

# Numismatic Association of Australia



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# South Australian WWI soldiers' 'forget-me-not' pennies

Peter Lane

## Abstract

*This article records a uniquely South Australian form of love token made during the First World War. The tokens were made outside army camps from pennies in circulation and were given by recently enlisted soldiers to their mothers or loved ones shortly before embarking from Adelaide. A brief background is given of earlier love tokens to provide a context for this form of keepsake. Known details of the giver and recipient of the love token are recorded. Close examination of the lettering on the tokens confirms that multiple letter punches of each number and letter were used, but the overall style suggests they were all made by the one hand.*

Forget-me-not pennies are base metal coins which have been hammered with letter and numeral punches to record a farewell message between two people. They were made a century ago when war was raging around much of the world, at a time when being Australian was synonymous with being British.<sup>1</sup>

These pennies may be defined as trench art. This describes a decorative item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, or civilians, with the manufacture directly linked to armed conflict or its consequences, though few items were actually made in the 'trenches'. The description covers artifacts from the Napoleonic Wars to the present day.

This year we celebrate the centenary of the beginning of the First World War, or the Great War as it was called prior to the Second World War. The Australian War Memorial (AWM) was established in Canberra in 1941, and a plea went out for personal items belonging to servicemen and servicewomen. The AWM was looking for diaries, letters and photos; anything that could tell a personal story. However the AWM did not collect any examples of the forget-me-not penny.<sup>2</sup>

These humble pennies were given out by recently enlisted servicemen to their sweethearts, family members and friends shortly before embarkation on overseas service. Little is

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1 I would like to thank Walter Bloom for his help in preparation of this article.

2 No example is recorded in their on-line collection data base.

known about these hand-made mementoes as they were unofficial; the few known pieces have all been found in South Australia. The writer has contacted the Army Museum of South Australia, and collectors of militaria, Australiana, and numismatica, but none have seen them. They were illegally made as they defaced the coin of the realm, and most likely made as *foreignnes* (work done for private gain without an employer's permission) in machine shops where letter and number stamps were readily available. All the known coins in this series have been made by using British Victorian and Edwardian pennies and Australian George V pennies. During WWI there were more British than Australian bronze coins circulating in Australia as Australia only started to mint its own pennies in 1911. Of the twelve pieces listed in this article, nine are British and three are Australian coins. The Army Museum of South Australia's retired curator and authority on South Australian military matters, Sven Kuusk, states that three WWI South Australian barracks; Keswick, Mitcham (Colonel Light Gardens), and Morphettville (racecourse) had workshops. The pennies may have been overstruck in one of these workshops or by a local blacksmith. The keepsakes were given by soldiers based in various barracks including Exhibition Camp in North Terrace Adelaide which apparently did not have facilities to make them.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore considered that the forget-me-nots were made outside the camps and ordered by soldiers on a word of mouth basis. The forget-me-not pennies were highly sentimental and affordable (being made from a penny and relatively quick to stamp out) for the private on five shillings a day. We do not know why they ceased being produced.

It is difficult to estimate how many forget-me-nots were made, however it is reasonable to assume that the number was relatively limited compared with the number of men who enlisted. In South Australia there were 34,959 enlistments (a ninth of the Australian Imperial Forces including Navy personnel).

These forget-me-nots (love tokens) made from pennies followed a tradition of farewell tokens. British convicts gave them to loved ones shortly before departure to the other side of the world. These British examples were usually intricately engraved on large 1797 pennies, and mainly free-hand engraved or stippled using a nail or some pointed object.

The WWI forget-me-nots have the reverses smoothed down. Australian soldiers were fighting for 'King and Country' so they did not want to remove the monarch's image and in no example has it been machined off the pennies. The sole example known to the author that is stamped on the obverse is in fact stamped on both sides, and even in this case only the reverse was smoothed down. Most have two sizes for capital letters, some just one, and the numerals 1, 2, 3 and 7 have serifs. One has a red substance inlaid into the lettering, two have been silvered, one has been holed, and two have a ring attached to the top so they could be worn. The known forget-me-nots with regimental

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<sup>3</sup> Private communication with Sven Kuusk.

and battalion numbers shown are only from units raised in South Australia. As they all appear similar in style, this suggests they were made by the same hand or at least in the same workshop in South Australia. A multiple variety of punches for each letter was used. As the maker would have had a batch of individual letters to use, in the same way as a printer would have type-set a document (pre-computer age), and these were used randomly. Appendices i and ii illustrate the differences in some of the punches.

### **e wording**

All have FORGET ME NOT, and frequently FROM [then first name] WITH LOVE TO [then first name or a relationship] and sometimes a service number, battalion details and an embarkation date. The lack of details in most cases makes it often impossible to confirm the identity of the presenter and receiver. Service numbers used in WWI were not unique to any one serviceman and were often re-used many times, making it difficult to confirm the presenter's name.

### **One example found in change**

The forget-me-nots would have been sentimentally precious objects to those who received them. It is easy to imagine them being kept for life regardless whether the servicemen returned or not. On one occasion somehow one slipped into change. It was noticed by Mrs K Kerin of Kapunda, South Australia in April 1919. She wrote to the Kapunda Herald offering to give it back to the 'rightful owner'. The paper wrote it up on 11 April 1919 with the heading 'AN INTERESTING PENNY'. Kerin described the coin as being an Edward VII penny, and stamped over the king's image '3906, 9<sup>th</sup> of 27<sup>th</sup>'.

The other side, ground smooth and stamped "Forget me not. From Jimmy to mother with love". Nothing was ever mentioned in the paper if the rightful owner came forward to ask for the penny, but in this case the presenter's and receiver's names have been identified. It was presented by Private James Warren Stewart, number 3906, of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion to his mother Mrs Annie Augusta Stewart of 103 Gilbert Street, Adelaide. On official army records James listed his address as the same as his mother's and described himself as single, of the Church of England faith, an ostler (stableman) and 21 years of age. He embarked on 7 February 1916 on HMAT A28 Miltiades. By the time he arrived in Europe the battalion was stationed on the Western front and they remained there for the duration of the war. He returned home.

### **e host coins**

All the host coins sighted by the author have been Victorian Young Head (1860-1894), Edward VII (1902-1910) bronze British pennies, and George V Australian bronze pennies (1911 to 1915 (English dies)). As the dates and mint marks were stamped on the smoothed reverses it is impossible to date the coins.

## Dating the stamping

At least four ships were used to transport the known soldiers who gave forget-me-nots to loved ones. These ships left Adelaide between 2 December 1915 and 9 June 1916.

## Catalogue of forget-me-nots

The order of the text is given how it was meant to be read, and not exactly how it appears on the coin. Dots and oval shapes devices have not been described.



- 1) Obverse: Queen Victoria, young head.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / TO / CHARLIE / WITH LOVE FROM / FATHER / 1574  
Lettering has red in full.  
Host coin: British penny

The token was given by 21-year-old Private George Baxter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Horse Regiment to his son Charles Raymond Baxter who was born in 1914 at Encounter Bay.<sup>4</sup> His mother was Gladys Matilda née Norton.<sup>5</sup> On 29 December 1916 at the Goolwa Institute Hall, a farewell was given by the mayor, supported by the local reverend and pastor, to the 'Goolwa boys' including George Baxter who were leaving for the front.

The farewell was also a welcome home party to a wounded private. Seven 'lads' who had signed up and were about to leave for the front were each presented with a silver mounted pipe or cigarette case and were wished a safe return. The locals claimed Goolwa to be one of the most patriotic towns in the State. Out of a total population of 600 (men, women, and children), '60 odd' had volunteered for the front of whom two had been killed and several wounded.<sup>6</sup> On 11 January 1916 Baxter embarked on HMAT A30 Borda from Adelaide for the front line.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Australian War Memorial Embarkation Rolls – on-line

5 [http://www.genealogysa.org.au/resources/online-databases.html?option=com\\_search&ref=search](http://www.genealogysa.org.au/resources/online-databases.html?option=com_search&ref=search)

6 *Daily Herald*, 1 January 1916, p.6

7 Australian War Memorial Embarkation Rolls – online

Several months later on 25 March George's wife had another child, E e Lorraine, and the newspaper notice stated he was ghting in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> In 1917 he was injured when two trains collided and he sustained a crushed hand. When he returned to Goolwa in December that year he was given a hero's 'welcome home' social party with the mayor present.<sup>9</sup>



2) Obverse: Crowned head of George V.

Reverse: FORGET ME NOT TO EVA WITH LOVE FROM FRED 3954 DEC 2 1915

Host coin: Australian penny

he serviceman who presented this forget-me-not was Frederick George Watson, born in London, England. He enlisted on 8 September 1915 at Adelaide describing himself as aged 26 years, single, a labourer of Mt Barker, and a Methodist. His serial number was 3954 which appeared on the keepsake. His mother was Mrs E T Westley of Mt Barker. His next of kin was recorded as Evelyn (Eva) Stephens of 226 Gouger Street, Adelaide, and she was the recipient of the forget-me-not. He embarked 2 December 1915 on the RMS Malwa for Alexandria. Watson held the ranks of private, corporal and sergeant and at one time lost his corporal stripe for misconduct. He served most of his time overseas in France and returned to Australia on 17 May 1919 on the Kildonian Castle and was discharged 29 June 1919.<sup>10</sup> Frederick married Evelyn but sadly she died at the age of 29 on 17 October 1920 at the Royal Adelaide Hospital.<sup>11</sup> Frederick died in 1931 at the same hospital.<sup>12</sup>

8 *The Advertiser*, 29 March 1916, p.6

9 *The Register*, 20 December 1917, p.9

10 Australian War Memorial and Australian National Archives

11 *Chronicle*, 23 October 1920, p.29

12 *News*, 6 June 1931, p.8



- 3) Obverse: Head of Edward VII.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT FROM GILL TO DAISY WITH LOVE  
Silvered  
Ring attached  
Host coin: British penny

This specimen has not been identified with a particular soldier. The penny was sold on Ebay on 8 October 2011 and mis-described as a half-crown. (This is evident as 'IMP' in the king's title does not appear on British Edward VII half crowns, nor does it have a reeded edge like the coronet that has similar wording to the penny). Permission to use the image was given by vendor: Robin & Maxine [bluevenom00 on Ebay].



- 4) Obverse: Queen Victoria, young head.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped; FORGET ME NOT / FROM / JAMES / 387 / WITH LOVE / TO / FLORRIE  
Host coin: British penny

No army records could be found under 'James 387' as having sailed from Adelaide. He may have enlisted in South Australia and then been discharged prior to embarkation.



**No images available for this penny (No. 5)**

- 5) Obverse: Edward VII counterstamped 3906 9<sup>th</sup> of 27<sup>th</sup>  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, Forget me not. From Jimmy to mother with love. [As described in the newspaper which would have used lower case text (the token wording is probably in uppercase, like all the tokens).]  
Host coin: British penny

Refer to: *One example found in change*, Page 3 for details.



- 6) Obverse: Queen Victoria, young head.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / FROM / LES / TO / FRIENDS  
Host coin: British penny

Note: This is the only example known to have lathe marks.

This forget-me-not is impossible to attribute as there were 567 Leslie's (with a first or second name) who embarked at 'Adelaide' and 'Outer Harbour' (near Port Adelaide) during the war, and there is no receiver's name.



- 7) Obverse: Queen Victoria, young head.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / FROM / LLEW / TO / MOTHER / 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER 1915  
Host coin: British penny

This token was given by Private Rees Llewellyn Taylor, born at Glenelg South Australia, aged 21 years when he enlisted at Adelaide on 23 August 1915. His serial number was 3765 and he served in the 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion. He described himself as a carpenter living at

30 Spencer Terrace, St Leonards, Glenelg. His next of kin was his mother Edie Jane Taylor (the recipient) of the same address. He embarked in Adelaide, 2 December 1915 on the RMS Malwa. Upon arriving in Egypt he developed tuberculosis and was hospitalised there, as well as in France and England. Taylor left England in October 1916 on the hospital ship SS Karoola arriving back in Adelaide on 1 December 1916.



- 8) Obverse: Queen Victoria, young head.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / FROM / SAM / 667 / TO / SAMUEL / WITH LOVE  
Ring attached.  
Host coin: British penny

The token was given by Sam (Samuel) Fielden who was born in 1883 in the County of Frome (the mid-north of South Australia). He married Edith Harriet (née Walding) and they had one son, Samuel James who was born in 1913 in Kadina (died 2 March 2001 in Adelaide). (Samuel James was the recipient, but by the time he was given it, Sam and Edith had separated, and the baby was living with his grandmother Mary Ann Fielden in 11 Symon Place, Adelaide.<sup>13</sup>) On 17 February 1916 Sam enlisted as a private describing himself as single, a baker, and of the Church of England faith. His next of kin was his mother.<sup>14</sup> Prior to enlisting Sam had attended Kadina Public School and worked for a few years for Arthur Henry Waters a baker of Carrington Street Adelaide. In January 1915 he was accused of embezzling Waters on three occasions totalling £8/12/7. Fielden and Waters must have reconciled as a year later Fielden appointed Waters as the executor of his Will.<sup>15</sup>

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13 [http://records.ancestry.com/Samuel\\_Fielden\\_records.ashx?pid=119344878](http://records.ancestry.com/Samuel_Fielden_records.ashx?pid=119344878) and Australian Archives Samuel Fielden WWI.

14 Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour – online

15 *Daily Herald*, 29 January 1915, p.3

Upon enlisting he commenced military training at Morphettville Army Camp,<sup>16</sup> and was a member of the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion, D company. On 9 June 1916 Fielden embarked from Adelaide on HMAT A19 Afric for the front line. He was transferred to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Battalion near Saint Quentin and was killed in action on 10 December 1916 near Bapaume, France. He has no known grave, but he is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France.<sup>17</sup> During Fielden's military service he paid the rent of his mother's home which helped her look after his son.



**Sam (Samuel) Fielden**  
Australian War Memorial  
ID Number. P09291.211

To commemorate the first anniversary of his death his mother published a poem in a local paper.

*He died, not in his native land, But under foreign skies:  
Far away from those who loved him  
In a hero's grave he lies.  
No loving mother's gentle hand  
To wipe the death dew from his brow,  
No token of love in that far off land  
To Mark the place where he sleepeth now.*

His brothers and sisters inserted the following poem.

*He gave his life for his country,  
For honor, faith, and right; With us his memory ever lives:  
He fought a noble fight.  
Midst the roaring of the battle,  
And the rain of shot and shell, Fighting for home and country,  
He like a hero fell.<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 February 1916, p.5

<sup>17</sup> Australian War Memorial records, Roll of Honour on-line

<sup>18</sup> *The Advertiser*, 10 December 1917, p.6



- 9) Obverse: head of Edward VII.  
Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / FROM / VICTOR / WITH LOVE / TO / ALMA / 9.27  
Host coin: British penny

The most likely giver was Victor Robin Sedgwick who embarked in February 1916 and had lived in an inner western suburb of Adelaide. The writer has been unable to connect this soldier with an 'Alma', but it is likely she was a girlfriend or sister. Museum Victoria has a sweetheart bracelet with Sedgwick's details. Its on-line collection describes Sedgwick and provides his background, with the following on the bracelet:

*Description:* Bracelet cut out of a single piece of brass, featuring the crude shape of Australia with an inscription within. Both ends of the thin bracelet arms end in loops – one holds a wire fastener, and the other receives the wire.

*Date made:* Possibly made in France during World War I.

Museum Victoria's Registration No HT 33621, dimensions 31mm (height), 64mm (Width).

Sweetheart bracelet from World War I, cut out of a single piece of brass, probably a shell casing, in the shape of Australia. The bracelet is inscribed '3911 PTE V.R. SEDGWICK AUST. CORPS CYCLIST BATT.' Victor Robin Sedgwick, from Hilton, South Australia, was 18 years old, just 5' 4 ½" (164cm) tall and working as a joiner when he enlisted on 25 August 1915. He needed his parents' permission to enlist, and selected his mother Mrs Rebecca Sedgwick of Davenport Terrace, Hilton, as his next of kin.

Victor embarked 7 February 1916 from Adelaide on the HMAT Miliades with the rank of Acting Corporal. He was sent to Egypt then on to England, and served in France. He escaped serious injury, and was only hospitalized for a period of sickness in France in 1918. He returned to Australia on 4 June 1919. The bracelet was acquired by Museum Victoria in Ballarat, and may be associated with 'Welcome Home' banner HT 33622.

While this bracelet does not conclusively connect the two items, the forget-me-not was acquired from an Adelaide coin dealer with a branch in Ballarat, which suggests the love token was probably also connected to Sedgwick.



- 10)** Obverse: Crowned head of George V.  
 Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FOR GET ME NOT FROM WILL  
 WITH LOVE TO MOTHER 816  
 Holed  
 Host coin: Australian penny

There was only one serviceman with the name of William with a service number 816 in South Australia and his full name was Henry William Jackson who was born at Burra, and enlisted on the 25 February 1916 at Port Pirie. He was 22 years old, married to Alice Ann Jackson of Bradbury Lane, Horsham Victoria and prior to enlisting was a seaman. He embarked 9 June 1916 on HMAT A19 Afric. He was wounded three times. Sam Fielden (token 8) was on the same ship and voyage as Jackson.



- 11)** Obverse: Head of Edward VII.  
 Reverse: Smoothed down and stamped, FORGET ME NOT / FROM / WILL /  
 TO / RUBY / WITH LOVE  
 Silvered  
 Ring attached  
 Host coin: British penny

William was an extremely common male's name during World War One. 3287 Williams embarked from South Australia, and approximately eight percent of enlisted men had that name. Ruby was also a very common name during this era and there is no further information on the forget-me-not. Its original provenance has been lost, thus it has proven impossible to identify the giver and receiver of the keepsake.



- 12) Obverse: Head of George V.  
Reverse: Only partly smoothed down and stamped, MIZPAH TO MOTHER WITH LOVE FROM JACK 583. The original legend has COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA visible, as is the inner ring.  
Silvered  
Ring attached  
Host coin: Australian Penny

While this example does not have the words "forget-me-not", it is a South Australian soldier's keepsake for his mother and it was stamped out like the other pennies recorded. Only part of the reverse was smoothed down, leaving the other details of the coin visible.

The Australian War Memorial records do not show a 'Jack' with a service number 583. As the nickname for John is Jack, a search under service number 583 revealed there were eight Johns. One was a South Australian and the most likely giver of the keepsake. His full name was John Wesley (sometimes misspelt as Westley) Stewart who enlisted at the age of eighteen, a carpenter's improver, of the Church of England faith, single and lived at Cochrane Street Ovingham, an inner western suburb of Adelaide. He enlisted on 29 January 1916 and his next of kin was his mother, Elizabeth Stewart of the same address. He undertook basic training at Morphettville Army Camp and embarked on 9 June 1916 from Adelaide on HMAT A19 Afric (the same camp, ship, and voyage as Samuel (Sam) Fielden; see forget-me-not number 8). Forget-me-not has a similar meaning to Mizpah which is a biblical word—"The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another" (Genesis 31:49). It has come to connote an emotional bond between people who are separated either physically or by death. Mizpah jewelry was common during World War I and earlier. Stewart served his war service in France, was wounded in action in September 1918 and returned to Australia on 20 May 1919.

## Summary

The forget-me-not penny was a form of keepsake made prior to departure for war zones. It was unique to South Australia as no similar examples have been found in other States. There is no clear indication where they were made, but probably in camps and/or blacksmiths shops. Examination of the letter punches has indicated that the person or persons who made the 'Forget Me Not' used letters at random. The forget-me-not penny provides a tangible reminder of the heart-felt side of departure between the soldier and someone who was dear to him.

## Appendix i.

### Survey of the small 'Forget'

The lettering appears to be individually stamped in thick and thin letters, with two sizes of the thick 'E' (same and smaller). There are two examples of 'O' in thick lettering (round and oval shape) and the same in thin lettering. All have serifs.



Charlie: Oval 'O', serifs, thick letters,



Sam: Round 'O', serifs, and thin lettering.



Eva : Oval 'O', serifs, small 'E' and thick letters



Llew: Oval 'O' small 'E', serifs and thick letters.



James: Round 'O', serifs and thick letters.



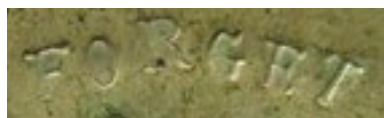
Victor: Oval 'O', serifs and thin letters.



Les: Oval 'O', serifs and thin letters.



Will to Mother: Round 'O', serifs and thin letters



Will to Ruby: Oval 'O', serifs and thin letters.

## Appendix ii

A comparison survey of some large letters used on the 'Forget Me Not' pennies of the eight with large numerals and letters.



Charlie: '1' rounded lines; '7' attened bottom stroke; 'A' at apex, serifs slight turned; 'E' has serifs (same as EVA); 'L' with one curved serif, thick and extended lines; 'R' serifs and medium size strokes (similar to Eva, Les, Llew—the difference may be only due to worn stamps or varied force when being struck).



Eva: '1' straight (same as Llew); 'A' apex at, serifs at, le stroke thinner than right; 'E' has serifs (same as Charlie) 'R' serifs and medium size strokes (similar to Charlie, Eva, Les and Llew—the difference may be due to worn stamps, or varied force when being struck).



James: 7 curved; 'A' apex at, serifs at, irregular le stroke; 'E' has no centre serif and lines extended; 'L' has serifs, thick lines vertical lines is tapered; 'R' serifs, medium thickness, right leg joins high up on other stroke.



Les: 'E' has serifs and thin lines; 'L' has serifs, thin lines (same as Les); 'R' thin letter, serifs and medium size strokes (similar to Charlie, Eva, Les and Llew—the difference may be due to worn stamps, or varied force when being struck).





Llew: 'L' straight (same as Eva); 'E' has serifs, thick lines; 'L' has serifs and thick lines (same as Charlie); 'R' serifs and medium size strokes (similar to Charlie, Eva and Les the difference may be due to worn stamps, or varied force when being struck); 'W' serifs, straight strokes.



Sam: 'A' pointed apex, serifs at, thin strokes and slightly larger stamp; 'E' has no centre serif, lines extended; 'L' has serifs and medium size strokes.



Victor: 'V' flattened bottom stroke (as Charlie), 'A' at apex, at serifs, left stroke thinner than right; 'L' has one curved serif, medium size stroke (same as Les); 'R' serifs and medium size strokes (similar to Charlie, Eva, Les and Llew the difference may be due to worn stamps, or varied force when being struck).



Will to Mother: 'E' no centre serif, lines extended and thin; 'L' at serifs, medium size lines (possibly same as Charlie and Sam); 'W' straight serifs, bent strokes.

### the author

Peter Lane is a regular contributor to the *JNAA*, *Australiana* and the recently ceased *Collectables Trader Magazine*, and is Honorary Numismatist at the Art Gallery of South Australia. He is interested in hearing if any other "forget-me-nots" have been found.

[pnj.lane@bigpond.com](mailto:pnj.lane@bigpond.com)