

Willam Hebbs of Woburn, Bedfordshire

Gary Oddie

Introduction

In terms of seventeenth century tokens, Bedfordshire is a relatively small county with Williamson numbers reaching just 107. The most recent publication⁽¹⁾ and a supplement⁽²⁾ added a few new die varieties and lead tokens that can be linked to the brass and copper issuers. The most recent addition to the list of issuers was John Spencer of Bedford in 2002⁽³⁾ now numbered 19A.

In July 2020 the appearance on eBay of the token shown below (200%) resulted in some excitement amongst collectors of Bedfordshire 17th century tokens.

Obv. • **WILLAM • HEBBS** • i.m. Mullet
Around **W•H**
Rev. **IN • WOORNE** • 1651 i.m. Mullet
Around **W•H**
Details. Brass, 16mm
Notes. A find from Milton Bryan c.2010.
New W/D number: Bedfordshire 102A.



The token had been found by Matthew Savage and his son in about 2010 whilst carrying out some building work on a house in Milton Bryan. Milton Bryan is 2½ miles south east of Woburn (Beds). The house, at 23 Church End, just a few yards away from Milton Bryan church, had been owned by Fiona Chapman MBE (d. 6 June 2020), former chair of Central Bedfordshire Council, and High Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant of Bedfordshire.

The steps in the garden were made from old gravestones. Whilst shovelling some in-situ gravel, to prepare for laying a patio, the token fell out of the gravel and was spotted. Permission to keep the token was given.

The importance of the token was not immediately recognised, and it was forgotten about for a decade.

Figure 1 shows the patio that was laid over the find spot.

There are two possible candidates for William Hebbs in Woburn at this time. The family tree of the first is easy to find as shown below.



Fig. 1.Patío laid over find spot.

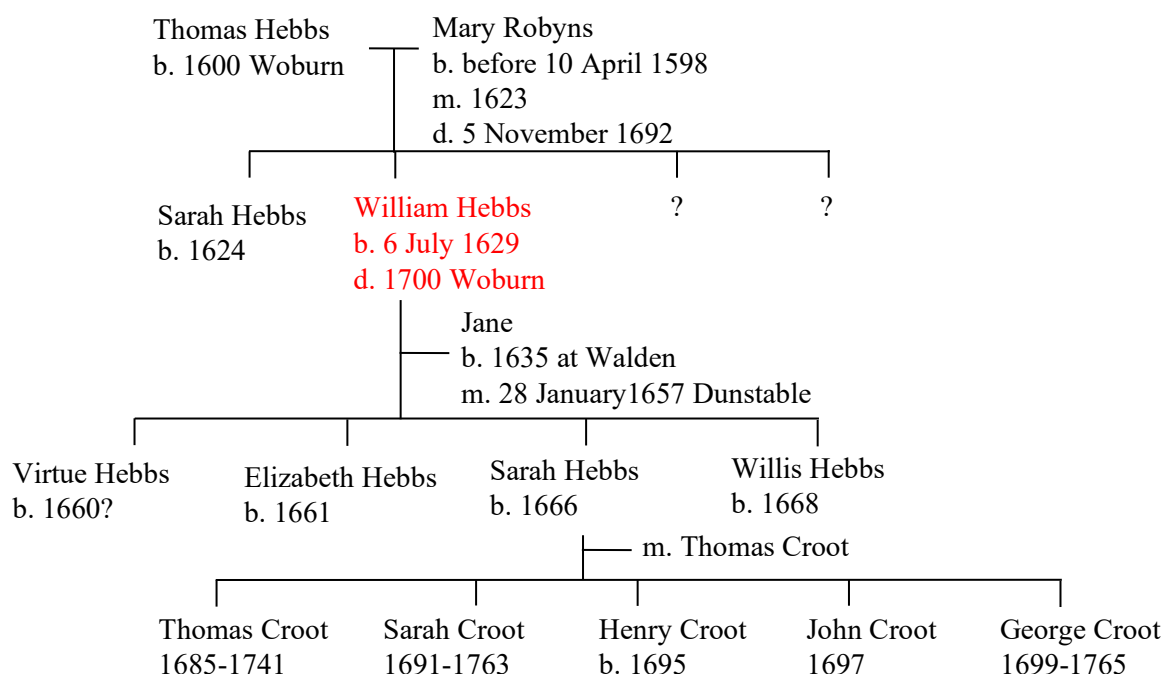


Fig. 2. William Hebbs' family tree, constructed from various genealogical websites.

At the time of finding, a web search produced a record of the arrest of William Hebbs for affray. This may be the same as the indictment of 19 April 1658 of William Hebbs, of Woburn, grocer, for a battery upon Henry Baduley. Hebbs was found guilty and fined 2s 6d⁽⁴⁾.

The second candidate is less likely but more intriguing. At the Bedford High Sheriffs' summer Assizes in 1669, Elianor Inch was tried for bewitching a William Hebbes of Woburn to death⁽⁵⁾. Possibly born in 1631, nothing more has been traced.

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) J. Gaunt, edited and expanded by G. Oddie. *Bedfordshire Seventeenth Century Tokens*. Galata, 2011.
- (2) G. Oddie. *Bedfordshire Seventeenth Century Tokens – Supplement*. TCSB v12n3 June 2017, pp118-9.
- (3) D.J. Gaunt. *An unpublished 17th Century Farthing of Bedford*. TCSB v7n5, December 2002, p171.
- (4) Bedfordshire County Records 1651-1660. v2 p46.
https://archive.org/stream/cu31924091761449/cu31924091761449_djvu.txt.
- (5) Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service. HSA1669/S/56.

Many thanks to Matthew Savage for the background story and for the tour of Milton Bryan, showing me the house and find spot, and also to the present owner of the house for allowing me to photograph the find spot.

Thanks also to Peter Preston-Morley for confirming much of the Hebbs family tree from a different source.

Thanks also to John Clarke of the Woburn Heritage Centre who confirmed that the churchyard was surveyed in 1913 and 2010 with no gravestone for William Hebbs being found, though many are now illegible. Similarly the centre has no records of his Will. John Green also made important corrections to the posts held by Fiona Chapman.

