

The Numismatic Ancestors of Francis Cokayne

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One of the interesting aspects of researching tokens is sometimes finding more than the usual who, when, where and why? In many, if not most, cases information can be hard to find and the story difficult to put together. In the case presented here and first presented at the 2018 Token Congress, the challenge was how to distil a very big story into a one hour presentation. Here I will present a brief summary of how a very unexpected connection was made; that between Sir Vicary Gibbs, Antony Gibbs, Henry Hucks Gibbs and Francis Cokayne.

The story starts with the acquisition of a scarce token issued by A(ntony) Gibbs & Sons for use in East Greenland in 1863 (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Antony Gibbs & Sons 1 Skilling token for East Greenland from 1863. (150%).

The Founding of Antony Gibbs & Sons (A.G. & S.)

Antony Gibbs (1756-1816) was the 4th son of Dr George Abraham Gibbs (1718-1794), Chief Surgeon at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.⁽¹⁾ He was apprenticed to Nicholas Brook exporting woollen cloth to Spain. He thus became fluent in Spanish and made high level connections with the Spanish merchants, civil servants and monarchy. In 1778 he returned to Exeter, forming Gibbs Brothers, with his brother Abraham, trading as woollen cloth merchants. Abraham died in 1782 and the company collapsed leaving Antony and his father bankrupt. Antony returned to Spain trading in cloth and wine, but the war with Spain made trading difficult.^(2,3)

In 1806 Antony was loaned £10,000 by his brother Sir Vicary Gibbs (1751-1820). Sir Vicary Gibbs had enrolled at Lincoln's Inn in 1769 and was called to the bar in 1783. His voice, attitude and dry humour resulted in him being called Vinegar Gibbs. After unsuccessfully defending William Winterbotham for sedition in 1793, he was retained as junior counsel to Erskine in the successful defence of the radicals and political reformers John Horne Tooke and Thomas Hardy in autumn 1794. His name thus appears on several political tokens of that period (Figure 2).



Erskine & Gibbs, D&H 1011

Tooke, D&H 1044

Tooke, D&H 1045

Tooke, D&H 1046

Fig. 2. Eighteenth century halfpenny tokens naming Vicary Gibbs. (100%, all © DNW)

South American Guano

With his brother's money Antony bought a licence for a Spanish merchant vessel and the *Hermosa Mexicana* landed at Lima in 1807 and started trading with South America and Peru in particular. In 1808 he relocated to London, founding Antony Gibbs & Co with Sir Vicary and his own son George Henry. In 1813 his second son William, was added to the company to form Antony Gibbs & Sons. Antony died in 1816.

In 1822, the Peru office was opened in Lima and in 1841 the company had a contract from the Peruvian and Bolivian governments to mine and export Guano from the offshore islands. From 1846-61, Antony Gibbs & Sons had the monopoly on this commodity. In 1856 211,000 tons were imported into the UK for use as fertilizer and in 1860 433 ships carried 350,000 tons from Chincha Island alone.⁽⁴⁾

Contemporary publications extolled the virtues of the guano as a fertiliser and land improver and the price rose rapidly.⁽⁵⁾ Complaints that it was too expensive received the reply 'you don't have to buy it!'

The guano was mined by 4000 Chinese indentured workers and slaves from Easter Island. This was raised in parliament as circumventing the anti-slavery acts and resulted in the Chinese Passenger Act of 1855. By 1860, none of the original workers were left alive and the same year the company made £100,000 of which 70% went to grandson Antony Gibbs. Figure 3 shows a few images of the operations around 1860.⁽⁶⁾

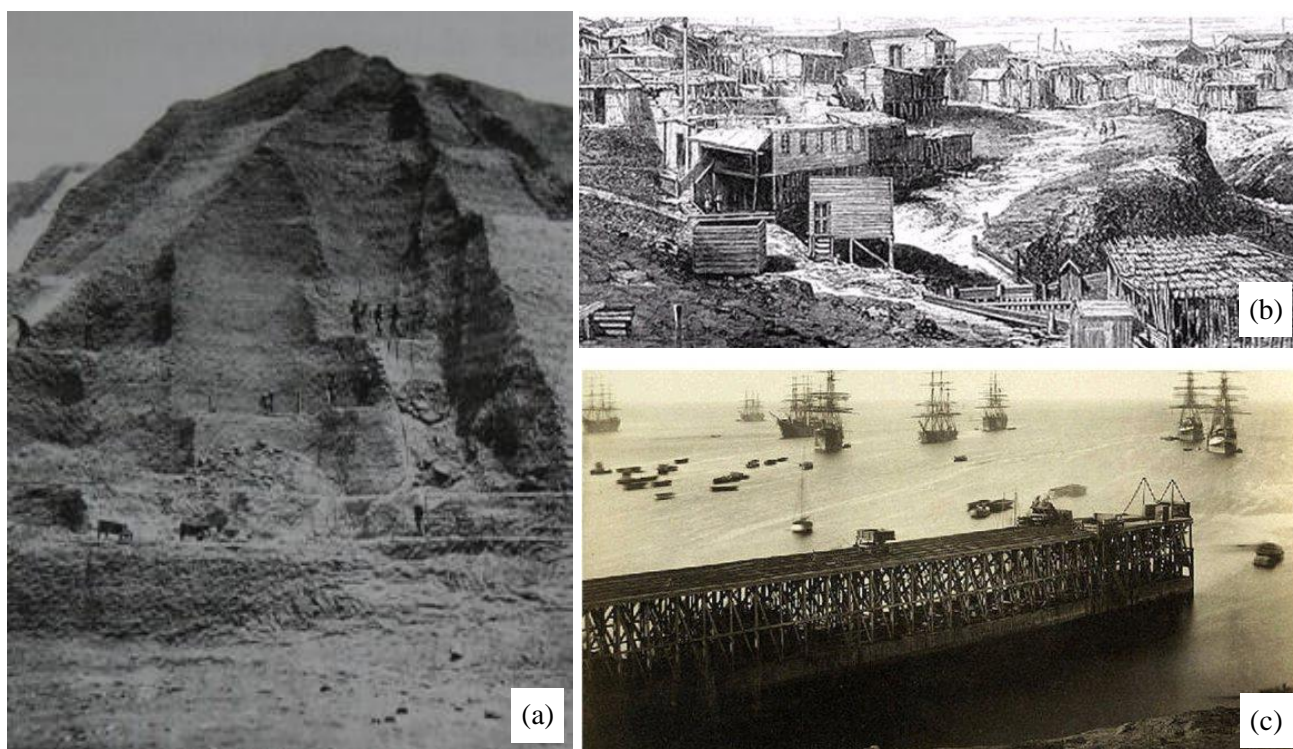


Fig. 3. (a) Mining the Guano on Chincha Island, (b) Workers' shanty town and (c) Ship loading.

The Gibbs family became the wealthiest non-landed family in Britain and with it came the music hall jibe:

William Gibbs made his dibs,
Selling the turds of foreign birds.

William Gibbs bought Tyntesfield House in Somerset which was rebuilt and enlarged 1860-65. The house was given to the National Trust in 2002, a year after the death of descendant Richard Gibbs.

Sodium Nitrate (saltpeter) had first been discovered and exploited in Chile in 1841 and was used for the manufacture of fertilizer and explosives. A Gibbs and Co office was opened at Calacala in 1861 and c.1900 a series of vulcanite tokens was issued. In 1880 the South American head office was moved to Chile.⁽⁷⁾ Whilst Gibbs operated several mining operations in Chile, And there is a large series of tokens from different mines and owners, the only tokens known for Gibbs & Co were issued from the Calacala office.⁽⁷⁾ (Figure 4.).



Fig. 4. Plastic tokens issued by Gibbs & Co in Chile, c. 1900. (100%).

Shipping and Banking

In 1814 Robert Bright was the representative of Antony Gibbs & Sons in Spain. That part of the company was renamed Gibbs, Bright & Co. of Bristol and Liverpool in 1818 and became the global shipment and shipping contractor to A.G.&S. Initially working the West African slave trade to the Caribbean they ceased slave trading activities on 10th September 1841.

In 1843 with Henry Hucks Gibbs as a director the company moved into Merchant Banking and financed the Great Western Railway and the construction of the S.S. Great Eastern along with diversification into insurance brokering especially for shipping. Thus the Gibbs empire had the mining contracts, the shipping company and the shipping insurance all covered. Henry Hucks Gibbs was the Director of the Bank of England 1853-1901, including the period 1880-90 when he helped bail out Barings Bank.

In 1881 these activities were reabsorbed back into A.G.&S. and the company was floated in 1973, initially inside the Midland Bank and then into HSBC in 1981. In 2005 the company was dissolved and absorbed into HSBC.

Greenland Adventurers

Joseph Walter Tayler F.G.S, was born in 1826 and was the first son of Rear Admiral Joseph Needham Tayler. He made his first expedition to Greenland in 1850 after the Danish government had given permission for exploration and mining.⁽⁸⁾ The Illustrated London News of 2nd February 1856 announced “Arksuk fjord is the only place in the world where cryolite is to be found. It is a white mineral and will probably be used to manufacture aluminium.”

The exploration of Greenland was also to search for lost Danish and Norwegian colonies that had thrived on the coast around 1000 AD. The 190 known villages had been lost by 1400.

In 1863 the Danish government provided a license for exclusive trading with the east coast of Greenland. This also proposed new settlement at Ekalumiut and 30% of any profits would go to the Danish government. Tayler would lead the expedition and A.G.&S. would provide the ships and funding.⁽⁹⁾

Two ships, The Baron Hombro and The Caroline were reinforced and set sail on 21st August 1863 under a new flag created for the venture. On 6th September they sighted land 63° 30' North but were blocked by 40 miles of pack ice. They moved south in an attempt to make landfall but were blocked by an ice field 120 miles wide. They abandoned the first expedition. A new ship was built to take the ice, The Eric, but this also failed to land in 1865 and the venture was wound up. The ship was sold as a whaler working out of Dundee. A set of tokens was created for use in the new settlement (Figure 5).⁽¹⁰⁾



Fig. 5. Antony Gibbs & Sons tokens manufactured for use for trade in East Greenland. (100%).

Though the ships never landed and a settlement was not set up many of the tokens are found in a high grade, often with lustre, several have been found showing signs of use/loss and with countermarks. The tokens must have been repurposed somewhere else, but no details have been found.



Fig. 6. Well-used and countermarked 24 Skilling tokens Antony Gibbs & Sons. (100%).

Whilst researching Antony Gibbs' business activities, it became clear that the family was traceable back to the late 16th century but had only become wealthy and connected after the business successes in South America.

The Cokayne Connection

Two published pedigrees have been found. The first published privately in 1922, is based on a manuscript from 1904 by Henry Hucks Gibbs (1st Lord Aldenham) and takes the Hucks family from 1583 to the 1870s, including the first two generations of the Gibbs.⁽¹⁾ The second is described as an "Abridged pedigree of Gibbs showing descendants of George Abraham Gibbs who have been partners or served in the firm of Antony Gibbs & Sons." This takes the family from 1718 to 1958.⁽³⁾

Normally when working on tokens it might be possible to trace the issuer, a relative, an address, but when the family tree becomes a pedigree and an oil painting or photograph can be found for almost every member for seven generations, this is certainly a family of high achievers and great wealth.

The appearance of the name Cokayne was immediately suspicious; what are the chances of Francis Cokayne, one of the greatest token collectors of the 20th century being related?

Figure 7 provides an update to the Gibbs pedigree. To save space, most of the titles have been omitted. The directors of A.G.&S. have been underlined and the main Cokayne connections are in red text

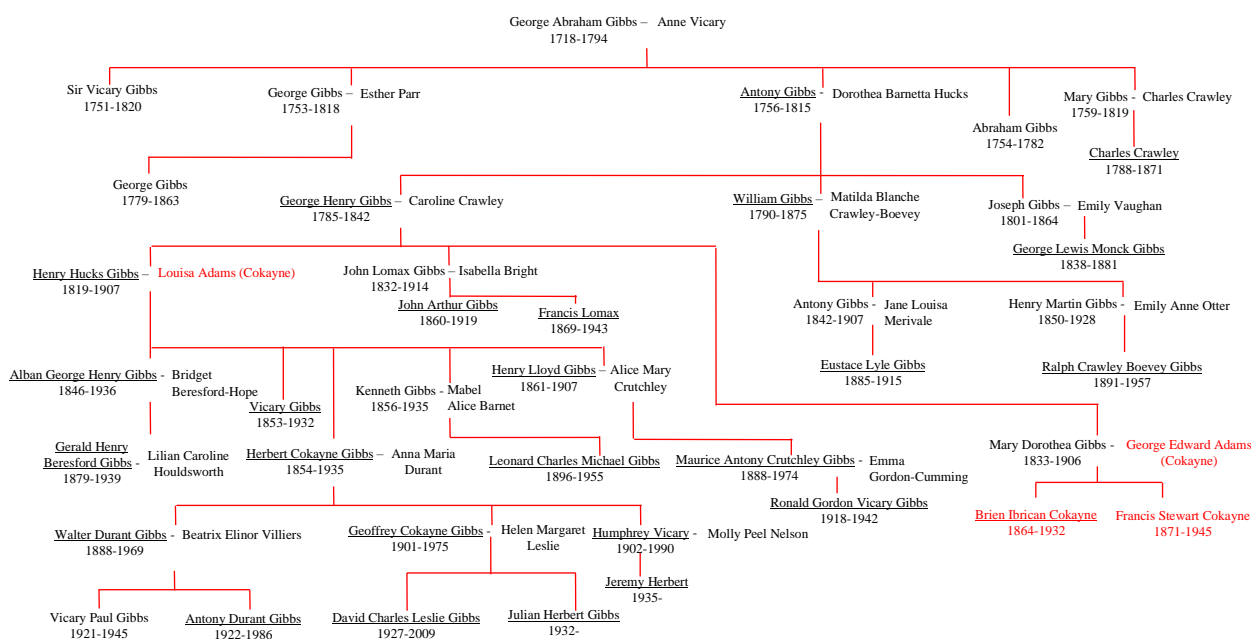


Fig. 7. Abridged Gibbs Pedigree (with entries from 1958 updated to 2021 and amendments).⁽³⁾

William Adams and the Hon. Mary Anne Cokayne had a daughter Louisa Anne who married Henry Hucks Gibbs in 1845. They also had a son George Edward Adams (1825-1911). He married Mary Dorothea Gibbs in 1856 and had eight children; two sons and six daughters. George Edward Adams changed his name by Royal Licence to Cokayne (15th August 1873) as per his mother's will. He was a genealogist (FSA 1866) and had a series of positions at the college of arms until his death in 1911. These included; Herald at the College of Arms (1859), and Clarenceux King of Arms (1894-1911). He compiled and published two major works; The Complete Peerage (1887, 1898) and the Complete Baronetage (1900-1906).

His first son, Brien Ibrican Cokayne was born 12th July 1864, was a businessman and banker, a partner in A.G.&S. and at the Bank of England was Deputy Governor (1915 to 1918) and then Governor (1918 to 1920). He received an OBE in 1917 and became Baron Cullen of Ashbourne in 1920. He died 3rd November 1932.

George Edward Adams' (Cokayne) second son was Francis Stewart Cokayne (1871-1945), who was a stockbroker and token collector. He formed several collections and was burgled twice. His collection of "countermarked overseers", private bankers' and tradesmen's tokens in gold, platinum, silver &c, chiefly of the 19th century" was catalogued by A.H.F. Baldwin and sold through Glendining's, 17-18 July 1946. Part 2, the 18th century tokens, tickets and passes relating to opera, theatres, gardens railways etc. was sold privately to Baldwin c.1946.^(11,12, 13)

Having mentioned this story to Tim Millett, he added; "My grandfather Douglas Mitchell (1906-2000) was very interesting talking about Cockayne and this ties in very well with what you say about their wealth and position. To be made Baldwin's number 22 was a good start and there would be very few of the old rolls which had not been annotated "NO. 22 Seen." I believe that he lived at Bryanston Square and from what I remember, a package had to be delivered to him every Friday night, so he had something for the weekend."

In 1939, the Cokayne family moved to Hatfield in Hertfordshire, where Francis died on 31st March 1945.



Fig. 8. Francis Stewart Cokayne in his Hertfordshire garden in 1944.

References and Acknowledgements

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