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# TWO CURRENCY TOKENS FROM BAY OF PLENTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

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Currency tokens issued by commercial traders were in widespread use in New Zealand in the middle and later part of the 19th century. Due to a shortage of coins 48 traders (mostly retailers such as merchants, grocers, drapers and milliners) issued their own penny and halfpenny tokens (Sutherland 1939: 13). By 1874 these tokens made up a large part of the copper coins in circulation. The cost of producing them was well below their face value so they were a profitable item for the issuer, particularly as many were never cashed in. As each token carried the issuer's name, they were also a form of advertising. According to Sutherland (1939), the tokens finally went out of circulation in the 1890s. Detailed catalogues, which describe and illustrate all the known forms, have been compiled (Sutherland 1939, Skinner 1965, Lampard 1981).

Tokens are seldom found in archaeological contexts, and in this respect are like coins (Prickett 1993). This paper briefly describes two specimens issued by Auckland merchants that were found in archaeological contexts in the Bay of Plenty in the 1980s.

## *United Services Hotel 1874*

This penny token (34 mm diameter) was found during the excavation of a house floor at pa U13/47 at Athenree in December 1982. It was recovered at the base of the topsoil in the entrance to the house. The specimen has, within a plain inner circle, the words UNITED SERVICES / HOTEL in two lines, the upper curved, with an ornamental bar below. Round the plain circle and beaded rim are the words CORNER OF QUEEN & WELLESLEY STREETS AUCKLAND. The reverse side depicts, with a beaded rim, the head of Queen Victoria with the inscription VICTORIA DIE GRATIA (Victoria by the grace of God) in half



*Figure 1. The 1874 United Services Hotel token. Obverse and reverse. (Photograph. Token is 34 mm in diameter)*



*Figure 2. The 1864 Gittos token. Obverse and reverse. (Photograph. Token is 34 mm in diameter)*

circle over 1874 curved below. The token comes in two forms (Skinner 1965: 54) and Lampard (1981: 41) rates both forms as “very common.”

The house where it was found was built to the traditional wharepuni form with a porch and interior stone-edged hearth. It was thought to have been in use in the 1880s.

#### **Gittos 1864**

A penny token (34 mm diameter) was found at V14/178 on 9 April 1987 during a site survey of Motiti Island (Walton and McFadgen 1990). V14/178 lies at the south end of Wairanaki Bay, immediately north of pa V14/54. The token is in a corroded state. It was found on the ground surface amongst oven stones, obsidian,

and charcoal. This debris was inferred to have come from two recently dug stock ponds immediately adjacent. The disturbed context precludes any knowledge of the exact provenance of the token.

Within a beaded rim are the words B. GITTOS / LEATHER / MERCHANT / IMPORTER OF / BOOTS & SHOES/ &c.&c. in six lines, the first being curved. On the reverse side, within the beaded rim, are the words WHOLESALE & RETAIL / LEATHER / & / GRINDERY / STORES / WYNDHAM STREET/ AUCKLAND / N.Z. / 1864 in nine lines, the first, second and ninth being curved. Grindery refers to the materials used by leather workers. Lampard (1981: 58) rates this token as “common.”

### Conclusions

Both tokens described here are common forms. They are from archaeological contexts which indicate their use by Maori. Both were issued by Auckland firms and this reflects the commercial importance of that town in the Bay of Plenty economy of the middle and late 19th Century. They were probably discarded when they had lost their value as currency, a decade or two after they were originally minted.

### References

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