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# HISTORY OF GIPPSLAND TOKENS

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## GIPPSLAND

Gippsland is a large area covering south eastern Victoria from the hills of the Great Divide to coast. Gippsland was named after the governor of the day George Gipps, by Polish explorer Count Paul Strzelecki.

## EXPLORATION

### COUNT P. STRZELECKI

Strzelecki arrived in Sydney in 1839 and set about making himself known, seeking backing for exploration of the Australian Alps and Southern Victoria. One of his new found friends was James Macarthur, Macarthur had seen the coastal plains near Wilsons Promontory when he was blown ashore on a return voyage from Van Diemens Land aboard HMS Pelorus in 1839.

The pair agreed to travel together, Macarthur providing the majority of the money for the venture. A party of six set off from Sydney on 21st December 1839, Strzelecki climbing and naming Mt Kosciusko in March 1840. They continued and crossed the Great Divide and followed the Tambo River down (following McMillan's route), heading south westerly they crossed more heavily forested hills (later to bear his name), the Great swamp and on the 12th May 1840 they reached Westernport and the civilisation of Port Phillip (Melbourne).

In his report of their expedition addressed to the Governor, Strzelecki tabled his notes and named the area in which he had passed, from south of the Great Divide and east of Port Phillip as 'Gippsland', probably as a gesture for support, for Strzelecki to continue his work and fund further expeditions.

### A. McMILLAN

Angus McMillan arrived in Port Jackson in 1838, carrying a letter of introduction to Lachlan Macalister, owner of a station near Camden who gave him employment. He later moved to another of Macalister's properties near Delegate in 1839.

McMillan made a series of expeditions into Gippsland from 1839-1841, he is credited as

being its discoverer. His initial expedition was based from Macalister's station, leaving on the 28th May 1839, crossing the Snowy River, Mt McLeod and heading northwest they arrived at McFarlane's station at Omeo. Obtaining good views of coastal plains he returned to report to his employer. The latter was delighted and encouraged McMillan to explore further.

On his second attempt he blazed a track to Omeo, continuing south he set up base near Ensay on the Tambo exploring further south over hilly, heavily timbered country he was forced to return with the loss of a packhorse.

McMillan set off again in January 1840, intending to reach Corner Inlet, heading southwards they reached Lake Victoria (King), surrounded by excellent grazing land. They then travelled westerly, crossed and named rivers reaching as far as the Avon River before returning as supplies ran short.

McMillan returned in October 1840 with 500 cattle and set up a base on the Avon river. After more futile attempts to reach the coast, he finally gained success in February 1841 crossing the Latrobe and finally reaching the sea at Port Albert on the 14th February.

## COMMERCE

As Victoria was developing into a thriving colony, its trade was based mainly on agriculture, payable gold had been discovered in New South Wales by Hargraves in 1851, thus sparking a gold rush in New South Wales. People from Victoria left to make their fortune, a group of established Melbourne businessmen seeing the dangers offered a £ 200 reward for discovery of gold in Victoria.

A strike was soon to follow in Ballarat in the same year and thus the Victorian gold rush commenced. These combined diggings drew people from all walks of life. The population of Australia exploded. In Victoria in 1851 the people numbered 77,345, by 1861 that figure was an astonishing 540,322 persons.

The first discoveries of alluvial gold were in the Castlemaine, Ballarat area with discoveries in the Gippsland region occurring at

Gaffney Creek in 1859, Woods Point in 1861 and Walhalla in 1864. In the late 1840's Port Albert was a trading port for supplies to pastoralists of Gippsland, it was also the shipping outlet for cattle to markets in Melbourne and Tasmania.

Gold seekers wishing to exploit these finds in the Gippsland hills, did so by boarding a ship bound for Port Albert. At this time no track was through from Melbourne, thus bringing prosperity to the remote sea side settlement of Port Albert and surrounding areas, as miners travelled overland towards the diggings they required food, clothing, tools and shelter.

### TOKEN ISSUERS

Because of this prolific population explosion there was a chronic shortage of small coin for trading. To meet this extreme shortage of mainly copper coins, hardware suppliers, storekeepers, etc. issued their own copper coins during 1850 and 1860's. These issues were not legal tender, however the authorities tolerated their circulation. Later they were declared illegal by the various colonies as Imperial coinage became available.

Three businesses in Gippsland showed initiative and had unofficial coins manufactured in Melbourne to meet their needs. Values were one penny and followed the precedent set by other enterprises. The three traders in Gippsland were J. Davey of Sale, J. Leeson of Sale and Gippsland Hardware Company of Port Albert and Sale, details of these original businessmen who issued these Tokens are outlined below.



### JOHN D. LEESON

Mr John D. Leeson arrived in Australia from Ireland, he settled in Sale where in 1855-56 he set up a business as a Watchmaker and Fancy Goods dealer. His shop was situ-

ated in Foster St. and he traded under the 'Fancy Goods Museum' title.

He was known around the settlement as 'Spring-heeled Jack' on account of his lively way of getting about. He was much involved in the public affairs of the township, being elected Treasurer of the Sale Mechanics Institute in 1858.

The postal service around the district was very unsatisfactory, complaints were commonly made to the Postmaster in Melbourne. With the opening of a new Hotel in Sale, the post office was established within the property, D. Clark being postmaster.

Again the service was to be unsatisfactory and it was requested that the service be removed from a public house, a passing through post office official Mr McArthur inquired and recommended J.D. Leeson as postmaster and was later appointed. Two years later a Post Office was established in Sale.

It was during 1862 that Leeson issued his token, value of one penny, the inscription outlining his business. Mr Leeson remained in Gippsland for many years, eventually leaving and settling in Wagga.



### JAMES DAVEY & COMPANY

Mr James Davey was a native of Bristol in England, arriving in Victoria in 1850, venturing up to Creswick. He revisited England and returned to Victoria in 1857 and in early 1858 entered into a partnership with Mr McKenzie as general storekeepers in Foster St., Sale.

The partnership was dissolved after almost a year and he carried on alone. It was during this time that he issued his token. He disposed of his wholesale and retail store to Mr Spod his brother-in-law and moved next door to new-built premises, where he carried on his drapery business for a number of years.

On settling into his new venture he began his involvement in the formation of Sale. He along with six others were elected as original councillors of Sale in 1863. On standing for re-election he was defeated, but this did not deter him from playing an active role in local politics. He had a keen interest in public affairs and never avoided performing a public duty.

In August 1871, he contested again for a councillor's role, campaigning untiringly, he was defeated by Mr Platt by a mere eight votes.

In the meantime his business, trading under 'Gippsland Mart' in Foster St., experienced several slumps, however he succeeded in getting ahead. In October 1865 after a banquet with business colleagues he moved to new premises also in Foster St. Later in December he ceased to trade under 'Gippsland Mart' and began trading as 'Bristol House' dealing in drapery, footwear, clothing. Mr Spod continued trading as Gippsland Mart.

Later in 1866 Bristol House was in the hands of receivers and closed its doors on 2nd February 1867, however the business rallied and Davey repurchased the stock and reopened in March.

On 10th December 1871 he and his family visited Prospect Station. Later in the afternoon while strolling with friends by Merrimans Creek, Mr Davey wished to bathe while requesting the others to continue, intending to catch up when his body was refreshed. After considerable time he did not catch up, the party found his clothing but his body was not found till the next day, he died aged 42 years.

His widow Matilda carried on the business until June 1879 when she sold the shop to Mr John Hatton and the stock to Mr B. McMullan.

## THE GIPPSLAND HARDWARE COMPANY

The Gippsland Hardware Co. was based in what promised to be a large and thriving town of Port Albert, but owing to various reasons, the town did not develop as anticipated.

The original business of Messrs James McEwan and Co., Ironmongers were the founders of the company (forerunner to the today's McEwans franchise). Starting in 1859, it was one of the first firms that existed in Port Albert.

The McEwans purchased land in Port Albert, built a store and started a business. They sent down two Scotsmen, named John Thompson and John Neill to take charge; they opened and managed the business for some time.

John Thompson was replaced by his brother James Thompson, eventually both Thompson and Neill were recalled to Melbourne, their responsibilities taken over by William Rigg (later, partner in the firm of McLean Bros & Rigg).

William Rigg carried on the business for sometime, when it was sold to Nehemiah Gutheridge of Sale. He was joined by a chap of the name Wood, a chemist by profession. It appears that it was this proprietary that issued the Tokens of 1862. They also opened a store in Sale, where business grew rapidly but fell away in Port Albert.

Mr Gutheridge also took a keen interest in local politics, on the 25th February 1861, Sale was proclaimed a town, seven councillors were elected, Mr Gutheridge being one and was further chosen as the first Mayor of Sale.

The Port Albert store was closed as the town dwindled, Mr Gutheridge carried on with the Sale business for some years and from there into the hands of F.S. Treloar a nephew of Gutheridge.

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