

## George III penny from 1797– item 5 in the Cabinet of Curiosities

By Tracey Chippendale-Holmes

### Monologue to young Will.

I'm the lowest value currency – a penny, no value to the people out there. But I'm different – like you. I was specially crafted by the 'awk'urst leaders to 'ide their 'igher value coins inside. I open, like a tortoiseshell snuff box, and there you might find one, two, three smaller treasures to be bought and sold. My outsides are a bit dulled now, rubbed to bronze by so many rough hands. Oh but my inner face still blinds, bright and warm with the sunlight always trapped. The orange of sunrise, purest copper from up there in Cheshire.

My owners pad the smaller coins with leaves, lest my contents be given away. I close tight, so that a fall from their pocket in a brawl or accidental dropping won't betray me. If I am found and picked up, I am the right size for a working man– the wide centre of his palm, cold, until I'm remembered by the elements that make him, and give him warmth. Don't worry if you drops me here, so long as none of them 'orses can reach me. They should know I'm not food. I smell and taste like other coins of my age when the men test me for authenticity. And everything looks right, because I was moulded from the original. Smugglers are clever, not much they can't make or fake.

Feel that engraving. Can you read?

No.

It says 'Britannia 1797'. And on the other side, sticking his nose out like a Roman emporer, is 'Georgius III. D:G. Rex'. That means 'e's the King. God help us all.

You've got to keep me secret, like Pete says. It's the sound might give 'em away. If my packing is dislodged, a clink, slide or scrape and the game is up. They'll know a smuggler's been 'ere, bought something, hidden something. Then you'll all be shipped off to Chichester and the Assizes, and me, little old me, will condemn you all to your deaths.

Up to the gallows on Telegraph 'ill? Or Tyburn and then gibbeted? Or the long one-way to the bottom of the world?

What will they do with me? Lock me up in a glass case in a museum, as a lesson to all?

Keep a tight 'old, Will, my boy. I'm your treasure now.