

Western Cape Numismatic Society



Lucky Coin Trees or Wish Trees

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Sometimes keen-eyed day-trippers or hikers in certain parts of Scotland, Wales or the northern regions of England can spot something very unusual; hundreds of coins embedded in tree trunks or stumps.

This strange practice dates back hundreds of years in the UK, when people hammered coins into trees with the superstitious belief that by doing this as an offering to nature it would cure their sicknesses. It was also believed that by removing the coins one would contract the illness that it helped to cure. (Possibly this rumour was spread to prevent the theft of these offerings from the trees)

Nowadays it has become commonplace in these regions to hammer a coin into a tree or stump with a nearby rock for good luck or before making a wish. It seems like the most popular choice of coin today for this purpose are the one or two penny coins, as they are only worth R0.22 and R0.44 at the current exchange rate but are not too small.



Photo taken in the Lakes District (UK) by the author on a recent visit (Note that most of these are modern 2 penny and 1 penny coins).



Photo source - Daily Mail

Unfortunately, this practice has become so widespread that local officials are appealing to visitors to not follow this example as it is apparently detrimental to the health of the forest. A spokesman for the National Trust for Scotland said: "For many years people have hammered coins into tree stumps and trunks as some sort of votive offering to make a wish. On our woodland properties we could tolerate it as long as it was on a small-scale, but now it seems to have taken off as a 'fashionable' thing to do and is out of control.

"While coins stuck into live trees is clearly harmful, what appears to be a dead tree isn't really dead – it's a habitat for many living things. Over time, weathering of coins will result in leaching of chemicals into that habitat. "We want to discourage the practice as it's now become as much of a nuisance as padlocks attached to bridges – but at least they are easy to cut off." ²



Some of the "looser" coins in these stumps (My bad!). All the others felt like they were set in concrete!

While South Africa may have some problems of its own, this is not one of them (probably because any coins hammered into a tree on Sunday afternoon will have "disappeared" by Monday morning!) Thanks for reading this, I hope you enjoyed it.

Joel F. Potgieter

References:

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