



# CHIPS AND TOKENS FROM PLAYBOY'S HYDE PARK (LONDON) CASINO

by Tom Stroh

I enjoy collecting Playboy chips because of the challenge in finding them, the challenge in finding out about them and the large variety of types, styles, and denominations used. This article covers what I have been able to piece together about the chips, tokens, and plaques of just one of the Playboy casinos, the London casino in Hyde Park.

Victor Lownes the founder of this, the first Playboy casino, had left his job with Playboy management in Chicago because he felt constrained by the corporate environment. After moving to London in 1965, he witnessed first hand the impact from the change in British gaming laws. It wasn't long before he was planning a US style Playboy club with gambling. It opened in July 1966.

It's important to separate the Hyde Park casino from the other Playboy English properties; the Clermont, the Victoria Sporting Club, and club casinos in Portsmouth, Manchester, all of which came later. The Hyde Park casino was the golden goose of the 1970s as well as the first casino in the Playboy Empire. It wasn't long before Playboy was the largest casino operator in England. This article addresses only the Hyde Park chips which generally are marked "London".

Lownes initial planning for the first Playboy casino included an arrangement with Crockford's, an established British gaming house. Crockford's would manage the club for a percentage of the profits. This arrangement eventually fell through, but not before Crockford's had ordered a large supply of chips with the Playboy logo from an American manufacturer. A deal with the cheque manufacturer could not be reached, so Playboy ordered a complete new set of cheques from another American manufacturer (T. R. King, Small Crown mold pattern). A few years later some of the Crockford chips appeared in the London Playboy casino. The source of these chips was traced back to an official of a Las Vegas casino causing Playboy to file a complaint with the authorities in Las Vegas, this according to Victor Lownes as he tells it in his book.

I am certain that the Hat and Cane chips, that have lately become so plentiful in unused condition, are the "Crockford Chips." That would explain the large quantity of London Hat and Cane chips surfacing in the US over the years, all in new condition, as well as the absence of these chips in casino photographs.

Unable so far, to positively verify this one way or another, the London Hat and Cane chips are listed here,

the first series. Used or not, they are a part of the Playboy casino legacy.

Another item worth mentioning here is the currency change to the decimal system that took place in England in 1971. Originally there were 4 Farthing to a Pence, 2 Pence to a Florin, 12 Pence to a Shilling, 5 Shillings to a Crown, and twenty shillings to a Pound which was also called a Sovereign or a Quid. Don't forget the Guinea which weighted in at 21 Shillings! This changed in 1971 to simply 100 pence (new pence) to the Pound. Since all the other English Playboy casinos opened after 1971 and later, any English Playboy chips carrying the old money system should be attributed to the Hyde Park casino.

As mentioned above, the Hat and Cane series was questionably the first, even if you accept that they were never actually used!

It is well documented in photos that, when the club was new, the chips on the tables were of the Small Crown mold. This is labeled as the first issue in the illustration. The denominations used in this issue were from the old currency system. The larger small crown denominations, the five, twenty-five and fifty Pound chips are present in photographs of the casino and in the records from T. R. King but I don't know of any actual examples in collections.

The second series with the Triangle-Club or triclub mold was a result of the currency change in 1971. The denominations smaller than a pound were marked “n.p.” for New Pence. These were later replaced by the fourth issue, still the triclub mold but with the small denominations only marked “p” for Pence, the “n” for new being dropped.

One thing that made researching these issues confusing was that the casino only ordered chips that were needed on an as needed basis. They did not replace, completely, one issue with another. This was verified by past employees. For example, in 1971 when the currency changed to a decimal system only the small denominations that were affected were replaced. The casino continued to use the small crown chips, one Pound and above, for the next 5 or 6 years.

The Large Greek Key issues came around 1972 and included denominations from 50 pence to 100 Pounds, possibly higher.

Around 1977 new chips in the Scroll mold pattern were ordered. I believe that again only small denominations, 50 pence and less, were ordered in the Scroll mold issues

The Bud Jones coin insert chips appeared around 1981 after Victor Lownes had been fired and the Chicago offices of Playboy took control of the European properties. Only two denominations have surfaced, the 50 pence and the one Pound. These chips show the influence of Chicago taking over. These Bud Jones coin insert style chips were used extensively in the Bahamas and Atlantic City Playboy casinos.

Plaques were used for high denominations up to 100,000 Pounds throughout the casino and plaques with small denominations were used on the French roulette tables. No plaques from any of the Playboy Casinos have surfaced yet, but, there is a good chance that a few survived and only need to “be discovered”. Jetons were used in the VIP rooms on the French Roulette tables. One of the differences between American Roulette and French Roulette is that French Roulette chips have the denomination on them.

Gaming tokens were allowed for use on the tables in the casino, there were no slot machines. It didn't go unnoticed that the original 1966 one Pound (about \$2) tokens ordered from the Franklin mint were disappearing on a regular basis. That was fine with management since they paid only 23 Pence (45 cents) each. Eventually removal of the tokens was encouraged by the club handing out free key-rings that fit the token and by offering the tokens to US club members by mail order.

Later date tokens, which just recently surfaced, are made of very light weight material, but otherwise look just like the original 1966 tokens. The ones that recently appeared are dated 1972, 1976, and 1977. The 1977 has an obverse design honoring the queens silver jubilee. There probably are dates other than what I've listed here. A past employee told me that they were ordered every year from 1972 until the casino closed. Surprises for collectors like the previously unknown tokens dated 1972 and 1976 periodically pop up.

The Playboy London Training School was established in 1972 in a newly acquired mansion called Stocks House located outside Aldbury in Hertfordshire. Here, bunny croupiers were trained for their future positions in the various UK Playboy Casinos. The training school was closed in 1982 along with the other Playboy Gaming assets in England.

The mold patterns used at the training school changed in accordance with those used in English casinos at the time. Training school chips with the Scroll and Triclub mould patterns can be found in private collections.

In Figure 1, I have shown the seven issues of chips and the new and old denominations. While not complete, it represents most of the London Playboy chips available today. Next to nothing is known about the higher denominations from Hyde Park. The second figure displays some of the roulettes and training tokens that can be found today.

Collectors of Playboy items experience a sense of discovery periodically when new, uncataloged, items show up in the market. Most of these new finds come from the estates of past visitors who carried home their own personal souvenir from their visit to the casino and as such, new discoveries should continue for many years.

1966 Hat & Cane Not Used	1966 Small Crown	1971 Triclub w/ n.p.	1972 Lg Greek Key	1973 Triclub w/ p.	1977 Scroll	1981 Coin Insert
	50 yellow w/blk					£ 50 & 100
	brown w/y/w					£ 25
Not Produced						£ 10
	drk blue w/red					£ 5
						£ 1
						50p
						25p
						20p
Old Currency						10p
		tan				5 p

Figure 1. The seven chip issues of Plyaboy's London (Hyde Park) Casino

Figure 2. Top right; The original 1966 Playboy/Franklin Mint token in the cardboard holder as sold in London. Second, the same token in the cardboard holder as sold in the US. Below:

Queens Jubilee one Pound token.

Playboy Training School chip

One Pound. Five Shilling Jeton

from the French roulette tables.



*The London Playboy Club*

ONE POUND GAMING TOKEN  
 THE PLAYBOY CLUB - LONDON  
 SIZE: 39.7MM EDGE: 200 REEDS  
 1966


	First Issue—Net Mintage	Proof	Proof-Like	Mint-Run
	Franklinium II (The Franklin Mint)	0	1511	25,297
	This Specimen Struck On	Original Condition	Year	
	Franklinium II	Mint Quality, Unc.	1966	

**This Gaming Token redeemable for One Pound sterling at The London Playboy Club.**

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*The Franklin Mint*

LONDON PLAYBOY CLUB  
 "One Pound" Gaming Token



Size: 39.7mm Edge: 200 reeds

First Issue - Net Mintage	Proof	Proof-Like	Mint-Run
Franklinium II	0	1511	25,297

This Specimen Struck On	Original Condition	Catalog No.
Franklinium II	Proof-Like	C2-66-01