

# A Day at the Museum – Part (i)

## The Search for the Lesser Elongated Squirrel

Gary Oddie

On Tuesday 25 July 2023, the author and two members of the Bedford Numismatic Society (Nigel Lutt, treasurer and Simon Rowley, secretary) visited Wardown House Museum and Gallery, in Luton. We were hosted by Elise Naish, Head of Heritage & Collections at The Culture Trust, Luton. The “behind the scenes” visit had two main motives. Firstly, inspection and photography of the Museum’s collection of Bedfordshire tokens ranging from 17<sup>th</sup> century to osier peelers’ and basket making tokens for a forthcoming book on Bedfordshire tokens.<sup>(1)</sup> The second reason for the visit was to work through the museum’s holdings of Anglo-Saxon and Norman pennies struck at the Bedford Mint, for another ongoing project.

Prior emails and inspection of the museum digital catalogue meant that all of our requests had been retrieved from storage and were ready when we arrived. A few hours later the work was complete, with many new images taken for the Bedfordshire book, including pieces not seen before. A few pieces were found to be in the wrong envelopes but were quickly identified and put back where they belonged and others that had once been on display but separated from their original envelopes were re-identified and put back in the correct places.

A second visit was arranged for Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> August to the Museum’s other venue at Stockwood Discovery Centre. There were two main motives for this visit. Firstly, to view the Bedford Mint pennies that had been missed during the previous visit as they were on permanent display at Stockwood and the second was to help the museum with the safe relocation of the Shillington hoard. This hoard of 127 gold aurei ranging from Tiberius (AD 14-37) to Vespasian (AD 69-79), a separate group of 18 silver denarii ranging from the Republican Cn Domit (128 BC) to the emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138)<sup>(2)</sup> and a bronze age mirror found nearby. This will be the topic of a follow up note about this once in a lifetime opportunity.

At the other end of the numismatic spectrum, the author also had an ulterior motive for the visit – to capture a particular squirrel – not the red or the grey, but the small, elongated variety.

Using rollers to manipulate metal goes back to maybe 600BC, where slitting presses were used to cut uniformly narrow strips from pre-beaten sheets with the continuous scissoring action of the roller edges. Using rollers to create flat sheets of metal would have to wait till the late Middle Ages before coming into common use and then it was only a small step to add designs to the rollers to create coins. This happened first in Europe, and it was not till the early 17<sup>th</sup> century that the patent farthings of James I and Charles I were made in roller presses, followed by Nicholas Briot’s experiments on larger coins at the London Mint and the civil war mint at York.

It would be another 250 years before someone had the idea of using a roller press to allow members of the public to create their own souvenirs of events. The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World’s Fair) was held to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the New World in 1492. The exhibition covered 690 acres and had 27 million visitors between 1 May and 30 October 1893. As well as the first Ferris wheels, the exposition was the first to have hand operated roller presses. I haven’t been able to find an illustration of the machines or details of exactly how they were operated. From the large variation of “smashed” or elongated coins, it would appear that any coin of about the right size was accepted by the machines. Here is an English shilling, “smashed” at the exposition, a long way from home.

Obv. ★COLUMBIAN★ EXPOSITION around 1893

Rev. Smooth

Details. Ar, 0.925, 2.36×2.85mm, 5.196g. The host coin is an 1849 Victoria young head shilling. A full weight coin should be 5.66g, and as little wear will have occurred after going through the press, the weight suggests that the coin was already quite worn when it was pressed. [GO].



A die study of the surviving pieces has identified eight main types, with a total of 22 varieties, including three modern reproductions of original varieties.<sup>(3)</sup> In most cases, sufficient vestiges of the host coins survive to allow complete identification of the original coin. As expected, Columbian Exposition elongates are known mostly on USA coins. However, pieces made from coins of the following countries are also known: Germany, Canada, Denmark, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, France, Mexico and Britain – essentially any coin that the visitors had available on the day that they didn't mind losing.

There are three main periods associated with production of elongates, and the first two are dominated by American machines.<sup>(4)</sup> The first, dating 1893-c.1965, the “oldies”, mainly associated with large public events such as expositions. Again in the USA, c.1965-c.1985, the “modern elongates” are mainly associated with the introduction of many private rollers and a small number of dedicated manufacturers. The introduction of the coin operated “Penny Press Machine” in 1971 led to a significant reduction in the number of manufacturers. After about 1985 the manufacturers and the phenomenon of elongates went worldwide, with machines appearing in tourism hubs, such as museums, amusement parks, and natural or man-made landmarks, producing “contemporary elongates”. Here is an elongated Australian shilling from the “Aussie Expo” of 1988, along with the three-day ticket used by the person who made the elongate.

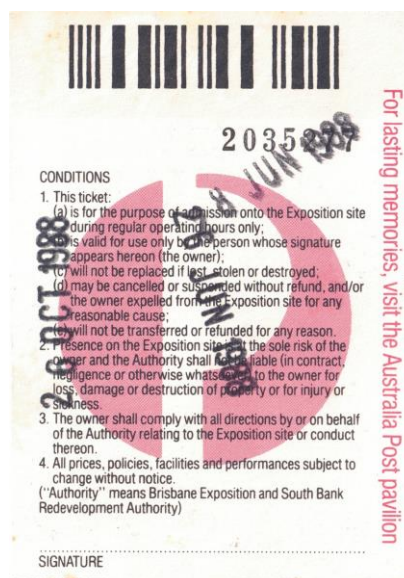
Obv. **AUSSIE EXPO** in a banner. Various scenes and animals including circus tents, roller coaster with **1988** on front. Small animals, one with speech bubble **G'DAY** and also **DOWN UNDER©**

Rev. Smooth

Details. Ar 0.500, 36.9×24.4mm, 5.601g. The host coin is a George VI 1952 Australian shilling. [GO].



54x76mm



Returning closer to home and Luton. Stockwood Park Craft Museum was opened in 1986 and later reopened as the Stockwood Discovery Centre in 2008. The buildings are located in the grounds and buildings of Stockwood House and Stockwood Park. The external part of the Discovery Centre features extensive gardens, including an Elizabethan knot garden and a dig for victory garden. The work of artist Ian Hamilton Finlay can now be seen on permanent display in one of the gardens.

The collection of rural crafts and trades held at Stockwood Discovery Centre was amassed by Thomas Wyatt Bagshawe. Bagshawe was born in Dunstable in 1901 and became a director of the family engineering firm. Bagshawe began a small private museum in Dunstable in 1927 and became the honorary curator of Luton Museum 1928-36 after which he became museum director.

During the 1930s and in the years immediately after World War II, Bagshawe undertook a systematic search of Bedfordshire villages to seek out the surviving crafts folk. He interviewed them and acquired artefacts from them. A complete set of clothes and tools were purchased from a hedge layer while he worked! In 1938 a rural industry gallery was opened at Wardown.

In 1954 Bagshawe offered all his huge collection to Luton Museum. The rural life gallery at Luton Museum remained on display until the 1970s. The collection is now housed in Stockwood Discovery Centre.

In 1991 the Mossman Carriage Collection of 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century horse-drawn vehicles was donated to the museum by George Mossman and is also on display at the Stockwood Discovery Centre. A single die Eurolink machine for making the elongates, was located with the Mossman collection prior to 2019. A machine with a slightly different roller is now located in the Discovery Centre. Here are the two entries in the new Bedfordshire book and a photo of the author having just made a small squirrel elongate on 15 August 2023.

**297.**

Obv. **Stockwood Discovery Centre**  
above a squirrel, tail aligns between S and C.

Rev. Uniface.

Details Ae, PE, 20.9×36.6 mm. Cannot discern the host coin. [GO].  
Made before 2019.



**298.**

Obv. **Stockwood Discovery Centre**  
above a smaller squirrel, tail aligns to C.

Rev. Uniface.

Details Ae, PE, 21.0×36.0 mm. Host coin is a 1995 penny. [GO].  
Replacement machine or new roller installed in 2019 and still operating in August 2023.



There is a dedicated group of collectors of elongates and several websites covering the topic, both from a worldwide<sup>(5,6)</sup> and national perspective<sup>(6,7)</sup>.

Whilst these are not tokens in the strict monetary sense, they do fall under the title par anumismatica or exonomia as they do serve an advertising purpose.

It is interesting to note that elongates and other niche series such as casino chips are not listed in the “First Dictionary of Par anumismatica”.<sup>(8)</sup>

Unlike many popular areas of numismatics, elongates aren’t big, shiny, old or valuable, but they are worth recording.

Author with a (literally) hot off the press small squirrel elongate penny. I estimate the temperature of the coin to be about 50°C as it leaves the machine.



## References and Acknowledgements

- (1) G. Oddie. *Bedfordshire Tokens, Tickets, Checks and Passes*. St Neots Press, forthcoming 2023.
- (2) R. Bland (ed.) Department for Culture, Media and Sport. *Treasure Annual Report 1998 – 1999*. (24 September 1998 - 31 December 1999). Entries 283 and 384 on pp109-110, 2000.  
This can be found on the internet archive/waybackmachine, here:  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120301112519/http://www.ncmd.co.uk/docs/treasurereport199899.pdf>
- (3) R. Learn. World Columbian Exposition Chicago, Illinois 1893. *The Elongate Collector (TEC) News*. October 2002. Though many of the images are missing, the text is available online on the internet archive/waybackmachine here:  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20071009162242/http://www.liss.olm.net/ec/rarities/wce/index.html>
- (4) Brief introduction on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elongated\\_coin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elongated_coin)
- (5) For a world catalogue see: <http://www.pennycollector.com/> which has comprehensive listing for Britian, catalogued separately under England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.
- (6) For an excellent listing of Scottish, UK and world elongates: <https://www.scottishpennies.com/>
- (7) The best site used to be <http://www.ukpennies.co.uk/> which now links to <https://arnsidechipshop.co.uk/Aukpennies/> which is very out of date with broken links again using the internet archive/waybackmachine, the following is a couple of years out of date but very comprehensive: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220121165945/http://www.ukpennies.co.uk/>
- (8) B. Edge. *The First Dictionary of Paranomimatica*. Crewe, 1991.

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