

Fishy Tales from King's Lynn

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Recently two notes have appeared on the E-Sylum about coins that have been found in the stomachs of fish. The first referred to an English seventeenth century token found in the stomach of a five-foot shark caught off Galveston, Texas in 1931.⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ The token was a farthing issued by Richard Langley of Ramsgate, dated 1657.

The second relates that on June 15, 1842, a shark caught off the Isle of May (in the Firth of Forth) was bought by fishmongers G. Dickson & Co at Edinburgh market. Inside was found a tin box containing various British and foreign coins and tokens with dates ranging from 1671-1811. The tin box must have been water-tight and stomach proof as it also contained an old map of Scotland by Jeffrey and some newspaper cuttings!^(4,5)

To these can be added the following piece.

Obv. **FOUND•IN•THE•BELLY•OF•A•COD-
FISH •1773•** around **18 MARCH BY
T•HENDRY LYNN** neatly engraved.

Rev. Peined flat with countermarks **FISH** and **FI** (distorted by the peining), with faint traces of **AG** and **R•F** of the host coin legend.

Details. Ag, 26.8 mm, 5.218 g, no trace of edge graining showing. 150%.

Notes. Using the remnants of the reverse legend to orientate the piece it is possible to just see the faintest outline of a bust in the toning on this William III shilling. [GO, Ex F. Pridmore 1970s, and D. Young 2006].



Known locally as Lynn, King's Lynn is a port and market town in the west of Norfolk. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book as having salt evaporation ponds and was known as Bishop's Lynn until the dissolution of the monasteries when it was given to Henry VIII by the Bishop of Norwich in 1536.

As a large market town Lynn Regis had many issuers of seventeenth century tokens W/D 63-103, not counting the minor die varieties.⁽⁶⁾ The town corporation made a very large issue of tokens (W/D 63-65). Williamson, or more likely the Norfolk editor, E. Skinner, repeats Boyne's erroneous description of the town arms as 'Three conger eels' heads erect, in the mouth of each a cross crosslet fitchée'.⁽⁷⁾

Obv. The Arms of King's Lynn.

Rev. **KINGS LYNN FARTHING 1669** rosettes and sexfoils in field.

Details. Cu, 20.0 mm, 1.69g. 150%.

Notes. Typical of town issues, larger and heavier than the merchants' issues. [British Museum T.4411].



The arms were never granted but were recorded at the Visitation of 1563. The town arms are described correctly in the Norweb catalogue as 'Azure, three dragon's heads erased and erect or in the mouth of each a cross crosslet fitchée also erect of the last'.⁽⁸⁾

The dragon's heads refer to the legend of St. Margaret of Antioch who has been portrayed on the Seals of Lynn since the 13th Century, and to whom the Parish Church is dedicated.⁽⁹⁾ As with many saints, persecution and miracles are needed for beatification and sainthood. The Christian daughter of a pagan priest she was imprisoned for her faith. She was devoured by Satan in the form of a dragon and used her cross to break out of the dragon and emerge unhurt. Hence the arms of a dragon's head pierced by a cross.

Another interesting piece showing the arms of King's Lynn is the Charity Coals piece, probably a ticket issued by the local Poor Law.⁽¹⁰⁾

Obv. **Charity Coals** neatly engraved

Rev. **6** above a shield with the arms of King's Lynn, all neatly engraved.

Details. ? Cu or Ae, 33×24 mm, 7.4 g. 150%.
[D. Powell].

Notes. The King's Lynn Poor Law Union was formed in 1835 and the letter font and style of the engraving is typically mid-19th century.



King's Lynn was a major port in the seventeenth century and was also a navigable gateway to inland Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire via the river Great Ouse and river Cam. Produce was exported and fish, coal (from Newcastle and the Northeast coast) and other goods were imported from as far away as the Baltic. A significant event driving trade through King's Lynn was the four-week Stourbridge fair held every year near Cambridge, one of the largest fairs in Europe.

On the Great Ouse, token issuers in Ely that display the fishmongers' arms include John Gayer (W/D 107), John Reade (W/D 116/7) and William Wagstafe, (W/D 122,4). Along with freshwater fish from the fens, they likely also sold preserved fish brought from the North Sea and along the Great Ouse from King's Lynn.

A few miles further upstream, on the Cam, in Cambridge, Joseph Linsey (W/D 58-9) also issued a token.

Obv. **JOSEPH LINSEY** around a double headed eagle.
i.m. Mullet.

Rev. **IN CAMBRIDGE 1663** around **HIS HALFE PENY.**
i.m. Mullet.

Details. Br, 19 mm. 150%.

Notes. The spread eagle refers to an old inn that was on the site on Bridge St. where the wharf, goods yards and shops were located. [GO].



In 1651, Joseph and John Linsey, both fishmongers, had brought a consignment of sea coals to Cambridge which had been unloaded into a "yard near the waterside there" which was probably behind the old Griffin tavern. A John Osborne was employed to sell and deliver the coal to the customers. After six months 100 chalder (at 40 bushels per chalder) had been sold "at a rate or price of 18s 4d the chalder or thereabouts". There was a disagreement between the three men and also the mayor and bailiffs which resulted in a bill being brought before the Court of Chancery. Joseph was awarded £100 in damages and £6 costs.⁽¹¹⁾

Returning to King's Lynn in the 18th century, can T. Hendry be found in the records? A search of the genealogical websites and newspaper archives reveals a few possible candidates with the name Thomas Hendry being baptised, married and buried at St. Margaret and St Nicholas' church in King's Lynn. One who died in May 1792 aged 72, has an entry in the Index of Wills, Consistory Court of Norwich, 1751-1818. And his son, also a Thomas was baptised on 2nd July 1750. A Thomas Hendry of King's Lynn was an executor on the will of woolcomber Thomas Goulty in 1750 and yet another was a brewer in King's Lynn who was declared bankrupt in 1774. The latter is likely the T. Hendry in the King's Lynn Poll book of 1768. Without more information, it will not be possible to narrow down the identity of T. Hendry.

A more practical and biological question arises as to how did the coins get into the stomach of the fish? Whilst cod are omnivores and bottom feeders, sharks are at the top of the food chain and most likely ingested metallic objects already inside their prey species, or the metal tin was floating when eaten. Contrary to suggestions in some popular films, sharks tend not to attack people, so some of the more imaginative reasons for the coin finds can be dismissed.

References and Acknowledgements

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