BILLY & CHARLEYS

Precis of parts of a Christopher Peal article of April 1966 (Seaby’s Coin and Medal Bulletin)

1857 London Shadwell Dock when dredged and being rebuilt it was reported labourers were finding quantities of base metal medallions. Corroded and dirty appearing is if very old in design. Dissenting opinion as to authenticity resulted in a libel case which in effect confirmed their authenticity. Thus, the supposed shore rakers – Billy and Charlie who were the actual makers not finders of these pieces had then some official acceptance. Although both were illiterate they showed extraordinary ingenuity and shrewd dealing ability. However, they were eventually found at work in an evening after their day job making and aging these medallions etc.

From the Internet, a Robert Halliday (precis) gives more information

William Smith (Billy) Charles Easton (Charley) were born in the early 1830s. The cast their lead objects primitively in plaster of Paris moulds the art work made with nails and small knives, aged with mud and acid. Dagger handles, Ampullae, statuettes, other possible pilgrim badges were all created. Uneducated though they used Arab numerals inappropriately, a meaningless jumble of letters and symbols, armour and crowns not of the apparent date. William Edwards a noted Antique dealer and George Eastwood of City Road bought and sold many as relics of the time of Richard II.

Other Articles and Interest

Hull Museum in 1908 wrote an article entitled Forgeries and Counterfeit Antiquities and from page 5 onwards gives their account only some 50 years later and shows a variety of photos of such pieces.

Robert Vetter colleague in the late 20s and 30s of H H Cotterell writes to C Peal in 1966 asking him to send information to a German Author.

Guardian of May 1971 in Auctions and Collections by Donald Wintersgill features – and notes contemporary comments on the forgers – wonderful skill and power of design and manipulation (as well then they were not educated..)

Country Life of June 1955 – featured the two sides of a highly imaginatively decorated medallion
Marsden BM – an article on Billys and Charleys is said to be in the pewter Society Library - but cannot be found. Thus, has the faking of Smith and Easton lived on for 150 years.

Google – Billy and Charleys.................................or

LOOK AT THESE WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION

http://spitalfieldslife.com/2014/01/04/billy-charleys-shadwell-shams/
http://www.mernick.org.uk/b&c/page1.htm

(Images below for private study only not to be reprinted without permission of owners)
fake with mould – (design taken) from Butter print
BILLIES AND CHARLIES
By AUDREY and IVOR NOËL HUME

FROM behind the shuttered windows and barred doors of a house in narrow-scale London, the view of the River Thames is a constant reminder of the past. The Tower of London, with its many treasures, is visible from almost every window in the city. William Smith and Charles Eaton were two of the most famous dealers in London, known for their expertise in fine art and antiques.

Smith and Eaton were not just dealers, they were connoisseurs. They had a deep understanding of the history and value of the objects they sold. Their reputation was such that they were often sought after by collectors and museums around the world.


The PASSING DREAM
SUMMER favours the privacy rules;
This evening, on the moon's round pool
Lilies basking, from winter voyage returned again
After a word of briefest rain,
Fragile, exquisite, cool.
With grass and flowers for comforters
And the sun's last, most healing wand
Laid on the wounds the mallow flowers.
This silent place
Offers its all-forgiving grace.
And over the brook where the snails swim
To the running, creamy gleam,
And beyond the willow-brushed farm's low cowshed.
The smooth down rises,
Here morel that rich, wounding sites
Wreathed with leaves' pale passion-dream.

MARJORIE STANNARD.
HUNDRED years ago two illiterate London mudrakers, William Smith and Charles Eaton, achieved immortality under the names of Billie and Charlie, and their forgeries are affectionately known to collectors as “Billie and Charlie.”

It is not often that forgeries are wittingly collected for their intrinsic qualities, nor, owing to their scarcity, is it usually possible for many collectors to share the same pursuit; but Billie and Charlie were both astonishingly inventive and industrious. They produced a vast quantity of spurious medieval metal objects cast in lead or cock-metall (an alloy of lead and copper), artificially aging them by pitting with acids. Cock-metal, which is similar to brass to look at, melts at a comparatively low temperature and was no doubt chosen on account of the ease with which it could be cast into the required shapes by means of sand or chalk moulds.

Specimens Abroad

Not the least remarkable aspect of this fraud was the care with which these objects were dispersed over a wide area. Specimens are reported to have been found as far away as the mines of South Africa, and many of the larger works of excavation which have been carried out near London have been “salted” with them so that the workmen might find a ready sale for objects dug out of the earth under the eyes of the onlookers.

It was, indeed, during the excavations made while constructing a new dock at Shadwell in 1838 that matters came to a head. No fewer than 2,000 of these objects were produced as discoveries made during the work. Not unnaturally the alleged archaeological find created a great stir and Mr. Syer Cunning, President of the British Archaeological Association, exhibited some examples at one of the society’s meetings later that year and denounced them as “recent forgeries in lead.”

A report of the proceedings of this meeting was printed in The Athenaeum and an antique dealer, who had dealt in these metal objects since June, 1847, brought his claim for redress before a British jury. The trial took place at Guildford, before Mr. Justice Willes, on Thursday, August 5, 1838, and is reported in The Times on the following day.

Evidence of Finds

From that account it is clear that the dealer had decided that these objects were genuine when they first came to his notice in 1847 after visiting the new Shadwell dock to examine the soil. He bought for £346 1,100 specimens from two young men, who were supposed to have found them. One of these two “shore-rakers” was then called, and gave evidence that 2,000 were found (at Shadwell) between June, 1857, and March, 1838. He and his companion used to buy them from the navigators as they discovered them, but he had
TWO CLEVER FAKEERS

Illiterate Mudrakers Whose “Billie and Charlie” Duped Antiquarians

FROM A COLLECTOR

found a great number of them himself by raking over the earth after it was dug out.

Counsel then proceeded to call several eminent antiquarians, including two Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of London, to testify to their genuineness. The Judge, in summing up, decided that there was no case against the Athenaum. To capture only the mounds that Billie and Charlie were found preparing but the very tools with which they were made.

These he proudly showed to the Society of Antiquaries, together with the metal objects which he had been forced to buy in the course of the lengthy manoeuvres by which he at last traced dates in the eleventh century in Western Europe.

The medallion illustrated here is unusual in that the heraldic design is reproduced by what must be intended as a representation of the Flight into Egypt without the figure of St. Joseph. It is obvious to the least knowledgeable that the mask of the two knightly figures forming a loop for suspension does not accord with the period suggested by the date (1000) in the inscription on the other side. The low-relief figure of a standing bowman is a greater rarity; six inches high, it is a most original piece of invention. The back has traces of a long pin for attaching it to a coat of mail in the manner of the Medieval Pilgrim’s Badges described in The Times of December 21, 1927. Even more surprisingly derived from the pilgrim’s sign is the large open-work roundel, containing four small circles, each inhabited by a small figure. Two of the figures seem to represent bishops, one holding a book and the other a tall cross.

Less plausible were the numerous daggers made by Billie and Charlie, some obviously unsuitable for use as weapons, the blade being thick and unserviceable for cutting or piercing. The hilts are always very convenient and rarely is a guard provided. Yet these daggers are frequently given one of the five dates and a meaningless short inscription.

“Billie and Charlie” are said to have duped antiquarians and dealers in the 1920s. From left to right—a medallion-like object; a standing bowman, which is a rare fake; an open work roundel, and one of many “Billie and Charlie” daggers.

Billie and Charlie’s forgeries were obvious and the jury, therefore, returned a verdict for the defendant. But the fact that no evidence at all had been given to prove that the objects were forgeries was considered by many to indicate their genuineness, with the result that there was a larger demand for “Billie and Charlie,” which was duly met by an increase in production.

It was the distinguished archaeologist Charles Read, F.S.A., who, with a technique not unlike Sherlock Holmes’s, set himself to trace out the two men who had been the acknowledged purveyors—acting daily between the alleged finders and the dealer,” as he told the Society of Antiquaries in 1861. It was by winning the cooperation of a man who, employed in constructing the City sewers, had called on him one evening in 1839 to sell him some pottery fragments and some “Billie and Charlie” that Charles Read was eventually able to capture only the mounds that Billie and Charlie were found preparing but the very tools with which they were made.

Remarkable Skill

While efforts to deceive, such as these forgeries, are contemptible few and far between. Many forgers find a market not only in the real world but also among collectors of antiques. Not least of the creations is the rare turn, almost 90 degrees. Illustrated here, which displayed the skills of a work of art in its own right. On the reverse of the head in the centre is some lettering, so that one is left wondering whether either Billie or Charlie was left-handed, or perhaps it is just another expression of their amazing individuality and lack of interest in accuracy.

The inspiration of this huge fraud was undoubtedly the finding by archaeologists and antiquaries, like Roach Smith, of many examples of lead pilgrim’s badges along the banks of the Thames in London during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The fact that the idea of angling the name of these various leaders occurred to two workers is now as surprising as their negligible attempts to copy the genuine finds. In their eyes they created a wonderful new series of objects which are more local documents of the mid-nineteenth century, for they give a clear indication of the efficiency of the Middle Ages as a means of copying the text.

That these “Billie and Charlie” succeeded in duping antiquarians, collectors, and dealers may seem hardly credible to us today, but it is the most glaring proof of the truth that a well-chosen fake planted at the right time in the right circumstances will always succeed.
BILLIES AND CHARLIES

Sir,—You may care to publish the enclosed photographs of one of the more ambitious efforts of Billie and Charlie, whose skill in baiting academic gullibility made such amusing reading in your issue of June 9. Although its antiquarian value may be nil, it does nevertheless occupy an honourable place in its own right as being an historic forgery in the collection of the Birmingham Archaeological Society, which not long ago had it on exhibition. It came to the Society from a former president, the late Mr. John Humphreys.

Presumably it is one of the relics described in the article. It

FRONT AND BACK OF A RELIQUARY FORGED BY BILLIE SMITH AND CHARLIE HATON

is about eleven inches high and stands on four feet fashioned as human heads. The two upper guardian figures on the front are not at all unlike the woodwoses who appear on several of Lincoln cathedral’s choir stalls. While confounding their learned contemporaries, Billie and Charlie seem to have had the gift of anticipating the future. To me the delineation of the crowned image within looks exactly as if he were speaking into a microphone. — MARGARET JONES (Mrs.), 32, Forest-road, Moseley, Birmingham, 15.
BILLIE AND CHARLIE TOKENS.

BY CHRISTOPHER PEAL.

In 1857, when Shadwell Dock in London was dredged and rebuilt, various Roman antiques, notably a lead coffin, came to light. At the same time, it was reported that labourers on the job were finding quantities of base metal medallions. These were apparently bought by two shore rakers, and sold by them to a dealer in curios. Corroded, dirty and appearing to have great age, the items were archaic in design—Anglo Saxon and Norman. In fact, many bore dates of the 11th century. Their appearance divided the opinion of the antiquaries sharply, some denouncing them as forgeries, others accepting them. A critical report led directly to a libel case. After hearing evidence for the plaintiff, in which two noted antiquaries affirmed authenticity, and one of the shore rakers told of the labourers' finds, the Judge stopped the case and found for the plaintiff. Thus the shore rakers—Billie and Charlie (who were not middlemen, but were the actual makers of the items)—had gained valuable legal approval and official expert acceptance. Not a word in Court had been said against them. For two or three years, demand was intense—and Billie and Charlie rode the crest of the wave keeping pace with the demand. Although illiterate, they showed extraordinary ingenuity and enterprise with their designs. However, a determined, shrewd antiquary, through an encouraged intermediary, secured moulds and tools. Billie and Charlie were found at work in the evening after their legitimate day's work, casting and antiquifying their products with acid and mud.
Many of these medallions were called "Pilgrims Signs," and although quite unlike any others ever seen, were nevertheless very interesting and arresting (See Fig. 1). The antiquarians seem to have been remarkably slow in reading the legends, which are always a meaningless series of "archaic" letters, some letters reversed and with occasional numerals introduced, but always gibberish. The inscription "SMOSRNACSMRPOSROMRPMC" either exercises or deflates the imagination (See Fig. 2). It did occur to some that the dates e.g. 1030 were in modern arabic numerals. This was explained as 16th century foreign copies of the originals. It was calculated that from sales, etc., that some 12,000 items must have been in circulation. There is very little literature on the subject of Billie-and-Charlies particularly from the wares point of view. It is remarkable that a range of items so well known to Museums and collectors alike—so good humouredly accepted as outrageous forgeries but of undoubted enterprise and initiative—has been so little catalogued. They are nearly all of lead, although quoted as "lead and pewter" (pewter usually being 75% tin, 25% lead). Some are in brass. The casting technique is often ingenious. The decoration method is most important to recognize. Three items in this rapid survey will suffice
a. the lettering of the "legend" (try reading it!)
b. the dots with which so much design is carried out.
c. the style.

What has all this to do with numismatists? The "Pilgrim Sign" hardly come in his province. Let us see what are recorded as having been made by Billie and Charlie. Articles quote "Bishops on horseback, Figurines, Images, Pilgrim Signs, Daggers, Spear-heads, Seals, Rings, Jugs, Vases."

**Tokens.**

A range which has apparently not been recorded is of "tokens". The writer has examples in his trays of other lead tokens. They range from .8" to 1.1" diameter, whereas the "medallions" and "pilgrim signs" are 3½" upwards. They seem to have been unrecognised, or not commented upon in numismatic circles but they are unquestionably true Billie-and-Charlies. Some have plain reverses. Some bear a faint similarity to short cross pennies. All have the distinctive lettering, decoration as far as possible by dots, and they have an obvious family likeness to other larger Billie and Charlies. How many are to be found in collections?

In conclusion, the writer feels convinced that some other types of lead tokens are forgeries. Literature of the time implies that some other forgeries were already being made immediately prior to Billie and Charlie's activities. Other references quote succeeding types. Again, the Hull Museum publication alone mentions a fresh flow of Billie and Charlies in 1908 and goes further to illustrate a die of nine counterfeits dated early 18th century, cast in one stellar die. There are several types of doubtful specimens (not "Billie and Charlies"), for instance, those depicted on the bottom row of *B.N.J.*, Vol. IV, 1908. Look to your lead!

Author's Note: *Correspondence welcomed.* (Figs. 1 and 2 reduced in size).

The best reference for types and detail of the products is "Forgeries and Counterfeit Antiquities," Hull Museum Publication, No. 54.

Although no article mentions tokens, particularly interesting references are:

"BILLIE AND CHARLIE TOKENS AND MEDALS"
William Smith (Billy) and Charles Eaton (Charley) worked in the 1850s on the Thames foreshore as "mudmakers" employed by the local warehouse owners to keep their portions of the river frontage clean. Their unpleasant, and not very remunerative, occupation, was supplemented by the recycling of any salable items of flotsam and jetsam that came their way. But for their change finding of a few medieval pilgrims' badges, the probabilities are that they would have pursued their humble trade unremittingly throughout their lives. However, in the summer of 1857, operations commenced on the excavation of a basin for a new dock at Gravel Lane, Shadwell. While working with the labour gang digging out the foundations, they apparently turned up a few examples of pewter badges. Once they found out that antiquarian collectors prized these items quite highly, the resourceful pair hatched a scheme to capitalise on their finds by counterfeiting them in lead or a lead-copper alloy.

The artful artisans set up their headquarters in a workshop at Rosemary Lane, Tower Hill, and production speedily got under way. One of them later confessed "I had made hundreds of them; that the moulds were Plaster of Paris, and that he had copied some from the Antiquarian Magazines", the periodicals in question were the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* and *Collectanea Antiqua*. The latter was a publication edited by Charles Roach Smith, who later played his part in the controversy over the badges. The earliest fakes were doubtless good facsimiles of the originals (Fig. I). A suspicious antiquary later wrote "the metal of which they were composed appeared to have been rubbed with acid to give the appearance of age, and they had then been smeared with river mud".

The first unsuspecting customer to be duped was William Edwards, a well-known London dealer who was shown some of the fakes. No doubt thinking himself on to a good thing, he virtually contracted the duo to sell their discoveries to him alone. "His boys" as he called them sensibly supplied him with only a few examples at a time until the naive Edwards owned hundreds of them, eventually paying out some £400 to the inventive pair, making their sideline a very profitable one indeed. As their skills improved Billy and Charley widened the scope of their products, often using their own designs and adding a whole new range of medallions, badges, daggers, units, reliquaries and so forth to their burgeoning stock. Problems first arose when Edwards began retailing his own purchases to avid collectors. He sold a large part of his stock to another dealer, George Eastwood who eventually purchased over a thousand and advertised them as "a remarkably curious and unique collection". Edwards too wrote to his own customers offering "all varieties" of these exciting new discoveries, including "boxes in the shape of books, covers ornamented with Old English letters, men in armour, inside opening with hinges, some have the Virgin, Pope &c". "They are the most interesting relics I have met with in years" he gushed "and the earliest Pilgrim's sygns that have been found." Between them he and Eastwood assigned them to the period between the death of Becket and the reign of Richard II.

Opinions among the so-called experts differed. One of the few who was suspicious was the Derbyshire antiquary and collector Thomas Bateman (Fig. 2.), who was offered specimens from both Eastwood and Edwards. The former wrote to Bateman in November 1857 offering him "a remarkably curious and unique collection of London signs or badges of the time of Richard II". They were of "all varieties, many of them military, full length figures in armour of the time". He had over a thousand of them, but at the time the suspicious Bateman refined the offer of a sight of them. In January 1858 William Edwards actually sent the antiquary a selection of the objects, offering him 20 specimens, some found as late as the day before, at a price of £10 the lot. Bateman examined the group and felt them to be "so unsatisfactory in appearance" that he wrote to the former "to desire that no more articles of this kind might be sent". In fact, to the discerning customer - and...

**Fig. 1.** An example of a Pilgrim's badge which shows a mounted knight and an invented inscription.
very few of these appear to have been at all alert, many being taken in with their eyes open - the more extravagant forgeries dreamed up by the fertile imaginations of their purveyors had suspicious features that should have been self-evident from the start. Many of the figures depicted had details of dress and armour that were very inaccurate for the supposed period, Bateman commenting on “costumes of the 13th and 17th centuries being blended in the same figure”. Many contained indecipherable sham Latin inscriptions and dates, usually between AD 1000 and 1500 which were in Arabic numerals, the fakers being blissfully unaware that most of these should have sported Roman notations (Fig.1).

Alongside Bateman was the metropolitan antiquary H. Sayer Cuming, who was as doubtful as the former concerning the authenticity of the lead figures. His suspicions were first aroused in October 1857 when he heard that a fellow member of the British Archaeological Association (BAA) had laid out £60 in purchasing some of the specimens. Upon seeing sketches of the items, he immediately denounced them as fakes. In March 1858 he examined some 300 of the “forged leaden figures” and said a BAA member from paying £400 - an enormous sum for the time - in buying them. Cuming wrote to a friend that “the game is now almost up, and it is high time it should be”. At the beginning of April he revealed that the august British Museum had procured some of the leads at the price of three shillings each. “They do not like their appearance” wrote Cuming “and think they must be false. They taste very strongly of acid, and when washed in water come out quite new, for the acid has had but small effect upon the surface of the metal.”

The first move to declare this flood of spurious material doubtful came at a meeting of the British Archaeological Association at the end of April 1858, when Cuming lectured on “Recent Forgeries in Lead”. In his lecture he declared that the bulk of the Shadwell pilgrim signs to be forgeries. The Athenaeum, a journal with a strong bias towards antiquarian subjects, printed a short account of the meeting in its issue of 8 May. The relevant paragraph read:

“The remainder of the evening was occupied in the reading and discussion of ‘An Account drawn up by Mr Cuming on the Recent Forgeries in Lead.’ These are figures reported to have been obtained from the Thames, and are called Pilgrims’ signs. They are being offered, not only in London, but throughout the country, and antiquaries should be on their guard in the purchase of them...” The whole are proved to be of recent fabrication through assuming to belong to the 14th century. Bishops are equipped with naries of three distinct fashions, forms known to have been used from the 12th century to a later time. The military figures are as absurd as the ecclesiastical. They appear to have been made in chalk moulds, the grooving tools being nails and penknives. They have been steeped in a strong acid and smeared over with Thames mud. It is to be lamented that there are no legal means of punishing so gross an attempt at deception and extortion.”

George Eastwood read the above account and considered, somewhat groundlessly, that The Athenaeum was attacking him personally as a purveyor of false antiquities. He commenced an action for libel, not against Cuming or the BAA who had been responsible for doubting the authenticity of the signs, but against the magazine that had reported the revelations! The editor determined to fight the case in the interests of the freedom of the press, wrote to a number of collectors, asking them their opinions of the badges. Some of the latter, including Charles Roach Smith (Fig.4) and Thomas Bateman, were subpoenaed to appear at the trial. Roach Smith, a close friend of Bateman, who was present, revealed to the former by letter that he “by no means think them made up for imposition...” or made recently as I infer you do. Still, you may have some evidence not known to me & I suppose it will be brought out at Guildford. I was in hopes of never hearing of them or seeing them again”.

Eastwood marshalled an array of witnesses to support his own claims. The resulting trial took place at Guildford on 4 August 1858 before Mr. Justice Willes. Eastwood, “anxious to free himself from the serious charge made against him” opened the proceedings by explaining how William Edwards had sold him 40 of the signs in June 1857; he eventually bought some 1,100 for which he paid the dealer £296. A box of the articles in question was placed on the court bench and great was the hilarity “created by the extraordinary character of some of them that were produced”. The correspondent of the Times confided “There were warriors and women fashioned out of lead in the most rude manner, and in all sorts of attitudes. One of the things that was produced appeared sorely to puzzle everyone. It had something resembling the appearance of a chimney-pot, about eight inches long: but no one seemed to be able to give the least guess what its original object possibly could have been”.

Under cross-examination Edwards explained the circumstances in which he had bought the articles from the unprepossessing pair. In fact “Bill” was in court to give evidence, but there was a perfect gale of laughter when it was revealed that Charley had recently married, and his wife had refused to let him appear! William, a “rough-looking young man” told of how he and his confederate had found upwards of 2,000 badges between June 1857 and March 1858 whilst helping to excavate the foundations for the Shadwell dock basin. As well as the specimens uncovered by the couple themselves they maintained that many others were purchased by them from certain of their fellow workmen for a few pence or the provision of pots of ale.

Fig.2. Thomas Bateman (1821-1861), the Derbyshire antiquary and collector, one of the very few who condemned the Shadwell productions as counterfeit.
Various “authorities” were then called upon to give their opinions on the authenticity of the pilgrim signs. The big gun was Charles Roach Smith, a leading expert on the authenticity of antiquities. He felt that the badges were genuine; if not, he thought “they are the most extraordinary insults that were ever offered to the judgement of collectors”. However, he could offer no opinion relating to their age or purpose “because they were a new class altogether”. He was convinced, rather vaguely it would seem, that they were “connected with some religious proceedings... but at present he could not really say what they were”. He admitted however that they “resembled no other pilgrims' signs that he had ever seen”.

The Reverend Thomas Hugo was just as unsatisfactory a witness. He rambled on in much the same vein as Smith, also feeling that the relics to be bona fide. He felt he could give no reason for his conclusion but the “ladies' reason” - he thought so because he thought so, a remark that no doubt endeared him to the feminist lobby everywhere! After “other evidence of a similar nature” the defence submitted that there was no case to answer. There was nothing to show that even if the article in the Athenaeum was a libel, not a “tittle of evidence” existed to show that it applied to Eastwood himself. Mr. Justice Willes concurred; in his judgement “it was a principle of law that what a man said honestly in the course of a public discussion on matters of public interest... could not under any circumstance be construed as libel”. He himself felt that the article in question could be applied to the whole trade in antiquities, and not to the plaintiff in particular. The jury duly returned a “not guilty” verdict.

Thus the old firm of “B and C” suffered a sudden slump in their burgeoning fortunes. The trial closed with no positive statement as to the legitimacy of the so-called “leads”. It also left unanswered the question of why so many of them should have ended up in one particular place on the bank of the Thames, since neither Bateman or Cuming, who were both present to testify for the defence, were called to the witness stand.

One amusing result of the court case was that the opinions of Roach Smith, Hugo and others seems to have guaranteed a virtual certificate of credibility to the pilgrims’ badges, and a number of collectors, now accepting the frauds as the genuine article, began buying up all the available specimens. Demand increased to such an extent that the crafty couple reopened the production line to cope with the growth in orders. However, the heyday of the spurious trinkets was soon to be over. Cuming, adopting measures as dubious as those of the tricksters themselves, bribed a labourer to force an entrance into the Rosemary Lane workshop and steal some of the actual plaster moulds used to fashion the medallions. He duly exhibited the spoils at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries, and many were the red faces when the so-called authorities had to admit that the unlettered pair had so comprehensively duped them. Roach Smith’s own embarrassment can be well imagined after his staunch defence of the authenticity of the badges. Bateman later wrote of his friend’s credulity “in being imposed upon by such trash”. Cuming subsequently reported the gaining of “a glorious victory, defeating the cabal with our own weapons. They became their own executioners, and it is well for them that we did so, for had we brought forward our witnesses we should have crushed the villains fearfully”.

Thus the old firm of “B and C” suffered a sudden slump in their burgeoning fortunes, though it seems they must have escaped the full rigour of the law; perhaps Eastwood and Edwards had managed to shift their stocks in the aftermath of the trial - at any rate no one seemed keen on bringing the fraudsters to justice. Too many reputations had been damaged and credulous collectors were perhaps not willing to have their shortcomings once more paraded under the public gaze. The diverse products of the Tower Hill tricksters have gone down to posterity as “Bilys and Charleys” after their perpetrators, and the duo now enjoy a notoriety they could not have envisaged when they began producing the Shadwell shams. Their curious fabrications still turn up, sometimes still labelled as genuine medieval relics, and some pieces have a curious value that ensures good prices at auction, sometimes rivalling those of the genuine articles! Perhaps the shades of the resourceful William and Charles still haunt the salesrooms, enjoying private mirth at the gullibility of the many whom they thoroughly duped, and at the antics of modern collectors who still prize their shabby but imaginative products.