

An Enigmatic Commonwealth Farthing – Tracing Edward Rowland’s Patterns of 1652

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The token shown below is Williamson Uncertain 76⁽¹⁾ and has a long and enigmatic history.



Fig. 1. Williamson Uncertain 76.

Obv. **** / PITTY / THE / POORE / 1652**

Harp to left and St George’s cross on a shield to the right of THE

Rev. **** / SVCH / GOD / LOVES / *ER***

Harp to left and St George’s cross on a shield to the right of GOD

Details. This is an electrotpe in copper^(2,3), 17mm, plain edge, shown 200%

It appeared as Norweb 9369⁽²⁾ (ex. Nott) and was first recognised as an electrotpe when it was catalogued for sale⁽³⁾. The Norweb description gives “probably a private pattern by ER illustrating a new technique in bimetallic striking” and a reference to Peck⁽⁴⁾. The piece in Peck has an obverse in copper and a reverse in brass and also has a sister bimetallic token of similar fabric and also the initials ER.



Fig. 2. A petition token, Peck plate 5 no 370⁽⁴⁾.

Obv. ***THE* / COMONS / PETITION**

*** A Harp and St George’s cross on a shield ***

Rev. ***THE* / POORES / RELEFE**

E R separated by a Harp and St George’s cross on a shield.

Details. Obv copper, Rev brass, 19mm, plain edge. Also known in copper. Shown 200%.

A common set of punches has been used to create both pairs of dies.

Looking at the piece shown in Peck plate 5 number 369, it is clear that the token shown in figure 1 above is an electrotpe of the British Museum specimen. Interestingly both pieces in the British Museum have a provenance from the Marmaduke Trattle sale of 1832 which makes no mention of tokens and the two pieces were lots 1521 and 1522 respectively in section IV ⁽⁵⁾.

A most Choice and unique collection of English Coins and Medals. The Works of Briot, the Simons’, Rawlins, the Roettiers. The Patterns and Proofs of the time of Charles I, the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell and Charles II are most numerous and choice.

The description given in Peck for the two pieces is interesting⁽⁴⁾.

The two following pieces are almost certainly private patterns, although the initials ER at first rather suggest that they are merely tradesmen's tokens. Both are curiously composed of two thin flans, one of copper and the other of brass, tightly pressed together. This is significant, for it represents yet another method of striking in two metals as a precaution against counterfeiting, which, as already explained, was almost a prerequisite for the acceptance of any pattern by the authorities, but for a trader's token it seems an unnecessary and unlikely refinement. It is highly probable, therefore, therefore, that these pieces were submitted by ER as specimens of a new technique in two-metal striking, and if this is correct, the legends need not be taken too seriously, for although quite unsuitable for a state farthing, they are of the "petitioning" kind which, later, under Charles II, were to become fairly common. The important thing is that these pieces would at least prove that such flans were capable of taking an impression from any, more suitable, dies that the mint might choose to use."

Montagu, writing in 1893⁽⁶⁾, describes both pieces in reverse order.

The next two pieces described, examples of the first of which, so far as I know, only exist in the National Collection and in my own, are also probably private tokens. . . .and ER were most probably the initials of the issuers of these pieces.

Boyne lists and illustrates both pieces as uncertain tokens 49 and 50⁽⁷⁾. The first token is illustrated in the text on p529 and the second is on plate 36 no 6. Williamson lists them without comment as uncertain 76 and 77⁽¹⁾.

So the question remains, who was ER and is there any way of tracing his petition from 1652? How to even start?

With increasing numbers of books and archives being uploadad, and searchable, the internet beckoned as an easy but possibly long shot. . . .a fraction of a second later. . .

The proposals of Edw. Rowland, goldsmith, concerning farthings, referred to the Mint Committee, to confer with him, and report their opinion; Sir Jas Harrington to take care hereof.

To be found in the: Council of State. Day's Proceedings, Vol XXV, Nov 4 1652⁽⁸⁾. A few clicks later and a reprint of the original book was in the post. This added nothing extra to the story. So a virtual trip was made to the National Archives to see the original.

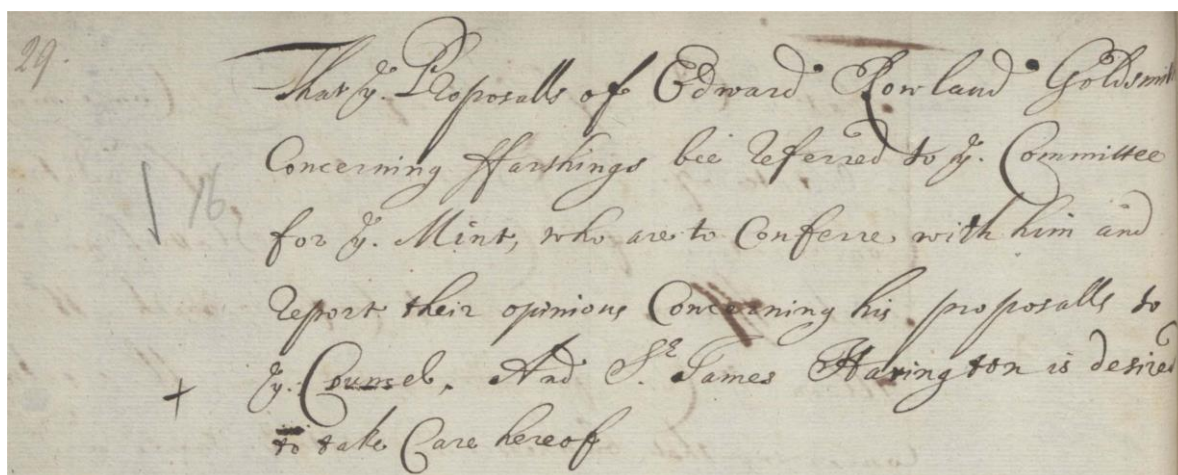


Fig. 3. Extract from Council of State. Day's Proceedings, Nov 4 1652⁽⁹⁾.

This doesn't add much but confirms Edw as Edward and is reasonably conclusive evidence for ER being Edward Rowland. In the introduction to Williamson, there is a section listing various state papers that refer to farthing tokens (pp xxxviii-xliii). The entry shown above is absent.

No further information about Edward Rowland has been found from coin or token lines of enquiry, but the trail is not completely cold. A search of the IGI found just a single candidate within London. An Edward Rowland, son of Edward and Alice, was christened at St Botolph Without Aldgate in June 1640.

If Edward Rowland was a goldsmith living in London, he might be expected to have a fairly central residence, possibly close to the Guild Hall. Most of this area was destroyed during the Great Fire of 1666 and the rebuilding survey names many of the residents⁽¹⁰⁾. Searching the index of Mills and Oliver produces one main entry on July 10th 1667 when a property of Edward Rowland was surveyed on St Lawrence Lane. Whilst there is no plan of his own property, two adjacent properties show him to be a neighbour (Figure 4).

It is difficult to locate exactly where these buildings were, but having spent some time cutting out photocopied and scaled plans for the premises on and behind St Lawrence Lane, Mr Rowland may have had two premises close to Blossom's Inn as shown in figure 5. This is just 100 yards south of the Guild Hall.

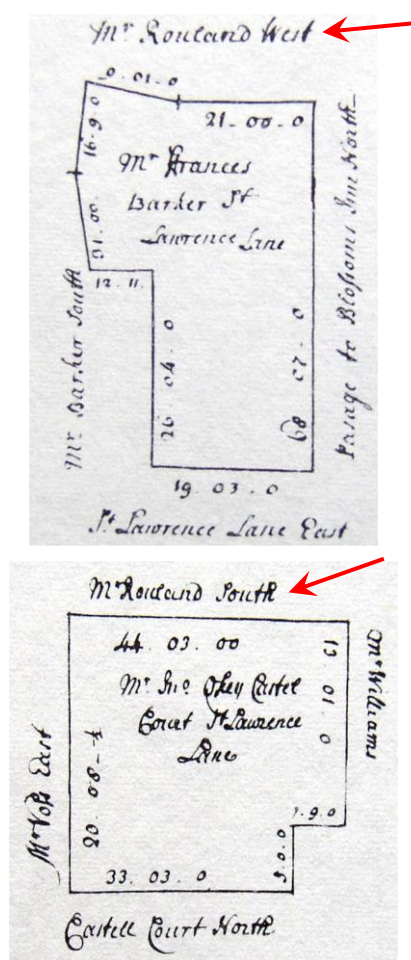


Fig. 4. Extracts from the survey after the Great Fire⁽¹⁰⁾.

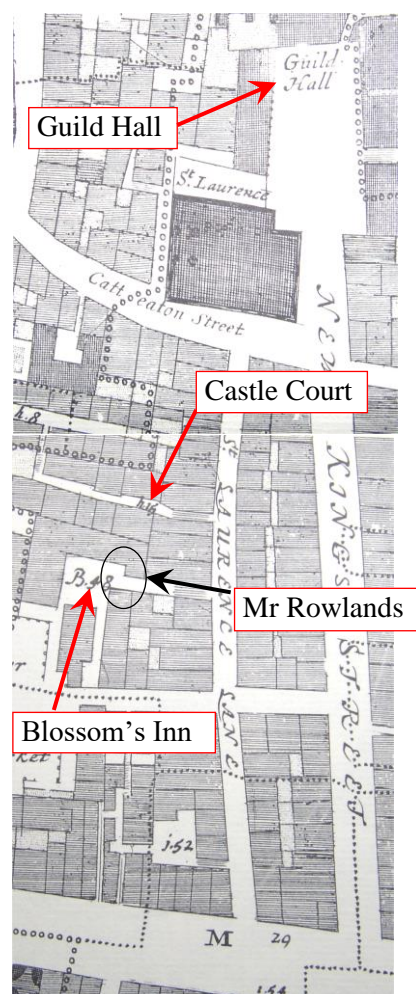


Fig. 5. Approximate location of Mr Rowland's premises behind St Lawrence Lane in 1676⁽¹¹⁾.

The Hearth Tax records from London and Middlesex have recently been transcribed, indexed and published⁽¹²⁾. In "St Lawrenc Lann" an Edward Rouland (sic) was taxed for 31 hearths. There are 42 entries for Lawrence Lane averaging 6.5 hearths each, and not counting Edward Rouland the largest number of hearths is 13. This is almost certainly the same Edward Rowland and with this number of hearths, he is a significant character.

An earlier record of an Edward Rowland, goldsmith, who had a shop on the upper floor of the Royal Exchange in Cornhill in 1629 may refer to the issuer of the patterns, or more likely his father⁽¹³⁾. His premises were searched by the wardens of the Goldsmiths' Company and many items of sub-standard silver were found.

Searching through the silver and goldsmiths' marks from London for the seventeenth century reveals just a single candidate in the period 1630-1700, though the initials are not attributed⁽¹⁴⁾. The mark shown in figure 6 appears on a small hand bell from 1670-71.

Whilst this may be a tenuous connection, the attribution of the initials ER to Goldsmith Edward Rowland and confirmation that the pieces are patterns rather than tokens would seem to be reasonable.



Fig. 6. ER with a mullet below, Goldsmith's mark 1670-71.

Notes, References and Acknowledgements

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https://thetokensociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Volume_eleven-1.pdf

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