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THE LOVE TOKEN OF THOMAS ALSOP

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Love tokens are engraved discs. They were often made from worn coins or tokens. Their function was to record personal events like births, christenings, marriages, deaths and partings. Naturally, the quality and style of the engraving varied. Some bear no more than crude pin pricks while others exhibit elaborate lettering, scrolls and motifs.

Love token production reached its peak between 1700 and 1850, an era which happily spanned the settlement of Australia. Yet they are often passed over by collectors. Perhaps their unusual

nature and endless number are at once a fascination and fear, with the latter tending to be the more common emotion.

Like all numismatic items, possession is not the sole aim of the collector. Knowledge of the original purpose for the production of a love token is paramount. Since they can offer as little as a pair of initials or a first name, it is very important that the original function be preserved. Naturally, as love tokens can be easily contrived, a knowledge of the history of each piece is of great importance.

THE ALSOP LOVE TOKEN

Side 1

Tho time
may pass & years
may fly & every
hope decay and
die & every joy
dream be set but
thee I never
can forget

Side 2

When
this you see
remember me & bear
me in your mind let
all the world say what
they will dont prove to
me unkind
Thos Alsop
Transported
July 25 1833
Aged 21



Disc: The engraving was done on a 1797 British penny that had been filed down until the design could not be seen. The engraver marked the flat surface with faint guidelines that can still be seen, and embellished the piece with simple scrolls.

Thomas Alsop is believed to have been illiterate. In 1857 his mark when registering the death of his wife was an "X". The token is therefore probably the work of a professional engraver. The verse was probably chosen by Thomas from the engraver's "partings" selection. Both the author of the verse and the engraver (probably the same person) are unknown. It is not unlike other verses on love tokens of that period.

The date, 25th. July 1833, is only two days after Alsop's trial. It was probably prepared for the occasion after the trial but before removal to the docks when the families and friends were bid farewell.

The details given on the love token make it clear which of the two men of that name who were transported to the Australian Colonies was responsible for it's production. The Thomas Alsop in question was transported to Tasmania (the other went to Appin in New South Wales).

Thomas Alsop

Thomas Alsop (also spelt with two L's) was born in 1812 and at the time of his trial, the 23rd of July 1833, he was described as being a "brick labourer", 5 feet 8 inches tall, single and having tattoos on his left arm depicting a woman, a mermaid and an anchor. He was tried at Staffshire, together with Thomas Dexter and William Dexter who were aged 27 and 77 years respectively.

The charge read:

"Stealing one ewe sheep on the 24th of April 1833 at the Parish of Colton, the property of Joseph Walkden."

The trial was reported in the *Staffordshire Advertiser*. It reported that Constable Wood, at 9 a.m. on the morning after the theft, called on T. Alsop, who was lying

in his bed still dressed. When the constable searched him, he found marks of blood on his trousers and in his pocket "a cord stained with blood". Also there was some mutton hidden in Alsop's house. Later Constable Wood searched Thomas and William Dexter's house and found more mutton, about 20 pounds. From the pieces of mutton the constable was able to identify them as coming from the carcass left in the field.

The jury, found T. Alsop guilty, but acquitted the two Dexters. Alsop could have faced the gallows, but instead was sentenced to be transported for life.

Six months later, on the 29th. of January 1834, he sailed on the *Moffat* with 398 other convicts. This was a record number for a single ship. They were bound for Hobart, Van Diemens Land. The *Moffat* arrived one hundred days later, only one day slower than the record, on the 9th of May 1834.

Thomas Alsop was fortunate to have been transported on the *Moffat*. At 820 tons, it was twice the average tonnage of the ships normally used. It was only twenty years old and was from the ship yards at Bengal, and thus probably well built. The Master of the ship was James Cromarty. While this was his first voyage to Australia, he did so well that he received two further commissions to transport convicts. Perhaps most of all, Alsop was lucky to have Thomas Braidwood Wilson as the ships surgeon. He was a veteran of seven "runs" to Australia and was noted for his success in preserving life on board ship. He insisted on cleanliness and a daily serve of lime juice and wine. Only six died on this voyage of the *Moffat* — an acceptable level in those days. On the voyage Alsop was described as being "well behaved".

On arrival in the Colony, Alsop was assigned to a chain gang. This meant wearing a distinctive yellow and black uniform and ankle chains which were linked together. In the middle of these chains was a large ring which was employed to chain all members of the

gang together. If additional security was thought necessary, individual members of the gang could also be handcuffed.

In July 1835 Alsop tried to abscond. When caught he was sentenced to thirty six lashes and had to serve at the docks with the hulk-gang.

His behaviour did not improve:

- 1836 March — disobedience of orders-tread mill
- April — suspicion of felony-discharged
- September — stealing cattle — 3 year chain gang
- 1837 January — refusing to work
- 1838 February — being disorderly and assaulting a Timothy Carroll while representing himself as a constable — 3 months hard labour.
- 1839 May — absent without leave — 36 lashes
- June — misconduct and being in town without permission — 2 months hard labour
- July — attempting to abscond — road part extended 12 months
- September — absconding — hard labour in chains with hulk-gang — not raising alarm when five men broke out of hut for felonious purposes — further 6 weeks at Restdown

1842 June — misconduct — 6 months hard labour (revoked as his master deemed at fault)

1847 March — misconduct, being in bed with a female prisoner — hard labour.

On the 7th of November 1848 Alsop was granted a conditional pardon, and on the 5th of February 1850 he was granted a full pardon.

Thomas Alsop was not a model prisoner and as a result suffered the extreme hardships of the convict system. When he received his pardon he was in his mid thirties and could not afford to buy passage home.

Thomas married Irish born Sarah Eliza Kirk, 15 years his junior and on the 15th. of May 1854 they had a son whom they named Thomas. Sixteen months later they had a daughter whom they named Sarah. At that time he was working as a fish hawker and lived in Argile Street, Hobart.

Thomas died on the 9th. of May 1891 at the Hobart Hospital. He lived much of his eighty eight years in humble surroundings, was often in trouble with the authorities and never rose above his station of life. He will be remembered not for great deeds, or shaping Australia, but for his humble copper love token: "when this you see remember me"