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OLOF HILMER HEDBERG – SAILOR, EMIGRANT, WHALER, MERCHANT AND FIREMAN – TOKEN ISSUER OF HOBART TOWN

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Tasmanian tokens have always been of great interest to me as they were issued in this my home and State and because of the fascinating backgrounds of the issuers themselves, they also give a good insight of colonial life.

One issuer in particular holds special interest because of the types of rarity of tokens issued and his most interesting life in the colony of Hobart Town. His name was OLOF HILMER HEDBERG.

OLOF HILMER HEDBERG was Swedish by birth. He was born in Uddevalla, Sweden, on 14 April 1817, (Uddevalla is situated north of Gothenberg, on the Bohuslan Coast), the son of Handlaren Anders Johansson Hedberg and Johanna Maria Hedberg (nee Vinding). Not much is known about his early life but during the period 1835-43 he is recorded as a "Husforhorslangder" – a small merchant, then on 6 October 1838 he "gick'till sjos" – went to sea – and for a short time was employed on the missionary schooner *Triton* in the Pacific.

Hedberg arrived in Hobart Town in late 1844 and secured employment in the government Bonded Warehouse. It was during his employment that he attracted "favourable notice" of a certain Charles Seal, a wealthy shipowner (who in 1850 owned the largest fleet in the colony) and city merchant who started Hedberg in his own business, which he carried on for many years with great success. On the death of Charles Seal in 1852, Hedberg took over the management of Seal's whaling business which he eventually purchased from Seal's widow. For many years he traded with success. This was at a time when whale oil was in demand and many ships used the port at Hobart Town as their base for whaling in the Southern Oceans. At one stage, on Good Friday, 1847, there were

37 foreign whalers anchored in the Derwent, refitting and off loading their cargoes of whale meat and oil. The "*Colonist*" published an article:

What has become of English whale-ships? We see the harbour of our noble River Derwent almost blocked with American and French ships – splendid ships of large tonnage-coming here to refit, but not one single British whaler!

At this time whale oil was worth 83 pounds per ton, black oil 32 pounds, and whalebone 210 pounds.

The waterfront of Hobart Town was alive with merchants, ship-chandlers, outfitters, sailmakers, boat-builders, blacksmiths, riggers and biscuit makers – there was work and profit for all.

It is probably opportune at this time to outline briefly what the whaling industry meant to the growing colony of Hobart Town.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, seal skins, whalebone, and black and sperm oil, were very valuable exports for Van Diemen's Land. The Tasmanian coast and islands were frequented by both seals and black whales. In fact the Derwent River was a breeding ground and large whales could be frequently seen in the large river. Indiscriminate slaughter annihilated their breed or sent them to safer waters. It is interesting to note that a court of inquiry in 1826 revealed that sealing was carried on at all times of the year, even during pupping season, when the mother seals were killed and the pups were left to die of neglect.²

The court suggested that sealing should have been confined to definite seasons so that the pups would have time to mature but this suggestion was ignored.

1. The reverse of A203-HR34 is muled with the reverse of A323/A674, e.g. the laureated head of Wellington with WELLINGTON & ERIN GO BRAGH round within a beaded rim. This piece was first reported in Spink's Numismatic Circular Mar-April 1920 when it was noted that Mr. L. G. P. Messinger exhibited at a meeting of the Royal Numismatic Society (15 February 1920) a token bearing the head of Wellington with ERIN GO BRAGH on one side and Britannia seated with AUSTRALIA on the other, "as an Australian issue".

Andrews states "it is probably a mule of two of Taylor's reverses . . ."

2. The AUSTRALIA raised rim uniface piece in nickel HR33/1 (ex Sidney Hagley and G. C. Heyde Collections-Hyde sale Lot 395; Stern Sale Nov. 1976 Lot 490. Possibly only three specimens known.)

Indiscriminate sealing and whaling continued on a large scale until by 1832 the seals had disappeared, and by 1840 the black whales had also become very scarce and whalers had to go further afield to the Tasman and Antarctic oceans to ply their trade.

Between 1828 and 1849, 226 vessels for whaling were built in the colony and for the same dates there were 449 vessels operating out of Hobart Town employed in colonial fishing.³ The total value of fisheries for the same period was 1,333,776 pounds sterling.

By 1836 Hobart Town had nine separate establishments to treat whale oil, employing 392 men, and one at Launceston employing 50 men. The industry peaked in 1837 when a return of 135,210 pounds was recorded. After 1840 whaling in Van Diemen's Land declined but larger ships were built to travel greater distances seeking the black whale.

The importance of the whaling industry to the colony was not only to provide a valuable export but to encourage the growth of subsidiary industries – shipbuilding and all the trades associated with construction, fitting and provisioning of sea going vessels. Whaling gave Hobart its character as a port with ship building yards and a busy harbour front.

Hedberg was deeply involved with this industry. He owned two brigs, the “Victoria” of 184 tons and the “Maid of Erin”, 150 tons. In 1868, the “Victoria” voyaged for eleven months but only took 7½ tons of oil.

Then the price of oil suddenly fell; the “takes” became small and Hedberg's misfortunes began. Hedberg had invested heavily in coal mines on the east coast of Tasmania which failed. The loss of capital invested in the mines and the sudden crash in oil prices nearly ruined him. He managed to survive the losses and re-commenced business as produce merchant and commission agent in Argyle Street, Hobart Town.

It was from this business that tokens were issued. The *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 December, 1854 states:

Mr. O. H. Hedberg has imported per ship Derwentwater a large quantity of copper tokens for the convenience of the trading community.

Hedberg's tokens circulated alongside the many tokens issued by various merchants in the colony until 1876 when the Bronze Money Act 1875 declared tokens illegal, and they were replaced with British Coin.

On 7 September 1855, Hedberg applied for citizenship. His application stated:

Whereas Olof Hilmer Hedberg formerly of Gottenburg in the Kingdom of Sweden now resident in our Island. . . Dealer in Oils...

On the front of the parchment it reads:

Pursuant to the Act of Council of this Island in that case made and provided I do hereby certify that the within Olof Hilmer Hedberg (professing himself not to be a Roman Catholic) did this day take and subscribe before me the oaths of allegiance penalty and obligation

JAMES HORNE
Puisine Judge
7 September 1855

So Hedberg became a British subject.

Hedberg also became involved with fire-brigades in Hobart Town. Firebrigades during the 1840's-1880's were mainly operated by Insurance companies and there were two main volunteer brigades situated in Hobart Town. One was operated by the Tasmanian Fire and Life Insurance Company and the other controlled and operated by the Cornwall Fire Insurance Company.

In 1859, the fire engine owned by the Tasmanian Fire and Life Insurance Company is recorded as “being under the control of O. H. Hedberg. Argyle Street”.

Hedberg held the position of Superintendent of the Tasmanian Fire Engine for 13 years and then Superintendent of a combined brigade – the forerunner of the Hobart Fire Brigade until October 1864 when he handed control over to his deputy, Edward Maher.

Cornwall Chronicle stated:

We learn from a letter of the Tasmanian Insurance Office, published in this issue, that Mr. Hedberg retires from the post he has so well filled for twelve or thirteen years as superintendent of the company's engine,

3. The AUSTRALIA raised rim trial with Brass insert obv. A204, (Ex Sir Reginald Marcus Clarke/G. C. Heyde Collections-Heyde Sale Lot 339.)

and those who have witnessed his courageous and successful career in that office will fully endorse that.

The *Tasmanian* reported that Hedberg was a man of Herculean strength.

This is born out by many of the reports on the various fires he attended during his career. Many daring exploits of Hedberg climbing on to burning buildings, with little regard for his own safety, are commented on by the press.

Hedberg had two families. On 2 November 1844 he married Martha Williams (aged 17 years). Olof was described in the marriage register as a "storeman" aged 27 years. Martha died on 2 November 1861, aged 34 years, of general debility (weakness) and puerperal (chilbed) fever. The couple had eight children. He remarried on 30 November 1864, at the Chain of Lagoons, to Marian (nee Wardlaw). There were two children of this union.

On Friday August 22, 1884, Hedberg died aged 68. Hedberg's death was reported in the *Tasmanian* on 30 August 1884.

Mr. Hedberg had been ailing from dropsy for some time past. His death is regretted by all with whom he was acquainted, and out of respect to his memory all the vessels in port had their flags halfmasted on Friday afternoon and Saturday.

... He was temperate in all his habits, and his well known smiling face will be missed by many a friend.

THE TOKENS

The series of tokens issued by O. H. Hedberg appear, at first, to be very difficult to catalogue, but with an examination of die links the various issues can be identified. The series can be divided into two main areas - *regular or issued pieces and the so called "patterns" or irregular issues.* Although the regular series lack an ornamental design as do many other Tasmanian Issues, there are enough die variations to enable a number of classic rarities to be included and to make the series very interesting. The presence of mules and "*patterns*" gives the series added interest.

Normal issues

1. Pennies

Dr. Arthur Andrews 'Australasian Tokens and Coins' The Mitchell Library, Sydney 1921, lists three main issued pennies. Known now as A196, A197 and A198.

The three tokens bear the same design -



Obverse: O. H. HEDBERG in two lines across the centre of the token with OIL & COLOR STORES ARGYLE ST. HOBART TON round within the indented rim. A short pointed bar above O. H.

Reverse: O. H. HEDBERG SWEDISH HOUSE HOBART TON round within the indented rim ONE/PENNY in two lines in the centre.

Three dies are identified.

A196 - Obv: HEDBERG 21mm long. and between OIL and COLOR equidistant. The A of ARGYLE is level with H of HEDBERG. While the N of TON is slightly higher over the G of HEDBERG.

- Rev: PENNY is 15 mm long.

A197 - Obv: HEDBERG is 20 mm long. The initials O. H. are wider apart and the A of ARGYLE and N of TON are above HEDBERG. & nearer L (OIL) than C (COLOR)

- Rev: PENNY is 17mm long.

A198 - Obv: HEDBERG 20 mm (or less?) and nearer L (OIL) than C (COLOR)

- Rev: PENNY 15 mm

All three specimens are UPSET and with beaded rims.

Die links are apparent. A196 and A198 have the same REVERSE DIE. While A197 has a separate OBVERSE and REVERSE DIE. There are *two reverse dies:* Die 1 - PENNY 15 mm and Die 2 - PENNY 17 mm.

The position of the bar above O. H. and below HEDBERG cannot be taken too seriously due to its variation with wear.

Gilbert C. Heyde in his work '*Unofficial Coins of Colonial Australia and New Zealand*' published in 1967 identified a further type. This type has the Obverse of A198 with a die 2 reverse. (H100/4)

Known specimens now were:

Type 1 A196 -H100/1

Type 2 A197 -H100/2

Type 3 A198 -H100/3

Type 4 A - -H100/4

A further specimen was added to the known types with the identification in 1981 of a hitherto unknown die combination. This particular specimen has A197-H100/2 (HEDBERG 20mm long), while the reverse has A196-H100/1 (PENNY 15mm long).

As a result of this latest find we now have *FIVE* major types in the *REGULAR* series of pennies instead of *THREE* as originally listed by Andrews in 1921.

We can now add Type 5 A- H-

Patterns or irregular issues

Mules:

Three of the Obverse dies are muled with different reverses while one reverse die is muled with three different obverses.

Obverse die mules:

M-Type 1 A196-H 100/1 with Lipman Levy penny (New Zealand A205 -H38)

M-Type 2 A198-H100/3 with FOUR PENCE (H35)



M-Type 3 A198-H100/3 with AUSTRALIA raised rim Penny (A203-34)

M-Type 4 A198-H100/3 with AUSTRALIA penny (A202-H33/3)

M-Type 5 A199-HR36 with Jno Andrew and Co, Penny.



Reverse die mules:

RM-Type 1 A197 -H100/2 with AUSTRALIA penny (A200 -H33/1)

RM-Type 2 A197 -H100/2 with AUSTRALIA penny (A201 -H33/2 Die A)

RM-Type 3 A197 -H100/2 with AUSTRALIA Penny (A201 -H33/2 Die B)

Reverse Mule Types 2 and 3 are important as there are again two further important die types. Die A shows distinct flags on the steam ship while Die B does not. Ray Jewell of Melbourne identified the two types when cataloguing for the Marcus Clarke sale in the late 1960s. However, Ken Downie also of Melbourne recognised the two dies and illustrated them in early 1980. Downie also noted that Die A invariably exists on *thick flans facing NORMAL*, while Die B exists on *thinner flans in the UPSET position*. Die B also shows some "pimples" 2 mm above the ship, due no doubt to some deterioration of the die.

Sub group

A further sub group of mules or patterns can be noted. It is very debatable whether they should be included within the overall HEDBERG GROUP of tokens or whether they should be regarded merely as a product of Taylor's son who was known to have produced various irregular pieces while apprenticed in his father's works.

W. J. Taylor's involvement in producing tokens for the Australian colonies is well known. It is also well known that a high proportion of Taylor's output is found muled. It could also be quite possible that some of the mules were produced by Stokes who purchased the dies from Taylor.

The tokens in question are A203, A204 and A674.