

Letter 1 — Jersey, 20 May 1796

Envelope/cover: Addressed to "*Matthew Boulton Esq., Soho, Birmingham*" — filed as "*C. Williams, Sep. 1796*" in the archive. The outer sheet reads: "*to / Jersey 20 May 1796 / Chas. W. L.*"

Full transcription:

Sir,

By the Bearer, my friend Mr. Goset, I take the opportunity of sending you five different Coins, which all pass current in this Island — What is extraordinary the Government halfpenny will not pass here for more than two liards, or a farthing, and they will take any of the Provincial halfpennies for ~~acceptance of~~ their Value, a French Sol — The only reason I can offer for this Why so, for such I must call it, is I suppose because they are a little heavier or thicker — That you may have a better opportunity of Judging about our business, these are the reasons for my troubling you with the enclosed Coins — The least is called

(continued overleaf)

un liard de France — the next in size two liards, or a farthing — the large one, un Sol or a half penny in Value — I send you two of two liard pieces, one of which is a new copper piece sent here by the friendly people of Birmingham.

On such Coin I could wish to have the Arms of Jersey (which I send enclosed) struck on one side, and on the other, I should like to have Mont Orgueil Castle — an ancient Castle in this Island, and very picturesque — a sketch of which I'll do myself the honor of sending as soon as possible.

On the smallest Coin — The three leopards on one line — and — liard de Jersey — put on the other — in the manner — Liard de France — is put on the one I now have the honor to send you will be sufficient —

On the next size, I would also have, under the leopards — deux liards de Jersey — and on the largest in the same manner — un Sol de Jersey — under the Castle — Mont Orgueil — its name —

For a motto — if there is room round the Leopards: *Mon Dieu, mon Roi, ma patrie* or *une foy — un Roi — une Loi*

But before the matter is taken in hand I should be glad to know what expense will attend such coinage — I have the honor to be, in great haste,

Sir, Your most obedient and most humble servant

[Signature — appears to read C.O.P. W[illiams] or similar]

Jersey May 20th, 1796

— Williams Esqr., &c. &c.

Letter 2 — Anglesey, 6 September 1796

Anglesey 6 Sep. 1796

Dear Sir,

When I was at your House some time ago I had mislaid & undelivered a letter but delivered the Coin mentioned in it to your son, who, ~~???~~ gave them to you. I now leave the matter with you — should you think it worth your while you will please to favor me with a line upon the Subject.

Be so good as to order some of your people to give me a line to say when the Articles bespoke by my Daughter are likely to be furnished —

Yours sincerely, **F. Williams**

I purpose moving hence in a fortnight to attend my Duty at St. Stephens. When in doubt whether I have the pleasure of calling on you in my way.

These are two pages of a reply letter from Matthew Boulton himself, archive reference 123, dated Soho, September 15, 1796 — making this the direct response to ...

These are two pages of a reply letter from Matthew Boulton himself, archive reference 123, dated Soho, September 15, 1796 — making this the direct response to the Williams letters.

Page 1 (pg1 — the pricing/technical page)

Soho Sep. 15th 1796 [123]

— received your fav[our] of 6th C[urrent] but was away from [home, was] in Cornwall it was some days before I saw [it]. I find the Specimens of Coins you sent from which are of 3 sizes but are very irregular in their proportional weights & nominal Value

Then follows a data table comparing the coins sent by Williams. It is partially legible:

No.	Denomination	[Weight col 1]	[Weight col 2]	[col 3]	[col 4]	[col 5]	[col 6]
1	a New World [sol?]	37	190 gr	at h $\frac{1}{2}$	15	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
2	2 liards	100	70	at h $\frac{1}{2}$	15 $\frac{1}{2}$	2/1	9 $\frac{1}{2}$
3	4 Sol or 1 liard	180	50	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	16 $\frac{1}{4}$	17 $\frac{1}{2}$	1•

(The column headers are unfortunately obscured by the fold and ink transfer, but appear to record weight in grains, diameter, thickness, and comparative values.)

I have no objection to strike them in Copper at the above prices as it makes no difference to me, but I suppose it will be best to enumerate these unruly Coins. And I am inclined to think that the quantity minted will be very small. I must also charge the Dies which will be from 4 to 6 Guineas per pair according to the work, & would be more if a good head was to be engraved; but I shall deduct 2 Guineas out of each Ton of Coin that is ordered. Hence if a set of Dies is charged 4 Guineas & 2 Ton of Coin is ordered from that Die then & in that case the Dies will cost nothing.

It is evident why the Birmingham friends made choice of the 2 liard pieces No. 2 in preference to the others but I reason more regularity in weights & Numbers if any quantity is ordered

Page 2 (the continuation and signature page)

I have long wished to see you at Soho & to communicate to you sundry Letters which I have received from Ed. Solomon of Liverpool who wanted me to cast for him a set of Copies of your Anglesey pence & halfpence. He assures me he has taken a Counsel's opinion upon the Legality of it & urged various arguments to induce me to undertake his order but my last letter has silenced him however as I hope you will contrive to dine with me

or take your Bed as you go to Town & then I will shew you the Correspondence.

Wishing you health & every other good I remain with regard

Dear Sir Yours Sincerely Matt. Boulton

I have had an unfortunate leg which confined me two months to the House & one of them to my Bed but I have now laid aside my Crutches & nearly my Cork heel.

Commentary & Analysis

Boulton's pricing structure — dies & coinage

Item	Cost	Notes
Die pair (simple)	4 Guineas	Standard work, no portrait engraving
Die pair (portrait/complex)	6 Guineas	"If a good head was to be engraved"
Die cost rebate	-2 Guineas per ton ordered	Deducted from die charge per ton of coin
Break-even	2 tons ordered	At 4-guinea die cost, 2 tons = dies cost nothing
Coins struck	"at the above prices"	Copper, no objection — makes no difference to Boulton

The coin weight data table (No. 1–3: sol, 2 liards, 4 sols/1 liard) records weight in grains and comparative values but is partially obscured by fold damage and ink transfer.

Key revelations in this letter

- Boulton's absence

He was in Cornwall when Williams's Sep. 6 letter arrived — delays explains the 9-day gap in reply

- The counterfeit threat

Ed. Solomon of Liverpool sought to commission copies of Boulton's own Anglesey pence — and had taken legal counsel to argue it was lawful. Boulton refused.

- Boulton's health

An injured leg confined him to the house for 2 months, one of them bedridden. He was only just off crutches at the time of writing.

- Invitation to Soho

Boulton invites Williams to dine or stay overnight at Soho on his way to Parliament, promising to show him the Solomon correspondence

- Preference for 2-liard

Boulton notes it is "evident" why Birmingham friends chose the 2-liard piece — it was the most regular in weight and dimensions

- Commercial tone

"It makes no difference to me" — Boulton is relaxed about the commission but recommends standardizing the irregular Jersey coins first

The Solomon counterfeit affair

The most striking disclosure in this letter is that a Liverpool merchant, Ed. Solomon, had been pressuring Boulton to strike unauthorized copies of his own Anglesey penny and halfpenny tokens — the very coins already circulating on the island as quasi-currency. Solomon claimed a Counsel's legal opinion supported the legality of such copying, and used "various arguments" to persuade Boulton to take the order. Boulton refused, and says his last letter "silenced" Solomon.

"...who wanted me to cast for him a set of Copies of your Anglesey pence & halfpence. He assures me he has taken a Counsel's opinion upon the Legality of it & urged various arguments to induce me to undertake his order but my last letter has silenced him..."

This reveals an active secondary market for counterfeit or cloned trade tokens — a significant problem in 1790s Britain before the Coinage Act of 1817 imposed tighter controls.

Complete correspondence timeline

20 May 1796 — Jersey

C.O.P. Williams writes to Boulton proposing a Jersey coinage. Sends 5 coins via Mr. Gosset. Full design spec: three denominations, Arms of Jersey, Mont Orgueil Castle, French mottoes.

May–Aug 1796 — Soho visit

F. Williams visits Boulton's house at Soho. Mislays his letter but leaves coins with Boulton's son.

6 Sep 1796 — Anglesey

F. Williams follows up from Anglesey. Presses for a response. Mentions heading to Parliament ("St. Stephens"). Also chases an order for his daughter.

c. Sep 1796 — Cornwall

Boulton is away in Cornwall when Williams's letter arrives. He is also recovering from a leg injury that had confined him to bed for a month.

15 Sep 1796 — Soho (Archive 123, this letter)

Boulton replies. Provides pricing: 4–6 guineas per die pair, 2-guinea rebate per ton ordered. Analyses the coins by weight/size. Willing to proceed. Discloses the Solomon counterfeit affair. Invites Williams to Soho.

1841

Jersey finally receives its own coinage — 45 years after this exchange. The designs eventually used echoed the proposals in these letters.

Significance of this letter

This is Boulton's own reply, making archive 123 the third document in a complete three-way exchange — a rare survival of both sides of a business negotiation.

Boulton's pricing model is historically valuable. The offer of a die-cost rebate against volume orders (2 guineas off per ton, making dies "cost nothing" at 2 tons) is a classic loss-leader structure: Boulton recovers his skilled engravers' time through volume, not upfront fees. It shows how the Soho Mint competed for token business across Britain and the Channel Islands.

The Solomon affair is the letter's most arresting revelation. A Liverpool merchant was actively trying to commission counterfeit copies of Boulton's own Anglesey tokens — and had obtained legal advice arguing it was lawful. In the 1790s, the legal status of private token coinage was genuinely murky: the government had largely abdicated copper coinage, leaving a vacuum filled by private manufacturers. Solomon's argument was not entirely without basis, which is why Boulton felt he needed to write a firm rebuttal rather than simply ignore the request. Boulton's tantalizing offer to

show Williams "the Correspondence" in person suggests he regarded the matter as a live concern worth discussing with an MP.

Boulton's health note at the close — matter-of-factly mentioning two months on crutches with a cork-heeled shoe — gives a vivid glimpse of the 68-year-old industrialist still conducting business while barely mobile, at the height of his mint's international activity.

Key observations

Who is Matthew Boulton? These letters are addressed to one of the most important figures in British industrial history. Boulton operated the Soho Manufactory in Birmingham and his steam-powered **Soho Mint** was the most technologically advanced in the world in the 1790s, producing the famous Cartwheel pennies for the British government (1797) and coins/tokens for clients worldwide.

The Jersey currency problem. In 1796, Jersey had no native coinage. French *liards* and *sols* circulated alongside British copper. The writer makes a sharp observation: British government halfpennies were being discounted to a farthing's value, while heavier Birmingham *provincial tokens* (likely Boulton's own trade tokens, sometimes called "Druids") passed at full face value. This is a real-world demonstration of **Gresham's Law** — heavier coins were preferred, lighter ones undervalued.

The design specification is remarkably detailed: the Arms of Jersey (three leopards), Mont Orgueil Castle, French-language denominations, and two possible Norman-French mottoes — "*Mon Dieu, mon Roi, ma patrie*" and "*une foy — un Roi — une Loi*" — both royalist in character, consistent with Jersey's loyalty to the Crown.

"F. Williams" and "St. Stephens." The second letter writer identifies himself as heading to "St. Stephens" — 18th-century slang for the Houses of Parliament (St. Stephen's Chapel was where the Commons sat). This means Williams was likely an **MP**, giving him both social standing to

correspond with Boulton and potential political influence over a Jersey coinage charter.