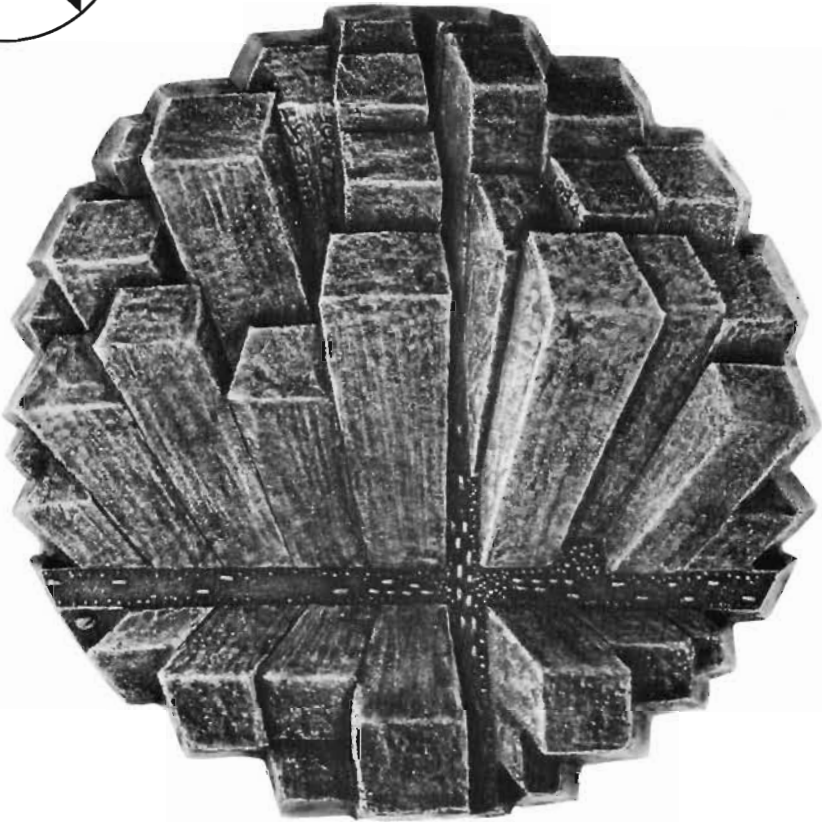


VOLUME 2

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JOURNAL OF THE  
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION  

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OF AUSTRALIA.

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# THE “TEA STORES” TOKENS and their connection with Samuel Peek

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The “Tea Stores” token series is thought to be the first to have been manufactured in Australia for regular use. Even though no name occurs on these tokens they are often referred to by the name “Peek and Campbell”. This attribution, despite its popular adoption, appears to be in error. The company “Peek and Campbell” was founded in 1835, but by 1852 when the first of the tokens were produced, it was “S. Peek & Co.”.

The pioneer merchant Samuel Peek was the prime figure around whom the history of this token issuing firm revolves. His career appears to have been quite eventful if it can be judged by the few surviving references to him in contemporary Journals etc., but as for so many figures of that era, no consistent contemporary accounts have survived.

Samual with his brothers Richard Peek and Edward Campbell founded the firm at 424 George Street, five numbers South of King Street, in 1834. It is important to add the reference to King Street as the numbering system of George Street has been changed on at least four occasions so that the present 424 is to the South of

the actual address. The Peek & Campbell premises extended right back to Pitt Street. The premises are easily recognised on the contemporary illustration of George Street included in the study by Fowles (1848), by their characteristic archway. It can also be found among the illustrations on the present Australian \$5 note. As was common in that period, the factory associated with the shop (the Steam Coffee Mill) was in the same block.

If we might judge by his acquisition of property near Gosford on the northern entrance to the Hawkesbury river, including indeed Peeks Point, it would seem that the business was quite successful up until the recession of 1841-42. After that crisis, the partnership was dissolved and Samuel sued his brother Richard. The Jury found for Richard and, as a result Samuel became insolvent and his interest in Peek & Campbell was taken over by Robert Porter. Matters did not improve for the remaining brothers, and by early 1844 both Richard Peek and Edward Campbell were also declared insolvent. Robert Porter then took full control of the firm

but continued to trade under the name "S. Peek & Co."

The firm name "Peek & Campbell" ceased to be used by 1844. Late that year Richard Peek advertised his own new venture at 452 George Street and referred to his being "late PEEK & CAMPBELL". In 1845 Robert Porter controlled the City Tea Warehouse at 424 George Street and described himself as "late SAMUEL PEEK AND CO."

With the help of another prominent merchant, Samuel Peek was able to re-establish himself by 1847. He became involved with the business at 424 George Street again and its name reverted to "S. Peek & Co.". Robert Porter continued with this enterprise while Samuel appears to have spent much of his energy on other business ventures and land development around Gosford. In 1848 the *Wells Gazette* reported: "a great proportion of the town of Gosford is the property of S. Peek, merchant, of Sydney — it has two wharves and a deep water frontage".

In 1851 Samuel Peek made a judgemental error. He was visited by his friend H. H. Hargraves who had just returned from the Californian goldfields. He is reported to have laughed at Hargraves belief that gold could be found in quantities in New South Wales. As a result he did not become directly involved in gold exploration. He did invest some money in minerals, however, having an interest in the copper mines at Burra Burra in South

Australia. As a result, when he decided to manufacture copper tokens in 1852, he was aware of a good source of local copper, a factor which may have induced him to arrange local manufacture of his tokens rather than following the norm and arranging for their production in Britain.

The copper, in the form of rods of the required diameter was supplied to the steel engraver of Surry Hills, J. C. Thornthwaite. The blanks for the first production of pence and halfpence were therefore prepared by the unique method of having an apprentice cut them from the rods with a saw. It is related that a passerby suggested that they could be made more easily by punching them out of copper sheet like cookies out of rolled pastry. The first copper sheet for this new process was reputed to come from an old steam-ship funnel.

As a result of the change of blank manufacturing technique, two varieties of the 1852 issues can be found. The first is characterised by the blanks being quite round but of uneven thickness. These usually exhibit saw marks under the striking. The second are characterised by one side of the flan having rounded edge caused by the punch. These are often "bitten" as every effort was made to obtain the maximum number of blanks from the sheet copper.

Thornthwaite's troubles did not end with his efforts to prepare his blanks. He was also ill equipped to strike the tokens. At



first he attempted to employ a type of book press but soon found that this could not apply sufficient pressure to strike up his designs. He then moved to a drop-hammer system with disastrous results for his dies. He could not handle the forces necessary to strike the large copper tokens and never achieved the quality of imported pieces in that metal. However, he did have slightly more success with his attempts to strike the smaller silver threepence tokens in later years.

Just why the "Tea Stores" token should be referred to under the name "Peek and Campbell" is a mystery. It would appear that it was already the tradition early this century when Dr. Andrews was preparing his catalogue of Australian tokens. The influence of this study clearly explains the current usage. Gilbert Heyde, in his listing, correctly moved away from Andrews usage.

The firm "S. Peek & Co." ceased trading in 1855. The property was acquired by Joseph Harpur who continued to operate it as a wholesale grocer and steam coffee warehouse. Samuel Peek had already commenced building a substantial hotel at Gosford, and at the end of 1855 left for England with his wife to acquire furniture and fittings for this enterprise. Both he and his wife were lost returning to Sydney in 1857 in the wreck of the *Dunbar* at the Gap, Sydney. No Will could be found, and as a result most of the projects that Samuel had in train failed. His hotel, which was nearly complete fell into disrepair and was vandalized.

The property at 424 George Street was demolished in the late 1860's to make way for the Sydney Arcade which in turn was demolished to make way for the Coles store which now occupies the site.

Like most of the token issuers of old Sydney, the physical signs have now vanished, only the tokens themselves and their advertisements in the newspapers of their era remain to remind us of them

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