

William Clowes and the Tokens For The King's Evil

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Much has already been written about the numismatic aspects of the King's Evil^(1,2,3,4). The gold angels of Charles I especially struck and pierced for the ceremony and the admission tickets and gold touch pieces of the time of Charles II and later are well known, but no convincing candidates for the earliest documented admission tokens have been put forward. Before suggesting three possible admission tokens used for the touching ceremony of Charles I, one unpublished and two very obscure, a brief digression will be made into the background.

The disease commonly called the King's Evil, scrofula or in Latin struma is usually the result of a mycobacterial infection, often tuberculosis, of the lymph nodes of the neck. The most usual symptom is a persistent, painless mass in the side of the neck, which usually grows with time. The skin can become a bluish-purple colour and eventually may rupture leaving an open wound. The disease was rarely fatal in itself, though other infections of the wound or attempts at medical intervention or surgical excision were the more likely causes of death until the development of antibiotics in the mid-20th century. People suffering from the disease often had lengthy periods of remission and many cases of spontaneous cure were recorded and considered miracles.

The divine power of the monarch, stemming from the time of Edward the Confessor, was believed to be sufficient that the monarch's touch could provide a cure for the disease. Many monarchs carried out the touching ceremony – the laying on of hands – the earliest noted is Henry II⁽⁵⁾. Figure 1 shows Queen Mary carrying out the ceremony.

Queen Anne was the last English monarch to carry out the ceremony, touching the infant Samuel Johnson in 1712. George I put an end to the practice as being "too Catholic".

The Stuart Pretenders and their descendants in exile continued to carry out the ceremony until 1807. Several French kings also carried out the ceremony until Louis XV stopped it in the 18th century, though it was briefly revived by Charles X in 1825⁽⁶⁾.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the gold angel given out at the ceremony led to the temptation for repeated attendance and false claims of the disease. On several occasions many more people attended the ceremony than there were gold angels set aside. Thus, procedures evolved where those attending the ceremony had to have their disease confirmed firstly by the local minister and surgeon, with a final inspection by the Monarch's surgeon.

The earliest reference to this vetting is found in a book of 1597 written by William Tooker⁽⁷⁾. Tooker was born in 1557(?8) and following an MA from New College, Oxford, served several ecclesiastical posts in the South West. In 1588 he was appointed chaplain to Elizabeth I and rector of West Dean in Wiltshire⁽⁸⁾. Tooker was a skilful courtier and his book "Charisma sive Donum Sanationis" was an historical vindication of the power inherent in the English sovereign for curing the king's evil. Elizabeth, who considered possession of this power as a proof of the validity of her succession, held Tooker in high regard after the publication of this work. His career stagnated with the death of Elizabeth, carrying less favour with James I, and Tooker died at Salisbury on 19 March 1620-1, and was buried there in the cathedral.



Fig. 1. Queen Mary touching for scrofula c.1553.

A paragraph from this extremely rare book was translated from the Latin by Pettigrew⁽¹⁾ and is given in figure 2.

Using schoolboy Latin the relevant paragraph of the original book was found to be on pp94-5. An on-line translation tool⁽⁹⁾ confirmed the details of Pettigrew's translation, with the significant exception of the reference to tickets. Translating the whole chapter produced nothing and the expected word "tessera" has not been found in this book.

The next major character is William Clowes (I) (1543/4-1604) the distinguished Elizabethan surgeon, who worked at St Bartholomew's in the 1570's and was surgeon to the navy in 1586. In 1602 he published the first book written in English on the subject⁽¹⁰⁾. A pioneer of chemical medicine, this book has many sections including physical remedies, which range from herbal to caustic chemicals, to surgical remedies describing the removal of the growths and a section on the Royal touch (pp48-61, figure 3) including examples of miraculous cures. William Clowes (I) became Serjeant Surgeon to James I in 1603.

His son, William Clowes (II) (1582-1648), was apprenticed to his father and was admitted to the Barber-Surgeons' Company of London on 22 January 1605. He was already surgeon to the Prince of Wales and because of the royal duties was excused compulsory attendance at the Barber-Surgeons' Company functions when he was liveried on 13 December 1615. He became "Sergeant-Surgeon to the King" on the prince's accession as Charles I in 1625. He declined to serve as renter warden, the fourth ranking warden of the Barber-Surgeons' Company, considering the office to be too lowly for a king's surgeon⁽¹¹⁾.

Clowes' career involves many small controversies. He was elected out of turn as master of the Barber-Surgeons in 1626. His election was called into question because by convention it should have been the turn of a barber that year. The election stood, but some opposition remained amongst the members.

It was Clowes' duty to examine all persons brought to be cured by the royal touch. The royal patronage was likely very lucrative, and Clowes pursued people who claimed to be able to cure the King's Evil. A gardener called Leverett appeared in front of the College of Physicians on 3 November 1637, claiming to be able to cure just by touch a range of diseases. Leverett failed to cure cases brought to him and Clowes presented statements that Leverett had slighted the king's sacred gift of healing, enticed lords and ladies to buy the sheets he had slept in, and deluded the sick with false hopes. Clowes also produced further evidence that Leverett was an impostor, including the proof that he was a fourth, and not a seventh son.

In 1637 an anatomy theatre designed by Inigo Jones was added to the company's building in Monkwell Street. Clowes was a substantial contributor to the building fund. The new theatre was required to accommodate the increased demand for lectures and dissections, stimulated by William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, as well as other advances in surgery.

Clowes's second term as master of the Barber-Surgeons, in 1638, also began controversially with two sets of electors refusing to elect and serve him. A third set of electors was found and Clowes and the new wardens were

In this work, which is now of great rarity, the reverend doctor declares that "the queen never refused touching any body that applied to her for relief, after it had appeared, upon a strict inquiry and examination made by her physicians and surgeons, and by a certificate under their hands, that the complaint of the diseased was really the *king's evil*, and was of so virulent a nature that there were no hopes of its being cured by physicians, or else the sick persons so very indigent, that, not being able to apply to physicians for remedies, they had no resource left but in her royal goodness. This was done to prevent any impositions being made on her sacred touch by any other foul disease; every person admitted to be touched being obliged to pass such examination, and to take with them a ticket from the physician and surgeon by whom they were examined."

Fig. 2. Extract from Pettigrew⁽¹⁾, p170.

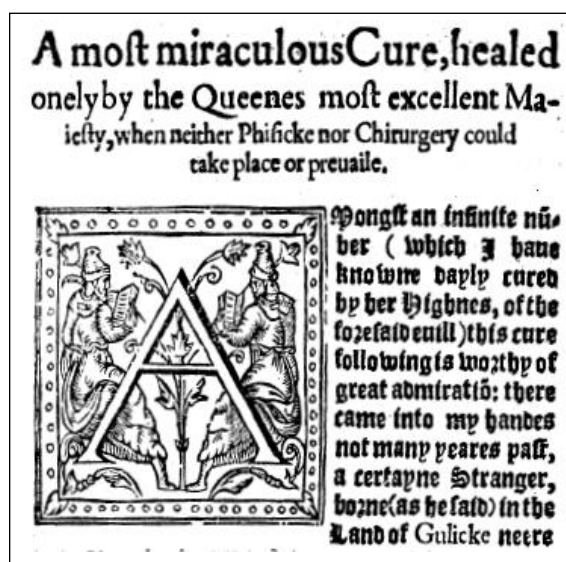


Fig. 3. Extract from William Clowes, 1602⁽¹⁰⁾. p48.

sworn in. Clowes remained influential, until his death in 1648, by maintaining standards of lectures and surgeons, often quite vociferously.

The management of the touching ceremony became increasingly difficult due to the increasing numbers of people attending. From 1626 to 1638 there are almost annual proclamations⁽⁵⁾ to reiterate the need for sufferers to bring a certificate signed by their parson or churchwardens to confirm that they have not been touched before or to postpone or cancel the dates of the ceremonies (usually Easter and Michaelmas) due to plague or other contagions.

It is possible to work out the official numbers attending the touching ceremony from the numbers of angels struck. An entry in the State Papers for 1635 “Sir William Parkhurst for Angel Gould for healing 600 li” would suggest 1200 people attended the Easter ceremony that year.

There are several contemporary documents that refer to the striking of tokens by the Mint for use at the touching ceremony^(2,12). A draft for a document from April 1635 is reproduced in full below⁽¹³⁾.

To S^r W^m Parkhurst Kn^t Warden of our Mint

Truly and well Beloved wee Greete you well. Whereas by our Proclamations wee have signified our pleasure that the poore People, and other your loving subjects that are troubled with the disease comonly called the Kings Evill, shall not presume to resort to our Court to be healed, but only twice in the yeare (vizt) Michas and Easter, by reason whereof the number hath allwayes been so greate that the Serjant Chirugion, whose office it is to View, and prepare them for the Royall touch, hath been accustomed to take their names, and to give everyone a token thereby, to know and distinguish those that are approved and allowed for every healing day, appointed from those that are not. And whereas wee are informed by our Sarjeant Chirurgion, that there hath been a great abuse committed by dissolute and ill disposed People, who for to gaine the Gold only have counterfeited his tokens, wch were cast in a mould made by a Freemason whereby wee have not only been deceived of so many Angells, but also hath many time increased the number to be more than was appointed for the day, and many that were appointed wanted their Angells and our Royall presence disturbed by their outcry, in consideration and for prevention whereof, our please is and wee doe hereby will and command you to give present order unto our Servant Edw^d Greene chiefe Graver of our mint to make both presently, and from time to time such number of tokens of Bras Copper and such other mettall as our Serjant shall give direction for under his hand writing, every one of which to be in bredthe the compass of an Angell and that the said Tokens be returned to the warden of our Mint whereby he may know what number of Angells have bin expended in this our fond service, also that you allow or pay unto our said Graver fior the workmanship and metal of these, the summe of 2 pence for every such peece, being made and delivered to our Serjeant Chirurgeon, and whereas wee are informed that there hath been some already made, and delivered unto him, Our pleasure is that you allow unto our Graver the same price for those that shall appeare unto you hath been made, and not allowed for us also from time to time for those that are to be made and delivered (as afore said) and this our warrant shall be your sufficient discharge to be allowed upon the accompt of the Mint.

Given under our signet at

Dated at Westm^r the first day of April 1635

Fig. 4. Transcription of State Papers 16/286, 1634-1638 ordering new brass tokens due to counterfeiting⁽¹³⁾.

A payment was made to the chief engraver at the Tower mint in 1635-6 “for making of Tokens, used about the healing of the disease called the King’s Evil”. The tokens were delivered to William Clowes, Sergeant-Chirurgeon, at 2d. the piece, the number of the first consignment being 5,500. A warrant for the year 1638-9 reads^(2,12): “Paid to S^d Edward. . . [Greene] for providing and making of Tokens used about the Healing of the disease called the King’s Evil by virtue of a Warrant dormante under his Mat’s Signet, date the first of Aprill Anno Caroli XI^{mo} Viz. MVCLVI Tokens and delivered unto William Clowes, his Mats. . . [Sergeant] Surgeon at 2d. the peece, soe here allowed as well as by virtue of the same wart xij^{li} xiiij^s vj^d.” To these 5,500 and 1557 tokens can be added another 8887 struck between 1635 and 1639.

It would thus seem that there are at least two types of admission ticket struck by the Tower mint. Those from before 1635 which suffered from counterfeiting and those after 1635 which were the size of an angel (28-29mm), probably all struck in brass or copper.

There is no contemporary description of the design. The piece usually described as an admission ticket for the touching ceremony is shown below^(1,2,3).



Fig. 5. Admission ticket for touching ceremony⁽²⁾. Williamson Uncertain 102.

Obv. **HE TOVCHED THEM** around a hand issuing from a cloud blessing one of four heads.

Rev. **AND THEY WERE HEALED** around a crowned entwined rose and thistle.

Details. Brass, 19mm. Shown 200%.

The tokens are extremely rare, as might be expected, as they would have been worth ten shillings to the holder and their issue would have been tightly regulated.

The token shown below recently appeared on a well known online auction site.



Fig. 6. The Token for the cure.

Obv. **THE TOKEN FOR THE CVRE**

A pair of small plumes and crown above and below

Rev. Three crowns arranged vertically with a single fleur de lys each side

Details. Brass, 19mm, plain edge. Traces of outer beaded border. Shown 200%.

The token was described as seventeenth century, but doesn't look quite right for the more familiar 1648-1672 series. The legend including the words "THE CVRE" is a very unusual and definitive statement and immediately suggests a connection with the Royal touching ceremony.

The design is reminiscent of the 1630s-1640s coin weights of Charles I which show crowns of various sizes and a sprinkling of small regal symbols. The shilling weights are also brass, 19-20mm in diameter and a few examples are illustrated below.



Fig. 7. Charles I coin weights for shillings. W1053, W1061, W1064 and W1076. Shown 200%.

Whilst researching the token shown in figure 6 and the touching ceremony in general, a search of the internet also turned up two very obscure but associated tokens.

During the 1933-37 excavations of eight ossuaries at three Indian sites along the Potomac River a group of 18 tokens were found that had been made into a necklace. From the proximity to Piscataway fort and records of land ownership it was concluded that the tokens had originated in England between 1630 and 1640⁽¹⁴⁾.

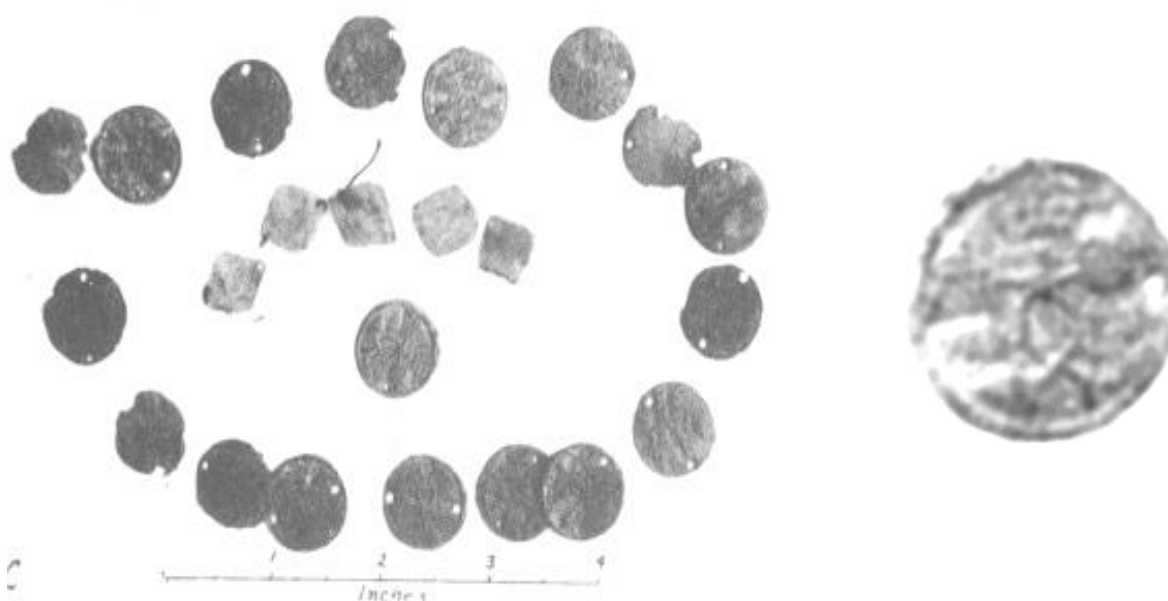


Fig. 8. American Indian Necklace made of English tokens, and detail⁽¹⁴⁾.

The tokens are described as “copper jetons or medallets”, about $\frac{3}{4}$ ” (19mm) in diameter and have a crowned rose and thistle filling the obverse. The reverse is blank. Correspondence with the British Museum at the time suggested that they were issued 1630-40 and that they were used as admission pieces to the ceremony of the King’s Touch.

More recently, but also in America, during a 1996 excavation of an early 17th century fort site near Jamestown, Virginia, a small brass token was found⁽¹⁵⁾. It was much corroded and it could only be imaged using X-rays.

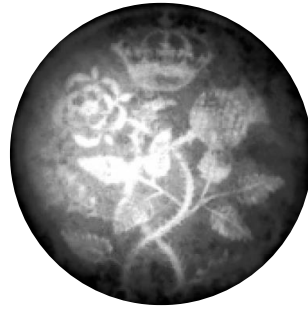


Fig. 9. Token found during excavation of James Fort in 1996⁽¹⁵⁾.

This piece again shows the crowned and entwined thistle and rose, but of a slightly different design to figure 8, with more leaves and a crown with a broader top. It is also uniface. The footnotes in this report also describe three other finds; One was found during National Park Service excavations at Jamestown; one was located at the Maine (ca. 1618-1625) near Jamestown, and one was excavated at Flowerdew Hundred, about 25 river miles from Jamestown. All of the pieces are described as admission tickets for the touching ceremony.

A plausible explanation was given for their appearance in early American colonies in the 17th century in that they probably represent inexpensive copper items for the Indian trade.

The term “the cure” appears throughout contemporary documents for the ceremony and therefore it is concluded that the token shown in figure 6 with its legend “THE TOKEN FOR THE CVRE” is likely an admission ticket for the touching ceremony during the early part of Charles I reign, 1626-38.

In researching this piece, other tokens have been identified of the same period that may also satisfy the same use. The crowned and entwined rose and thistle, a symbol of the union of England and Scotland, was used regularly by James I and Charles I and is now known on three distinct tokens (figures 5, 8 and 9). Whilst all of the items described were certainly made before 1648, care must be taken in dating the tokens from the archaeology as the tokens might have been used to date the archaeology!

Notes, References and Acknowledgements

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2. H. Farquhar. *Royal Charities. Part I: Angels as healing-pieces for the King's Evil*. BNJ v12 1916 pp39-135.
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9. GoogleTranslate. This is now a very impressive tool, the range of languages available and subtlety of translation has improved significantly in the past few years. It is not perfect, but only missed a few words and was very good at extracting the meaning from Tooker’s fairly dense Latin.

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Thanks are due to the late Robert Thompson for the most recent ODNB references, Martin Allen at the Fitzwilliam Museum for copies of the Symonds article and to The Withers team for the illustration of W1061 in figure 7.

