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## CONVICT ROMANCE REVEALED BY COIN DISCOVERY

An act of love by a convict 184 years ago has surfaced in the form of a 1797 English penny engraved with a romantic message which will today be handed over to Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks Museum at 11am.

Engraving a coin with a message of affection was one of the few ways a convict transported to Australia could leave a memento behind for loved ones in England.

The coin, known as a convict love token, came to light after Queenslander Peggy Thompson discovered it among the belongings of her late husband's Grandfather, a former sea captain who gathered a priceless collection of historical artefacts on his many journeys.

Made from an English 'cartwheel' penny minted in 1797, King George's head has been shaved off and replaced by two sets of initials inside a heart beneath lovebirds kissing. On the back is a verse that states that the convict is bound for Van Diemen's Land in 1825.

One of the initials is 'CD' and Hyde Park Barracks Museum curator Brad Manera believes these belong to convict Cornelius Donovan, a blacksmith who was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1825 after being convicted of forgery.

Mr Manera said the Hyde Park Barracks, which housed convicts from 1819 to 1848 and is currently nominated for World Heritage Listing, is an ideal home for the love token and he is thrilled to be on the receiving end of such a rare find.

"Defacing a coin was as much a crime in the 19th century as it is today. Yet convicts and soldiers about to sail off into the great unknown leaving their loved ones behind, chose, as a memento, to shave the monarch's features from a coin and replace it with a simple message of love.

"This love token is an extraordinarily important object. It is loaded with emotion; every letter is carved with affection and sorrow at parting.

"Although transportation usually carried a minimum sentence of seven or fourteen years, shipwreck, disease, neglect or overwork meant that very few transportees ever returned to the British Isles.

"Some love tokens were made in prisons, others on the hulks while awaiting transportation and some on the convict transport ships at sea. Some enterprising and literate convicts made love tokens for other convicts, for a fee. This love token is particularly important though as its inscription claims that the convict who presented to his sweetheart made it with his own hand.

"What makes this love token so interesting, apart from the obvious affection Donovan felt for the one he was leaving behind, is that it has a very distinctive design that is repeated in contemporary love tokens in other collections. This may be the key to identifying when and where those tokens were made.

"Another vital aspect of this love token is that the maker knows that he is going to Van Diemen's Land. Most convicts assumed that they were bound for Botany Bay. To be so certain of his destination, the person who made this must have done so just before his transport ship departed. It is therefore likely to have been made on a convict hulk just prior to embarkation rather than in a prison in the days just after sentencing.

"Whether the token ever made it into the hands of the object of his affections will forever be a mystery. Somehow between 1825 and the late nineteenth century it turned up for sale in Sydney and fortunately for us, was purchased by Captain Thomson who passed it down to his son, Mrs Thomson's late husband," said Mr Manera.

The love token is a welcome addition to the collection of the Hyde Park Barracks Museum which currently features the exhibition *Convict Hulks* exploring life on the prison ships.

**Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Queens Square, Macquarie St, Sydney, open daily 9.30pm – 5pm. [www.hht.net.au](http://www.hht.net.au)**

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