

Readers' Letters

Some most interesting contributions this month, and thank you all. Firstly, the latest on that piece of Nigel Tucker's which he found in Devon and which Alex Kussendrager reported {LTT_18, Sept 2006} as relating to the locks on the waterway system at Spaarndam, between Haarlem and Amsterdam. Nigel has done a bit of research regarding the findspot and come up with the following:



Apparently the land near Ebford, in the area of the parish in which the token was found, was owned by a **Robert Venn** who was a wealthy serge maker and merchant who had offices in Holland, possibly in Rotterdam, as three of the nearby fields are named "Great, middle and little Rotterdam". These fields were named in a deed of 1676, so it seems the Dutch connection was long-standing. He built Ebford manor and other fine houses in the area and he also bought into a number of ships which presumably traded from Topsham nearby. He had an uncle, also called Robert, who died in Holland. In 1711 his sister Elizabeth married Matthew Lee, another wealthy merchant, and on Robert's death he bequeathed the Woodbury land to Elizabeth and Matthew. They had a son, also called Matthew and there is a note in the son's diary of a visit he made to Holland on his father's behalf. He mentions attending the English Presbyterian church in Amsterdam in 1734."

That combination of two correspondents' efforts to resolve a most unlikely link, involving places in two different countries, must encourage us all. Alex has also kindly sent us the pictures on the right, but I will let him explain the delights of bakenloodjes later. Suffice it for the moment that they relate to a variety of taxes on shipping operating on the Netherlands' extensive waterways. Which begs the question; did anyone in Britain ever use tokens for tax purposes? It has been done in other places at comparatively recent date, e.g. the state-issued aluminium pieces of the USA, which are presumably early 20th century.



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John Bromley has kindly replied to my request for identification about the various birds depicted in the type 18 article {LTT_13, Apr 2006}. He thinks that several of them depict doves, particularly Figs.4-6, and comments:

"The dove is a common symbol of the Church being used to denote peace. Could these have links to monasteries and the like – it would be interesting to know where the majority are found in relation to ecclesiastical sites. Likewise, most large houses kept dove cotes and these were a prized building."

Fig.3 is clearly a swan, concerning which John remarks:

"Swans are owned by the Crown so have links to royalty. Could these have been used by royalty on their estates to ensure some sort of anonymity?."

The appearance of hens, geese and the like which provided either direct or indirect edible produce might possibly indicate some sort of farmer's or market token, but as to small birds and waders..! Perhaps they ate a greater variety of bird in those days; or perhaps there is no reason at all, and they are just issuers' choice of artwork. Some useful clues here, nevertheless, as to what type of establishment to go looking for in the history of your neighbourhood if you find pieces with certain birds depicted.

Classification System: Types 28 and 32 still to come shortly, but are held over this month because of the amount of correspondence received and number of new pieces reported.