

Seventeenth Century Glasshouses

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One of the main features of the seventeenth century token series, apart from its size, is the diversity of issuers and the potential for even a singular token to open up a window on people, trades and places that have been lost in the intervening years.

The token illustrated below caught my attention recently, as it shows an image of a building, which is most unusual⁽¹⁾.



Fig.1. The Calne Glasshouse token.

Obv. AT THE GLASS HOVSE

A building showing arched door, windows, roof and central turret.

Rev. IN CALNE 1669

ASI

Details. Brass, 16mm

This piece is listed as Wiltshire 35 in Williamson⁽²⁾ and further specimens can be found in Norweb 5433⁽³⁾ and in the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes⁽⁴⁾. A very good illustration of the token can also be found illustrated in Boyne's plates⁽⁵⁾.

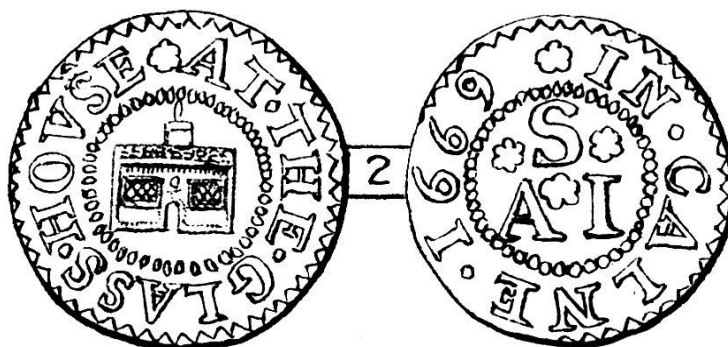


Fig. 2. Boyne's illustration of the Calne Glasshouse token.

The most recent specialist work on Wiltshire tokens provides some background information on possible owners of the initials shown on the token. "Anthony Smith who married Jean in 1659, had an establishment of four hearths, where 'Town Money' was paid" ⁽⁶⁾. Information lodged at Devizes Museum and cited in the Norweb notes adds the following regarding the building itself "The Deeds of No. 5. Market Hill, Calne (subsequently West Hill House) go back to the 17th century, when the premises were the Bell Inn; the back premises, known as 12 Quarrbarton, are described in the deeds as the Glass House."

Suspecting there might be something interesting behind this token, the web beckoned. Several searches later had uncovered much about a modern chain of restaurants, gardening and an album by a very obscure 1970s progressive rock band from Wales!

A quick check on Lillywhite and what was happening in London⁽⁷⁾. GLASS HOUSES in London appear to date from the end of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. A Patent was granted by Elizabeth in 1580 to a Venetian for making Venice glasses in Crutched Friars, and according to Stow “the friers Hall was made a glasse-house, or house wherein were made glasse of diverse sorts to drinke in”. Lillywhite then lists nine glass-houses from seventeenth century London and describes them as “usually a place where glass is made, and possibly a house made of glass and in isolated cases a place of refreshment.” Into this latter class falls the Glasshouse Inn, Broad Street, London, visited by Samuel Pepys on 30th March 1663 and 25th February 1663/4.

A slightly different search then produced the entrance to a rich seam of information and links and references to the history of glass and glass manufacture. Here the Calne token appears merely as a sideline to the study of seventeenth century glass.⁽⁸⁾

A mid seventeenth century glass house was a place where glass could be manufactured from the raw materials and then re-worked into articles such as drinking glasses and sheet glass. Initially the industry was small scale, but as demand grew so did the size and capabilities of the glass manufacturers. The granting of Royal Patents on manufacturing techniques and the restriction of the use of wood for charcoal (James I, indenture of 1614, as the trees were needed for ships) meant that coal had to be used. This resulted in a rapid evolution of furnace design and inventions allowing the handling of larger masses of molten glass. In the seventeenth century Britain evolved from a small local manufacturer and net importer to a dominant position in European glass manufacture and export.

The raw materials of sand, potassium nitrate, trees for charcoal and clay for sealing the furnaces and making crucibles, were all plentiful in Calne and nearby in Compton Bassett.⁽⁹⁾

Very little is known of seventeenth century glass house design, though might be inferred from the buildings of a century later.⁽¹⁰⁾ A large underground flue directed air to the middle of a conical furnace, around which sat clay crucibles from which the molten glass was taken through apertures in the side of the furnace. The upper part of the furnace was an empty space which allowed the heat to rise and draw more air into the bottom of the furnace. The figures below show an early glass house of a French design and an eighteenth-century glasshouse of an English design when the furnace had grown too large to fit inside the main building.

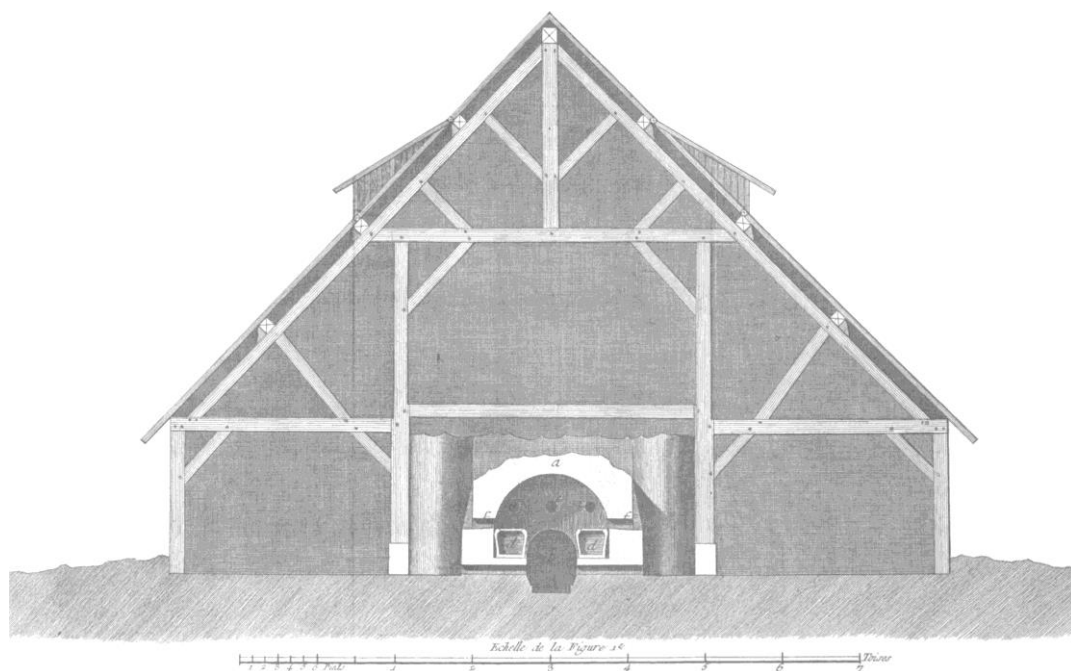


Fig. 2. Glass house with internal furnace. France, late 17th and early 18th century.⁽¹⁰⁾



Fig. 3. Mid-18th century English glass house with external furnace.⁽¹⁰⁾

Neither of these designs seems to be a close match to the image on the token. Glass houses were of sufficient importance to be shown on 17th and 18th century maps, one example being the glass house near Alfold, shown on John Speed's map of Surrey in 1610.

The figure below shows the glass house at Redcliff Backs, Bristol, as drawn on Millerd's map of 1710. Note the swirling smoke coming out of the top of the turret.

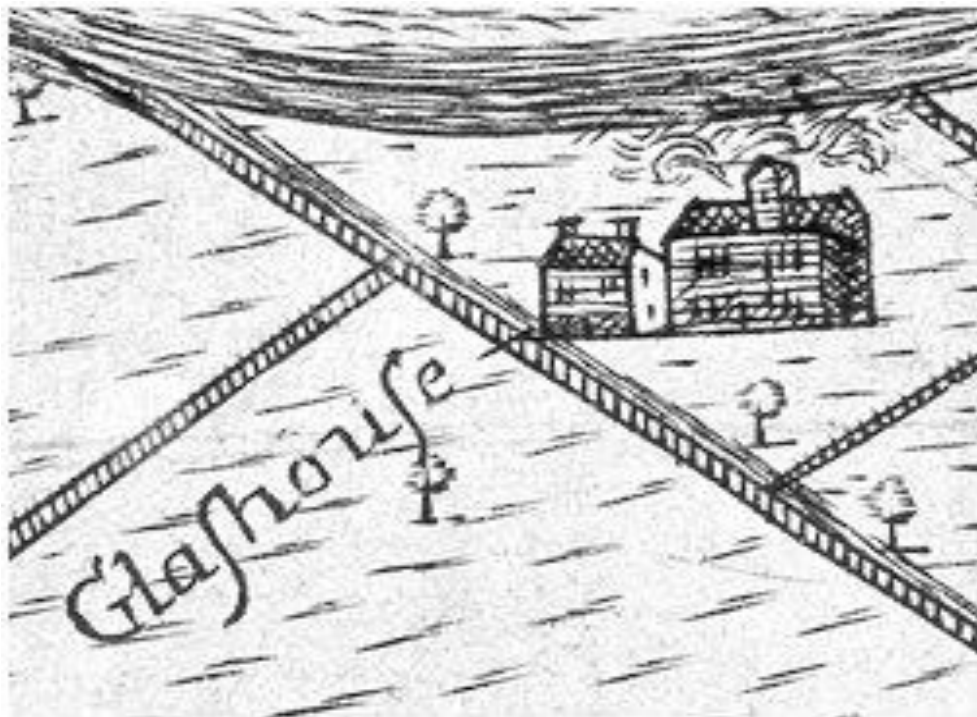


Fig. 4. Glass House at Redcliffe Backs, Bristol, in 1710.⁽⁸⁾

Inspection of earlier editions of the map shows that this building was constructed sometime after 1673. Another glass house can be found illustrated on Henry Bell's Groundplan of King's Lynn, dated 1680 and a subsequent map of 1725 shows that the building had been and remodelled into a more conical design.⁽¹¹⁾

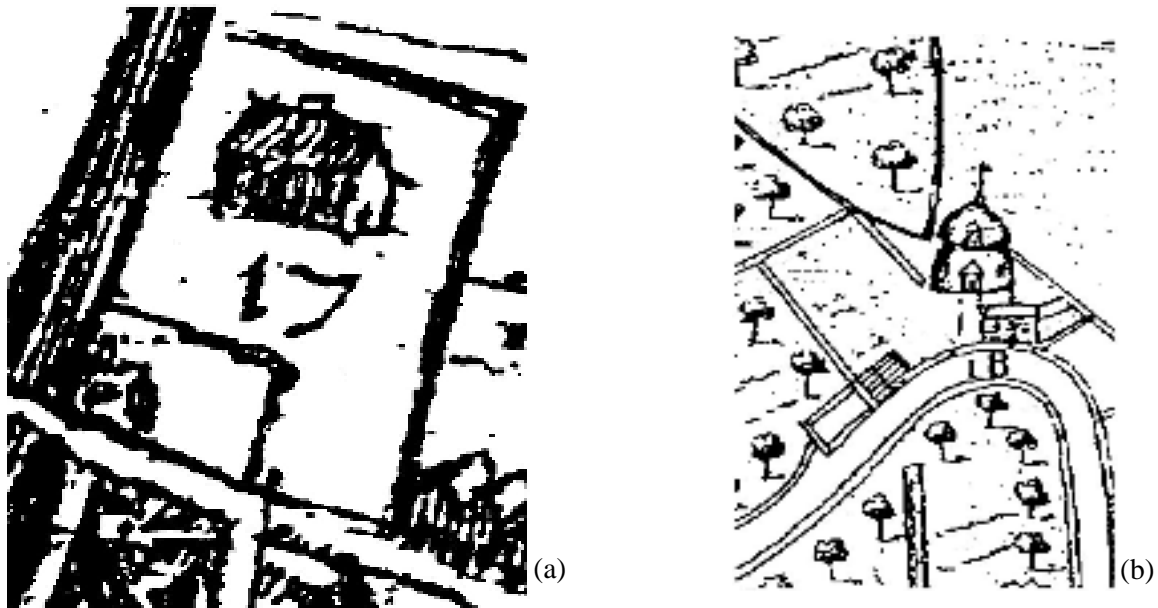


Fig. 5. Glass house at King's Lynn (a) in 1680 and (b) in 1725.⁽⁸⁾

A late 17th century trade card shows another simple cylindrical design for a glass house.^(8, 12)



Fig.6. Trade card - John Burroughs at the Glasse house without Ludgate London.

In 1674 John Burroughs was a signatory on the Indenture of agreement between the London Glass Sellers Company and George Ravenscroft for the supply of the new flint glass, and he was master of the Glass Sellers Company from 1681-2.

The glass houses shown in figures 4 and 5a are quite close to the design shown on the Calne token and suggests that the die engraver, working in London, was familiar with the design of these early industrial buildings.

It would seem that the seventeenth century glass house was seen as a novelty for travellers to visit as can be seen in Celia Fiennes diary⁽¹³⁾:

Here begins my northern Journey in May 1697. . . . *To Aberford we Came by several pretty Seates in view, we Lay at an acquaintances house, Mrs Hickeringalls: thence we went to Castleton Bridge [Castleford, West Yorkshire] 5 mile, where was a glass house; we saw them blowing white glass and neale it in a large oven by the heate of ye ffnurnace. All the Country is full of Coale and the pitts are so thick in ye roade that it is hazardous to travel for strangers.*

And some months later *Ffrom Woolslly after and 8 weekes stay I went to Wolverhampton 11 long mile, then to Churchill neare Sturbridge 9 or 10 mile further, by the many glasshouses where they Blow Broad Glass, but they were not at work on that sort when I was there.*

Though glass houses were once relatively well known, most seem to have been lost somewhere during the industrial revolution and are waiting to be rediscovered. The Calne token might be the earliest image of an industrial building on a token.

References

1. Item 280762283354 sold by murphywoody on eBay, 2nd November 2011.
This note was originally published in the TCSB, vol.10 n.5, December 2011, pp177-182. I was recently reminded of it at the April 2023 meeting of the BNS when Laura Burnett gave a talk “The Industrious Revolution Illustrated: 17th century trade tokens - trade, retail, and occupational identity” which illustrated an example of this token.
A further piece appeared at Noonans 5 May 2021 Lot 752 (part).
2. G.C. Williamson, *Trade tokens issued in the seventeenth century*. London, 1889-91.
3. R.H. Thompson and M.J. Dickinson. *Sylloge of coins of the British Isles (SCBI 49)*. The Norweb Collection, Cleveland, Ohio, USA: *Tokens of the British Isles 1575-1750. Part VI: Wiltshire to Yorkshire, Ireland to Wales*. 1999.
4. Two pieces donated by F.M. Willis, who published an update to G.C. Williamson in *Wiltshire trade tokens of the seventeenth century* in 1892. DZSWS:2003.1.59 and DZSWS:2003.1.60.
5. W. Boyne. *Tokens issued in the seventeenth century in England, Wales and Ireland by corporations, merchants, tradesmen etc*. London. 1858. Wiltshire no 20, and Plate 33, no 2.
6. E.G.H. Kempson. *Wiltshire XVII Century Tokens*. 1978.
7. B. Lillywhite. *London Signs*. 1972.
8. C. & S. Brain. *Pioneering Glass*. Their quite excellent web page is at <http://www.cbrain.mistral.co.uk/home.htm> which includes a comprehensive bibliography, and scientific and historical links.
9. J.E. Jackson. *Wiltshire: the Topographical Collections of John Aubrey*. Aubrey’s notes of 1659-70 published in 1862.
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11. G. Rastrick. *Ichnographia Burgi perantiqui Lennae regis in Agro Norfolciensi accurate delineata Ano MDCCXXV*. London, 1725.
High resolution image available here – http://www.vintage-maps.com/zoomify/template.php?zoomifyimage=10982_0.jpg
12. F. Davis. *Early 18th-century English Glass*. Country Life. 1971
13. C. Fiennes. *Through England on a side saddle in the time of William and Mary*. London, Field and Tuer, The Leadenhall Press. 1888. pp75 and 286.

