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‘J B’ OF ‘FOUNDLING FIELDS’

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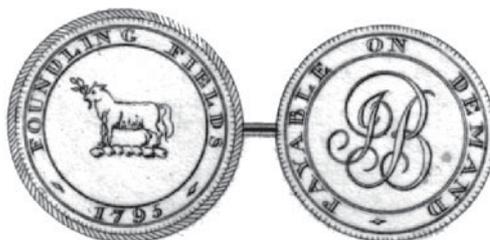


Fig. 1. Detail from plate 29 of Charles Pye's *Provincial Coins and Tokens*, 1801.

SOME years ago I spoke to the Society on the subject of the Westwood/Hancock token consortium, and explained that when John Westwood, senior, died in March 1792, the coining business was taken over by his younger brother Obadiah. Although Obadiah had boasted that it would be ‘carried on with its usual Spirit’ the business lasted less than three years and Obadiah went the way of his brother into bankruptcy and virtual oblivion in November 1794.¹

To what extent, if any, the coinery played a part in Obadiah's debacle is questionable but, although he was able to re-establish himself rapidly in his old calling of coffin furniture maker, it is clear that his token-making activities with John Gregory Hancock came to an end sometime during the following year.² Even if not directly a factor in a bankruptcy, no doubt precipitated by the recession of 1793–94, it is likely that the coinery had become increasingly unprofitable and a drain on scarce resources. As I have suggested before, a sea-change was taking place in the nature of provincial coinage and the large-scale token production for industrial and commercial concerns on which the Westwoods had built up their business was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Increasingly the call was for comparatively low-volume issues to meet the needs, profit motives or simple ‘vanity’ of local shopkeepers; a demand that new, thrusting, manufacturers like Peter Kempson and William Lutwyche were better placed to meet and to foster.

The last tokens produced by the Westwood/Hancock consortium were the ‘1795’ halfpennies struck for the Thames and Severn Canal Company (Fig. 2) and for ‘Foundling Fields’. There was, though, a stark difference between the two. The former were among the most celebrated of Hancock's productions, with their dramatic representation of a Severn trow and meticulous depiction of the canal's eastern portal.

The latter, although their engraving is unexceptionable, are demonstrably inferior in quality and design to what had gone before. Pye observed that the ‘Foundling Fields’ ‘impressions are bad in consequence of the copper being too thin’ (the cipher of the reverse is always weakly

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Abbreviations: *D&H*: Dalton and Hamer, 1910–18; *Middx*: Middlesex.

¹ *The London Gazette*, No. 13723, 15 November 1794, 1139.

² Obadiah Westwood seems to have retired from his coffin furniture business about 1808. Described as a ‘gentleman’ in a legal document of 1811 he subsequently appears to have moved to Sheffield and then to London (Chelsea), presumably to live with his son John Westwood, junior, where he died in February 1826.



Fig. 2. Thames and Severn Canal halfpenny (*D&H*: Gloucestershire 59).

struck, probably purposely so).³ Moreover while the canal company's halfpennies were most likely struck at a standard of forty-six to the pound avoirdupois (the notional weight standard of Tower halfpence at this time and the standard Lutwyche suggested was the norm for eighteenth-century provincial coins),⁴ the weights of the substantive issue of 'Foundling Fields' tokens examined (averaging 8.08 g) suggest a ratio of pieces of not fewer than fifty-six to the pound.

The halfpennies (*D&H*: Middx 303–305a) fall into three types, all sharing the same obverse die of the crest of a lamb holding in its mouth a sprig of thyme within a circle and the legend **FOUNDLING FIELDS** ♦ 1795 ♦ (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Three 'Foundling Fields' halfpenny reverses. *D&H*: Middx 303–5.

There are three reverse dies, two of which broke at an early stage, the third also developing a flaw that tends to obscure the stop in the legend.

***D&H*: Middx 303:** A cipher **J B** within a circle. Legend: **PAYABLE ON DEMAND** ♦. The **J** of the cipher is much smaller than the **B**, and a diamond-shaped stop comes midway between the beginning and the end of the legend.

Edge: grained.

No details of diameter, weight or die axis are known.

Charles Pye in the 1801 edition of his *Provincial Coins and Tokens* tells us that only a few specimens of this version (Plate 29, 6; p. 13) were struck as a result of the die breaking, rating it as 'r,r,r'. Today the piece is excessively rare but it likely that at least two examples are extant. A specimen was sold in the Davis sale in March 1901 (lot 131, bought by Lincoln), described as a proof of the highest rarity. Another was sold in the Hamer sale in November 1930 (lot 163, ex William Norman).⁵ They may well be the same piece and be the token illustrated in *D&H* (p. 130), but one cannot be certain of this. Neither, if there *were* two, seems to have resurfaced in the collecting world since then but what was fairly definitely a different specimen was offered by Schwer in October 1986 which he described as only 'G. F.'⁶

³ Pye 1801, 13.

⁴ Sharp 1834, ii.

⁵ W.J. Davis Collection, 11 March 1901, lot 131; S.H. Hamer Collection, 26 November 1930, lot 163.

⁶ Schwer List No. 55 (Mail Bid), 21 October 1986: personal communications from Peter Preston-Morley and Michael Dickinson. The Waite Sanderson, Longman, Noble and Spence collections did not include a specimen.

D&H: Middx 304: The letters of the cipher are now the same size but the beginning and end of the legend are much closer and the stop, again mid-way between them, is a round point •.

Edge: grained.

Diameter: 28 mm; average weight: 7.1 g (6.96–7.28 g); die axis: 6h.

This piece is also engraved in Pye's catalogue (Plate 29, 7) but in his 'OBSERVATIONS' (p. 13), Pye confuses the quantity supposedly struck with that of the more plentiful *D&H: Middx 305* which he did not refer to or illustrate.⁷ The token is, in fact, extremely rare. The Davis specimen was described as 'almost of the same degree of rarity' as *D&H: Middx 303* while Kent, as with *D&H: Middx 303*, rated it as 'r r r' stating that its price would be a matter of arrangement.⁸ Very few specimens are known today, the most recent being in the Noble and Spence sales.⁹

There is evidence of an increasing reverse die flaw from the edge under the point to the **P** of **PAYABLE** and on towards the first **A** (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Detail of the die flaw on the edge of *D&H: Middx 304*.

D&H: Middx 305: The cipher is as the last but with the beginning and end of the legend further apart, as in 303. The stop is again a round point but is now much closer to the second **D** of **DEMAND •**. It is, however, often obscured by a die flaw rising from the edge below it (Fig. 5); as a result the piece engraved in Denton and Prattent's *The Virtuoso's Companion* (Fig. 6) is erroneously shown with no stop at all.

Edge: grained or in some cases plain (*D&H: 305a*). Specimens also exist in brass.

Diameter: 28 mm; average weight: 8.08 g (7.36–8.56 g); die axis: 6h.



Fig. 5. Detail of the die flaw on the edge of *D&H: Middx 305*.

Pye did not illustrate this version, the substantive issue. It is not uncommon but whether it was struck in the quantity that he implies in his mistaken reference to *D&H: Middx 304* must be open to question. Bearing in mind the lightness of the piece, the quantity he postulates (three hundredweight) would suggest an issue in the region of 18,500 pieces. This seems too

⁷ Pye 1801, Plate 29, nos 6 and 7, and p.13.

⁸ W.J. Davis Collection, 11 March 1901, lot 131; Kent, 1913, 109.

⁹ W.J. Noble Collection, 7 July 1998: lot 433 (part), ex Schwer; David L. Spence Collection, 29 September 2005: lot 1401, ex W. Longman Collection, 12 March 1958: lot 155 (part), ex Baldwin, November 1913.

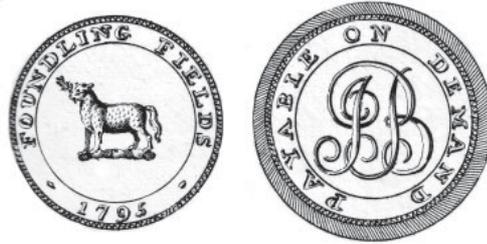


Fig. 6. Detail from plate 57 of the *Virtuoso's Companion*, 25 January 1796.

high on the basis of the number of specimens that are still extant, although the poor quality of the tokens may well have resulted in most having been melted down after 1797 and few having been collected.

It would not be unnatural to conclude that the 'proprietor' or issuer of the tokens, London-based as Pye notes, wanted something done on the cheap to capitalize on the issue of a light-weight coin-substitute in the metropolis. Samuel, in one of his *Bazaar* articles, commenting on the lack of issuer's name or precise address and the tokens' small size and weight, imagined that 'a fair profit was made on their issue, so possibly the issuer was not especially anxious for their return'.¹⁰ One could just as well argue that the 'Foundling Fields' tokens were struck for a specific utilitarian purpose and that, despite their light weight, they were genuinely intended to be promissory within a limited locale where the issuer was so well-known that he needed no designation beyond his initials.

Neither Pye nor, for that matter, Sharp could throw any light on 'J B's' identity. Samuel, however, suggested that the issuer was a 'J Burton' and, although he was writing only in the 1880s, he probably depended on some lingering tradition, for there does just happen to be reliable, contemporary testimony to support his attribution. This is the word of Miss Sophia Banks, who really knew her London tokens, and registers the issuer as 'Burton. London' in the manuscript catalogue of her token collection now in the British Museum.¹¹

Miss Banks's annotation can be taken further but before doing so something should be said about the iconography of the obverse of the token. The combination of the central lamb and the legend **FOUNDLING FIELDS** immediately suggests some association with the celebrated Foundling Hospital, described by one historian as 'the most spectacular philanthropic enterprise of the age'. The lamb on a wreath or torse represents the crest in the armorial bearings granted to the Hospital in 1747 – strictly a lamb argent holding in its mouth a sprig of thyme proper. The arms were based on a design by William Hogarth,¹² a staunch supporter of the Hospital and one of its first Governors, but Hogarth's original lamb was modified by the College of Arms which added the sprig of thyme as a differentiating feature. Initially, indeed, there seemed to be some uncertainty about the concept of the crest, for Hogarth includes a comment below his sketch that the 'Arms are to be altered by the Desire of the Committee[;] a Wolf in Fleecy Hosiery is to be substituted for the Lamb, and the Supporters [*Nature* (exemplified by the many-breasted goddess Artemis, symbolizing the nurture of young things) and *Britannia*] are to be taken away' (Fig. 7). Perhaps it was thought that a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' would better reflect the cruel world from which the Hospital as a caring shepherd would protect its foundlings. In the event the lamb was retained – as modified – and effectively became the Hospital's logo, used on the children's buttons and the institution's crockery and cutlery.

Hogarth played a considerable role, with the redoubtable Captain Coram, in the campaign to set up the Foundling Hospital and he later succeeded in persuading a number of friends among the most distinguished artists of the day to support the Hospital through the gift of

¹⁰ [Samuel], 28 June 1882, 685. A sentiment echoed by Bell 1963, 102.

¹¹ [Sarah Sophia Banks], VI, SSB 191–72–1. It is unlikely that Samuel was aware of Miss Banks's note.

¹² Langford 1991, 568; Nichols, 1782, 234 and 323.



Fig. 7. Hogarth's original pen and ink sketch for the Coat of Arms for the Foundling Hospital, 1747 (Part of the Foundling Hospital Archives in the care of the London Metropolitan Archives © Coram /The Foundling Museum).

paintings and other help.¹³ Of particular numismatic interest is that one of this circle was the medallist Richard Yeo, from 1749 assistant engraver at the Royal Mint, who was persuaded to cut a seal for the Hospital although it was to take another twelve years before his finished work illustrating the finding of Moses in the bulrushes (Exodus, 2:1–9) was completed (Fig. 8).¹⁴



Fig. 8. Richard Yeo's Seal for the Foundling Hospital (from Nichols and Wray 1935, facing 201).

As a further aside it may just be worth mentioning that when the arms of the Hospital were finally approved by the College of Arms they included 'in chief' a crescent argent between

¹³ Through the efforts of Hogarth and his fellow 'Gentlemen Artists' the hospital became in effect (as was his intention) a public gallery of contemporary art attracting large numbers of visitors.

¹⁴ McClure 1981, 68. Richard Yeo (c.1720–79) effectively acted as Chief Engraver of the Mint from 1760 and was formally appointed to the post in 1768. Forrer makes no mention of the seal in his list of Yeo's œuvre: Forrer, VI, 1916, 701–4; VIII, 1930, 304–5. The subject of the seal was suggested by Captain Coram himself since Moses was 'the first foundling we read of'.

two mullets or. These devices, coincidentally or not, formed part of the old arms of Halle, the birthplace of Handel who was also closely associated with the Hospital, composing an anthem especially for it and conducting a succession of performances of the *Messiah* to its great financial benefit.

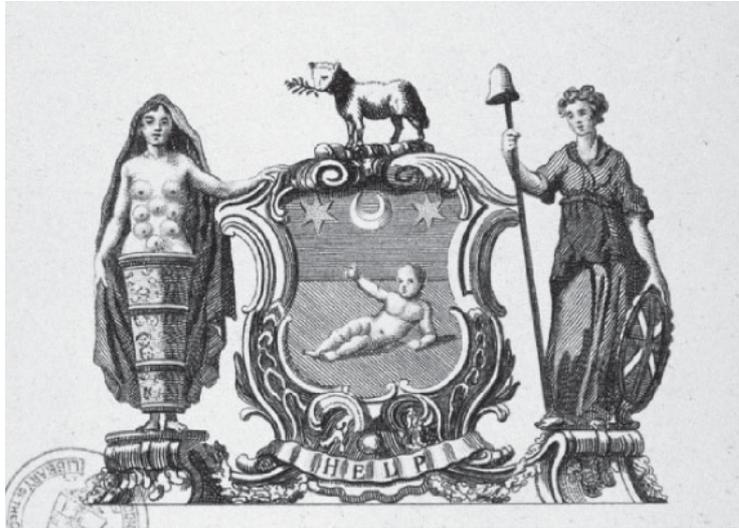


Fig. 9. Detail of an engraving by Thomas Cook of the Arms of the Foundling Hospital, 1809 (© City of London).

But to return to the 'Foundling Fields' halfpenny. The legend **FOUNDLING FIELDS** was a designation that seems to have had no official warrant. In 1745 the Foundling Hospital moved from its original temporary premises in Hatton Garden to Lamb's Conduit Fields,¹⁵ an extensive tract of open countryside in Bloomsbury lying north of what is now Guilford Street with Southampton Row (and the Bedford estate) as its boundary to the west and Grays Inn Road to the east. Guilford Street had not then been built and the fifty-six acres of pasture land that the foundation acquired from the earl of Salisbury lay well beyond the northern fringe of London. Great Ormond Street and Queen Square, with its 'delightful prospect of Hamstead and Hygate [*sic*]' which so attracted Fanny Burney, constituted the nearest populated area.¹⁶ It therefore offered quiet and fresh air, it was remote from the physical and moral temptations of central London, and it had ample space for expansion. 'Foundling Fields' was thus shorthand for the whole open area surrounding and to the north of the Foundling Hospital, up to what is now the Euston Road. Apart from the present context, the only other reference to it which I have come across is 'Bowling Green House, Foundling Fields', where Thomas Mullett operated a bowling green and served tea, coffee and hot loaves every day, but this was way to the north on the Skinners' Company estate.

The site was far bigger than that needed for the Hospital's actual buildings and grounds, and as the eighteenth century wore on and London expanded further northward, the governors began to realise that a vast income potential lay in the development of what had become a considerable landed asset. Parts of the adjoining Bedford estate to the west – Bedford Square and Gower Street, for instance – had already been built up when in 1788 the hospital decided, in the face of a vocal opposition against what was seen as further intrusion into a green field area, to embark upon its own development plan.

¹⁵ So named after William Lamb, an Elizabethan philanthropist, who restored the local conduit from a tributary of the Fleet to provide a public water supply in the area in 1577.

¹⁶ Ellis (ed), 1889, I, 98 [16 November 1770]. From her father's house at the upper end of Queen Square Fanny Burney, writing in 1770, would have seen the distant villages on the far heights beyond a clear and vast expanse of farm and heath land.



Fig. 10. The Foundling Hospital Estate, beyond the northern edge of the built-up areas of London (section from John Rocque's Plan of London and Westminster, 1746, © City of London).

The scheme, skilfully conceived to preserve the advantages of the hospital's open situation within an appropriate architectural setting and strictly controlled by the foundation's surveyor, was put out to individual speculators. These ranged from the small working journeyman to the larger capitalist and, although at first it was the hospital's policy not to allow any one speculator to take up the leases of more than a moderate proportion of the ground available, one builder soon began to tower above his fellows, to dominate the development of Bloomsbury for the next twenty years and become the most enterprising and successful London builder of his time.

This was James Burton (1761–1837), the son of William Haliburton, a Southwark builder of Scottish descent, a son of the manse and apparently well connected.¹⁷ Little is known of Burton's early years – like that of the musicologist Charles Burney (Macburney), his family, taking the high road south, had de-Scotticized their surname to make themselves more acceptable in an English milieu – but he was professionally trained as a surveyor, and was already practising as a successful architect and builder in Southwark when in 1790 he approached the

¹⁷ Both Sir Walter Scott and Lord Heathfield of Gibraltar fame were distant relations. For Burton's career see Colvin 1995, 199–200; ODNB 2004, *sub* 'Burton'; Olsen 1964, 52–55 and *passim*; and Baines 1956, 13–19.

Hospital for an option to develop single-handedly the whole of the western part of its estate. The twenty-nine year old's proposals were rejected, but two years later he was allocated the south side of Brunswick Square and part of Guilford Street and in 1793 further ground between Guilford Street and Bernard Street. By 1795 he had contracted to build the west side of Brunswick Square and the whole tranche of land to the west as far as the Bedford estate. Before long he was adding site to site until virtually all of the earmarked development was in his hands, and within a decade he been responsible for the construction of 586 houses on the Foundling estate, with a gross value estimated in 1823 at £296,700. Much of this area, ravaged by bombing in the Second World War and by subsequent redevelopment, has been replaced by the grotesquely modernist Brunswick Centre and Burton himself has become a largely forgotten figure, overshadowed by his precocious son Decimus. But in 1807 Samuel Pepys Cockerell, the surveyor to the Foundling Hospital, spoke of Burton in glowing terms:

Mr. Burton is the one individual ... to whom your excellent charity is indebted for the improvement which has taken place on the estate. All that has been done by the other builders is comparatively trifling and insignificant. Without such a man, possessed of very considerable talents, unwearied industry, and a capital of his own, the extraordinary success of the improvement of the Foundling estate could not have taken place.¹⁸

This, though, was but the beginning of an entrepreneurial career in the construction industry. Burton had already moved on to the adjacent Bedford and Skinners' Company estates – building Russell Square and its adjoining streets, the east side of Tavistock Square, Burton Street and Burton (now Cartwright) Crescent – and then on to some of the Nash terraces around Regent's Park, a large part of Regent Street and finally Waterloo Place. In the meantime he had undertaken a big housing estate in Tunbridge Wells and then, having overspent himself on Regent Street, went on to dissipate what remained of his fortune in the creation of the fashionable seaside resort of St Leonard's-on-Sea in Sussex – which by 1833 could be described as 'the most unique collection of elegant buildings of any watering place on the British coast' or, if your architectural disposition was more jaundiced, as 'a conceited Italian town'.¹⁹



Fig. 11. James Burton (1761–1837) (© Hastings Museum & Art Gallery).

¹⁸ Quoted in Olsen 1964, 79.

¹⁹ Quoted in Colvin 1995, 199 and the *ODNB*, 2004, *sub* 'Burton'. Despite the magnitude of Burton's development expenditure he still managed to be worth £60,000 on his death.

All this was in the future, however. In 1795 he was still actively developing the area bounded by the west side of Brunswick Square, Bernard Street, Great Coram Street and Woburn Place and it is this land to which the title 'Foundling Fields' was probably given, not an official Hospital designation but a shorthand by Burton for the area he was developing.

It is in this context that one must view the 'JB' halfpenny: not as a cheap profit-making artifice as Samuel implies, but as a genuinely redeemable token coin supplied by Burton to his subcontractors to help make up the wage bills of the workmen employed on this particular undertaking. Paltry the tokens may have been, but there was no need for them to have been any heavier than they were since they must have been intended to be of only limited circulation in a restricted neighbourhood, probably venturing little further than the eponymous tavern in Lamb's Conduit Street which was the workers' nearest house of call. In such circumstances, too, there was no need to identify their issuer other than by his initials for recipients would have known that the tokens would have been readily honoured by someone who, canny Scot that he was, was an honest employer and immediately available at the centre of his hive of building activity in 'Foundling Fields'.

Burton died at St Leonard's in March 1837.²⁰ A veritable captain of the building industry, bold, thrusting, and of undoubted vision, he had established his reputation forty years before in his first great entrepreneurial venture in Foundling Fields. Brunswick Square balanced by its counterpart Mecklenburgh Square made up the centrepiece of an area to which he gave style and uniformity and yet still preserved the open aspect of its setting. Even after the turn of the century, when the Foundling estate was being intensively developed, the area could still be described as airy, even if the 'cheering prospect of ... the beautiful Hampstead Hills' was rapidly disappearing. As Jane Austen's Isabella Knightley was at pains to point out to her valetudinarian father:

Our part of London is so very superior to most others! You must not confound us with London in general, my dear sir. The neighbourhood of Brunswick Square is very different from almost all the rest. We are so very airy ... so remarkably airy! – Mr Wingfield [a London apothecary] thinks the vicinity of Brunswick Square decidedly the most favourable as to air.²¹

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²⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine* recorded Burton's death on 31 March in its issue for June 1837 (Vol. VII, New Series, Part I, 669): 'At St Leonard's on the Sea, aged 76, James Burton, esq., the celebrated architect and builder of that new watering place, as also of Burton Crescent, &c, &c'.

²¹ Austen 1817 [1996], 86–7.

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