

VOLUME 4



JOURNAL OF THE  
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALIA.

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# JOHN CRAVEN THORNTHWAITE AUSTRALIA'S FIRST MEDALLIST AND TOKEN MAKER

BY GEORGE D. DEAN



Fig. 1. J. C. Thornthwaite.

Although there were a number of engraved and die-struck items produced before the 1849 arrival in Australia of JOHN CRAVEN THORNTHWAITE, he was the first "free enterprise" businessman to set up as a medallist in the Colony of N.S.W.

J.C.T., as he was often to sign his work, was the fourth of eight children from the marriage in 1817 of William Craven Thornthwaite, Ironmonger, and Jane Dunn. He was born in County Cumberland, England, in 1820, and at 18 years of age was apprenticed to Slater Geoghegan from The Strand, Middlesex, England, in the calling of STONE, SEAL and GEM ENGRAVER. An uncle, John Joseph Thornthwaite, put up the £84 for the 6-year apprenticeship for which amount the master, as well as training him in his craft, had to find the lad "sufficient meat, drink, lodge and all other necessaries" during the said period of training.

J.C.T. emigrated to Australia in 1849, but not before taking as his wife, in 1848, Ellen Parkin, daughter of Peter Spurr Parkin, Accountant, of London.

We know from previous writers on the subject that J.C.T.'s apprentice was also a Parkin, George by name, whom it can safely be assumed was his wife's brother and who, no doubt, would have been employed soon after setting up in business at Bourke Street in Surry Hills (Sydney, N.S.W.).

The union between John and Ellen Thornthwaite produced 7 boys and 2 girls and John Sydney (the second child) born in 1851 and Peter Spurr (the fifth) born 1861 both followed their father's calling, the former actually working for his father, while the latter continued as an engraver with Prouds and later with Angus & Coote until his death in 1925. Peter was, the family claim the second last SEAL ENGRAVER to be trained in that calling in Australia.

L.A. Thornthwaite of Bouth, Cumbria, England, who researched and devised a Thornthwaite family tree dating back to 1624, gives J.C.T.'s place of death as Sydney, on 1st November, 1893.

In an endeavour to trace the various locations of the business over the years, numerous almanacs, directories and other references were consulted. The following are my findings.

The 1855 Waugh & Cox Directory lists JOHN C. THORNTHWAITE as a DIE SINKER AND MEDALLIST, Bourke Street, Surry Hills.

Dr. Andrews reports that C.1858-60 he had his press at Leichhardt and was striking tokens for Hogarth & Erichsen.

I could find no other references until 1863 where in Sands Sydney Directory he is listed as DIE SINKER of 173 Pitt Street. The 1864 edition of that Directory shows JOHN CRAVEN THORNTHWAITE of the same vocation and address with a private residence at Enmore.

In 1865, presumably next door at 175 Pitt Street, his private residences were given as Enmore and Newtown.

1866-9 saw him listed as being at 146 Pitt Street, while the Directory of 1870-1 has THORNTHWAITE, JOHN, ENGRAVER, at 157 Pitt Street, and his private address as Burwood.

Dr. Andrews recorded that as late as 1920-1, John *Sydney* Thornthwaite was carrying on his father's business (Thornthwaite & Co.) and was using some of the old plant and machinery. A photo of the store at No. 8, of unknown address, accompanying this article shows J.S.T. standing in the doorway and could be from this period.



Fig. 2. J. S. Thornthwaite outside shop.

After tradesmen's tokens were outlawed in N.S.W. from 1868, J.C.T. would have had to find other types of numismatic items to produce or diversify his business interests . . . which he did. The photo of Thornthwaite & Co. clearly shows that they still advertised as DIE SINKERS & ENGRAVERS, sold POSTAGE and DUTY STAMPS and were operating as STAT-IONERS & PRINTERS.

It will be a challenge for future historians to fill in the gaps in relation to the various moves of the business.

In an address to the Australian History Society on 22nd May, 1918, A. W. Green recalled, "I suppose that every one of the older members of the Society remembers Thornthwaite's shop in later years. In 1867 (it was) in Pitt Street, about where Dalton Bros. building now is. Many a time I have gazed into the window admiring the medals, etc. on exhibition there?"

On this latter point, very few medals or medallions have so far been attributed to Thornthwaite. The first reference I can locate in this area is from Hyman P Coleman in "An Account of the Coins, Coinages & Currency of Australasia", 1893, on p.100 of which it states, "Among other work by this engraver was the medal struck for the Anti-Transportation League, in 1851, when New South Wales ceased to be a place to which convicts could be sent."

Neither Les Carlisle nor I have seen nor are we aware of the existence of any medallions for this organisation but this does not necessarily mean they were not made or exist – somewhere.

In 1867-8 a well-struck 61 mm piece was designed by Thornthwaite and is recorded in Carlisle as C1868/4, there being but 1 gold, 50 silver and 100 bronze issued. This piece was struck for the Horticultural Society of New South Wales. The first type was made TO COMMEMORATE THE VISIT OF H.R.H. PRINCE ALFRED, DUKE OF EDINBURGH, K.G., TO SYDNEY, while the second type lacks the above wording and was used as a prize medal. The date 1868 on some specimens appears to have been changed from 1867. This beautifully designed and executed medal is a far cry from the early efforts in token making by J.C.T., and though undoubtedly he engraved the die, I do not believe he had the necessary machinery for its striking, it possibly being done at the Sydney Mint.

That he could and did, according to A. W. Green, produce many medals, calls on researchers to look closely at all medals and medallions not yet attributed to one maker or another and then try to identify those made by Thornthwaite.

C1868/2 is another piece struck in commemoration (sic) of Prince Alfred's visit to Sydney in 1868. The J.B. on the bust is curious.

Could this refer to J (?) Brown or WHITTY & BROWN who cut the dies for this and other Whitty & Brown bust issues with Thornthwaite doing the actual striking as was the case with Hogarth & Erichsen? Brown was an engraver, not a medallist, and it could follow that he engraved the dies while Thornthwaite completed the work.

Contrary to the observations of earlier writers, I believe the bust on the Whitty & Brown pieces is not of a family member, but that of H.R.H. Prince Alfred, a fact which could be used to date the token issues of that firm (i.e. c. 1867-8).



Fig. 3. 1850 Pattern Token.

The first dated piece by J.C.T. (1850) is generally considered a trial or pattern token, there being but one specimen known. It was originally found by a Mr. Shaw of Adelaide, was recorded in the Heuzenroeder Collection in 1893, passed in time to Mr. A. Burton of Sandgate, Q., around 1908, to Edward Wills then Gilbert Heyde, and in 1977 became part of the Collection of the Science Museum of Victoria (now the Museum of Victoria).

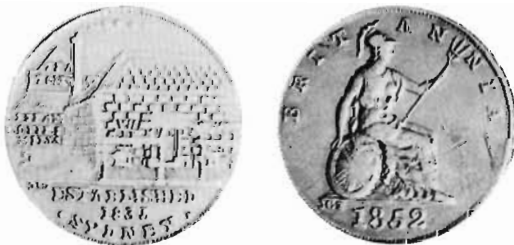


Fig. 4. Tea Stores 1/2d, 1852.

It was J.C.T. who produced the first locally made 1d. and 1/2d. tokens to be regularly used in Australia. These were ordered by Samuel Peek of Samuel Peek & Co. (earlier trading as Peek & Campbell) of 424 George Street, Syd-

ney. The tokens do not name the issuer but give the maker's initials and are dated 1852 and 1853.

From the outset, the firm laboured under the double disadvantages of lack of skill and suitable plant. Originally Thornthwaite had his apprentice cut blanks from copper rod of the appropriate size using a saw. Over the years I have collected many examples showing evidence of being sawn with some being slightly wedge-shaped, the result of a saw drifting from the desired cutting line. This exercise was no doubt tedious and time-consuming.

Eventually providence smiled on the business in that local Surry Hills gardener, John Baptist, having had experience in such matters, showed them how to punch blanks from sheet copper and this raises another probability – could the J.B. mentioned earlier stand for John Baptist?

As Dr. Andrews says, “The press used for stamping the tokens was an old affair, and hardly suitable for the purpose, being worked on the same principal as a letter-copying press. Incapable of giving the necessary force, they weighted the stamper with some of the copper ingots, but no better results were obtained. They finally had recourse to a drop-hammer worked with a block and pulley, somewhat resembling the machines used on a larger scale for driving piles. This method answered only too well, as it not only gave the sharp blow required, but sent the dies flying in all directions, simply bombarding the inside of the workshop and rendering it somewhat unpleasant and unsafe for the occupants.”

While tokens cut from rods were perfectly round, their thickness varied. On the other hand, pieces punched from copper sheet were often found “bitten” (a piece cut out of the side) resulting from cutting blanks too close



Fig. 5. Thornthwaite 1d 1854.

to earlier holes in an effort to save costs on material.

1854 saw Thornthwaite produce copper pence and half-pence for himself. These are noteworthy for their crude workmanship and lack of clarity of detail in design because the dies were not cut deep enough and they had little or no rim to protect the design on the “soft” copper tokens, points that typified his early work.



Fig. 6. William Allen 1d 1855.

Thornthwaite also made pieces for John Allen of Kiama whom it is understood, on being shown a few samples, rejected the order because of inferior quality (A5, 3 known).

The order for his brother, William, from Jamberoo, he apparently executed and likewise these too the customer rejected. In an endeavour to recoup some of his money, J.C.T. sold them to the toll-keeper at Annandale (Sydney) “who passed them on in change to the hapless wayfarers” states Dr. Andrews. It is doubtful if many more than 20 to 25 W. Allen specimens exist with only 4 or 5 of those being well-struck, undamaged, and in VF or better condition.



Fig. 7. Bell & Gardner 1d.

Approximately 10 years later when his production methods had improved considerably, it is thought he made tokens for Bell & Gardner of Rockhampton. Two distinct varieties are

known, the second type I first recorded in the A.N.S. Report of January, 1970.

The A. Nicholas issue of Tasmania is an unattributed token and though the die workmanship is much better than the early efforts of J.C.T., many of the pieces are so poorly struck, the issue could only have come from Thornthwaite.

Patterns for copper tokens are also recorded to have been made for Iredale of Sydney and James Campbell of Morpeth, but no token so far has linked J.C.T. with either of these two businessmen. Could Thornthwaite’s dated piece (A578) mentioned earlier be one of the “missing” tokens? Being dated 1850, it is possible it was shown to Iredale who rejected it because of design or workmanship, and instead promptly placed an order via his agent in London for, it is recorded, “about 1851, owing to there being a great shortage of pennies in the Colony, the firm of Iredale & Co. imported 10 tons of copper tokens” to facilitate trade.

If this was not the case, then maybe one or two of the crude colonially produced dies attributed to Whitty & Brown could have been made by Thornthwaite, e.g. A625 standing figure reverse with head under TH, or the one penny obverse series A632-7. Iredale did, after all, use a standing figure reverse.



Fig. 8. Thornthwaite's rare 1d (A.581).

The 1d. and ½d. dies J.C.T. prepared for his own tokens were used with other dies to create new tokens. One example is for the TEA STORES (A432) issue. This 1d. had a regular obverse, but reuses the reverse of Thornthwaite’s 1854 1d. (A579).

A581 is a rare, if not unique, piece which at first glance looks like the obverse of an A579 1d., but the wording and design in the centre is different. Instead of a wreath there is a kangaroo only supporting the shield on the

left, while the words DIE SINKER replace the emu to right. The reverse uses the floral design in the centre with DIE SINKER/AND in two lines but slightly upset. In the outer area ADVANCE AUSTRALIA/J.C. THORNTHWAITTE is in two lines above and 1854 below.

In the Heyde Collection dispersal, Part 3, and in his book, mention is made of a uniface Id. token, A580. On close examination of this piece at the time, I felt sure it was nothing more than a regular A579 with the back filed off – though perhaps a long time ago.

Another oddity in the author's collection is a counter-stamped specimen, hand-done, letter by letter, on a Id. copper token of G. & W. H. ROCKE (A467). Strangely the wording is curved and stamped back to front, i.e. ETIAWHTNROHT. Did someone working in Thornthwaite's shop punch the letters into this token as a test piece so he would not get the spelling wrong on the die he was preparing?

Beginning in 1854, Thornthwaite produced silver tokens and in particular the 3d. for James Campbell of Morpeth, of which perhaps only 10 of the £5 worth (400) made survive. It is also reported he made a silver 3d. token for Richard Lamb of Sydney.



Fig. 9. James Campbell 3d.

To achieve a better finish on his silver tokens, Thornthwaite use a machine called a "fiddle" which raised and formed the rims. Unquestionably, whatever design loss may have resulted from his primitive methods and the use of seal engraver's tools, was more than made up for in intrinsic value. As the tokens were usually made from old melted down British and foreign silver coin and were slightly larger and



Fig. 10. Thornthwaite's rare "Oak leaves" 3d.

thicker than normal currency issues, they represented about 33% more in metal content and thus value which put a further restriction on their extended use.

While J.C.T. is credited with making the die, the honour of striking the first silver token in the Colony goes to George Parkin.

Among the rarest tokens by this issuer that circulated is his OAKLEAF 3d. (A681). It has been suggested that 5/- worth (18 to 20) only were made "because he was not satisfied with the reverse."

John S. Thornthwaite is reported to have stated that his father cut the die for and made one 6d. SILVER TOKEN – one that he wore on his watch chain for several years until it was stolen. The obverse was very similar to that on his threepences while the reverse had THORNTHWAITTE above, and across the centre, in two lines, SIX/PENCE.

Spotted in a pawnbroker's shop years later, it soon after disappeared and is rumoured to have been sent to England. We can only hope one day it will be "found" and returned to Australia.



Fig. 11. J. S. Thornthwaite.

Every early writer of note, when describing the Thornthwaite silver tokens, has committed to paper at least one error. It would serve little purpose in listing these errors in detail, it being far better for me to rewrite and describe in full all the “known” issues and variations.

T1 (A684) (CAMPBELL, James, MORPETH) 1854 3d. 16mm.

Obv.: The Australian Arms when rising sun as crest, the kangaroo to left and emu to right as supporters; on the scroll beneath is ADVANCE AUSTRALIA while around within a beaded rim SYDNEY NEW SOUTH WALES with 1854 below. Tip of tail of emu to L of WALES.

Rev.: A sinuous numeral 3 with tail ending in a point, rising sun above, SILVER to left, TOKEN to right No. J.C.T.

T2 (A685) CAMPBELL, James, MORPETH N.D. 3d. 16mm.

Obv.: A floral device in centre, with GENERAL STORES forming an inner circle of legend and around within the beaded rim, JAMES CAMPBELL MORPETH.

Rev.: As T1.

T3 (A—) (LAMB, Richard) (No place) 1854 3d. 16mm. (H250/5)

Obv.: As T1.

Rev.: Large 3 with horizontal stroke straight and tail ending in a knob. SILVER over, TOKEN below.

T4 (A681) THORNTHWAITE, J. C.) SYDNEY 1854 3d. 16mm.

Obv.: As T1.

Rev.: A large numeral 3 formed by an oakleaf branch bent into the required shape and surmounted by a rising sun. SILVER to left, TOKEN to right, and 1854 at the bottom all within the beaded rim.

T5 (A682) (THORNTHWAITE, J. C.) SYDNEY 1854 3d. 16mm.

Obv. As T1.

Rev.: A smaller numeral 3 surmounted by rising sun, the horizontal stroke of 3 straight and the tail of the loop ending in a knob. SILVER to left, TOKEN to right, with J.C.T. below. K to E of TOKEN ½mm apart.

T6 (As A682) (THORNTHWAITE, J. C.) SYDNEY 1854 3d. 16mm. (H250/4)

Obv.: As T1.

Rev.: As T5 except K to E of TOKEN 1mm apart.

T7 (A683) THORNTHWAITE, J. C.) (No place) 1854 3d. 16mm.

Obv.: As T1 except that the legend *omits* SYDNEY and the words NEW SOUTH WALES are expanded to cover the same area so that the E of WALES is against the tip of the tail of the emu.

Rev.: As T5 (?).

Not Seen.

T8 (A—) THORNTHWAITE, J. C., SYDNEY 1854 6d. 19mm.

Obv.: As T2 but enlarged.

Rev.: J. C. THORNTHWAITE/SIX/PENCE. Not seen.

*Note:* Coleman P. Hyman tells us J.C.T. struck *two* tokens for Campbell.

*Re T1* (A684) (Campbell – no stated name). Heyde is in error in attributing *a variety of* A682 as A684 when clearly the latter has, as Dr. Andrews points out, a sinuous 3 and not one with a horizontal bar. This error is repeated in Gray’s Auction Catalogue of March, 1974, Part 3, Lot 607.

To date I have located only two specimens of T1 – one in the Mitchell Collection known to Dr. Andrews and one in my own collection which is clearly a trial strike. The latter came from the Ken Welch Collection and before that from Tasmania.

The obvious rarity of this piece reinforces my belief that it is the unnamed 3d. order for James Campbell that was not proceeded with.

*Re T2* (A685). The Hon James Campbell would possibly have rejected Type T1 because the obverse did not have *his* name on it but agreed to use the reverse and so T2 (A685) was created.

*Re T3* (H250/5) (Richard Lamb). With one exception (Tea Stores) all the pieces J.C.T. struck for clients did NOT have his initials on them, therefore T3 must have been struck for a client and RICHARD LAMB is the only one we cannot find a token for . . . until now. Incidentally, the copper half-penny blank on which J.C.T. tested the dies for “RICHARD

LAMB” came up for auction at Spink’s Sale in July, 1987, Lot No. 1808.

This same trial piece is illustrated in the 35th Edition of “The Australian Antique Collector” on p.107, but here regrettably it is wrongly attributed to Julius Hogarth.

Dr. Andrews reports the silver tokens of Hogarth & Erichsen, though generally of a later date and inferior quality to those of Thornthwaite, were mostly struck at Leichhardt on the press owned by the latter who, he goes on, knew both Hogarth and Erichsen intimately.

After tokens were outlawed, J.C.T. would have had to find a new source of income. To survive as a medallist, no doubt he would have had to bid for and produce various medallions, metallic tickets and passes, also club discount

checks so very common fifty to one hundred years ago. For example, he struck the ROYAL VICTORIA THEATRE (Sydney) passes for the areas designated DRESS BOXES, UPPER BOXES, PIT AND GALLERY.

John Craven Thornthwaite, our first regular die sinker and engraver, struck so many interesting tokens and other numismatic items, collectors and researchers have a hard road ahead trying to unravel which were his and which were not. The search, nevertheless, will be most rewarding. It is hoped all new information will be recorded for all to share.

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of J.C.T.’s descendants, granddaughter, Mrs. Dorothy Rees, and great granddaughter, Mrs. Jenny Speare, who provided photos for this article, a family tree and information on his early life and training.

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