

The Earliest Dated Token Issued in Sussex “AT THE CATT IN EAST GREENSTED, 1650”

By Geoffrey Barber

Sussex came late to token-issuing, the first dated token being issued in 1650 and the last in 1670. The slow uptake and the low number issued (around 230 including die varieties) reflects the lower population and weaker economy at that time compared to other parts of England. The earliest dated token was issued by Thomas Page of East Grinstead in 1650. It has an image of a cat with the inscription “AT THE CATT IN EAST GREENSTED 1650” and the initials P|T.E for Thomas Page and his wife Elizabeth. The Catt refers to the Cat Inn which is now known as The Dorset Arms.



Fig. 1. The farthing token of Thomas Page (BW86, N----, KR52)
“AT.THE.CATT.IN.EAST.GREENSTED.1650”
(Nigel Clark collection)

Hill's *The History of East Grinstead* states the establishment was an old coaching house first called “The Newe Inne” when it was built and subsequently named “The Ounce” and afterwards “The Cat”. According to Kerridge & de Ruiter, it was known as “The Cat” by 1636.¹ The names “The Ounce” and “The Cat” were derived from the two leopards which form the supporters of the Earl of Dorset’s coat of arms, an ounce being another name for a leopard.² The connection to the Earl of Dorset arises from Thomas Sackville, the first Earl of Dorset (1536-1608) who was the member of parliament for East Grinstead.

Thomas Page married Elizabeth about 1625, although their marriage has not been found. The marriage records at East Grinstead would appear to be complete for this period suggesting that they did not marry there. Baptisms for the following children have been found:

Thomas Page, baptised 19 July 1626 at East Grinstead.

Richard Page, baptised 5 Jan 1631/32 at East Grinstead.

Benjamin Page, baptised 20 Sep 1635 at East Grinstead.

Elizabeth Page, baptised 18 Oct 1640 at East Grinstead.

There is an alehouse keeper’s recognizance for 1641 for Thomas Page of East Grinstead, suggesting that he was at the Cat Inn then, and another in 1648 identifying him as an “innholder”.^{3, 4}



Fig. 2. The Dorset Arms at 58 High St, East Grinstead which in 1650 was a coaching inn known as “The Cat”. East Grinstead was on the old coaching route from London to Lewes and Brighton.

In 1650, Thomas Page of East Grinstead issued his farthing token (Fig. 1), the earliest dated token to be issued in Sussex. Sometime around 1652, he moved to Battle in East Sussex and became an innkeeper there. His son Thomas, who is identified as a carpenter in various documents, had moved from East Grinstead to Battle by 1652, where his daughter Mary was baptised. This provides our best estimate for when his father became an innkeeper there. Sometime later he issued an undated farthing token at Battle (Fig. 3) with an image of a double headed eagle and the words

"THOMAS.PAGE.AT.THE.SPRED.EGLE".

It has the initials T.P. and the fact that there is no initial for a wife suggests that Elizabeth had died, although her burial record cannot be found (the East Grinstead parish burial records between 1639-1654 are fragmentary with pages missing).⁵ Although this token is undated, research by the author has shown that it is probably the earliest to be issued at Battle, where six tokens were issued in total (all undated!).⁶ We can be confident that it was Thomas Page the father who issued both tokens as there are documents concerning a property called Gedges at East Grinstead confirming him as an innholder at East Grinstead and later at Battle.⁷



Fig. 3. The farthing token of Thomas Page of Battle (BW22, N----). The obverse showing the double headed eagle and the reverse (difficult to read in places) with T.P. in the middle for Thomas Page. The obverse has the words THOMAS.PAGE.AT.THE around the edge and the reverse has SPRED.EGLE.IN.BATTELL but the word SPRED is obliterated in this particular token.

(Nigel Clark collection)

Ten years later, in 1662, an Alehouse Keeper's Recognizance at Battle states:⁸

Thomas Page is admitted and allowed by His Majesties Justices of the Peace about named to keep a common alehouse & to use the common selling of ale & beer within the now dwelling house of the said Thomas Page situate in Battell aforesaid & called the sign of the Eagle

These were early public house licences where the alehouse keeper appeared before two Justices of the Peace each year and entered into a bond, promising to maintain good order in their houses and not to permit unlawful games.

The year 1662 was the last year Thomas Page was innkeeper at The Eagle, with Edward Welsh taking over. The year 1662 was also the last year his sons' children were baptised at Battle and sometime after that they returned to East Grinstead. He would appear to have died in 1664 and there are two possibilities for his burial, one at Battle and the other at East Grinstead.

Although Thomas Page was the innkeeper at The Eagle, he was not the owner of the premises. It looks very likely that Thomas Page had a ten-year lease on the property, 1652-62 so his token would have been issued during that time. The Battle and District Historical Society publication *Inns and Other Public Drinking Houses* states that in 1657 Edward Welch was admitted to the copyhold messuage [dwelling] in Middleborough (one of the five boroughs of Battle) once called Fishers but now called The Eagle. This was the result of his inheritance from his grandfather coming due. It looks likely that Edward Welsh, the grandfather, owned The Eagle and that his trustees/overseers held it for the young Edward with Thomas Page being brought in to operate and manage it as innkeeper. (Edward Welsh's grandfather has been documented as an innkeeper at Battle in Alehouse Keeper's Recognizances in 1632 and 1636-43.⁹ He died in 1647 and his will is key to understanding the Welsh family.¹⁰)



Fig. 4. The farthing token of Edward Welsh of Battle (D23A, N----). The obverse showing the double headed eagle and the reverse with W|E.M in the middle for Edward Welsh and his wife Mary (nee Shether) who he had married in 1654. The obverse has the words EDWARD.WELSH around the edge and the reverse has BATTLE.IN.SVSSEX. (Nigel Clark collection)

According to Martin, Martin & Whittick, legal documentation confirms that Edward Welsh was operating The Eagle in 1662 which would be the year he took over from Thomas Page.¹¹ He then issued his own undated farthing token with the same double headed eagle (Fig. 4).



Fig. 5. The undated halfpenny token of Richard Page and Henry Brasted of East Grinstead (BW87, N-- --, KR54). The obverse has the words RICH.PAGE.AND.HEN.BRASTED , around a cable circle containing a crown and the reverse has EAST.GRIMSTED.IN.SVSSEX , around a cable circle containing THEIR HALF PENY.
(Nigel Clark collection)



Fig. 6. The Crown at 35 High St, East Grinstead.

Of interest also is that Thomas Page’s son, Richard Page, was to later jointly issue an undated halfpenny token at East Grinstead with Henry Brasted (Fig. 5). The token has an image of a crown and a document in 1683 identifies Richard Page as an “innholder”, so it is likely that Richard Page was innkeeper of the still existing tavern “The Crown”.¹² Henry Brasted is described as a mercer in documents in 1657 and 1661, and also in his will proved in 1685, so while it may be that he was a joint proprietor of the inn, it may also be possible that he used the token at his mercer's business (or both).^{13, 14, 15} Richard Page and Henry Brasted appear to have both held positions of responsibility/authority in East Grinstead parish. Richard was a sworn constable in 1660 and 1661 and Henry was noted as “Leftenant” on his burial record in 1684, with his will bequeathing a sword & belt and a steel bow to his son William. Richard Page died in 1702 and his occupation is given as “gentleman”.¹⁶

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- ¹ Kerridge, Ron & de Ruiter, Rob: *The Tokens, Metallic Tickets, Checks and Passes of West Sussex, 1650-1950*, 2009, p.69.
- ² Hills, Wallace Henry: *The History of East Grinstead*, 1906, Farncombe & Co Ltd, p.15.
- ³ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO): QR/51/3, Alehouse keeper's recognizance, 1641.
- ⁴ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO): SAS/FB/544, Mortgage in Fee, 17 Apr 1648.
- ⁵ Crawford, R.P.: *The Parish Register of East Grinstead, Sussex 1558-1661* in Sussex Record Society, Vol XXIV, 1917, p186-190.
- ⁶ Barber, Geoffrey: *The Six Merchant Tokens Issued at Battle in East Sussex, 1650-70*, (2022). https://archive.org/details/the-six-merchant-tokens-issued-at-battle-27-feb-2022-bdhs_202302
- ⁷ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO): SAS/FB/544, SAS/FB/557. Both documents concern the property Gedges at East Grinstead, with the first in 1648 referring to Thomas Page of East Grinstead, innholder and the second, in 1683, referring to the same Thomas Page as late of Battle, innholder, deceased.
- ⁸ Thomas Page of Battle, innkeeper; alehouse keeper's recognizance, Date: 1662, ESRO reference: QR/135/117
- ⁹ Alehouse Keeper's Recognizances, Sussex Quarter Sessions, Eastern Division, c 1550-1914. (ESRO)
- ¹⁰ Will of Edward Welsh, Yeoman of Battle, made 6 Jan 1642/43, proved 4 May 1647. (TNA: PROB 11/200/228)
- ¹¹ David and Barbara Martin with Christopher Whittick: *Building Battle town* (Domtom Publishing Ltd, Burgess Hill, 2016)
- ¹² ESRO: SAS/FB/560, *Deed poll of release in fee*: John Bodle of East Grinstead, yeoman to Richard Page of East Grinstead, innholder.
- ¹³ ESRO: BH/P/ES/CG/4. Lease, 1657: Henry Brasted of East Grinstead, mercer, to Edward Drew of West Hoathly, gent.
- ¹⁴ ESRO: AMS 542. Bond in £200, 4 Nov 1661. Henry Brasted of East Grinstead, mercer, to Henry Chennell of the same, freemason.
- ¹⁵ Will of Henry Brasted, Mercer of East Grinstead, made 22 Jul 1684, proved 24 Jan 1685. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/36/220)
- ¹⁶ Will of Richard Page, Gentleman of East Grinstead, made 5 Nov 1698, proved 7 Jul 1702. (ESRO: PBT 1/1/45/45)