

**The Two 17th Century Merchant Tokens Issued
at Henfield, West Sussex:
Elizabeth Trunnell (1657) and Thomas Pilfold (1668)**



By Geoffrey Barber

Abstract

Two merchant tokens were issued at Henfield in the 17th century. Both merchants were mercers (clothiers) with Elizabeth Trunnell issuing hers in 1657 and Thomas Pilfold in 1668. It is likely that Thomas Pilfold took over the business from Elizabeth Trunnell, a widow who had continued to operate the mercer's shop after her husband died in 1654. Thomas Pilfold was then succeeded by his son John who took the business well into the 18th century. The Pilfolds also owned a property called Hedgecocks at Henfield.

In researching the token issuers, the extended family trees of both families were constructed and used with the many surviving wills to gain insights into their lives. Elizabeth Trunnell's will shows a very comfortable living for the time and Thomas Pilfold's will contains rare personal feelings and thoughts as he tries to deal with a wayward son.

Both tokens can be seen at the Henfield Museum.

Background

During most of the 17th century there was a chronic shortage of small coinage in Britain. To address this, James I and Charles I licenced the manufacture of copper farthings to certain members of the aristocracy. Instances of underweight coins and refusal to redeem the farthings for "real" money created distrust amongst the public, and these licences were eventually withdrawn in 1644. The Civil War, which had started in 1642, then delayed the introduction of a proper solution which was to have an official regal copper currency. However, the merchants of England and Wales could not wait, so between 1648-72 they responded by issuing over 20,000 different base-metal farthing, halfpenny, and penny tokens so they could provide change to customers. Some of these would have been tradeable at the issuing merchant only, but others were widely accepted if it was known that the issuing merchant would honour their value. A number of towns even issued tokens for wider usage in order to facilitate trade amongst the poorer people, such as Midhurst in West Sussex (see Fig. 1). It wasn't until 1672 that the official farthings, halfpennies, and pennies that we know today were finally introduced and the issuing of tokens banned.



Fig. 1. The Midhurst Town farthing token (BW127).
 On the obverse: A.MIDHVRST.FARTHING.IN.SVSEX/
 FOR.YE.VSE.OF.YE.POOR/1670 over a shuttle.
 On the reverse: two pilgrims near a palm tree.
 (Author's collection)

These merchant tokens are of great interest because they usually name the issuer, the town/village where they lived, and often identify the type of business they operated. Such tokens have been collected for over 200 years by numismatists, but it is only in our generation that the resources have become available to thoroughly research the token issuers and their families through online access to parish records, wills and archived documents.

We are indebted to numismatists for their work in developing the knowledge about these tokens and for maintaining a market for serious collectors which has helped to preserve many of them. The standard reference work by Williamson was published between 1889 and 1891, itself a revision of William Boyne's similarly titled original of 1858. Williamson's numbering system is still used today to identify a particular token. Sussex BW96 (B[oyme]W[illiamson]96) identifies the token issued by Thomas Pilfold of Henfield in 1668, and Sussex BW97 identifies the token issued by Elizabeth Trunnell of Henfield in 1657. The leading reference today for 17th century West Sussex merchant tokens is the 2009 publication by Ron Kerridge and Rob de Rooter¹, although much work remains to be done to properly research the many token issuers.

Some 230 of these tokens have been identified in Sussex. This includes die varieties, so the number of different issuers is somewhat less than this. The relatively low number reflects the population and economy in Sussex towns and villages compared to places like London where about three thousand were issued. About one third of the Sussex tokens are undated, and among the dated the earliest to be issued was at East Grinstead in 1650 and the last in 1670 at Midhurst, Petworth and Steyning. The most common occupations of the Sussex token issuers were mercers (31 tokens), grocers (23 tokens), chandlers (16 tokens) and innkeepers (16 tokens).

The Henfield Tokens

There were two tokens issued at Henfield, a farthing token in 1657 by the widow Elizabeth Trunnell and a halfpenny token in 1668 by Thomas Pilford, both mercers by trade. Mercers issued more tokens in Sussex than any other occupation and were the equivalent of the retail clothing trade we know today. In the big city a mercer would traditionally deal with silk and other imported fabrics and were regarded as the high-end clothing retailer. On the other hand, a draper would deal with general cloth as used by tailors to serve the wider community. But in a village such as Henfield, said to have had 400 adult parishoners in 1676,² many of these lines were blurred and the mercer would deal in linen, wool, and silk, incorporating the draper's role and sometimes the haberdasher. To become a mercer required an apprenticeship and the cost of this could be substantial, so it was generally only available to the more well-to-do families (for example, Giles Watts who became a mercer at Battle was apprenticed to John Hanfield, a woollen draper in Ashford, Kent in 1710 at a cost of £45)³.

Elizabeth Trunnell's Token, 1657



Fig. 2. The Elizabeth Trunnell farthing token (Sussex BW97)
On the obverse: ELIZABTH. TRVNNELL 1657.
On the reverse: OF. HENFIELD. 1657 with T over I.E
signifying I[J]ohn and Elizabeth Trunnell.
(Henfield Museum collection)

Elizabeth Trunnell was one of a number of widows who issued a token in Sussex. It was she and Alice Charmayne of Arundel who were the earliest to do so, at least in the tokens that were dated (about a third were issued undated). Her husband John Trunnell, a mercer, had died in 1654 leaving everything to Elizabeth⁴, and her token shows that she was successful in keeping the business going. At that time, Elizabeth had five surviving children: Ann, John, Richard, Robert and Thomas who were all adults with only Thomas yet to be married. Records show that John became a mercer at Henfield, Richard a mercer at Hurstpierpoint, Robert a shoemaker at Henfield, and Thomas a barber-surgeon at Hurstpierpoint.^{5,6,7}

In 1657, when the token was issued, Elizabeth was probably operating the mercer shop at Henfield with the help of her eldest son John as there are records that show he was a mercer and living at Henfield.⁸ Her second son Richard was working as a mercer at Hurstpierpoint, a village about 5 miles away. There is an undated farthing token that was issued at Hurstpierpoint by the mercer Thomas Donstall [Dunstall] with his initials T.P. The lack of an initial for his wife Elizabeth, who he married on 11 Jan 1659, suggests that it

was issued before then. Thomas Dunstall also came from Henfield⁹ and these common connections make one wonder if Richard was working for Dunstall and whether his experience at Hurstpierpoint influenced Elizabeth in her decision to issue her token, or vice versa. Sadly, Richard died in 1657, the year Elizabeth's token was issued, at age 31 years.



Fig. 3. The Thomas Donstall [Dunstall] undated farthing token (Sussex BW109)
On the obverse: THOMAS.DONSTALL around a wool comb.
On the reverse: OF.HVRST.MERSER with T.D
signifying Thomas and Donstall.
(Nigel Clark collection)

Something very interesting comes to light in the will of Thomas Dunstall's brother, John, who wrote his will at Henfield on 13 May 1659, at the age of 25 years, stating that he is "sick in body but of good & perfect remembrance". He must have been aware that he was going to die as he was buried just four days later. A witness to the will was none other than John Trunnell, eldest son of the widow Elizabeth, the token issuer. Surprisingly, he also died and was buried 15 days after witnessing the will, at 36 years of age. This was a tragedy for Elizabeth as she had lost Richard and now John, the eldest son, who was clearly positioned to take over the business. One is left to wonder if, in witnessing the will, John Trunnell also contracted the sickness that was afflicting John Dunstall. Smallpox comes to mind, a disease which can cause death, usually within 8 to 16 days of infection. It is a contagious disease, spread easily in a household setting, through the air or on objects like bedding and clothing.

The deaths of Richard and John meant that there was no successor for the business, as her other two sons had not been trained as mercers. With Elizabeth an elderly woman, the opportunity was there for Thomas Pilford to take over the business. His token was issued in 1668 indicating that he was established at Henfield by then.

Elizabeth died in 1673, at about 80 years of age, and was buried at Henfield St Peter. Her youngest son Thomas had died two years earlier at 37 years of age and he had neither wife nor children.¹⁰ She was survived by her son Robert Trunnell, the shoemaker, and her daughter Ann Jenner so it is possible that Elizabeth has descendants alive today who can claim a connection to her and her token.

Elizabeth's will deals mostly with her personal items, as any land or property belonging to her deceased husband would probably have been passed to her children long ago. In any event, her son Robert is left the residue of the estate so if there was anything not specified in the will, he was to receive it.¹¹

Elizabeth's personal items show that she must have had a very comfortable living. Her will mentions three rooms in her house: a hall with a chimney, a separate lodging chamber and a milk house, and there were probably more. She is well endowed with beds, sheets, pillowcoats, blankets and towels; table cloths and napkins; pewter plates, platters, candlesticks and flagons; brass pots and kettles as well as furniture such as cupboards, chests for clothes of linen and wool, a small table at the foot of her bed, a gilt leather chair, stools, and bullrush chairs; an iron spit, pothanger, iron cleaver, tongs and gridiron; wooden bowls and platters; two velvet cushions, a carpet, hats, a gilt hat brush, a spinning wheel and a pewter chamber pot!

The Trunnell Family

While it was Elizabeth who issued the token it seems appropriate to mention her husband John Trunnell, who would have started the business at Henfield.

The surname Trunnell is a local name and a variant of Trundle, possibly connected to a hillfort known as The Trundle at Singleton, West Sussex.¹² Unfortunately, the surname disappears from Sussex. There are no Trunnell entries in the Sussex Marriage Index after 1675 and none for Trundle/Trendle after 1739.

The last Trunnell family left in Sussex in the 1500s were reasonably wealthy. In 1561, John Trunnell purchased Nyton farm in Aldingbourne, which still exists today.¹³ It is his grandson John who became the mercer at Henfield. His father Robert died when John was about 8 years old, and in his will custody of John is given to Henry Potter, a preacher and brother-in-law:¹⁴

“... to kepe him att School att some of the universities of this land and do allowe him for his mayntenance xijli [£,12] yerely so long as he shalbe charged with my said sonne”

We know that John became a mercer with a business at Henfield, so it must have later been decided that an apprenticeship was the best option for him. He married Elizabeth Healy, the token issuer, on 27 September 1614 at Thursley in Surrey and they first appear at Henfield in 1616 when their daughter Elizabeth is baptised there. Five of their eight children grew to adulthood and all the male children were taught a trade. He died in 1654 at age 63 years, unaware of the sadness and disappointment that Elizabeth would later experience. Only their son Robert, the shoemaker who married and stayed behind at Henfield, was able to take the Trunnell surname into the next generation, but with no male heir his burial in 1710 is the last time we see the Trunnell name in Sussex.

Thomas Pilfold's Token, 1668



Fig. 4. The Thomas Pilfold halfpenny token (BW96)
On the obverse: THOMAS.PILFOLD AT 68 around the Mercers' Arms
with P on top and T and E on either side signifying Thomas and Elizabeth Pilfold.
On the reverse: HENFIELD.IN.SVSSEX around HIS HALF PENNY.
(Author's collection)

Thomas Pilfold's origins are harder to trace than the Trunnell's. He may have been born in 1632 at Billingshurst to Thomas Pilfold, a yeoman, but this is not certain.



Fig. 5. Mercers' Maiden

The earliest evidence of Thomas at Henfield is the baptism of his son Thomas on 14 Mar 1660 which gives the best estimate for when he took over the business.¹⁵ While there is no record of his marriage,¹⁶ he and wife Elizabeth had seven children, all making it through to adulthood.

In 1668 he issued his halfpenny token at Henfield (Fig. 4) which shows the “Mercers' Maiden” surrounded by the initials for Thomas and Elizabeth Pilfold. The “Mercers' Maiden” (Fig. 5), taken from the Worshipful Company of Mercers' coat of arms, was used on many 17th century tokens to identify the mercer's trade.

Thomas died in 1687 and his will expresses his desire to be buried inside the church at Henfield.¹⁷ The will shows that he was greatly vexed by his eldest son Thomas whose inheritance was subject to:

“whensoever it shall please God that he returns to his right mind, becomes dutiful & respectful to his mother & relations, & diligently follows his calling & employment”.

Not wanting to disinherit his son, he gave the following bequests with conditions:

- To Thomas Pilfold, eldest son – the dwelling house in Henfield except for the south end which is to be Elizabeth's for the term of her natural life. Thomas to pay Elizabeth £11 13s 8d per year.
- To Thomas Pilfold, eldest son - all the goods & wares in the shop and in the chamber over the shop and paying £100 each to eldest daughter Elizabeth and third daughter Jane.

Trustees were appointed in the event that Thomas did not:

“... behave himself dutifully to his mother & diligent in his calling” and if he should continue to *“spend & by his negligence waste whatsoever he hath in his own disposing”*. In that case he was to *“stand to the Curtesy & Allowance of his mother, Elizabeth Pilfold my wife to whom alone I doe hereby give ye aforesayd house, goods & wares with all the appurtenances thereunto belonging to be solely at her disposing to all intents & purposes”*.

So, he was given a chance to redeem himself. It is not known what Thomas did during his life, but he died in 1737 at age 77 years and was buried at Henfield. His mother’s will made in 1713 does treat Thomas kindly, with a bequest of £6, some household goods and forgiveness of debts.¹⁸

It was the second son, John Pilfold, who seems to have been the diligent and responsible person that Thomas had hoped to see in his eldest son. John became a mercer at Henfield, presumably continuing his father’s shop. He received the following bequest in his father’s will in 1687:

- To John Pilford, second son - the new house, outhouses gardens, orchards on one acre of land in Blaxton [Blackston] Street in Woodmancote, after the decease of his mother Elizabeth.

There are records of two apprentices that John took on:¹⁹

1 May 1713: William Fowle, son of Thomas (yeoman) of Albourne, apprenticed to John Pilfold mercer of Henfield.

3 February 1725: Peter Hill, son of Edward Hill of Woodmancote, apprenticed to John Pilfold mercer of Henfield.²⁰

John died in 1751 and his will shows him to be quite wealthy.²¹ He had no male heir though, being survived by daughters Jane and Mary who both married well. It is not known who took over the mercer shop in Henfield, but it could have been one of the apprentices (the apprentice William Fowle was the son of John’s brother-in-law Thomas Fowle).

John’s will shows that he held the copyhold property called Hedgecocks at Henfield, held of the Manor of Stretham. He passed this to his wife for the term of her natural life and then to his married daughter Mary Dennett, wife of John Dennett Esq. of Woodmancote He also left his house in Henfield to his his wife for the term of her natural life and then to his married daughter Jane Langrish, wife of Robert Langrish, apothecary of Midhurst. There is no mention of the Blackston Street property at Woodmancote that John inherited from his father.

Conclusion

All artifacts help to bring history to life, and the two tokens issued at Henfield are no exception. The issuers were prosperous merchants who nevertheless had to deal with raising a family, educating their children, coping with the mortality of their children and spouses, and even dealing with problem children as adults. They are the same issues that families have today, though thankfully we do not suffer the mortality rates they had in the 17th century. The tokens are a reminder of “Old Henfield” and rightfully deserve their place in the Henfield Museum.

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REFERENCES

All wills cited have been transcribed and given to the Sussex Family History Group Wills Depository which currently holds over 13,500 transcriptions. Copies are freely available to members.

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- ¹ Kerridge R. and de Ruiter, R “The Tokens, Metallic Tickets, Checks and Passes of West Sussex, 1650-1950”. (2009)
 - ² Sussex Archaeological Collections, Vol 45, “A Religious Census of Sussex in 1676”, p.144
 - ³ Sussex Record Society, Vol 28. (1924) “Sussex Apprentices and Masters 1710-1752”, p.20
 - ⁴ Will of John Trunnell the Elder, Mercer of Henfield, Sussex, England, made 10 Jul 1654, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 16 May 1655. (TNA: PROB 11/245/247).
 - ⁵ Will of Richard Trunnell, Mercer of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, England, made 3 Aug 1657, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 19 Sep 1657. (TNA: PROB 11/267/456).
 - ⁶ Deed of Feoffment, 28 Mar 1670. (ESRO: SAS-EG/111) – *refers to Robert Trunnell as shoemaker and Richard Trunnell his brother as mercer. Also refers to deceased brother, John Trunnell as mercer.*
 - ⁷ Will of Thomas Trunnell, Barber Surgeon of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, England, made 21 Dec 1670, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 14 Jan 1671. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/32/124).
 - ⁸ Deed of feoffment, 28 Mar 1670 (WSRO: SAS-EG/111) - shows that John held land at Henfield. He was also buried there on 28 May 1659.
 - ⁹ Thomas Dunstall was baptised 18 Dec 1633 at Henfield, son of John and Elizabeth Dunstall. The will of his uncle Thomas Dunstall of Henfield, proved 31 Jul 1660 (TNA: PROB 11/299/784) and brother John Dunstall of Henfield, proved 27 Jun 1659 (TNA: PROB 11/293/515) confirm this. An interesting fact is that Thomas Donstall's son became the Rev. John Donstall who was rector at Newtimber (1687-1733) and South Stoke (1706-1733).
 - ¹⁰ Will of Thomas Trunnell, Barber Surgeon of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, England, made 21 Dec 1670, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 14 Jan 1671. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/32/124).
 - ¹¹ Will of Elizabeth Trunnell, Widow of Henfield, Sussex, England, made 20 May 1673, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 20 May 1674. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/34/6C).
 - ¹² The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland (2016)
 - ¹³ Bargain and Sale (unenrolled), 14 Jun 1561. (WSRO: ADD MSS/13135)
 - ¹⁴ Will of Robert Trunnell of Bosham, Sussex, England, made 12 Oct 1598, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Chichester, 19 Dec 1610. (WSRO: Ep/I/27/STC II/Folder U-W).
 - ¹⁵ This baptism incorrectly records the mother's name as Mary. Subsequent baptisms have the mother's name as Elizabeth.
 - ¹⁶ There is a marriage of a Thomas Pilfold to an Elizabeth Wheeler on 5 Aug 1657 at Billingshurst. However, it looks like an older Thomas Pilfold as it states “Thomas PILFOLD, yeoman of this parish, Alderman City of Chichester. Elizabeth WHEELER daughter of Thomas WHEELER gent whose former husband was Mr NATT”.
 - ¹⁷ Will of Thomas Pilfold of Henfield, Sussex, England, made 9 May 1687, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 17 Jun 1687. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/38/40).
 - ¹⁸ Will of Elizabeth Pilfold of Henfield, Sussex, England, made 8 Jul 1713, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 3 Jun 1724. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/51/307).
 - ¹⁹ Sussex Record Society, Vol 28. (1924) “Sussex Apprentices and Masters 1710-1752”.
 - ²⁰ It is interesting to note that Peter Hill is the grandson of Richard Trunnell's widow from her marriage to Thomas Goffe in 1661.
 - ²¹ Will of John Pilfold of Henfield, Sussex, England, made 13 Jan 1749, proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Lewes, 28 Mar 1751. (ESRO: PBT/1/1/58/353).