

A Lost Cambridgeshire 17th Century Token

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As part of an ongoing study of the seventeenth-century tokens of Cambridgeshire almost 2000 tokens have been viewed in museum and private collections, but as yet a specimen of John Lowry's token (Williamson 61) has not been traced.

John Lowry served an apprenticeship as a Chandler in Cambridge⁽¹⁾ and became a freeman of the city by apprenticeship⁽²⁾. He became one of the Common Council of Cambridge and in November 1640, he was elected Member of Parliament for Cambridge in the Long Parliament, sharing the constituency with Oliver Cromwell. He was elected alderman on 11th of May 1641⁽³⁾. In the Civil War, Lowry became a colonel in the parliamentary army and in 1645 was seeking resources from the speaker of the Commons⁽⁴⁾.

He was then mayor of Cambridge and he came into dispute with Cambridge University when he refused to take the customary oath to maintain the rights of the University. The University appealed to the House of Lords. The matter was not resolved until 1647 when the House of Lords ruled in favour of the Vice-Chancellor and made a general order that the Mayor should respect the privileges of the University⁽⁵⁾. In 1659 Lowry was re-elected MP for Cambridge in the Third Protectorate Parliament⁽⁶⁾. He was displaced from being alderman in 1662⁽³⁾.

In St Sepulchre's parish, Edward Spillman was taxed on three hearths in 1662 and 1664⁽⁷⁾, owned by John Lowry. John Lowry died 1669.

Williamson's description of the token is copied directly from Bowtell's notes⁽⁸⁾ "JOHN LOWRY . OF . CAMBRIDG . HIS . HALFE . PENY . 1657 encircling a bust of his patron, Oliver Cromwell. This is rather singular, being struck in cameo – that is to say, the letters, etc are indented, instead of intaglio, or cut in relief, as coins are in general. (Bowtell)".

The location of this piece is not now known, but is unusual in many aspects. As well as the incuse lettering and carrying a portrait of Cromwell, this is a very early date for a provincial halfpenny token. Notwithstanding these and that the token has not been seen for over two centuries, this token has been described as a typical English piece!⁽⁹⁾.

References

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- (5) VCH Cambs v3: (1959), pp68-76.
- (6) VCH Cambs v3: (1959), pp191-210.
- (7) Evans, N and Rose, S (2000). Cambridgeshire Hearth Tax.
- (8) Bowtell, J (1813). Manuscripts deposited at Downing College library. Volume iii. pp647-652.
- (9) Brunk, G G (1991). 'Coins stamped with advertising: A forgotten chapter of nineteenth century Midwestern History'. Journal of American Culture, v14 n1.

