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INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION H51

Trade Tokens

Trade tokens were used as far back as the sixteenth century. Until the seventeenth century the Royal Mint issued only gold and silver coinage. This meant that there was a shortage of small-value coinage for poorer people. Even pennies were made of silver. James I (1603-25) was the first monarch to introduce copper coinage of low value. However, production of copper coins remained low and intermittent - none were produced during the Commonwealth or for the first ten years of the reign of Charles II. As more and more people were drawn into the cash economy, rather than relying on home-produced goods and food, this shortfall became acute. Even after copper coins became more widely available in the early eighteenth century there were often production and distribution problems. The Royal Mint was situated in London, but the coins it produced were slow to percolate through to the north and west of the country. Small employers responded to this shortage by producing their own tokens, such as these in this box.



1788 Anglesey Mines Halfpenny.
The Anglesey mines copper tokens are historically very important because they were the first tokens which were produced on a mass scale and whose usage spread far outside the locality in which they were produced. Thomas Williams owned copper mines in Anglesey, north Wales, and coin presses in Birmingham. He produced his first tokens in 1787. Altogether he used 300 tons of copper to produce thirty million tokens! The coins show a druid's head surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves and acorns on one side - Anglesey was a druid stronghold at the time of the Roman invasions - while the flowery cipher on the other side reads 'PMCo.', which stands for Parys Mines Company. Parys mountain is the site of a copper mine near Amlwch in Anglesey. Around the edge of the coins the words 'Payable in London , Liverpool or Anglesey' are usually inscribed though gradually the names of places where they could be used expanded - Bristol, Macclesfield, Redruth, Birmingham … The incredible success of this coinage forced the government, in 1797, to issue 1,000 tons of official copper coins.

1792 Birmingham Mining and Copper Company Halfpenny. The BMCC issued their first halfpenny in 1791. It shows a female figure of Commerce on one side and a stork perched on a cornucopia on the other. Three hundredweight of these coins were produced. The company had mines in Redruth, Cornwall, its smelting was done in Swansea and its products sold in Birmingham. These three places are named around the edge of the coins.

1813 Flint Lead Works Penny. Tokens make an interesting contrast with official coinage because of their witness to economic and social events, and because their imagery is so varied. Manufacturers emphasised the role of business in creating wealth and civility and often proudly display their factories and machines. This example shows the factory front with eight chimneys and a ship lying alongside a nearby quay.

Half Sovereign Token. This, in fact, isn't a trade token at all! In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many coin-like objects were produced to serve as gambling counters or gaming pieces, to keep score or act as tokens during card games and other games of chance. This is one of these. It is believed to have been issued from 1842 until the 1870s. This example has been drilled through so that it can be hung on a necklace or watch chain.

Sheffield Cutler's Hammer



Situated on the River Don, Sheffield is surrounded by seven hills that contain iron ore and by the sixteenth century had obtained a reputation for its production of knives, scissors, scythes and shears. These goods were made mainly in houses and small workshops. By the eighteenth century Sheffield also became an important coal mining area. In 1796 the population of the town was 9,095. In 1742 Thomas Boulsover, a Sheffield cutler, began to fuse a thin layer of silver to copper to produce what became known as Sheffield Plate. Other craftsmen in Sheffield began to use this method to produce tableware that looked like silver, at a fraction of its cost. In the nineteenth century Sheffield's name was known all across the British Empire as the country's premier producer of cutlery.

There were three stages in producing a knife blade, each of which was carried out by a separate craftsman. Firstly the forger hammered the hot steel into the desired shape; secondly the grinder gave the blade a sharp edge and polished the blade; thirdly, the cutler fitted the blade to a handle. This heavy hammer would have been used in the first of these stages.

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Table Knife and Fork



This knife and fork from Sheffield are made of steel and bone. The rivet in the centre is probably brass. They illustrate something of the skill that went into producing a fine set of cutlery. In the nineteenth century handles were made from a wide variety of materials - rosewood, ebony, beech wood, horn from various animals (including buffalo), bone, ivory, mother-of-pearl, porcelain, silver and gold. It is estimated that in 1887 72,000 stag horn handles were produced in Sheffield weekly. Ivory tended to be used with silver handles, so this bone and steel set are of slightly lower order! Still, they are finely crafted and the whole set must have been impressive.

George III and George IV Coins



It was during the reign of these two kings that many of the foundations of the Industrial Revolution were laid. However, this set of coins are included not just because they are memorials of an important period, but because they are some of the first coins to be produced by steam power.

Matthew Boulton was born in Birmingham in 1728. In 1762 he established the famous Soho Manufactory, two miles north of Birmingham, which undertook the manufacture of metal objects. In 1773, Boulton went into partnership with the inventor James Watt. During the next eleven years Boulton's factory produced and sold Watt's steam-engines. These machines were bought mainly by colliery owners who used them to pump water from their mines, but Boulton and Watt also turned their attention to the problems of the coinage, particularly copper coins that were being counterfeited. Boulton applied his engineering success to ways of producing coins efficiently using steam power. He proposed using a retaining collar to ensure a constant diameter, which would protect the design from wear, and also deter counterfeiting because of the heavy equipment needed to strike the coins. In 1797, Boulton was given a contract to supply 20 ton of twopences and 480 ton of pennies. These were the famous Cartwheel Twopences and Cartwheel Pennies of 1797 - one of each is included in this box. These magnificent and impressive coins weighed two ounces and one ounce respectively - the twopences are the largest and heaviest British coins ever issued. A further order for the same quantities was received the next year. Unfortunately for collectors, these were issued with the same date as the first issue - 1797. This was the first time Britannia had appeared on pennies or twopences.

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Northern Counties Union Railway Co. Share Certificate



Britain's railway system, which was crucial to the country's economic success during the nineteenth century, was built in a piecemeal way by numerous private investors. Most people have heard of some of the large companies such as the Great Western Railway Company or the London and North East Railway Company, but there were hundreds of smaller ventures. Quite often these railway companies were set up by a single entrepreneur who needed a line to service his factory. As the address on this certificate indicates, the NCUR Company was a Cumbrian venture. There were many other small railway companies in the area, with names like the Carlisle and Canonbie Railway and the Kendal and Windermere Railway. Not all of these companies managed to get their lines built. The Kendal and Windermere Railway was one of the first industrial enterprises to be stopped because of environmental protest. In 1844 the poet laureate William Wordsworth led a campaign against the company's proposals, arguing that bringing many travellers into the district would destroy the beauty they had come to enjoy. The NCUR is another enterprise which failed to get off the ground. One wonders whether James Gandy of Heaves Lodge, Kendal, got his money back? Gandy is a Cumbrian surname and James Gandy & Sons owned woollen mills in the area in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Pair of Clogs



Clogs were a very common form of footwear in the nineteenth century. Clogs began life in rural areas where the high wooden soles lifted the wearer out of the mud. The soles were generally made of alder wood, which was durable and water resistant. As people drifted into towns to seek work in factories they continued to wear their traditional footwear. The working day in many industrial towns began with the clatter of clogs on cobbles as crowds of workers hurried towards the factories. This pair is unusual. Most Victorian clogs are black, have metal studs on the base to stop the wood wearing away and don't have such complicated leather uppers. They may not be British.

The Times Engineering Supplement

This Times supplement dates from 1906. This issue focuses on the electrical engineering industry. It is clear from the pages of reports and adverts that even at this early date electricity as a source of industrial power was rapidly gaining ground.