

DANIEL ECCLESTON
Visionary, Token-Issuer, Deadbeat

Thus far, all of my articles on Matthew Boulton's provincial tokens have been based on a single source, the Boulton Papers in the Birmingham Central Library. The present study will form an exception: here, we have *two* archival sources, the usual collection of letters and fiscal documents which we are accustomed to finding in the Boulton Papers, and a second cache in the Local History Collection of the Lancaster Public Library. I visited this charming northern British city a decade ago in search of materials on its eccentric native son, Daniel Eccleston. What I found will help me flesh out the story of this gentleman, perhaps the most interesting of Boulton's correspondents in the token trade - and certainly the oddest.

You can learn a bit about him in R. C. Bell's *Commercial Coins, 1787-1804*. You can learn a great deal more in a useful monograph by Edith Tyson.¹ She puts Eccleston's date of birth as 1745, although the exact month is not known. He died in March 1821. He was a Quaker although not a particularly observant one: he was thrown out of the Society of Friends 'on account of his total neglect of attending their meetings' - an attitude which Eccleston brought to most activities with which he was connected. Like many of his more sober brethren, he was a merchant, trading with the Caribbean islands of Antigua, Barbados, etc., and actually spending several years in that part of the world. He dealt in sugar and anything else which might turn a profit. After many adventures, he returned to Great Britain, and to Lancaster.

There he became a liquor merchant, then an insurance broker. Eccleston

was of a speculative turn, and engaged in many visionary schemes, none of which answered his expectations. ... Amongst others may be mentioned his scheme of a carriage for crossing the Sands [of the Lune Estuary, above which Lancaster sits] at high water, for which purpose he caused an immense pair of Wheels to be constructed; he also invented cast-iron looms for weaving sail-cloth, some of which

¹Mrs. Edith Tyson, F.M.A., 'Daniel Eccleston' ('A Lancaster Museum Monograph'); undated typescript, 17 pp.

are yet to be seen in this town. ... In these pursuits he squandered most of his property ...²

In short, something of a dreamer. Eccleston was also something of a social gadfly, and he occasionally ran afoul of the authorities. We must bear in mind that the decade of the 1790s, the period which saw the production of most of the tokens in which we share an interest, was also a period of deep political unrest, of social ferment, of constant worry about an invasion by the French - and of a regrettable but understandable knee-jerk reaction to the nonconformist. Eccleston qualified: he harbored unusual opinions. He may have made an indifferent Quaker, but he was a splendidly original freethinker, devout in his way. He wrote and published a tract called *Reflections on Religion: or, Freedom of Thinking, and Judging for Our-Selves, On Religious Subjects. No Atheism* in 1797; a copy survives in Lancaster. The title is explanatory of the contents, which manifest a splendid tolerance for all religions, Christian or not. Two years previously, Eccleston had printed and circulated a broadside pleading with George III to make peace with the revolutionary French; a copy exists in the Boulton Papers, and a reduced version is illustrated elsewhere in this article. Such activities (and later ones, such as commissioning medals dedicated to Napoleon and George Washington³), kept the authorities interested in Mr. Eccleston, as well as nibbling away at his inheritance.

He was clapped in jail on at least one occasion. We find him there at the beginning of 1798, but whether because of debts, conscience, or writings we cannot say. He took a most virulent dislike to John Parke, who may have represented him and failed to keep him out of jail. Eccleston's opinion of this individual was rather appropriately referred to as a 'tirade' by the nameless archivist who sorted his papers. It is worth quoting in full, for it gives us the flavor of the man:

If I should die in Prison,

²*Lancaster Gazette*, 21 December 1816 (an obituary notice for Daniel Eccleston, quoted in Tyson, p. 16). The obituary was somewhat premature.

³by Thomas Webb, a Birmingham medallist active between 1804 and 1827. It is illustrated. The Napoleon medal was designed by John Gregory Hancock, Sr. and appeared in 1802; it appears to be very rare.

I publish to the World,
An Inhuman Monster,
In the Shape of a Man.
That Dirty, Lousy, Upstart,
Pettifogging Attorney.
Known by the Name of
John Parke.
As my Executioner.
And I do most Solemnly,
And Sincerely Declare,
From my Heart;
That I Deem it
A Species of Murder.
And I think He ought
To be Hanged for it.

Dan/ Eccleston
Lancaster Castle, January 1st 1798.⁴

Eccleston's later years were spent in genteel and gently deepening poverty. His obituary appeared in the *Lancaster Gazette* on 21 December 1816. A small but substantive inaccuracy had crept in: Eccleston wasn't dead, and would indeed live on for another four years. It is possible that the *Gazette* erred. It is more likely that Eccleston planted his own death notice. It would have been like him. And it also gave him the excuse (and, obviously, the capability) of penning the letter for which he is most famous.

It appeared in the *Lancaster Gazette* precisely a week after the notice of his death. Robert C. Bell alluded to it, but I take the liberty of transcribing the entire document, which most of my readers have never seen. Its primary purpose (beyond the pulling of a good many legs), seems to have been to set the record straight concerning Eccleston's financial success, or its lack:

⁴Handwritten tirade, Eccleston Scrapbook Number Two (Local History Collection, Lancaster City Library), p. 231

“And the Ladies cry, in doleful dumps,
“Daniel’s dead. What’s trumps?”

FRIEND MINSHULL⁵

I hope through the channels of thy next Lancaster Gazette, to have the privilege of thanking thee for the pains thou hast taken in the obituary of thy last publication, in sketching my character, though it is, in several instances, erroneous. Had I been a worldly minded man during my residence on that small speck of earth on which thou still continues to exist, I had many opportunities of amassing a fortune, during my residence in America and the West Indies, as well as in England, and might, long before thou sent me across the river Styx, have been driving about amongst you in my leathern vehicle, called a coach, but my visionary schemes, as thou calls them, were not entered into solely with a view to profit. I might truly have said with St. Paul, that I had known both how to want and how to abound; I could also have added, that I never murmured, but was always content[!] with every dispensation of Providence. To the sketch thou hast drawn, I will, with thy leave, just add one circumstance, viz. that I was two or three years in Virginia and the Northern provinces of America; and on my returning from Montreal to Boston, sailed down Lake Champlain and Lake George, in a birch bark canoe, with the king of the Cohnawaga Nation, and five other Indians, and was eleven days twelve nights on the lakes and in the woods with them. In Virginia, when at Alexandria, I had the pleasure, and I may also add, the honour, of meeting with General Washington, who gave me an invitation to call and spend a few days with him on his estate at Mount Vernon

We are totally precluded from giving you poor mortals any description of this happy country

“Hope humbly then, with trembling pinions soar,
“Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore,
“Know this, enough for man to know,
“That VIRTUE only makes your bliss below
“And all your knowledge is your self to know”

From my habitation in HEAVEN, the NEW JERUSALEM, the CITY OF THE SAINTS’ SOLEMNITY, in which, through the infinite mercy of God, I hope to obtain an inheritance.

DANIEL BELTESHAZZAR

FITZ-WILLIAM

CARACTICUS

CADWALLADOR

LLEWELLYN

⁵Presumably the editor of the *Lancaster Gazette*.

AP-TUDOR
PLANTAGENET
ECCLESTON⁶

An eccentric to be sure, but one with a small but secure niche in numismatics, in the guise of a halfpenny token struck by Matthew Boulton.

As with so many other of the latter's affairs, we first encounter this one when it was already under way. We first hear of the business in a letter from Eccleston to Boulton dated 10 July 1794. From it, we glean several important bits of information. Eccleston names Noel-Alexandre Ponthon as the designer of the intended Lancaster halfpenny. We would have known this from the treatment of Eccleston's coat on the final product, for the rendition of fabric by a series of carefully-placed parallel lines was something of a signature of this French designer; but it is agreeable to have written confirmation.

The letter suggests that Ponthon must have been well along with the work by that time, and that the Lancaster merchant was having second thoughts about the form his token was taking:

If Mr. Ponthon has not already proceeded too far with the Die, I cou'd wish the Letters in Relief, like Mr. Wilkinsons [halfpenny] instead of being indented as the Canada halfpenny is, and the Halfpenny to be 1 3/16 Inch Diameter.-- Have a particular reason for wishing this alteration, from some information I've recvd in London.-- Have taken some pains to procure you the Canada Arms, but have not yet succeeded--⁷

This letter suggests that Boulton had initially persuaded Eccleston to adopt his latest coinage innovation (letters indented rather than in relief, a design concept which he was about to employ on coinage for Madras and would eventually introduce on his first copper coinage for Great Britain). The letter also suggests that Eccleston was having second thoughts and wanted a more orthodox approach taken on his token. But what did he mean by the 'Canada Halfpenny'?

Eccleston was apparently referring to Boulton's abortive project to strike halfpenny tokens

⁶*Lancaster Gazette*, 28 December 1816; reproduced in Tyson, p. 17.

⁷Matthew Boulton Papers [MBP]230, Letter Box E1, Daniel Eccleston to Matthew Boulton, 10 July 1794.

for John Simcoe, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper, or British, Canada. David Vice published a series of definitive articles on the affair in Spink's *Numismatic Circular* (Vol. 85, 1977). The project ended with no practical effect; but the few patterns which were created had their letters sunk into the surface of the metal rather than raised above it. And they are likely to have served as inspiration for the final form assumed by the Eccleston token.

Boulton stacked the deck for his new idea. In his reply to the Lancaster merchant, he agreed that Eccleston could certainly have his tokens with raised letters, although he was frankly at a loss about 'the motives which have determined you to prefer letters in relief as you have not mentioned them'⁸. In any case, the die with incuse inscription had now been finished, and any alteration of the type suggested would cost a considerable amount of money and cost a considerable amount of time, because Soho would have to scrap the old die and engrave an entirely new one. What did Eccleston want?

As it happened, what he did *not* want, and likely could not afford, was any additional expense on a matter which was more of a whim than a life-or-death affair. He apparently agreed to let matters stand, and Boulton struck him slightly more than a ton of halfpenny tokens in a few weeks' time, sending them to him on 25 August 1794. I estimate the coinage at 109,247 business strikes, and an unknown and likely unknowable number of proofs; this estimate is based on a weight of forty-six pieces per pound, a figure borne out by the weights of observed specimens. Eccleston supplied most of his own copper, another indication that the eccentric merchant had to watch his pennies - and his halfpennies as well. Boulton charged him L.51.17.6 for coining, casks, paper and string, and L.5.5.0 for Mr. Ponthon's dies.

It had apparently been agreed that there would be two tons' worth of Lancaster halfpennies, rather than the ton of so which were struck in August. On 15 September, the Birmingham coiner informed Eccleston that he was now ready 'to give orders for what remains to complete the 2 ton of Lancaster halfpence *to be struck in relief, as you seem to prefer them executed in that manner*'⁹

This leads us to a great rarity.

According to R. Dalton and S. H. Hamer, authors of *The Provincial Token-Coinage of the*

⁸MBP230, Matthew Boulton to Daniel Eccleston, 14 July 1794.

⁹MBP230, Matthew Boulton to Daniel Eccleston, 15 September 1794; italics mine.

18th Century, there are two normal varieties of Eccleston halfpenny token, to which they assigned numbers 57 and 58. Both feature legends sunk into raised borders, and the only difference between the two is that the dies used for D&H 57 were lapped prior to striking D&H 58. But there is a third Eccleston piece, D&H 56, and it is distinctly *abnormal*. It features relief rather than incuse lettering and seems to offer visible proof that Boulton was indeed acting on Eccleston's orders. There is just one problem: this token is unique, the sole specimen reposing in the collection of Jerry and Sharon Bobbe. Dalton and Hamer suggest that 'the rare specimen [D&H 56] is from dies which were hardened, but as the obverse die developed a number of fine cracks it was not hardened, hence the marks on the "field"'¹⁰. I doubt whether the cracks would have stopped Boulton from lapping and using the die, or from creating a new die in its place. The real reason why Mr. Eccleston received no more tokens, and the Bobbes acquired a unique specimen, is probably that the Lancaster merchant was tardy in rendering payment for the shipment he had already received. In fact, he never did pay for it in full.

Matthew (and eventually Matthew Robinson) Boulton sent him a number of genteel dunning notices over the years. Deep in debt himself toward the end of 1796 (for the 'Cartwheel' coinage which would put Soho to work still lay a year in the future), Matthew Boulton found himself 'under the necessity of pressing my friends for as many of the small sums which are owing & amongst them I must earnestly entreat you to send me the L.57.2.6 as *pr acct* on the other side by which you will very much oblige'¹¹. But Eccleston hardened his heart, and did not respond for thirty months.

At length, he sent a remittance for ten pounds (13 March 1799), and, feeling flush, for a similar amount at the end of 1800. He also volunteered to keep a keen watch for a lone burglar who was still at large after a robbery attempt at Soho on Christmas Eve and who had been rumored heading in the direction of Lancaster. The felon was apprehended near Manchester a few months later, with no apparent help from Mr. Eccleston.

But the latter was that way - generous to a fault, so long as it didn't involve money or undo effort. The Soho ledgers show him still owing L.37.2.6 of the original bill at the end of 1801; in the summer of 1804, Eccleston (who had retained contacts with the West Indies), sent Matthew

¹⁰R. Dalton and S. H. Hamer, *The Provincial Token-Coinage of the 18th Century* [1910-1918; reprinted and updated by Allan Davisson, 1990], p.71.

¹¹MBP230, Matthew Boulton to Daniel Eccleston, 21 September 1796.

Robinson Boulton 'half a Doz Cocoa Nuts.--- They came in our last West-India Fleet, seem full of Milk, and [I] expect they are very good ones'.¹² The younger Boulton's reaction went unrecorded.

Over the next decade, Eccleston paid a few more pounds here and there. Soho had received another L.20, in two instalments, by March 1807, but that still left him L.17.2.6 in arrears, as Boulton's secretary William Cheshire wrote to remind him; he reminded him again toward the end of the year, but to no avail. Forty pounds were the most they would ever get out of Daniel Eccleston.

In time, Matthew Boulton died, and his son turned away from the coining business in the pursuit of leisure. Small debts were often overlooked, or forgotten. But they might be resurrected, and so it was with the monies owed by a Lancashire merchant. Late in 1820, Zacchaeus Walker, Jr. (who was Matthew Boulton's nephew and was acting as Matthew Robinson Boulton's amanuensis at the time) was going over old accounts and found one which, to his horror, had gone unpaid for a quarter of a century. And so he sent one final, polite request for remittance ('I presume the transaction must have been entirely lost sight of by you, or it would not have been suffered to have remained so long unliquidated.'¹³). But politesse did not suffice with a man like Eccleston, who in any case was nearing death, this time for real. Soho remained unpaid, and its correspondent passed into the Great Beyond, on 3 March 1821. It is doubtful whether the sum owed for a long-ago token was then uppermost in his mind.

And there are times when it is best to absorb one's losses and turn to the consolations of philosophy. Matthew Boulton may have never gotten his fifty-seven pounds in full; but the token which an eccentric merchant had him strike afforded him much worthwhile instruction in coinage and affords us a handsome memento of a remarkable time, and of two remarkable men.



—R. G. DOTY

¹²MBP230, Daniel Eccleston to Matthew Robinson Boulton, 16 August 1804.

¹³MBP65, Mint and Coinage Letter Book, 1820-1823, Zacchaeus Walker, Jr. to 'Daniel Belteshazzer [sic] Plantagenet Eccleston', 18 October 1820. Walker's choice of address suggests that he had seen Eccleston's 'obituary' of 1816.