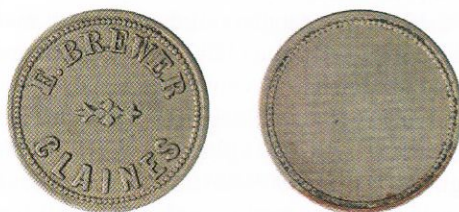


Tokens of 'E. Brewer Claines'

Murray Andrews

Tokens issued for E. Brewer of Claines appear frequently in the coin trade, but have received little historical or numismatic attention. Two varieties are known, struck in different metals using the same dies:

Type 1



Obv.: E. BREWER / CLAINES; legend in two lines divided by quatrefoil with two fleurs, within pellet border.

Rev.: Blank field within pellet border.
Cupro-nickel; 24mm; 4.8g.

Type 2



Obv.: E. BREWER / CLAINES; legend in two lines divided by quatrefoil with two fleurs, within pellet border.

Rev.: Blank field within pellet border.
Brass; 24mm; 4.4g.

The tokens are of early twentieth-century style, employing simple uniface designs rendered in mixed serif and sans-serif type ⁽¹⁾. Though unsigned, they were almost certainly produced by manufacturers in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, a hub for pre-war token production situated only 35km north-east of Claines, a suburban parish on the northern outskirts of the city of Worcester ⁽²⁾. Quite how many tokens were originally issued is uncertain, but an estimate in the high hundreds or low thousands seems reasonable given the number found in the coin trade: one lot sold at a recent

auction consisted of 745 examples – 363 of type 1, and 382 of type 2 – stored in large grip-seal bags ⁽³⁾!

The ‘E. Brewer’ named on the tokens can be identified as Edwin Tomes Brewer, a Claines greengrocer and market gardener. Born in Evesham in 1872, Edwin was the second son of George Brewer (1842-1912), a local bootmaker, and his wife Joyce, née Tomes (1844-1927) ⁽⁴⁾. By the time of the 1891 census Edwin had begun working as a garden labourer, and it is presumably in this line of work that he met his future wife, Mary Anne Grove (1876-1945), the daughter of the Evesham market gardener Joseph Grove (1852-1922) and his wife Charlotte (1847-1910). Edwin married Mary in 1894, and by 1896 the couple had relocated to 59 Ombersley Road, Claines, where they would raise seven children: Charlotte Joyce (1895-1966), Edwin Joseph (1897-1970), Mary Elizabeth (1899-1956), Frederick Richard (1902-59), Allen William (1903-73), Nancy Irene (1907-8), and Reginald Tomes (1909-40) ⁽⁵⁾. In the 1901 and 1911 census returns Edwin is described as a self-employed market gardener, but his business may well have involved as much retailing as it did growing: historical directories of 1908, 1912, 1924, and 1932 describe him variously as a fruiterer and greengrocer ⁽⁶⁾. In any case, Edwin’s business was clearly profitable, and by the time of his death on 7 January 1936 he had built an estate worth £16,984 17s. 6d., equivalent to nearly £860,500 in 2021 ⁽⁷⁾.

The intended function of these tokens is unclear. They are unlikely to have served as advertising tokens, since they provide no information about who Brewer is or what he traded in. It is possible that they were intended as shop tickets, to be given as a discount against the next transaction, or alternatively as truck tickets used to pay labourers working Brewer’s holdings. That Brewer hired men for this purpose is certain: at the Worcestershire Petty Sessions of 26 June 1900 he successfully levied a 17s. 0d. claim – one week’s wages – against a former employee, the labourer Reuben Sanders, who had vacated his post without giving notice ⁽⁸⁾. However, since truck systems had been virtually eliminated in England by the 1890s, it is perhaps more likely that the tokens worked like hop tallies, being used to monitor piece-work in the field and redeemable for cash wages once picking had finished.

References

1. On the early twentieth-century resurgence of sans-serif type, see Rabinowitz Deer 2016, 117. Tokens of similar style are known for A.E. Chappell of Bromsgrove, Worcestershire (1910), Escritt and Barrell of Grantham, Lincolnshire (1902), and Ben Tawn of Fressingfield, Suffolk (?1920s/30s): see Marsden 2020 and Whitmore 2009.
2. Courtney 2000, 160.
3. Dix Noonan Webb, 3 October 2018, lot 3440.
4. Kew, The National Archives (TNA), RG 11/2925, Census 1881, 43.

5. TNA, RG 14/17637, Census 1911.
6. *Littlebury's Directory of the City of Worcester* 1908, 385; *Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire* 1912, 332; 1924, 340; 1932, 454.
7. *National Probate Calendar* 1936, 483.
8. *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 30 June 1900, 7.

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