

A Seventeenth Century Truck System – Thomas Renolds of Colchester (Essex W/D 143)

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Whenever the word “truck” is used in the context of tokens, the images that spring to mind are factory owners paying their oppressed workers in tokens and notes that can only be redeemed in shops whose interests are those of the factory owner. The discussions also tend to circle around larger industrial concerns where organised workforces (via unions, guilds and collective bargaining) have managed to set standards for minimum rates of pay. In this case the truck system is one method by which the employer can increase his profits.

Whilst the truck system can be summarised as “a device for employers getting back by underhand ways part of the wages which they nominally paid away”⁽¹⁾, this mechanism is not unique and, as with the more general reasons for issuing tokens, “no single explanation of the truck system is sufficient”⁽²⁾.

An alternative form of truck is the payment of labourers in their employers’ own product, payment in kind. An example of this appears in the cloth trade in Colchester in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The cloth industry was highly organised with the clothiers being members of the English and Dutch Bay Halls and the weavers were members of a craft guild⁽²⁾. On April 29th 1637 William Newton and two other Colchester weavers brought an action against Thomas Reynolds, a bay maker, for recovery of the value of wages paid to them in cloth that Reynolds had been unable to sell. The three weavers had only been able to dispose of the cloth at a substantial loss. The Colchester General Sessions of the Peace had ordered Reynolds to make restitution of Newton’s estimated loss in the transaction of 58 shillings. Reynolds initially refused to pay, but did so when the council of the Inner Star Chamber ordered that he either paid double or would be sent to the Fleet Prison^(2,3).

This is the same Thomas Reynolds who would later become Mayor of Colchester in 1654 and 1662⁽³⁾ and issued a seventeenth century token (W143, N1211)⁽⁴⁾. The token gives the name as Renolds. He died in 1665.



References

- (1) A. Marshall. *Principles of Economics* . 1st ed. p580, 1890.
- (2) G.W. Hilton. *The Truck System, Including a history of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960*. Heffer, Cambridge, 1960.
- (3) E. Judson. *The lives and wills of the Essex token issuers*. Privately published. pp83-5. 1987.
- (4) R.H. Thompson. *The Norweb Collection*. Part II. SCBI, 1988.

Postscript

This note was originally published in the TCSB, Vol.9 n.11, June 2010, p.432. Now that the British Museum collection of seventeenth century tokens has been photographed and can be compared with the plates of the Norweb Sylloge, it is possible to produce the die study presented on the following pages. With five obverse and five reverse dies leading to the eight die combinations seen, Thomas Renolds likely placed more than one order for tokens. Whether the tokens were involved in any way with payments to his piece workers cannot be confirmed.

(N = Norweb, J = Judson, BM = British Museum, KP = Kevin Pryke, image source in green)



143.1
N1210 J143e

BM T.877

Obv: mm Mullet, central rosette, T=D
Rev: mm Mullet, central rosette, R=ES

Top bar of T aligns with D

Tail of R aligns between E and S



143.2
N- J-

BM 1896,0502.2

Obv: mm recut fat Mullet, central rosette, T=D
Rev: mm Mullet, central rosette, R=ES, later die state



143.3
N1215 J143d

BM T.644

Obv: mm Mullet, central rosette, T=S
Rev: mm Mullet, central cinquefoil, R=HE



143.4
N- J143d var

KP BM T.872

Obv: mm Mullet, central rosette, T=S
Rev: mm Pierced Mullet, central cinquefoil, R=end E



143.5
N1213 J143a

BM T.871

Obv: mm Mullet, central rosette, T=I
Rev: mm Pierced Mullet, central cinquefoil, R= end E



143.6
N1212 J-

KP

Obv: mm Pierced Mullet, central cinquefoil, T=AK
Rev: mm Pierced Mullet, central cinquefoil, R=end E



143.7
N1211 J143b

BM T.876

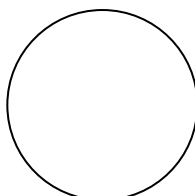
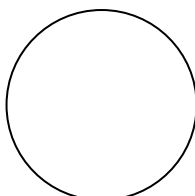
Obv: mm Pierced Mullet, central rosette, T=•
Rev: mm Pierced Mullet, central broken cinquefoil, R=start E



143.8
N1214 J143

BM T.873

Obv: mm Mullet, central dot, T=start N
Rev: mm Cinquefoil, central dot, R=ES



143.9
N- J143c

Judson lists a variety similar to 143.7 with the T and R touching the obv. inner circle. The inner circle is a wireline.

For completeness, the following brockage in the British Museum is included here.



143.10

BM T.875

Reverse Brockage of
143.4-143.6

For background notes on the issuer, his wealth, property and his descendants, see Judson (1987), pages 83-5.⁽³⁾

If any readers have a specimen of 143.9 with a definite wireline inner circle on the obverse, the author would be pleased to hear. Two specimens of 143.7 have been seen in a corroded state, giving a first impression of a wireline inner circle, but closer inspection reveals vestiges of the beaded inner circle.

Additional Acknowledgements

Thanks to Nigel Clark for looking through an early draft of this note and for clarifying the Judson and Norweb numbering systems. And also, to Kevin Pryke for spotting an incorrect image and upgrading the images of 143.4 and 143.6.

