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The testament of the London coin dealer William Till the Younger (1782-1844)

Hadrien Rambach

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The testament of the London coin dealer William Till the Younger (1782-1844)

by Hadrien J. Rambach

Résumé : Cet article retranscrit et commente le testament de William Till, un grand marchand en monnaies londonien, actif du début des années 1830 jusqu'à sa mort en 1844. Il créa une dynastie, car son commerce fut repris par son neveu William Webster, dont le fils travailla ensuite pour Spink & Son.

Abstract: This article contains a transcription of and comments on the will of William Till, a major coin-dealer in London, active from the early 1830s until his death in 1844. He somehow founded a dynasty, being succeeded by his nephew William Webster, the son of which then worked for Spink & Son.

This note is devoted to a major British dealer of the past, “perhaps the greatest London dealer of the mid-Victorian era”¹, about whom Harry Manville wrote – as usual – a precise entry. He was the son of an inn-keeper and wine/spirit-merchant, from Slough, also named William Till. Attested as a dealer in 1832, at 17 Great Russell Street (Covent Garden), he was a founding member of the Numismatic Society of London in 1836/37. Following the footsteps of his father, who may have raised his son's interest for numismatics, Till issued tokens in the 1830s to advertise his trade, the design of which was based on Thomas Spence's 1793-96 satirical tokens on Thomas Paine. He wrote, with the restorer John Doubleday (c.1799-1856)³, the catalogue of the huge collection of the Duke of Devonshire (sold in March 1844 by Christie), a work which brings him little glory because of many inaccuracies. At his death on 8 April 1844⁴, his inventory was sold at auction, divided into more than 3,100 lots. Sotheby first offered *Greek, Roman, English, and Foreign coins, English and early Italian medals* (6-11 January 1845, 747 lots sold for £592 19s 6p), then *Roman, English, Anglo-Gallic, Scottish, Irish and Foreign coins, tokens, English and Foreign medals* (28 July – 4 August 1845, 915 lots sold for £681 3s 6p), followed by *Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, English, Patterns and Proofs, Scottish, Irish, and Foreign coins, English and Foreign medals* (20-27 April 1846, 985 lots sold for £1019 1s 6p), and *Greek, Roman, British, Anglo-Saxon, English, Patterns and Proofs, Scottish, Irish, and Foreign coins, English and Foreign medals* (12-14 Mays 1846, lots 990-1462 sold for £466 13s). Finally, the Numismatic library, 189 lots of books and 2 lots of autographs, was sold on 21 May 1846 (for £119 18s)⁵.

Manville incompletely listed Till's publications, which are:

* “Queen Anne's farthings, and patterns, from the coins, in the British Museum”, in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, vol. XXV, issue 722 (30 May 1835), p. 353-355.

* *An Essay on the Roman Denarius and English Silver Penny; Shewing their Derivation from the Greek Drachma of Aegina. To which is appended a list of English and Scotch Pennies from the Conquest, together with their several degrees of rarity; an account of the Farthings of Queen Anne; a List of Books necessary to the collectors of medals; Transactions of the Numismatic Society, with a list of its members; as well as that of collectors of medals in England and on the Continent; likewise of medal engravers. With an addenda, &c.*, London, the author, 1837. X, 230, (1) p., 3 pls⁶.

* Second edition: London, Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, and by the author, 1838. X, 230, (1) p., 4 pls.

* Third edition: London, John Hearne, 1846. X, 230, (1) p., 3 pls.

* Extract: *The Farthings of Queen Anne*, London, the author, 1837. 16 p.

* *Descriptive Particulars of English Coronation Medals, from the inauguration of King Edward the Sixth to our present sovereign, the Queen Victoria; subjoined are desultory memoranda of many of the most choice, rare, and costly commemorative medals and medallions of illustrious personages distinguished in British History*, London, Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, and by the author, 1838. Frontispiece, xix, 112 p., 1 pl.⁷

* Second edition: London, John Hearne, 1846. Frontispiece, xix, 112 p.

1. BERRY 1978, p. 26.
2. MANVILLE 2009, p. 289-290. Sources: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1811, ii, p. 283 note; *Encyclopaedia 1*, 1845.1, 1845.17, 1846.12, 1846.13, 1846.14; *Encyclopaedia 3*, nos 309, 309a, 313, 314, 348, 349. Till was listed in the *Post Office Directory* for 1832, as reported in WESTGARTH 2009, p. 174.
3. The author of two essays on ancient British (Gaulish) and British Roman coins, and the owner of a library and of Etruscan potteries (auctioned by Sotheby on 30 April 1856), Doubleday worked for the British Museum – for which he notably restored the Portland Vase – and for the Royal Mint – for which he executed many coin casts. MANVILLE 2009, p. 80.
4. I am grateful to the referee of the *British Numismatic Journal* for telling me of the birth of a William Till on 27 June 1782 at Upton-cum-Chalvey (i.e. Slough), who is likely to be our numismatist.
5. The auction totals are those calculated by Sydney Noe in his copy of the catalogues, now at the American Numismatic Society – a copy of which David Hill kindly provided me.
6. Review: *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1837, ii, p. 397: “Though Mr. Till does not possess the learning which is requisite for an authoritative critic in Numismatology, yet this little book contains many practical hints and observations”. Review: *The Numismatic Journal*, 1837/38, p. 196-197.
7. Review: *NC*, 1838/1839, p. 206-207.

Previously, Leonard Forrer had noted that: “*His place of business at 17 Russell St., Covent Garden, was a famous relic of the past, as it was originally Tom’s Coffee House, and the tables on which he exhibited his coins were those that were used by the best political, literary, and theatrical celebrities of the eighteenth century*”⁸.

And an interesting note was made in May 1855, when Jeremiah “*Crafter laid before the meeting [of the British Archaeological Association] a cast of a large [Roman] as ... one of a number of pieces said to have been made for the late W. Till, coin dealer of Russell-street, Covent Garden ... Although no fraudulent intentions are imputed to the late Mr. Till for having these pieces cast, we cannot refrain from expressing our regret that they are frequently offered for sale as genuine coins, and that they too often realize exorbitant prices*”⁹.

Forrer also noted that: “*On his death, he was succeeded by his nephew, William Webster, whose son Mr. Wm J. Webster is the well-known numismatist, and my esteemed colleague in the firm of Spink & Son, Ltd*”. Indeed, William John Webster (1848-1919), who was the son of William Webster (1821-1885), joined Spink & Son in 1892¹⁰.

Whilst researching the provenance of an aureus of Caius¹¹, I realised that Till’s will was still available, preserved at The National Archives in Kew, under the reference PROB 11/1999/168, and I thought that its publication would be worthwhile¹².

The numismatic elements of this will can be summarized as follow:

* a nice Greek coin, and a nice Roman gold coin, to John Drummond (1793-1875)¹³

* a nice gold coin of Alexander the Great, and a nice gold coin of Philip of Macedon (and 19 guineas), to Edward Spencer

* his (empty) mahogany coin-cabinet to William Joseph Taylor (1802-1885)¹⁴

* his own gold medal by Taylor, and the gold medal of John Peckham – by the same, to the British Museum¹⁵

* and finally, “*all my other silver and bronze tokens which appertain to myself and my father and the late Mr John Peckham and which I had also executed for me by my friend Mr J. W. Taylor may be distributed generally amongst my friends*”.

He also requested “*that the catalogues for the sale of my coins, medals and coin cabinets be made and prepared by the said William Webster*”, and he left £10 to fellow coin-dealer Harry Osborn Cureton (c.1785-1858) who was to be in charge of

examining Till’s coins, exclude those not worthy of sale by auction, and advise on how best to sell them.

The proceed of the sale was to be divided amongst six recipients: 1/11th to the widow of Edward Pain, 1/11th to his cousin Elizabeth Duel, 1/11th to his cousin Sophia Powell, 1/11th to his cousin John Till, 4/11th to his cousin William Henry Till, and 3/11th to his cousin William Webster (1821-1885)¹⁶.

The sale indeed took place, with some 3,309 lots dispersed at Sotheby’s for the significant total of £592.19.6 + £681.3.6 + £1019.1.6 + £466.13.0 + £119.18.0 (i.e. £2,879.15s.6d). Though a more in-depth study would be necessary to judge properly, a single example suggests that the sale was not successful¹⁷.

Till remains a mysterious figure: his date of birth is not fully certain, nor is the cause of his death on 8 April 1844 – only two weeks after the auction of the Devonshire coin-collection which he had catalogued. The works of Manville and Westgarth are priceless, but the example of William Till shows that a definitive research in the history of collectors and dealers is far from being achieved.

This is the last Will and Testament of me, William Till, of No. 17, Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, Middlesex, Coin Dealer (formerly of Upton cum Chalvey, Bucks).

First it is my desire that my just debts, funeral and testamentary charges and expenses be fully paid and satisfied out of my personal estate and effects as soon as conveniently may be after my decease.

I give and bequeath unto my cousin William Henry Till of Burnham in the County of Buckingham, Shoe Maker, and my cousin William Webster (the son of John Webster, late of Windsor in the said county of Buckingham) now residing with me, all those my four freehold messuages or tenements or cottages with their and every of their appurtenances situate lying and being at Barnet in the parish of Hadley, in the County of Middlesex, nearly opposite the Green Man Inn there, in the respective occupations of --- Hawks, --- White, --- Goodman and --- Baldock to hold the same unto the said William Henry Till and William Webster and the survivor of them and the heirs and assigns of such survivor for ever.

I give and bequeath unto my said cousin William Webster all my household furniture, linen, bed and bedding and other household utensils and effects. I give and bequeath unto my said cousin William Henry Till all my wearing apparel. I give and bequeath to William Till, son of my said cousin William Henry Till, all and every silver watches and watch that I may have at the time of my decease. I give and bequeath to my cousin Sophia Powell, the wife of Mr John Powell of Eton in the county of

8. FORRER 1916, p. 95. Forrer also added that Till “was the grandson of William Till, the proprietor of the once famous Windmill Inn at Salthill (who died in 1764)”.

9. *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. XI (1855), p. 254-255.

10. MANVILLE 2009, p. 305-306.

11. George La Borde collection; sold by Numismatica Ars Classica, auction 105, Zurich, 9 May 2018, lot 11.

12. I am grateful to William Hall for his help transcribing this document.

13. An army general of Dymock (Gloucestershire), his collection of ancient and English coins and medals was auctioned by Sotheby on 19-22 July 1864, with the remainder being consigned to Sotheby for a sale on 9-10 December 1929. MANVILLE 2009, p. 82.

14. Born in Birmingham (West Midlands) where he was taught die-sinking, Taylor moved to London in 1829, where he dealt in coins as well as successfully working as a medallist. MANVILLE 2009, pp. 283-284.

15. British Museum, inv. J.3175 (I am grateful to Thomas Hockenull for identifying it) and British Museum, inv. T.6378 (ref.: Dalton & Hamer 1910, 27, p. 4).

16. This suggests that Forrer was mistaken: William Webster (1821-1885) and William John Webster (1848-1919) must not have been Till’s nephew and grand-nephew, but his cousin and his cousin once removed. According to his probate on 12 August 1885, Webster’s wealth at death was £2,977 14s. 1d.

17. Till bought the La Borde Caligula aureus himself, for £6 12s. (no buyer’s premium), from the Devonshire auction by Christie, London, 18-24 March 1844, lot 359. It was resold in his estate-sale by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, London, 6-11 January 1845, lot 116, in which the dealer Jakob Wolf / Henry Charles Dantziger bought it for only £1 10s. (no buyer’s premium). The fact that he was still buying such coins very shortly before his death suggests that it was very unexpected. And such a difference of price within six months is rather surprising.

Buckingham, Tinman, my table clock.

I give and bequeath to Abraham Rhodes Rhodes of Mill Hill, Hendon in the county of Middlesex, Esquire, my model of the Old Jerusalem Gate - St John's Square, my old china bear jug and my china jug of blue and gold.¹⁸

I give to my godson Abraham Rhodes, son of the said Abraham Rhodes Rhodes, my diamond ring and diamond pin.

I give to Lieutenant Colonel John Drummond, late of the Coldstream Guards and of 28, Brunswick Square, Brighton in the county of Sussex, one of the finest Greek and one of the finest Roman Gold Coins that I may be possessed of at the time of my decease and to be selected by my executors for the purpose.

I give to Mr. Theodosius Purland of 59, Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, Dentist, a silver cross with a silver chain attached and the garter of the Order of the Garter with a gold buckle attached and the sum of ten pounds.

I give to my cousin Mr. John Till of Eton aforesaid my Encyclopedia Britannica.

I give to Mr Frederick Edmonds of No. 44, Poultry in the City of London, a silver snuff box which was presented to me by his brother Charles, also the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings.

I give to Mr Charles Edmonds, late of 53, Castle Street, Southwark, the sum of ten pounds.

I give to Miss – Hoggray, the daughter of the late Mr James Hoggray of 17, Great Russell St., aforesaid spinster, the sum of nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings.

I give to Mrs Mary Rhodes, wife of the said Abraham Rhodes Rhodes, Esquire, the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings.

I give to Mr Timothy Peter Whelan of No. 19, Chester Street, King's Road, Chelsea the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings.¹⁹

I give to my cousin Mr William Sowerby of Stoke Poges in the said county of Buckingham, Carpenter, the sum of forty pounds.

I give to Mr Edward Spencer of 11, Brunswick Parade, Pentonville, Solicitor, one of the finest gold coins of Alexander the Great that I may be possessed of at the time of my decease and likewise one of the finest gold coins of Philip of Macedon that may be in my possession at the time of my decease, also one of my silver pattern tokens and I also give him the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings.

I give to my aunt Mrs Elizabeth Till of Eton aforesaid widow the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings.

I give to Mr Henry Cureton of Aldersgate Street in the City of London, Coin Dealer and Medallist, the sum of ten pounds.

I give and bequeath all my coins, medals, cabinets, books, pictures, antiquities and all the rest, residue and remainder of my Personal Estate and Effects whatsoever and wheresoever (except such part thereof as is here-into-before specifically

bequeathed) unto the said Abraham Rhodes Rhodes, Charles Frederick Wagner of No. 19, Fitzroy Square in the said county of Middlesex, Esquire and Henry Heath of the Harrow Road, Paddington in the said county of Middlesex, Dentist, to hold the same upon trust to sell and absolutely dispose thereof by public auction at such time and place as the said Henry Cureton or some other competent person shall appoint and name for that person for the best price that can be reasonably obtained for the same (but it is my wish that before such sale takes place, the said Henry Cureton shall examine my said coins and medals and select and set apart therefrom in such as he shall consider not worth the expense of submitting to public auction) which I direct my said trustees to dispose of for the best price they can obtain for the same or in such other manner as they shall think fit and it is my will that the net money to arise by such sale of my said personal estate and effects after payment thereof of the expenses thereof and all my just debts, funeral and testamentary expenses and the several pecuniary legacies hereinbefore and hereinafter by this my will given and bequeathed shall be divided by my said Trustees and Executors into eleven equal parts or shares and shall be applied and disposed of in manner following, that is to say, I give to my said cousin John Till one of such equal parts or shares. To my said cousin William Henry Till four other of such equal parts or shares. To Mary Pain of Harley Mews, Harley Street, Cavendish Square aforesaid, widow of Edward Pain, one other of such eleven equal parts or shares. To my cousin Elizabeth Duel of Eton aforesaid widow of ---Duel, Shoemaker, one other of such eleven equal parts or shares. To my said cousin Sophia Powell, wife of the said John Powell, one other of such eleven equal parts or shares and to my said cousin William Webster the remaining three of such eleven equal parts or shares and I hereby nominate constitute and appoint the said Abraham Rhodes Rhodes, Charles Frederick Wagner and Henry Heath, Executors and Trustees of this my will and do give to each of them the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings in token of my respect and as some compensation for the trouble they may respectively have in the execution of the trusts of this my will and it is my will and I do hereby declare and direct that my said Trustees and Executors shall and may out of any monies that shall come to their hands respectively by virtue of the trusts hereby in them reposed, deduct and retain all costs, charges and expenses which they shall respectively incur and be liable to, in relation to the execution of the said trusts and that one of them shall not be answerable or accountable for the other or others of them but each for his own acts and deeds and for so much thereof only of the said trust monies and premises as shall come to his hands respectively and that the receipt of the said trustees therein shall be a good discharge to all persons paying the same for so much money as shall be expressed to be received and that such

18. Abraham Rhodes Rhodes (c.1790-1888), of Mill Hill, Hendon (Middlesex), had been an original member from the Numismatic Society of London in 1836/37, but he resigned in 1851 and his collection of Anglo-Saxon coins, and of English coins, patterns and medals, was auctioned in 175 lots by Sotheby on 31 March of the same year. MANVILLE 2009, p. 238.
19. (Timothy) Peter Whelan, a member of the Numismatic Society of London since 1846, was a coin dealer in Central London. In addition to numerous fixed-price-list catalogues, he also published *The Historical Numismatic Atlas of the Roman Empire* in 1864. MANVILLE 2009, p. 309.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

persons taking such receipt shall not be bound to see to the application of such money nor accountable for the misapplication or nonapplication thereof or any part thereof or any part thereof and I do hereby revoke all former and other wills and declare this only to be my last will and testament.

In Witness whereof I have to the two preceeding sheets hereof set my hand and to this third and last sheet set my hand and seal this twenty eighth day of November, one thousand eight hundred and forty. William Till.

Signed, sealed and published by the said William Till the testator as and for his last will and testament in the presence of us who in his presence at his request and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses – Henry Tadman, 30, Villiers Street, Strand – William Haywood Taylor, 13, Hungerford Arcade.

This is a Codicil to the last Will and Testament of me William Till of No. 17, Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, Middlesex, Coin Dealer, bearing date the 28th day of November 1840 and I desire the same to be taken as and to form part of my said last will and Testament.

I give to Miss Mary Edmonds, the sister of Mr Charles Edmonds, in my said will named and now residing with him the sum of ten pounds.

I also give to Edwin Pain, son of my cousin Mary Pain in my said will named, the sum of one hundred pounds, the said two legacies to be paid out of the produce of the sale of my residuary estate and effects in my said will mentioned and I hereby revoke and make void the bequest in my said will mentioned to my cousin Elizabeth Duel of one eleventh part or share of the net residue of my personal estate and effects and in lieu and stead thereof I do hereby will and direct that my Trustees and Executors shall lay out and invest one eleventh part or share of the net residue of my said personal estate in the name of my said cousin Elizabeth Duel in the purchase of a Government Annuity to be payable to her for and during the term of her own life to and for her own use and benefit absolutely and save so far as the same is varied by this Codicil, I hereby ratify and confirm my said last will and testament.

In Witness whereof I, the said William Till, have hereunto set my hand and seal this twenty-fourth day of August one thousand eight hundred and forty-three. William Till.

Signed, sealed, published and declared by the said Testator William Till as and for a Codicil to his will in the presence of us who in his presence at his request and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses. Elizabeth Hyde, 17, Gt Russell Street, Covent Garden --- T.H. Taylor, 17, Gt Russell St., Covent Garden

This is a Codicil to the last Will and Testament of me, William Till, of 17, Great Russell Street, Covent

Garden, in the County of Middlesex, Coin Dealer, bearing date the twenty eighth day of November 1840 and which I desire to be taken as a part thereof.

I desire that my two Gold tokens or medals, one appertaining to myself and the other to Mr John Peckham, which were executed for me by Mr J— Taylor, Medallist, to be presented by my executors to the British Museum and desire that all my other silver and bronze tokens which appertain to myself and my father and the late Mr John Peckham and which I had also executed for me by my friend Mr J. W. Taylor may be distributed generally amongst my friends according to the discretion of my executors.

I give to my cousin William Webster in my said will named in addition to the bequests given to him by my said will, the sum of one hundred and eighty pounds and also my plaister busts representing myself and I request that the catalogues for the sale of my coins, medals and coin cabinets be made and prepared by the said William Webster.

I desire that the easy chair which I purchased about the sixth day of February instant be given to my cousin Sophia Powell of Windsor.

I hereby revoke the bequest of a silver snuff box which I had bequeathed to Mr Frederick Edmonds in and by my said Will and Testament and I do hereby give and bequeath the said box to Miss Mary Edmonds, the sister of the said Frederick Edmonds.

I give to my friend Mr Taylor, Medallist of Litchfield Street, Soho my large mahogany cabinet now standing beside my bedstead in the Middle Room after all the medals have been taken therefrom.

I give to William Spurr of No. 16, Regent Street, Westminster the sum of ten pounds.

To Henry Deal, formerly of Egham, Surrey, but late butler to the Lady Plumer of Cannons Park, near Edgeware the sum of ten pounds and save and except so far as my said last will is hereby altered or varied I do hereby ratify and confirm the same and the former codicil by me made thereto and do declare this to be taken as part and parcel of my said will.

In Witness whereof I the said William Till have hereto set my hand and seal this twenty-fourth day of March one thousand eight hundred and forty four.

William Till. Signed, sealed, published and declared by the said Testator William Till as a codicil to his last will and testament in the presence of us present at the same time who in his presence at his request and in the presence of each other have here subscribed our names as witnesses. John Grant, 17, Great Russell St, Covent Garden --- William Butcher, 17, Great Russell St., Covent Garden – Thomas Henry Taylor, 17, Gt. Russell St., Covent Garden.

Proved at London, with two codicils, 7th May 1844 before the Worshipful John Danbury, Doctor of Laws and Surrogate by the Oaths of Abraham Rhodes Rhodes, Esquire, Charles Frederick Wagner, Esquire and Henry Brownlow Thomas Heath (in the will written Henry Heath) the executors to whom the admon was granted having been first sworn duly to administer.

Fig. 1 – Penny-sized silver token, 1834, 33mm, plain edge, 17.74 g. Sold Dix Noonan Webb Ltd., 19 March 2003 auction, lot 1232. Photo © DNW.

Fig. 2 – Charles II silver halfcrown engraved A FRIEND'S GIFT within oval and WILLIAM TILL / YORK STREET / WESTMINSTER. Sold St. James's Auctions Ltd., auction 37, 27 June 2016, lot 513. Photo © St. James's Auctions Ltd.

Fig. 3 – View of Tom's Coffee House, No. 17 Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, from the street, a woman and child walk past shop window with a dog, a man walks in the opposite direction to the left. 1857, watercolor by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (1793-1864), 238 x 163 mm. British Museum, inv. 1880,1113.3094. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum. The name of Webster (successor of William Till) can be seen on a door-sign.



Fig. 3

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Fig. 4 – Gold token bequeathed by William Till, 29 mm, 13.78 g. British Museum, inv. J.3175. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 5 – Gold token bequeathed by William Till, 29 mm, 13.89 g. Obv.: shield of arms, JOHN PECKHAM o CHEMIST & DRUGGIST o. Rev.: phoenix rising from the flames, SLOUGH, BUCKS, HALFPENNY TOKEN o 1795 o. British Museum, inv. T.6378. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

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der Schweizerischen Numismatischen Gesellschaft und der American Numismatic Society

