

# An unusual coin ticket and a lead token: a singular connectivity

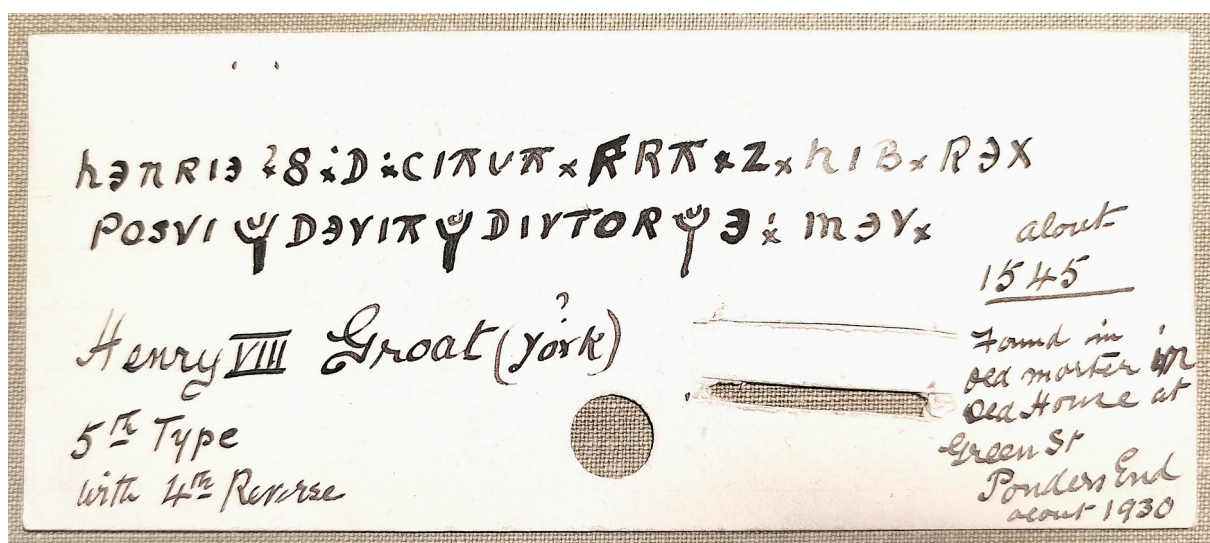
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The stimulus for this note was an essay on ‘Thrillers’ by G. W. Wodehouse, published in *The Penguin Book of British Comic Writing*.<sup>1</sup> In categorising classes of villains in mystery stories, the first of his group of three, were “Sinister men”

from various Oriental backgrounds, adding in brackets, “or practically anywhere except Ponders End and Peebles”! These strange but enticing exceptions, perhaps included for comic effect, had an alliterative ring, that brought to my mind two items of numismatic interest.

The first is a coin ticket that fell out of a second-hand book I acquired many years ago. I cannot recall the title of the book, but I suspect it to be coin related.

The ticket is notable on several counts - its size and shape, the fact that it was intended to also function as a holder for the coin it described, and most significantly, for the information it disclosed. The ticket is 12.4 x 5.2 cm., has a blank reverse, is holed for index card filing, and has two parallel slits cut to accommodate the coin. The coin, now unfortunately absent, was a groat of Henry VIII, possibly minted at York. The link to the Wodehouse quotation is the ticket’s annotation reading: “Found in old mortar in Old House at Green St Ponders End about 1930”.



<sup>1</sup> P. G. Wodehouse, “Thrillers” in *The Penguin Book of British Comic Writing*, (Edited by Patricia Craig), BCA, 1992, 16-27.

It seems likely that the word ‘morter’ refers to the mixture of cement, sand and water, used to bind the stones and bricks in the walls of the dwelling, rather than a dish for grinding, or a contrivance for firing incendiaries, although the more usual spelling, ‘mortar’, is applied equally to all these meanings.

Ponders End, the internet informed me, is an industrial and residential district situated on the eastern edge of Enfield in north London. It appears to have had a number of quaint old houses in former days, some attracting the artistic skills of John Thomas Smith, his engravings being published in 1797.<sup>2</sup>



In Green St, Enfield Highway



At Ponders End, near Enfield

I do not know whether any of these cottages were still in existence nearly a century ago, but they seem an ideally romantic depository for a Tudor coin.

Less romantic, but equally engaging, is a more recent piece of history. Green Street, Ponders Lane, achieved national attention in 1979, when the residents of one of the houses reported alarming paranormal activity in their home, including furniture moving about apparently of its own accord, strange noises and even levitation of one of the residents. An internet search of ‘Green Street, Ponders End’, readily reveals the extent of public interest at the time.

Perhaps Wodehouse was too hasty in dismissing Green Street, Ponders End from villainous activity. While the disturbances of 1979 may tax credulity, the villainy of Henry VIII is not in doubt.

Could there be villainy in Peebles, a picturesque Scottish town situated on the banks of the Tweed River? Not if the token now described had the function that one commentator has attributed to it. The token bears the Arms of Peebles on

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<sup>2</sup> John Thomas Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery*, Nathaniel Smith and I. T. Smith, London, 1797.



its obverse, and a ringlet of small leaf shaped objects surrounding a raised central circular unadorned plateau on the reverse.



Peebles lead token

Obv.: CONTRA NANDO INCREMENTUM surrounding three salmon. Rev.: Ornamental leaf border surrounding circular plateau. 24 mm.

The armorial design and legend place the token's origin at Peebles. The portrayal of two salmon swimming downstream, while the central fish swims upstream, takes its inspiration from the annual migration of the salmon up the Tweed, and thus the motto CONTRA NANDO INCREMENTUM, which may be loosely translated as 'against the tide we multiply'. Plaques and signs bearing the coat of arms occur at a number of places throughout the town. Two examples are illustrated below.



Image attribution: Jim Barton



Image credit: Mike Allport / Art UK

The token is unprovenanced and was procured from an internet auction. The vendor described it as an eighteenth or nineteenth century pass, probably for "hunting/fishing salmon".

An article in *Leaden Tokens Telegraph* is more enlightening.<sup>3</sup> Dismissing a speculation that the token might be an early nineteenth century town farthing on advice from Michael Dickinson, the writer settled on a mid-nineteenth century

<sup>3</sup> 'Beating the Bounds' in *Leaden Tokens Telegraph* (Editor: David Powell), Issue 145, July/Aug. 2021, 6-7.

pub token associated with ‘Beating the Bounds’ festivities. The suggestion is that the token was “used to control an allowance of ale made to each of the participants”, perhaps a precaution against potential villainy.

The ticket and token are, perhaps, of little intrinsic merit. Nevertheless, their stories, as here presented, are the outcome of a confluence of two disparate disciplines, literature and numismatics. This poesis, to my mind, is but one example of the complex relationship collectors and curators have to the objects in their care, one that draws its energy from a diversity of associations and experiences, and provides enchantment to the academic pursuit.

