

# Collecting decimals - a good start in 2001

A change in NPA's policy may have a positive effect on collecting. By **Judy shaw**

**C**ollecting Decimals will have a good start in 2001 with the special Commemorative \$5 note being introduced for the celebration of Australia's Centenary of Federation. For obvious reasons, the design details are being kept close to the chest of the Reserve Bank until a time closer to issue. We have been told it will be a circulated note which will replace the ordinary note for 2001, and it will also be offered in Collector Folders, with letter prefix AA. We will keep our clients further advised on this issue.

Note Printing has also advised us that at the present time there have not been any notes printed for the year 2000, and with nothing anticipated, it is highly unlikely that any will be printed now at all, which is a great pity. It seems there was much more currency printed in 1999 than was needed for general use which, in turn, caused an over-supply. This was done to accommodate any problems associated with the now 'uneventful' Millennium Bug!!

This also brings us to the Reserve Bank's latest policy, which is Note Printing Australia will not be printing any special notes for Folders or date sets. They will now only be printing



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denominations which are needed for maintaining the Reserve Bank's supplies for circulation each year. We have been told however that Note Printing Australia will continue to supply both Dealers and Collectors with any notes that are printed. Most Collectors will also know by now that only two denominations were printed during 1999. They were the McFarlane Evans \$50 and \$100. Although it seems unlikely we will be able to complete a dated note set for every year (assuming that, in the future, the Reserve Bank does not need every denomination to be printed each year) the change could well

have a positive effect on collecting, as we will revert back to the days of the paper notes, where we all had to be quite astute in locating, very early, any changes which were made.

Established Collectors will recall the times when we all overlooked changes in the paper decimal notes. This was how the scarce to rarer notes were born - 1968 was a perfect example, thousands of people put away our first decimal notes in 1966 (the signatory Coombs/Wilson series) as a keepsake, but even Collectors were taken by surprise with the short run of Coombs/Randall notes late in 1967 early 1968. This situation was caused by the retirement of the Secretary to the Treasurer, Mr Roland Wilson, in October 1966, followed relatively closely by the retirement of Mr H.C. Coombs in July 1968. The \$1 and \$20 are the most significant beneficiaries of this short run.

The Phillips/Wheeler era was another example. When 'Australia' replaced 'Commonwealth of Australia' on our notes in 1974 this also caused many to miss the Phillips/Wheeler Australia notes. The \$5, \$10 and \$20 proving the scarcest in this series.

It also took Collectors a while, during 1976, to realise that in the Knight/Wheeler signatures there were not only two different serial types, but also two different thread types causing up to three varieties in this signature, in all denominations.

The Johnston/Fraser was the easiest to miss. We went to the



Reserve Bank and were offered two bundles of Johnston/Fraser \$20's. We could choose as they actually had a bundle of each of the OCRB and Gothic. Not being related to J Paul Getty we could only afford so many so opted for one bundle of the OCRB (and a small quantity of the Gothics). We thought that as the OCRB was the first note issued it would disappear and the Gothic would then be available. Wrong! What had happened was Note Printing had an order from the Reserve Bank for more \$20 notes, and as their machine with the OCRB serial numbering was already being used for another denomination, they had to use the machine with the Gothic serial numbers to do a quick run of the \$20 notes. Consequently, the Gothic serials were distributed and disappeared very quickly - and we were left holding the OCRB's so to speak! The \$50 also had the OCRB and Gothic printing; of these the OCRB has proven the scarcest.

Now our tip, after such experiences, keep your eyes open and your ear close to the ground because scarce notes will also be turning up in the polymer notes. It was less than five years after issue when Collectors became aware that the Fraser/Cole first prefix AA00 was going to be scarce and look what happened to the last prefix AB19!

Collectors have also reported a couple of varieties in the polymer notes, which we know have already been published; but for the benefit of our new Collectors, feel it is worth repeating.

The first was the Fraser/Cole \$5 with light green serials. These were discovered a short time after issue, but at that time it was thought the notes had been tampered with. It wasn't until recently when we opened a bundle which we held in the bank vault since purchasing in 1992

that we noticed throughout the bundle certain notes had a distinctive light green serial. At first we felt there would probably be quite a few of these around, but time and research has revealed that the light green serials are, to date, quite a lot harder to find. It is also worthwhile noting that on checking with the Note Printing Chemist we were advised of the possibility that the serials could turn bright green if treated (although it was not disclosed how!) All the clearly 'untampered' green serials that we researched have been a lighter apple green.

Following these, another keen Collector picked up on the 1995 Fraser/Evans \$5 variety - this is known as the 'thin band' variety. The orientation band is on the portrait side of the polymer note, on the left top margin, from Fraser/Evans signatures onwards. On the \$5 note there were approximately seven wide lines included. A variety occurred when artwork was used from an earlier proof of the note to make printing plates, after a number of the existing printing plates were damaged. There were about 13,000,000 of the thin band variety (which have approximately a dozen thin lines included) out of a total of 95,000,000 notes, the thin band variety ranged between prefixes HC95 and HK95.

More recently, the 'blue' and 'grey' Dobell \$10 notes were documented. Dobell is the standing figure centred on the front of the note. There is a noticeable difference in the whole note. It is not as blue, which can be easily seen when comparing a 1993 note against any note printed after 1994. It seems that during the 1994 year the blue Dobell ceased and the lighter grey Dobell was released.

It has been said that decimal notes do not have the potential of

our predecimal notes. It is certainly true there are many more decimals available, but then Australia's collector base is growing also. I can remember the predecimal notes as a youngster and I am certain there would have been very few people who would have thought the notes they were handling then, as every day currency, would be valuable today. In fact, I expect they would have been staggered to see what some notes are actually fetching on today's market. We also have to remember some Predecimals are over 85 years old now. In years to come, I expect it will be the same with our quality decimal notes. The popularity of collecting notes will not wane. Our children and their children will be saying if only they had had the chance to put away some of the early paper and polymer decimals - just like we are saying about Predecimals today!