

Who wants to be a millionaire ... I DO!

by Judy Shaw



Could there be a *hidden treasure* still untapped in Australian Banknotes? The Star notes have indeed proven to be the “VIP” of the Australian note series, however, there is another kid on the block that has been almost totally overlooked. Notes numbered one Million. I will endeavour to do a comparison and then I will let you decide!

First, let's explore the reason both the Star notes and the one Million numbered notes were introduced. It was actually determined during an era when it was deemed not only unworkable and unacceptable, but almost *unforgivable*, to issue notes out of sequential order.

When notes were spoiled throughout the course of printing, Star notes were introduced as a cost effective way to keep the numbering sequence in order. In the paper decimal series it was not unusual for Star replacement notes to be printed in a consecutive run. Spoils could happen anywhere within each sheet printed and that encompassed not only the full prefix range but also the complete numbering range as well. Unfortunately, nothing was permanently recorded; in fact handwritten 'notebooks' were actually discarded once full and everything had balanced! However, it has been estimated that for some decimal notes the ratio was as high as one star to just under 250 'usable' notes in one signature combination of one denomination. In some cases that equated to well over 500,000 Star notes per signature combination in any one denomination printed!

Whilst one Million numbered notes were introduced for a similar reason, (i.e. to complete the final number in the sequential run) this is where the comparison ends. Only one 'Million numbered' note per prefix can be printed and also they were only printed when a complete serial run 000001 to 1000000 was done, hence the numbers issued were extremely limited. In fact it left the potential to have (in some cases) only a couple of sheets of notes printed per signatories. To date only a handful have surfaced in each denomination, often in used condition. In the George V notes and a couple of the signatories in the paper decimal notes, only **one note** has been found.

Designed to keep the numerical sequence intact the Star notes were pre-printed in a separate run and held and used as required. Consequently, the prefix and serial number on the Star note was not the same as the note it was replacing.

Million numbering, however, could not be printed on the machines that were utilized for serial numbering as they only had provision for six spools with numerals. There are of course seven digits in a million. Experienced Note Printing staff had to use a separate machine to handset and print by hand the 1000000, thus the method used was far more complex and time consuming. It was also a requirement that the Million numbered notes were in perfect sequence when slotted behind the 999999. *This was a continuation of the same method used prior to Star notes when spoils were replaced with a hand pressed note possessing the same number as the spoiled note, resulting in an exact numerical sequence. Such notes would not be able to be identified as hand numbered against machine numbered.*

Most of the following description is taken from a letter sent to me by the Reserve Bank following authentication of the DBP 1000000 note. (See article *CAB Year Book 2003*) *Although the information below has appeared in an earlier CAB article, I felt it worth repeating.*

1. The Operator placed an unnumbered note into the hand press and aligned its position utilising the locater “clips” installed on the machine.
2. The numbering boxes were set to 100000 (one hundred thousand) and the note printed.
3. The note was then removed from the press and placed to one side.
4. The Inking Rollers were moved to an inoperable position and the Numbering boxes de-inked.
5. A piece of pink blank paper, cut to note size, was inserted into the Press once again aligned with the “clips”.
6. The Press was then operated producing an embossed image of 100000 on the blank piece of paper.
7. The embossed piece of paper was removed from the Press and the Operator cut a small square after the last zero on the number.
8. The reprinted 100000 note with the embossed piece of paper placed over it, was placed into the Press both being slightly shifted from the original position so that the only numeral that would be printed on the note, is a zero in the cut out area of the embossed blank piece of paper, to the right of the 100000.
9. When the Operator was satisfied with the positioning the inking Rollers would be placed into the operating position and the last zero printed (*phew!!*)
10. The final comment was – As the alignment system on the Press was a manual/visual operation on the part of the Operator, the positioning of the last zero could never be guaranteed as being consistent in all cases. To produce an acceptable note the Operator may have to repeat the operation several times, each time using a new note and blank piece of paper until “reasonably” satisfied with the result. (*Now that's tricky!*)

I had the privilege to meet a gentleman who had been operating the machines when the DBP 1000000 note was printed. His comment to me regarding the care and skill required was “these notes were never attempted after a counter lunch” I can definitely understand that!

Star notes commenced during the Armitage McFarlane signature in the 10/- and £1 notes. Although considered one



R26m Riddle Heathershaw £1 (Geo V) the oldest known million



The unique Million numbered Knight Wheeler test series DBP \$1. Shown here as part of a consecutive pair (one of only a dozen such pairs located to date).

of the rarest Star notes, I am aware of thirty different Armitage McFarlane 10/- Star notes that have been handled over the last 30 or so years. (I say different as often the same note can go through sales more than once)

In the Armitage McFarlane 10/- numbered one Million I have recorded only three different notes, no comparison really.

The earliest Million numbered note that has been located is the 1927 George

V, Riddle Heathershaw £1. This note was located in South Australia and auctioned through Downies in June 2002 for \$21,790 (including commission). The (R9) 1933 Riddle Sheehan 10/- is the only George V, ten shilling banknote to be found with the Million number. All George V notes are now very scarce and highly sought after, because of this, the Million numbered notes have to be counted along with some of the scarcest of these banknotes.

There are only a dozen consecutive pairs of 999999/1000000 (*five decimal and seven predecimal*) that have been located and still remain together. These look great and are very desirable as such.

Below is a table of quantities of each Type and Signature combination:

It was thought that both Star notes and notes numbered one Million ceased after the Phillips Randall Signature combination. However, it seems there was an after thought and another remarkable note was printed, the Knight Wheeler test series DBP \$1 numbered 1000000. This note is unique in that it was printed several years after the cessation of printing one Million numbers; it was printed during a paper test series and there was only one single note printed. What value can be placed on such an exceptional note?

Sadly, some may think that notes numbered one Million are just a special number such as a solid number 777777. It is not until you look at the reason for their existence, the lengths taken to print them, the very small quantities printed overall, not to mention the tiny few held in captivity, that you can truly come to see that they are in a league of their own.

I have been researching these fabulous notes for many years and have no doubt they will continue to captivate Collectors for many years to come. The fascination for these notes is the complete package of rarity, technical skills and historical interest—and you know, all else aside, they really do look like a “Million Dollars”!

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THE “MILLION” NUMBERED NOTES: TABLE OF QUANTITIES FOR EACH TYPE AND SIGNATORY

PREDECIMAL NOTES

1 x R9m	Riddle Sheehan 10/- (Geo. V)
3 x R13m	Armitage McFarlane 10/-
3 x R14m	Coombs Watt 10/-
2 x R15m	Coombs Wilson 10/- (Geo. VI)
6 x R16m	Coombs Wilson (C'wlth) 10/-
15 x R17m	Coombs Wilson (Res.) 10/-
1 x R26m	Riddle Heathershaw £1 (Geo V) <i>(Oldest known note numbered one Million)</i>
1 x R30m	Armitage McFarlane £1
2 x R31m	Coombs Watt £1
3 x R33m	Coombs Wilson (C'wlth) £1
14 x R34m	Coombs Wilson (Res.) £1
1 x R48m	Coombs Wilson (Geo VI) £5
3 x R49m	Coombs Wilson (C'wlth) £5

3 x R50m	Coombs Wilson (Res.) £5
3 x R62m	Coombs Wilson (C'wlth) £10

DECIMAL NOTES

2 x R71m	Coombs Wilson \$1
1 x R72m	Coombs Randall \$1
4 x R73m	Phillips Randall \$1
1 x R76bm	Knight Wheeler DBP \$1 <i>(Last ever note numbered one Million printed for issue)</i>
4 x R81m	Coombs Wilson \$2
3 x R83m	Phillips Randall \$2
1 x R301m	Coombs Wilson \$10
1 x R302m	Coombs Randall \$10
1 x R303m	Phillips Randall \$10
1 x R403m	Phillips Randall \$20