

# Trade Tokens Recovered in Wiveton

*By Peter Carnell*

*Almost 1,200 metal objects, one third of them coins and tokens, have been discovered recently by metal detectorists in the Wiveton area. Most of these objects have been identified as far as their condition will allow, and their location in the ground has also been recorded. The author has made a detailed study of these records and in this article he describes the tokens, sets them into their historical context, and comments on their relevance to the history of the Glaven valley.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years (1997-2000) some 1193 metal artefacts, including over 360 coins and 40 tokens, have been found in the fields close to the Wiveton-Blakeney boundary. All the objects were recorded on site and have been identified by the recorders, with the help of English Heritage, Norfolk Museum Services and specialised catalogues. These metal-detecting finds provide an unexpected input to the 'Haven' project initiated by the Society to extend our knowledge of the physical and economic development of the Glaven valley settlements.

A study was undertaken to create a database and to identify groups of objects that would help to illuminate the history and activities of the villagers. A resume of the research and a summary of the finds are being prepared for a future article, and two further reports, one on coins and one on jettons, are also being produced.

This article is based on a study of the 40 trading tokens, mostly from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It describes the tokens and the unravelling of some of the monetary problems that would have been encountered in the villages of Wiveton, Cley and Blakeney as elsewhere in the country.

## REGAL COINS AND TOKENS

Regal coins of the realm are authorised by the crown. Tokens were unauthorised, usually illegal, yet frequently tolerated. For short periods in the past the regal currency failed to meet demand and tokens were privately produced to make up the shortfall. To put the Wiveton tokens into context it is necessary to relate them to the supply of regal halfpenny and farthing coins and the periods when they were supplemented by tokens.<sup>1</sup>

### Early History

For some 500 years, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, silver pennies had been almost the only coins in England. Halfpennies were occasionally minted, and sometimes pennies were halved or quartered to serve as halfpennies and farthings. Then in 1279 Edward I introduced a new silver coinage; in addition to the penny there were halfpennies and farthings and also a groat worth fourpence. These coins were literally worth their weight in silver, but they were small and rarely in sufficient supply. As the country moved further from barter to a monetary economy there was an increasing demand for larger - and more - halfpennies and farthings which could only be satisfied if coins were made of cheaper base metals: copper, tin or lead. English monarchs, however, were averse to such base metal regal coins in place of silver or

gold. Although Scotland and Ireland had a regal copper coinage by the 1460s, England continued with an inadequate small change coinage for a further 200 years.

Some tokens were issued by monasteries and became known as Monk's pennies or 'Leaden' money. There was a long history of parliament urging unsuccessfully for a base coinage and in Tudor times some grocers, chandlers and tavern keepers issued their own lead and tin tokens redeemable only by the traders issuing them.

Changes continued to be made to the regal coinage, with many new values introduced, until Henry VIII began a devaluation which was continued under Edward VI and also Elizabeth I when, for example, the groat was devalued to 3½ d (and other coins proportionately). In Elizabeth's reign the continued shortage of small change and the need to avoid minting impossibly small silver farthings brought forth an ingenious solution: unusual new denominations were introduced, such as the penny-halfpenny and the three-farthing piece (one was found in Wiveton). As an example of their use, a penny could be exchanged for a farthing worth of goods and a three-farthing piece as change. But one needed to have a penny to be able to purchase a farthing worth of goods, and the new coins were not a success.

So the problem remained. A scarcity of silver and an increase in its price in relation to gold made it economic to melt down coins for the silver, so the silver small change became smaller still and even more difficult to handle.

### **Seventeenth Century**

James I of England (James VI of Scotland) knew of the advantages of copper coinage in Scotland but would not create a regal copper currency; instead in 1613 he licensed Lord Harington (and successive licensees) to produce copper farthings. Since the face value of these 'Harington' farthings was considerably more than their intrinsic value they were profitable for James I and the licensee. The profitability encouraged counterfeiting. There was a consequent loss of confidence in the Harington farthings, which failed to provide a substantive small change currency.

In 1644 Parliament revoked the 'Harington' licences by public demand. The lack of small change worsened as the remaining silver coinage became scarcer still due to hoarding in the Civil War (1642-8). The execution of Charles I in 1649 removed the exclusive royal prerogative of coining copper or brass coins and there was an immediate issuing of private tokens in these metals. At the restoration of the monarchy (1660) Charles II planned a new coinage but it was not until 1672 that the mint was able to produce regal halfpennies and farthings in sufficient quantity and to ban tokens.

The period 1649 to 1672 was a boom time for tokens. Initially they were valued at a farthing but after 1656 halfpenny tokens appeared and soon became predominant. New issuers of halfpenny tokens were being added at a few hundred a year by 1670.

### **Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century very little silver or copper was minted and there was a further boom period in token production between 1788 and 1797. Again the monarch (George III) considered copper unfitting to bear his imprimatur, and to meet the demand for small change the towns and merchants issued tokens. In 1787 Matthew Boulton began to produce

large quantities of tokens by steam power and within ten years 75% of the halfpennies and 90% of farthings in circulation were the privately produced tokens.

The new production methods helped the Mint to issue 1000 tons of regal copper coins in two years from 1797, including the first copper pennies and two-penny pieces (Boulton's 'cartwheels'). Tokens became irrelevant, were made illegal and production soon ceased. In 1795 James Condor, an Ipswich draper, wrote a standard text on 18<sup>th</sup> century tokens, which are now commonly known as "Condor" tokens.

Yet tokens had a third boom period between 1811 and 1815, at the height of the Napoleonic wars, when the hoarding of coins and the increased industrial war production created a further demand. Large quantities of copper tokens could be made by steam power and production quickly reached a peak in 1813. Industrial firms, a few towns and some merchants were issuing them. In 1816 a re-coinage began with the first regular 'token' silver coins (ie with a face value higher than their intrinsic worth) and from 1821 regal copper coins were again in plentiful supply. Tokens were again banned and production ceased, not to return.

## **THE WIVETON TOKENS**

### **Date of the Tokens**

Forty tokens were found, most of them (30) from the first 'boom' period 1648 to 1672. Of the remaining ten tokens, two are undated and carry religious inscriptions. They may be medieval, incorrectly labelled Nuremberg jettons, or 'communion' tokens issued at a pre-communion service to ensure that communicants were properly schooled. Three are medieval or Tudor and only five are from the other two 'boom' periods of 1788-1795 and 1811-1815.



**Medieval lead token from Wiveton  
A crown on each side**

Two of the medieval tokens were made of lead. The one illustrated above has a cross on each side, the other is cut half across with pellets of medieval design. Both may be monastic.

### **Seventeenth Century**

After fire swept the greater part of Cley in 1612 the centre of the village moved from Newgate Green northwards, probably encouraged by the silting of the eastern channel of the Glaven. This silting was hastened by the creation of an embankment (later demolished) across the Glaven in 1637 that prevented ships coming up the Glaven to Newgate Green or Wiveton. By the time that tokens were being issued (1648) the sea trade was declining but there would still have been a demand for a small coinage.

Most of the tokens in circulation from 1648 to 1672 were circular and of copper or brass. All the Wiveton tokens fit this description except for one rare lead example. It is dated 1656 but unfortunately the issuer and place of issue cannot be determined. The tokens tend to be thin and easily worn or damaged. Consequently four have been identified only as '17<sup>th</sup> Century' but it is certain that they were issued after 1648.

The need for tokens can be seen from the evidence that among the Wiveton metal detecting finds are 34 Harington (type) royal farthings from 1613 to 1625 (James I) and 43 from the reign of Charles I. Only five regal pennies and no regal halfpennies were found for the whole period of the two reigns (1603-1648). These regal coins were of silver, few were produced and many probably hoarded. The Glaven villagers had no choice but to use the disliked copper Harington farthings. After their suppression in 1644 there was a pressing need for a replacement farthing, which was only satisfied after 1648 when private tokens were in supply.

Although tokens date from 1648 the earliest found in Wiveton were a lead token (1656) and two issued in Yarmouth (1654 & 1656). It is probable that it took time for a trade in tokens to become established and for a while the scarcity of small coins was not being satisfied in Wiveton by a supply of tokens. This seems to be ameliorated by about 1656, which coincides with the end of the period when only farthing tokens were in circulation. Perhaps the villages used foreign coins and counters (jettons) as happened elsewhere in the country.

#### **Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

Only a few coins and five tokens were found dated after 1672. Of the tokens, four are from Norwich in the 1790s, and one '19<sup>th</sup> century' token is probably from the 1810s. Of the four from 1787-1797 two are Norwich & Norfolk halfpennies (1787 and 1792), one an undated advertising token and the fourth a 1793 haberdasher's halfpenny token.



**Norwich and Norfolk halfpenny, 1792**  
**Arms of Norwich and shield of the county**

The undated advertising token probably did not have an exchange value. It has been recognised as from 'Dunham & Yallop firm of goldsmiths and jewellers of Market Place, Norwich, who chose to put the front of their shop on the reverse of their tokens. It is an old-fashioned shop front, with a glass door in the middle and two windows visible on either side. On the obverse is the female figure of Hope'. This description is by Whiting, who says of the haberdasher's halfpenny: 'Robert Campin, Haberdasher of Goat Lane, Norwich, inscribed his name, occupation and address on a token depicting a stocking, glove and a knife and fork. On the reverse is a seated Britannia with an anchor and a globe. The token, a common one, is dated 1793'.



**Halfpenny token of Robert Campin  
Haberdasher, Norwich 1793**

In the Wiveton token collection there is only one tentatively dated and unidentified 19<sup>th</sup> century token.

### **Town and Trader Tokens**

In the period 1648-1672 tokens are of two kinds: municipal or 'town' tokens and privately issued 'trader' tokens. The two had very different circulation patterns. Town tokens were issued for general use to facilitate trade in the city, town or Hundred and as a replacement for the absent regal small coins were widely accepted. Trader tokens, by contrast, could only be traded a few streets away in the towns and in rural areas were only accepted as far as the next village.

### **Town Tokens**

In Wiveton 11 town tokens were found: 7 from Norwich, 1 each from Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Ipswich, and 1 from Holt Hundred.



**Norwich farthing token  
1670**



**Ipswich farthing token  
1670**

The Norwich tokens are all farthings and date from 1667 to 1670. They display the City's coat of arms, a castle above a lion rampant. Although there were at least 92 traders issuing tokens in Norwich only the municipal tokens were found in Wiveton.

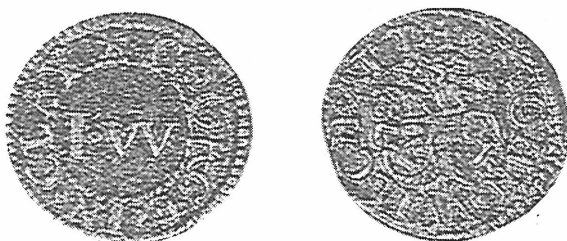
One town token is unusual in that at first glance it appears to be a Cley token, but according to the Norweb catalogue this token was issued by the Holt Hundred from Cley. It shows symbols for the Hundred: an anchor with coiled rope and a horseshoe on the reverse.

### Trader Tokens

As trader tokens were only accepted from traders known to the purchaser, usually within a short distance of home, it is not surprising that 7 of 13 such tokens found at Wiveton had come from no further afield than Cley. They were issued by two traders: John Wilch of the George Inn and Richard Shawe a tallow chandler.

Ale had been the England's main beverage for thousands of years. From the time of the Conquest large quantities of wine were imported from France and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch introduced beer made from hops. In 1553 an Act was passed to restrict wine sold in towns by limiting the number of inns. Norwich was licensed to four inns. In a census of 1557 there were 14,202 alehouses, 1631 inns and 329 taverns in England and Wales. With the rise of the Puritans came a tightening of restrictions on inns and taverns. Innkeepers were, however, reputable members of the local community. Isaac Walton in his *Compleat Angler* of 1653 says 'I'll lead you now to an honest ale house, where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the window and twenty ballads stuck about the wall'. Small change was essential to the many inns, taverns and alehouses. They were major issuers of tokens - more than a thousand such hostelries issued tokens in London.

Six halfpenny tokens were found in Wiveton issued by **John Wilch** of Cley. They show St George and the dragon and, on the obverse, his initials. They are all undated but would be after 1656 since only farthings were produced up to that date.



**The halfpenny token of John Wilch  
The George Inn, Cley**

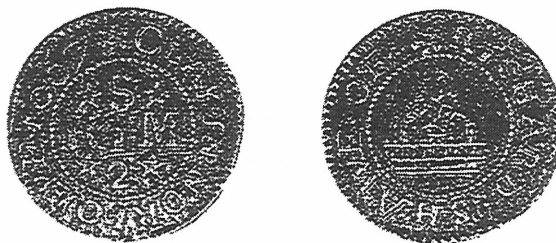
John Wilch does not appear in the 1664 or 1666 Heath Tax records but a James Wilch of Cley is recorded with seven hearths in 1664 and six in 1666.<sup>2</sup> These hearths were probably at the George Inn and the reduction in hearths may have been due to successfully claiming a hearth used in trade such as a forge. The Norfolk Record Office holds a series of deeds, covering the period 1650 to 1821, which relate to a property variously known as Gurneys, the George and (latterly) the George and Dragon.<sup>3</sup> These deeds show that the property passed from William Wilch to his son John (by 1650) and then to John's son, James (who mortgaged it in 1661), and then to his son, another John, who sold it in 1682. Although there is no burial record in the Cley registers, John Wilch died in 1660 after making a nuncupative will,<sup>4</sup> so he could have issued tokens during the last four years of his life. Incidentally, in the deeds John, James and John are all described as mariners, so inn-keeping was not their full-time occupation.

Richard Shawe of Cley was a candlestick maker or tallow chandler. Candle making was a respectable and profitable, if smelly, business. Campbell describes their production in an amusing analysis of trades and professions in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

‘In order to make the commonstore candles, the tallow is first rendered and strained from the skin, and all impurities in the fat. The wickers are made from cotton spun for that use, The workmen cut them into proper lengths. The tallow is melted and put into a vat of boiling water, which keeps it in constant flow. The wicks are ranged five or six upon a stick and placed upon stands near the fat. The candle maker takes one of these sticks by both ends, plunges it into the fat and takes it out again. This he lies down upon the stands and takes up another until he has dipped them all. Then he begins with the first and dips it again, and continues dipping them one after another, until they are of the thickness he wants ... it is a nauseous greasy business, but the profits atone for the inconvenience. Yet pthisicky people, not used to it, find much difficulty to breathe near the scent of a tallow-chandler's workhouse.’

**Richard Shawe's** token found at Wiveton is dated 1667. It shows a typical pyramid of initials, S/RM, standing for Richard and Martha Shawe. It is a halfpenny token, which only became common in the late 1660s. The obverse depicts a man dipping candles in tallow. The Cley parish registers record the baptism of Margaret, daughter of Richard Shaw, in April 1662. Two years later the birth and burial of a son is registered on the same day. They seem to have moved by 1664 since he is paying the Hearth Tax in Blakeney on two hearths in 1664 and 1666 suggesting that it was indeed a 'profitable business' (perhaps he moved from the smell!). The Blakeney parish register records the birth of a daughter, Frances, to Richard and Martha Shawe in September 1665.

It seems that candle making was a family business since an issuer is known in Holt by the name of Francis Shawe whose tokens, dated 1658, also show a man making candles. These candlestick makers' tokens are very similar, depicting a man making seven candles (there are usually five or six). It is probable that an itinerant salesman sold the tokens to them both.



**Richard Shawe in Clay 1667  
Candlestick maker**

A single grocer's token was found, a farthing issued by William Lincolne from Yarmouth in 1654. It has the initials L/WI on one side and on the other the arms of the Worshipful Company of Grocers: a shield with a chevron between nine cloves, referring to the medieval fraternities of pepperers and spicerers. By the 1650s grocers sold many spices brought by sailing ships including figs, almonds, cloves, cinnamon, cardamoms, senna, dates, turpentine, prunes, aniseed, caraways, comfits, rice and also tea, coffee and chocolate. The reduction of trade in the Haven ports suggests that such spices came from Yarmouth rather than as direct imports from abroad. In Norwich there were 92 issuers of tokens, 37 of whom were grocers, but no grocer's tokens from Norwich were found in Wiveton.

William Bateman of Yarmouth issued the 1656 token shown below. It is unusual to find the term 'merchant' on a token. It depicts a bugle horn, perhaps because it referred to an inn or tavern also part of the business.

In King's Lynn 35 traders were issuing tokens, including Giles Bridgman who issued one with 'Lin Regis' and the initials B/GS. It carries his family arms on the reverse. Although undated it is probably before 1656 and his coat of arms suggests that his was probably an influential family in Lynn. He may have been one of the royalist gentry whose activities precipitated the siege of the town by Parliamentary forces in 1643.



**William Bateman**  
**Merchant of Yarmouth, 1656**



**Giles Bridgman**  
**King's Lynn**

One of the Wiveton tokens was issued by a baker, Philip Williams of Cambridge. It is a farthing with the initials W/PM, the PW for Philip Williams and the M for his wife. On the obverse it shows the arms of the Worshipful Company of Bakers, a shield with an arm holding a balance. Campbell records that a baker could not make large profits for he was 'so under the direction of the magistrate ... the poor are more at his mercy than the rich, small families more than great, for in rolls, two penny loaves and threepenny loaves there is no check upon him.' Campbell also comments that bakers preferred a customer who ran a tally, '... the ill-natured part of the world allege that they take opportunity of making Dead Men, as they phrase it, that is of cutting double strokes on their tally, which makes a large amends for the lying out of their money'.

Two tokens show the Mercers' arms. One was issued by Edward Ben in Foulsham in 1668. The second was that of Richard Mansar of Wells and is just marked R M. He was probably the same Richard Mansier in Wells who is registered for the Hearth Taxes in 1664 & 1666 on three hearths. A Roger Mansier in Wells is assessed for 6 hearths - a related publican?

Mercers and drapers handled much of the retail trade. Campbell again provides his peculiar definitions: '... the mercer is the twin brother of the woollen draper. They are a like one another as two eggs - only the woollen draper deals chiefly with the men and is the graver animal of the two - the mercer trafficks most with the ladies and has a small dash of effeminacy in his constitution'. According to Campbell, the mercer trades '... in silks and velvet brocades and innumerable train of expensive trifles .... [and] must have a good deal of the Frenchman in his manner and a large parcel of French goods in his shop'. However, many of the out-of-town traders carrying the Mercers' Arms on their tokens were less exotic, some were also drapers, bakers or grocers.

The Wiveton finds contain no token from Blakeney but Seaby claims there was a tradesman in the village who issued tokens. Both Dickinson and Norweb claim (but with uncertainty) an

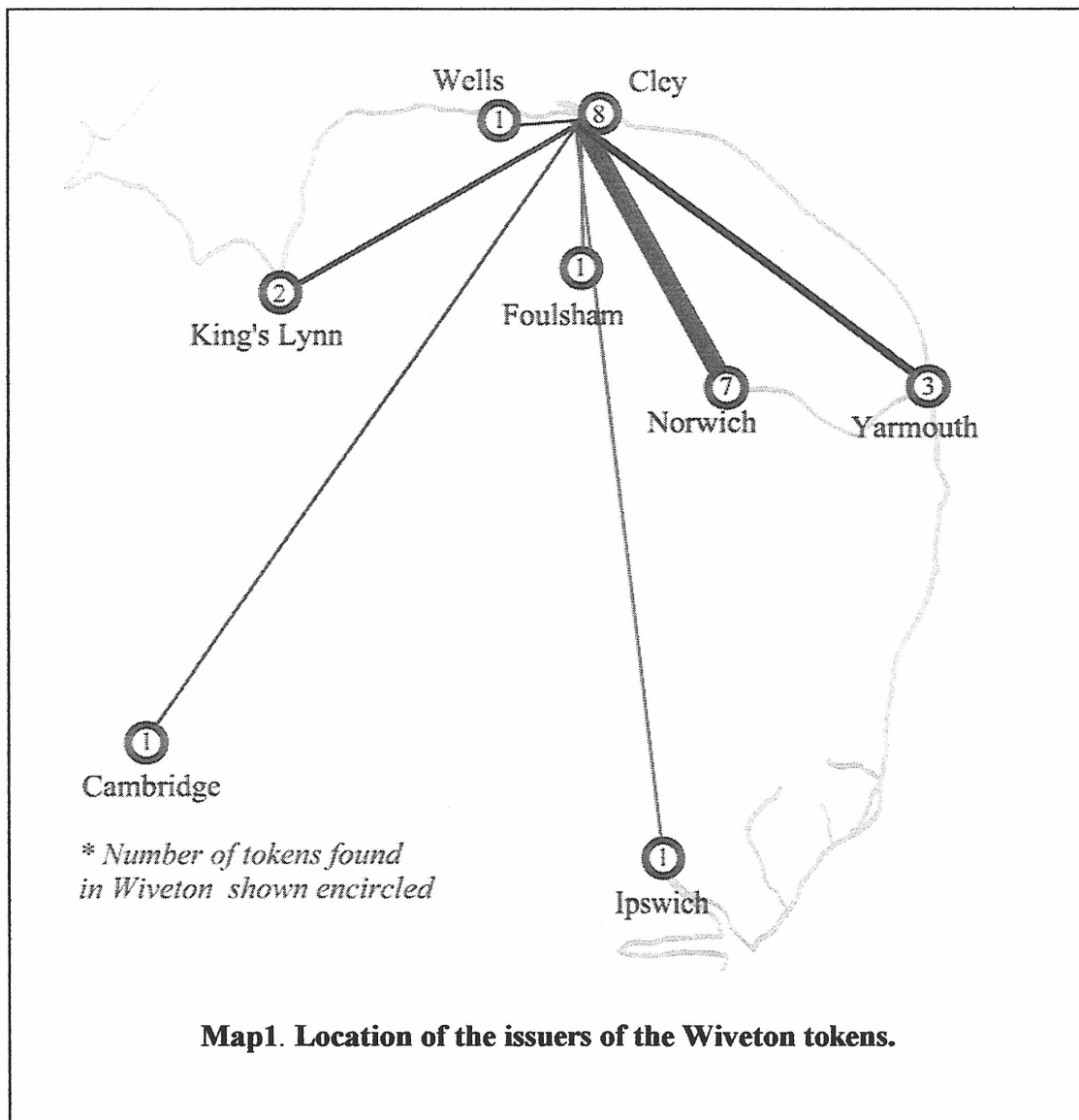


issuer in 'Blakny' and describe the token as a halfpenny issued by James Wilson in 1668. It depicts a woolpack on the reverse, probably referring to the cloth trade. There were families of that name in Blakeney but no James Wilson has yet been identified for this period.

### Source of the Tokens

Distance seems to be critical for the acceptance of tokens. In Wiveton the Norwich city tokens were an accepted form of small currency but few were traded from towns outside the county. Bury contributed none, from 41 issuers, neither were there any from London even though more than 3000 issuers are known.

Some of the tokens state the place where they were issued, otherwise the source must be found in catalogues by reference to their initials. Not all the tokens have been identified, mainly because they are too worn or damaged and there is not sufficient detail to recognise them.



Map 1 shows the location of the 24 issuers of the town or trader tokens found in Wiveton and dated to the period 1648 to 1672. It can be seen that eight tokens were from Cley, which was within sight of most Wiveton villagers.

Tokens were usually traded with the trader issuing them or with a friendly nearby trader. Some traders had a subdivided box into which they would allot the few trader tokens that they would accept. Berry shows that trader tokens were rarely traded beyond the next village, or in towns beyond the next street, so that it would be unusual to find, for instance, a Wells trader token in Wiveton.

| Place of Issue       | Distance from Wiveton | Number of Tokens   |                     |                     |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                      |                       | Town               | Trader              | All                 |
| Cley                 | 3                     | 1                  | 7                   | 8                   |
| Wells                | 11                    | None issued        | 1                   | 1                   |
| Foulsham             | 16                    | None issued        | 1                   | 1                   |
| Norwich              | 38                    | 7                  | 0                   | 7                   |
| King's Lynn          | 45                    | 1                  | 1                   | 2                   |
| Yarmouth             | 60                    | 1                  | 2                   | 3                   |
| Cambridge            | 99                    | None issued        | 1                   | 1                   |
| Ipswich              | 124                   | 1                  | 0                   | 1                   |
| Totals               | 396                   | 11                 | 13                  | 24                  |
| Average Distance (n) | 50km<br>(31 miles)    | 45km<br>(28 miles) | 24 km<br>(15 miles) | 34 km<br>(21 miles) |

**Table 1 Comparison of Distances travelled by the Tokens**

Table 1 shows how far on average tokens travelled to Wiveton. The average distance for the trader tokens was 24 km (15 miles). If one excludes the tokens issued in Wiveton's 'shopping centre' of Cley – and in shopping terms Wiveton was almost a suburb of Cley – then the six remaining tokens travelled on average 49 km (30 miles). Yet trader tokens are rarely found so far from their point of issue so there has to be a reason for this discrepancy in Wiveton. It is probable that the means of transport is by water rather than by road. With the exception of Foulsham the sources are all ports or are on navigable rivers. Sailors from Wiveton, Cley and Blakeney would probably travel regularly to these towns and could as easily purchase items there as in parishes close by.

Town tokens issued by the town to stimulate trade, though not redeemable, were accepted by many traders in the town and by some outside, but rarely would they be accepted outside the county. The Table shows that the average distance a town token travelled to Wiveton was 45 km (28 miles). Those from more distant towns again probably came by sea.

### Disposal of the tokens

When found the tokens were scattered fairly evenly across all the fields, unlike the jettons which were grouped in clusters. The tokens were too widely distributed to have been lost

together and then redistributed by ploughing. Their movement would have been limited first by the older strip and furlong boundaries and later by the boundaries of the enclosed fields. The small numbers involved do not permit a confident statement of how they were lost, but there are a number of possibilities.

Most of the fields searched were adjacent to, or incorporated, the old pre-enclosure roads yet the random distribution of tokens found on fields away from the roads gives little credence to the idea of casual loss.

A possible reason for the absence of the second and third token eras is that there may have been trading during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that had ceased by the 18<sup>th</sup>. The original road from Blakeney to Langham incorporated a junction and a Green Lane to Wiveton. Perhaps this was a trading place, possibly a market or fair. No record can be found for such a market but fairs were often not recorded.

When tokens were suppressed in 1672 they became valueless and were discarded. It is likely that they were thrown onto the soilheap and then spread on the fields. Since this was done by many households across all the fields the scatter would both be extensive and random – which is essentially how the finds were distributed.

## **SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS**

### **Provenance**

- Unusually for metal detecting finds, the Wiveton material is well documented with the circumstances of discovery being recorded as well as the location and identity of each piece.

### **Tokens as an historical record**

- The tokens offer an insight into the local history of the area, supplementing the documentary evidence for specific individuals, local occupations (of Hearth Tax payers, for example) and the lack of a legal (national) small change currency.

### **Date of the tokens**

- The finds include a few medieval-Tudor and 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century tokens. Most (75%) of the tokens are from the boom token period 1648-1672. The remaining conclusions refer to this statistically significant period.

### **Source of the tokens**

- The 24 tokens from Wiveton that can be identified have three main sources:
  - local traders, whose tokens have a local distribution
  - Norwich city, whose municipal tokens were accepted county wide

- East Anglian ports, whose tokens (both trader and municipal) appear to have travelled further than those of inland market towns – some, no doubt, by sea.
- Local individuals have been identified: the publican at the George and the tallow chandler, both in Cley, though there is no evidence for the (possible) Blakeney cloth merchant.
- Trader tokens from outside the local area include those of a baker, a grocer, a mercer, and an innkeeper.

### **Tokens as small change**

- There were centuries of inadequate small change and the many 'Harington' type farthings (1613-1644) found in Wiveton indicate that problems with the currency were experienced in the Glaven ports as elsewhere.
- Particularly in the period 1648 –1672 town tokens from East Anglia, and particularly Norwich, had become the *de facto* small currency in the absence of a regal coinage.

### **Finally, how were they lost?**

- The tokens may have been lost during their currency or soon afterwards but the relatively even distribution of the finds seems to rule out casual loss. They might have been lost at markets or fairs but again the pattern of distribution is against this idea and there is no documentary support.
- The most likely process is that the tokens were eventually thrown away with the nightsoil onto the fields. The end of the local tokens may therefore be found in the everyday story of household waste.

### **Acknowledgements**

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- 5 R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman, Being a Compendious View of All the Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, now practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster. Calculated for the Information of PARENTS, and Instruction of YOUTH in their Choice of Business*, London, T. Gardner at Cowley's Head in the Strand, 1747, (Bodleian library, Oxford).