

The Machynlleth (1909) find of 18th - and 19th - century copper coins and tokens

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In 1906 David Davies, Liberal MP for Monmouthshire and future Baron Davies of Llandinam, purchased an old building on the north side of Heol Maengwyn in central Machynlleth, Powys. Known locally as Senedd-dŷ, or Parliament House, the building purportedly occupies the site where Owain Glyndŵr's rebel parliaments met in 1402 and 1404, and has been recently dated through dendrochronology to c. 1470 or earlier.⁽¹⁾ Intending to develop the property into a Public Institute and Library, Davies commissioned the Shrewsbury architect Frank Shayler to repair and restore the building, and between 1909 and 1912 dozens of workmen were employed in shoring the stone walls and fixing the leaky roof.⁽²⁾ In the course of these works, one of the labourers uncovered a hoard of copper coins and tokens hidden beneath a window in the exterior wall. News of the discovery soon filtered through to local newspapers, which described the find in the following manner:

Another interesting discovery has been made in the form of some old coins which were found in the masonry of one of the walls. These include some halfpennies of 1805, 1806, and 1807, and two or three very interesting trade tokens. One of the latter bears on one side the circumscription: "Jestin ap Gwrgan Tywysog Morganwg", and on the other side an undecipherable circumscription around an impression of a coat of arms consisting of three chevrons. The date appears to be 1795 ... Presumably Jestin had an 18th century commercial descendant who was sufficiently proud of his historic and royal ancestor to have his head and title struck on the token. One of the other tokens is a copper coin dated 1811, bearing in the centre the words, "Value One Penny", and around the side, "Worcester City and County Token", and on the obverse the county arms and motto "Civitas In Bello In Pace Fideli". The other token is of the value of a halfpenny, is dated 1813, and bears the circumscription, "Pure Copper Is Preferable To Paper".⁽³⁾

Contemporary reports set the total at 14 coins and tokens, of which 'George III halfpennies ... predominate, but there are also two or three trade tokens'.⁽⁴⁾

The existence of this hoard has not previously been noted by numismatists, and, frustratingly, the current whereabouts of the coins and tokens is unclear.⁽⁵⁾ However, a provisional reconstruction can be made on the basis of newspaper evidence, and is presented in Table 1 below. This reconstruction places the face value of the hoard at just 7½d. in contemporary currency, and is consistent with a loss or burial date in the mid- to late 1810s.

No.	Denom.	Issuer	Type	Date	Comment
1-11.	Halfpenny	George III	Fourth Issue	1806-7	'1805' halfpenny misread or counterfeit?
12.	Halfpenny token	John Stubbs Jorden	D&H Glamorgan 1-3	1795	
13.	Penny token	Worcester House of Industry	Withers 1240-59	1811	
14.	Halfpenny token	Canadian Provinces	Breton 965	1813	

Table 1: Provisional listing of coins and tokens from the Machynlleth (1909) hoard.

Regency era bronze hoards are exceptionally rare finds, and the Machynlleth hoard consequently offers an unusual and significant glimpse of the interplay of official and unofficial currency in the 'small change' economy of early nineteenth-century Britain. Two features of the hoard will be of particular interest to readers of the *TCSB*. Firstly, the token component has a surprisingly broad geographical reach, encompassing issues struck for circulation in Glamorgan, Worcestershire, and the Canadian Provinces – the latter some 5000km west of its eventual place of concealment.⁽⁶⁾ The presence and acceptability of these tokens in an area so far removed from their intended circulation zones contrasts with the pattern observed for seventeenth-century tokens, and presumably reflects the growth of inter-regional economic integration in Britain during the Industrial Revolution, facilitated in its earliest stages (c. 1730-1830) by the creation of 22,000 miles of road and 2500 miles of canal.⁽⁷⁾ Secondly, the apparent presence of a 1795 Glamorgan halfpenny in the hoard is highly significant, and supports David Dykes' suggestion that the generally worn state of these tokens in modern collections reflects their prolonged circulation in the years after the introduction of Bolton's 1797 Cartwheel coinage.⁽⁸⁾ Whether this situation held true in other parts of Britain remains unclear, and awaits clarification from documentary evidence and additional hoard finds.

Notes

- (1) D. Miles and R. Suggett, 'Welsh Dendrochronology Project – Phase Eight', *Vernacular Architecture* 35 (2004), 112, no. 8.
- (2) RCAHMW, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire. I. – County of Montgomery* (London, 1911), 145.
- (3) *Aberystwyth Observer*, 21 October 1909, 2.
- (4) *South Wales Daily News*, 11 October 1909, 4; *Cambrian News*, 23 February 1912, 6.
- (5) See, for instance, I.D. Brown and M. Dolley, *Coin hoards of Great Britain and Ireland 1500-1967* (London, 1971).

- (6) Though intended for circulation in North America, the Canadian Provincial token is nonetheless of British manufacture, and bears an obverse design that closely resembles the Bristol tokens of Samuel Guppy's Patent Sheathing Nail Manufactory (Withers 470-85).
 - (7) On the circulation of seventeenth-century tokens, see A. Marsden, 'How and how far did seventeenth-century tokens circulate? A consideration of some of the evidence from Norfolk', *TCSB* 13:6 (2021), 213-22. The contrast in circulation patterns is underlined by single finds of nineteenth-century tokens, which will be the subject of a future *TCSB* article by the present author. On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economic integration, see M. Hechter, 'Industrialization and national development in the British Isles', in N. Baster (ed), *Measuring development: the role and adequacy of development indicators* (London, 1972), 161; N. Thrift, 'Transport and communication 1730-1914', in R.A. Dodgshon and R.A. Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England & Wales* (London, 1978), 457-60.
 - (8) D.W. Dykes, 'Some reflections on provincial coinage 1787-1797', *British Numismatic Journal* 74 (2004), 174.
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