

THE DIES OF THOMAS SPENCE (1750–1814): ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS

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THE following paragraphs continue the numbering of the Addenda to a paper on Spence published in *BNJ* xxxviii (1969), pp. 126–62 and plates vi–viii.

6. I must apologize to Mr. Bell for incorrectly styling him ‘Dr.’ throughout.

7. *Dies naming Spence* (p. 129 n. 2): The words ‘becomes an obverse with the following reverses’ occur in Atkins (1892); I cannot now find anything similar in Dalton and Hamer, which is, however, arranged for the most part according to Atkins.

8. *Obv. B* (p. 130 n. 2): Comparison with the legends of the Head design earlier recorded by Spence (1795A, 359), and of that appearing on Farthing Obverse 1, makes it clear that Spence did not intend 1794 on *His Head* to stand as the date of production. For ‘tokens’ read ‘dies’.

9. *Rev. I* (p. 134): It is probable that the cock and lion, traditionally symbolizing France and Britain, specifically signify here that for which each country then stood, Revolution and landed Aristocracy; for in Spence’s *Rights of Infants* . . . in a dialogue between the *Aristocracy and a Mother of Children* (1797), the woman declares that ‘when we begin with you, we will make a full end of your power at once. We will not impolitically tamper with the lion, and pluck out a tooth now and then . . .’.

10. *Rev. K* (p. 134 n. 1): The footnote should refer not from *George III/Ass*, but from *rev. L (Heart in Hand)* only, and to Addendum 2.

11. *Obv. M* (p. 137): Since *Horne Tooke* and *Old Bailey* were probably acquired by Spence as a pair designed for someone else, it should be made clear that in Birchall Halfpennies, London 110, *Horne Tooke* is first recorded as being paired with an original Spence die, *rev. K*.

12. *Rev. M* (p. 137): In both catalogue entries mentioned, *Old Bailey* is paired with *Horne Tooke*, and its earliest recorded pairing with an original Spence die (*obv. W, Gordon*) is in *Virtuoso* 85, 9 May 1796.

13. *Obv. Q, Mendoza* (p. 138): Birchall Halfpennies, London 225–6, are in his appendix.

14. *Rev. T* (p. 139): It may be confirmed that the *Guillotine*, originally a Skidmore die, is in Birchall Halfpennies, London 45, paired with an original Spence die (*obv. J, the Tree of Liberty*).

15. *Obv. T, United* (p. 139): For ‘head’ read ‘bust’.

16. *Rev. LL, Heath* (p. 146 and Addendum 1, p. 162): On Dalton and Hamer, Somerset 46, the impression of this die is weak and expanded. The very rarity of the piece makes it unlikely that this effect results from the accidental production of brockages, and it would appear that the *Fox* die (*obv. N*, was struck on a small-flan halfpenny of Heath which had been hammered out. In any case, the piece cannot be considered to die-link Spence with Kempson and/or Lutwyche.

17. FO1 (p. 147): Below Spence’s bust is the signature JAMES.

18. FR4, *Slave* (p. 149): In *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* (1801, p. 6), Spence does make passing mention of slavery: ‘like the Slave Trade, it [sc. investment in land] is fraught with every mischief and evil to the Human Race . . .’.

19. FO6 (p. 149): The set of *Pigs’ Meat* containing the print *The Civil Citizen* is in the Department of Coins and Medals.

20. *Medals or Currency?* (pp. 151–3): This section is unsatisfactory. The arguments put forward do not prove that Spence intended his tokens to circulate in the currency, and I now believe that this possibility should be rejected. (The puzzling mention of France in *Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin*,

1964, p. 229, which has not yet been traced to its source, would not support these arguments.) The occasional worn specimen is insufficient to deny their usually uncirculated condition; and a frustrated intention to circulate them is belied by the types of Spence's earliest tokens, which do not imitate the regal coinage. Spence described them as coins or tokens simply because he wanted them to be accepted among the pieces it was then fashionable to collect. Similarly, he produced them in considerable quantities, and sold them cheaply, only because he wanted them to reach a wide range of collectors (cf. his reference below to 'others which are now despised for their commonness'). He did not intend them to function as currency, and if they did so, it was only by accident, or momentarily when he threw tokens among the passers-by—who would doubtless scramble for what they thought was money.

There is, however, greater difficulty in seeing collectors pure and simple as Spence's intended audience than was perhaps realized while his production was contaminated with alien designs. The 'costume' dies certainly appear to have been designed for such customers, although there is evidence in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that they purchased political pieces also, as some bought his publications: 'It is curious to reflect with what avidity the aristocratic party of this country bought up the seditious [*sic*, i.e. seditious] books hinted at in the Royal Proclamations; even legislators and statesmen eagerly united in the crime of encouraging what they afterwards thought proper to term *treason* and *sedition*' (*The Case of Thomas Spence*, 1793, p. 7). Spence, however, was too consistent, too 'rigidly pertinacious of his plan, which [in Hone's words] was ever first in his thoughts and foremost in his purpose', too much aware of where his likely support lay, to have actually designed his political dies for such a clientele. They are clearly intended as propaganda, and not for profit.

Three possibilities now present themselves. It may be that some established collectors were potential 'friends' of Spence, at least in 1795: the 'well-meaning Democrats and Friends to Reform' to whom the *End of Oppression* gave offence, and to whom Spence addressed his mock *Recantation*. Secondly, collecting appears to have extended so widely that Spence could have hoped for support from new collectors. It is noticeable that the advertisement in the earlier issue of Spence's catalogue (1795A, p. [52]), which is transcribed below, is addressed rather to potential than to established collectors. Support for this possibility is to be found in contemporary literature: 'the unbounded passion for collecting caused a ready sale' (Pye, 1801, p. 4); 'it was the object of every person to demand as many curious half-pence in exchange as were to be acquired' (Sheplard, 1798, p. 119). (Sheplard may be right in saying that collecting was at its height as early as 1794, cf. p. 152 n. 4; for not later than May 1795 it was a 'universal rage'.)

'TO THE PUBLIC.

'It has been asked why this universal rage of collecting coins?—In answer to which it may be said, There is no other way to preserve them from oblivion. Again, some of them on account of device, some for neatness of workmanship, and all on account of their great variety, may, nay will claim the attention of the curious in after-ages. These considerations incite the judicious to make collections, especially of the best impressions, while they are yet cheap and easily to be met with, well knowing that they will never be of less value, nor their beauty encreased by wear.

'Many coins, which might have been had in currency a few months back, at the value of a halfpenny, now on account of their scarceness bring a great price; and others, which are now despised for their commonness, will, in their turn, soon do the same. Many collections are already estimated at great value, and as time is daily adding thereto, what will they not amount to in a few years?

'This list will therefore be a most useful companion and assistant in the business of collecting and arranging the numerous coins, and render that an agreeable amusement, which has hitherto been very irksome and confused. New coins, as they appear, may by means of the blank spaces be added to the list under their respective heads, and thus for a long time to come it will remain valuable.

T. S.'

Finally, though direct evidence beyond Davenport's vague reference is so far lacking, it seems unlikely that Spence would not have handed out his tokens to those who were first and foremost his friends, as a visual expression and memento of his Plan, perhaps to purchasers of *Pigs' Meat* etc. (as afterwards to purchasers of *The Giant killer*), perhaps at meetings of the London Corresponding

Society, perhaps at Free and Easy meetings as were proposed to promote the circulation of 'Citizen' Spence's pamphlets, and subsequently advertised in Evans's *Humorous Catalogue of Spence's Songs*:

'Then hasten to Spence
And lay out your pence,
To forward his excellent Plan.'

21. *Propaganda* (p. 154): Thomas Thompson also had strong connections with London, among others through representing Evesham in the House of Commons from 1790 to 1802 (W. A. Cotton, *The Coins, Tokens, and Medals of Worcestershire*, 1885, p. 122); and Conder was from Mile End, T. being his brother (W. Longman, *Tokens of the Eighteenth Century connected with Booksellers & Bookmakers*, 1916, p. 65).

22. *Countermarking* (p. 155): Spence's blanks are the same size as the Tower halfpence of 1770-5, and he is therefore unlikely to have ordered them after the proclamation of Boulton's first halfpence on 4 December 1799. His countermarks seem not to occur on coins of this 1799 issue; and unless the existence of a countermarked 1806/7 halfpenny can be confirmed, it would appear that Spence was not countermarking after 1799.

Indeed, there may be an indication of the date when Spence ceased to do so in Evans's memoir (1821, p. 3): 'On his liberation, he got a small shop, No. 9, Oxford-street, and continued to publish his Pigs'-meat, and his Plan, and to strike medals till the year 1798.' Evans is certainly misleading about the period of time between Spence's release from Newgate and his removal from Little Turnstile (when, however, he may not have known Spence well), and wrong about the length of time that Spence continued to strike 'medals' if by that is meant tokens. However, the mention of 9 Oxford Street (where Spence moved about the time that he gave up producing tokens) suggests that Evans was at least including countermarked pieces in that description. He would, moreover, have had particular cause to remember an event in 1798, as he was arrested on 18 April of that year and remained in prison until 1801 (Rudkin, 1927, pp. 99, 123). Spence may well, therefore, have commenced countermarking in 1797, and given it up by 18 April 1798.

An illustration of a countermarked blank may be found in Mr. Christopher Brunel's 'Thomas Spence', in *Coins*, vol. 9 (no. 1) January 1972, pp. 28, 30 (Names in numismatics).

23. '*Grotesques*' (p. 158): Further support for this suggestion is to be found in the pairing of *obv.* B, *His Head*, with *rev.* F, *Shepherd*: that *rev.* F in its earlier state occurs only here outside its true pairing shows that this was its first such pairing, a combination of types which exactly parallels Spence's 'Lessons for the Sheepish Multitude' (*Pigs' Meat*, ii, pp. 32-5). It may be that Spence's self-identification with a shepherd provides a better interpretation of the *Deserted Village / Shepherd* than Professor Mathias's, particularly since Spence in his *Letter from Ralph Hodge to his cousin Thomas Bull* describes a village deserted through enclosures without making the connection with sheep-farming that More made in *Utopia*. Spence, of course, may have been prepared for alternative interpretations of his tokens, and certainly should have expected them.

24. *Table II, note d* (p. 161): *Obv.* EE / *rev.* 00 and the obverse mule NN / QQ should be deleted, for Dalton and Hamer on p. 557 no longer list Middlesex 997 and Wiltshire 17 among 'Pieces not traced'.

25. *Table II, note e* (p. 161): 'stage' read 'state'. *Obv.* WW, *Wheeler*, is dated 1797, and although it appears on *Virtuoso* 152, 7 December 1796, it was presumably made late in 1796; *rev.* F in this pairing would therefore be in its later state, as it was so early as January 1796 (Birchall Halfpennies, London 37 = DH Middlesex 737 = *obv.* I / *rev.* F, known only in the later state).