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THE SOLUTION OF THE *CHARLOTTE* ENIGMA

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My acquisition of the fabulous First Fleet *Charlotte* medal (Carlisle 1788/1) at a Spink Sydney Auction in 1981 generated considerable publicity, not merely in numismatic circles but also in the daily media, where it was widely acclaimed as the first Australian colonial work of art and an icon of the foundation of our nation.

A sensational consequence of the publicity was that a previously unrecorded related piece (Carlisle 1788/2) came to light and was offered by Spink at their following auction and later purchased by my friend Ian Armstrong for his amazingly omniverous collection. It is a small battered and repeatedly holed thin copper disc and was reputedly found during the renovation of an old house in Camden Town N.S.W. in the early 1940's.

The original *Charlotte* Medal was handcrafted from a 74mm thin silver disc, having a dated caption on its pictorial obverse, the reverse being engraved with a nautical narrative of the voyage of the *Charlotte* to Botany Bay.

On the 47mm related copper piece, the narrative although condensed, covers both sides of the disc apart from a reverse tail piece, symmetrically composed of the sun, moon and star ornaments similar to the original. In addition, two large block capital letters *WB* are deeply incised at the left base of the reverse.

This newly discovered piece appeared to cast doubt on the traditional explanation of the existence of the silver medal. A convict, Thomas Barrett had been credited

with its production, being the only person on the *Charlotte* with proven skill in such matters, having forged and passed coins while at Rio de Janeiro. As both pieces are obviously by the same hand, why are the initials on the copper specimen *WB* and not *TB*?

A convenient, if not very convincing explanation, was that Barrett had an alternative given name that he preferred using.

After discussing the problem with Les Carlisle at the Camperdown Numismatic Symposium in March 1997, I realized that the apparent anomaly would have to be resolved if the Barrett attribution was to be sustained.

Pondering the evidence while driving back to Melbourne, the key to the solution of the puzzle suddenly came to me. Supposing the initials *WB* had nothing to do with the maker of the pieces! After all, the silver medal was not signed!

Once such a possibility was admitted, it became patently obvious that the large block capitals were completely out of character with the consistent engraving style of both specimens, (cursive script), and moreover, out of balance with the design. Had Barrett wished to sign his work, surely he would be more likely to discreetly initial his artistic silver production!

Therefore, *WB* was almost certainly a subsequent addition, and once this was assumed, my research has revealed the whole story which reconciles all the known facts.

My investigations lead me to suggest the following sequence of events:- Thomas Barrett (c.1758-1788) was convicted of theft at the Old Bailey in 1782 and sentenced to death, which was commuted to transportation for life. After a turbulent confinement in the hulks, he embarked on the *Charlotte* for Botany Bay on the 11th. May 1787, as a *First Fleet* convict.

The First Fleet under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip consisted of eleven ships, comprising two war ships, *Sirius* and *Supply*, three storeships, *Borrowdale*, *Fishburn* and *Golden Grove*, and six convict transports, *Alexander*, *Friendship*, *Scarborough*, *Lady Penrhyn*, *Prince of Wales*, and *Charlotte*.

The *Charlotte* was barque-built on the Thames in 1784. She was 105 feet long, with two decks and three masts and displaced 338 tons. Her complement on the voyage to Botany Bay consisted of the master, Captain Thomas Gilbert and crew, a company of forty-four marines, eighty-nine male and twenty female convicts. Also on board was Surgeon General to the Fleet, John White.

While the Fleet was anchored at Rio de Janeiro, Thomas Barrett was involved in making and passing forged quarter dollars to the locals. John White recorded this incident in his Journal which was published in 1790. He says (pp 44-46):-
... Thomas Barret (sic), a convict, had, with great ingenuity and address, passed some quarter dollars which he, assisted by two others, had coined out of old buckles, buttons belonging to the marines, and pewter spoons, during their passage from Teneriffe. The impression, milling, character, in a word the whole was so inimitably executed, that had their metal been a little better, the fraud. I am

convinced, would have passed undetected.

A strict and careful search was made for the apparatus wherewith this was done, but in vain; not the smallest trace or vestige of any thing of the kind was to be found among them. How they managed this business without discovery, or how they could effect it at all, is a matter of inexpressible surprise to me; as they never were suffered to come near a fire; and a centinel (sic) was constantly placed over their hatchway, which, one would imagine, rendered it impossible for either fire or fused metal to be conveyed into the apartments. Besides, hardly ten minutes ever elapsed, without an officer of some degree or other going down among them. The adroitness, therefore, with which they must have managed, in order to complete a business that required so complicated a process, gave me a high opinion of their ingenuity, cunning, caution, and address; and I could not help wishing that these qualities had been employed to more laudable purposes. The officers of marines, the master of the ship, and myself, fully explained to the injured Portugeze (sic), what villians (sic) they were who had imposed upon them.

Following the Rio debacle, it is inconceivable that Barrett would have been given any opportunity to further exercise his talents during the remainder of the voyage.

The *Charlotte* eventually anchored with the rest of the fleet in Botany Bay on the 20th. January, 1788, but as the adjacent area on investigation was considered unsuitable for the settlement, disembarkation was delayed for six days, after which Captain Phillip moved the fleet north to the vastly superior location of Port Jackson, where on the 26th.

January he raised the British ensign, thus officially establishing the new colony on the first *Australia Day*.

One can imagine the frustration of those confined on board with such a delay, after such a long voyage, and no doubt John White alleviated his boredom by employing the accomplished Thomas Barrett to create a memento of the voyage for him. He would have composed the text from his Journal notes, providing a silver disc, probably cut from one of his surgical dishes, together with a sharp surgical instrument to be adapted as a makeshift burin.

As the synopsis could be completely engraved on one side, Barrett appropriately embellished the other side with a view of the *Charlotte* anchored in Botany Bay, adding a caption which included the date of arrival. The passing of time was symbolised by ornamental sun, moon and stars.

It is emphasised that the text with its dates and bearings must have been provided to Barrett from some official source; as a convict he would not have had access to such information, and with his record would certainly not be allowed to have metal of any kind in his possession, much less silver!

White's ongoing instructions to Barrett would have been delivered by William Broughton, his personal servant on the voyage, and Broughton must have persuaded Barrett to make an abbreviated version of White's commission for him, supplying a small piece of copper sheathing for the purpose.

When transcribing from the silver medal to the copper piece, Barrett misread the date of Departing the Cape of Good Hope as 14 Nov, instead of the correct 13

Nov. (Possibly confusing it with the arrival date, 14 Oct. on the previous line). This mistake confirms that the copper piece was derived from the silver specimen.

The work must have been completed prior to disembarkation, because there would have been no time allowed for such frivolity while the new settlement was being established.

A month after landfall, Thomas Barrett was tried for stealing provisions and thus achieved the grim distinction of being the first convict hanged in the new colony!

John White, appointed first Chief Surgeon by Governor Phillip, worked under extremely difficult conditions, endeavouring to cope with serious health problems in the infant community, which were compounded by the arrival of the Second Fleet in 1790, followed by the Third Fleet in 1792. He sought relief from his arduous duties by sketching the natural history of his exploratory rambles.

White received land grants, but his own health failing, he sailed for England in the *Daedalus* in December 1794, (taking his silver *Charlotte* medal with him). He was never to return, resigning his N.S.W. appointment in 1796.

He was to marry twice, having three children by his first wife. He also brought to England a son he had by a convict in N.S.W. John White died in 1832 aged 75.

The subsequent provenance of his *Charlotte* medal is unknown until its reappearance in the famous collection of the Marquess of Milford Haven, and is illustrated in his catalogue of British Naval Medals published in 1919 (p465, No 49). By an odd coincidence the date 13 Nov. that Barrett wrongly transcribed on the copper piece as 14 Nov, is incorrectly

printed as 18 Nov. in the MHC description on p463.

William Broughton, White's servant on the *Charlotte*, spent the rest of his life in the antipodes where he had a distinguished career. In 1789 he was appointed storekeeper at Parramatta, and in 1800 was transferred to Norfolk Island.

In 1795 he was granted land which he named Chatham Farm, and in 1805 was appointed deputy commissary in New South Wales. Broughton had five children in a defacto relationship with Elizabeth Hearthorn and in 1809 she and their youngest child Betsey sailed for England in the *Boyd*. However the ship was captured by the Maoris when it called at New Zealand and Elizabeth and most of the passengers and crew were massacred, but little Betsey was spared.

Broughton was appointed a magistrate in 1809, and in 1810 married widowed Elizabeth Charlotte Simpson at Parramatta. She had five children by Broughton.

He was promoted to acting assistant commissary general in 1814 and became a trusted official of Governor Macquarie.

Broughton, having received a grant of 1000 acres at Appin in 1811, established his family farm known as Lachlan Vale near Camden. William Broughton died in 1821 aged 53.

Elizabeth remained at their farm until her death in 1843. This farm provides the

final piece of the *Charlotte* puzzle, as it is in this very area that the copper relic was stated to have been found in the 1940's.

At some stage William Broughton had his initials scored on his souvenir, and the crude perforations of the metal suggest its probable use as a marker of some description at the farm, Lachlan Vale.

Thus both *Charlotte* pieces complement each other, revealing a fascinating numismatic facet of our beginnings.

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THE SILVER CHARLOTTE MEDAL



THE CHARLOTTE AT ANCHOR/IN BOTANY BAY/JANY TH 20, 1788.



SAILED/THE CHARLOTTE OF/LONDON FROM SPIT HEAD THE/13 OF MAY 1787.BOUND FOR BOTANY/BAY
 IN TH ISLAND OF NEW HOLLAND/ARRIV'D AT TENERIFF TH 4 OF JUNE IN/LAT 28.13 N LONG 16.23 W
 DEPART'D IT/10 D ARRIV'D AT RIO JANEIRO 6 OF AUG IN/LAT 22.54 S LONG 42.38 W DEPART'D IT THE/5 OF
 SEPR ARRIV'D AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE THE/14 OCTR IN LAT 34.29 S LONG 18.29E/DEPART'D IT TH 13
 OF NOV^r AND MADE THE/SOUTH CAPE OF NEW HOLLAND THE 8 OF
 Jany 1788 in Lat 43.32 S
 Long 146.56 E arrived at Botany Bay
 the 20 of Jan'y the Charlotte in Co in
 Lat 34.00 South Long 151.00 East distance
 from great Britan
 Miles
 13106

Size 74mm

THE COPPER CHARLOTTE MEDAL



SAIL'D THE/CHARLOTTE IN CO/FROM SPIT HEAD TH 13 OF/MAY BOUND FOR BOTANY/BAY IN THE
 ISLAND OF NEW/HOLLAND ARRIV'D AT TENERIFF TH/4 OF JUNE 1787 IN LAT 28.13 N/LONG 16.23
 DEPART'D TH 10 DO/ARRIV'D AT RIO JANERIO TH 6 OF/AUG IN LAT 22.54 LONG 42.38 W/DEPART'D TH 5 OF
 SEPR AND/ARRIV'D AT THE CAPE OF GOOD/HOPE TH 14 OF OCTR IN/LAT 34.29 S LONG 18.29 EAST/DEPT'D
 TH 14 OF NOVR/MADE THE SOUTH/CAPE OF NEW



HOLLAND JANY/TH 8. 1788 IN LAT 43.32/S LONG 146.56 E ARRIV'D/AT BOTANY BAY TH 20 OF JANY/IN LAT
 34. SOUTH/LONG 151 EAST DISTANCE/FROM GREAT BRITAN MILES/13106/WB

Size 47mm