

Isaac Desborough of Eltisley (Cambridgeshire W/D 100)

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For well over a century the only known example of this seventeenth century token was a very corroded specimen held in the Fitzwilliam Museum. The surname is incomplete but begins DES and the central shield design is too worn to be identified.

The token was first published by W.G. Searle in 1871⁽¹⁾ and the reading was repeated in Williamson in 1889 where Searle was the subeditor for Cambridgeshire.⁽²⁾ This incomplete reading continues into the most recent catalogues.⁽³⁾

Obv. ISAAC DES[. . .]
around a shield

Rev. OF ELTESLEY 16[. . .]
around IDE

Details. Br, 16 mm

Notes. [Fitzwilliam Museum, CM.BI.388-R].



100

In 1995, the issuer was speculated to be Isaac Desborough, and the shield possibly the family arms.^(4,5)

The present author has been collecting Cambridgeshire tokens and background information about the issuers for 25 years, with a view to publishing a book on this relatively small county.⁽⁶⁾ The W/D numbers range 1-214, though quite a few have been properly claimed by other counties and a few reclaimed from elsewhere. From the beginning of the project the Eltisley piece had been irritating due to its incompleteness.

However recently two slightly better specimens have been found, the first thanks to Gerry Buddle and the second off eBay. These allow the complete reading of the name and identification of the shield.

Obv. ISAAC DESBROWE
around a shield with three bear's heads on a central fes

Rev. OF ELTESLEY 1653
around IDE

Details. Br, 16 mm

Notes. [GMO]



100

The surname Desborough can be found in many local records. The usual genealogical sites has the name being spelled variously as Disborowe, Disbrowe, Desborough and Disbrowe.

The will of James Disborowe of Eltisley (yeoman) was made 26th November 1634. The executor was his son John. He left his wife Anne £20, and his son Samuel freehold land at Wrathingwell (Wrestlingworth? seven miles south) and Eltisley at age 21. Another son Isaac Disborowe was left land at Eltisley and neighbouring Croxford (Croxtton? one mile east) at age 21. As he was underage at the time the will was written the land was to be administered by his brother John. John was also obliged to build a house on the land at Croxley (Croxtton?) as the former house had blown down. He left his daughters: Rebecca £100, Susanna £200, Elizabeth £200 and Sara £200 when they reached the age of 19. The current vicar of Eltisley was left £28 a year for the maintenance of the ministry. His sister Alice Pomfret was left 40s per year. All other lands and goods were left to his son John. The will was witnessed by Thomas Hobbs and an Isaac Disborowe (probably the father of the token issuer).

As is often the case in the seventeenth century, there is a father and son with the same name, thus making it difficult to identify the token issuer. Baptisms can be found in the Eltisley church register for 1646 and 1649

for children born to Isaac and Elizabeth Disbrowe. The Elsworth register records the burial of Isaac Disbrowe, gent, on 8th December 1660. This may refer to the token issuer or his father, as they had the same name⁽⁵⁾.

Cooper notes that on 29th August 1654 Oliver Cromwell constituted a number of commissioners for “ejecting scandalous, ignorant, and insufficient ministers and schoolmasters in the counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon.”⁽⁶⁾ Included in the list of commissioners is the name Isaac Disbrowe.

The VCH records that the manor of Goldinghams, Eltisley, was leased to Isaac Disbrowe in 1650, and that a short while later the senior branch of the family migrated to Elsworth (three miles north east)⁽⁷⁾. It is also noted that by a will proved in 1669, Isaac Disbrowe of Elsworth devised land in Eltisley to his grandsons.

The family was well connected and in 1636 John Disbrowe (1608-80) married Jane Cromwell, sister of Oliver. Jane died in 1656. John was a significant character in the military during the civil war and afterwards during the protectorate⁽⁸⁾.

The hearth tax returns of Eltisley are headed by a return for James Desborow (gent) who was assessed for five hearths in both 1662 and 1664. A Lawrence Desbrow was assessed in the hearth tax of 1674 at Eltisley. An Isaac Desborough was taxed on three hearths in Over in 1662 and 1664. This is just seven miles north east of Eltisley.

It would seem that there is also a line of Desboroughs who moved to New England⁽⁹⁾. A Samuel Disbrow acted as witness for Mercy Holbridge Disbrow, wife of Thomas Disbrow (baptised Eltisley 1625), who was tried and convicted of witchcraft at Fairfield, Connecticut Colony, in 1692.

This Samuel died 10th December 1690 aged 75 and is mentioned later in his widow’s will when she died on 4th March 1698 aged 83. Rose Disbrowe of Elsworth Co. of Cambridge, is described as a widow, late wife of Samuel Disbrowe Esq., aged and indisposed. A further bequest to brother Joseph Hobson Esq. ten pounds to buy him mourning – other property – and “my great bible for the term of his life”, and, after his decease, to a sister now Mrs Sarah White. A grandson Samuel Mills Esq. and his lady were to receive his grandfather’s ring with his coat of arms upon it.

The Desbrough family were entitled to a coat of arms: three bear’s heads couped (sable) and muzzled (or), two above, one below a fes. The shield on the token has the same elements.



References

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- (3) M.J. Dickinson. *Seventeenth Century tokens of the British Isles and their values*. Seaby, 1986, Reprinted Spink, 2004.
- (4) D.F. Wratten. Seventeenth Century Cambridgeshire Tokens. *TCSB* v5n5 pp167-170 May 1995.
- (5) D.F. Wratten. 17th Century Token Issuers of Cambridgeshire. *TCSB* v5n7 pp252-256 January 1996.
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- (7) C.H. Cooper. *Annals of Cambridge*. 1845. Volume iii p459.
- (8) L.F. Salzman, etc. *The Victoria History of the County of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely (VCH)*. Vol. v p49 p51. 1938-2002. (2002).
- (9) S.K. Roberts. John Disbrowe, *Oxford DNB*. 2004.
- (10) H. Fritz-Gilbert Waters. *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. 1890, p.160.

