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A POST-MEDIEVAL LEAD TOKEN MOULD FROM EVESHAM

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While post-medieval lead tokens are often unearthed by archaeologists and metal detectorists, finds of lead token moulds are rather thinner on the ground.² It was by a stroke of luck, therefore, that the author had the opportunity to rediscover a previously unrecorded example among the collections of the Almonry Museum in Evesham, Worcestershire (Figure 1).³

Measuring 97.8 mm long, 65.4 mm wide, and between 32.5 mm and 33.2 mm thick, the mould is fashioned from a single block of mudstone or limestone, probably sourced locally from the late Triassic to early Jurassic Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone beds of the Evesham and Avon Vales.⁴ It has an irregular sub-rectangular plan and trapezoidal section, and has been ground flat and polished on at least six sides. Circular mould matrices (16–24 mm diameter) have been cut into the large upper and lower faces, and marks on the latter suggest that they were laid out using compass-drawn circles.⁵ Of these two surfaces, the lower face features a vertical funnel that flows into four casting cells, which are arranged in a T-shape and joined by runner channels. The upper face, meanwhile, has a transverse funnel, which flows into four casting cells arranged in a square shape and joined by runner channels; a separate fifth cell is located above them, and is not joined to its neighbours.⁶ While the presence of funnels and runners suggests that the mould originally formed half of a two-piece set, the lack of fixing sockets means that the missing second

¹ Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

² For examples of post-medieval lead token moulds found in England, see du Quesne-Bird 1969a; 1969b; Kelly 1970; Powell 2007; Oddie 2023.

³ Almonry Museum accession no. 3186. I am grateful to Ashleigh Jayes (Manager, Almonry Museum) for permission to research and publish this object.

⁴ Williams and Whittaker 1974. The stone was identified by Imogen Preddy (*pers. comm.*, 8 July 2022).

⁵ On the use of compasses in medieval and later stoneworking, see Shelby 1965.

⁶ A 3D model was produced using photogrammetry, and is available online at <<https://skfb.ly/ow7z9>>.

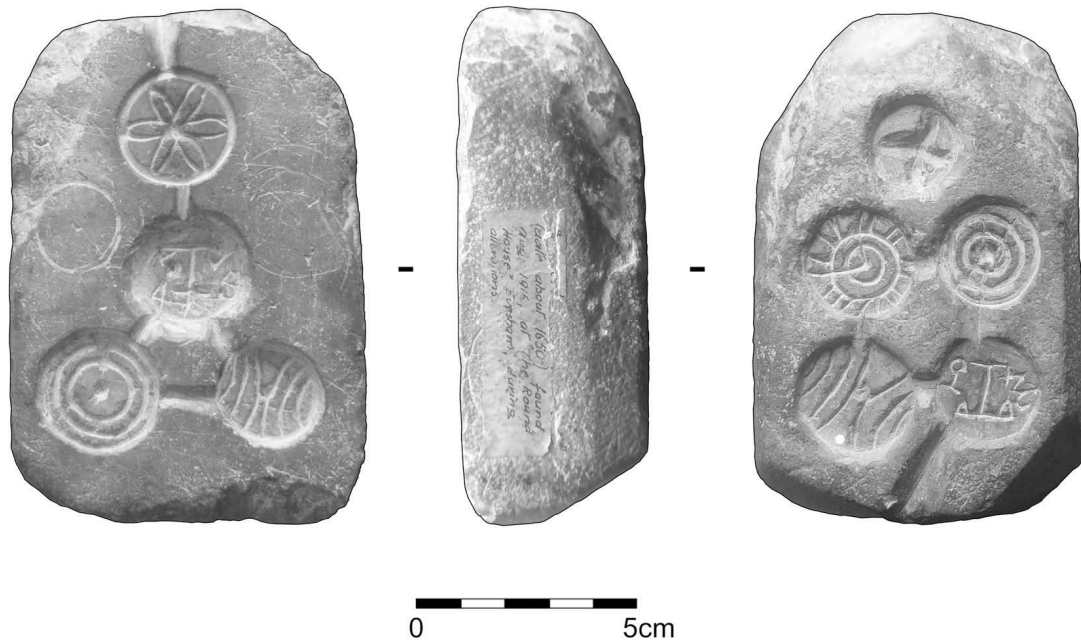


Fig. 1. Bifacial lead token mould in the Almonry Museum, Evesham

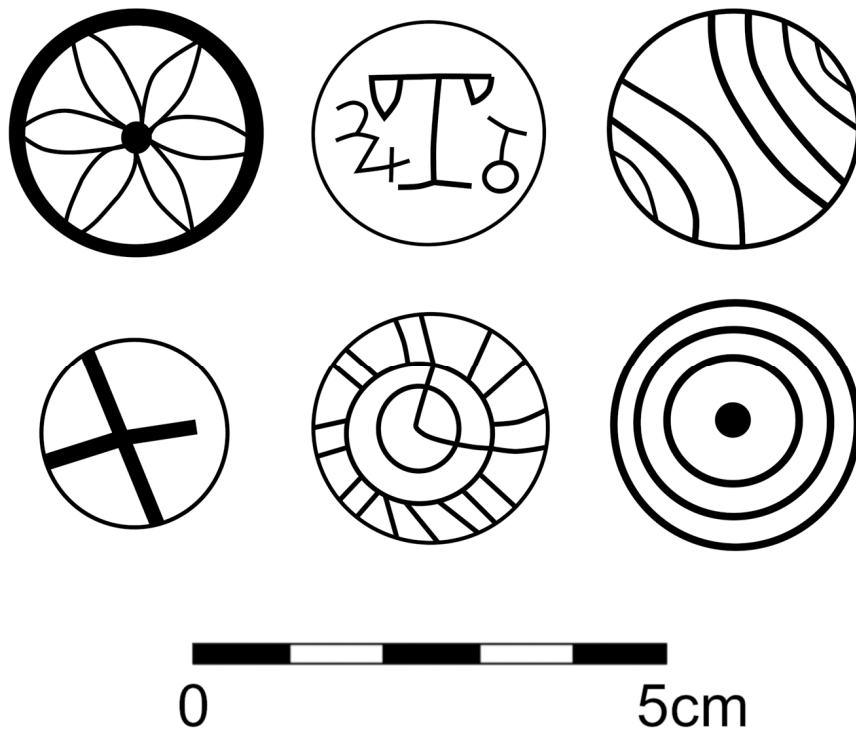


Fig. 2. Reversed line drawings of the six motifs represented on the Almonry token mould: the retrograde motif 2 ('initial T') is rendered as engraved

half was probably not engraved, and it is entirely possible that the piece was intended to produce uniface castings with the aid of a flat roof tile or wooden board.⁷

Six different motifs are represented on the nine casting cells (Figure 2), each of which can be matched to one of the thirty-seven lead token types identified by David Powell.⁸ The first motif,

⁷ Archibald 1979, 113.

⁸ Powell 2010.

a six-petalled flower or ‘daisy wheel’ (Powell type 1), appears in the uppermost cell of the lower face, and is a common apotropaic device found on post-medieval buildings and household furnishings across Britain.⁹ Tokens employing this ‘stock’ motif are known throughout England, and include Worcestershire parallels from Bewdley, Broome, Finstall, Hallow, and Wychbold, although no exact matches for this mould have yet been traced.¹⁰ The second, an elaborate initial T (Powell type 2), features on two cells on the upper and lower faces, and is flanked by two unusual symbols resembling a ligate ‘24’ and T surmounting an O. These symbols are borrowed directly from alchemical literature, which enjoyed a major revival in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Britain:¹¹ the former is a retrograde rendering of a common sigil for the planet Jupiter and its ‘planetary metal’, tin, while the latter most closely resembles a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ‘alchemical script’ symbol for the lower case letter k.¹² The third motif consists of arcs or curved lines (Powell type 9), and is represented on two cells on the upper and lower faces. The fourth and fifth motifs, a simple cross (Powell type 14) and a radiant sun (Powell type 26), each appear on a single cell on the upper face, while the sixth and final motif, a series of concentric circles (Powell type 31), appears in two cells on the upper and lower faces. This final motif is perhaps the most significant, as the two matrices engraved with this design are exact matches for two lead tokens from a hoard concealed beneath the floorboards of an upper room in the Almonry Museum, which was dated by associated buttons and buckles to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries.¹³ When combined with the size of the casting cells¹⁴ and the peculiar use of alchemical symbolism, these mould matches provide a convincing justification to date the mould to the period *c.* 1650–1750.

The provenance of the Almonry mould is supplied by a handwritten label pasted onto its side, which notes that the specimen was ‘found Aug 1916, at “The Round House”, Evesham, during alterations’. Located in the centre of Evesham’s historic Market Square, the Round House (Figure 3) is a Grade I listed fifteenth-century timber framed building, and was probably originally established as an inn servicing visitors to Evesham Abbey and the town’s buoyant medieval cloth market.¹⁵ The building certainly seems to have been in use as a public house at the time the mould was made: between 1677 and 1774 the property was in the ownership of the Hopkins family, a dynasty of Evesham mercers with strong commercial ties to London, and contemporary documents record its use as both a tavern and a hat shop.¹⁶ In this case, the archaeological and historical context is likely to convey something of the mould’s function, which was presumably intended to supply a kind of unofficial ‘small change’ for the purchase of low-value food and drink on the premises.

⁹ Hoggard 2019, 74–86.

¹⁰ Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) WAW-A28568; WMID-AB6DD4; WAW-59E682; WAW-E61A2F; WAW-256337; WAW-3BC7F6. The failure to identify an exact match may reflect constraints inherent to the PAS database, which only selectively records objects produced after *c.* 1700: Daubney 2016, 178. As of April 2023 a total of 7,359 post-medieval lead tokens had been recorded by the PAS, of which just 167 were found in Worcestershire and 58 in neighbouring Gloucestershire. Gary Oddie (*pers. comm.*, 18 April 2023) suggests that these figures represent less than 1 per cent of the actual number unearthed by metal detectorists in England and Wales.

¹¹ Monod 2013, 23–52.

¹² Gettings 1981, 44 and 149–50. Alchemical symbols for ‘planetary metals’ like mercury and copper and ‘mundane elements’ like antimony and sulphur occasionally feature as design elements on seventeenth-century European medals: Bolton 1890, 77–83.

¹³ Archibald 1979, 114, nos 11 and 13.

¹⁴ Powell 2008, 6.

¹⁵ Brooks and Pevsner 2007, 301; Cox 2015, 207.

¹⁶ Brotherton 2008, 153; The National Archives (TNA), PROB 11/477/310.



Fig. 3. North facing view of the Round House from Evesham Market Square (© David Stowell, CC BY-SA 2.0 licence)

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