

A Unique Farthing Token from the Thames

By Simon Maslin



Newly discovered 17th century farthing token of the Ship Carpenters Arms, Rotherhithe Wall, [SUR-7B4C77](#)

The third quarter of the 17th century saw a serious deficit of circulating copper small change caused in part by the English civil wars of the 1640s and the cessation of the royal (rose) farthing coinage of Charles I. With everyday transactions desperately in need of usable currency, local and regional traders, craftsmen, civic corporations and hostelries stepped in to address the problem by issuing their own individual token farthings and halfpennies. Primarily functioning at a very local level, these tokens would be given out and exchanged by the issuers and those who trusted their business. Over 14,000 varieties are recorded as having been produced before they were banned by order of Charles II in 1672, whose government then issued an official copper coinage in the same recognisable form as persisted until decimalisation, some three hundred years later.

The distribution patterns and imagery of these tokens can tell us much about the activities of the issuers, many of whom were prominent characters with civic offices and roles who are named in historical documents of the period. Despite the huge recorded diversity, new issues come to light every so often, perhaps now more so than ever through the work of the PAS which provides an easy channel for new discoveries to be documented and shared.

This particular token, recorded as [SUR-7B4C77](#), is a previously undocumented variant and also a very well-preserved example. It names a tavern or inn called the Ship Carpenter's (or Shipwright's) arms in Rotherhithe Wall, Southwark. On the obverse it has the arms of the name, on the reverse are the issuers' initials 'I' & 'TW', most likely for the tavern's proprietor and his wife. Both the identity of the owner and the precise location of this establishment are apparently not now known.

Surrey benefits from having an extremely comprehensive and up-to-date study of these tokens (Tim Everson's 2015 *Seventeenth Century Trading Tokens of Surrey and Southwark*), but even so only one

other example was previously known of a token issued by this particular establishment, itself also known from a unique specimen, but with a different design to this latest find. Consequently this variant becomes a new addition to the corpus of tokens for the historic county of Surrey and Southwark and is now the reference example for its type, Surrey 284B.

This article first appeared in Issue # 493 of "Surrey's Past", published by the Surrey Archaeological Society, February 2023.

