

The Six Merchant Tokens Issued at Battle in East Sussex, 1650-70

By Geoffrey Barber

During most of the 17th century there was a chronic shortage of small coinage. The unsatisfactory attempts by James I and Charles I to introduce copper farthings had failed and licences to make these farthings were withdrawn in 1644. The chaos of the Civil War which had started in 1642 resulted in the deferral of the introduction of an official regal copper currency, so between 1648 and 1672 the merchants of England and Wales responded by issuing over 20,000 different base-metal farthing, halfpenny and penny tokens so they could provide change to customers. It wasn't until 1672 that the official farthings, halfpennies and pennies that we know today were finally introduced and the issuing of tokens was banned.

In Sussex, some 230 of these tokens have been identified. This includes die varieties so the number of different issuers is somewhat less than this. The relatively low number is a reflection of 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 in West Sussex.

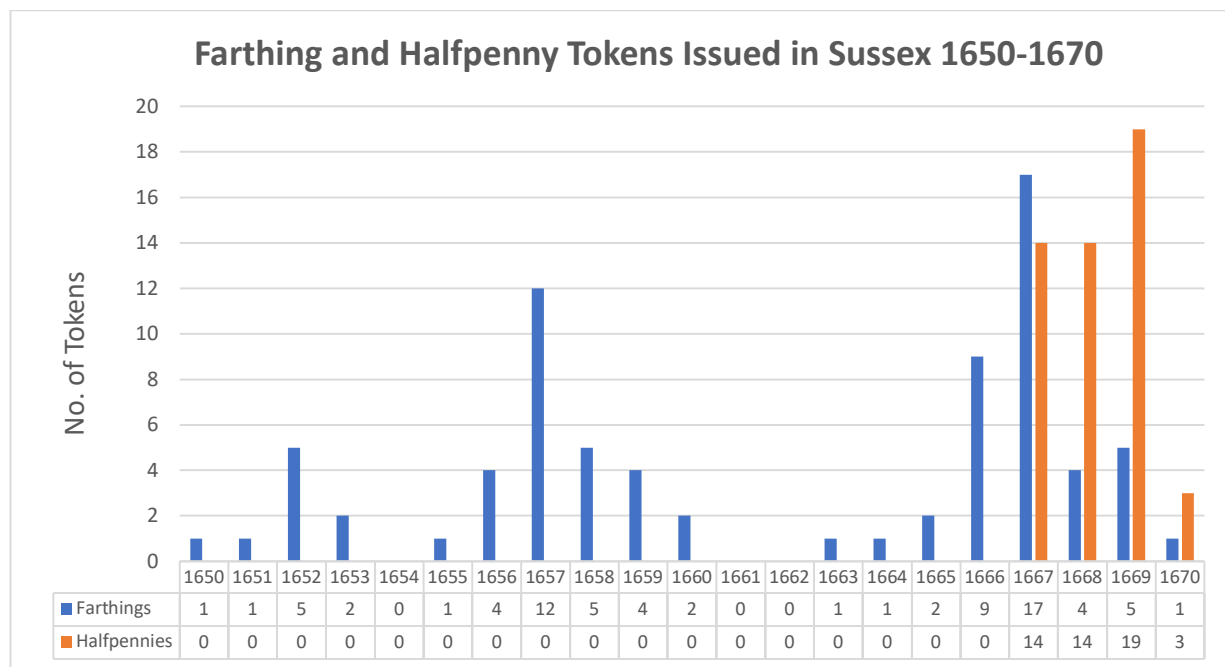


Fig. 1. The issuance of farthing and halfpenny 17th century merchant tokens in Sussex. Data excludes die-varieties but not multiple issuances by the same merchant in different years or in different denominations. The data also excludes the substantial number of undated tokens, about 34% of total issuances.

In East and West Sussex, the most common occupations of the token issuers were mercers (31 tokens), grocers (23), chandlers (16) and innkeepers (16) – see Fig. 2. The town of Battle shows great consistency with these results with their six tokens being for an innkeeper, a mercer, grocer (probably incorporating a Chandler – his father's occupation), tailor and an apothecary.

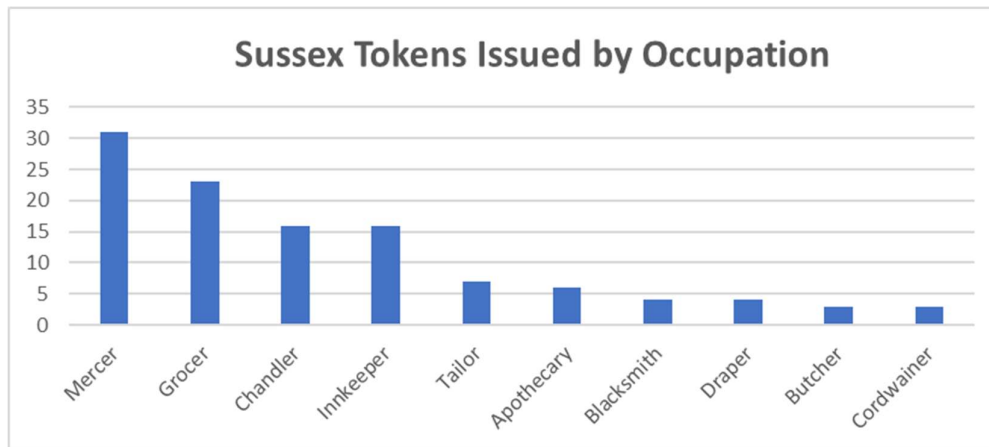


Fig. 2. The number of merchant tokens issued in Sussex by occupation.

The six tokens issued at Battle are all undated. This article presents detailed research on each issuer with images of the tokens shown where available.

1. Thomas Page, undated farthing token, “AT.THE.SPRED.EGLE” (BW22)



Fig. 3. The undated farthing token of Thomas Page of Battle. The obverse showing the double headed eagle and the reverse (difficult to read in places) with T.P in the middle for Thomas Page. The obverse has the words THOMAS.PAGE.AT.THE around the edge and the reverse has SPRED.EGLE.IN.BATTELL but the word SPRED is obliterated in this particular token.
(Nigel Clark collection)

The earliest token issued at Battle is likely to be that of Thomas Page whose farthing token contains an image of a double headed eagle and the phrase “AT.THE.SPRED.EGLE”. Documents exist which show him to be the innkeeper at “The Eagle” in Battle and previously an innkeeper in East Grinstead.¹ He is the same Thomas Page who issued the earliest known token in Sussex at East Grinstead in 1650.

His family tree shows that his son Thomas Page, who is identified as a carpenter in various documents, had moved from East Grinstead to Battle by 1652, where his daughter Mary was baptised. This provides our best estimate for when his father became an innkeeper there.

¹ ESRO: SAS/FB/544, SAS/FB/557. Both documents concern the property Gedges at East Grinstead with the first in 1648 referring to Thomas Page of East Grinstead, innholder and the second, in 1683, referring to the same Thomas Page as late of Battle, innholder, deceased.

Ten years later, in 1662, an Alehouse Keeper's Recognizance states that:²

Thomas Page is admitted and allowed by His Majesties Justices of the Peace about named to keep a common alehouse & to use the common selling of ale & beer within the now dwelling house of the said Thomas Page situate in Battell aforesaid & called the sign of the Eagle

These were early public house licences where the alehouse keeper appeared before two Justices of the Peace and entered into a bond, promising to maintain good order in their houses and not to permit unlawful games.

The year 1662 was the last year Thomas Page was innkeeper at The Eagle, with Edward Welsh/Welch taking over (see later). The year 1662 was also the last year his sons' children were baptised at Battle and sometime after that they returned to East Grinstead. He would appear to have died in 1664 and there are two possibilities for his burial, one at Battle and the other at East Grinstead.

Although Thomas Page was the innkeeper at The Eagle, he was not the owner of the premises. The Battle and District Historical Society publication *Inns and Other Public Drinking Houses* states that in 1657 Edward Welch was admitted to the copyhold messuage [dwelling] in Middleborough³ once called Fishers but now called The Eagle. This would be the result of his inheritance coming due given that his father had died young and that his grandfather, also an innkeeper at Battle, had made the underage Edward Welsh a beneficiary of his will proved in 1647. The overseers of the grandfather's estate had probably been keen to lease the property so it would continue operating while the younger Edward Welsh became old enough to operate it himself. It looks very likely that Thomas Page had a ten-year lease on the property, 1652-62 so his token would have been issued during that time. After he had taken over, Edward Welsh also issued a farthing token with the same double headed eagle.

Of interest is that Thomas Page's son, Richard Page, was to later jointly issue an undated halfpenny token at East Grinstead with Henry Brasted, a mercer. Richard was an innkeeper there at the Crown Inn and a crown features on his token.

2. Edward Welsh, undated farthing token, Double Headed Eagle (D23A)



Fig. 4. The undated farthing token of Edward Welsh of Battle. The obverse showing the double headed eagle and the reverse with W | E.M in the middle for Edward Welsh and his wife Mary. The obverse has the words EDWARD.WELSH around the edge and the reverse has BATTELL.IN.SVSSEX.

(Nigel Clark collection)

² Thomas Page of Battle, innkeeper; alehouse keeper's recognizance, Date: 1662, ESRO reference: QR/135/117

³ One of the 5 boroughs of Battle: Middleboro, Uckham, Santlake, Montjoy, and Telham

Edward Welsh's grandfather has been documented as an innkeeper at Battle in Alehouse Keeper's Recognizances in 1632 and 1636-43.⁴ He died in 1647 and his will is key to understanding the family of Edward Welsh the token issuer. It also shows the family to have been quite wealthy.⁵

Edward's father died when he was only 4 years old and it is clear that his grandfather played an important role in his upbringing. When the grandfather died in 1647, Edward was about 13 years old and still too young to inherit. The grandfather only had his five grandchildren left when he wrote his will, all his children having died before him. His request to be buried near his children in the Battle churchyard is very poignant.

In his will, the grandfather instructed his overseers to ensure his grandchildren were "well and decently educated", leaving them sums of between £100-250 pounds each with various lands and tenements in Battle and Hollington going to the male grandchildren.

In 1657 Edward Welsh was admitted to the 'copyhold messuage in Middleborough once called Fishers but now called The Eagle', presumed to be the inn operated by Thomas Page. Edward would have been 24 years old, his brother Richard 20 years old, so both coming of age and entitled to their inheritance from their grandfather. Edward received property at Battle as specified in his grandfather's will:

I give and bequeath all other my Messuages Lands tenements barnes Stables Orchards Gardens and hereditaments whatsoever both freehold and Copyhold in Battell aforesaid unto the said **Edward Welsh** my Grand child and to his heires and assignes for ever (saving That my aforesaid Overseers shall and maie receive and take rents issues and proffits thereof for the time and purpose aforesaid according to the power to them before bequeathed)

It looks likely that Edward Welsh, the grandfather, owned The Eagle and that his trustees/overseers held it for the young Edward with Thomas Page being brought in to operate and manage it as innkeeper.

According to Martin, Martin & Whittick, legal documentation confirms that Edward Welsh was operating The Eagle in 1662 which would be the year he took over from Thomas Page.⁶ His token would have been issued after this, so between 1662-1670.

Edward Welsh's farthing token has a two-headed eagle, representing his inn The Eagle, and also carried his wife's initial M, a common feature on 17th century tokens. He had married Mary Shether in 1654 at Brightling.

3. Giles Watts, undated farthing token, Mercers' Arms (BW23)



Fig. 5. *In the Draper's Shop* by Adriaen van Bloemen
(Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21848602>)

⁴ Alehouse Keeper's Recognizances, Sussex Quarter Sessions, Eastern Division, c 1550-1914. (ESRO)

⁵ Will of Edward Welsh, Yeoman of Battle, made 6 Jan 1642/43, proved 4 May 1647. (TNA: PROB 11/200/228)

⁶ David and Barbara Martin with Christopher Whittick: *Building Battle town* (Domtom Publishing Ltd, Burgess Hill, 2016)



The “Mercers’ Maiden” with crown and flowing hair is the main feature in the Mercers’ coat of arms and commonly used on mercers’ tokens, as it was for Giles Watts.

Mercers issued more tokens in Sussex than any other occupation, followed by the grocers. Mercers 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 country town such as Battle, many of these lines were blurred and the mercer would deal in linen, wool, silk incorporating the draper’s role and sometimes the haberdasher.

Giles Watts and family would seem to have been the cloth specialists in Battle and their wills show that they were wealthy men. The father Giles Watts declared himself as a mercer in 1636 on his marriage licence and in 1657 on his will, while his son Giles Watts declared himself to be a draper on his marriage licence in 1662 and a gentleman on his will in 1686. It is likely that the younger Giles had served an apprenticeship as a draper to learn the clothing trade, just as his nephew, another Giles Watts, did in 1710.

Giles Watts’ father left him substantial holdings of property in Kent and Sussex and his younger brother Robert Watts inherited his father’s own house in Battle and another property. His married sister was left fifty pounds and each of his unmarried sisters two hundred pounds. One of the items his father left to his wife was fitting for a mercer: “stuffe for a gowne with linning and garnishing suitable”.⁷

It is the lack of a wife’s initial on the token which makes the son the likely issuer of the token, as his father was married nearly all his life. The younger Giles was briefly married 1662-65 and he died childless. The inclusion of both the husband and wife’s initials on the token was an almost standard feature on tokens, although exceptions are known. The period 1658-1662 is therefore looking promising for the issue of this token although it was not a time of high issuances in Sussex generally (see Fig. 1). The peak period for token issuances was 1666-69, after the death of Giles’ wife Elizabeth, so this may be more likely.

Giles Watts died childless in 1686. In his will he left the sum of fifty pounds for the purchase of land to that value to be settled on the churchwardens and overseers of the poor of Battle to be used for the benefit of the poor.⁸ There is a document dated 1729 referring to a house and land purchased by the Battle parish officers for the Giles Watts Charity and subsequently used as a workhouse.⁹ The remainder of his substantial estate was divided between his siblings and their children.

It is likely that the business continued within the family through his step-brother Robert Watts who named one of his sons Giles who was apprenticed to John Hanfield, a woollen draper in Ashford, Kent in 1710 at a cost of £45. This nephew later returned to Battle and took on his own apprentice mercers in 1718 and 1723, each paying him £40 for the privilege.¹⁰

⁷ Will of Giles Watts, Mercer of Battle, Made 19 Dec 1657, proved 28 Jul 1658. (TNA: PROB 11/281/752)

⁸ Will of Giles Watts, Gent of Battle, made 20 Jul 1686, proved 23 Mar 1687. (TNA: PROB 4/190/28)

⁹ ESRO: SHE 5/3/1

¹⁰ Garraway Rice, R. *Sussex Apprentices and Masters - 1710 to 1752*, p.20, p.111, p.201

4. John Medhurst, undated farthing token, Grocers' Arms (BW21)



Fig. 6. The undated farthing token of John Medhurst of Battle showing the Grocers' Arms and the initials M for Medhurst and I·I for John and J for Joan his wife.



The shield on the Grocers' Arms shows nine cloves, being among the spices they sell. Originally known as Pepperers, they sold a range of spices and other products such as tea, coffee, chocolate, sugar, tobacco, dried fruit and nuts, mostly imported and sold "en gros", hence the Grocers name. They did not sell fresh produce.

Grocers serviced both the wealthy and the relatively poor, and customers needed to rely on the grocer's integrity for the purity and weight of goods purchased. It was also inevitable that grocers offered some credit to their customers, so a sense of trust between the grocer and his customers was important, even more so in a small town like

Battle.¹¹

John's father was a chandler, so it is almost certain that his grocery store also sold candles. Someone in the family is likely to have continued the trade, possibly his brother William who inherited all his father's tools and equipment.¹²

John was the second son of his father, John Medhurst, who died in 1654. His father left his property (messuage and tenement) along with his tools of trade to his eldest son, William. To his younger sons John and Richard he left £10 each and to his daughters varying sums of £35, £15 and £10. It is possible that John's father paid for an apprenticeship for him, a common way of compensating younger sons who would not inherit the family property.

John is described in the church records as haberdasher in 1652 and a mercer on his will in 1689, yet his token has the Grocers' Arms. This points to some potential overlap between John Medhurst's store and Giles Watts' mercer shop, so maybe his goods also included some haberdashery and cloth. They both dealt with imported goods, each with their own supply networks and each looking to make money in a small town. However, we can probably surmise that John Medhurst's business was more akin to a general trader who dealt with a wider range of lower value goods. He and his father's wills show that they were not wealthy and his shop is unlikely to have been a serious competitor to the Watts family of mercers.

John Medhurst's token has his wife Joan's initial "J", showing this was issued sometime after his second marriage circa 1660.

¹¹ Suggested reading: Stobart, Jon: *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650-1830* (OUP, 2012)

¹² Will of John Medhurst, Chandler of Battle, made 8 Jan 1649/50, proved 7 Feb 1653/54. (TNA: PROB 11/239/305)

John died in 1689 at Battle, and was survived by his wife Joane and two married sons. His will leaves the sons £5 each and lesser amounts to grandchildren while Joane received the remainder and the house for the duration of her natural life.¹³

5. Jonas Lulham, undated farthing token, Merchant Taylors Arms (BW19)



Jonas was the son of Adam Lulham, a tailor. Adam’s will, proved in 1665 leaves a “joyned chest” and the family messuage and tenement to Jonas on condition that he pay out the £13 of legacies given to his siblings.¹⁴ The family was not particularly wealthy, probably a reflection of the smaller profits in garment making.

Jonas issued an undated farthing token with the Merchant Taylor’s coat of arms indicating that he too was a tailor. The shield on the coat of arms shows a royal pavilion between two mantles (capes).

Jonas married about 1660 and because his token has his wife Mary’s initial “M”, we can say it was issued after this, probably after his father died in 1664 and possibly during the peak period for issuing tokens in Sussex which was 1666-69.

There is a marriage of an Abraham Luhlham of Battle in 1657, probably a cousin, which records his occupation as a hatter, so it may be that the token was used by others in his family as well.

6. Thomas Manhood, undated halfpenny token, “APOTHECARYE” (BW20)



Fig. 7. The undated halfpenny token for Thomas Manhood, stating that he is an “apothecary”. The three initials indicate that he had a wife (name unknown but starting with an “M”).

According to Berry, the vast majority of people could not afford a visit to a qualified doctor or physician and consulted the apothecary instead. Apothecaries were originally affiliated to the Society of Grocers as they both dealt with medicinal herbs but they broke away in 1617 forming their own company. Apothecary tokens carried a variety of images such as a mortar and pestle, the Apothecaries coat of arms or a pot of lilies. The significance of the image on Thomas Manhood’s token of a heart pierced by two arrows is debatable, but perhaps the heart is for health and the arrows taken from the Apothecaries Arms which shows Apollo with a bow and arrow defeating disease, represented by a dragon.

¹³ Will of John Medhurst, Mercer of Battle, made 13 Dec 1689, proved 7 Apr 1690. ((TNA: PROB 11/399/129)

¹⁴ Will of Adam Lulham, Tailor of Battle, made 8 Apr 1664, proved 6 Jan 1664/65. (ESRO: PBT 3/2/2)

There is not a lot of information to be found on Thomas Manhood/Manwood. Despite being married (as indicated on his token), a marriage cannot be found and neither can baptisms for any children. Although Thomas was born at Battle, it is not a common surname in Sussex. Further research may show that he was a religious non-conformist, possibly Catholic, which could explain his absence from many of the records. Evidence for this suspicion is that a Chrisoganus Manhood of Battle, gent, was on a register of Papists' Estates in 1717.¹⁵

This is the only halfpenny token to be issued at Battle, the rest being farthings. It is therefore likely to have been issued 1667-70, the period when all dated halfpennies were issued in Sussex.

Conclusion

The tokens and the history behind the token issuers of Battle provides an interesting view of some of the businesses operating in a small county town in the 1650-70 period. Of course there were many merchants and trades there that did not issue tokens, such as the baker, butcher, shoemaker and blacksmith. It is therefore interesting to consider how these tokens were used in the community, whether tradeable at the issuing merchant only, or more widely accepted. There is evidence to show that these tokens could be accepted at other businesses if it was known that the issuing merchant would honour their value. Berry talks of innkeepers having sorting trays for the various tokens on their counters and the tokens being redeemed by the appropriate merchant from time to time.¹⁶ Also, there are examples where the town itself issued tokens for general use to facilitate trade amongst the poorer people. This happened, for example, at Rye in 1668 and Midhurst in 1670. In a small town such as Battle, some degree of cooperation between the merchants is likely to have existed, and the tokens were probably also used in surrounding villages. As well as their practical value in facilitating financial transactions, the tokens probably also had significant intangible value to the issuers in generating loyalty and awareness in regards to their business.

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¹⁵ The National Archives: QDR/5/10

¹⁶ Berry, George: *Seventeenth Century England: Traders and Their Tokens*, 1988, B.A. Seaby Ltd.