

Reconstructing a Hoard of Joseph Heath 17thC Tokens (Cambridge W/D 52)

Gary Oddie

Introduction

The majority of seventeenth century tokens are typically known by just a few specimens, these numbers being supplemented by metal detector finds of stray single specimens over the past few decades. Detecting on old market sites can also produce accumulations of seventeenth century tokens from diverse and mostly local issuers. On the other hand, there have been cases where a large group of tokens from a single issuer has survived intact. These are rarely documented beyond a passing note in a local publication – “a hoard of trader’s tokens was found”. A listing of such notices has already been published⁽¹⁾.

Two particular hoards have been analysed in detail. A hoard of well over 200 tokens of George Robinson of Witham (W/D Essex 351) was discovered in 1936⁽²⁾, but not brought to the attention of numismatists until 1965⁽³⁾. Evidence of the hoard has since been traced back to 1870 and the majority (~150) are now in Colchester Museum⁽⁴⁾. Most toned VF specimens seen over the past few decades probably came from the same hoard.

A hoard of 14 tokens issued by the Overseers of St Neots (W/D Hunts 52 and 53) were found in nearby Eynesbury, in 1983, both Huntingdonshire at the time, but now Cambridgeshire⁽⁵⁾. Again, all clean brassy and VF as they had lain undisturbed for 300 years on the top of a roof beam in the loft of a cottage. They are now in St Neots Museum.

There are likely to be two types of hoards of seventeenth century tokens. The first will be hoards belonging to the issuers, their working stock or brought back together sometime around 1672 when the tokens were made illegal, and the customers and public would return their pieces for conversion to regal coinage. The second type of hoard will be a group of tokens accumulated by a customer or other person and not returned during the recall. These will be smaller groups, sometimes with tokens from more than one issuer. The Robinson/Witham hoard is likely that of the issuer and the Overseers/St Neots hoard likely an accumulation of someone working in the workhouse or a local person.

To put the token recall in perspective contemporary records exist confirming that 150,000 of the Norwich Corporation farthing tokens (W/D Norfolk 225-228) were sold to metal merchant John Melchior for £48 10s to be scrapped.⁽⁶⁾ The mixed metal tokens (brass) were scrapped at 9d and the copper pieces at 11d per pound weight. The total face value was about £150. Even with this cull, the Norwich corporation tokens remain one of the commonest available today, and they circulated widely across England and Wales, sometimes for many decades after the recall. With 12 obverse and 11 reverse dies known⁽⁶⁾, that suggests an average of about 12,500 tokens per die pair as a minimum.

Two Cambridgeshire Hoards

There is a notice of a hoard of tokens of the Cambridge issuer John Finch (W/D Cambridgeshire 44)^(2,7,8). In 1688 a William Finch (haven’t been able to prove related) “came to Cambridge and purchased a business from Widow Godfrey. This was the foundation of the business latterly known as Messrs. Mackintosh who were ironmongers in Market Place, and where, “within living memory”, was melted down a large bag of John Finch tokens for their metal value.” This became Messrs. Hurrell and Beales, ironmongers at 14 Market Place, Cambridge, now Market Hill. The original building was demolished in the early 1970s.

When I first started collecting the tokens of Cambridgeshire about 25 years ago, I realised that a hoard of Joseph Heath’s tokens (W/D Cambridgeshire 52) must have survived and then been dispersed. This is by far the commonest token of the county and it has been possible to put together a group of 43 pieces, all in a similar grade, mostly clean and brassy in appearance and have certainly never been in the ground. The Fitzwilliam Museum has five that look like they have the same provenance along with three that are more worn/dirty/corroded. Other examples have been found by metal detectorists and are often quite corroded.

Joseph Heath

Joseph Heath was appointed burgess to the common council by King Charles II with a charter of 3 January 1684/5⁽⁹⁾. This charter also names several other token issuers.

There are several references to Joseph Heath in the registers, but those with later dates certainly refer to his son or grandson of the same name. Joseph and Hannah Heath had sons baptised at All Saints Church; John (23 October 1670), Thomas (2 March 1672/3) and Joseph (16 April 1676). There are burial entries for two Hannah Heaths, one on 3 December 1687 and the other on 10 October 1706. These are possibly the wife and daughter of the issuer respectively

A marriage recorded in St Michael's church in 1703 between Joseph Heath and Mary Allen gives him as a chandler of All Saint's parish. This is likely a son. A Joseph Heath died in 1708 (son?) when an administration bond gives his trade a grocer and his wife's name as Mary.

The arms are a shield "per chevron, in chief two mullets, in base a heathcock"; the arms of Heath of Co. Durham, Middlesex and Norfolk.



Fig. 1. The Heath Arms

The Tokens

All tokens seen show the same die axis of 0° and the same die alignment, most easily seen on pieces that are struck off centre. This suggests that they were created in one batch. However there are three clear die states on the reverse die which suggests the die was deteriorating during the batch.

Obv. IOSEPH·HEATH·OF★

Around a beaded inner circle and shield of arms
Outer circle of lozenges

Rev. CAMBRIDGE·1666★

Around a beaded inner circle and IHH and pierced cinquefoils. Close-up of area where flaw will develop.

Details. Br, 1.551g, 16.60-16.93mm. Shown 1.5×

Notes. [GMO 52.1-01]



52.1

Obv. IOSEPH·HEATH·OF★

Around a beaded inner circle and shield of arms
Outer circle of lozenges

Rev. CAMBRIDGE·1666★

Around a beaded inner circle and IHH and pierced cinquefoils. First traces of die flaw.

Details. Br, 0.929g, 16.18-16.55mm. Shown 1.5×

Notes. [GMO 52.2-13]



52.2

Obv. IOSEPH·HEATH·OF★

Around a beaded inner circle and shield of arms
Outer circle of lozenges

Rev. CAMBRIDGE·1666★

Around a beaded inner circle and IHH and pierced cinquefoils. Extensive die flaw.

Details. Br, 1.078g, 16.14-16.41mm. Shown 1.5×

Notes. [GMO 52.3-13]



52.3

A Group of Joseph Heath's Tokens



Fig. 2. The accumulation of the tokens.

Measuring the Tokens

Each of the tokens was weighed and the maximum and minimum diameters determined and averaged. The plots below show the weights and average diameters first for the whole group and then sorted by the three die states.

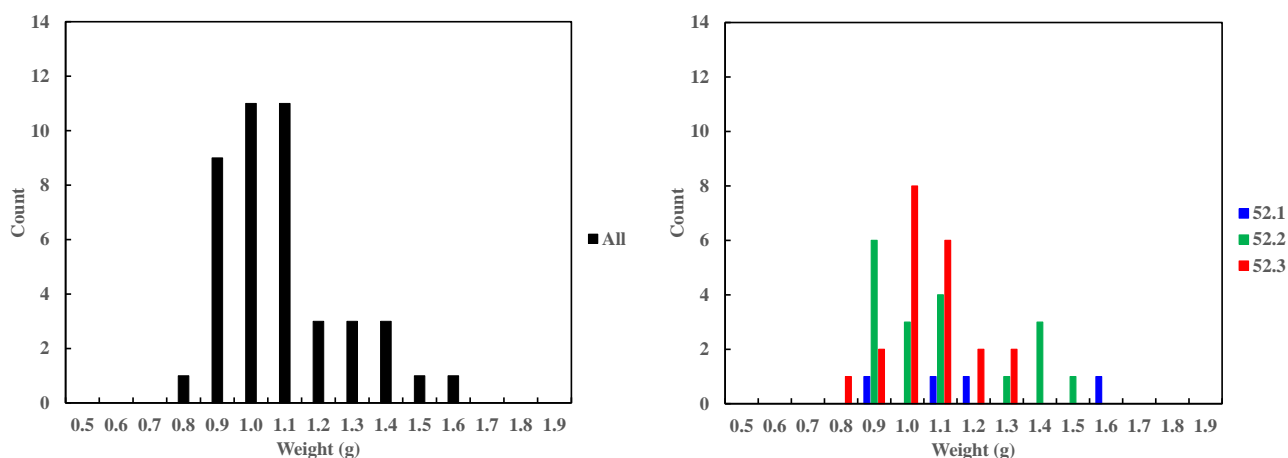


Fig. 3. Histogram of the weights of the 43 Joseph Heath tokens, all together and sorted by die state.

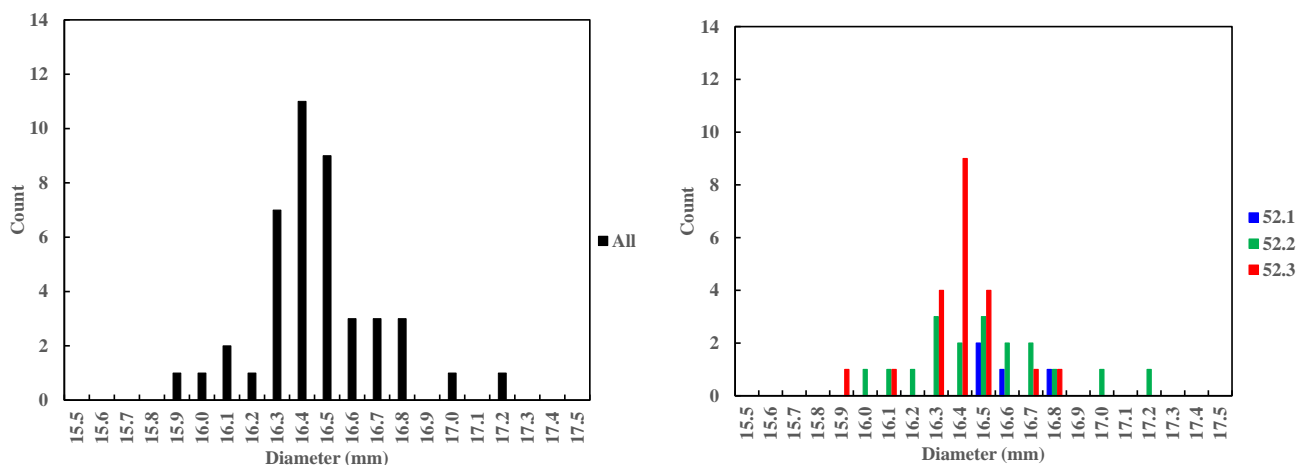


Fig. 4. Histogram of the diameters of the 43 Joseph Heath tokens, all together and sorted by die state.

Whilst the numbers are still quite small, there may be a slight decreasing trend in both the weights and diameters as the die states progress as shown in the table below.

	Sample Size	Average Weight (g)	Average Diameter (mm)
52.1	4	1.153	16.55
52.2	18	1.054	16.46
52.3	21	1.005	16.36
Whole group	43	1.039	16.42

Table 1. Average weights and diameters of the 43 Joseph Heath tokens, all together and sorted by die state.

These are only small variations and may be due to the small sample size or a clipped flans that are in the 52.2 and 52.3 groups. However eliminating the damaged flans from the samples makes very little difference to the trend. To be certain of such subtle trends, the sample really does need to be in the 100s for each of the groups.

Estimating the Original Hoard Size

Some years ago I carried out some tests with a screw/fly press using newly cut dies to measure the forces involved and the speed with which seventeenth century tokens could be struck⁽¹⁰⁾. The force was found to be just under 20 tons and a token could be produced every 4 seconds. It was thus estimated that a batch of 3000 tokens could be manufactured in a morning on a single press. It was suggested that the tradesman placed a £3 order for which £4 worth of tokens were supplied, with a pair of dies costing £1, the profit on the metal £1, and the profit for the tradesman £1.

This is all very approximate but will not be too far off. The question then arose “what does a batch of 3000 seventeenth century tokens look like and can it be recreated?” At the time a screw press and dies were available, but what about the supply of blanks, brass or copper, 16mm diameter, 1.00g each? A quick visit to eBay revealed retail prices at around £1 each and an enquiry to a friend’s engineering company brought the price down to about 10p each with “mate’s rates”. I am still not sure why I didn’t think of it first, but there is a metal stamping company at Llantrisant that does this sort of thing on a very large scale – The Royal Mint! And, by a stroke of luck, one of their discontinued lines used blanks that were 17.14mm diameter, weighing 1.78g – the old decimal halfpenny. Both measurements are very close to a large seventeenth century farthing token. A few days later, and bought for just over the scrap bronze price, the postman staggered to the door.



Fig. 5. Heap of 3000 decimal halfpennies 35×30cm and 5cm deep and weighing over 5.2kg.

Shortly afterwards a suitably sized oak box was acquired, and a small customisation added the arms of Joseph Heath to the lid. The 3000 coins fill the box to about 6cm deep.



Fig. 6. A box suitable for a hoard of Joseph Heath's tokens. Internal dimensions; 26w × 10d × 12h cm.



Fig. 7. Box half-filled with 3000 suitably sized bronze coins.

Discussion

This note has presented an accumulation of 43 tokens issued by the Cambridge merchant Joseph Heath. Three distinct die states have been identified.

At present, no documentary evidence has been found regarding the size of a typical order of seventeenth century tokens by a local tradesman. It is suggested that 3,000 tokens might be a sufficient number for a smoothly operating token system. These are all rough estimates, but 1,000 tokens seems to small and 10,000 too large.

During the token recall only a fraction of the original issue would be returned to the issuing tradesman and these would usually have been scrapped very quickly. For an issuer's accumulation to survive requires a particular set of circumstances, and may be rare. However I suspect most counties have a token or two where the issue is relatively common in a particular state (e.g. brassy VF) and also known in a range of other states as random unconnected survivors. In small numbers the former are likely the savings of a token user and in large numbers are most likely the issuer's stock.

References

- (1) C. D. Daines and R. H. Thompson. A hoard of St Neot's "lace-making" tokens from Eynesbury. *BNJ* vol. 55, 1985, pp164-68.
- (2) I. D. Brown and M. Dolley, *A Bibliography of Coin Hoards of Great Britain and Ireland 1500-1967*. London, 1971.
- (3) D. T.-D. Clarke. Numismatics in the Colchester and Essex Museum. *SNC*, 1965 p129 coll.
- (4) R. H. Thompson and J. Gyford, J. The Witham hoard of 17th century tokens and George Robinson the issuer. *Essex Archaeol Hist.* Vol 20, 1989, pp133-142.
- (5) C. D. Daines and R. H. Thompson. A hoard of St Neot's "lace-making" tokens from Eynesbury. *BNJ* vol. 55, 1985, pp164-68.
- (6) A. Marsden. 17th Century Norfolk Tokens in Norwich Castle Museum. 2016, Norfolk Token Project. Also available here: <https://norfolktokenproject.wordpress.com/corporation-tokens/>
- (7) K.A. Jacob. Trade Tokens and Local History. *Amateur Historian*, v6n2, Winter 1964, pp55-61.
- (8) J.A. Jacob. Cambridge Trade Tokens of the 17th and 18th Centuries and the Traders who issued them. *Cambridgeshire Local History Council*. Bulletin No. 30, 1975, pp11-19.
- (9) C.H. Cooper. *Annals of Cambridge*. 1845, reprinted 2009. Volume iii p603.
- (10) G. Oddie. How to Make a Seventeenth Century Token. *TCSB* v11n10, March 2016, pp369-376. Available here: https://www.thetokensociety.org.uk/pdf2/Volume_eleven.pdf and just this article here: https://norfolktokenproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/tcsb_v11n10-pp369-376.pdf

Footnote

It has been pointed out that I have made an assumption in using W/D references. These initials refer to two standard catalogues. W is G.C. Williamson's *Trade Tokens Issued in the 17th Century*, originally issued in 1889, but more commonly met with as the 1967 reprint published by Seaby and D refers to M. Dickinson's *Seventeenth Century Tokens of the British Isles and Their Values*, published by Seaby in 1986 and reprinted by Spink in 2011.

