

SCOTTISH BEGGARS' BADGES

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BEGGARS' BADGES MARKED (from left to right) "DUNDEE", WITH THE ARMS OF THE TOWN; "KADY No. 11 (?) 1772"; "NO. 6 EGLSGRIG PARISH 1773"; AND "OLD ABD 1722". The first three badges are pewter, the fourth brass

TO many people the beggar's badge is unknown; it has been an almost neglected subject even to the antiquary. The badge was of ancient usage in Scotland, having been introduced early in the 15th century, when an Act was passed permitting sick persons or those incapable of working to earn their living by begging, and stating that these persons were to be identified by a badge.

The custom was not confined to Scotland. Akin to it, in England in the late 17th century, was the wearing of the badge of poverty, as it was called. The municipal records of Liverpool for 1685 contain the following: "Ordered that all persons whose names are in the Poore Booke, and who receive almes in this burrough shall wear a pewter badge wth. ye towne's armes engraved on it, and such as refuse to weare them are hereby ordered not to have anie releife from this towne." Again, in Birmingham, about 1775, the parish authorities also decided to compel persons receiving relief to wear badges, and had a number of badges cast for this purpose. The enforcement of wearing the badge was distasteful, especially among women, and it was abolished later by Act of Parliament.

Frequent Acts of the Scottish Parliament relating to begging were passed before the Reformation, but after that date it would appear that there were three sources through which the deserving poor might obtain badges conferring on them the privilege of begging. These were: the magistrates of towns, the kirk-sessions of parishes, and the

Sovereign, who could bestow larger privileges in the matter of mendicancy than the others. It is recorded that Edinburgh was searched for beggars who did not possess these badges, and that these persons, when found, were put out of the city and sent off to beg elsewhere.

The badges were generally made of lead, pewter or brass, and lead was the metal most

commonly used. If sold, lead badges would be of little value, but pewter and brass were almost precious metals at one time in Scotland.

The devices stamped upon them were varied: the most usual was the name of a parish, the city arms and the date. Many of the badges bore also the recipients' numbers impressed on them.



LEAD BADGES INSCRIBED (left) "KIRKALDY POOR No. 17" WITH THE ARMS OF THE TOWN, AND (right) "FRASERBURGH POOR." All the badges illustrated on this page are reproduced their actual size

Notes

painting, is the two figures of soldiers at the left of the picture, one dead and the other being struck down by the Belgian Lion, who from their scarlet scarves and feathers are both of the Imperialist and not the French faction. This probably refers to some unidentified mutiny or rebellion in the forces of the Emperor.

It is less easy to indicate the possible author of this painting. The name of Jan van Kessel has been suggested. He certainly painted an *Armourer's Workshop* for Charles Howard, Earl of Carlisle, probably a variant of Jan Bruegel's *Venus at the Forge of Vulcan*. But, unfortunately for this attribution, the date of the picture under discussion cannot be later than 1635 or 1636, a date when Kessel was not more than nine or ten years old. The most that can be said is that the artist was certainly of the school of, if not an actual pupil of, the elder Jan Bruegel, and his obvious familiarity with Rubens' work would seem to indicate that the period of his pupilage was during the second decade of the seventeenth century, when Rubens was acting as Bruegel's secretary.—C.R.B.

Beggars' Badges

In a glass case in the little museum in Winchester is a small cast lead badge, with holes pierced at the sides to allow of it being sewn on to the body garment. This little badge is some 4 in. long by 3 in. wide. The design and lettering on it is shown by the accompanying illustration, which

is reproduced by courtesy of the museum. The descriptive label reads:—

"Romsey Beggars' Badge, 1678. These badges were granted by the justices to persons licensed to beg." The inscription on the badge appears to be as follows:—

"I receives Allemes
of the Town
Made in the Mayoralty
of Mr. Henry Squibb
Mayor of Romsey inf-
ra in Hamsir
Anno Domini 1678
Of Rumsey."

Both the portcullis as well as the lettering are raised, not cut in the surface. These badges, though rare, are to be met with at times, and Mr. Mead, the curator of the Royal Museum at Canterbury, tells me that in the transcript of the Churchwardens' Accounts of the Church of St. Andrew, p. 23, fol. 14, the wardens set down in their accounts, towards the end of the fifteenth century—"Item payd to Clysston for scochyns." Mr. Mead adds: "We do not possess an example of the Metal Badges in the museum, but our Municipal Records have various references to the making of them. The earliest is of 1530-31, viz.: "Paid for making the Seals for beggars." Another reference dates 1554-55: "For ii. dosen Skotchens of lede for the poore people of the Citie that they might be knownen from other strange beggars."—HENRY LITTLEHALES.



THE BEGGARS' BADGE IN WINCHESTER MUSEUM