A previously undescribed Scottish communion token from Keithhall, Aberdeenshire

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ABSTRACT

A previously undescribed Scottish communion token has been discovered in the collections of Aberdeenshire Heritage. The token, dated 1704, is considered to be from Keithhall parish, Aberdeenshire.

INTRODUCTION

The communion token collection of the former North-East of Scotland Museums Service (now part of Aberdeenshire Heritage) was recatalogued during the early part of 1996. During the course of this work it became apparent that there was one token (mus reg no PEHMS:I7056) which was not listed in any of the standard works on Scottish communion tokens (eg Brook 1906; Kerr & Lockie 1941; 1953). Enquiries to several major collections of communion tokens, including National Museums of Scotland, St Andrews University, Marischal Museum, Hunterian Museum, and Perth Museum & Art Gallery, revealed no other example of this token, which thus appears, so far, to be unique.

The token (illus 1) was acquired by the Carnegie Museum, Inverurie, sometime prior to 1975, as part of a small collection of tokens and coins from one John Kerr, Kemnay. Apart from a stock Free Church of Scotland token, the other tokens in this collection were from Aberdeen (East), Bourtie, Cushnie, Drumblade, Grange, Keithhall & Kinkell, Kinnoull, Maryculter, New Machar, and Peterculter. All of these parishes, except for Kinnoull, are in north-east Scotland.

THE TOKEN

Obv.   M | WK | 1704; SIC | ITVR | AD | ASTRA round edge.

Rev.   [Uninscribed]

Lead, square, 27 mm

There is no abbreviation or initial of the parish name, but the fortuitous combination of the minister's initials (WK) and the date (1704) allows the search to be narrowed down. A trawl through the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* reveals that there were only three parishes in Scotland in 1704 which had ministers with the initials WK: New Luce in Wigtownshire (William Kyle,

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ILLUS 1   Communion token from Keithhall. Scale 1:1

1694–1710) (Scott 1917); Dairsie in Fife (William Knox, 1704–46) (Scott 1925; 1950); and Keithhall in Aberdeenshire (William Keith, 1683–1709) (Scott 1926; 1950).

The fact that William Knox became minister of Dairsie in 1704 is, at first sight, very suggestive. Knox, however, did not become minister of Dairsie until late 1704, and his first communion service would have been in 1705; a dated token for Dairsie parish was produced in 1708 (Brook 1906). On stylistic grounds, the unidentified token does not resemble known late 17th- or early 18th-century tokens from either Wigtownshire or Fife, but it does resemble those from Aberdeenshire (for example, Chapel of Garioch, Culsalmond, Gartly, Old Deer, or Peterhead). Also suggestive of an Aberdeenshire origin is the fact that the motto, SIC ITVR AD ASTRA, was used on a communion token a century later by Inverurie parish, which borders Keithhall.

KIRK SESSION EVIDENCE

In a recent paper on a communion token from Leuchars, Ian Carradice (1994) showed how kirk session records could be used as evidence for token production. A search through the Kirk Session records for New Luce and Dairsie parishes for several years before and after 1704 revealed no entries relating to communion token production. The Keithhall Kirk Session register does, however, have the following entry in 1704 (Scottish Record Office CH2/201/1):

> Febry the 13 day
> the sd day given out of the box seven pound
> for new tokens to the Sacrament

The Sacrament was duly celebrated the following 23 April.

WILLIAM KEITH

All the evidence described above strongly suggests that the unknown token comes from Keithhall parish, and that William Keith is the minister whose initials appear thereon. William Keith is described in the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* (Scott 1926; 1950) as being the grand-nephew of George Keith, who was minister of Keithhall parish from 1675 to 1683, before moving to Old Deer parish. Following studies at Marischal College, Aberdeen, where he matriculated in 1673

(Anderson 1898), William Keith was ordained to Keithhall parish in 1683, succeeding his great-uncle. He appears to have conformed to Presbyterianism at the Revolution in 1689, as seen in the Kirk Session register entry (Scottish Record Office CH2/201/1):

26 May 1689
this day the Minister read an public proclamation appoynting King William & Queen Mary to be publickly prayed for

This initial conformity seems not to have persisted, since in 1707 he was cited in a 'list of Ministers who have not complied with the present Church Government' (Diocese of Brechin manuscript material held by the University of Dundee: Br MS 3DC/94–106). In this he followed his family chief, the Earl Marischal, and many of the great Keith family, who, in general, remained Episcopalian. His great-uncle George Keith, for example, held Old Deer parish for the Episcopalians until his death in 1710. William Keith himself died in 1709.

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