

## Canadian Tokens in 19th-Century Britain and Ireland

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In a previous article in the *TCSB* I noted the unexpected presence of a Canadian Provincial halfpenny token in an early 19th-century hoard of copper coins and tokens from Machynlleth, Powys.<sup>(1)</sup> Since publication seven additional British and Irish finds of 19th-century Canadian tokens have come to my attention:

1. Canadian Provincial halfpenny token, 1812. Breton 963. Fd. Ballymacdermot, Co. Armagh, 1962.<sup>(2)</sup>
2. Canadian Provincial halfpenny token, 1813. Breton 965. Fd. Portsdown Nurseries, nr Portsmouth, Hampshire, 1948.<sup>(3)</sup>
3. Nova Scotia penny token, 1832. Breton 870. Fd. Piddletrenthide, Dorset, 2019 (Fig 1).<sup>(4)</sup>
4. New Brunswick penny token, 1843. Breton 909. Fd. Leeds, West Yorkshire, 2008.<sup>(5)</sup>
5. New Brunswick halfpenny token, 1843. Breton 910. Fd. Poole, Dorset, c.1973-83.<sup>(6)</sup>
6. Bank of Upper Canada halfpenny token, 1850. Breton 720. Fd. Hemsworth, West Yorkshire, 2009.<sup>(7)</sup>
7. Nova Scotia penny token, 1856. Breton 875. Fd. Peakirk, Cambridgeshire, 2011.<sup>(8)</sup>

Alongside these finds, we might also note an interesting passage from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-62) describing the stock-in-trade of a 'street-seller of second-hand curiosities' on Camden High Street:

*The principal things on his barrow were coins, shells, and old buckles, with a pair of the very high and wooden-heeled shoes, worn in the earlier part of the last century. The coins were all of copper, and certainly did not lack variety. Among them were tokens, but none very old...The colonial coins were more numerous than the foreign. There was the "One Penny token" of Lower Canada; the "one quarter anna" of the East India Company; the "half stiver of the colonies of Essquibo and Demarara;" the "halfpenny token of the province of Nova Scotia," &c. &c.*<sup>(9)</sup>

Ivor Noël Hume has noted the similarities between the contents of Mayhew's vendor's barrow and more recent finds made by 'mudlarks' scouring the Thames Foreshore, and it may not be unreasonable to identify these tokens as London finds.<sup>(10)</sup>

Though few in number, the single finds form a more-or-less coherent group of Canadian bronze penny and halfpenny tokens issued in the early and mid-19th century. While most are unstratified detector finds, two specimens – the 1812 halfpenny token from Ballymacdermot and the 1843 halfpenny token from Poole – were found in pre-1950

layers on archaeological excavations, supporting their interpretation as genuine 19th-century ‘circulation losses’ and not 20th/21st-century ‘collector’s losses’.



**Fig 1:** Nova Scotia penny token dated 1832 found at Piddletrenthide, Dorset (©The Portable Antiquities Scheme CC BY 2.0)

Viewed alongside the evidence of the Machynlleth hoard, the single finds therefore point towards some kind of small, unofficial role for Canadian bronze tokens – and perhaps, by extension, other colonial bronzes – in the 19th-century domestic currency, presumably stimulated by demand for ‘small change’ in industrialising towns and villages across Britain and Ireland. The absence of any tokens postdating the mid-1850s is perhaps significant, and may suggest that the replacement of Britain’s copper coinage with a new bronze currency in 1859-63 brought their circulation to a close.<sup>(11)</sup>

### References

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