

Trading Places

The Gray's Inn Gate Neighbourhood

The newly christened Lady Hale Gate has been a way into the Inn since the last decade of the 16th century, when land abutting High Holborn was purchased by the Inn from Mr Fulwood, the access route laid out, and 'thereuppon ... erected a fayre gate, and a gatehouse, for a more convenient and more honourable passage in the high street of Holborne'. Thereafter, this access route into the Inn teamed with commerce in the 1600s and 1700s. Indeed, there were shops on both sides of the passage way as late as 1770, when the Inn ordered the shops to be demolished and a west side route paved.

Trade tokens

We can begin to know something of the businessmen (and woman!) of this passageway from the 'trade tokens' they have left behind. Trade tokens had existed since the medieval period, but in the turbulent years surrounding the English Civil War, which culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649 and Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth, England's official coinage was in total disarray.

While the wealthy could use credit, everybody else needed another way to do business. So traders, now unencumbered by the centuries old royal prerogative of the right to issue money – pressed their own farthing, half-penny, or penny tokens to give as small change. Tokens could be spent locally, not just in the business premises of the person that had issued them, but other businesses accepted tokens issued by people they knew and trusted to honour its value. In London alone, over 4,000 trade token variations were created in the 1660s.

Most trade tokens were made of copper – but brass, lead, pewter, and even leather was used. Most were round in shape, but squares, diamonds, hearts and octagons also circulated. The design on the faces of the tokens was a matter of great pride amongst the issuers, who employed professional engravers – even engravers from the Mint! Trade tokens generally included the names, initials (sometimes along with the initials of their wife, too) and symbols of these business people, as well as the location (often spelt phonetically and in a variety of ways

due to the low literacy level). For example, for the traders of Gray's Inn Gate, their efforts at spelling the location of their shops are endearing: 'by grasing gate'; 'NEER GRAYES IN GATE'; 'AGAINST – GRAIS INN GATE'; 'AT GRASEIN GATE'; and, finally, the oh so close: 'GRAYS INN GATE' (to be fair, the possessive apostrophe was still novel in the 1600s).

The Crown began to produce farthings again in 1672, and a proclamation banned the private issuing of trade tokens. However, further proclamations issued in 1673 and 1674 suggest that tokens continued to circulate, showing that locally made, reputation-backed currency served a valuable purpose in London's economy in the Restoration years. In the 20th century, the British born US diplomat Raymond Henry Norweb, along with his wife Emery May, collected over 13,000 trade tokens during their lives, resulting in the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, Norweb tokens series, published in eight parts between 1984 and 2011. Categorised geographically, the 'Norweb cataloguing' system records from B1233 to B1239a issuers of trade tokens from 'Gray's Inn Gate (Holborn)'.

William Place

Perhaps unsurprisingly, with law being a profession that still today, and much to the chagrin of judges the length of the country, produces copious correspondence, a prominent trader at Gray's Inn Gate was a 'WILLIAM PLACE', with his token emblazoned on the reverse with 'FOR POST LETTERS'. On the obverse of the token is a picture of a man on a horse, with a post bag slung jauntily behind him, and a bugle horn lifted to his lips in his other hand. The horse's front hooves are raised and there is a general sense of haste and motion conveyed by the image. (See the illustration opposite).

The following advertisement appeared in the *Mercurius Publicus Comprising the Sum of Forraign Intelligence*, No 17, 25th April – 2nd May 1661:

'Advertisement from His MAJESTY'S Post-office:

All gentlemen and others are desir'd to take notice that the Post-Office hath been abused by severall persons, who have falsely pretended themselves to be appointed to receive Letters from the Post-Office,



William Place's token.

and have exacted a penny a letter above the due post, alledging it to be for carrying the same to the Office, and some such persons have also destroyed many letters to game the post to themselves.

And to prevent the like abuses his Majesties Post-Master generall hath appointed the persons hereafter named at his own charge who have given security and voluntary Oath for their faithfullnesse to receive all Letters in their respective places for the Post-office, viz. ... Holborn. Mr. Place , Stationer at Grays-Inn-gate.'

Obviously, the practice of false post masters continued to plague the land in the early years of the Restoration, as another advertisement appeared two years later again in the *Mercurius Publicus* and also in the *Kingdom's Intelligencer* in June 1663:

'These are to give notice to all persons concerned, that the persons hereunder named are appointed to receive all Letters that shall be brought unto them, to be sent by Post into any part of his Majesties Dominions of England, Scotland, and Ireland, or the parts beyond the Seas by the foreign Posts, without taking enny reward for their pains, other than the allowed rate for post of such Letters as are to

be paid for at the Office; the said persons so appointed receiving Salaries for such their service, and having given Security for the faithful performance of their duties every Post-night. That is to say: ... Mr. William Place, Stationer at Greys-Inne-gate. And all gentlemen are earnestly desired to cause their Letters to be delivered at the aforesaid places, each Post-night, before ten of the clock at the furthest.'

From a notice for August 1662, it is not clear if Mr Place was also a trusted lost property bureau for the members of the Inn too, or perhaps had actually been somewhat negligent in performing his duties:

'Lost, August 18, 62, in the morning, between Gray's-Inne and the Temple, three Silver Seals, enclosed one in the other, if any one has taken them up, and will deliver them to Mr. Place, a Stationer at Gray's-Inne-Gate, who will give a further description of them, shall be well rewarded for his pain.'

Mr Place did not just deliver your post (or lose it as the case may be), his description in the above advertisements as a 'stationer' means that he could also provide the pen and parchment, as a lawyer may need for writing a letter or legal brief. The term 'stationer' was also synonymous with bookseller in this period.

In another advertisement in March 1662, Mr Place is advertised as a supplier of Mr Theophilus Buckworth's, 'so famous Lozanges or pectoralls approved for the cure of consumptions, coughs, catharrhs, astmas, hoarsnesse, and all other diseases incident to the Lungs'; and in the *Kingdom's Intelligencer* in the June of the same year, the following was 'only to be had at Mr. William Places, at Graye's-Inn gate, Holborne':

'Most excellent and approved Dentifrices to scour and cleanse the teeth, making them white as Ivory, preserve them from the Tooth ach, so that being constantly used, the parties are never troubled with the Tooth-ach, to fasten the Teeth, sweeten the breath, and preserve the gums and mouth from Cankers and impostumes, and being beaten to powder, and taken a dram at a time in wine, or other convenient Liquor, is a speedy remedy for any Flux, or looseness of the belly.'

If you consider that the skill set of a barrister, then as now, is not just persuasive written advocacy, but also excellence in oral advocacy, then the energetic and entrepreneurial Mr Place, in offering throat lozenges and assisting in oral hygiene, alongside his stationer's and posting services, perhaps becomes a little less incongruous.

Joseph Higgs

After a hard day in court or toiling in chambers, the members of Gray's Inn may also have liked to stop at 'JOSEPH HIGGS. CONFECTIONER', with his shop 'AGAINST. GRAIS. INN. GATE. IN. HOLBORN'. At that time, a confectioner would have meant a purveyor of candies, bonbons, light pasty, and that most exotic of New World produce – chocolate. Mr Place's supplying of toothpaste was in no doubt somewhat symbiotic on his neighbour Mr Higgs' supplying of sugary treats.

Mr Higgs makes an appearance in the court records for 1679, where he was summoned at the Middlesex Session of 28th April of that year to answer for 'being a reputed papist'. He appeared and was redelivered to his bail, whereas his wife, Anne Higgs, failed through illness to appear and was held over to the next Great Session of the Peace. His likely kinsmen were not so fortunate though. Ellin Higgs, wife of confectioner James Higgs, had been fined twenty pounds the previous month for 'not going to church, chapel, or any other usual place of common prayer' during the last month. Anti-Catholicism was a re-occurring theme of 17th century England, but was on the rise again in the 1670s due to the pro-French policies of Charles II's Government and the success of the Counter-Reformation on the Continent. In the minds of the English people, French power, Catholicism, political absolutism and the persecution of Protestants were all seen to be interchangeable parts of the same threatening force in Europe in the 1670s.

Mr Higgs' token had a fleur-de-lis and a rose as its symbols, which were also the likely symbols on the sign above his shop, so that those of a sweet toothed disposition, but a lack of literacy, could locate his shop with ease. The fact that the fleur-de-lis – then, as now – was closely associated with the French monarchy and Catholic saints might have been entirely incidental. As may be the fact that there was a Catholic Club frequented by conspirators in Fulwood's Rents at that time.

By January 1683, perhaps tiring of London life, Catholic persecution, and grown wealthy on the gluttony of Gray's Inn members, Mr Higgs,

for the consideration of £2,471, 6 shillings and 8 pence, entered into a indenture with Henry Stonor for Blount's Court in Rotherfield Peppard in Oxfordshire. The Stonors were a notable Catholic family in the county, and Blount's Court still stands today (although with much Georgian alteration) and, since 1975, has been used as a research centre for the chemical manufacturer, Johnson Matthey.

Other traders

Other traders issuing tokens at this time have left lighter marks on the historical record. For example, 'ELEANER WEAVER' issued 'A HALFE PENY' 'NEAR GRAIES INN GATE', but, as the coin only states on its flans its value and her initials 'E.W.', it is not clear what her particular trade was. The parish records for 1662 show that she was a widow of Robert Weaver, and it is likely she had inherited the business (whatever it was) from her husband.

'R.AT.GRASEIN.GATE.IN.HOLBVRN' was 'RICH. SUTTON. AT. YE. MARMADÉ'. The mermaid depicted on the token is 'in her vanity' (i.e. admiring herself in the mirror). Mermaids made picturesque swinging sign boards amongst hostelries and taverns, so it is likely that Richard Sutton was providing a much needed intoxicating drink to the members of the Inn, especially after the abstemious years under the Puritans earlier in the century. He may indeed even be the same 'RICHARD SVTTON AT YE KING', who also issued 'HIS HALF PENY' at a tavern on Old Bailey.

What is certain, though, is that these trade tokens breathe life back into their issuers and evoke the bustle of what is now Lady Hale Gate, where those traders once plied their trades. They are tangible slithers of history that have slipped across time, so that it is possible to hold in the palm of your hand something that was once passed from these traders and was pressed into the hand of our own Gray's Inn forbearers.

Master Lucinda Orr

