

The Banknotes issued by J. Wilkinson of Ipswich in 1796-7

Gary Oddie

Having had an interest in all things to the value of “one shilling” for many years, one thing that stood out from the beginning was the rare appearance of banknotes with this value. Indeed looking through Roger Outing’s mighty catalogue, for banknotes with a value of 5/- or less, resulted in the following meagre lists for England and Wales⁽¹⁾. It does not include skit notes, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Ireland, military issues etc.

Outing #	Location	Issuing Business / Partners	Date	Value
148a	Bilston	- / Ed. Wooley	1812	5/-
606a	Cranbrook	- / Chapman & Co.	c1804	2d
744a	Erith	- / Thomas Leigh	c1812	5/-
1046a	Ipswich	Ipswich Bank / J. Wilkinson	1796	4d
1046b	Ipswich	Ipswich Bank / J. Wilkinson	1797	1/-
1488n	Newark	Newark Bank / Pocklington & Co.	1809	5/-
1493b	Newbury	Newbury Bank / Toomer, Bunney & Slocock	c1796	5/-
1843a	Saddleworth	- / Wm. Radcliffe & Co.	c1799	5/-

Table 1. Notes listed by Outing: Section 1 - England and Wales; not London, not other issuers, not skits), with a denomination 5/- or less.

Outing #	Location	Issuing Business / Partners	Date	Value
3003a	Attercliffe	Attercliffe Bank / Harvey, Storr & Co.	1799	2d
3009a	Birmingham	Birmingham Workhouse / -	1808	2/6
3009b	Birmingham	Birmingham Workhouse / -	1808	5/-
3015a	Bristol	- / Thomas Hanmer	1798	6d
3026a	Exeter	Exeter Commercial Bank / -	c1797	5d
3029a	Garth	Garth, Cefn & Briton Ferry Ironworks / Henry Scale	nd	5/-
3030a	Garth	Gornley & Sedeeley / I.M.	nd	5/-
3031a	Highfields	- / Joseph Firmstone	nd	5/-
3032a	Horsham	Horsham New Bank / Wm Stepney	1801	2d
3033a	Huddersfield	- / Robert Bellwood	c1800	5/-
3034a	Ipswich	Mendham’s Tea Warehouse / -	nd	5/-
3038a	Louth	- / Eve & Campbell	c1811	2/6
3039a	Manchester	- / Samuel Oldknow	1793	1/6
3040a	March	- / F.W.E.	18--	5/-
3044a	Rochester	Watt’s Charity / -	1773	4d
3046a	Tonedale	- / Fox Bros	c1810	1/-
3048a	Wainfleet	- / David Wright	c1788	5/-
3050a	Wolverhampton	- / Benjamin Harley	c1800	5/-

Table 2. Notes listed by Outing: Section 3 - Paper money issued by companies and institutions that were not banks, with a denomination 5/- or less.

This list of 26 notes increases to 51 when notes for less than 20/- are added. This gives an idea of the low denomination local notes that might have been used instead of the silver coins which were in short supply prior to the recoinage of 1816.

When the opportunity arose to acquire a specimen of the shilling note issued by J. Wilkinson of Ipswich, the work presented here began⁽²⁾.

Not in the best of grades, when the double-sided glass frame was opened, several long-dead insects were found! The paper is barely holding together and is too limp and fragile to attempt to remove the old mounts. The front and back of the note are shown below.



Fig. 1. One Shilling note issued by J. Wilkinson, Ipswich Bank in 1797. Outing 1046b.
(Approx. 185 × 115 mm, 85%)

The front reads, with **manuscript entries**: *No 178 Ipswich Bank / On Demand I promise to pay / ONE SHILLING to the Bearer at my / Banking House S^t CLEMENT STREET / Value received the 13 Day of April 1797 / for Self & Co / One Shilling J Wilkinson / Ent^d J.D.W.*

An oval to the upper left has a representation of Trade and Navigation, a woman standing with an anchor and a three-masted ship sailing away behind. There are some further manuscript numbers to the right.

The back has in manuscript: *Jn^o Taylor May 2 1797 / Rob^t Ralph(?) (?) 6 1801*

The search started well with a quick check of previous publications that mention this note. On page 295 of Dawes and Ward-Perkins (2000) we find “John Wilkinson (-,1797-?), UBD cordwainer St Clements, Fore Street⁽³⁾. Where the UBD is the Universal British Directory (1793) of Barford and Wilkes⁽⁴⁾. There is a further reference to Jones (1951) who adds “There is a traders’ note for one shilling drawn by J. Wilkinson, Ipswich Bank, in 1797 at the time of suspension of cash payments”⁽⁵⁾. Preston (1994) gives the shilling note a catalogue number 94 but nothing more⁽⁶⁾.

More recently a “Four Pence” note has been added to the Wilkinson issue (Outing 1046a) and a good illustration can be found in the Spink archives⁽⁷⁾. This note is dated *31 May 1796*, is signed *J.D. Wilkinson*, states *Ent^d HP* and the oval is replaced by a circle containing the monogram *DSW&C^o(?)*.

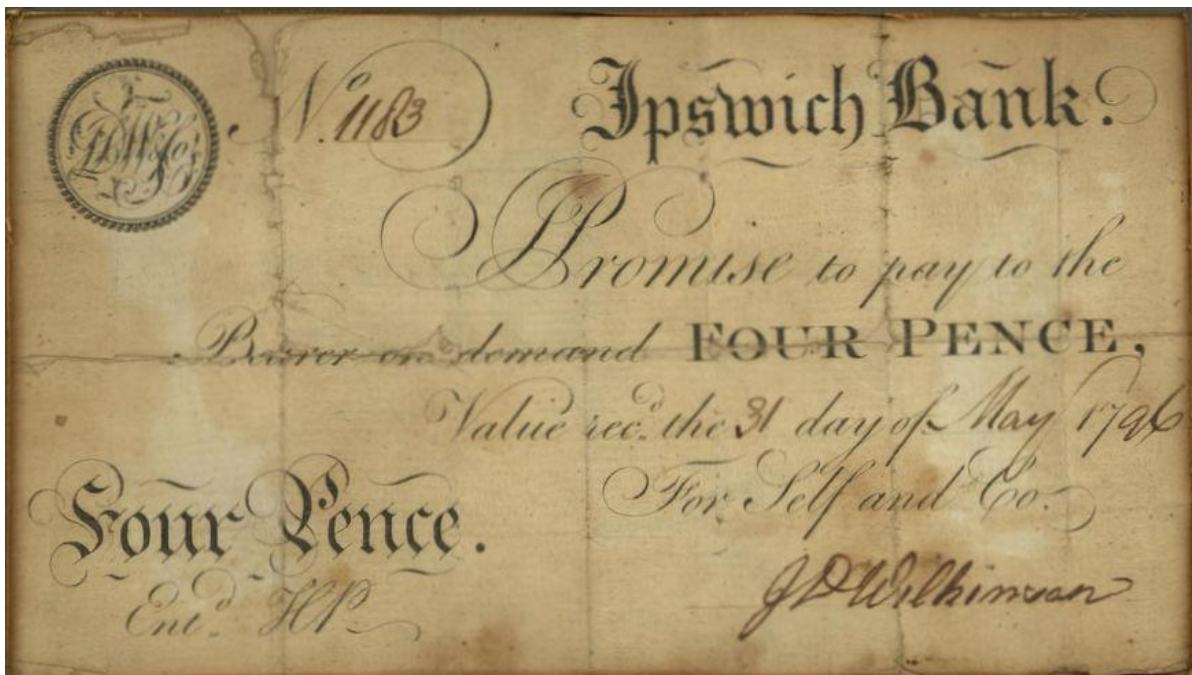


Fig. 2. Four Pence note issued by J. Wilkinson, Ipswich Bank in 1796⁽⁷⁾. Outing 1046a.

Digging deeper into the John Wilkinson story proves problematic as a John Cobbold (1774-1860), the Ipswich businessman, banker and brewer was the first son of John Cobbold (1746-1835) and Elizabeth Wilkinson (d.1790) and was known as John Wilkinson Cobbold. The Cobbold family were very wealthy and lived in the Manor House near St Margaret’s Church, Ipswich.

There is another John Wilkinson, the West Midlands Ironmaster (c1728-1808), who was a prolific issuer of notes and tokens⁽⁸⁾. His note issuing activities were partly responsible for the 1775 Act of Parliament banning the issue and circulation of notes with a value of less than twenty shillings⁽⁹⁾.

Figure 3 shows a section of the map of Ipswich drawn by Thomas Jefferys and Joseph Hodkinson in 1780. St Clement’s Church and St Clements Street are outside the town walls in an area that had grown

rapidly in the previous centuries to serve the merchant ships arriving at the Orwell estuary and the shipyards to the east. St Clements street was renamed Fore street in the early nineteenth century and today much of the estuary is taken up with the Neptune Marina.

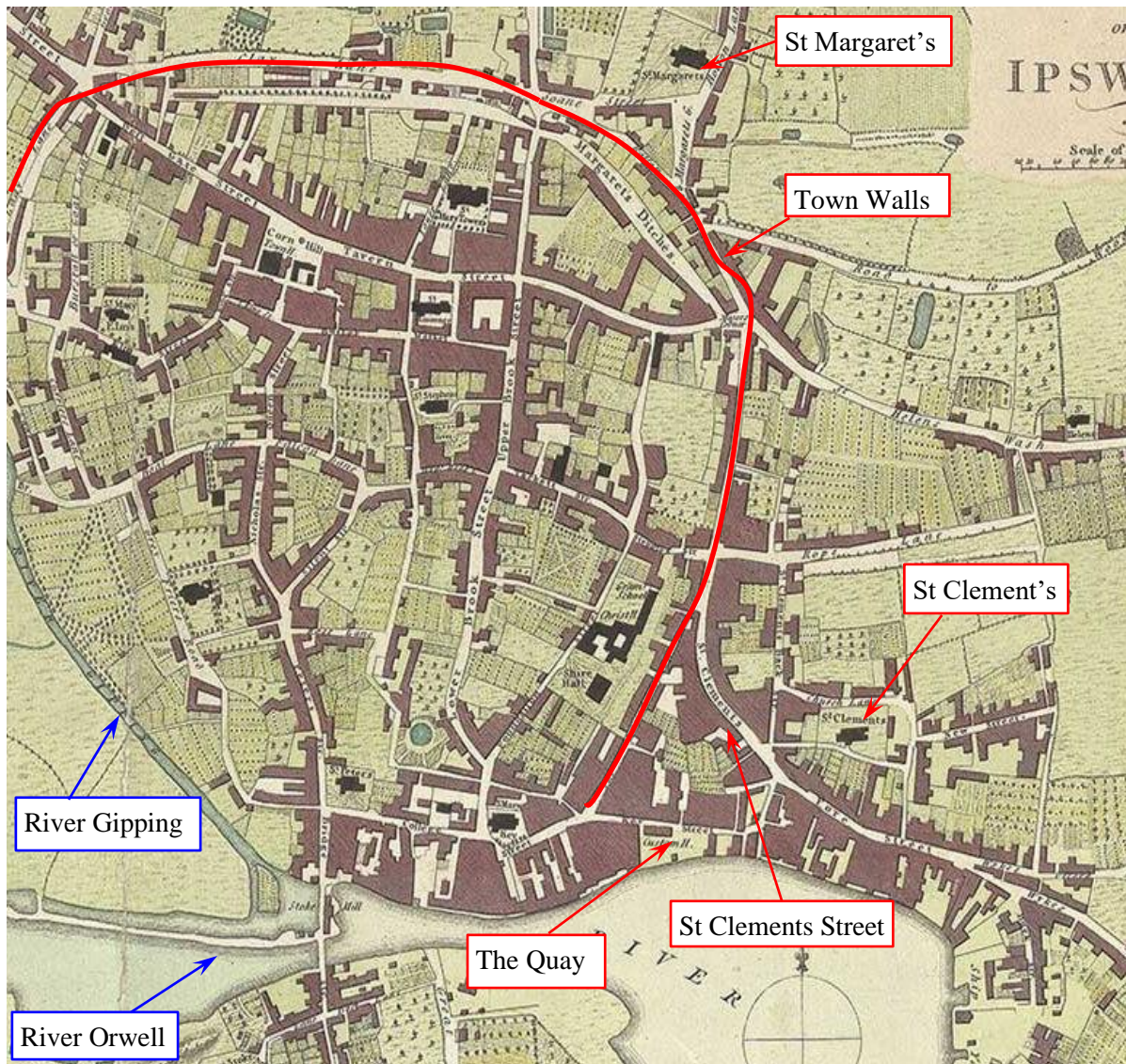


Fig. 3. Map of Ipswich from 1780 by Hodkinson & Jefferys.

In the late eighteenth and for much of the nineteenth century the area around St Clement's suffered from extreme poverty. Many cottages were thrown up with poor drainage, and away from the docks industries such as rope making, and brick and tile kilns came and went. By 1900 the slums of St Clement's were home to about 9000 people⁽¹⁰⁾.

It is from a Banking House in this unlikely area of Ipswich that John Wilkinson issued his Four Pence and One Shilling notes. These were probably needed to provide small currency for the poorest people when the banks stopped paying cash.

This is a particularly challenging name to research and as yet I have been unable to find anything else about this John Wilkinson using the usual sources: ancestry.co.uk, findmypast.co.uk and britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk. If anyone has any promising leads or definite information I would be pleased to hear via the BNS blog.

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) R. Outing. *The Standard Catalogue of the Provincial Banknotes of England and Wales*. 2010.
- (2) Lacy, Scott and Knight (Bury St Edmunds). Coins, Tokens & Banknotes, Lot 599, 17 June 2020.
- (3) M. Dawes and C.M. Ward-Perkins. *Country Banks of England and Wales. Private Provincial Banks and Bankers 1688-1953*. Vol. 1. 2000.
- (4) P. Barfoot and J. Wilkes. *Universal British Directory*. 5 vols 1790-1797, in 1793 volume.
- (5) A.G.E. Jones. Early Banking in Ipswich. *Notes and Queries for Readers and Writers, Collectors and Librarians*, v196n19, September 15, 1951. pp402-405.
- (6) H. Preston. *Early East Anglian Banks and Bankers*. 1994.
- (7) Spink Banknote Auction, 17043. Lot: 3023, 6 October 2017. Many thanks to Barnaby Faull and Spink for permission to use the image. <https://www.spink.com/lot/17043003023> Accessed 8 February 2021.
- (8) W.H. Chaloner. John Wilkinson as Note Issuer and Banker. *Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin*. n367, December 1948, pp550-553.
- (9) Statute 15 George III chap. 51. *An Act to restrain the Negotiation of Promissory Notes, and Inland Bills of Exchange, under a limited sum, within that part of Great Britain . . . less than the sum of twenty shillings*. 1775.
- (10) F. Grace. *Rags & Bones*. Unicorn Publishing, 2005.

