AUGUST MEETING:

The following is a resume of Mr. O. C. Fleming's talk "The Australian Commonwealth Coinage":

Our guest's talk covered the 50 years of the coinage of the Commonwealth of Australia very fully.

Using an epidiascope to illustrate his remarks he showed that some of the Tradesmen's Tokens of the middle 19th Century used here were the prototypes which influenced the designs eventually placed on our coinage from 1910 on.

Even though Australia had Branches of the Royal Mint minting gold (Sydney from 1855 to 1926), (Melbourne from 1872 and Perth from 1899), these institutions did not coin silver until 1916 and copper or bronze until 1919.

N.S.W. and Victoria in 1898 first thought of the profit angle to be derived from minting silver but as Federation was approaching nothing eventuated until a Bill actually authorising coinage was passed in 1909—Australia's first silver was issued in 1910, copper and bronze in 1911.

On the silver of 1910 the bust of Edward VII appeared on the obverse. The reverse had the "Ensigns Armorial of the Commonwealth of Australia" which had been granted by Royal Warrant dated 7/5/1908.

In September, 1912, this design was discarded and another adopted but nothing was done on our coins about these incorrect "Arms" until 1938 when there appeared on our florins an adaptation of this 1912 design but still very much incorrect. South Australia for that State's Centenary in 1935, had been granted the use of a Piping Shrike in lieu of the Rising Sun with 3 Wheat Sheaves above but this latter obsolete design was still perpetuated.
So, despite repeated, but abortive, attempts by numismatically and heraldically minded citizens, Australia can still boast of a sixpence with an armorial design officially discarded in 1911, a florin issued in 1932 with several incorrect features in the Arms portrayed, both circulating alongside Bank Notes with a heraldically correct print of the position thereon.

Is it any wonder, asked our speaker, that co-ordination or cooperation is not possible when 10 different designs of our Arms were at one time being used by Commonwealth Government Departments on letterheads and other official documents?

Prior to 1916 for silver and 1919 for coppers, the Royal Mint, London, Messrs. Heaton and Sons of Birmingham and the Bombay (India) Branch of the Royal Mint were responsible for the minting of our coinage, the latter two institutions using appropriate identifying mint marks.

In 1942/43 it was necessary to enlist the aid of the Calcutta Mint (India) to assist with the production of coppers and the San Francisco and Denver Mints (U.S.A.) to mint silver in 1942/43/44, again with appropriate mint marks to indicate origins. These measures were necessary with the increases in our population during those war years and consequent demands for coin.

"Silver" from 1910 to 1945 contained 92.5% silver and 7.5% alloy but from 1946 this was changed to 50% silver and an alloy of copper nickel and zinc because of the rise in price of the main metal used.

Our pence are usually 97% copper with tin and zinc making up the other 3%, the tin/zinc ratio being dependent on supply and demand of tin.

Again in 1951 the demand for small change necessitated the Royal Mint London assisting our own mints and so 6d, 3d, 1d, and 1d appeared with the mint mark PL thereon. This has an unusual story behind it, particularly as the Royal Mint does not normally mint mark coinage struck there.

The following is an extract from the Eighty-Second Annual Report of the Deputy Master and Comptroller of the Royal Mint, 1951:

"Australian numismatists and others who examine their 1951 coins with more than the customary glance will have already observed that some of them (in fact, those struck in the United Kingdom) bear on the reverse a diminutive PL. This is mintmark. The same letters were used, as well as others, for the same purpose on coins struck at London during the Roman Occupation. No contemporary expanded version has yet been found and I will not venture to judge between the various suggestions as to the full form. Prima (officina) Londinii, Londinienis or Londinio — the first workshop of London, the first London workshop or the first workshop at London — all have well-qualified champions. Some suggest that P is an abbreviation of Pecunia; others percussa. Whatever be the extended form, however, the significance was the same in 1951 as in Roman times, that the coins were struck in the Mint in London."

Other points covered were the titles used on coinage — amended when India assumed autonomy and the public and ecclesiastical outcry when the letters FD (abbreviation of FIDEI DEFENSOR, Defender of the Faith) were inadvertently (?) left out of those titles on the coinage of Elizabeth II in 1953/54.
Australia's only four commemorative florins; those for Canberra (1927) the Melbourne Centenary of 1934/35, Federation (1961) and the Royal Visit (1954) were also discussed. Again we have a heraldic “nightmare” on the 1951 piece as the Southern Cross used is that for the state of Victoria and not that of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The various initials on coinage of artist-designer-engravers and Mint Marks were next covered.

Various designs which had been submitted over the years were thrown onto the screen. (These included seven submitted by one of the artists commissioned by the Government for the Federation florin of 1961.)

Australia has never issued half-crowns or farthings nor any coins portraying Edward VIII. As a result of his abdication only one of our coins is dated 1937. This was the crown but the head of George VI appeared on it.

Forgeries of various denominations and years added a lighter note to the Lecture; mis-struck coins illustrated our Mints have antiquated machinery and that workmanship is therefore poor as a result.

It is of interest that a complete collection of all denominations, dates and mint marks amounts to some 300 coins and is very hard to come by now, let alone for collectors of the future, particularly as the silver prior to 1946 is being withdrawn.

The three scarce pieces, the 1930 penny, 1923 ½ penny and the Melbourne Centenary florin of 1934/35 and the reasons for their scarcity was explained.

A specimen of the 1930 penny was displayed by medium of the epidiascope as were also the suggested nickel pattern pence of 1919/21.

In concluding Mr. Fleming briefly touched on the question of Decimal Coinage and said that when and if this question is decided and a modern Mint established at Canberra, as is intended, to cope with any increased coinage necessary, that all anomalies at present existing will be eliminated.

As a result Australia's coinage will then, it is hoped, be proudly used and accepted both at home and abroad.

Mr. Fleming also left for members a number of copies of the Bank of N.S.W. publication "From George II to Elizabeth II — The Story of Currency in Australia" — A few copies are still available.

From "THE ILLAWARRA MERCURY", September 8, 1868.

During the 'sixties and 'seventies of last century there were many temperance organisations formed — one of which was "The Sons and Daughters of Temperance" and the Wollongong Ladies formed a local "Division" or branch which they decided to call "The Dewdrop Division”.

A wag of the times was immediately at work and we print the following “poem” with due respect to the temperance cause:

"Sparkling, I ween, and bright and clear ye may be
As the dew which hangs from herb, flower, or tree;
But I doubt if ye are to your order true
When naming yourselves ‘drops of (the mountain) dew’.

QUIZ.”

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