

SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

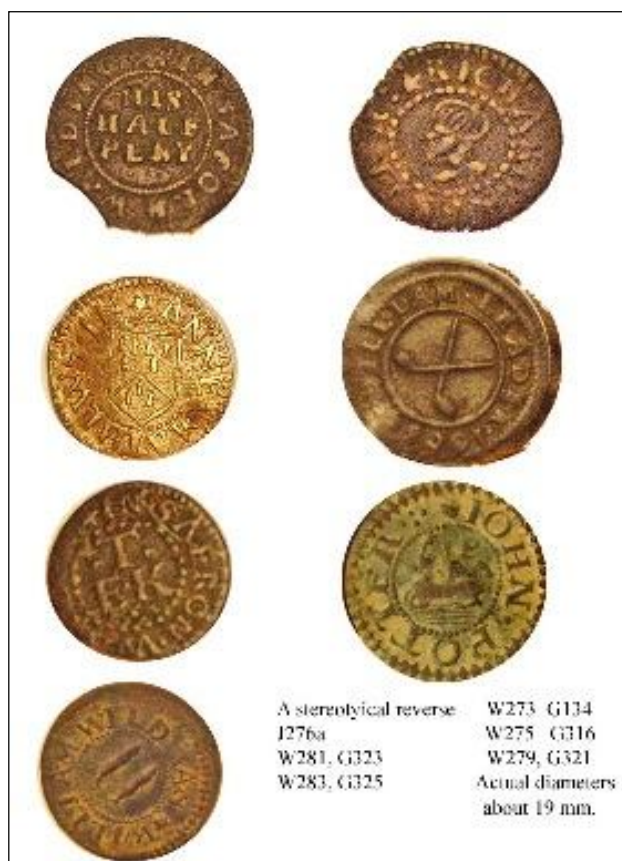
The following article appears by permission and is the copyright of the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* and the author. Fair dealing for the purposes of private study or non-commercial educational, archival or research purposes is freely allowed, but under no circumstances are articles or illustrations to be reprinted in any other publication, website or other media without permission. All rights reserved. It has not been possible to include all the original illustrations with the articles, but these can be seen in copies deposited at Saffron Walden Town Library.

Enquiries re articles can be sent to saffronwaldenhistory@gmail.com

The Seventeenth Century Copper Tokens of Saffron Walden: a commentary

©Tony Fox

Reprinted from: *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 11 Spring 2006



Saffron Walden copper tokens c.1650-1680.
Illustration by courtesy of Saffron Walden Museum.

Saffron Walden's coinage is restricted to the mid-17th century.¹ All issues are in copper, with two halfpennies and the rest being farthings. They are all round, and none are easily found. They were the only small change in the Town until the official copper coinage of Charles II in 1672; surviving specimens usually show the wear that might be expected after 20-odd years use of a small, soft, copper token.

Interest in Saffron Walden tokens is not new. Williamson's national survey of seventeenth century tokens (published 1889) acknowledges help with the

Saffron Walden issues from Joseph Clarke FSA, a resident of the Town.² The Saffron Walden Museum has also collected them for a long time, and a manuscript catalogue of its collection was in the possession of its Mr. Guy Maynard before the First World War. In 1914, Gilbert included Saffron Walden's tokens in his general survey of the Essex 17th century issues.

That these tokens exist at all indicates the indifference of the then Government to the practical difficulties of life amongst the lower-classes. Insistence that all legal cash transactions should be with regal coinage of gold and silver created huge problems for those doing small transactions. How does one buy or sell a loaf, when the smallest regal coin is a silver penny (twelve of which made a labourer's day wage, and nine of which would feed a whole family for a day)? Such problems did not occupy the minds of those who bought flour in bulk and had live-in servants to do the baking.

The worn state of these tokens witnesses a considerable degree of trust that existed between those that issued them and those that accepted them. The latter, especially in Essex and the other home counties, had already been massively ripped off before, and within living memory of the Saffron Walden issues. In 1613, Lord Harrington had been given a patent for copper

farthings which he issued from Token House Yard (just off Lothbury, near the Guildhall in London). Nationwide, the magistrates were asked to encourage their use, as did King Charles I on his accession. Gold and silver coins thus migrated to London, and Essex and the home counties were flooded with the copper tokens. Then, the patentees refused to redeem their farthings, and the lower classes were left with nothing but copper coins whose intrinsic value was much less than the face value that they had been accepted for. Many poor people were ruined and not a few riots resulted.³ It is important to remember that not even during the Commonwealth (outside of the siege towns) was there any regal, small denomination, copper coinage.

Small, worn, locally-issued copper coins can hardly be described as the glamorous end of numismatics. For more than a century, however, there has been a small band of aficionados for these coins. The wider interest is the insight that these tokens give us into mid-seventeenth century life and its people. Interest in local token issues is much more likely for reasons historical than numismatical.

The invention of copper tokens issued by local traders, rather than national patentees, introduced a measure of local reputation, personal knowledge, and therefore a degree of trust, into transactions where small copper halfpennies and farthings were needed as small change. Some towns (but not Saffron Walden) even went to the extreme of adding legends to the farthings such as 'For the use of ye poor', accordingly. The issuers of copper tokens were not anonymous middle-class tradesmen. Their names were well-known among the local population. Many of these tradesmen served in prominent offices in the Town. Honouring their copper tokens would have contributed to these tradesmen's reputations as business(wo)men. But one wonders about political recognition, too.

Could those seeking high office in Saffron Walden in the 17th century have found that issuing and honouring these tokens was good publicity?⁴

Table 1 provides a list of the Saffron Walden traders that issued tokens in the seventeenth century, collated from all the sources in the bibliography. Saffron Walden was one of 98 such places of issue in mid-17th century Essex.

Little is known about how these tokens were manufactured. Williamson thought that there were itinerant salesmen for the mintage, who might also make the designs, in negotiation with the prospective issuer. The actual coin-striking probably took place in London. The economics of the production side of the 17th century token trade is also mostly unrecorded. Presumably, it was similar to that at the end of the following century, where the manufacturer's profit came from the difference between the face value of the tokens sold to the issuer, minus a discount, but which was nevertheless higher than the intrinsic value of the copper from which they were made plus the costs of striking and transportation. Payment for bulk new copper tokens would be demanded in regal silver and gold coinage.

There is some evidence of economy in the process of copper token design in Saffron Walden. Some reverse designs were re-used. For example, John Potter and Anne Mathews shared a reverse design (see table 1). Two of the 30 Essex issues bearing the arms of the Grocers' Company are from Saffron Walden. Depictions of clay pipes and fish(es) are widely found across the country, including at Saffron Walden. The coat of arms of the Mercers livery company appears on one Saffron Walden issue and five others in Essex. Original engraving cost money, and copying dies was cheaper, one being made from another at the beginning of a mintage.

In summary, the copper coins of Saffron Walden were minted at a time when many Essex towns and parishes were doing so, and in response to a lack of regal coinage suitable for small transactions. These tokens were issued by well-known Saffron Walden tradesmen, many of whom occupied high office in the Town. The well-worn state of surviving specimens show that they were accepted by the population, honoured by their issuers, and may even have been a form of publicity.

Notes

1. Excluding oddities (e.g., the coinages of besieged towns during the Civil War), the five general phases of local English coinages are pre-Roman, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, 12th-14th century Plantagenet, and the 17th-19th century tokens. Colchester (*Camulodunum*) appears to be the only town in England represented in all five (its claim to the Roman phase can be argued from the early Claudian series, if not those of Allectus and Carausius (whose 'C' mint might have been elsewhere). In addition, there was an Elizabethan copper farthing that was legal tender within 10 miles of Bristol, and

some other Tudor tokens on lead or leather used by individual traders which did not, apparently, circulate more widely.

2. Joseph Clarke FSA was diocesan architect at the time (www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/apsley.htm). He is probably the same Joseph Clarke who was town councillor, mayor, and brother of Joshua Clarke, a Saffron Walden maltster (www.townlib.org.uk/ex-founding.htm). Interestingly, there is a stray reference attributed to Miller Christy (1890) that Joseph Clarke had been the taxidermist of an elephant exhibited at the Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace in 1851, and belonging to the Saffron Walden Museum until 1960 (www.twohootstaxidermy.co.uk/archive.htm). (Websites accessed 19 June 2005).

3. The story is told in the opening to Gilbert's series of articles. It is interesting to consider that today's regal circulating coinage is, in fact, entirely token because its intrinsic value is less than its denominations; this is why 5p and 10p pieces have had to be reduced in size during recent decades.

4. High office was not a universal ambition, judging by the numbers of those who paid fines in order to refuse office.

Dalton, R. & Hamer, S.H., *The Provincial Token-coinage of the 18th Century* (1910-1913), pp 30-34.

Dickinson M., *Seventeenth century Tokens of the British Isles and their Values* (1986), pp 59-60.

Fox A.W., 'The Essex D&H no.42 (Leigh): The church belies it'. *Conder Tokens Coll J* (2005; 10 No.35), pp 14-18.

Gilbert W., 'The token coinage of Essex in the seventeenth century', *Trans Essex Arch & Hist* (1914) **13**: 184-199, 267-280; (1916) **14**: 1-15, 146-157, 256; and (1925) **17**: 244-256.

Judson E., *The Lives and Wills of Essex Token Issuers, incorporating a re-listing of the seventeenth century trade tokens of Essex* (Little Bardfield, Essex: 1987), pp 160-166.

Williamson G.C., *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century* (1889-1891, reprinted 1967), **1**: 229-231.

Table 1: Saffron Walden traders' tokens c.1650-1675. Abbreviations: W - Williamson; G - Gilbert; D - Dickinson; J - Judson (Judson and Dickinson, unless stated, use the same numbers as Williamson); L - legend only (all the reverses carry the name of the town, variously spelt) with stereotypical legends (such as 'his farthing'), which do not lead to the differentiation of different varieties of the same issue. SWM: Saffron Walden Museum. The spellings used are those on the tokens themselves.

Name	Trade	Date	Obverse	Reverse	Reference nos.
Nathaniell Cattlin ?	Weaver	1668	A shuttle	Halfpenny, L	W271, G312
Richard Kentish ¹	?Mercer	Unknown	The Mercers Arms	L	W272, G313
Richard Kentish ¹	Inn-keeper	Unknown	Head of a black boy	L	W273, G314
Samvell Leader ^{2,3}	Unknown	1653	Two tobacco pipes	L	W274, G315
William Leader ²	Unknown	1668	Two pipes, crossed	Halfpenny; L	W275, G316
Ann Mathews ⁴	Grocer	1656	The Grocers' Arms	L ⁷	W276, G317
Ann Mathews ⁴	Grocer	1656	The Grocers' Arms	L ⁷ variant in SWM	W-, G-, J276a
Thomas Mehew ²	Grocer	1658	The Grocers' Arms	L, "Safforn. Walldin"	W277, G318
Thomas Mehew ²	Grocer	1658	The Grocers' Arms	L, "Waldon"	W-, G318**, J277a
Thomas Pa(?t)lmer ²	Draper	Unknown	L	The Drapers' arms	W -, G319, J277b
Thomas Patmer ^{2,6}	Draper	Unknown	L	The Drapers' arms	W278, G320
Iohn Potter	Inn-keeper & Grocer	1656	A hart couchant	L ⁷	W279, G321
Edward Tompson ⁸	Unknown	1659 (W has 1655, probably an error; J has 1659)	L	L	W280, G322
Edward K Tompson ⁸	Unknown	1659	L	L	W281, G323
William Wildman ⁹	Unknown	1656	Two fishes	L	W282, G324
William Wildman ^{2,10}	Unknown	1667	Two fishes	L	W283, G325

¹ It is unknown if these are the same person. ² Sometime Borough treasurer. ³ Sometime Mayor. ⁴ Formerly schoolmaster's widow, whose second husband was John Potter (see W279, G321). ⁶ Doubtless the same person. ⁷ Identical reverses with the initials AM. ⁸ These both have the initials EKT on the reverse. ⁹ Sometime Chamberlain. ¹⁰ Son of immediately previous. **Reported with the same number in Gilbert's addendum of 1925.