

The Holdens: a Family of Utterers and Coiners in Nineteenth Century Lancashire

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Two particular events stimulated the making and use of counterfeit coins in the 1820s and 1830s. Until the later 1820s the vast majority of counterfeits were struck with Birmingham the main centre of production. In the later 1820s counterfeiters began casting coins using moulds made from plaster of Paris. The materials required were cheap and the process relatively simple thereby opening up the activity to many people. The Holdens were amongst those to take advantage of the technique. The second event was the ending of death sentence as a potential punishment for coiners in 1832.

The key source, which explains the circumstances that led to the Holdens' lives of crime, is a series of four articles headed Narratives of Crime that were published in the *Blackburn Standard* on 28 April, 12 May, 26 May and 2 June 1852. The articles are based upon the 28th annual report written by the Reverend John Clay in his capacity as Chaplain to the Preston House of Correction. It focuses on the recollections of the head of the Holden family and his eldest son and provides an insight into the personal story of a family which would otherwise only be on record, in a very limited way, for their criminal activities. The *Blackburn Standard* text has punctuation marks implying that the words are a verbatim record.

The identity of the family was concealed by the Reverend Clay who simply refers to the main source as J.H. His family are listed by their Christian names with H. as their surname. However, from other newspaper reports it has been possible to identify J.H. as John Holden. Holden, his wife and eldest son were all sentenced to 12 months in gaol in February 1851 for counterfeit coin related offences and it was while they were in gaol that Clay's conversations with John and James Holden took place. The four-part account is presented as a warning to others. They begin with a summary of the criminal history of the Holden family:

J.H. [John Holden senior]:	1 March 1846 uttering base coin, acquitted. 2 August 1846 uttering base coin, 12 months imprisonment. 3 August 1848 uttering base coin, 18 months imprisonment. 4 February 1851 uttering base coin, 12 months imprisonment.
Ellen H. [John senior's wife]	1 December 1847 uttering base coin, 3 months imprisonment. 2 February 1851 uttering base coin, 12 months imprisonment.
James H. [eldest son]	1 April 1848, felony, 6 months imprisonment. 2 March 1849 uttering base coin, acquitted. 3 August 1849 convicted (probably of assaulting a police officer, see below), 1 month imprisonment. 4 January 1850 convicted, 3 months imprisonment. 5 February 1851 uttering base coin, 12 months imprisonment.
Jane H. [daughter]	1 April 1848 [the case was actually heard in August] uttering base coin, 9 months imprisonment. 2 November 1849 uttering base coin, 12 months imprisonment.
John H. [youngest son]	1 August 1848 uttering base coin, 9 months imprisonment. 1 September 1849 convicted, 3 months imprisonment.

Although not listed by Clay, Mary Holden, wife of James was also involved in uttering (see below). Clay's account has been enlarged by reference to local newspapers and this information forms the second part of the paper. There are a few inconsistencies between Clay's dates and local newspaper reports but otherwise he produced an accurate record of their trials.

John Holden was born in 1800, one of seven children. His early years were difficult. Following the death of his parents the children spent a time living with their grandmother but were then separated, each being brought up in a different household. Holden was badly treated at times. He became an apprentice in a mill at Lower Darwen where he served his time. He viewed this period of his life very positively. Early on in his account he lamented that the course he had taken meant that he was far worse off than his siblings who had followed a different lifestyle and were all in 'creditable circumstances.'

Holden married Ellen Entwisle on 16 August 1824 at St Mary the Virgin, Blackburn. Both were from the parish. John, recorded as a weaver, signed the marriage certificate, Ellen made her mark, a cross. They were clearly careful with money having saved £33 by 1826. All was well until a mob attacked the mill in which John was working that year and broke all of the power looms. After six months without work the couple moved to Wigan where he was paid ten shillings a week for over-seeing other spinners and made a further £2 per week 'off my own wheels'. He had a lathe and after finishing for the day at the mill he spent time making chairs, bird cages and other items. Holden and his wife saved £200. Holden describes these years as very happy and laments what followed as being due to drink and keeping bad company. After nine years of marriage, and four children, he began drinking. Initially this was on Saturday nights but it then became a daily habit of excessive drinking. Ellen also began drinking.

Realising that their savings were diminishing, Holden decided to turn his life around and stopped drinking for twelve months. However, following the second of what was to be a series of unfortunate occurrences he once again reverted to alcohol. In about 1838, after twelve years working at Wigan, the mill owner died and the business closed. Holden was again out of work. The family moved to Bolton, where Holden got a job as a weaver in a factory. In order to provide work for his parents-in-law he took on a beer house. This could have been a success as it was close to the factory and many men called in. However, John and Ellen Holden joined in the drinking and they provided alcohol to factory workers during their shifts at work. He was warned by his manager that if he didn't give up the beer house, he would inform the master of what was happening as all of the spinners were becoming drunkards.

Because he felt that the temperature in the factory, and too much drink, were damaging his health, Holden once again tried to make a new start and went to spin for a Mr Sidebottom in Derbyshire. He also took up joinery again and made a reasonable living. Things then took another turn for the worse. Ellen became sick for a year and one of his sons died. Holden again resorted to drink. Nevertheless, he was promoted to the post of 'over-looker'. Then his mother-in-law died. She had helped Ellen look after the children. As a result of her illness, Ellen lost the use of one of her hands and was unable to cope without her mother – they had six children by this time. Holden's drinking increased, sometimes he was off work for a week or a fortnight at a time. He lost his job and went to Ashton-under-Lyne looking for work. He took £2 with him but instead of seeking work he spent the money on drink. Five days later he returned home £1 in debt. There followed a time of short-term employment between periods of drunkenness. Wages offered grew less and less.

The family returned to Blackburn where Holden managed to find employment. However, Ellen began to drink heavily again. Often, he came home to find her drunk in bed and no food to eat. They also had four children 'unfit for work'. In order to get Ellen away from this life-style they moved back to Bolton where Holden soon met up with his old drinking companions. It was at this point that his involvement with counterfeit coins

began. Whilst drinking with two men, a shoemaker, referred to as NS, and a labourer, who went by two or three names, Holden asked how, in spite of doing little work, they were never short of money. The reply was 'Ah, there is none that will work except fools and horses'. They revealed that they made their living by making and paying with bad money and could make as much money on a Saturday night as Holden could earn in a week. Holden quickly recognised the opportunities and his life of crime began. The three men went to Tyldesley Banks. During the afternoon and evening, they passed about £4 in counterfeit coins. According to Holden the shoemaker and labourer described him as one of 'the best payers they ever saw'. At the end of the day Holden received ten shillings in good money and the same amount in bad. He passed the counterfeit coins in Bolton on the following day. Upon hearing this, his collaborators warned him that this was bad practice as uttering in your home-town could attract attention and suspicion. The three of them followed the same pattern over the next twelve months, with much drinking. Holden had many narrow escapes from arrest. His accomplices were very concerned about being caught as both had been in prison two or three times. Eventually the shoemaker and labourer were arrested in a liquor vault in Bolton by three policemen who, for reasons that are unclear, ignored Holden. The latter quickly went home and removed all evidence of their illegal activities from his house, including £4 or £5 of counterfeit coins and three moulds. He didn't destroy the counterfeits but passed them in Bolton. Holden decided to make more coins and bought 'a dozen of Dixon's spoons', and melted them in a pot. The results were poor and un-passable, and he was obliged to go back to work. Although a seemingly simple process, casting counterfeit coins from plaster of Paris moulds required care and skill if they were to avoid detection.

Holden gave defence evidence at the trials of the shoemaker and labourer which helped in securing their acquittal. Once released, the trio reverted to their previous activities. Holden was then seen, while drunk, in a place where he had hidden counterfeit coins. He was spotted by someone who informed the police, and he was arrested. His explanation was that he had accidentally discovered the coins, taken one to be tested by a watchmaker, and had then returned to retrieve the others in order to have them similarly tested. He was acquitted. This was his trial in March 1846 listed by the Reverend Clay above about which no further information has been found.

While in Kirkdale gaol, Liverpool, awaiting trial, Holden met a man who provided him with the name of a supplier of base coin in Manchester. Following his release, Holden bought £5 worth of counterfeit coins from this man. When he returned for more, Holden found that the supplier had left for America and he again tried making his own but without success. He re-joined NS who agreed to make him £10 worth of coins for ten shillings, providing Holden obtained the metal. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that it was widely known that the purchase of significant numbers of Britannia metal spoons was a potential sign that they were being melted down and used to make counterfeit coins. Holden duly bought 'a dozen of Dixon's best Britannia metal spoons'. He met NS on the following Sunday to undertake the work. Sunday was a day when the police 'were always engaged on other business'. Holden told Clay how he made the coins in considerable detail but, unfortunately, the information, for understandable reasons, was not included in the newspaper articles.

Within a few weeks all three were in prison, beginning with Holden, who was arrested in a drunken state in Bolton in possession of about 30 base sixpences, shillings and half-crowns. He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment in August 1846. A man referred to as W, presumably the labourer, was convicted of making counterfeit coins whilst NS was, once again, acquitted. Neither NS or W have been identified with any certainty. Holden states that NS had previously been sentenced to transportation for seven years, a term that he served.

Holden recorded seeing NS making £30 or £40s' worth of coins at a time. NS reduced the risk of arrest by passing very little of the money himself. Instead, he sold the coins to utterers in Bolton. Holden eventually succeeded in making base coins but preferred to buy them from others. The act of casting counterfeits was

fraught for him. He described himself as trembling while in the act and if there was any sound at the door, he would break the moulds, thereby minimising the evidence against him.

On his release from prison, Holden found that his wife and younger children were in the workhouse. As a result, he had no home to go to and his relations had turned against him. In response he went to Bolton and joined NS where there was plenty to drink and easily available counterfeit coins. He made 30 shillings in good money, accompanying two men to Blackburn to pass base coin. Holden's role was simply to carry the coins and to give them to the utterers when required.

Shortly afterwards, Ellen was released from the workhouse and Holden found work. However, a few days later the police went to the factory where he was working and told the master that Holden was a coiner. As a result, he lost his job. At this point Holden felt that his reputation was such that he would never get another job and he decided to leave the country. To do this he needed money and neither he nor those of his children old enough to work had jobs and as a result the ambition came to nothing. In the meantime, John and Ellen continued to pass base coins. As a consequence, Ellen was arrested and sentenced to three months in prison. The trial was held on 1 December 1847. Ellen's arrest and conviction left Holden with eight children to look after. The situation was serious and Holden went before the relieving officer and the Board of Guardians but the workhouse was full. He was given a paper token entitling him to soup and bread but this was not sufficient to live on, and days went by when the family didn't eat. He knew that the use of counterfeit coins was dangerous but, in the end, he went to Bolton to see his 'old mate' NS. The latter, however, had been sentenced to twelve months in the New Bailey Prison, Manchester, for buying stolen goods. NS's wife gave Holden 5 shillings, some food and metal that NS had been going to use for coining. While in Bolton, Holden went to see associates recorded as JO and K and from them acquired some base half-crowns and shillings. JO offered to accompany Holden back to Blackburn and to stay with him until Ellen's release. They took with them about £6 in base coin and the metal given by NS's wife. The coins were passed over the coming days in Burnley and various villages, including Parlock. Although they succeeded in disposing of all of the counterfeits it wasn't without challenges. Coins uttered by JO were refused several times and on one occasion the police were fetched. However, JO told a plausible story and no action was taken. Neither JO or K have been identified.

Holden described how he and JO operated. One carried the base coin, or 'swag', and a large bottle. When using the coins in public houses or beer shops to buy rum or gin, usually costing a penny halfpenny, the utterer paid, received change and took away the liquor in a small bottle. The drink was then poured into the large bottle after leaving the premises. If the counterfeit coin tendered was challenged, they were ready to replace it with a genuine coin. Small shopkeepers were 'plundered' in the same way with purchases of a half-pound of sugar or half an ounce of tobacco. The coins had to be prepared prior to uttering to remove the 'blue appearance and slippery feel' that would otherwise have made them unpassable. This was called 'putting on the fage'.

Holden's children were concerned for his wellbeing and tried to persuade him to cease involvement with counterfeit coin. His oldest daughter said that they could live on the money from the parish and the soup and bread. JO argued to the contrary. The decision was to continue but to move out of Blackburn to reduce the risks. Accordingly, they left the children in Blackburn and took a house in Church, near Accrington. Holden and JO gathered all that they required: a dozen Dixon's spoons, a crucible, coals and plaster of Paris. They made four moulds, three for half-crowns and one for shillings. The coins being larger, moulds for casting half-crowns were more difficult to make and use than those for shillings. While JO made the moulds, Holden went to get food and four shillings worth of drink. The following day they got the fire going, and in a period of about two hours melted all of the metal that Holden had brought from Bolton which made nearly £10 of base coins. After a break for food and drink they cast more coins using the spoons which gave them almost £9 more. Having successfully passed five half-crowns, they returned to Blackburn and informed Holden's children that

they would be away for a time. The plan was to travel through Ramsbottom, Bury, Heywood and Rochdale, where they took lodgings, passing counterfeit coins along the way. By the end of the day, they had made about £7 in good money, had a 'basket-full of all kinds of food and other articles' and the large bottle was almost full of a mixture of spirits. Whilst they spent base coin in shops, the favoured approach was to pass the coins in public houses and beer houses. After visiting the village of Smallbridge their stock of base coins was low and they decided to return to Blackburn using the last of the coins along the way. They had made just over £15 in good money.

After a week or so, Holden and JO made more coins. The metal provided by NS's wife had proved to be good so they went back to Bolton for more. There was 'about half-a hundred weight' of it and they sent it back to Blackburn on a cart. Clay estimates that this would have made about £210 'worth' of half-crowns. They made and uttered coins over the following week or two. At this point the police became interested in Holden, primarily because of the improved appearance of his children due to the fact that Holden had been buying them clothes. As a consequence, he and JO moved to a house belonging to one of Holden's relatives in Over Darwen to make the next batch, £27 of half-crowns. These coins were spent firstly in Mellor, Ribchester, Clitheroe and Whalley, in Lancashire, and then, after a short visit home, in Keighley, Bradford, Halifax and Skipton, in Yorkshire. These locations represent a wide area across Lancashire and Yorkshire. Holden's forays into Yorkshire seem to have been successful in the sense that he was not arrested. Holden and JO shared just over £14 in good money and Holden had another basketful of 'all kinds of articles' and a bottle full of various spirits. One of Holden's daughters told him that once Ellen was released, they must leave Blackburn as they couldn't carry on undetected. However, Holden's confidence was such that he felt he could continue, at least for a time. He and JO made more moulds from which they cast about £15's worth of coins overnight while the children were in bed. The following morning, he very narrowly avoided arrest. The police arrived at 10.00am and asked the children where their father was. They replied that he was asleep in bed. Holden and JO were in the process of 'faging' the coins (making them ready for uttering) and heard the police speaking to the children. Holden records that he was 'much frightened and all of a perspiration, and I wanted to throw it [the counterfeits] through the window into the water, as there was a brook that ran under the window at the back'. JO would not allow this and was able to deflect the police. Having hidden the coins away from their premises, the pair passed them in the following days. Locations included Preston, Chorley and Leyland. The coins were all successfully spent this time, largely in grocers' shops, and they returned home with a large quantity of food for the family.

Prior to Ellen's release Holden spent some of his ill-gotten gains on a 'new suit' for her. The first place the couple went to was a public house after which they bought clothing and other items for the oldest children. The family attracted considerable interest from neighbours at the time of Ellen's return home. The morning after Ellen's return, she and Holden were getting their breakfast, 'with the rum bottle on the table', when two policemen arrived to search the property. Once again, they failed to find anything. Holden and Ellen realised that they couldn't stay in Blackburn as the family couldn't do anything without being watched by neighbours or the police. Accordingly, the family and JO decided to move once again, this time to Stalybridge where they took a house. Three of the children were able to gain employment, but not Holden. As a result, he and JO began making counterfeit coins again. They had brought metal and plaster of Paris with them and JO went to Manchester to get crucibles. Holden did get temporary employment as an over-seer at thirty shillings a week at a factory at Millbrook, Lancashire, a position he felt that he could have retained. However, the downward spiral began once again. He and JO were making and uttering base coin on a scale as great as ever before. The children began to feel neglected and started to fail to turn up for work and Ellen began drinking heavily again, sometimes days at a time. She wasn't looking after the children and there was frequently no food for them when they returned from their factory shifts. The oldest daughter had to stay at home to look after the house and her mother. In a note, Clay states that the daughter's life could have been very different but at the time of writing she was living with a man who she supported by working in a factory and by prostitution. Holden and

JO continued to regularly make and pass counterfeit coins to the value of £10 to £15 over the following four to five months. The police became increasingly suspicious and began searching their house once or twice a week. Holden and JO realised that they were in danger and they and Holden's family moved back to Bolton and then to Oldham. JO receives no further mentions. Holden found work for three of his children and a position to 'gate' one hundred looms at a factory in Royton, to the north of Oldham, for himself. On returning home after being offered the job at Royton, Holden found that two of his children had abandoned their jobs. He and Ellen went into Oldham to try to find them work and the usual sequence of events followed. The pair went to a public house 'to rest' and drank so much that they had to stay overnight. While they were drinking Ellen revealed that she had brought about £3 worth of base coins with her. As a consequence, they went to other public houses buying a 'noggin of liquor' paying with a counterfeit half-crown each time and into shops to buy sugar and tobacco. They used all of the coins that Ellen had. Upon returning home, they discovered that their son Joseph had lost his job because his two siblings had failed to go to work. Clay notes that in spite of his upbringing, Joseph went on to live an honest life. At this point nobody in the Holden family had employment (Holden hadn't yet taken up his position) and as a consequence they continued to use base coin until Holden was arrested again, along with two of his children, Jane and John junior. While being held in Kirkdale gaol prior to his trial, Holden received the news that his wife had given birth to a son, three of his children were suffering from smallpox and his youngest child had died. He stated that the 'child was more to me than all the money that Staley Bridge was possessed of'.

At the assizes held in August 1848, Holden received 18 months in gaol and Jane and John junior were each sentenced to 9 months. No details of the circumstances of their arrests are given, but newspaper reports show that the offences took place in Ashton-under Lyne (see below). By the time Holden was released Ellen and the younger children were once again in the workhouse. Jane was back in the Preston House of Correction for 12 months following another conviction involving counterfeit coins. She had been arrested in Clitheroe along with Holden's son John. The other children, who were making their way in a legitimate manner, had ceased to have anything to do with their mother as a result of her drinking. Ellen and the younger children were in the workhouse.

After his release, presumably in early 1850, Holden, now aged 48 years, went to Preston where he got a job in the weaving industry and over time his children were able to leave the workhouse and join him. After living an honest life for a time Holden became dissatisfied with living in lodgings, gave in his notice and returned to Stalybridge. He worked and followed an honest life. He arranged for a job for his daughter, Jane, in readiness for her release. All went well for a few weeks but then Jane met a young man involved with base money and went with him to Blackburn where he made coins which they both passed. Holden and Ellen went to Blackburn when they discovered this. The four, together with James, met up and began drinking. The police, suspecting Jane of passing base coins and seeing Holden there once again, searched them and found a purse containing 10 base shillings on the floor. At their trials in February 1851 Holden, Ellen and their son James each received 12 months imprisonment. Clay estimates that Holden and his associates had passed more than £600 worth of base coin over the years.

The third of Clay's four reports ends with Holden regretting the fact that his life had been ruined by drink and involvement with counterfeit coin. Prior to that he had been happy, so it was a warning to all. By 1852 he and Ellen had had 13 children, with nine still living. He felt that if he had followed a different life at least one or two of the dead children would have still been alive. He went on to say 'It is my sincere wish, as a penitent, that those who read this Narrative may profit by it' and compared his happy early married life with what followed. In spite of his apparent remorse, it wasn't long after his release from Preston gaol that he was once again involved with counterfeit coin, as were James and John junior (see below).

The final part of the Reverend Clay's account of the Holden family, published in the *Blackburn Standard* on 2 June 1852, relates to James Holden, son of John and Ellen. It differs from that of his father in being much shorter and less personal. Family members and his wife, Mary, receive no mention. It is very much about the practicalities of the use of counterfeit coin. James' statement begins with a detailed description of making counterfeit coin but, again, Clay omits this. James was impressed by the abilities of NS, who he describes as 'the best maker of base coin in Lancashire'. He records that in certain places he had been to there could be nine or ten people active in passing coins. They stayed at beer shops. Owners were often complicit in that they would tell those arriving where utterers had previously been active. The informant would receive a payment as a consequence. Women were more successful as utterers. A particular target was factory gates where people leaving work needed change for high value coins received in their wages. James cited an example of women wanting change for a gold sovereign and accepting, unwittingly, 20 shillings in counterfeit coins. He also said that counterfeit coins were sold at Bolton market by stallholders claiming to be selling fruit. Likewise, some beer house keepers also sold coins. He records that one beer house keeper, who had been operating for 12 years, sold a £1's worth of coins for seven shillings. Others were mentioned including S in Burnley, a lodging house keeper, selling five shillings worth of coins for £1, and W in Blackburn who kept a beer shop and brothel. The latter bought his coins from someone referred to as JD in Birmingham.

James also comments on casting. Crown pieces could not be cast in a mould because of the lettering around the edge which was there simply to defeat counterfeiters. Crowns had to be struck using a press. He records that most coins of this denomination were made in Birmingham by PM, although JB in Rochdale was also producing them. Neither has been identified.

According to James records fairs were places where base coins were commonly passed. Men carried the 'swag' (base coins) while the women uttered them. When a woman received change for a coin passed, her male accomplice took the good money and gave her another counterfeit. As a footnote, Clay states that the appearance of these female 'smashers' should be a warning as to their occupation as 'two-thirds of them are deeply marked with bruises and scars, and intemperance'. The method used in shops was for women to carry a basket on their arm and, before paying, to drop a shilling or half-crown so that it 'rang', meaning that it had landed on a hard surface and was clearly silver and genuine. They would then switch this coin and pay for the purchase with a base coin which if tested would not 'ring'. Before using a coin in a beer house, they watched to see whether the landlord or barmaid examined coins that were tendered. If not, it was deemed safe to pass counterfeits. James says that there were some involved in the trade who had never worked a legitimate day in their lives.

Like his father, James expressed remorse: 'I thank God that I got twelve months in this place; it is the best year that I have spent in all my life, for I can go to my bed at night without dreaming of policemen. And when my time is out, I hope and trust in God I may be able to get work, and get my bread by the sweat of my brow'. It is impossible to know whether James or his father meant what they said about following a better life or whether it was to create a good impression on the Reverend Clay. Neither adhered to their commitment.

Local newspaper reports enhance most of prosecutions involving the Holden family cited in Clay's 1852 report and add others that were to follow.

John Holden senior March 1846:

Nothing beyond the details recorded by the Reverend Clay cited above was found.

John Holden senior August 1846:

The *Bolton Chronicle* for 22 August 1846 states that John Holden was prosecuted at the South Lancashire Assizes for possession of 26 counterfeit shillings with intent to utter at Bolton. He was arrested by a police

officer in Bradshawgate, Bolton, following information received. During a struggle, Holden dropped a bag containing the coins. This case was similarly reported in the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* for 22 August 1846 except that the number of coins is given as seventeen.

Ellen Holden December 1847:

The *Blackburn Standard* for 8 December 1847 reports that Ellen Holden, aged 46, was convicted at the Preston Intermediate Sessions of uttering two counterfeit shillings at Lower Darwen, which lies between Blackburn and Darwen, on 30 November and was sentenced to three months with hard labour in the House of Correction. Ellen worked with an accomplice called Mary Preston (46) who received six months imprisonment suggesting that she was the instigator or already had a significant criminal record.

James Holden April 1848:

No details relating to this conviction were found. The case, described by Clay as a felony, is unlikely to have been connected with counterfeit coin.

John senior, Jane and John junior August 1848:

The *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* for 31 May 1848 records that on 29 May 1848 John Holden senior, John Holden junior and Ann (in fact Jane) Holden were brought before the Stalybridge Petty Sessions charged with having passed counterfeit coins to Mrs Ann Ellis, Mrs Hilton and Mr James Chadwick, all shopkeepers. Following information received, the Holdens were arrested at the railway station while about to travel to Ashton-under-Lyne, presumably intent on leaving the scene of their crimes. All three were remanded.

The *Manchester Times* for 30 May 1848 and the *Liverpool Standard and General Advertiser* for 31 May 1848 provide further information. It was believed that Holden senior had used the children to pass base coin by sending them into shops to buy small quantities of tobacco and 'other trifling articles' for which they paid with counterfeit coins and 'in many cases they too well succeeded.' According to letters found during a search of Holden senior's house he had a son who had been transported in September 1847 [this case has not been traced] and another son (James) in Preston gaol. Holden senior is described as being well-known to the Ashton-under-Lyne police. When arrested he had in his possession 12 base sixpenny pieces dated 1846 and one dated 1845. He had passed others bearing the date 1843. He also had some counterfeit half-crowns dated 1844 which were 'very badly executed'. In order to try to make them more convincing 'each piece was daubed with a light brown mixture resembling snuff.' There is also a reference in the *Manchester Times* that following a previous arrest of Holden, remains of moulds had been found.

The *Liverpool Standard and General Advertiser* 22 August 1848 in reporting their trial states that John Holden senior was found guilty of having base coins in his possession, including a large number of sixpences. He received 18 months with hard labour. John Holden junior (9) and Jane Holden (14) pleaded guilty to passing base coins at Ashton-under-Lyne. The judge when passing sentence "feelingly addressed" the children saying that they were doubtless instructed to commit the offence by their father. They were each sentenced to 9 months in the House of Industry "where they would be looked after and he hoped, as they would not there be contaminated, they would be led, on their release, to pursue a better course of life". The cases were heard at the Southern Division, Liverpool. The judge's hopes were not to be.

Mary Holden March 1849 (this case is not listed by Clay):

The *Blackburn Standard* 21 March 1849 records that Mary Holden, wife of James Holden of Syke Street, Preston, was examined at the Police Court regarding three charges of uttering counterfeit silver coins - a sixpence to Mrs Betsey Clark, a 'smallware dealer' in Syke Street, in payment for a pair of twopenny 'sidecombes', a counterfeit shilling to Mrs Roberts of the Veteran Inn, Salford, for three halfpence worth of porter and a counterfeit shilling to Mrs Robert Holiday of the Spread Eagle Inn, Cable Street, in payment for a

pennyworth of porter. The evidence was accepted and she was remanded to await instructions from the Royal Mint. As nothing subsequently appears in local newspapers the case probably did not proceed.

James Holden August 1849:

Clay states that James Holden was convicted of an unspecified crime in August 1849 and was sentenced to one month in prison. The *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* for 9 June 1849 records that three men, one called Holden (Christian name not recorded), were convicted of having assaulted police constable Fisher while he was discharging his duty and with attempted rescue. Holden was fined £3 or faced one month in prison. The sentence correlates with Clay's list and it is likely that this is the conviction referred to but it cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty.

John Holden junior September 1849:

It is quite possible that a report published in the *Blackburn Standard* for 3 October 1849 relates to this case. John junior stole a pair of boots and was taken into custody. Unfortunately, the location of the offence is not given. The account states that the defendant's brother had been imprisoned for passing counterfeit coins and for an un-specified felony, which match with James' record, and that his two sisters lived in the same house as their brother together with a woman of 'bad character' and who were themselves prostitutes. John Holden's mother had recently taken him out of the workhouse in order to send him begging on the streets. The magistrate, W. Eccles, ordered that John junior should go to the workhouse and be 'kept out of the way of his family'. He also said that a warrant should be issued for the arrest of his mother for sending John out begging. No mention is made of the length of time John Holden was to spend in the workhouse. The other key piece of information missing is that no reference is made to the fact that John Holden junior had been sentenced to nine months for uttering in 1848.

W. Eccles was MP for Blackburn and a magistrate in the town. This suggests that the offence committed by John Holden took place there.

Jane Holden November 1849:

The *Preston Chronicle* for 24 November 1849 provides details of the activities of Jane and Mary Holden presented at their remand hearing. They had been in custody for over a week. Miss Ann Bulcock, a straw bonnet maker who lived in Wellgate, Clitheroe, said that Jane went in to her shop on 5 November and bought a 'bonnet foundation' for twopence halfpenny. She paid with a half-crown and was given change. Half an hour later it was noticed that the coin was base. Betty Harrison kept a shop in West Bradford, presumably the village north of Clitheroe. She stated that Jane went into her shop on 7 November and bought half an ounce of tobacco costing three halfpence. She paid with a half-crown and received change. Shortly afterwards the coin was seen to be counterfeit. John Robinson kept a public house at Pimlico, a village north of Clitheroe. On the afternoon of 7 November Jane went in and ordered three halfpence worth of raspberry brandy, once again paying with a half-crown. Robinson noticed that her purse seemed to be full of money and that the change she received was 'put down her breast' rather than into the purse. Again, the half-crown was subsequently recognised as counterfeit. Inspector Clegg took the coins to the hearing. He considered them to be good imitations. Jane was remanded in Preston House of Correction for a week. Details of the case were sent to the Mint Solicitor who had to approve every case involving counterfeit coins before they could go to trial. The *Blackburn Standard* for 28 November 1849 records that Mary Holden was involved in some way but was discharged due to insufficient evidence against her. The witnesses all said that Jane had passed them the base half-crowns. The *Preston Chronicle* for 1 December 1849 states that Jane Holden (16) pleaded not guilty to uttering but was convicted and received twelve months with hard labour in the House of Correction.

James and Mary Holden January 1850:

James Holden is listed by Clay as having been convicted and sentenced to three months imprisonment on 4 January 1850. The case sheds light upon another aspect of the lives of the Holden family. A report in the *Blackburn Standard* for 9 January 1850 under the headline 'Two Professional Niggers In Trouble' relates to James Holden and his wife Mary who in hand bills were stated to be 'celebrated and admired Nigger singers from the Liverpool and Manchester courts'. They were clearly street singers who followed a common practice at the time of blacking their faces as part of the act. They were convicted of assaulting John Pendleton, a fellow singer, described as a 'professional Nigger singer much and deservedly applauded every where he had made his appearance'. The assaults occurred on two consecutive days. In the first one, the Holdens entered Pendleton's apartment at night while he was asleep and attacked him, Mary hitting him on the head with a candlestick. James invited Pendleton to meet the following night to settle their differences and once again he was attacked by the Holdens. It emerged during the trial that James Holden believed that Pendleton had organised people to 'hiss' him off the stage at Accrington which Pendleton denied as being 'unprofessional'. Holden was found guilty of assault and ordered to find sureties to keep the peace or face three months in prison. In response James said that he had decided to murder Pendleton when they next met and Mary, unnoticed, took off her shoes and threw one of them 'with great force' at Pendleton's head. She then screamed 'give me three months too'. Mary 'gave vent to abominable language' and threw her other shoe at Pendleton's head. The magistrate recollected having seen Mary previously when charged with having robbed a man in Haslington about eighteen months before. No record of the latter has been found. The piece finishes with the sentence 'Seldom has such a scene as this was altogether been witnessed in a country police court.' It is uncertain as to whether Mary got her wish.

John senior, Ellen and James February 1851:

The *Blackburn Standard* for 22 January 1851 reports that on Saturday 18 January 1851 a 'notorious gang of passers of base coin' was again brought before the magistrates. They were John senior, Ellen and James Holden and George Thompson. John and Ellen were charged with possession and James and Thompson with uttering. The case against John and Ellen was based on the fact that police constables Brackin and Parkin, acting on information received, went to their lodging house in Cockroft, Blackburn. Upon entering Brackin saw Ellen try to pass a purse to a little girl who was present. Brackin, after a struggle, took the purse from Ellen. John attempted to seize back the purse but was brought down by the police officers and the purse was recovered. John and Ellen were taken into custody. The purse contents proved to be ten counterfeit shillings.

James Holden had gone into a number of shops in Eanham, Blackburn, on 7 January 1851 and each time asked for half an ounce of tobacco. The number of times that he did this is not stated but, with one exception when change was given, the coins were immediately recognised as counterfeit, refused and returned to him. Each time this happened he threw the tobacco back and implied that he would get another coin and return to buy the tobacco. This was a common ploy used by utterers to get them out of the situation when the coin they used was recognised as counterfeit. Inevitably they did not return. James Holden showed the arresting officer that he knew the legal process relating to counterfeit coins. He said that the Mint determined whether a prosecution should proceed and would not approve one involving a single instance of passing a base coin meaning that there would be no case against him. This was correct but unfortunately for him the other recipients of counterfeit coins came forward to make statements and after the evidence was submitted the Mint Solicitor clearly decided that the prosecution of all three Holdens should proceed. The evidence against Thompson was insufficient and he was discharged.

The *Lancaster Gazette* for 22 February 1851 published a report on the Holdens' trial and provides additional information. One person to give evidence against James Holden was Blackburn grocer John Rawcliffe, the one person who had accepted the shilling he was tendered. The deception was short lived. As soon as Holden had 'nipped out' Rawcliffe realised that the coin was base and followed the utterer. He caught up with Holden and

told him that the shilling was bad. James took Rawcliffe by the collar and demanded the shilling back and it was returned.

Silversmith George Cooper Hatton, who had 'some experience of examining base coin', declared the coins recovered from Ellen to be made from Britannia metal and cast in a mould. He said that should there be an imperfection it would appear on all of the coins cast in the same mould. In this case there was a defect on the back of the monarch's neck on the obverse.

In passing sentence, the judge referred to the seriousness of the crime and the fact that the poor were commonly the ones that suffered from such crimes. All three received 12 months with hard labour.

The use and, to a certain extent, production of counterfeit coins was very much a Holden family business which hasn't been paralleled elsewhere. The year in which John senior became involved is uncertain but, in view of his prosecution record and Clay's report, it is unlikely to have been before early 1845 when he was about 45 years of age. Clearly, we only know of instances when they were caught. The accounts indicate that there were many occasions when Holden and his family successfully passed base coins, indeed Clay refers to John senior having had many narrow escapes. Although John senior admitted to Clay that he made moulds to cast counterfeit coins, he was never charged with this offence. The indications are that he was not very good at the process. The act of counterfeiting was viewed as a much more serious matter than uttering and had been a capital offence until 1832.

The shoemaker (NS) and labourer, referred to above, told Holden senior that it was ill-advised to pass counterfeit coins in your home-town, after he had uttered a number of coins in Bolton. Doing so, especially repeatedly, significantly raised the risk of detection and arrest. The Holden family took this advice seriously. Clay's account and the newspaper reports relating to family arrests and prosecutions show that they travelled significant distances in Lancashire and, occasionally, into Yorkshire. Clay refers to activity in Blackburn, Bolton, Bradford (Yorks), Bury, Clitheroe, Halifax (Yorks), Heywood, Keighley (Yorks), Mellor, Parlock, Ramsbottom, Smallbridge, Haslingden, Chorley, Over Darwen, Accrington, Leyland, Ribchester, Rochdale, Skipton (Yorks), Stalybridge, Tyldesley Banks and Whalley. Newspaper reports add Ashton-under-Lyne, Eanham, Lower Darwen, Pimlico, Salford and West Bradford in Lancashire and Knutsford, or somewhere in the vicinity, in Cheshire.

The illegal activities of the Holden family didn't end with John senior's imprisonment in 1851 and the Reverend Clay's report. As already stated, the surname Holden was common in the region making it difficult to correlate some arrests and prosecutions with members of the family with absolute certainty. Some cases involving assault, theft, possession of stolen goods, drunkenness and illicit stills may well be connected with them but can't be confirmed. A few, however, do relate to the family and show that John senior, John junior and James continued their criminal activities after 1852, including the use of counterfeit coins. The *Blackburn Chronicle* for 8 September 1855 carries the following report relating to John senior:

'COMMITTAL OF A "SMASHER" – John Holden a notorious 'smasher' [ie utterer] was this morning brought up under remand on a charge of uttering counterfeit coin. He has several times been convicted of coining and uttering and has suffered imprisonment in Kirkdale and other gaols. Two of his sons, then under sentence of transportation, formed a prominent feature in the report of the chaplain of the Preston House of Correction about two years ago, and it was there stated that these lads had been encouraged in their career of vice by their father, who was not only privy to their acts but actually planned many of the robberies which they committed. In this instance, Holden was charged with uttering three base sixpences. One of these was at the Spread Eagle public-house in Little Bolton, another to a coal dealer residing near the same place, and a third to a woman named Ann Hyde. He was committed for trial'.

A report in the *Bolton Chronicle* published on 13 October 1855 states that Holden was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for uttering counterfeit coins on a number of occasions. He is described as a weaver. Whilst wrongly giving Holden's age as 40 (he was in fact about 55 years of age) the piece includes a description of him as the oldest manufacturer of base coin in the country and as having been convicted more often than any other known individual. It is not possible to be absolutely sure that this is John Holden senior but the reference to the number of prosecutions suggests that, in spite of the age discrepancy, that it is.

One of the sons facing transportation was John junior. The *Blackburn Standard* for 11 August 1852 records that he was convicted of stealing a watch belonging to Moses Haworth at Altham on 20 July of that year. He was further charged with having stolen a shawl belonging to David Haworth on 16 July, a coat belonging to Richard Haworth at Sabden on 19 July and a shawl and a pair of boots belonging to Joseph Hall at Blackburn on 22 July. Holden was sentenced to seven years transportation. The sentence reflected his criminal history.

John Holden junior faced further charges in 1857 which show that he was not transported. Instead, he was granted a ticket-of-leave. Eastern Australia no longer wanted to receive criminals sentenced to transportation and as a consequence, those sentenced to be transported served time in gaol in this country and, if they behaved well for three years, they could receive a ticket-of-leave which effectively meant that they were released. The following account shows that Holden was released on a ticket-of-leave on the 4 September 1857, some five years into his sentence. He wasted little time in returning to criminal activity. The *Preston Chronicle and Lancashire Advertiser* for 3 October 1857 reports:

'TWO SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS.- George Dickinson and John Holden, who had been remanded for a week, were charged with having certain articles in their possession for which they could not account satisfactorily. Mr. Superintendent Laverty exhibited the following blacklist against Holden:- Liverpool Assizes, August 1848, for uttering base coin, nine months imprisonment; Knutsford sessions, August, 1850, base coin, twelve months [this is not listed by Clay and no details have been traced]; Preston sessions November 1851, felony, six calendar months; Preston sessions, August 1852, felony, seven years' transportation; ticket leave, 4th September, 1857'.

John Holden junior once again faced prosecution in 1861 at the Lancashire Assizes. The *Lancaster Gazette* for 3 August 1861 reports that Holden, a weaver aged 23, together with John Kelly, aged 14, were charged with uttering counterfeit half-crowns at Preston on 15 and 16 March that year. Holden was sentenced to 7 years in gaol and Kelly received 12 months with hard labour.

Holden senior continued his involvement with counterfeit coins. The *Preston Chronicle* for 20 August 1862 contains the following:

'A SMASHER – John Holden, an old offender, was charged, before Mr. Parkinson, yesterday, with passing base coin to Mrs. Hindle, of the Wellington Inn, King Street [Blackburn], and two other persons. The prisoner was remanded until the authorities at the Mint could be communicated with.'

The *Preston Chronicle* for 23 August 1862 adds to this by recording that Robert Murray, formerly a police officer at Bolton, stated that Holden had previously been convicted of uttering at the Lancashire Assizes in 1851 and at the Bolton Sessions in 1855. This clearly establishes that the person charged was John Holden senior. He was, however, either acquitted or given a very short sentence as the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* for 6 December 1862 reports that he was charged at the South Lancashire Assizes on 5 December 1862 with passing a base florin at Blackburn. He was sentenced to 6 years penal servitude. The severity was due to the number of his previous convictions. This is the latest prosecution that can be associated with the family without question.

The Holden family, whilst perhaps unusual for the scale and duration of their involvement with counterfeit coins, provide a remarkable insight into the circumstances, practicalities and techniques involved in this field of criminal activity.

