

The TAMMS Journal

January/February, 2024, V64, N1 - Abridged



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Should be relevant to tokens, medals, or exonomia, and are accepted with the understanding that they are unrestricted from publication. Please indicate if the article has been previously published, and if so, where and when. Digital files are preferred via e-mail to gregsburns@gmail.com. The journal reserves the right to edit all items for form or content. As a guide to the general style typically preferred for use in our publication, please see the journal's website at www.tamsjournal.com.

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Author's Biography

Authors interested in providing the information may submit a brief biography (place of

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The TAMS Journal

The Bi-Monthly Publication of the Token and Medal Society

January-February, 2024: V64, N1 - Abridged



About the Cover

A gathering of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), a federation of local reading and debating clubs that in the decade following the French Revolution agitated for the democratic reform of the British Parliament. Radical democrat Thomas Spence was a member. In May 1794 charges of treason were laid against 30 leading radicals including Thomas Spence. The LCS's final rally pictured took place in Copenhagen Fields, October 26, 1795, with the society's dissolution by the turn of the coming century.

About Us

The TAMS Journal (Publication No. 599-550; ISSN 0039-8233) is the official publication of the Token and Medal Society. Published six times per year, this venerable magazine was first mailed to members in April 1961. A typical *TAMS Journal* issue includes articles, society news, hobby announcements, library updates, advertisements (every member is entitled to a free 25-word classified ad in each issue), and maverick token listings and attributions.

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Our Mission

The Token and Medal Society, Inc., is an educational and non-profit organization devoted to furthering the exonomia field consisting of all forms of tokens, medals, badges, and other items of a related nature. The aims of TAMS are:

- To promote and stimulate the study of tokens and medals,
- To cultivate fraternal collector relations,
- To encourage research and articles and recordings pertaining thereto,
- To disperse information and knowledge in a society's journal,
- To advance interest and prestige,
- To promote meetings at conventions,
- To promote and encourage distinct classifications at exhibits,
- To endeavor to determine values of rarities,
- To permanently record historical information relating to tokens and medals by publishing original works by members, and by reprinting old works not readily available to present day collectors.

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The Tokens of Thomas Spence

by Charles Catlett

One of the very first coins I ever purchased, around age 12, was a 1794 English halfpenny token with Lady Godiva on it. I remember getting off the escalator on the 3rd or 4th floor of Robinsons Department Store in downtown Los Angeles and turning right—directly into the store’s coin and stamp department. There was Lady Godiva in a glass display case for less than \$10! Wow—you sure couldn’t buy any 18th century American coins for that price. That was my introduction to Conder tokens—more than fifty years ago.

Most of you know Conder tokens—the provincial token-coinage of eighteenth-century Great Britain. They were produced in the 1790s to compensate for a shortage of mint-issued small change. Conder tokens were named after James Conder, who first cataloged them. An original copy of his book can still be found on occasion; I fortunately just purchased one. Perhaps the most popular reference book on Conder tokens is Dalton and Hamer’s book, first printed in 1910. I have the 1967 reprint of that, and all the D&H numbers listed here refer to that book. There are over 10,000 known varieties of Conder tokens.

I had purchased a few of these tokens over the years but got hooked on them when I saw a token in an auction catalogue featuring a snail. Who could resist such a charming token? Even though it had traces of “snail slime” (stable verdigris), the country scene with the tree, bridge, and snail was appealing. Most intriguing was the motto, “A SNAIL MAY PUT HIS HORNS OUT.” But it got even better, because the obverse was an advertisement for a coin dealer, Thomas Spence. A few of my Conder tokens were made by Spence, but those tended to be of a political nature. My snail didn’t seem to be political, but then, what did the motto mean?

This is where I jumped down a few rabbit holes in search of an answer and even wrote a paper for the Pacific Coast Numismatic Society about my search. As it is an English token, it made sense to look at English literature for a clue. It turns out there are a number of nursery rhymes featuring snails. Here are three of them:

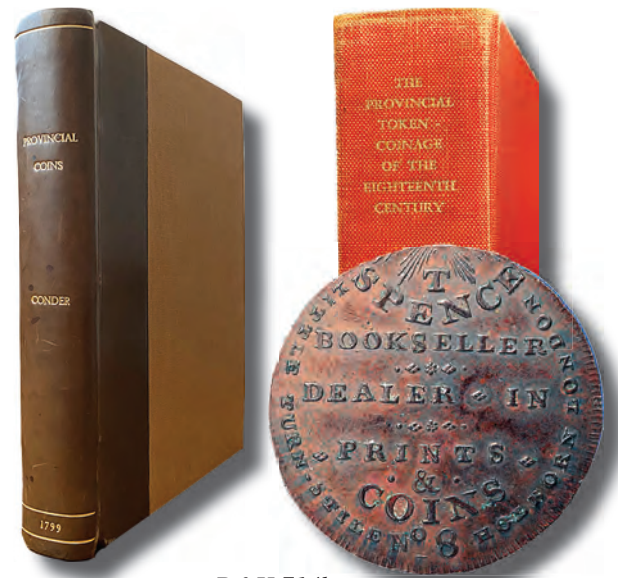
*Snail, snail,
Put out your horns,
I’ll give you bread,
And barleycorns.*

*Snail, snail, shoot out your horns;
Father and mother are dead;
Brother and sister are in the back yard,
Begging for barley bread.*

*Snail! snail!
Come out of your hole,
Or else I’ll beat you,
As black as a coal.*

There are variations on these rhymes from all over Europe, Russia, and China. Children played games of collecting and torturing the little critters while repeating the rhymes. Coaxing a snail to put out its horns was considered a good omen for health, the weather, and the harvest. After a long hard look, I was unable to find a French ditty about broiling them in garlic butter and eating them. But none of this seems typical of Thomas Spence.

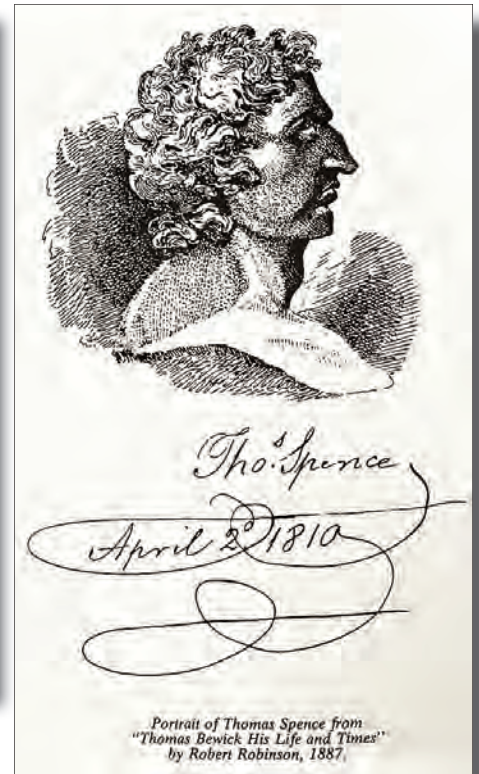
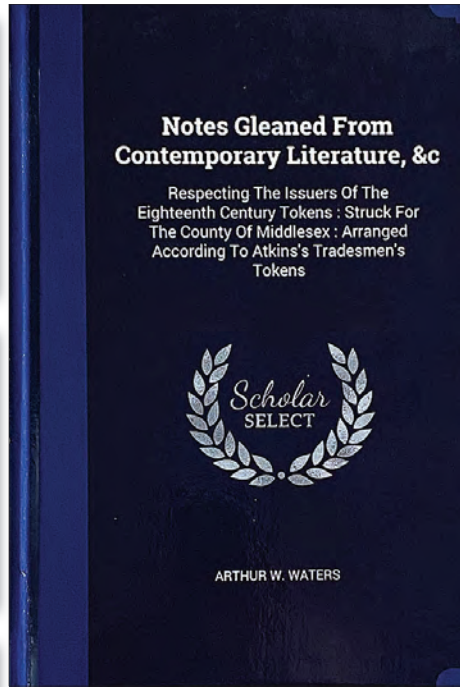
What seemed perhaps more relevant was what is found in the margins of English, French, and Flemish illuminated manuscripts toward the end of the 13th century. Beautifully drawn on the edges of these magnificent



D&H 714b



medieval pages are numerous colorful illustrations of knights fighting snails. And the snails usually have the upper...uh...horn. While no one knows with certainty what the scenes mean, one theory is that they reference the Lombards, a Germanic people who originated in Scandinavia and migrated south—eventually ruling much of Italy. They had been known for their ferocity in battle until encountering Charlemagne in 772 AD, when they panicked and ran. In the 13th century they became known as pawnbrokers and usurers—lenders of money at exorbitant rates. They were quite unpopular and viewed as cowards—people who might flee the lowly snail. Literature of the time often interchanged the terms “Lombard” and “usurer.” Could Thomas Spence have been exhorting the snail to fight usury?



We have a Lombard Street here in San Francisco. Unfortunately, the name Lombard has no link to San Francisco. San Francisco surveyor Jasper O'Farrell named the road after Lombard Street in Philadelphia. The Lombard Street in Philadelphia, which began as an alley in 1740, was named after Lombard Street in London. That Lombard Street was named after the Lombard moneylenders who occupied the street during the Renaissance.

I finally gave up searching random internet sites for a clue. Thanks to Allan Davisson, whose auction included my snail token, I was able to get information from the best source on the satirical tokens of Thomas Spence. It is a 1906 book by Arthur Waters that pulled information on eighteenth century tokens from then-contemporary literature. A modern reprint is readily available and was well worth the investment. Regarding the snail: "This curious design implied the snail can do as it likes; but the Englishman, under

the powers that were, at the end of the eighteenth century, could do nothing without coming within the clutches of the Law and tyranny of the private owners of the land. This is another of Spence's hits at landlordism."

So who was Thomas Spence? He was a man born in poverty, who struggled through life and died in poverty—but became one of the leading revolutionaries of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

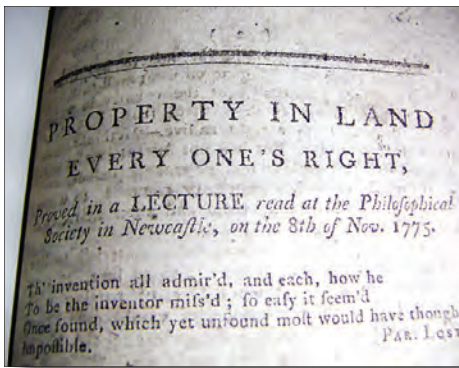
Spence's parents migrated from Scotland to Newcastle, where Thomas was born on June 21, 1750. His father Jeremiah, a poor hardware dealer, had nineteen children. His mother Margaret was his father's second wife. Thomas was only about five feet tall, had a limp and speech impediment, and was described variously as "simple," "sincere," "single-minded," "serious," "odd," and "querulous."

Spence had little formal schooling, though he learned to read the bible as a child, standing beside his father at a hardware stall in the Sandgate—a district near the river in Newcastle. Spence recalled that his father, a member of the Glasite church, not only made his sons read the Bible, but questioned them at the end of every chapter, a

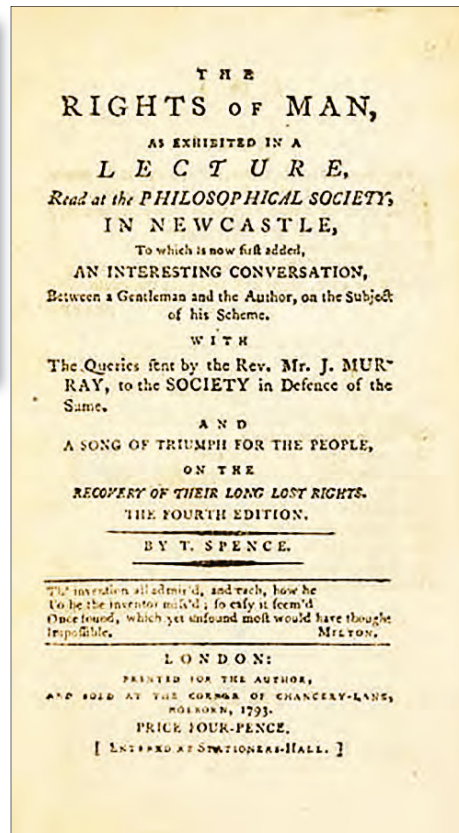
practice that taught Spence to question and reason. The Glasites, a small sect which splintered from the Presbyterian church, preached, and to some extent practiced, "the community of goods and the equality of man." But Spence's childhood mentor, Rev. James Murray (1732-1782) taught Spence to observe the contrast between biblical teachings and social reality.

In 1771, in one of the Enclosure Acts, the government attempted to "enclose," for private use, a part of Newcastle Town Moor, which had traditionally been used by the entire community for farming and grazing. The community fought back, and in 1773 the "enclosure" was overturned. This populist uprising is thought to have inspired a 1775 lecture Spence gave at the Newcastle Philosophical Society.

The lecture was originally entitled "Property in Land, Every One's Right." Spence printed it and sold it as a pamphlet. Later printings used the title "The Rights of Man," predating Thomas Paine's 1791 booklet of the same name. For presenting this lecture, and for immediately publishing it



Original edition of Spence's printing.



and “hawking it about like a halfpenny ballad,” the Philosophical Society did him “the honour” of expelling him.

The pamphlet first set out Spence's lifelong “Plan”: The end of the aristocracy; the elimination of landlords; communal land ownership; universal suffrage (including women's suffrage); a “social guarantee” to provide income for those unable to work; and the right of children to be free from abuse and poverty.

Spence's views also cost him his teaching career. Though Spence had learned his father's net-making trade, he started as a clerk to one Mr. Hedley, “a respectable smith,” and then from 1776 to 1779 taught at the Free Grammar School. From 1779 to 1887 Spence taught at Sandgate Chapel School, but after the school claimed his views led to a decline in enrollment, he was fired.

Sadly, Spence's views on education were also unpopular. He had developed a new phonetic alphabet and pronunciation system, which he called Spensonian, designed to help the illiterate learn to read and write and pro-

nounce words “correctly,” disguising class distinctions. He published several of his papers in the script. Though it never took hold, modern linguists have noted it would have been a very good system, and many dictionaries adopted his practice of including the phonetic pronunciation of words before the definition.

Spence's 1777 marriage to Christian Elliott produced a son, William, in 1781, but the marriage was troubled, and Spence moved to London around 1791 with his son. His wife died, reportedly of cancer, sometime shortly afterwards. And shortly after that, Spence married a servant girl to whom

he proposed at first sight when he saw her cleaning the steps of a house. She accepted immediately. Until recently, she was nameless, and myth had it that they married the day they met. Further research has revealed her name, Ann Lambole, and the fact that they were properly married after



“banns,” the tradition of announcing their engagement publicly once a week for three weeks before the wedding.

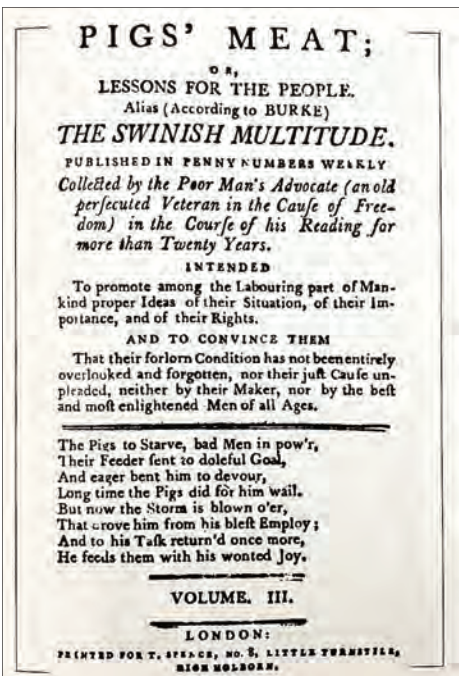
She agreed to marry Spence to punish a lover for his behavior. Soon after, she deserted him and sailed off with a sea captain to the West Indies and eloped (apparently while Spence was in prison in 1794). Upon return to England, she went back to Spence, who forgave her—but she turned out to be harsh-tempered and overbearing. “For the safety of his health and property he was at length compelled to dismiss her from the house.”

Meanwhile, Spence persisted in his radical views. In London in 1792 he opened a stall in Chancery Lane as a book and saloop (hot sassafras with milk and sugar) seller. He began publishing political broadsides and selling radical pamphlets, which occasionally led to commotion around the stall between supporters and detractors. Some of his detractors sent thugs over to the stall to stir up a commotion. Late that year, he was arrested for the first—but not the last—time, for “seditious libel.” Shortly after his release on Christmas Eve, his landlord gave him three months' notice to quit the stall. Spence was soon arrested and released again, and in March 1793 he moved his business to a shop at No. 8 Little Turnstile, High Holborn, London—a short walk from where the British Museum was and is still located.

Spence called this shop “The Hive of Liberty” and from it he became a prominent radical bookseller and writer. Undaunted by his arrests, he started a penny periodical, initially called *A Pennyworth of Pigs' Meat* and later, simply, *Pigs' Meat or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, a reference to the working class, who had been dubbed the “swinish multitude” by the conservative politician Edmund Burke. He printed 1,500 copies each week. He continued to back women's suffrage, wrote on the rights of children, and held radical meetings in his shop. He spent a large portion of the 1790s and early 1800s in and out



Above the general alleyway of “Little Turnstile,” and below, the door of #8 now shared with #7.



of court or prison. A 1793 report on sedition in London described him this way: “This man lives in the dirtiest poverty, but his shop is decorated with lines in prose and verse, expressing determination to carry on this traffic [political pamphleteering] in spite of the laws of magistracy.” In 1794, the English crown, increasingly concerned about sympathy with the French and American revolutions, suspended habeas corpus. This time, Spence was jailed and held without trial for seven months.

This experience was immortalized by Spence in a half penny and a farthing token, two of the many tokens he made as he exploited the craze of collecting privately issued tokens. Tokens would seem to have been an ideal medium for Spence: Minting them and dealing in them, he could advance his political ideas and/or publicize his shop and his token business.

The token shown here, Middlesex D&H 743, is a good example. The obverse features a coining press; the reverse is a play on words for his business location, using his address at No. 8 Little Turnstile. This example has a great die break on it as well, which is fairly common with Conder tokens.

Spence’s tokens were minted mostly from 1794 to 1796. There is no evidence that he owned a coining press. But tokens were manufactured in the quantities ordered by Spence, dies were produced for him, they were used under his control on blanks obtained by him, and the tokens were sold by him. He was even known to fling his political tokens from his windows to passers-by. The sources of his planchets are unknown. It seems he drew from a variety of sources, because there are noticeable

variations among the planchets. The halfpenny planchets vary in diameter from 28 to 30 mm, and while some are thick enough to allow for edge lettering, some are considerably thinner.

Spence published a handbill listing 20 obverse and 20 reverse dies that could be ordered paired in any combination. A correspondent for *Gentleman’s Magazine* wrote of seeing “many thousands of the tokens lying in heaps [at Spence’s shop] and selling at what struck me to be very great prices.” Spence was fortunate to have the talents of Charles James as a die engraver. Spence had the ideas, the bitterness, the satirical imagination, but it was the vivid imagery of James that made these pieces stand out and led to their enduring popularity. One author described the designs as “miniature political poems.”

In 1795 Spence published *The Coin Collector’s Companion being a description of modern Political and other copper coins*. He supplemented this with an index listing many of his own coins, which were indeed made in large numbers. Modern reprints of the

Companion do not, unfortunately, include the supplement with Spence’s tokens.

There were over 1,000 types of Conder tokens produced around London, and thousands more made throughout Britain.

One of the most prolific issuers was Gilbert Pidcock who owned a menagerie located on a major London thoroughfare and who minted tokens with a wide variety of animals—both imaginary and real. Peter Kempson in Birmingham and John Skidmore in London were also quite prolific in producing tokens—also aimed toward collectors. They often portrayed famous buildings. But politics was a common



D&H 743





Lot from Noonans Auction 165, December 2019.

theme of their tokens as well. It is likely that the workshop that minted Spence tokens also minted tokens for others, as some planchets with edge lettering meant for Spence became tokens produced for others.

Spence went bankrupt in late 1796, likely from the expense of large-scale token production and the costs of his frequent imprisonments. Spence's son William was also imprisoned once for selling his father's work. William died in 1797 at the age of 16. Spence moved to 9 Oxford Street that year, and sold his dies to John Skidmore, who continued the practice of combining dies at random, sometimes joining Spence's dies (engraved by James) with Skidmore's dies (engraved mostly by Benjamin Jacobs). This sometimes made nonsense of the tokens' political message.

Government repression eventually blocked radicals from all public organizing, so they resorted to chalking walls, popping into pubs to sing subversive songs, and countermarking circulating coins. Spence used a series of punches prepared by his friend Thomas Bewick to counterstamp slogans on circulating coins. There are 27 different punches known. He continued to use them at least through 1797.

Spence continued selling his propaganda from a closed barrow which he

pushed around the streets of London. In 1801 the Spencian Philanthropists formed, espousing his visions even as he continued to suffer imprisonment and business failure. Spence died unexpectedly September 8, 1814. The Spencian Philanthropists organized his funeral, which was attended by his many political admirers, in the graveyard of St. James' Chapel Burial Ground, Hampstead Road. His tokens were given away in the funeral procession.

Three years after Spence's death, an act of Parliament was passed prohibiting "All societies or clubs calling themselves Spencian or Spencian Philanthropists." It was the only political ideology ever expressly outlawed by the British Parliament.

It is interesting to note that Spence was not particularly popular among token producers of his time. This was both for his often-outrageous designs but also for his penchant to mix up multiple die combinations. Often Spence's obverse and reverse depictions would have no relation to each other. Perhaps this gets to the heart of Spence's propagandizing token project: He was inviting those who found a token in their pocket change to make out a relation between its two sides, and thus to learn to think for themselves about politics. Ironically,

John Skidmore, who held the opposite political views of Spence, purchased all of Spence's dies and then proceeded to mule those with his own dies.

In 1969 the British Numismatic Society published an article by R. H. Thompson (available online) called "The Dies of Thomas Spence (1750-1814)." It lists all his known and suspected die attributions and combinations, the three variations of edge lettering (when used), and the 27 different counterstamps Spence used on circulating coins. This article, along with the book by Dalton and Hamer, are probably the best sources of information on Spence tokens, though there are a few tokens listed in Dalton and Hamer that probably were not produced by Spence. There is still some debate about the origin of some dies attributed to Spence, even after exhaustive comparison with contemporary catalogs of his time and other research. We simply may never quite be sure about some of these—but it sure is fun to speculate.

A review of the Spence tokens from my collection is always fun and thought provoking.

Middlesex Halfpenny D&H 676 is the first Spence token listed in Dalton and Hamer. It is considered the first token Spence produced. It commemorates his infamous 1775 lecture and the publication of his Plan. It predates the "token mania" and is thus quite rare. It is the only known variety of his own tokens which he marked with countermarks (at least three of those are known). The sun design on the obverse predates a Spence publication of 1796 entitled "The Meridian Sun," which is a discussion of his Rights of Man speech. The reverse features what he likely envisioned from his Plan: a cornucopia (plentiful food); an olive branch (peace), and the scales of justice. The word "millennium" in the reverse motto is used in the secular sense, as in "a period of happiness and benign government."

The second obverse die in the Dal-



D&H 676



Obv.: SPENCES GLORIOUS PLAN IS PAROCHIAL PARTNERSHIP IN LAND WITHOUT PRIVATE LANDLORDISM
 Rev.: THIS JUST PLAN WILL PRODUCE EVERLASTING PEACE AND HAPPINESS OR IN FACT THE MILLENIUM
 Counterstamps: THE LAND IS OURS
 LAND IN PARTNERSHIP

ton and Hamer book has a portrait of Spence, which was paired with several reverse dies. The portrait is accompanied by the motto T. SPENCE—7 MONTHS IMPRISONED FOR HIGH TREASON. The highlander on this example's reverse, D&H 683, honors the Scottish and Highland soldiers killed on the field of Fontenoy. It was his way of reaching out to any Scots sympathetic to his cause. It was said that one Highlander killed nine Frenchmen with his broadsword.

Spence also issued a farthing (quarter penny) with his image, D&H 1080. The motto reads: T. SPENCE A STATE PRISONER IN 1794. The reverse features a padlock with MUM above and 1796 below. This referred to the “gagging act” of 1795, also known as the Seditious Meeting Act. “Mum” is probably in reference to Shakespeare's verse in Henry VI, “Seal up your lips, and give no words, but—Mum!”

The padlock takes on more significance in D&H 752. The obverse features a Spaniel dog, representing the downtrodden Englishman of the day—a slave to taxation, unfair laws, and what Spence felt was little better than slavery—MUCH GRATITUDE BRINGS SERVITUDE. The FREEBORN ENGLISHMAN on the reverse, with fettered legs, hands tied behind his back, and a padlock through his tongue, again refers to the “Gagging Act”. It was passed to deal with seditious meetings, writings, and speeches against the government, particularly when attempting

to advocate a reform to obtain just representation of the people in the House of Commons.

Spence issued a dozen different tokens advertising for his younger brother, Jeremiah, who remained in Newcastle. They all have a common obverse featuring a keelman in his best clothes, which would have been a flat

D&H 683



D&H 1080



D&H 752



hat, blue coat, yellow waistcoat, slate gray trousers, and buckled shoes. The motto lets us know that Jeremiah was a slop seller. Slop is an old English term for cheap, ready-made, and often loose-fitting clothing, especially sailors' trousers. His business was on the quayside in Newcastle, most likely selling seaman's clothing. The reverse

Factoid...

Spence died in September 1814. He was buried by “forty disciples” who pledged that they would keep his ideas alive. They did this by forming the Society of Spencean Philanthropists. The men met in small groups all over London. These meetings mainly took place in public houses and they discussed the best way of achieving an equal society.

Much of the activity of his followers after Spence's death evolved into various violent attempts at revolution, which the government sought to severely put down.



on this example of Newcastle D&H 5: NOTED ADVOCATES FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN, includes three Thomases: Sir Thomas More, a noted renaissance humanist; Thomas Paine, who advocated for revolutionary causes in America and Europe; and Spence himself. Another reverse of this token, Newcastle D&H 14, has the motto “AFTER THE REVOLUTION” and shows three men dancing and a fourth eating freely under a tree. The design illustrates the “freedom” that was to be Englishmen’s after the reforms proposed by Spence. There is one Newcastle variety, perhaps more in line with Jeremiah being a clothier, that shows the sailor on the obverse and the gallant garb on Scotland on the reverse.

Another token with a clothing theme features a Bridewell Boy: Middlesex D&H 708. Conder describes the subject as a “Charity Boy” in his 1799 book—a homeless boy. In 1553 Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London, convinced the young King Edward VI to grant his palace at Bridewell to the Lord Mayor of London as a place for punishment of “disorderly women,” and as a charitable institution (or school) for the training and education of poor children. The contemporary word for a charitable institution was “hospital.” Bridewell Prison and Hospital was governed jointly with Bethlehem Hospital for the insane—better known as Bedlam. Bridewell became an infamous prison. The school associated with Bridewell understandably moved to Witley and changed its name



D&H 5



D&H 14



in the 1800s and continues to this day. Bridewell Boys wore a blue uniform and white hats. At one time, they fought fires, but that ended in 1790 due to friction with the Insurance Officers’ own firemen.

Then there are the portraits featured on this halfpenny, Middlesex D&H 724. The obverse features a “Blue-Coat” boy (from Christ’s Hospital School) in a cassock. These “charity boys” were reportedly foundlings—abandoned infants raised by others at the school. The obverse shows one of the scholars of the world-famous Christ’s Hospital, opened in 1552 by founder King Edward VI. The reverse features a collegian “Westminster Scholar” in gown. Westminster School dates at least from the early 14th century. These two dies (as well as the Bridewell Boy previously) are doubted by some to have been made by Spence.

One more token with an outfit is Middlesex D&H 857a, featuring “A TRUEHEARTED SAILOR”: a man wearing hat, waistcoat, jacket, and trousers while smoking a clay pipe. Of importance is that he is holding out a begging bowl. There was no pension available for disabled soldiers or sailors, so the sight of injured ex-servicemen



D&H 857a



D&H 708



D&H 724



would have been common. Spence draws attention to this plight with the man's previous courage serving his country versus his present need to beg in the streets. On the reverse, "WHEN THIS YOU SEE REMEMBER ME" was a favorite motto on pieces of sentimental pottery given as keepsakes by sailors to their wives and sweethearts. The crowned anchor with hearts likely has a deeper meaning. The Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand was the site of a dinner hosted by the Whig Club on February 4, 1795, to celebrate the acquittal (of treason) of Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall, and John Horne-Tooke.

Middlesex D&H 849 depicts how Spence saw things before his "revolution." It shows an emaciated man in prison, his ribs protruding, gnawing on a bone. The design was inspired by a description of the Bastille on the morning it was liberated. "ROUSE BRITANNIA" was described by Spence as "Britannia confounded and the cap of liberty falling to the ground." It has also been interpreted as Spence's wish for the apathetic British public to wake up, though Britannia is not depicted as being very sleepy here.

Middlesex D&H 732 depicts two different threats to liberty. The obverse depicts a sailor seizing a landsman, which referred to the Royal Navy's system of conscripting men by the feared "press gang." A "press gang" would snatch men off commercial vessels or

the street and force them onto naval ships to serve as sailors. The reverse features a North American Indian holding an ax and a bow. In one issue of *Pigs' Meat*, Spence holds an imaginary conversation with the Indian, who says "Many colonies of Christians have established themselves in various parts of America, and carry on here, as in their original country, the iniquitous traffic in the soil. They expel, or exterminate us, the natives, because we will not work, or pay rent to

them, for living in our own country. We free born Indians cannot submit to pay homage or rent to any man for leave to dwell upon the earth, though he would say God would have it so."

There were three Spence dies featuring *Pigs' Meat*. *Pigs' Meat* was published weekly in sequentially numbered editions of twelve pages each, selling for a penny. Published in 1793-1794, the 72 editions ran to three volumes each of 288 pages. It had extracts of radical writings from various authors as well as work by Spence himself. Some copies included a copperplate engraving very similar to the one which is on the token. The inscription on the plate reads:

"This is that matchless *Pig's Meat*,
So famous far and near.
Oppressors' hearts it fills with dread,

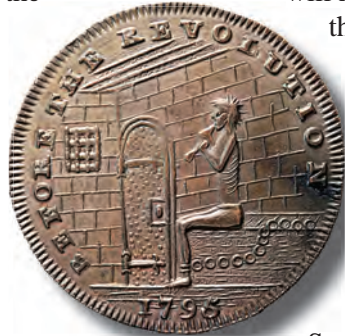
But Poor Men's hearts does cheer."

The first halfpenny token shown here is Middlesex D&H 842b. The obverse features a talking pig (!) announcing "Pigs meat Published



by T. Spence." The pig is trampling on the emblems of royalty, with a liberty cap above it. The reverse features the three advocates (three Thomases).

Middlesex D&H 1091 is a farthing with a reverse depicting a volume of *Pigs' Meat*. The obverse image is a cat with the motto IN SOCIETY LIVE FREE LIKE ME. Spence would take the cat as his coat of arms, because it could be stroked down, but would not suffer itself to be rubbed against the grain. When Spence was buried, his



D&H 849



D&H 732



D&H 842b



two favorite tokens were placed in his coffin: this one and his first one featuring "The Meridian Sun."

The other farthing token with *Pigs' Meat* is Middlesex D&H 1083. The reverse again shows a pig trampling on the emblems of royalty with a liberty cap above. The obverse depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and has



D&H 1091



human race. He stated that “Abel seemed to resemble the commonalty, Cain the nobility.” Cain is the symbol for land seizures and hence suppression of the landless. The reverse “END OF



D&H 720



D&H 1083



OPPRESSION” features two men dancing around a bonfire of land charters or title deeds—freeing them from the oppression of landlords.



That same reverse is used as an obverse on Middlesex



D&H 814



D&H 820. The reverse features a caduceus, a symbol of commerce, with a crown at the “top” and a Phrygian (liberty) cap at the “bottom.” The caduceus is horizontal, not in the usual vertical position, representing equality in power and commerce between the crown and the people.

reverse of this token has a threatening image directed at the Crown and Tory politicians. In the background a cock stands on a hill defiantly crowing at a dismayed lion in the foreground. The cock represents the French revolution and the direct threat it posed to the English crown, represented by the lion. It is a warning to the crown to be afraid of the power of the common man, for they may revolt at any moment, as the motto states LET TYRANTS TREMBLE AT THE CROW OF LIBERTY. That die was used for nine different token combinations.



D&H 820



Spence displayed his dislike of landlords and taxation with the obverse on D&H 720. It features an ass carrying

two pairs of paniers (baskets)—the lower two labeled rents, the upper two labeled taxes—saying “I WAS AN ASS TO BEAR THE FIRST PAIR.” The motto originated with an engraving he published in 1796. The ass declares: “I’m doomed to end-less toil and care / I was an ass to bear the first pair.” It refers to the public bearing the burden of both high rents and taxes. This die was used for eight different token combinations. The

complex meanings. In one sense, they represent the innocence of earthly paradise and the peoples’ natural rights. But they also recall the Fall of Man and Milton’s words, which are used in the legend, affirming that the desirable state is social equality.

Middlesex D&H 814 is one of Spence’s heavy-hitting political tokens. The obverse features Cain standing over a slain Abel. Spence felt this was the start of oppression in the

complex meanings. In one sense, they represent the innocence of earthly paradise and the peoples’ natural rights. But they also recall the Fall of Man and Milton’s words, which are used in the legend, affirming that the desirable state is social equality.



D&H 884



D&H 878



features the motto A FRIEND TO PEACE AND LIBERTY, with two shields resting at the base of a tree: One features a pole topped with a liberty cap crossed with a banner, the other features a sword pointing to one arm of a balance scale. This reverse die was engraved by Benjamin Jacobs, who produced many dies, mostly for John Skidmore. This was a Skidmore die, muled with an obverse die of Spence.



D&H 772a



Spence did honor several other men who fought for causes close to his heart. DH 865a features John Thelwall, who was very active in the formation of various political societies in 1790s England. For this he was tried for high treason but not convicted. The reverse "LIBERTAS" die was only used once, paired with this obverse. There is some doubt that the reverse was a Spence die, though the motto would be fitting for his goals. It is the only Latin motto on a Spence token.



D&H 865a



John Horne Tooke was one of the most effective English agitators for

parliamentary reform and freedom of dissent in the late 18th century. He was jailed for seditious libel in 1787. He was also committed to the Tower of London with a charge of high treason in 1794. The trial for that took place at The Old Baily—England's most important Crown Court (the subject of the reverse on D&H 878 seen here). He was acquitted. Spence matched his portrait with ten other dies.

The Pandora's Breeches die also paired with Horne Took on Middlesex D&H 841 is a more complicated design. The Pandora of ancient mythology had a box filled with every imaginable kind of misery and evil, though in the bottom of the box was the gentle frame of Hope. Pandora's Breeches refers to an attempt to burn down the House of Commons in 1792. A pair of breeches stuffed with combustibles was found smoldering above a "water closet" in the wooden rafters of the building. Because the breeches were made of wool, they would have continued smoldering until finally catching fire

D&H 841



and burning down the building later that night. Fortunately, someone saw smoke early enough to put the fire out. One can imagine all hell breaking loose if the Houses of Parliament had burned down in that fire. Below, a head with a dagger through the neck has been severed from the body of a serpent. The portrait of the head belongs to Joseph Priestley, who was incorrectly thought to have been the arsonist. Priestley famously discovered oxygen and several other gases, became a Christian minister of the Unitarian persuasion, and later in life focused his support for the French and American Revolutions. For these later two pursuits he was essentially chased out of town (London) in 1794, moving to America. This die is listed as being made by Spence but probably was made by Peter Skidmore, who had political leanings opposite to Thomas Spence.

Next is the interesting case of Lord George Gordon, son of the 3rd Duke of Gordon. The halfpenny shown here is Middlesex D&H 782. He is mostly renowned for giving his name to the Gordon Riots in 1780 (to which the date on the token refers). On the 2nd



D&H 782



D&H 804c



of June he headed a crowd of some 50,000 people and marched to the Houses of Parliament to present a petition against Catholic Emancipation. They threatened to storm Parliament, but then dispersed and over the next few days burnt down Catholic chapels, several prisons, and even attempted to storm the Bank of England. Eventually the army was brought in and some 450 people were killed or wounded before peace was restored. For his role in instigating the riots Gordon was charged with high treason and sent to the Tower of London, although a few months later he was acquitted on the grounds that he had “no treasonable intent.” In 1787 he converted to Judaism taking on the name of Yisrael bar Avraham Gordon and went to live in Birmingham. The next year he was sentenced to five years in Newgate prison for defaming the French ambassador, and whilst there conducted the life of an Orthodox Jew—he grew his beard to a long length (as pictured on the token), and put on his Jewish ornaments daily. He fasted when the Jewish law prescribed it, and likewise celebrated the Jewish holidays. He was supplied kosher meat and wine, and Shabbat Challos (Sabbath bread) by prison authorities. They also permitted him to have a minyan on the Jewish Sabbath and to nail a mezuzah on the door of his cell. The Ten Commandments were also hung on his wall. Shortly after his release, as a model and pious prisoner, he contracted typhoid, which had been raging through Newgate, and died. He was not buried in a Jewish cemetery though. Because he had been excommunicated, he was buried in the

“detached” Anglican burial ground of St. James’ Piccadilly.

Spence joined two heads on Middlesex D&H 804c. William Pitt is on the left, in tears; Charles Fox is on the right, laughing. Fox, the leader of the opposition, is very gleeful because Pitt is unhappy at his unpopularity and inability to control “sedition and revolt”—or as Spence would have it “liberalism and republicanism.” The inscription *QUIS RIDES* means “who are you laughing at?” Prime Minister Pitt increased taxes to pay for the war against France and cracked down on radicalism. Fox supported American patriots and the French Revolution and thought King George III was a tyrant. He was also an abolitionist and supported religious minorities—clearly someone Spence admired. The Janiform head might, however, be equating the two politicians, as in Spence’s line: “Whate’er your parties ye may call, You’re all alike, so d’mn you all.” (from *Pigs’ Meat*). The meaning of the heart in the hand on the reverse isn’t clear. A hint may be in a line of one of Spence’s songs: “Then let us all join heart in hand . . . To haste this golden age’s reign.”

Another two-headed image is on Middlesex D&H 797. Here the head of King George III is conjoined with the head of an ass. It gives you a sense of how Spence felt. The motto “A Million Hogg” refers to the “swinish multitude,” as they had been called. The guinea pig is George III, as you



D&H 797



can see from his image on the gold guinea.

And speaking of asses, the Middlesex D&H 1112 farthing depicts the British public as a bull with the head of an ass being ridden by King George III—an emblem of state oppression. Spence got the idea for this design from a contemporary rhyme:

*John once was deem’d John Bull;
But now, alas,
His spirit gone,
He’s mildly nam’d, Jack Ass.*



D&H 1112

Perhaps one of the strangest designs of Spence is seen here on this farthing, D&H 1100. The man walking on his hands and feet refers to public servility to unfair and unjust laws: “IF THE LAW REQUIRES IT WE WILL WALK THUS”. Spence’s opinion was that the dispirited populace would simply obey any law. The reverse again shows the public (with the head of an ass) being ridden by King George III.

These next two farthings show just how much Spence disliked Prime Minister Pitt. A gallows with a hanging corpse, a ladder still in position; a spear, fetters, and headsman’s axe on the ground. The identity of the man hanging is easily figured out. THE END OF P*T with an “eye” where a letter “I” should be was a way to state that it was Pitt without spelling out the proper name—reportedly to protect Spence from more charges of treason. The conjoined heads of Pitt and the Devil (EVEN FELLOWS) on D&H 1098 confirm the sentiment, as does SUCH IS THE REWARD OF TYRANTS. Spence reportedly had the inspiration for the EVEN FELLOWS design from the following verse entitled THE ALLIES:

*Satan, as our devines admit,
 Inflicts our penal evil;
 We thence infer that Master Pitt
 Is colleagues with the Devil!
 And, when they both their work
 have done,
 And war no longer rages,
 There’s One above the silver moon
 Will pay them both their wages.*

There are a number of “hanging man” tokens attributed to Thomas Spence by Dalton and Hamer, like this example of Middlesex D&H 831. It certainly was not produced by Spence. The obverse features a man hanging from a gibbet, with a church in the background. The motto END OF



D&H 1098



D&H 1100



PAIN is a play on words suggesting a rather extreme way to end the influence of Thomas Paine. There are several reverses used with this obverse image. One reverse has the motto MAY THE KNAVE OF JACOBINS NEVER GET A TRICK.

The Jacobin Club was the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, a group of pro-French Revolution political activists. The motto referred to Paine as the knave or spokesperson for them. As in the card game whist, to never get a trick is to never be successful. It’s hard to believe Spence would have engraved this sentiment. Another reverse features an open book entitled *The Wrongs of Man, Jan 21, 1793*. Paine’s book (*The Rights of Man*) was published in 1791. King Louis XVI of France was executed Jan 21, 1793. The token implied that Paine’s ideas lead to the death of Louis XVI in France and would do the same to the king of England if they were followed. Thomas Spence admired Thomas Paine and would not have issued a token condemning Paine for his writing. A similar token with three men hanging, the “Three Thomases,” was also not made by Spence. They all probably came from Peter Skidmore, who had purchased all of Spence’s dies.

One final variety of tokens attributed to Spence was sometimes made by others (see page



D&H 1111



following this one). His two farthings shown feature an abolitionist image of a kneeling black slave in chains with clasped hands and the motto AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER. The design was by Spence’s friend Thomas Bewick (who produced Spence’s counterstamp punches) for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in 1787 by Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp. The image first appeared on porcelain from the factory of Josiah Wedgwood, a noted abolitionist. In 1788 a consignment of these medallions was sent to Benjamin Franklin and spread among US abolitionists—worn in jewelry and hair ornaments and set into snuff boxes. An interesting note about the image is that the upper classes typically didn’t kneel to pray at the time these tokens were minted. The image appealed to the white European desire to convert slaves to Christianity and white European ideas about humility. These images are now seen by some as disempowering to black people, compared to other images created during the same era by black artists—which showed standing slaves breaking their own chains.

This die was matched with six other Spence farthing dies. But there



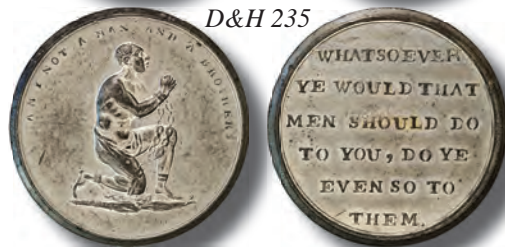
D&H 831



Wedgewood, 1787.



D&H 1118



D&H 235



D&H 1089



D&H 1038a



D&H 482

were several penny and halfpenny tokens with the same image produced by others. They are listed in Dalton and Hamer as being part of a political and social series of tokens. The penny-sized tokens came in copper, white metal (like the one shown), and brass, though some were gilt. Some have the tiny initials “TW” suggesting the diemaker was Thomas Wyon, who engraved medals with his brother Peter in Birmingham in the 1790s before becoming chief engraver of seals at the Tower Mint in London. It is not clear who engraved dies for the halfpenny pieces, though some consider them to be the work of William Lutwyche—a well-known diesinker who also dabbled with counterfeits. Shown also is an example of one of his advertising farthing tokens.

There are several other Thomas Spence tokens with political themes and delightful imagery that aren't in my collection—yet. The popularity of all his tokens makes them challenging to collect.

The social problems of the late 18th century persist, though the methods to promote social change are vastly different. While these tokens provide a window on the past, perhaps they also inspire reflection on our present and future. That is what Spence would have wanted.

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