

CONVICT ART

Copper Keepsakes

Mementos of a time when the British banished criminals to “unknown lands” are now available.

BETWEEN 1788 AND 1868, the British government shipped approximately 162,000 convicts (of which 20 percent were women) to Australia, one of the largest-scale transportation of prisoners. Many of them engraved tokens as keepsakes for loved ones.

Time moved slowly for those banished to the penal colonies, and the thought of never returning left them with “leaden hearts,” the name subsequently given to the small discs on which the convicts recorded their personal messages and designs. Often the piece would include the name of the prisoner and his or her loved one, the length of sentence, or a popular phrase, which was engraved or stippled with small pin pricks on the large, copper “cartwheel” pennies of the time.

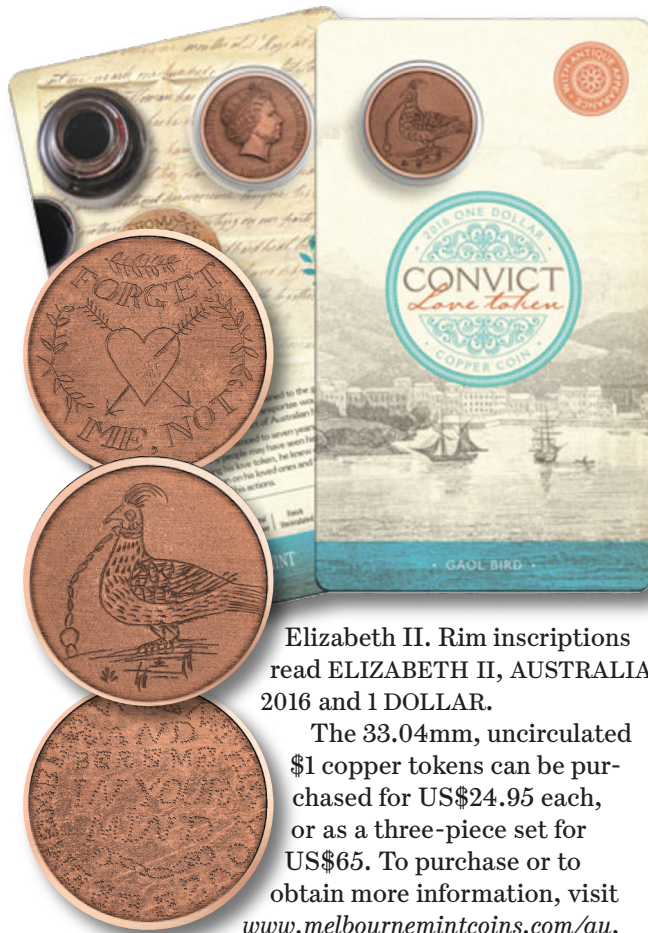


Excluding government files, these tokens were the only recorded evidence of the convicts' lives. As relics of colonial culture, they have become highly sought and preserved by individuals and many museums. The largest collection (314 pieces) re-

◀ Irish Republican Brotherhood member John Boyle O'Reilly was transported to Australia for imprisonment. His fellow inmates might have carved love tokens, the subject of the Royal Australian Mint's new series. Actual Size: 33.04mm

sides in the National Museum of Australia.

The Royal Australian Mint has released three \$1 coins fashioned after these original “love tokens.” The reverses replicate classic designs and popular inscriptions: “Forget Me, Not,” “Gaol Bird” and “When This You See, Remember Me.” The mint used a hand-antiqued finish to create a vintage effect. The common obverse features Ian Rank-Broadley's portrait of Queen



Elizabeth II. Rim inscriptions read ELIZABETH II, AUSTRALIA 2016 and 1 DOLLAR.

The 33.04mm, uncirculated \$1 copper tokens can be purchased for US\$24.95 each, or as a three-piece set for US\$65. To purchase or to obtain more information, visit www.melbournemintcoins.com/au.

PHOTOS: MELBOURNE MINT & WIKIPEDIA.ORG (O'REILLY)