

KENT HOP-TOKENS

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THE Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) appears to have been introduced into England for cultivation in the reign of Elizabeth I, about the year 1524, and the village of Little Chart, in Kent, claims to have "England's oldest hop-garden."

Walter Rowles, in *The Kentish Chronologer* of 1807, tells us that in 1492, before the use of hops, wormwood was used for preserving malt liquor.

The cultivation of hops was a popular industry, first because it was very profitable, and secondly because it employed labour for almost all the year, "Planting, Soiling, Houghing, Poling, Tying and Picking." About the year 1870, some 46,600 acres were under hop-cultivation in Kent, and it is obvious that as all the picking had to be done in a few weeks, many thousands of pickers were required. These came chiefly from London, for "a holiday with work and pay," and were known as "furiners."

Payment for picking was arranged through the medium of tallies and hop-tokens. These showed the number of bushels picked, and were the basis of payment after the rate was agreed upon, which sometimes took several days.

The pickers received payment on account from time to time in exchange for these tokens, but the growers kept a sufficient balance in hand to prevent loss should the pickers leave before their work was completed.

Hop-tokens were passed as money between the pickers themselves, and were also accepted by the shop-keepers and inn-keepers in the locality, who were sure that the tokens would be redeemed later by the growers who issued them.

Tally-sticks (from the Latin "talea," a rod), were used either separately or in conjunction with the tokens. They were made of wood, and were about 9 in. long and 1 in. wide, sawn down the centre to leave one piece longer than the other, with a thick piece at the top. This had a hole bored through it, to enable the tally-man to carry them by means of a cord hung over his shoulder, in order that he might have both hands free to mark the tallies. Both pieces were numbered for identification, usually with ink, the picker retaining the shorter piece. After the hops had been measured, both pieces of wood were



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fitted together, and notches cut across them with a knife or triangular file. A notch usually denoted five bushels, the odd bushels, if any, being marked on a different part of the tally-stick. Later, tokens, which were metal discs with a number or mark, were given to represent the odd bushels, to be exchanged later with the tally-man for additional five-bushel notches. When the notches reached the end of the tally-stick, the tally-man expected a "drink" from the picker, before commencing to mark the other side. A mark was made, usually with ink, on the tally-stick to record any money paid on account to the picker, and when the tallies were finished with, the notches were planed off in order that they could be used again for the next season.

The tally-sticks were gradually superseded by the tokens, also known as tallies, checks and medals, and these were made to represent, by combination, any number of bushels.

The earliest tokens (1-5) were made of lead, thick and crude, and it is quite possible that the medieval merchants' tokens were once used for hop-tokens, followed later by metal discs having figures to denote the number of bushels picked, and the initials of the growers, for identification and the prevention of forgery (6). The earliest dated hop-token is said to be that issued by Toke of Godinton in 1767.

As the hop-growing industry increased, many varieties of hop-tokens were made, with more or less elaborate designs, the usual metal used being lead alloyed with zinc, but brass, copper, iron, cardboard and paper were also used. Nearly all were home-made, or made in the neighbourhood of the hop-gardens in which they were used.

Most of the tokens with elaborate designs belong to Sussex, where it seemed to be fashionable for the hop-growers to compete with each other to produce pleasing pieces. This type of token was in use until about 1862, when the excise duty was taken off hops. The hop-growing industry started to decline from that date, and the later tokens were mostly plain, cut from sheet metal and punched with numbers to denote their value, and the initials of the growers, instead of being cast. The method of casting was either in strips (7) between wooden, plaster, or chalk moulds, or separately. A mould for the Bradbourne tokens, now in the Maidstone Museum, is made of brass. It is interesting to note that some of the ancient Greek coins were cast in strips, and afterwards broken apart. This method of casting was also used for the old Hebrew coins, and the Ancient British tin coins of 2,000 years ago.

Mistakes were often made in preparing the moulds by not realizing that the letters and figures should be reversed (7 and 9).

Tokens with the value of six were in some instances made in different shapes (8), triangular, square, or octagonal, to prevent confusion with the nines. The Offen tokens of Egerton have a small hole pierced on either side of the figure nine to distinguish it from the six.

Many were countermarked with initials when one grower took over a stock of tokens from another, or a son from his father (8). Sometimes the initial letter of the place where the tokens were used were placed beneath the initials of the grower or the figures (13). The letter "B," however, usually denotes bushels, and "D," dozens of bushels. Some sets of tokens are uniform in size for the different values, while others have been made progressively larger as the values increase. The numbers on the tokens vary from 1 to 200, but the lower values are the more numerous. The Kentish horse (reversed), with the motto "Invicta" appears on the 120 bushels token of Aaron Pinyon, of Boxhurst, Sandhurst (9). Perforated metal tokens were used by John Day, of Scott's Farm, Hunton. These were shaped like dominoes, the numbers being shown by the punched holes (10). There are comparatively few tokens with money values upon them. One of these sets comes from Catt's Place, Brenchley. They were issued by Edmund and Rosamund Monckton in 1774, and consist of a crown, half-crown, shilling, and sixpence (11). On the two larger pieces the initials of the husband and wife appear together. It will be realized that payment with this type of token must have been difficult and complicated, hence their scarcity. An unusual type of token from Smarden is made of copper, octagonal in shape, with the grower's initials and the figure 4 in addition to four perforations (12). E. Scott, of Hunton, used printed cards, with the six and the nine spelt out to prevent these numbers being mistaken one for the other (13).

F. W. Waters, of Frog's Farm, Newenden, issued a 30 bushel token in 1860, showing two oast-houses (14).

In East Kent, five-bushel baskets are provided for the pickers, but in the Weald the hops are measured out of the canvas bins into which the hops have been picked. Children sometimes pick into separate receptacles, such as umbrellas and odd baskets, and if they do not behave, are "given the bine," a somewhat painful form of punishment!

On your first visit to a hop-garden, you would soon be recognized as a new-comer, and would be met by one of the pickers, who would rub your shoes with a handful of hop leaves, and invite you to "pay your footing" with "shoe-money." In some cases where careless picking has resulted in leaves being included with the hops, the measurer may refuse to measure them until "the next time round," which may mean the next day. This penalizes the picker, as the hops shrink if left too long. When the measurer is seen approaching, pickers will "hover up" the hops, by inserting their arms in the bins, and lifting the hops so that they will lie as lightly as possible, and will take less to fill the measuring-basket. After the hops have been measured, they are put into long sacks called "pokes," in which they are carried to the oasts for drying over fires on which sulphur is thrown. After drying, the

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hops are pressed into "pockets," which are marked with the name of the grower and the date, and are ready for sale. The old method of pressing hops was for the pocket to be suspended below a hole in the cooling-room, the hops being filled in gradually with a wide canvas "hop-scuppet," while a man trod or jumped upon them until the pocket was full.

In Kent, the buildings in which the hops are dried are called oast-houses, and the hop-grounds are known as hop-gardens. In Herefordshire and Worcestershire these are called hop-kilns and hop-yards respectively.

When the hop-pickers were finally "paid off," they would go into the nearest town to buy new clothing, etc. Their discarded garments, boots and shoes would be left in the roadways outside the shops. About 50 years ago it was not unusual for three or four cartloads to be cleared away after a Saturday's shopping in Maidstone.

The use of hop-tokens has been discontinued for many years, the the accounts now being kept in books.

"Hop-dogs," with a serrated hook at the end of a wooden handle, used for pulling poles out of the ground, are becoming rare, as the modern method is to grow the hops on coir yarn. The tokens, too, are gradually disappearing, as many were thrown away as useless or sold for old metal, although some are still used for fruit-picking and sheep-shearing tallies, and in some instances as card-counters.

It is hoped that if any are found, they will be taken or sent to the Maidstone Museum, for identification, recording, and preservation.