

## QUAKER SHILLINGS

The coinage of Queen Anne saw the source of silver identified through the incorporation of provenance marks and the trend continued through the first half of the eighteenth century. Coinage bore roses, plumes, WCC (Welsh Copper Company), Vigo, SSC (South Seas Company) and Lima plus one other device.

It has been said that coins bearing the combined roses and plumes device were minted from a mixture of metal from Wales and the West Country. There is some truth in this but there is more to it. This mark set in the reverse angles came into being as a result of a warrant given in 1706 and renewed in 1709 by Queen Anne. It confirmed that silver supplied by "The Company for Smelting down Lead with Pit Coal and Sea Coal" and converted into coin, would bear the roses and plumes device. Such a mark had been proposed by the company, more easily known as the London Lead Company or the Quaker Lead Company, as it mined in England and in Wales.

Its locus operandi was dictated by the occurrence of lead ore deposits which are to be found mainly in the carboniferous limestone of the Pennines and part of the Halkyn Mountains of North Wales, in Scotland's Silurian rocks of the southern uplands and the Ordovician rocks of Central and North Wales. The relevance of this to silver is that almost all lead ores contain some of this precious metal, varying in the mines of the London Lead Company from 36oz per ton of lead down to 4 or 5oz. The lead mined was melted in a furnace and "run off" to leave silver in the metal state (although this method was replaced by crystallization in 1833).

The silver so refined by the London Lead Company was then sold to the Mint in accordance with charters granted to native mining companies such as the Mine Adventurers of Wales, Copper Miners in England and Lead Miners in England and Wales, the latter being the parent of the London Lead Company. The Mint used the silver for coinage as shown in the table of denominations by years and reigns. From that it can be seen why this type of coinage became known commonly as Quaker Shillings as they are the most prolific denomination of the series by both years and numbers. But back to the London Lead Company:

This Company was to all intents and purposes a Quaker enterprise that can trace its history back to 1692 when coal replaced wood in smelting. However, 1704 is perhaps a better starting point. In that year there were various manoeuvrings that gave the Friends control of business that operated with a Governor and a Court of 24

Assistants, elected annually, that met every Tuesday. The Company was focused on the smelt mills at Gadlis near Flint in North Wales, Ryton-on-Tyne (soon to be replaced by Whitfield smelt mill some 30 miles from Newcastle upon Tyne) and Acton Mill in Derwent Valley. Also it had operations in Derbyshire and Scotland but perhaps its main centre was Alston Moor in Cumbria. It was in that area in particular where the common Quaker tradition was displayed with the building of a new community in 1753 at Nent Head, 5 miles south east of Alston. There the Company sought to provide for all the needs of the whole community, not just those of its employees, in much the same way the Cadbury family did in Bournville over a hundred years later. And other Quaker principles prevailed, such as at Gadlis where the workmen were "not allowed to swear, visit alehouses, or bring drink to the works except from their own families".

Philanthropy aside, the Company were ever pushing to improve techniques, productivity, economy and quality and to this end it paid great attention to staff training and investing in the best processes. The result was that it was said of it "that the market prefers the lead and silver of the London Lead Company to any other it can get".

In the early years through to 1837 the Company sent all its silver to the Mint, rising from 750lbs in 1704 to over 2,000lbs in 1720. It seems that the signing of new leases, the surrendering of others and the cessation of the Scottish output in 1831 reduced the overall output of silver in the 1730s but not to insignificant levels. Further, it needs to be kept in mind that between 1750 and 1765 the London Lead Company took out new leases around Newcastle upon Tyne and Alston Moor. Then its first lease in Teesdale was signed in 1753 and Nent Head/Derwent output more than doubled between 1738 and 1765. Hence there was still a considerable home supply of silver to the extent that it has to be asked why the Mint became so focused on imports of this precious metal.

It would seem that the London Lead Company, whose makeup had less Quaker input in the 1730s as the original members died out, reviewed its trade and finance and balked at selling silver to the Mint at less than the market rate. It appears the Mint looked elsewhere for silver and so the roses and plumes device was last seen on coins dated 1737. However it was not until 1766 that the Mint's solicitors challenged the Company, saying their charter bound them to supplying the Mint. Eventually the solicitors accepted the Company argument they were not so bound and henceforth if the Mint wanted silver from the London Lead Company, it would have to pay the going market price. Therefore the loss of the Company output is another factor in the great dearth of silver coinage in the late eighteenth century.



1732 Roses &amp; Plumes 6d.

Despite circulating coinage ceasing to use London Lead Company silver after 1737, it seems the Mint still relied on its high quality output for Maundy money. This was not issued every year but it is possible the London Lead Company silver was used to produce Maundy coins in maybe as many as the next 16-18 years of issue.

After its provision of silver for coinage completely ceased, the London Lead Company continued in trade as obviously, silver was really a by-product of its main business. Restructuring continued and in 1790 the Derbyshire and Welsh leases were sold to leave the company concentrated in the north of England. Later in the late nineteenth century the lead market was going into decline and by 1883 the London Lead Company had no interests outside Teesdale. Its end however is unclear as the final Company Minute Book is missing, but major factors must be the influx of cheap foreign lead imports and the fact that the Company veins were nearing exhaustion. So the Company was wound up in 1905.

Hence 2 roses and plumes denote some 2 centuries of history but one has to be grateful Queen Anne's warrant did not confer the right to have "The Company for Smelting down Lead with Pit Coal and Sea Coal" inscribed in full on the coinage as that would not have fitted so neatly in the angles.

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### *Sources*

All information about the London Lead Company comes from the research of Arthur Raistrick, principally published in *Two Centuries of Industrial Welfare* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1977) and *Transactions of the Newcomen Society*, (1934), (pages 119-163). Raistrick was also the source for Brooke's article in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, (1934), (pages 51-6). *The Mint* by Sir John Craig (1953) and *Silver Pennies and Linen Towels* by Brian Robinson (1992) were also consulted and the table was populated with data from *The English Silver Coinage* by Seaby & Rayner (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1968).

*P.S.* If anyone can supply further information about the final years of the Company, the writer would be pleased to hear about it.

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