

Pieces of Eight!

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 May 1998

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Charles Dye — 10 May 1998, 21:43

"Gordon Brain" <gobrain at netcomuk.co.uk> can do cant, can't he....

(doesn't make a) bad bit's difference - 'Makes no difference'. From bit as in small coin worth 12.5 cents (i.e. one eighth of a dollar - related to 'piece of eight' = old Spanish dollar ?), survives in phrase 'two bit ...' meaning cheap, not worth much. Bad bit = counterfeit small coin, so worth even less.

Yes. But note that these "bits" are pieces of computer cards! Computer geeks have been getting mileage out of this pun for decades: a bit is an eighth of a byte, so a byte must be worth a dollar. Eric S. Raymond, for instance, lists "quarter" in "The New Hacker's Dictionary" (recommended!) as two bits, and specifically mentions the Spanish silver dollar connection.

Sad irony: The computer revolution has just wiped out the last surviving use of the monetary "bit" in the U.S.A. Stocks are now being traded in sixteenths of dollars instead of eighths, preparatory to purely decimal trading.

"Tis no Disparagement to understand the Canting Terms: It may chance to save your Throat from being cut, or, (at least) your Pocket from being Pick'd."

Elisha Coles (1676)

Beautiful!

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