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# Australian value-stated, service and amusement tokens and checks

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This paper looks at the use of value-stated tokens and checks—those that show a monetary value, usually on one side—that were, or still are, in use in Australia. The following is an overview of their use, which falls approximately between 1870 and the 1950s, and covers the whole of Australia. More detailed attention has been given to gaming machine tokens (although some technically are not value-stated) as these are integral to the story. In Australia, gaming machines were almost exclusively used in the States on the eastern seaboard and their use during this period was seriously affected by laws of prohibition. In fact there was one firm located in Western Australia, George McMullen of Perth (July, 1901), that made machines for this industry and three firms on the east coast, the best known being Buchanan in Sydney. It can be assumed that the Western Australian firm supplied the local or State market.

## Value-stated tokens

Value-stated tokens were an early form of loyalty card. Proprietors would reward customers with a token showing a value equivalent of say 5% or 10% of the amount of their purchase, in this way encouraging the customer to return to the store or business and spend the token on additional purchases. Effectively, this was a method for giving a discount for selected goods.

Some of the businesses that embraced this form of discount included butchers,

cafes, hotels, tailors and clothiers, hardware and general merchants, ironmongers, jewellers and even a billiard parlour. The most common values were in the 3d to 5/- range, however, denominations as low as ½d and as high as £5 are known, and were made by many medal makers in Australia. Regrettably, most makers did not record their names on the tokens, and the invoices and other documents relating to the purchases have mostly not been located.

Club tokens or checks (club money) are by far the most common value-stated pieces encountered. The more exclusive the club, the more likely a wider range of values will be found; up to 20/- in some cases. In the clubs where tokens were in use, the usual arrangement was that upon a member tendering, say, a £1 note to the bartender or steward, the former would be given 10/- in coinage of the realm, plus 10/- or occasionally 11/- in club money, to be used in the club for its services or amusements.

The numerous types of clubs that issued tokens include commercial travellers, recreational, services, sporting, lodge, graziers, professional or gentlemen's as well as religious, even those with a literary or musical interest. In this category, the bulk of the pieces are 6d or 1/-, although denominations up to 5/- do exist. The tokens come in different metals, finishes and sizes and are sometimes holed. Some venues had their tokens otherwise marked so as to record the revenue from the various areas of

activity. These differences made it easier to identify values and where they were used within the premises.

While most of the above-mentioned pieces showed the business or venue's name on them, some used stock tokens for economic reasons. The stock tokens had a value stamped on one side and were plain on the reverse. Sometimes the blank side had a counter-stamped letter or number, the numeral possibly indicating that the piece came from a barber shop that employed many barbers. This was used as an efficient means for the owner to record individual productivity of the employees.

### **Gaming machines and their tokens**

In clubs it was most common from the 1920s to find at least one to three gaming machines, sometimes called poker or fruit machines, the only difference being the window showing cards or images of fruit. These gambling 'slot machines' were predominately manufactured in America, and the suppliers also provided tokens for their machines. That is why many of these overseas tokens are encountered in Australia in accumulations of old coins.

One of the earliest poker machines to come to Australia was *The Little Model Card Machine* made by Sittman & Pitt of Brooklyn, N.Y. during the period 1891–1911. This model originally came with slots accepting U.S. currency, and was easily modified to accept Australian three-penny pieces; this made it popular in Australia. Sometime later these machines were modified again to accept only tokens, and these pieces were made in Australia and bore the name of the club. Due to indecisions as to whether it was legal to have gaming machines, the owners had to

take the initiative and have them modified, yet again, to accommodate a different size token. The pieces declared, 'PROPERTY OF MACHINE' or 'AMUSEMENT ONLY', or had similar wording. The machines were later converted, for a fourth time, to give mints, gum, or cigars as payout, and thus were clearly for amusement only and not for gambling.

During the 1930s to the 1950s the biggest name in gaming machines was Charles Shelley of Sydney, who virtually single-handedly controlled the supply of machines and tokens. He sold or, alternatively, let out his equipment in many ways including hire, or took a share in the profit, usually a 50% split with no risk to the club.

In 1939 there was a general prohibition in New South Wales on gambling in clubs and hotels. The enforcement of the government's new direction caused hardship for most clubs, as they relied on the remuneration generated by the machines, and so ways had to be found to make up the shortfall. Some owners placed a levy on members, while others relaxed the entry requirements to becoming a member in the community from which prospective members were drawn, thereby increasing membership.

Prior to 1939 there had not been much of a slot machine industry in Australia compared to overseas. One example of an Australian machine was *The Australia*; it became perhaps the best known machine and was made by A.O. Buchanan, one of only three Sydney manufacturers. It was produced and in service from 1937 to about 1940 when the prohibition laws were enforced.

With the arrival of American servicemen in Australia during World War II came

counter-top gaming machines and the profits from these subsidized drinks in the officers' wet (alcohol provided) canteens. At the end of the war the 'GIs' returned to their country and left behind their machines and Charles Shelley (Bueschel, p 127), realizing the potential, swooped on as many machines as he could find, even French-made units (which, incidentally, were illegal in the country of origin), and put them into storage to be used sometime in the future.

In 1948, when poker and amusement machine laws were amended in NSW, Shelley brought some of his 'ex GI' machines out of storage, had them re-cased and modified to comply with the new law, and by doing so helped to rejuvenate the amusement machine industry. His *Shelspeshel* is one such single-reel example. Judging by the number of Shelley machine tokens surviving, his business must have been extensive.

Although the use or ownership of the old poker or fruit machines today may be illegal in most States, there appears to be no such restriction on owning the tokens used in them. These tokens, along with business, club value-stated and service tokens, are a permanent reminder of a bygone era and are now collectable in their own right.

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(See Plates of Figures on the following two pages)



Figure 1. Obverse and reverse Charles Shelley Pty Ltd, Sydney, Shilling Special Award, 32.5mm, copper.  
Dean Stock 286.



Figure 2. Obverse and reverse Charles Shelley Pty Limited (Sydney), 10/-, 18mm, nickel.  
Dean Stock 272.



Figure 3. Obverse and reverse C. Shelley, Box 2294M, G.P.O., Syd(ney), no value, 22.5mm, nickelled.  
Dean Stock 249.



Figure 4. Obverse and reverse R.Q.Y.C. (Royal Queensland Yacht Club, Brisbane), 20/-, 24mm, aluminium.  
Dean Club 157.



Figure 5. Obverse and reverse B.G. Wilson & Co, Ironmongers, Brisbane, 1/-, 31mm, brass.  
Dean Business 326.



Figure 6. Obverse and reverse John White (Grocer), Gympie (Qld), 2/6, 27mm, brass.  
Dean Business 321.



Figure 7. Obverse and reverse Tatts (Tattersall's Club) Brisbane, no value, 21mm, brass.  
Dean Amusement 288.



Figure 8. Obverse and reverse Maryborough & Wide Bay Club (Qld) 1d, 24mm, copper.  
Dean Club 117.



Figure 9. Obverse and reverse C.T.A. of NSW (Commercial Travellers' Association, Sydney) 1/-, copper, 21mm.



Figure 10. Obverse and reverse NSW Leagues' Club (Sydney), 1/-, aluminium, 23mm.



Figure 11. Obverse and reverse V.N. & M.C. (Victorian Naval & Military Club, Melbourne), 1s, brass, 23mm.



Figure 12. Obverse and reverse Tattersall's Club, Melbourne, 6d, brass, 24mm.



Figure 13. Obverse and reverse Auto-Car Club, Tasmania, 3d, copper, 23mm.



Figure 14. Obverse and reverse M.C. (Masonic Club, Tasmania), 2/6, brass, 27mm.



Figure 15. Obverse and reverse W.A. Club (West Australian Club, Perth), 6d, copper, 23mm.



Figure 16. Obverse and reverse R.S.A.Y.S. (Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron, Adelaide), 6d, aluminium, 25mm.

