



VOLUME 12



JOURNAL OF THE
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA INC.

<http://naa-online.com/>

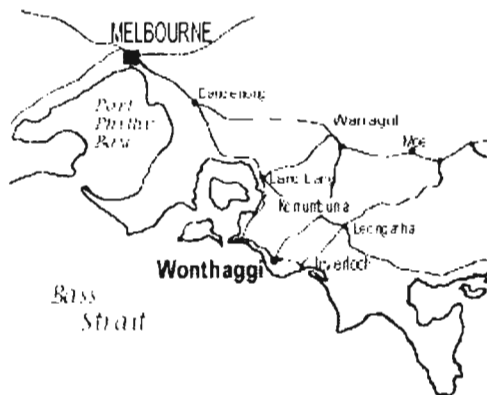
THE WONTHAGGI BREAD TOKENS

By Tilo Junge

INTRODUCTION

The Wonthaggi Bread Tokens are the only bread tokens thought to be used by a bakery in Victoria. This article aims to introduce the town, follow the rise of the Co-operative and examine the use of the tokens within the community.

The township of Wonthaggi located some 130 km south east of Melbourne, was established as a black coal mining town.



A TOWNSHIP BEGINS

The Wonthaggi township and the immediate region as a whole were to prosper due to the development of black coal mining.

This region was first settled by a Scotsman named Samuel Anderson in 1835. The area was initially home to two large pastoral runs, 'Anderson' at Powlett River and 'Blacks' at Tarwin River.

Although the first samples of black coal had already been found by William Hovell in 1826, no attempt was made to recover coal on a commercial basis. The first truly

successful mine in the area was that of Coal Creek at Korumburra; this mine commenced operations in 1889.

Various coal mining activities continued in the region, but it was a coal strike in New South Wales which commenced in November 1909, disrupting black coal supply to Victoria and hindering the State's essential services, that brought about significant change.

This disruption of coal supply to Victoria, prompted the State to take steps to become less dependent on New South Wales. Legislation was passed through Parliament to allow Victoria's own coal mining activities to be freed up. (In 1908 one third of Victoria's black coal usage was consumed by the Victorian Railways)¹.

Just eight days after Parliament sanctioned the 'Coal Mines Regulation Act' of 1909, the opening up of black coal mining activities in the Wonthaggi region commenced. The first coal dispatched from the mine was hauled by bullock wagon to coastal Inverloch for shipping to Melbourne².

These mine workings were known as the State Coal Mine. Working conditions were at first basic, and initially the miners were housed in tents. By April 1910 it was reported that 750 miners were in the employ of the State Coal Mine. The 'Canvas Town' as it was known, was to house 2,500 people in rows of tents (interestingly the rows between the tents were named after the streets of Melbourne) until plans to establish a permanent town of Wonthaggi could be undertaken.

DEVELOPMENT OF WONTHAGGI

The recruitment of miners came at a time when many of Victoria's gold mining towns were economically depressed. This ready pool of skilled miners was in turn drawn by the generous wages of 60 shillings per week offered by the Sate Coal Mine.

On the 24 February 1910 a model township was laid out by Government Surveyor I. Drape³.

The intervention of the First World War (1914-19) was to hinder local developments. Immediately following the war the construction of many of Wonthaggi's public buildings began.

THE CO-OPERATIVE

The humble beginnings of the Wonthaggi Co-operative Distribution Society Limited can be traced back to 1912. Canvassing for

the establishment of a co-operative are recalled in Coral Di Domenico's essay ⁴. Her father recalls the night when two gentlemen, one being Matt McMahon called upon his parents home to canvass for prospective shareholders of the proposed Co-operative store.

Coral's grandparents like many other people indicated their support and soon afterwards the Wonthaggi Co-operative Distribution Society Limited commenced trading. The Co-operative's first premises were located in Watt Street, opening in either September or October 1912.

The Committee of Management consisted of President *M. McMahon*, Treasurer *D. Simpson*, Committee, *H. Richards*, *J. Sayers*, *A. Davidson*, *W. Brown*, *T. Mathieson*, *J. Williams*, *A. Dodds*, *A. Munley*, *J. McCulley* ⁵.

The Co-operative was given such strong support by the community that by November 1918, the store had moved into bigger



The Wonthaggi Co-op bakery building, circa 2000.

premises on the south side of Graham Street. Around 1928, the Co-op bought additional premises on the north side of Graham Street to establish further store product lines. Motor cars were also sold by the Co-op at this time.

MEMBERSHIP

Shareholders in the Co-operative were required to maintain a minimum share-holding of 5 pounds (£5), a subscription system of payments at 2 shillings and 6 pence (2s 6d) per fortnight was available for those who sought payment of membership by instalments.

In January 1913, the Co-operative had a register of 101 members, of which 42 were fully paid up. Each new member was given a membership number, consisting of the first letter of their surname and a number which followed the number of the last joined member with the same first letter of their surname.

As shareholders of the Co-operative, members were able to place on their account any purchases from within the store. Accounts were settled on a monthly basis, the maximum credit for an account was equal to that of their share-holding.

Once the Co-operative became profitable, it was able to give a dividend to shareholders as an additional benefit through excess capital being made available to shareholders' funds. The dividend was paid on a pro rata basis depending on the share capital held by each member.

In 1923, the dividend was paid at 1 shilling in the pound. In 1928 the dividend was to reach as much as 3 shillings and 4 pence in the pound ⁶.

WONTHAGGI CO-OP BAKERY

The 1920's appear to have been prosperous years for the Co-operative. Amongst a wide range of produce and products available from the store, the 1921 half yearly report to shareholders notes the following:

"The Bakery Department has arrived at the stage that we can look forward to turning out the first batch of bread in the near future" ⁷.

The head baker was Mr F. Ball and manageress of buns, pastry and confectionary was Miss A. Martin. In the next half yearly report to shareholders we read:

"...and congratulates the members on having added another new department, viz – bakery and pastry, which is also receiving increasing support" ⁸.

The bakery was located in Watt Street, on the original site that the Co-operative occupied when it first open in 1912.

BREAD TOKENS ARE USED

The half yearly reports to Co-operative's shareholders, apart from outlining the business and financial matters, carried advertisements or 'specials' for the Co-operative's various departments. For the half yearly report ending 28 February 1923, the advertisement on the Bakery Department was included.

Interestingly, the small print in the Bakery Department advertisement reads:

"Procure your fortnightly Tokens from the Bread Carters. It saves small docketts daily, Does away with mistake. Insist on getting your Tokens"

From a numismatic point of view, this one advertisement establishes that tokens were in use from at least early 1923, but they may have well been in use from the start or a

date between the bakery opening and the advertisement.

The advertisement explains the benefits of the tokens and where the customers could get them. Whilst bread carters were very likely to have been employed from the beginning when bread was mainly sold by home delivery, it can not be assumed tokens were used at the beginning of the bakery as there is no known evidence. Nevertheless we can say the Wonthaggi Bakery used bread tokens in its early days.

WHY WONTHAGGI CO-OPERATIVE BREAD TOKENS?

The Wonthaggi Co-operative is the only bakery in Victoria known to have used bread tokens. Yet, the bread token system was used extensively in New South Wales by some 170 or more bakeries⁹.

The reason for the manufacture and use of the Wonthaggi bread tokens, remains to a certain extent a mystery. The one common element that can be concluded from the towns that used bread tokens, is that, mining activity in these towns was a prevalent industry, particularly coal mining.

It could therefore be reasonably assumed that the idea of using tokens was brought with the miners themselves. Indeed it is known that a number of coal miners that worked in Australia, were Cornish or of Cornish ancestry. Perhaps this was a practice used in Cornwall?

The question is then raised that if tokens were related to mining activities, surely the use of tokens would have been established during the 1850's gold rush era, but this is not the case.

It is known that the use of bread tokens, although not directly related to, is closely associated with co-operatives. Many issu-

ers of bread tokens were co-operatives.

One obvious reason is that the use of tokens would mean that at the delivery point, no cash would be needed and that anyone wanting to steal tokens would have considerable trouble trying to redeem any number for cash, or would have excess quantity of bread to eat; either way they would soon be found out.

That this may have been the principal reason for their issue, becomes doubtful when it is realised that milk deliveries in Wonthaggi were made on a similar house to house basis during the same period, without the use of tokens.

WONTHAGGI'S BREAD TOKENS

The Wonthaggi Bread Tokens are known to have been issued in five different values, these are:

**Small Loaf, Large Loaf
1 lb, 2 lb and 4 lb Loaf**

One would assume that in order to receive bread via the home delivery service one needed to be a member of the Co-operative and secondly that bread tokens should be used as a means of transaction.

An opportunity to gain an insight into the use of the tokens in the late 1950's arose when I was able to meet Bill Dunbar of Wonthaggi.

Employed as a baker at the Co-operative, Bill was often required to fill the role of the bread carter when one of the carters was sick or unable to attend work.

The Co-operative made deliveries on a daily basis, except on Sunday or Wednesday, which was the bread carters other day off (The Tuesday prior being the bakers' holiday).

A total of three carters undertook separate

delivery rounds by horse and cart in Wonthaggi. In later years they were replaced by motorised vans.

The carters had to know not only their delivery rounds by house, but also by name. Bill indicated that people could purchase bread by token, cash or account (1960's). In these later years deliveries would also be made to non-members of the Co-operative.

The bread was delivered in one of three sizes and Bill recalls the sizes as 4lb, half (2lb) or 'quart' (1 lb). The size to be delivered was indicated by the token left out for collection, or by a written note if paying by cash or account.

At this time only three loaf sizes were baked and delivered, which seems to contradict the five different token values.

Bill was able to recall that the 'small loaf' token corresponded to the '1 lb' token and likewise the 'large' loaf token to the '2lb' token.

The bread was delivered to the door, though it was not unusual for the carter to actually bring the bread on to the kitchen table or even into the pantry. Mind you this would be at 3 in the morning! (One can only imagine the curfuffle that such a home service would create today).

The carters would also collect the grocery list that would be left out, so that a grocery delivery could be made by the Co-operative. This occurred only on a once-a-week basis.

When arriving back at the Co-op each of the carters was required to reconcile the amount of bread loaves delivered with the tokens, cash and accounts collected from the deliveries.

Fortnightly on Thursdays, the carters had the additional responsibility of delivering to each customer the number of tokens required for their use over the next two weeks.

These Thursdays were known as 'token days'; again the number of tokens delivered had to reconcile with the ledger.

WHY FIVE TOKENS?

As already indicated only three different loaf sizes were baked at the Co-op Bakery whilst Bill Dunbar worked there in the 1950's and 60's.

Numismatically this is of interest, as it is known that five different values of tokens circulated. Could it be that the amount of five bread tokens represents separate periods in the bakery's history?

The first period, being the baking of 'small and large' loaves. The second period, being the baking of three types of loaf sizes '1lb, 2lb and 4lb'.

It is known that the 'lb' type tokens were used in the 1950's and 60's to purchase bread. We can therefore assume that the 'small' and 'large' loaf tokens represent an earlier period of use.

This theory is supported by the fact that the 1lb and 2lb tokens are exactly the same size as the small and large tokens respectively. This would confirm that the 1 & 2lb tokens were deliberately made the same size, so that the small and large loaf tokens previously in use, could continue to be used. This would also account for the interchangeability between these tokens recalled earlier by Bill Dunbar.

In the bakery advertisement of 1923, referred to earlier, there is no mention made of the actual loaf size. One could assume that only one size was being baked, but possibly there were two sizes.

Referring to similar advertisements in the half yearly report of 1928, bread is sold as 4lb loaf delivered at 1/- per loaf; again no



Obverses of the Wonthanaggi bakery tokens



Reverses of the tokens: small loaf, large loaf, 1lb, 2lb and 4 lb loaf

TECHNICAL DATA ON TOKENS

Value: Small Loaf
Date: No date (c1922)
Metal: Aluminium
Size: 21 mm
Milling: Plain
Weight: 1.4 – 1.5g
Minted: Stokes

Value: Large Loaf
Date: No date (c1922)
Metal: Aluminium
Size: 27 mm
Milling: Plain
Weight: 2.5 – 2.6g
Minted: Stokes

Value: 1 lb Loaf
Date: No date (c1928)
Metal: Aluminium
Size: 21 mm
Milling: Plain
Weight: 1.4 - 1.5g
Minted: Stokes

Value: 2 lb Loaf
Date: No date (c1928)
Metal: Aluminium
Size: 27 mm
Milling: Plain
Weight: 2.4g
Minted: Stokes

Value: 4 lb Loaf
Date: No date (c1928)
Metal: Aluminium
Size: 31 mm
Milling: Plain
Weight: 3.2 – 3.3 g
Minted: Stokes

mention is made of other loaf sizes.

An entry in the day-book of Stokes (medal and token manufacturers of Melbourne) for the 17th October 1928, records an order for 100 large aluminium and 500 small aluminium checks from the Wonthaggi Co-operative.

Although the term large and small does not necessarily refer to the loaf size, it could be assumed that this would be the case.

If so, we then have in the year 1928, the use of both terminologies, the ‘small and large’ loaf tokens and ‘1 lb and 2 lb’ loaf tokens.

It could therefore be assumed that the ‘small and large’ loaf tokens were initially used by the bakery from 1922, and during late 1928 the ‘lb’ tokens were introduced, possibly due to legislation changes that may have required the weight of bread to be specified as opposed to a loaf of unknown weight.

THE BAKERY CLOSES

The declining years of the bakery appears to have commenced in 1960, the Co-operative half yearly report stating:

“We would like to draw the attention of many of our Town members, to the fact that their Society owns a Bakery. If they do not or will not support it the overall results of the Society must suffer” “We would ask everybody to remember that the Society’s expenses in maintaining and paying for a delivering on a Saturday have to be met irrespective of the quantity of bread sold.”¹⁰

The next half yearly report states:

“The only Departments causing concern at the moment are the Ladies Shoe Department ... and the Bakery Department, for two reasons. 1 – the comparatively large number

of people who do not buy any bread from the society whatever and 2 – the number of people who do not buy bread from the Society to cover their requirements on Sundays and Bakers Holidays.”¹¹

The next half yearly reports goes on to state: “As a result of a most satisfactory arrangement, made with Austral Bakeries Pty Ltd., your Society will very shortly be supplying members with ‘Home Pride’ bread.” ... “The excuse that you do not like ‘Co-Op’ bread will no longer exist and the amazing range in the varieties of ‘Home Pride’ bread available will mean that it will be your own fault if each one of you is not supplied with your exact requirements...”¹²

THE DECLINE AND CLOSURE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE

The decline of the Co-operative itself also occurred in the late 1960’s, when the committee of the day resigned after being divided over an issue caused by an internal departmental disagreement.

A new committee was formed in 1968 and many fundamental changes were made. But the trend to shop out of town had also begun.

During 1972/73, the company Ardare took over the Co-operative. The Ardare management placed staff into similar positions at Ardare stores to those at Inverloch and Archies Creek and so ending the life of one of Wonthaggi’s founding businesses, which served the township for over 60 years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members of the Oates family
Wonthaggi & District Historical Society.
Lyn Chambers
Bill Dunbar
Les Carlisle

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Fahey, *Wonthaggi State Coal Mine*, B Clancy & Co, Wonthaggi, Reprint 1996, pg 11.
2. *ibid.* pg 11
3. *ibid* pg 24
4. Coral Di Domenico, *Patchwork of Our Past*, Bough of Wonthaggi (150th Anniversary), An Essay on the Wonthaggi Co-operative Distribution Society Ltd
5. *1st Half Yearly Report of the Wonthaggi Co-operative Distribution Society Limited*, Wonthaggi, 1913.
6. *ibid.*, 1923; *ibid* 1928
7. *ibid* ,18th half yearly report 1921
8. *ibid.*, 19th half yearly report 1922
9. L Carlisle, W Mira & G Howard, *Australian Bread Tokens*, 3rd ed 1995
10. *96th Half Yearly Report of the Wonthaggi Co-operative Distribution Society Limited*, Wonthaggi, 1960
11. *ibid.*, 97th meeting, 1961
12. *ibid.*, 98th meeting, 1961

REFERENCE

L Carlisle, W Mira, G Howard, *Australian Bread Tokens*, 3Ed, 1995

Revised in January 2001

Any additional information greatly appreciated.

Mail to;
PO Box 40
Bairnsdale 3875