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# Noah Shreeve and his brass advertising tokens

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Noah Shreeve was an Englishman who migrated to colonial South Australia twice and died in Britain.\* He issued two near identical brass advertising tokens and these are included in Arthur Andrews' *Australasian Tokens and Coins; a handbook* (Sydney 1921). Andrews wrote, 'These pieces were not intended to circulate as small change, although in some instances they were taken in place of a halfpenny'. The tokens are not dated, but they do depict a young head of Queen Victoria. This article hypothesises more precisely when they were struck and used.

## Noah Shreeve

Noah Shreeve was born in Swaffham, in Norwich in about 1821. In 1840 Shreeve was tried at Norfolk for larceny and sentenced to four months imprisonment. The following year he married Susannah (nee Clark/e) and described himself as a gardener. The English census for the same year records they were living in London Street, Swaffham, with a Maria Clark (probably Susannah's 14 or 15 year old sister). By 1845 he was no longer a gardener and had acquired a 'baking office'. The 1851 census records that the Shreeves had moved to Ash Close, Swaffham and Noah and Susannah had five children. The 1856 census records Noah as a 'baker and Gardner'.<sup>1</sup>

In 1856 the Shreeves decided to leave England and start a new life in South Australia. They boarded the *Eliza* at Southampton in May 1856; by then Noah and Susannah had seven children aged between 1 and 15 years, but one was not well enough to travel.<sup>2</sup> The ship sailed under the auspices of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners and had on board some three-hundred and seventy emigrants.

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\* I thank Professor Walter R Bloom for supplying the German journal details; Dr David L. Briggs for supplying image of N. Shreeves book cover and general comments; Dena Davies for some of the personal information on Noah Shreeve—[rdee@tpg.com.au](mailto:rdee@tpg.com.au); Simon Gray for pointing out the Benjamin Fielding advertising piece similarity to the single 'T' Shreeve piece; Thomas Hocknell for supplying information on similar pieces to Shreeves; and Noble Numismatics for providing the images: Nobles Lot 1602 Sale 87 (Apr 08) (one T), and Nobles Lot 798 Sale 82 (Jul 06) (two 'T').

1 My thanks to Dr David L Briggs for this information.

2 My thanks again to Dr Briggs.

The *Eliza* arrived in Adelaide on the 20th August<sup>3</sup> and for the first twelve days in South Australia, Susannah and the children remained on board while Noah looked for work and accommodation, as was the custom at that time.

Shortly after arriving in Adelaide he found a two room cottage to rent for five shillings a week. His health was so poor that he could not work for a while, and he was given some government assistance for three weeks. He eventually found temporary work labouring at a steam mill where he used a pickaxe and shovel earning seven shillings a day. During this time he sent his eldest daughter Susannah out to work for ten shillings a week plus board; the others were too young to work. He was a member of The Manchester Unity Order of Odd Fellows and, as he had experience of being a baker, they raised £10 for him to establish a bakehouse, but that venture proved unsuccessful. He then became a man servant to a parliamentarian for thirteen weeks, but left on account of Mrs. Shreeve's health. He went back to labouring for six months, digging a cellar, and then being a bricklayer's assistant until this kind of work became so scarce that Shreeve turned to hawking tea and coffee door to door. This eventually led to him supplying shops in the suburbs. Bad health continued to plague him and his family. After two years in Adelaide he became seriously ill to the point of dying, but his health recovered after a couple of months. He was able to work again and managed to find larger accommodation for his family. The house he rented was in Robe Terrace, off Waymouth Street in the city. It had four rooms, and he turned the front room into a shop—number 2; the house number was 4, the rent was thirteen shillings and six pence per week. Being a go-getter he was not satisfied with just waiting for customers to come to his shop; he continued his rounds in the city and suburbs taking orders for his wares.

In March 1860 he accused John Jesse Robinson of stealing from his shop, but Robinson was acquitted<sup>4</sup> and Shreeve had to make a public apology.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the seventh year in Adelaide he calculated that he had earned £9,000 and saved just a few hundred pounds. He had four children born in Adelaide two of whom died in infancy. In 1864 he yearned to return to England and sold his wares at closing-down prices.<sup>6</sup> He sailed alone to Melbourne in the *Penola* and there he boarded the *Great Britain* bound for England. In London later that year he self-published *A Short history of South Australia* 1864,<sup>7</sup> which was to a large extent autobiographical but included local

3 *The South Australian Government Gazette* 1866 pp. 91-92

4 *The South Australian Advertiser* 6 March 1860 p3.

5 *South Australian Register*, 20 March 1860, p1.

6 *South Australian Register* 8 July 1864 p1.

7 The full title of this book is; *A Short history of South Australia by Noah Shreeve a Government Emigrant after a residence of eight years in that colony*. Much of this book was the source of his private life in this article.

wages and cost of groceries. It made life in South Australia seem like a paradise.

Shreeve returned to Adelaide in June 1865 in the *Coonatto* as a cabin passenger, and had 55 packages and 13 cases with him.<sup>8</sup> Shortly afterwards he set up business at 150 Hindley Street as a wholesale and retail importer.<sup>9</sup> His advertisements in August 1866 in the *South Australian Register* records that he had for sale at wholesale and retail prices, copying-presses, embossing-presses, Hink's and Wells's pens, gold-plated pens, Walkden's ink, Electro-Plated Teapots, American clocks, eight-day English clocks with long cases with phases of the moon and days of the month, French bedsteads, iron stretchers, looking-glasses, combs, brooches, brushes, paper, envelopes, Day-books, ledgers, China, concertinas, guns, opera and field glasses, slates, slate pencils, writing-desks, work-boxes, tea-trays, waiters, and many other things.

By 1870 he was trading from premises at 129 Rundle Street. Wanting to increase his business he wrote to three Adelaide newspapers complaining that as he had paid ten per cent import duty he was entitled to his share of business with the Board of Education. The outcome was not recorded in the papers. By 1872 his shop was back in Waymouth Street. According to newspaper shipping lists he last imported goods in October 1872.<sup>10</sup>

By 1876 he was recorded as living in Kensington (now an inner-eastern suburb). By 1879 he was residing in Jerningham Street, North Adelaide and stayed there till 1882. It appears that he returned to England around this time with a son but without his wife. His death certificate records that he died on 28 April 1907 at the City of London Infirmary. He was described as being aged 86 and 'formerly a Journeyman Baker', cause of death; Senile Decay. His estranged wife predeceased him. She died 10 March 1891 at Norwood, South Australia, at her son's (Frederick James Shreeve) home.<sup>11</sup>

### The advertising tokens

Shreeve's two advertising tokens share a common obverse and have two reverses. The obverse text reads N. SHREEVE ADELAIDE S.A IMPORTER & GENERAL AGENT. The reverses both depict a young head Queen Victoria and the words: VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN. The difference is in the spelling of BRITAIN one is correctly spelt and the other has double 'T's. Thomas Hockenhull of the British Museum states that Thomas Pope [a Birmingham Die-sinker of the nineteenth century] was the only manufacturer to put a mark on his Victoria bust designs [of this size piece], which makes matters a little difficult to confirm who made the tokens. Hockenhull claims that the single 'T' die was also used for at least two British pieces, Benjamin Fielding's and

8 *South Australian Register* 21 June 1865 p2.

9 *South Australian Register* 29 August 1866 p1.

10 *The South Australian Advertiser* 16 October 1872, p4.

11 *South Australian Register* 12 March 1891 p4.

Philip Berry's, who were both from Oldham (near Manchester). There is a die flaw at the bottom of the Queen's neck, right, on all three tokens which is quite easy to spot and the hair strands draped at the temple are also distinctive. Hockenull remarks on the single and double 'T' dies:

The bust design appears to be well executed and the engraver has neatly captured the vaguely benevolent smile, better known from the Wyon engravings. Besides the aforementioned Oldham tokens I have not come across this exact die on any other English farthing token.

The other variety of Shreeve token of which I am aware has inscription spelled BRITAIN and the bust of Victoria is a fraction more crudely portrayed. It would appear unlikely to have come from the same manufacturer as the Oldham tokens (unless, of course, an illiterate apprentice had been hired the previous day...)

In 1871 one of Shreeve's pieces entered the South Australian Numismatic Collection, then held in the South Australian Institute building in North Terrace; it was referred to as a 'token' by the donor, Mr Kay, who was the Institution's secretary. He had a casual interest in numismatics and worked at the Adelaide Assay Office where the Adelaide pounds were minted. This donation was recorded in a local paper, but surprisingly not in the coin register. The surviving ticket records it was a one 'T' variety. In June 1921 Miss Sedley Towler, who was in charge of the numismatic collection at that time, donated one with a double 'T'.

Heinrich (Henry) Heuzenroeder, a contemporary South Australian numismatist of long standing, described it as a farthing (with one T) in the German numismatic journal, *Berliner Münzblätter* in the January 1890 issue. In 1895 Walter Roth, a highly regarded numismatist and anthropologist who was then living in Queensland, referred to them as advertising tokens as they advertised a business and were not intended for circulation – a metal calling card.<sup>12</sup>

Andrews allocated reference numbers for the Shreeve pieces—494 and 495. He listed them under copper and bronze tokens and stated that they were not intended to circulate as small change but occasionally did. The British Museum on their website refer to this kind of piece as an 'advertising token' and state that:

Throughout the nineteenth century, advertising was used by British shopkeepers and traders to make their businesses known to customers. Using copper [or brass] tokens was one way of promoting a trader's name and the goods he sold... While the printed trade card was made of paper, an easily degraded material, the copper token was more durable. It was probably given out to established customers when

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<sup>12</sup> *The Queenslander* 21 September 1895 p555.

they visited the ... merchant's shop.

Shreeve was running his import business from around 1860 to about 1872 (except for the period he was in England), and the latter date almost coincides with the year the first one was donated to the SA numismatic collection. Surprisingly, given the token was clearly intended to advertise his business, it does not show his street details, just simply Adelaide. Many Australian and New Zealand tradesmen's tokens of the 1850s and 1860s did not record their full addresses, but they fulfilled the general purposes of providing change, making a profit for the merchants and advertising. A plausible answer in Shreeve's case is that they were most likely made in 1864 or 1865 when Shreeve was in England, and had not yet rented business premises in Adelaide.

As mentioned earlier, two dies were used for the Queen's portrait, one 'T' and a double 'T'. It has been claimed that the later example is rarer, however neither piece seems to be rarer than the other. Noble Auction electronic archives, reveals that they have offered seven examples that have one 'T' and six double 'TT' (some may have been offered more than once). A plausible explanation for the two reverse dies is that the double 'T' Great 'Brittain' error die was made first. When this example was shown to Shreeve he would have immediately recognised the error. He was literate and had just returned to England on a ship named *Great Britain*. Presumably he accepted the tokens, possibly at a bargain price just above their bullion value, and the order was redone with the correct spelling. To make the misspelt die, a portrait hub and letter punches were used. The portrait hub on the second die is very different to that of the first which implies the manufacturer had a number of these hubs, and used them on other pieces. The two Queen Victoria portraits on Shreeve's tokens are similar in style to those used on gaming tokens, and probably these portrait hubs were used over and over again at random.<sup>13</sup>

Shreeve's advertising token is the only known example of this kind of token used in Adelaide in the 1860s and 70s, which suggests that their makers did not promote them in South Australia. It would appear to be an early example in all the Australian colonies, but further research in this much neglected field would need to be undertaken before any such claim could be made with confidence. The lack of local contemporary examples adds weight to the suggestion that Shreeve decided to order his token while in England where they were relatively common and he would have seen them being used. It dates them circumstantially to 1864/5. It explains why they have no street address, the reason for two reverse dies, and why they occur in roughly equal numbers. They were used from 1865 when Shreeve returned to Adelaide and until 1872 when he closed his shop. Thus they are correctly identified advertising tokens, even though they may sometimes have been used as small change.

13 Comparing these punches with gaming tokens with the Queen's portrait would be a fascinating research project however it is outside the scope of this article.



**Andrews 494:**

Obverse: N. SHREEVE ADELAIDE. S.A round edge, IMPORTER / & / GENERAL / AGENT in four lines within. Reverse: Head of Queen Victoria in centre, VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN round edge. 24 mm, brass, reeded rim.

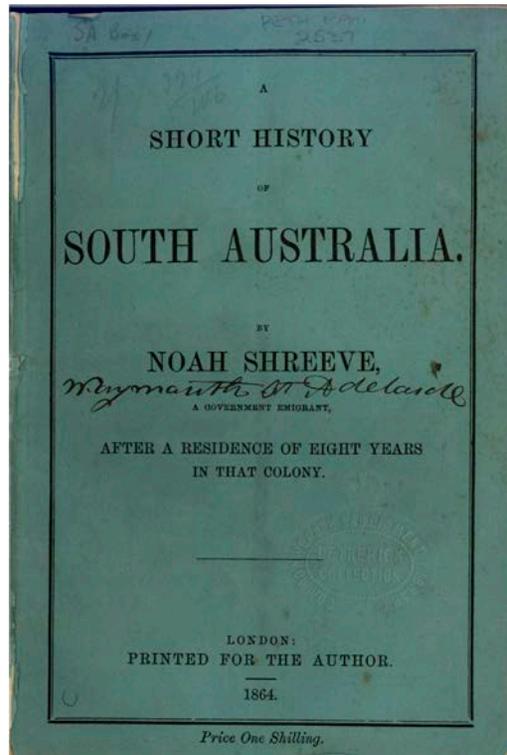


**Andrews 495:**

Obverse: N. SHREEVE ADELAIDE. S.A round edge, IMPORTER / & / GENERAL / AGENT in four lines within. Reverse: Head of Queen Victoria in centre, VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN round edge. 24 mm, brass, reeded rim. One recorded in copper, see (Spink Auctions (Australia) sale July 1988 lot 1773.



Detail of the double "T" (Andrews 495).



A Short History of South Australia by Noah Shreeve, image courteous Dena Davies

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