rolling mill on the River Rea at King’s Norton, would also become a small-scale token producer. His known products were D&H Middlesex 294-5 and Warwickshire 247-9. In 1793 Dobbs’s daughter married Soho mechanic John Southern, who may have been introduced to her while erecting a Boulton & Watt engine at Dobbs’s mill in 1787. See H.W. Dickinson and Rhys Jenkins, James Watt and the Steam Engine (Ashbourne, 1927), p. 286.
18 MBP 375/247.
On 19 March 1777 Charles tried yet again to explain himself to his former master. But even as he attempted to account for his latest actions he was forced to admit that he’d ‘been mistaken in my reasoning upon the propriety of that conduct toward you’. He further allowed that he had left ‘without a due reflection upon the gratitude I owed you as the genuine Protector of myself & Family’. Finally, he conceded that the charges made against him were ‘founded upon such facts as must have considerably lowered your esteem for me’. Still he hoped ‘to recover that esteem or at least a part of it by attempting to soften the apparent injustice & ingratitude of those facts, with declaring the motives to be innocent’:

I am at a loss how to convince you that this is true having nothing but my own bare assertion for it & the general tenor of my character. If those even had any Credit with you that will have I hope on this occasion, when I neither have nor can have my other advocates. I may have erred thro’ inadvertency or mistaken reasoning & I have a pleasure in confessing that error because that confession furnishes me with the hopes of regaining your friendship. I do not vindicate the measures but I plead innocence in the design & while I lay my heart thus open to you & make so fair an acknowledgement of my error I hope you will fully believe me not to have been guilty of any intentional ingratitude or dishonesty.19

Having ‘discharged’ his conscience Charles proceeded to inform Boulton of his plans:

If the breach between us, be so wide that a reconciliation cannot take place I know of no other method I can take for my support than by endeavoring to establish myself in Birmingham in the best manner I can where I shall certainly wish for, and endeavor to obtain, your friendship and protection & without which I shall not like, tho’ I must bear, the situation.20

In his July letter William, who had become acquainted with Boulton back in the days when he and his brothers had been commissioned by him to build Soho, tried his best to mend the breach between his cousin and first great patron:

My unthinking Bro.-in-law Charles has behaved with such ingratitude toward you that I do not know how to offer any apology or ask any mitigation of his fault and folly. I really wish him to be made and I believe he now is sensible of what he has done, and wishes he never had done it but whether he has suffered adequate to his crime you are the best judge, all that I will ask is, that when you think him sufficiently punish’d, and if you can forgive his Folly and make him useful to you, (for the sake of his Wife & Family I plead, and should not presume to do it but from a natural yte and a full conviction of your generous and forgiving disposition), then I hope you will once more give him a trial in your Manufactory. If you will do this I shall think myself under still greater obligations, and will be glad to come over to you whenever you think it proper to reinstate him. If I have asked an unreasonable thing forgive me & believe it proceeds only from my regard for my Sister.21

In a postscript he added, ‘I am not commissioned by Charles to plead in his Favour but I see how necessary it is to do so and shall be very glad to make him think so, and to sollicite the same Things himself’.

By this time Charles had come back to Birmingham, only to receive there an account from Boulton & Fothergill indicating his debt to the firm of over £568. In September he responded by claiming his right to deduct £118 15s. from this charge for unpaid salary, and promising that his cousin William would assume responsibility for another £300, which he supposedly ‘owed’ Charles, leaving a net amount due of £149 10s. 8d., which he promised to settle by the end of the month. In fact, as William had already revealed to Boulton in his July letter, he had promised to help Charles out back in March by giving him £300 in exchange for his bond, but had since found himself ‘very much push’d for Money’. William had offered Boulton his own bond, but Boulton had apparently refused to take it.22

Although Robinson claims that ‘Boulton was not willing to have Charles back in his employment under any circumstances’, 1778–9 Boulton & Fothergill correspondence addressed to Charles as well as to his brother John suggests that the two brothers were then living together at 3 Salisbury Street in London, and that both were serving as Soho’s agents.23 Of particular significance is a letter of 18 June to John from Jonathan Scale, who had taken Charles’s place as Boulton’s partner in Soho’s button division. Here Scale observes that his firm is

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19 MBP 375/20.
20 As in n. 19.
21 MBP 375/247.
22 As in n. 21.
23 Robinson, as in n. 7, p. 10.
at a loss who to debit or credit for the goods sent to & received from you & your brother Chas. . . . of course his acct. has [word obscured] credit at Whose in Birmingham & you now include that in yours & desire a bill for the whole, which cannot be done with propriety . . . [If you are in partnership will it not be better to give your names together, but of this you will please let us know . . .].

It seems that the two brothers did in fact agree to be treated as partners, for by October the firm was addressing correspondence to 'Messrs. Chas. & John Wyatt'.

However, by 1781 Charles was back in Staffordshire, at Tatenhill, near Burton on Trent, where he appears to have become the owner of a rolling mill. Anticipating the summer drought, he wrote to his old master in April to inquire about reforming or otherwise powering the mill with a Boulton & Watt engine. I have not been able to locate Boulton's reply, or to otherwise determine the fate of Wyatt's rolling mill. But it is certain that Wyatt left the mill, at least temporarily, in June 1787, to work for Thomas Williams, the famous 'copper king', who hired him to manage the Parys Mine Company's mint in Birmingham.

Although the very first Parys Mine Druids, excepting a few proof pieces made using dies engraved by John Milton, appear to have been minted during the opening months of 1787 at Thomas Williams's metal works near Holywell, Wales, by March Williams had already decided to transfer their production to his Birmingham warehouse at 9 Great Charles Street. The move was delayed, however, by the sudden death, on the morning of April 1st, of William Welch, the warehouse's manager. While seeking Welch's replacement, Williams engaged John Gregory Hancock, who had sunk the dies for the Holywell Druids, to prepare new ones for a far more extensive issue. He also contracted with John Westwood (who had supervised the original Druid coinage) and Charles Wyatt's brother-in-law, Thomas Dobbs, to deliver copper sheets to Great Charles Street from their rolling mills in Whitton and King's Norton.

On 13 June Williams, perhaps at Dobbs's suggestion, hired Wyatt to manage his new mint at a salary of £200 per annum. In going to work for Williams Wyatt managed to betray his former master yet again, for Williams and Boulton were arch-rivals in the bidding for a regal copper coinage. Each man was determined to coin copper on the government's behalf, so as to give a boost to his particular copper mining interests: the Anglesey mines for Williams and the Cornish mines for Boulton. By means of his bold venture into private coinage, Williams had 'stolen a march' on Boulton, who had only just begun his own campaign to coin money on behalf of the government and who had yet to begin building his own mint. Should Williams's bid have succeeded, he would have endeavoured to have his own Anglesey mines supply the copper for a new regal coinage, depriving Boulton not only of any prospect for an actual coinage contract, but also of his last best hope for saving the then struggling Cornish copper mines, and hence for saving his Soho works. The Cornish mines were the principal source of Boulton & Watt engine royalties, which were then the main source of revenue keeping most of Boulton's enterprises afloat. Charles Wyatt had thus agreed to take charge of an operation whose success stood a good chance of ruining his former master and surrogate father.

Wyatt appears to have been a competent mint master. Besides having developed some management skills he shared some of his father's mechanical abilities, and was therefore able personally to supply his mint with at least two and probably no fewer than three coining presses at a time when such presses were difficult to come by.

Although John Westwood Sr would eventually dismiss the Parys Mine mint's coining presses as 'the worst he ever saw', the presses cannot have been all that bad, or Wyatt's management skills...
must have been truly extraordinary, for if the numbers handed down to us are to be believed, the Parys Mine mint achieved one of the most impressive feats in the history of coining. In all, it is supposed to have produced 250 tons of Druid pennies and another fifty tons of Druid halfpennies, or nearly thirteen million coins in all, in less than two years, despite a very slow start (less than a ton had been coined by August 1787), and the concurrent striking of several tons of tokens for John Wilkinson. What made this feat especially impressive was the fact that both the penny and Wilkinson’s coins (which were originally issued as pence but later called in and reissued as halfpence) were struck in collar, using manual labour only.

If Charles Wyatt ran the Parys Mine mint in a manner that showed little mercy to his old boss, then Boulton was no more inclined to have pity on Wyatt when Williams decided, in the autumn of 1788, to abandon his quest for a regal coinage contract and to yield the field to Boulton. Williams’s change of heart was partly the result of a November 1787 agreement struck between him and the Cornish miners allowing him a two per cent commission on Cornish copper sales in return for his agreeing to limit Anglesey’s sales to one-third of total sales for one year. Under the new arrangement Williams was certain to profit from a new regal copper coinage even if he played no direct role in producing it. Furthermore, by early 1788 doubts had begun to grow concerning whether the government would act at all: the King had suffered his first major bout of mental illness, and no new coinage could proceed except by his authority.

Upon hearing of Williams’s diminished interest in coining for the government, Boulton jumped at the chance to remove his sole rival from the field. Toward the end of the year he had drafted an agreement in which he offered to purchase William’s presses and other coining equipment and to co制定 Williams’s Druids for him in exchange for Williams’s agreement that he would neither by himself or his Agent direct or indirectly make any opposition to him in the business of Coining for Government or others. If the government offered Boulton a contract to coin 1000 tons or more, then Boulton was to pay for Williams’s equipment in cash; otherwise, Boulton would deduct £7 out of every £31 he charged Williams for coining Druids until the presses were paid for. The agreement was finally signed on 3 March 1789. It represented a major victory for Boulton. It was also rather bad news for Charles Wyatt.

Williams, however, took some time to carry out the terms of his agreement with Boulton. On 15 May 1789, Wyatt wrote Boulton as follows:

Sir:

Not having received orders from Mr Williams to deliver any part of the Coining Tools, I hope you will pardon the delay which will be occasioned by my waiting for his directions on this business. I shall write by the first Post & may possibly have an answer on Tuesday.

I am respectfully

Sir your obed. Serv.

Chas. Wyatt

On 15 July and again on 22 July Boulton wrote to Williams to remind him that Wyatt was still awaiting his orders to surrender the Parys Mine presses, as well as dies, sheet copper and planchets that Boulton intended to use in striking his own Druids. On 27 July Williams finally responded, blaming Wyatt himself for the delay:

31 Charles Pye, Provincial Coins and Tokens, issued from the Year 1787 to the Year 1801 (Birmingham, 1801), index. Hawker, as in n. 2, pp. 50–54, notes that Pye’s figures may include twelve or thirteen tons of Druids manufactured at the Great Charles Street facility after Boulton had taken that facility over in anticipation of moving Druid production to Soho.

32 The total number of presses possessed by the P.M.Co. mint is unknown. However, when the presses were eventually sold to Matthew Boulton, they were assigned a value of 500 guineas. A contemporary pamphlet on coining says that a good manual screw press could be had for twenty guineas (J.C. Spillman, ‘An Overview of Early American Coinage Technology’, The Colonial Newsletter 21 (1) (April 1982), p. 769). Even allowing that the price assigned to Williams’s presses was grossly inflated, as Boulton insisted, it hardly seems likely to have been more than triple the market price. It follows that, if we allow £52 10s. per press, and assume that half of the presses in question were for blank cutting, P.M. Company had something like five coining presses at its disposal. This number would have sufficed to account for the massive output of Druid tokens, even without allowing for overtime. (The Royal Mint was at this time equipped with a grand total of nine screw presses, only five or six of which were generally in working order at any given time.)

33 Harris, as in n. 29.

34 Hawker, as in n. 2, p. 17.

35 MBP 375/28.
He poor fellow considering it, I suppose, and Ends his Employ under the P.M. Co. was loath to give up all at once but I have now wrote to him that it must be so. . . . I have ordered Wyatt do ever thing necessary on my part & beg you will lose no time in getting the matter finished. 36

At last, on 29 July, Wyatt informed Boulton that he had received Williams’s letter instructing him to surrender

all the Coining instruments at a valuation to be made by two People one on your part and one on Mr Williams’. I have fixed on Mr Whitmore & the appointment may be proceeded upon any day next week that you may think proper to appoint.

I have orders in the mean time to deliver the new pair of dies & any Sheets &c that you may require.

Thus ended Charles Wyatt’s brief tenure as manager of what had been Great Britain’s most productive mint. According to Colin Hawker the occasion found Matthew Boulton once again coming to Wyatt’s aid despite his disloyalty, by making personal contributions in support of the ‘Poor at the Parry’s Mine Warehouse’ on no fewer than four occasions starting on 1 December, 1789. 37 We shall see shortly how Wyatt was to repay this last act of kindness.

Immediately following his brief interlude as a mint master Wyatt entered into a metal plating partnership with Thomas Dixon and Edward Smith. However their firm, Wyatt & Dixon, was dissolved in 1790. In that same year Wyatt patented a special form of tinned copper roofing material, which his cousin James was to employ in several of his building projects, including the Chetney Hill Lazaretto in Kent. 38 By 1792 Charles had rejoined John in London where, according to a directory of that year, the brothers manufactured Charles’s patented sheathing at 19 Abchurch Lane. Several years later, in 1797 or early 1798, Charles embarked on what was to prove his most successful venture of all by purchasing James Parker’s recently acquired patent for a new waterproof cement, together with Parker’s cement manufacturing plant at Bankside. Parker & Wyatt’s rose-tinted ‘Roman’ cement was generously employed by Charles’s architect cousins, including Samuel, who used it to finish Boulton’s new Soho office wing in 1798. 39 By 1810, when his cement patent expired, Wyatt’s firm was producing 700 three-bushel casks of cement per week, and Wyatt, besides having occupied a fine London residence at 2 Bedford Row, was also Lord of the Manor of Minster in Sheppey (the source of much of his firm’s cement stone), which he purchased for £4000. 40

His successful move into construction supplies did not, however, quite spell the end of Charles Wyatt’s interest in coinage, for just as Matthew Boulton was about to grasp the regal coinage contract he had been struggling to obtain for over a decade, Wyatt tried to snatch it from him. In early March 1797, having learned that the Government was about to go forward with a new copper coinage, Wyatt wrote to George Rose, the clerk of the Parliaments, to inquire about the possibility of handling the coinage. Although I have not succeeded in locating a copy of his letter, on 7 March the letter was read to the Privy Council’s Coin Committee, which recorded the gist of it in its minutes. According to these Wyatt wrote

that he had been employed in making a Copper Coinage to the amount of many Thousand pounds, for the Anglesea Company and for Mr. Wilkinson, and desiring to be informed whether he might be permitted to make a Tender for executing the National Copper Coinage now in agitation.

The committee replied by asking Wyatt to send in his proposals as well as ‘some Specimens of the Copper Coinage struck by him for the Anglesea Company &c’. 41

Nothing further occurs in the Privy Council records concerning Charles’s Wyatt’s attempt to secure the contract that had been the chief object of his former master’s labour since the mid-1780s. And that is just as well, for one is hard-pressed to see how Boulton could possibly have maintained his unblemished record of magnanimity in the face of what would surely have been Wyatt’s most ‘dastardly’ betrayal of all.

36 Hawker, as in n. 2, p. 22.
37 MBP 375/29.
38 Robinson, as in n. 7, p. 11.
39 As in n. 37.
40 Francis, as in n. 3, pp. 35–7.
41 PRO BT6/126.
Hav[ing] been unsuccessful in obtaining a major contract for his fledgling Soho mint to manufacture copper coinage for the English government, despite having made intense efforts since 1788 to do so, early in 1791 Matthew Boulton turned his attention to France. A serious shortage of low denomination coinage had developed there during the first years of the Revolution and suggested to Boulton an opportunity to employ his recently constructed but under-utilized steam-powered mint. In February of 1791 he sent his agent, Dr Francis Swediaur, a well-known, widely acquainted, multi-lingual physician to Paris to meet first-hand with a prominent firm of Paris négociants, the Monneron Frères, whose two principals were Pierre and Augustin Monneron.1

Boulton had earlier been in contact with the Monnerons through a mutual friend, John Motteux, and Dr Swediaur carried a letter addressed to them, in which Boulton stated, in part, '... I beg leave to intimate to you that I have invented and executed Mills for Rolling Copper, for cutting it out into flans or blanks, and for coining it: also that I am concerned in Copper Smelting Works proper for refining the Bells. If therefore my Machinery or abilities could be made useful to your country I should with pleasure enter into a treaty for that purpose'.2

Months of discussion between Swediaur and the Monnerons and a considerable amount of correspondence between Soho and Paris eventually culminated in a contract, in September of 1791, for Boulton to supply the Monnerons with a large quantity of copper tokens. The Monnerons would place them into circulation in France to alleviate the extreme shortage of circulating copper, and, not incidentally, would make a nice profit on the difference between the value of the tokens as issued and their cost of production, while Boulton would finally achieve significant employment for his mint.

Initially, tokens of two sols denomination were struck, the Soho Mint utilizing an obverse die featuring a seated figure of Liberty which had been engraved by a young Frenchman, Noël-Alexandre Ponthon. He had been hired in Paris by Dr Swediaur, and had subsequently come to Soho, which began striking the two sols tokens combining his obverse die with a simple inscribed reverse and shipping them to the Monnerons in France.3 These first shipments were followed, in December 1791, by much larger and heavier tokens of five sols denomination. Their obverse die, depicting the Fête de la Fédération, incorporated a popular design originally engraved in 1790 by Augustin Dupré. This die had been purchased from Dupré by the Monnerons and brought to Soho by their intimate friend, M. Sénover.4

Throughout the last quarter of 1791 the Soho Mint experienced considerable difficulty in furnishing the quantities of tokens needed by the Monnerons (and which they had paid for in

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1 A large and adventurous family, the many Monneron brothers included a colonial administrator, a sea captain, an engineer, and businessmen in France and on Île de France in the Indian Ocean. Three of the brothers, Pierre, Claude-Ange, and Louis Monneron, were deputies to the Constituent Assembly, and a fourth, Augustin, subsequently became a deputy to the Legislative Assembly.

2 Matthew Boulton’s Papers, formerly archives department of the Birmingham Reference Library, now known as the Birmingham City Archives (henceforth BCA); Boulton Letter Book, 1791–1792. I am indebted to two former archivists in this department, John Warner-Davies, and Nicholas Kingsley, and their staffs, for the many courtesies extended to me during my frequent visits to study these invaluable papers. Letters and other documents quoted are by permission of the Matthew Boulton Trust. I have deliberately left the vagaries of 18th century spelling exactly as they appear in the documents quoted, making no editorial comments or corrections, and have added punctuation only when it seemed particularly necessary.

3 The first tokens were sent 27 October 1791. For an overview of the Soho Mint’s productions for the Monnerons, see: R. Margolis, ‘Matthew Boulton’s French Ventures of 1791 and 1792; Tokens for the Monneron Frères of Paris and Île de France’, BNJ 58 (1988), 102–9.

4 Dr Swediaur (Paris) to Matthew Boulton (Soho), 22 November 1791. BCA, Swediaur Letter Box.
advance). The Mint's initial problems were caused by its failure to secure enough copper at reasonable prices, and then, when adequate supplies of copper had been acquired, by numerous technical problems in striking the tokens, particularly the 5 sols pieces, which were much larger and heavier than anything previously struck in quantity at Soho.\footnote{The outer, circular legends of the reverses of the 1791 five sols tokens are very often weakly struck, and the border of denticles frequently has a ragged appearance. There were two major reverse varieties of 5 sols tokens in 1791, differentiated by the position of the circular legends, and the striking defects described occur in both varieties. A small number of well-struck examples do exist; it seems likely that these were struck individually on a hand press, rather than mass-produced on a steam-driven press.}

Boulton’s absence from Soho on a number of occasions during this critical period was caused by his having to attend to urgent parliamentary matters in London affecting Boulton and Watt’s steam engine business. His absence has proved to be a boon to present day researchers, as it became necessary to deal with the mint’s problems by correspondence. The letters between London and Soho providing vivid details about the difficulties at Soho. Machinery seemed to break down even more frequently while Boulton was away, and the correspondence between Boulton in London and his son, Matthew Robinson Boulton, and other key employees at Soho, is a litany of complaints (from London) and explanations (from Soho) about the production problems encountered and the various attempts to rectify them.

The very first shipments, in late October 1791, consisting of 2 sols pieces, had been sent by land to Dover, employing Sherrat’s Flying Wagon. This method, however, was not only quite costly, but the bouncing of the conveyance on the rough roads caused damage to the tokens. Most subsequent shipments were sent by canal, apart from small numbers of silver and copper gilt specimen or presentation strikings which Pierre Monneron and Dr Swediaur personally carried with them on two separate return trips via the 'Diligence' from Soho to Paris. Although initially Boulton had inquired of a Liverpool freight forwarding firm concerning the frequency of ships sailing from there to France,\footnote{Thorn & Co., Liverpool to MB, Soho and Birmingham, 12 and 30 November 1791. BCA: T1 Letter Box.} Hull, on the east coast of England, soon became the favoured port of departure.

Despite the many difficulties, late in December 1791, Soho began to strike a new issue of 5 sols tokens which were dated (on the reverse), 1792 and L’AN III DE LA LIBERTÉ. A limited quantity had been struck when a letter dated 11 January 1792 sent from Calais by Dr Swediaur (who was returning to Paris) informed Boulton, ‘... I rec’d here a letter from M’ Monneron acquainting me, that the Nat. Assembly have decreed that with the beginning of the year 1792 the 4th year of liberty should also begin (instead of July). It therefore will be necessary to change the die of the 5 sols as soon as you are obliged to make a new matrix of the reverse to change the letters: l’an III de la liberté, to l’an IV or l’an IV de la liberté...’\footnote{Dr Swediaur (Calais) to MB (London), 11 January 1792. BCA, Swediaur Letter Box.}

This request was promptly complied with at Soho, and as a result the 1792 five sols variety dated L’AN III, which was only struck briefly, is quite scarce, whereas the succeeding one, dated L’AN IV, is extremely common, having been made in much greater quantities. The 5 sols were struck initially at a weight of approximately 16½ to the French pound, but were subsequently slightly reduced to approximately 18 per French pound.

By February of 1792 Soho had got up to speed and was able to strike and ship large quantities of 5 sols tokens to the Monnerons. From evidence in the Matthew Boulton Papers it is possible to trace the route that the majority of these shipments took from Soho to France.

Loaded on to boats at Henshall & Company’s wharf in Birmingham, and travelling via the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, the casks of tokens entered the Trent and Mersey Canal (also known as the Grand Trunk Canal) as far as Shardlow, an important canal trans-shipment port. There the local office of Henshall & Company\footnote{Hugh Henshall & Company had been established by the proprietors of the Trent and Mersey Canal as their own carrying firm. C. Davies, 'Josiah Wedgwood and canal management', The Journal of Transport History, 3rd series, vol. 1, no. 1 (1980), pp. 49–57. Reprinted in Canals and Inland Navigation (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 85–93.} forwarded them on, via the River Trent, to Caleb Mauillon at the inland port of Gainsborough. He in turn sent them on (still via the Trent, which, upon joining the Ouse, formed the River Humber) to the firm of C.E. Bradbury at Hull. They were then loaded on to a vessel for transportation to France; Rouen or Dunkirk were the usual French
A THEFT OF MONNERON TOKENS

ports of entry. The shipment of 19 March 1792, which followed this route, and which was intended for consignment to a Monsieur Tests in Dunkirk, is described in the entry shown here (Fig. 1).

A more detailed record of the shipments to the Monnerons was kept in two invoice books, entitled A and B, only the second of which seems to have survived. It includes the shipment of 19 March 1792, which consisted of fifty-six casks, each containing forty pieces wrapped in 140 papers (i.e., 5,600 pieces per cask, or a total of 313,600 pieces). Each cask was individually numbered, its contents separately weighed, as well as the weight of the cask alone and the cask plus contents (Fig. 2).

On 4 April 1792 Zach Walker, Junior, Matthew Boulton's nephew, who served as a clerk at the Soho Mint, forwarded a copy of a letter of 1 April received from Caleb Maullin, wharfinger (the proprietor of a wharf) at the port of Gainsborough, to Matthew Boulton, who was in London attending to other matters. Regarding this particular shipment, Maullin wrote:

Matt Boulton Esq
Soho, near Birm

Having rec'd the 56 Casks of Medals & on examination finding them deficient in weight, & one of the Casks No. 471 had the Head thereof turned on the other side, I had the said 3 Casks viz No. 474, 482, & 471 all opened, & then found many of the Medals had been taken out & the Casks filled up with Straw & Horse Dung, & learning that some Medals had been circulated at Gainsbro' on Enquiry found they were the same as the Casks contained. I therefore immediately apprehended the Boat-Master & five other of the Crew & charging them with the Offence they are all fully committed to take their Trials - I have also accused a Baker at Gainsbro' for receiving some of the said Medals & shall have him examined Tomorrow as a Magistrate attends at Gainsbro' on purpose, & I then also mean to have many other Persons apprehended that have received Medals from Boatsmen. The Quarter Sessions at Kirton will be the 25th: Inst: when these Offenders will be tried, & it will be necessary to have one of your Servants to prove the Medals were made by you and packed in the Casks - You may depend upon my Exertion in this Business & I doubt not but I shall be able to have proper Examples made of these Villains. - At a late Quarter Sessions at Nottingham I had 2 Boatsmen transported for 7 Years each for stealing Earthen Ware & a person for receiving the same transported for 14 Years. - I mention this circumstance least you might have been

Fig. 1. Entries of 17 and 19 March 1792, the latter describing the route of the shipment of 56 casks of 5 sols tokens, and debiting them to the Monneron Frères Copper Account. BCA, Soho Mint Coinage Day Book 8 Feb. 1791-16 May 1795, p. 44.

B Coinage Invoices from 18th Feb 1792 unto ... BCA, Mint Book [Number 2].
Fig. 2. A portion of Invoice No. 13 describing the shipment of 19 March 1792 to the Monnerons which included the three rifled casks of copper 5 sols tokens, nos. 471, 474 and 482. It indicates that the tokens weighed 18 to the French pound, wrapped in 140 papers, each of which contained 40 pieces, i.e. 5,600 pieces per cask. The gross weight, tare, and net weight of copper are also shown for each cask, and the invoice is cross-referenced to page 44 of the Soho Mint Coinage Day Book, BCA. B Coinage Invoices from 18th Feb 1792 unto... p. 3.
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inclined to suppose it would have been better to have these Men committed for the Assizes; but the Justices in this Neighbourhood are determined to be severe in order to put a stop if possible to the many depredations this Navigation is subject to. I have the most positive instructions from Messrs Henshall & Co. not to spare any pains or Expence and I shall strictly attend thereto. - I am &c &c

Caleb Maullin

Trent Port Wharf 10
11: April 1792.

In his letter of 4 April to Boulton which enclosed a transcribed copy of Mr. Maullin’s letter, Zach Walker Junior commented:

Lest any occurrence should detain you in London longer than expected, I have thought it right to forward you the annex’d copy of a L. from Mr. C. Maullin Gainsbro’ in order that you may be the sooner able to take such measures in the business as seem most prudent.

I wrote Mr. Maullin, thanking him for his Vigilance &c &c &c informing him that you were in London when his favour came to hand, but that he might rest assured you would cooperate with him in taking the most effectual means of bringing the Villains to condign punishment; & that a Person should attend their Kirton Sessions at the time appointed to identify the Medals & Package, & give such further evidence as the Bench might deem necessary, as far as it lay in our power.

This Day’s post brings a L. from Henshall & Co’s Office at Shardlaw . . . acknowledging the receipt & forwarding the whole of the Casks in apparent good condition from thence, so that the depredation appears clearly to have been committed between that place & Gainsbro & will of course more fully ascertain the proofs of the Boatmen’s Guilt.

Dear Sir,

Your faithful Servant

Zaccs: Walker Junr:

NB- The 56 Casks were sent from hence

19th: March 12

It is apparent that the theft of goods shipped by canal was a continuous and serious problem. One authority has commented, ‘Complaints about the pilferage of goods and the poor behaviour of boatmen were legion throughout the canal age; they gave the waterways a bad name . . .’. He states further, ‘The proprietors of the Trent & Mersey Canal had a strong interest in ensuring that the employees of Hugh Henshall & Co. exhibited behaviour beyond reproach’.

It is quite possible, with a knowledge of the various types of tokens struck for the Monnerons, to determine the specific variety which was stolen by the boatmen from the three casks. The heading of the invoice illustrated indicates that this shipment consisted entirely of five sois tokens, and it can be deduced from the date of the shipment and the weight of the tokens that they were specifically the second major variety of 1792, dated L’AN IV DE LA LIBERTÉ on the reverse (the much scarcer variety, dated L’AN III DE LA LIBERTÉ, as mentioned above, was struck earlier and was slightly heavier). The obverse features Dupré’s rendition of the Oath of Federation. The lettered edge reads: DEPARTEMENS DE PARIS. RHONE ET LOIRE. DU GARD &c, indicating a few of the departments of France in which these tokens were intended to circulate (Fig. 3).

In a letter of 5 April to his son, Matt, who was attempting to supervise the Soho Mint in his father’s absence, Matthew Boulton writes:

I am sorry to find by Z. W’s letter of yesterday that our Casks have been Robed and am determind in every such instance to exert all my powers to punish the offenders I am sure it is the duty & the interest of Mr Maullin & all who are interested in the Canal to spare neither pains nor money to punish with Rigour those pests of Canals l therefore beg that Mr Brown, Mr Lawson & Z. Walker Junr would consult together & determine which of them is the most proper Evidence to prove the property &c. &c. - Who can prove the packing? one of them must be ready to set out about ye 20th I will write a line to Maulin about it.

10 Trent Port Wharf was on the west bank of the River Trent, opposite Gainsborough.
11 Z. Walker Sr. Letter Box 2. BCA. (Zach Walker Sr., Matthew Boulton’s brother-in-law, was principal clerk at his Birmingham warehouse; this Letter Box includes letters from his son, Zach Walker, Jr.).
12 Zach Walker Jr. to Matthew Boulton. Z. Walker Sr. Letter Box 2. BCA.
13 C. Duest. as in n. 8, p. 89.
14 William D. Brown was chief clerk, and James Lawson was a key employee at the Soho Mint, where he was responsible for the multiplication of dies and for one of the coinage presses.
15 M. Boulton to M.R. Boulton. M.Boulton/M.R.Boulton 1782-93 Letter Box. BCA.
Caleb Maullin had been wasting no time in initiating proceedings against the alleged thieves. On 31 March he had sworn out a complaint against them (Fig. 4):

Lincolnshire
Linsey

The information and complaint of Caleb Maullin of Trent Port Wharf in the Parish of Beckingham in the County of Nottingham aforesaid, Wharfinger taken and made before me Robert Wells D.D. one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Parts the thirty first day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Ninety two Who on his oath saith,

That having by a Letter dated 21st. March Instant had advice of Matthew Boulton of Birmingham in the County of Warwick Esq., having shipped Fifty six Casks of Copper Medals on Board of a Ketch or Vessel of Hugh Henshall and Co. William Peach Master March 27th at Shardlow in the County of Derby to his this Deponents' care at Gainsb.; he heard on the twenty ninth Instant that the Boat's Crew had paid several away to Tradesmen in the Town of Gainsb.; for Necessaries which they had purchased he had the Casks weighed and found several of them materially deficient in Weight and that upon opening three of the Casks he found a large Number had been stolen thereout – That he thereupon applied to several persons in the Town of Gainsb., who had taken many of them in payment and they delivered them to him again and this Deponent further saith that he hath Cause to suspect and verily believes that William Peach James Peach John Sheffield William Sheffield John Tomlinson and John Watts all of Castle Donington in the County of Leicester Boaemen have feloniously stolen the same and this Deponent saith that upon examining One of the said Casks marked and numbered 474. he found that the Head of the Cask had been taken off, several of the Medals (about 400 in Number) had been stolen out of this and two other casks, that the Casks had been filled up with Horse Dung and Hay, and that the head of one of the Casks had been put on the wrong side Outwards, wherefore he prays Justice may be Done in the premises.

Caleb Maullin

Taken and Sworn
Before Me
Rob. Wells16

16 Lincolnshire Archives LQS Kirton Easter 1792 A256 27. This document and others concerning the trial of the canal boatmen are quoted and/or reproduced with the permission of the Lincolnshire Archives.
The same day, 31 March, Caleb Maullin and three Gainsborough merchants who were alleged to have exchanged foodstuffs in return for stolen Monneron tokens posted recognizances (bonds) to guarantee their appearance as witnesses. All four recognizances are basically similar, Maullin's stating:

Lincolshire
Lindsay

Be it remembered, that on the Thirty first day of March in the Thirty second year of the reign of our lord George, the third of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, king, defender of the faith, &c. Caleb Maullin of Trent Port Wharf in the Parish of Beckingham in the County of Nottingham Wharfinger personally came before me Robert Wells, D:D: one of the justices of our said lord the king, assigned to keep the peace within the said parts and acknowledged himself to owe to our said lord the king the sum of One Hundred pounds of good and lawful money of Great Britain, to be made and levied of his goods and chattels, lands and tenements, to the use of our said lord the king, his heirs and successors, if he the said Caleb Maullin shall make default in the condition underwritten.

The condition of this recognizance is such, that if the above-bound Caleb Maullin shall personally appear at the next general Quarter Sessions of the Peace to be holden at Kirton in and for the said Parts and then and there prefer a bill of indictment against William Peach James Peach John Sheffield William Sheffield John Tomlinson &
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John Watts late of Castle Donington in the County of Leicester, Boatmen for the felonious carrying and taking away a quantity of Copper Medals the property of Matthew Boulton of Soho in the County of Stafford, Esquire and shall then and there give evidence concerning the same, to the jurors who shall inquire thereof on the part of our said lord the king. And in case the same be found a true bill, then if the said Caleb Maullin shall personally appear before the jurors who shall then pass upon the trial of the said William Peach James Peach John Sheffield William Sheffield John Tomlinson & John Watts and give evidence upon the said indictment, and not depart without leave of the court. Then this recognizance to be void.

Acknowledged before me
Rob Wells

In addition to Caleb Maullin, who was required to post £100 to guarantee his appearance at the trial, Richard Clarke, a baker, and John Whitaker, a cheesemonger, each had to post £20; and John Parkinson, a butcher, had to deposit £20 to guarantee the appearance of Eleanor Parkinson, his mother. It is apparent that a variety of Gainsborough merchants had been approached by the boatmen and accepted the Monneron tokens they proffered in payment for various foodstuffs.

That these large tokens of unfamiliar type, with legends in French, could be accepted in exchange for goods is both vivid commentary on and confirmation of the haphazard state of the copper coins and tokens circulating in England at this time. The extent of illiteracy in eighteenth century England seems to be a subject of debate, but it is quite possible that the passers, although not the recipients, were illiterate, leaving them ignorant of the French legends on the Monneron tokens they had stolen.

The sad state of the coinage at the time was often commented upon by Matthew Boulton. This view has been succinctly summarized by Richard Doty: ‘...there was little small change in circulation, the Royal Mint having ceased copper coinage just as the Industrial Revolution was getting under way, while the last silver struck in quantity dated back to the 1750s ... what [a] worker might expect to find in his pay packet was a motley assemblage of counterfeit halfpence and farthings (Boulton estimated that two out of every three coppers were suspect; a slightly later observer put the figure at an astounding ninety-eight percent), augmented in and after 1787 by private copper tokens – the more successful of which were also counterfeited.’

Of course, Boulton, who had been attempting to obtain government contracts to manufacture copper coin, was hardly an unbiased observer. Indeed, a different picture of the coinage in circulation and of the various methods of paying wages considerably at variance with Boulton’s view, has been put forth by Professor Mathias in his recent Lincercar Lecture: ‘...employees and tradesmen showed great resource in coping with the problems of economising on cash when settling accounts for their regular customers and suppliers. The shortage of cash for wages evoked equivalent stratagems. Payment could be made by the issue of ‘chits’ or credit notes, for obtaining supplies at the ‘tommie’ shop or with a compliant local retailer. Or groups of workmen might be paid in larger denomination notes or coin for changing in local ale-houses or shops. Both methods offered greater scope for exploitation or the dissipation of wages than payments in tokens which passed current in local or regional circulation’.

Whatever the actual situation, it is hardly surprising that the Monneron tokens – so large, handsome, and, for the most part, well-made, particularly in comparison with other circulating coppers, would be readily accepted by the merchants of Gainsborough.

Subsequently, a True Bill, undated, but presumably presented by the jurors just prior to the commencement of the actual trial, declared (Fig.5a):

Subsequent references:
17 Lincolnshire Archives LQS Kirton Easter 1792 A256 23.
20 Lincolnshire Archives LQS A256 45; a True Bill is a bill of indictment found by a grand jury to be supported by sufficient evidence to justify the hearing of a case.
of our Sovereign Lord George the third King of Great Britain... with Force and Arms at the Township of Gainsborough aforesaid and the Parts and County aforesaid Twenty Copper Medals of the Value of Tenpence of the Goods and Chattels of the Company of proprietors of the Navigation from the Trent to the Mersey then and there being found Feloniously did steal take and carry away against the Peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity And the Jurors aforesaid upon their Oath aforesaid do further present that the said William Peach James Peach John Sheffield William Sheffield and John Watts on the said thirty first day of March in the Year aforesaid with Force and Arms at the Township of Gainsborough aforesaid in the Parts and County aforesaid twenty Copper Medals of the Value of tenpence of the Goods and Chattels of one Matthew Boulton Esquire then and there being found Feloniously did steal take and carry away against the Peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity.

It should be noted that although Caleb Maullin in his complaint stated that about 400 medals had been stolen, the boatmen were tried for the theft of only twenty of them. Presumably this was the number that had been recovered from the three Gainsborough shopkeepers and could therefore provide the strongest evidence of the boatmen's crime.

It should also be noted that the name of one of the six boatmen included in Caleb Maullin's Complaint of March 31, does not appear in this True Bill. This was John Tomlinson, who would testify against the others.21

On the back of this True Bill appear the names of eight witnesses who were sworn in for the prosecution (Fig. 5b): James Lawson, John Tomkinson, John Perry, Caleb Maullin, Richard Clarke, Eleanor Parkinson, John Whittaker and John Tomlinson. Their testimony would have been

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21 His name appears among the list of those sworn in court (as per Fig. 5b), and James Lawson's letter of 30 April, 1792 to Matthew Boulton, quoted below, is additional confirmation.
essential in various ways to the prosecution of the case. James Lawson was one of the managers of Matthew Boulton's Soho Mint: he would have identified the stolen tokens, and attested to their manufacture at Soho. John Tomkinson was most likely an employee of Hugh Henshall & Company, possibly at Shardlow. John Perry was probably another employee of Hugh Henshall & Company, possibly at Trent Port Wharf, Gainsborough. Both Tomkinson and Perry would have testified to the progress of the shipment via canal, thereby pinpointing exactly where some of the casks had been broken into.

Caleb Maullin, wharfinger, Trent Port Wharf, was employed by Hugh Henshall & Company: Maullin would have testified to the condition of the rifled casks, to the numbers of tokens stolen, and most importantly, had tracked them to, and retrieved them from the receivers. Richard Clarke was a baker in Gainsborough; Eleanor Parkinson was the mother of John Parkinson, a butcher, at Gainsborough; and John Whittaker was a cheesemonger in Gainsborough. These merchants would have testified to the circumstances of their receiving the stolen tokens.

John Tomkinson was a boatman from Castle Donington; he would have testified against his fellow boatmen.

In Soho, James Lawson, writing on 19 April 1792, to Matthew Boulton in London, concerning progress on production problems at the mint, indicated his intention to testify at the trial of the boatmen:

At present we are going on in finishing the 4th & 5th Presses and with the 5 Curves which will employ the men till my return from Gainsborough, where I must be on Tuesday next – (on account of the Medals stolen) – I shall set out from this [place] on Saturday Morning & Suppose I may return here on Thursday –.

Meanwhile, Augustin Monneron, in Paris, had continued to press for the delivery of more medals (i.e., tokens), and Boulton, in London, informed him of the theft in a letter of 24 April 1792, a few portions of which are no longer legible:

I shall be happy to see you in London as soon as possible as I shall be obliged to attend my business in Parliament a fortnight longer & perhaps during longer – a Month longer – which is unfortunate for me & for your Medals besides which there is another misfortune which will cause a Month’s delay at least which is […] of the Water Men upon the Navigation to Hull have broke open 3 of the Casks of ye Sous & taken a quantity out and the robbers are in […] Jail & will be tried this Week. But in order to prove the Identity of the pieces I have been obliged to send my principal Manager of the Medals & the person […] Mulplices the Dies, as [Witness to …] I doubt not but the Thief will be […] accordingly. However the proprietors of the Boats I [shall Oblige] to pay the Value [of the …] stolen.

That same day, 24 April, the trial of the boatmen took place in Kirton, a small town in the Parts of Lindsey. The verdicts are described in another of the documents in the Lincolnshire Archives:

At the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, holden by adjournment at Kirton in and for the Parts of LINDSEY in the County of LINCOLN, on Tuesday the twenty fourth Day of April in the thirty second Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the third King of GREAT BRITAIN, &c. and in the Year of our Lord 1792. Before Richard Ellison Junior Esquire Chairman, William Richard Wilson Esquire and others Justices of our said Lord the King, assigned to keep the Peace of our said Lord the King in the said Parts of LINDSEY in the said COUNTY, and also to hear and determine divers Felonies, Trespasses, and other Misdemeanors committed within the Parts aforesaid.

William Sheffield Convicted of petty Larceny – To be Transported for seven Years to someplace beyond the Seas.

James Peach Convicted of petty Larceny – To be committed to the House of Correction at Kirton for twelve Calendar Months and there kept to hard Labour during that Time.

John Sheffield Convicted of petty Larceny – To be committed to the said House of Correction for Six Calendar Months and there kept to hard Labour during that Time.

22 James Lawson to Matthew Boulton, James Lawson & Archibald Lawson Letter Box. BCA.
31 Mathew Boulton to Augustin Monneron. M. Boulton. Letter Book R, 1791–2. BCA.
24 LQS Kirton Easter 1792 A256 74.
Subsequently, on 30 April 1792, after attending the trial and returning to Soho, James Lawson sent this report of the results to Boulton, who was still in London:

I got to Gainsbro' on Monday and found Mr. Maulin who was extreamly pleas'd to see me as he was afraid the great floods in the Trent might have stopt me and he had done every thing in his power to get clear proofs, and the Canal Co had also sent down Mr. Sparrow their attorney who I met on the road. Mr. Maulin had taken up all the Boats Crew 6 as all three receivers who were freed on finding surties for their appearance.

The trial came on Tuesday afternoon at Kirton about 14 Miles from Gainsbro', the proofs were clear as to identifying the Medals but none of the receivers would swear to any of the men (only saying they received them of Boatmen) tho' there was little doubt that some of them knew the men but for one of them turning evidence no proof would have been brought home to any of them and him they tried to make of no effect by bringing witnesses to prove him insane, the effect of which was against them.

They had for Council a Mr. Eskew and the canal Co Mr. Wills & a Mr. Clerk - the trial was a long one - continued from about 3 'till near 12 oClock when 4 of the men were found guilty, there was no clear proof against the Master of the boat tho' it is probable he knew - one of them is transported for 7 years another imprisoned 12 Months another 6 Months & the 4 publicly whipt through Gainsbro'.

Reports of the trial's results subsequently appeared in the 4 May and 11 May 1792 issues of The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury (See Appendix A).

It may seem odd that John Watts, the only canal boat thief sentenced to corporal punishment, was immediately discharged, while his cohorts were imprisoned (or transported) for from three months to seven years. It is likely that Watts, presumably unlike the others, had a family dependent on him, and, if so, his imprisonment would have left them destitute and consequently the responsibility of Castle Donington, where Watts lived; hence his immediate discharge after having received his punishment.

This intriguing episode, hardly more than a footnote in the fascinating history of Matthew Boulton's original Soho mint, nevertheless reflects in microcosm a trio of conditions in late 18th century England: the continual thievery that plagued the shipment of goods by canal, the chaotic condition of the copper coinage, and the draconian punishments meted out for seemingly minor crimes.

APPENDIX A

The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury, 4 May 1792:

'At the quarter sessions at Kirton, four boatmen were tried for stealing from a boat on the river Trent, a box of medals made at Birmingham, in honor of the French revolution. All of them were found guilty, one of them was sentenced to be transported for seven years, two to be imprisoned three months, and the fourth was whipped from the market place at Gainsbro', to the bridge and back again, on Tuesday last'.

A lengthier, more accurate report was carried in the 11 May, 1792 issue of the same newspaper:

'At the general quarter sessions of the peace, holden by adjournment at Kirton in Lindsey, on Tuesday the 24th day of April,

William Sheffield ... convicted of petty larceny, [was] sentenced to be transported for seven years, to some place beyond the seas.

James Peach, convicted of the like, was committed to the house of correction for twelve calendar months, there to be kept to hard labour during that time.

John Sheffield, convicted of the like, was committed to the house of correction for six calendar months, there to be kept to hard labour during that period.

John Watts, convicted of the like, was sentenced to be publicly whipt at Gainsborough, and discharged.'

25 James Lawson to Matthew Boulton, James Lawson and Archibald Lawson Letter Box, BCA, Lawson is incorrect in reporting the corporal punishment meted out, as only one of the boatmen was actually sentenced to be whipped.

26 Newspaper files, Lincoln Central Library.