

## LOCK HOUSE ARTIFACTS

### 1861 PENNY

by David Jones

A Victorian 1861 penny was unearthed at one of the work parties in 2016. It was found just outside the front door of the Lock House. See figure 1 below.



Figure 1: the 1861 penny

*(Image courtesy of Geoff Hales and Yvonne Plant)*

Pennies with this design were known as 'bun' pennies because of Queen Victoria's hairstyle. They were struck between 1860 and 1894, and circulated until demonitised on 31 August 1971, nearly seven months after Decimalisation Day (15 February 1971).

The coin is in poor condition and, although badly worn, the basic outline of the design is visible. I remember it was not uncommon to come across worn 'bun' pennies such as this in the 1950s, the early dates in particular had been in circulation for about ninety years. This suggests that this 1861 penny had most probably been lost in the 1940s or early 1950s when Leslie and Isabella Shaw and their Family lived in the Lock House, and so post-dates the time when the River Sow Navigation was open.

For comparison, an 1861 penny in much better condition is shown in figure 2 below.



Figure 2: an 1861 penny in better condition

*(Image courtesy of Keith Bayford, K.B.Coins, Stevenage)*

'Bun' pennies are made of 'coinage bronze', a hard-wearing alloy of 95% copper, 4% tin and 1% zinc. They are 31 mm in diameter and have a mass of 9.4 g ( $\frac{1}{3}$  oz).

The coins were designed and engraved by Leonard Charles Wyon (1826-1891) and struck by the Royal Mint at Tower Hill, London.

The obverse (heads) has the laurate head of the Queen facing left with the inscription in Latin "VICTORIA D:G: BRITT: REG: F: D:" around. This was short for "VICTORIA DEI GRATIA (by the Grace of God) BRITANNIARUM (of the Britains) REGINA (Queen) FIDEI DEFENSOR (Defender of the Faith)".

The reverse (tails) shows the seated figure of Britannia facing right, with a lighthouse to the left and a sailing ship on the right. Britannia holds a trident in her left hand and her right hand rests on a shield emblazoned with a 'union jack'. The value "ONE PENNY" is around and the date "1861" is in the exergue.

1861 pennies are relatively common and there were several design modifications that year. In total 36,449,280 were struck which was the second highest mintage of all the 'bun' pennies.

In 1861 Lord Palmeston was the Prime Minister, Victoria had been on the throne for 24 years. It was also the year that Prince Albert died, the American Civil War began, Italy was unified and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* published.

#### Additional Notes on the currency

In 1861 Britain was using the duodecimal system of currency of pounds, shillings and pence (£sd or Lsd).

£ (or L for Librae) is the pounds symbol; s (for solidi) was the shillings symbol and d (for denarii) was the pence symbol. There were 12 pennies in a shilling, and 20 shillings in a pound. This meant that there were 240 pennies in a pound.

There were three bronze denominations: farthing ( $\frac{1}{4}$ d), halfpenny ( $\frac{1}{2}$ d) and penny (1d); seven silver denominations: three pence (3d), groat (4d), sixpence (6d), shilling (1s 0d or 1/-), florin (2s 0d or 2/-), halfcrown (2s 6d or 2/6 ... pronounced 'two and six') and crown (5s 0d or 5/-); and two gold coins: half sovereign (10s 0d or 10/-) and sovereign (20s 0d or 20/-) ... the gold pound is known as a sovereign.

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