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THE TICHBORNE CLAIMANT MEDAL

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In England in mid Victorian times the Tichborne Claimant Trials were the talk of the nation. The people saw it as a class struggle rather than the trial of an imposter. The vast Tichborne Hampshire Barony had an annual income of £25,000 and the Claimant was only a butcher from Wagga Wagga in New South Wales.

The original Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne was born in 1829 and his mother was an illegitimate descendant of the Royal House of Bourbon. At the age 17 he left his home in Paris against his mother's wishes to attend a Jesuit College in Stonyhurst England. Three years later he obtained a commission in the 6th Dragoon Guards and wanted to marry his cousin Kate Doughty. At first Kate's father refused permission, because of Roger's 'wild ways', but later he agreed. However the marriage never took place. Later Roger travelled to South America, visiting a number of cities including Valparaiso, Quito and Rio. In 1854 he was bound for New York in the ill fated "Bella". Only a long boat, which was upside down, was found 400 miles off shore.

It was not until 1863 that the first advertisement for the whereabouts of Roger Tichborne was run in the "London Times". Later the Dowager, Lady Tichborne heard rumours that her son was living in Australia which caused her to write to A. and F. Cubbitt of the Missing Friends Office in Sydney. In August 1865 the agents placed an advertisement in "The Sydney Morning Herald" offering a reward for information relating to the whereabouts of Roger Tichborne. It certainly aroused the excitement of the colonists of New South Wales but little in the way of immediate results came from the advertisement.

The following month in Wagga Wagga, Tom Castro, a butcher who was facing an impending bankruptcy wrote to Lady

Tichborne revealing himself as her son. Apart from the recent advertisement, Tom Castro may have read an article written in 1862 on the Tichborne Estate and family, which appeared in the "London Illustrated News", as the Wagga Wagga Mechanics Institute kept copies of that paper.

In 1834 Tom Castro was born Arthur Orton at Wapping, England, thus making him five years older than Roger Tichborne. He was the twelfth child of George Orton, butcher and purveyor of ships' stores. George's business was prosperous enough to enable young Arthur to learn basic literacy. Arthur in his early years was nicknamed "Bullocky". When he turned 14 he was apprenticed to the master of the vessel "Ocean" for five years. A year later he jumped ship at Valparaiso in Chile and lived in Melipilla for a while. At Melipilla he became a friend of a family named Castro and he learnt some Spanish. His stay in Chile was to be useful later, as Roger Tichborne also sojourned there.

By 1851 Orton returned to Wapping and the following year he sailed for Hobart on the "Middleton". A surprising destination as gold had recently been discovered in Victoria and the 'Rush' was on. For two-and-a-half years he lived in Hobart and worked for several butchers in the city market. During this time he appeared before a Magistrate for a minor malpractice. In 1855 he moved to Gippsland, Victoria, and at first worked on a cattle station. Later "his career then became obscure, but essentially it was an exemplar of the outback worker's life: gold mining, mail running, station work, tinged with hints of bushranging and even murder." By 1864 he was working as a butcher's assistant in Wagga Wagga, under the alias of Thomas Castro. In January 1865 he married Mary Bryant, an illiterate second generation Australian.



F. CASTRO'S BUTCHER'S SHOP, WAGGA WAGGA, N.S.W. (The famous Tichborne Claimant.)
 Hunter Bros. Publishers, Wagga Wagga.

When Lady Tichborne replied to the claimant she neither accepted nor rejected him, but she did mention that Andrew Boyle, a Jamaican Negro and Roger's former servant, was living in Sydney. The claimant made full use of this information by gaining further knowledge of the background of Roger Tichborne. Arthur Orton now called himself Sir Roger Tichborne, and booked into the Metropolitan Hotel in Pitt Street, Sydney. For three months he stayed in Sydney preparing his claim and during this time he built up debts. To pay these debts he borrowed money from a solicitor and security was taken in the form of an IOU within a will. The will contained a number of major errors which were to be used against him in the trials. He avoided the hotel account by simply purchasing the hotel with a bill from Drummond's, a London bank with which he had no account! He then sailed to England with a party of legal advisers to assist him in his claim.

On Christmas Eve, 1866 he arrived in London and was seen that night in a hotel in his home town of Wapping. Immediately after, his brother suddenly came into money. Arthur, his brother,

admitted that he had taken a bribe only after the claimant ceased sending money. Shortly after arriving in London the Claimant visited the Tichborne family's solicitor and a meeting was arranged to see Lady Tichborne in Paris. She immediately accepted him as her long lost son. Arthur Orton then convinced many other people that he was Sir Roger Tichborne. However, six months later the rest of the family examined him, and all but two remote relatives claimed he was an imposter. As his mother had accepted him he received an allowance of £1000 a year. Whilst this was a large amount in those days he was anxious to have it increased.

In November, the family commenced negotiating a compromise with respect to the estate, to avoid a costly legal battle — a nephew was to hold the title and be given £50,000 and the Claimant was to keep the remainder of the estate. Before the compromise could be settled Lady Tichborne died intestate. The Claimant suspected foul play and the negotiations broke down.

In 1869 legal steps were taken regarding the Claimant and two Commissions were

conducted, one in Chile and the other in Australia. The Australian Commission went to Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Wagga Wagga and was completed by November that year.

Also during 1869, the Claimant was declared bankrupt, but that did not stop him raising funds for the court case. He raised £40,000 for legal fees by offering Tichborne Bonds. The Bonds were offered to the public for around £25 each and a payment of £100 was promised within one month of the Claimant taking possession of the Estates. This amounted to gambling on the outcome of the trial which greatly disturbed the legal profession. Evidence was taken in the Chancery. However, the civil court case was postponed until May 1871, as key witnesses from Paris could not attend any earlier as their city was under siege by the Prussian Army during the Franco-Prussian War. The public were to read of the trial's progress and in the end they were supporting the Claimant. When the hearing of the evidence reached 103 days the jury shouted "Enough"! During the trial many Royals including the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Emperor of Brazil and the King of Burma sat in the court gallery. The Jury's verdict found that the Claim was false and forced the Claimant to withdraw in a non-suit. Arthur Orton was then put in prison on two counts of perjury.

Shortly afterwards he was released on bail, and newspapers rallied to his support as he was seen to be the underdog. The whole of England appeared to come out and support him! Almost every pub had a Tichborne Defence Fund Box on their front bar. It became the focal point of class confrontation. One rich family and the legal system against a mere butcher from the Antipodes. It was reputed that 2,000 meetings were held for the Claimant cause and the largest was held in Manchester. Over £100,000 was raised for the Defence Fund according to the "Morning Advertiser". In April 1872 the 'Tichborne Claimant Trial', commenced

and ran for 188 days. In the summing up, the Lord Chief Justice of England spoke for 20 days, which was the longest speech in British legal history at that time. The verdict was guilty and he was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Immediately after the trial, the Tichborne Claimant medal was struck for the masses in cheap white metal. Whilst we do not know the exact number struck we can assume it would have been large due to the enormous publicity of the trial. Today the medals are not difficult to find but are normally in worn condition due to the softness of the metal. The medals were sold in bazaars and shops throughout England like so many other white metal medals of the day. Apart from the medal, plaster figurines of the principals in the trial were also sold as souvenirs. The medalist, A. G. Darby, was a relatively unknown engraver and this piece is the only example attributed to him in Daniel Fearon's "Spink's Catalogue of British Commemorative Medals 1558 to the present day with valuations" published in 1984. Whilst the medal depicts the 27 stone Claimant accurately and is well balanced, the most interesting feature is on the reverse side. Whilst it is only an inscription it is laid out in a spiral fashion representing the seemingly endless trial. A most unusual layout for a medal.

The medals probably were manufactured in either Birmingham or London as they were the main centres for manufacturing medals at that time.

After serving ten years in Newgate Prison, Arthur Orton was released. He then made appearances at a theatre in Leeds for £10 a night on the subject of 'prison reform'. Orton then negotiated with P. T. Barnum to tour America. However upon arrival in New York, Orton hired a theatre and spoke on 'English Injustice'. As only 100 attended on the opening night all engagements in America were cancelled, but Orton remained in New York for a few years working as a barman in the Bowery district.

By 1890 he was again living in London and attempted to stand for Parliament in a by-election, but failed to raise the necessary deposit. Five years later when he was completely destitute he sold his story of how he committed the fraud to a London publisher. When all copies were sold he then sold another story retracting the confession to another publisher. On the 31 March 1898 Arthur Orton died of a weak heart and poor circulation, and was buried in the Paddington Cemetery. The name on his headstone reads "Sir Roger Tichborne bart". Arthur Orton was not the only claimant, but by far the most well known and the only one recorded numismatically.



Medal description

Obverse: Bust of the Tichborne Claimant facing left with A. G. DARBY on the truncation.

Legend: SIR ROGER C. D. TICHBORNE.

Reverse: Inscription in a spiral layout commencing with an arrow : 1867 JAN^R CLAIMANT COMES FROM AUSTRALIA AND IS ACCEPTED BY LADY TICHBORNE AS HER SON. 1870 EVIDENCE TAKEN IN CHANCERY. 1871 MAY 11 TRIAL TO RECOVER THE TICHBORNE ESTATES BEGUN, 1872 MARCH 6TH NON SUITED. CLAIMANT EXAMINED 22 DAYS, DURATION OF 108 DAYS. 1872 MARCH 6TH NON SUITED. CLAIMANT ORDERED INTO CUSTODY TO BE TRIED FOR PERJURY. 1872 APRIL CLAIMANT INDICTED AS CASTRO ALIAS ORTON. 1873 APRIL TRIAL BEGINS AT BAR 1874 FEB^R 28 188th DAY OF TRIAL. VERDICT GUILTY 14 YEARS PENAL SERVITUDE. ★

Edge: Plain.

Metal: White metal.

Diameter: 42mm
holed and unholed



References:

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Acknowledgement

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