

# PENNY'S FINAL WHISTLE?

Canada has scrapped the penny. Plastic is all the rage. So is this the end of notes as we know them?

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They're taking the fun out of treasury, you know. Well, that may not be saying much, but they're certainly taking the treasure out of treasury, the cash out of cash management. When the Jeremy Vine phone-in show on Radio 2 starts talking about abolishing the penny, you know it's the thin end of the wedge – pardon the pun.

It all kicked off when the price of copper made them decide to scrap the penny in Canada, a country with enough metal mines and forests to not have to worry about the cost of notes and coins. In Sweden, there's even a campaign to get rid of cash – all of it. Remarkable, given that they were the first in Europe to have banknotes in the first place.

Even now paper money isn't the same. It's plastic. Well, not in the UK, obviously, because we don't do modern. Australia started it. And which was the first country in Europe to follow suit? Romania. That's right, Romania has plastic paper

money. It's even got a little transparent bit you can look through, like a window on an envelope.

Sure, it's awkward, expensive stuff. But real, proper, folding, clinking piggy

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banknotes and coins are what it's all about at the end of the day. According to the Bank of England, there's £61,752m of it in circulation. About half is £20 notes, almost £4bn in coins. And there's 11,297 million copper pennies scattered everywhere from jam jars to shop tills to the gutter in the street outside my house. (That gutter has a fair few of mine and gets a few more every time I pull my car



keys out of my pocket. Small price to pay, though.)

A load of electronic is and os may be the lifeblood of what treasurers do today, but it's not why they do it. Head of cash management? Sounds better than 'Head of digital resources'. Chief cashier at the Bank of England? Chief monetary bytes counter. See? No character.

And thanks to Barclays, it looks as though Britain may finally be starting to catch up with Kenya. Nothing to do with the London marathon, but everything to do with using your mobile phone for payments.

So, how will we say "A penny for your thoughts" in future? How will we toss a coin to decide who bats first in cricket? How can we act all romantic at the Trevi

Fountain in Rome if we throw a mobile phone or a 'contactless card' into it? How will billionaires light their cigars without a £50 note to flash their wealth? Where will the buck stop?

As for stuffing your money under your mattress, that soon won't be possible either (you might damage your mobile phone). Money never did grow on trees, but now, maybe soon, it never will. ♡



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