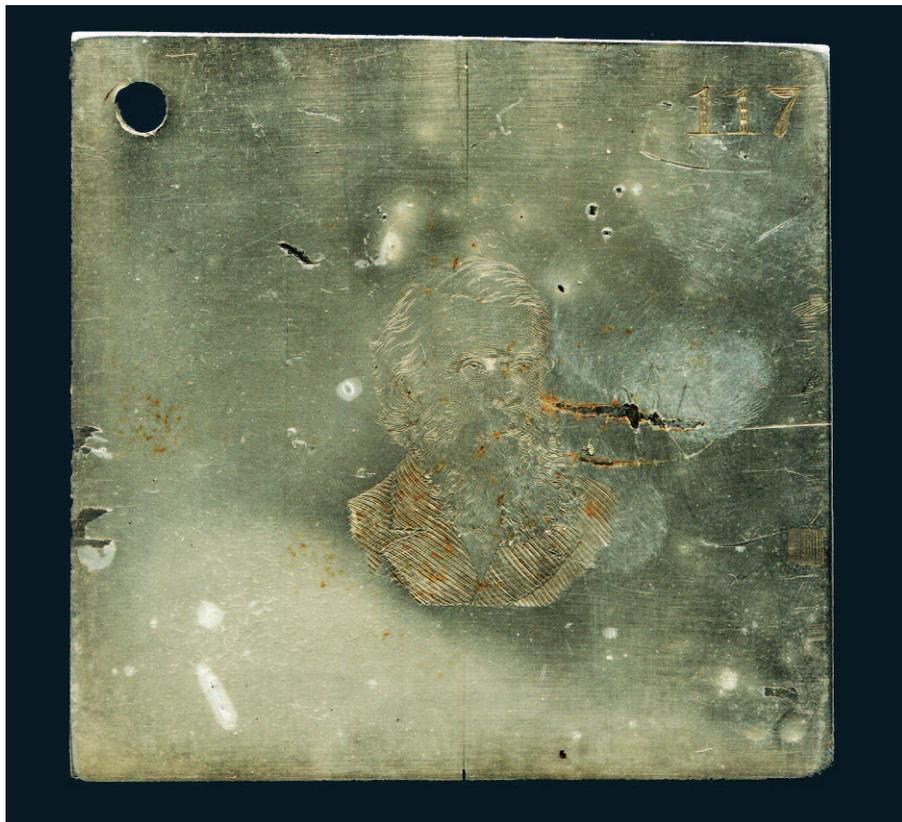


AMAZING GARAGE FIND: Parkes Plate for unissued notes from 1950s

by Tony James



Printing plate as it was found during a garage sale, with protective coating scratched and showing rust.



The plate after cleaning

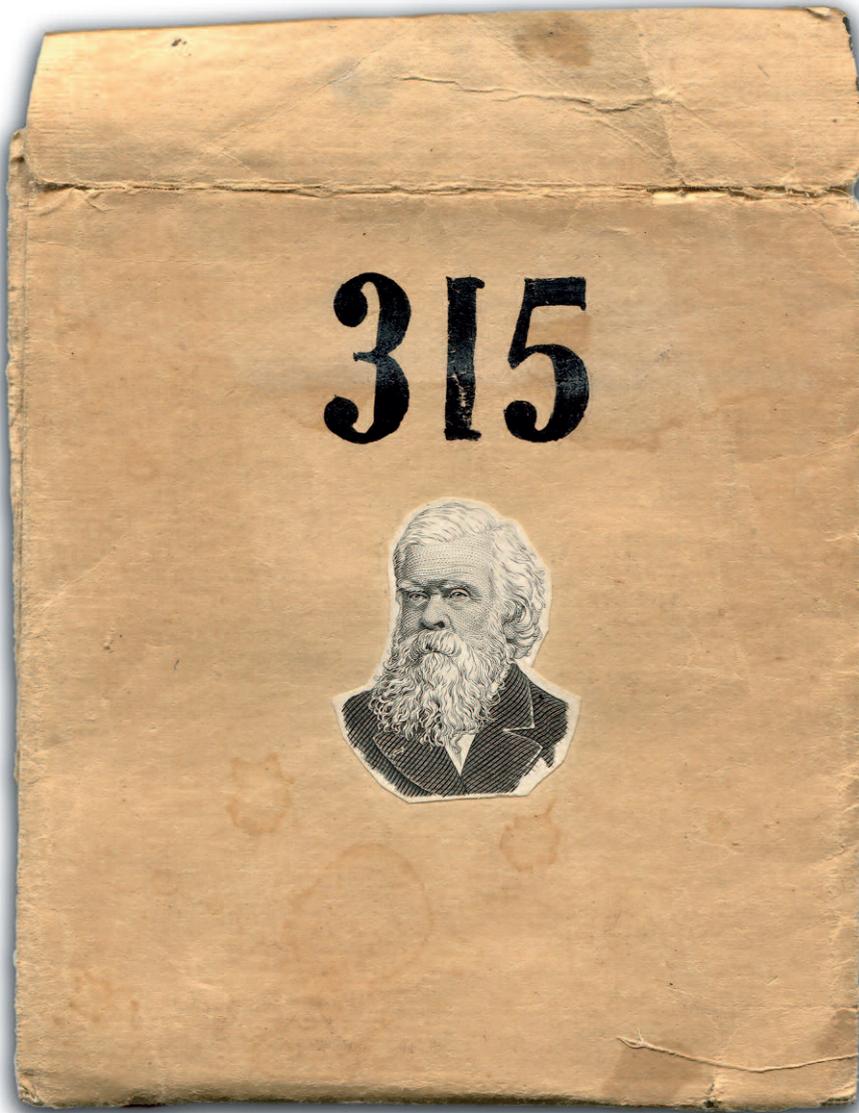
It started with a phone call from a reader: Shane said he had something he wanted to pass by me. It was a printer's plate with an engraving of Sir Henry Parkes. The plate, he hastened to add, depicted a portrait which might be part of a banknote; which was just as well, as my mind was already racing with possibilities of a worldwide major numismatic scoop. He said the plate came in an envelope with an impression of an inscription that was only revealed when rubbed with a lead pencil. It read "Nugget Trial 10/- Sir Henry Parkes as you required." The vignette was of a head and shoulders portrait of Sir Henry Parkes. Shane had already identified it as being similar to a picture on the website of the Reserve Bank of Australia and it seemed to be a replica of the image used for the unissued 10/- note of the early 1950s.

This unissued note is listed on the website under the page: Commonwealth Bank and Note Issue 1920-1960, section First Post War Notes: A Fresh Approach Early Designs, and is also illustrated in the book "Australian History 1901-2001 As Seen Through Banknotes" by Joanne and Edward Dauer and John Pettit published in 2007. The Reserve Bank website describes the post war need for a new series of currency banknotes with a portrait of King George VI for the £1 and prominent figures in Australia around the time of Federation on the other denominations. One of these portraits was of Sir Henry Parkes (the 'Father of Federation'), intended for the 10/- note.

Another fascinating part of the story is that the same vignette appears to have been used for the £50 that is also featured on the RBA website under page: The Commonwealth Bank and the Note Issue: 1920-1960, section: Unissued Notes of the 1950s.

The highest denomination of Australian note issue at this time was £10; however the post-WWII world was beginning to recognise the need for higher value notes and this matter was being kept under review by the Commonwealth Bank. Therefore the bank was working on possible designs so as to be able to respond quickly if the need arose. Missing out on being included on the 10/- note, Parkes' portrait was put forward for the potential £50 issue, together with that of Sir Edmund Barton, Australia's first Prime Minister, on the £100 note.

These designs were to symbolise Australia's Federation. Sir Henry Parkes (1815-1896) became known as the 'Father



Envelope with image stuck on the outside

of Federation' in recognition of his efforts during the last decade of his life to advance the cause of nationhood.

The printing plate

Shane found the envelope containing the small printing plate in a box of "junk"

he purchased at a local garage sale. He was looking for Australianiana and printing ephemera and the box of junk was an assortment of mementos of some one's earlier life, which shows that numismatic items can turn up in the most unlikely places.



The proposed ten-shilling note with the portrait of Sir Henry Parkes RBA NP-003125 from AUSTRALIAN HISTORY 1901-2001 As Seen Through Banknotes. Reproduced by permission of the authors, Dr Edward and Joanne Dauer.

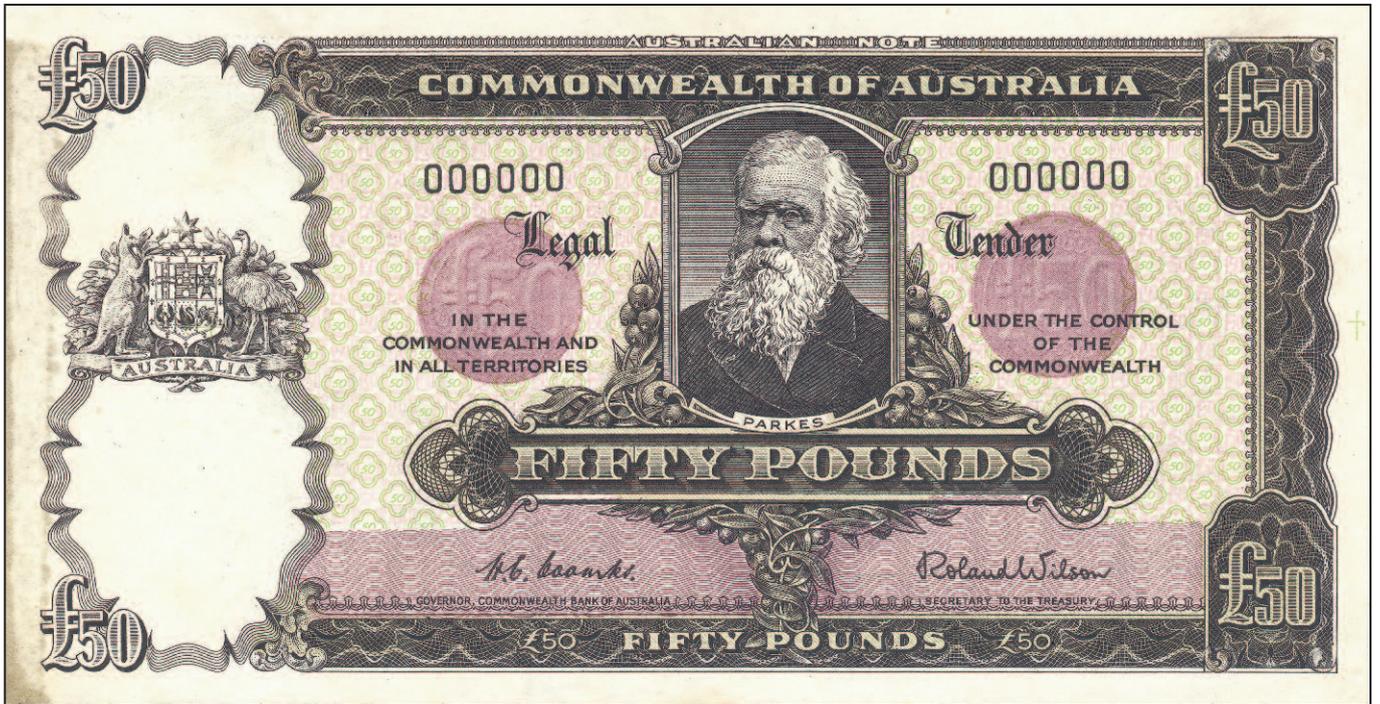
The buff envelope, with a print of the image of the plate, was reinforced with cloth backing and Shane found the impression regarding the Nugget Trial 10/- notation, revealing it through pencil rubbing the impression. The steel plate, measuring about 5cm by 8cm and 5 mm thick is coated with a wax covering to protect the surface from damage and deterioration from rust.

Supporting evidence

Before Shane phoned me regarding the plate, he had contacted Virginia MacDonald, the archivist at the Reserve Bank of Australia in Sydney. Virginia's response to Shane's email established that the plate could not be definitely tied to the printing plate for the unissued 10/- plate. However, she did mention that "a search of our records has located an image featuring a keyline portrait of Sir Henry Parkes that was considered around the time the banknote design for the unissued 10 shilling banknote was being developed. The image itself is labelled 'Sir Henry Parkes preparatory engraving sketch New Issue Notes (not proceeded with)'. For your information, keyline drawings are developed and used to create the engraved image on a printing plate." Virginia went on to advise that "our records also make reference to the existence of an engraved printing plate depicting a portrait of Sir Henry Parkes however we are unable to determine what exactly was depicted on the plate, including whether the attached key line image was the portrait used to develop that particular printing plate or its intended use. We are therefore unable to confirm whether the printing plate that you have in your possession was in fact produced for the purposes of developing the unissued 10 shilling banknote design."

When I received the plate from Shane I spent some considerable time going over it with a 10x magnifying glass comparing the plate and the print on the envelope with the 10/- and £50 illustrations in the book by Dauer and Pettit. Having previously been involved with this publication, I was aware that the illustrations had come direct from the collection of the Reserve Bank and was therefore confident that close or exact images would indicate a distinct possibility that the steel plate on my desk was such a keyline engraving.

Holding such an item in my hands, even with the possibility that it may not be the actual plate of the vignette used for the unissued banknote, it was tremendously exciting to compare the pictures, plates and envelope image. Line by line etched into the plate, the image created appeared to match the pictures. This was made even more interesting by the fact that I knew that any plate of the entire note



The unissued £50 note bearing the image of Sir Henry Parkes. Image courtesy of The Rare Coin Company. Used with permission.

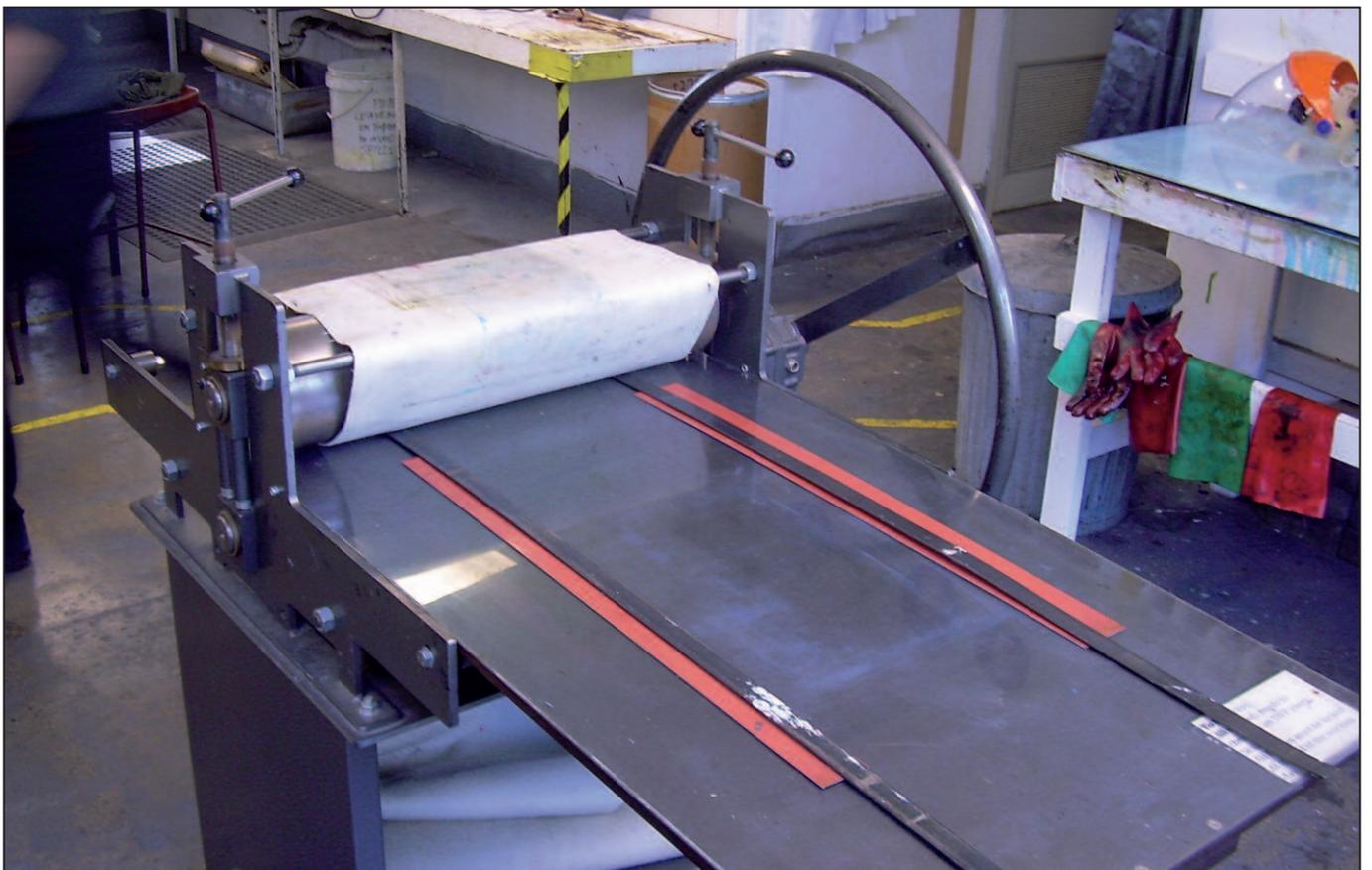
was never going to be released from the depths of the repository of the Reserve Bank of Australia. So the other comment from Virginia regarding the connection and ownership of this printing plate was just as interesting. "Given that we are unable to confirm the connection between the printing plate in your possession and the unissued 10 shilling banknote, there are no grounds for the Reserve

Bank to provide any comments about whether you would be able to retain the item. Our records unfortunately don't provide us with any further information and we apologise for not being able to assist more in this regard."

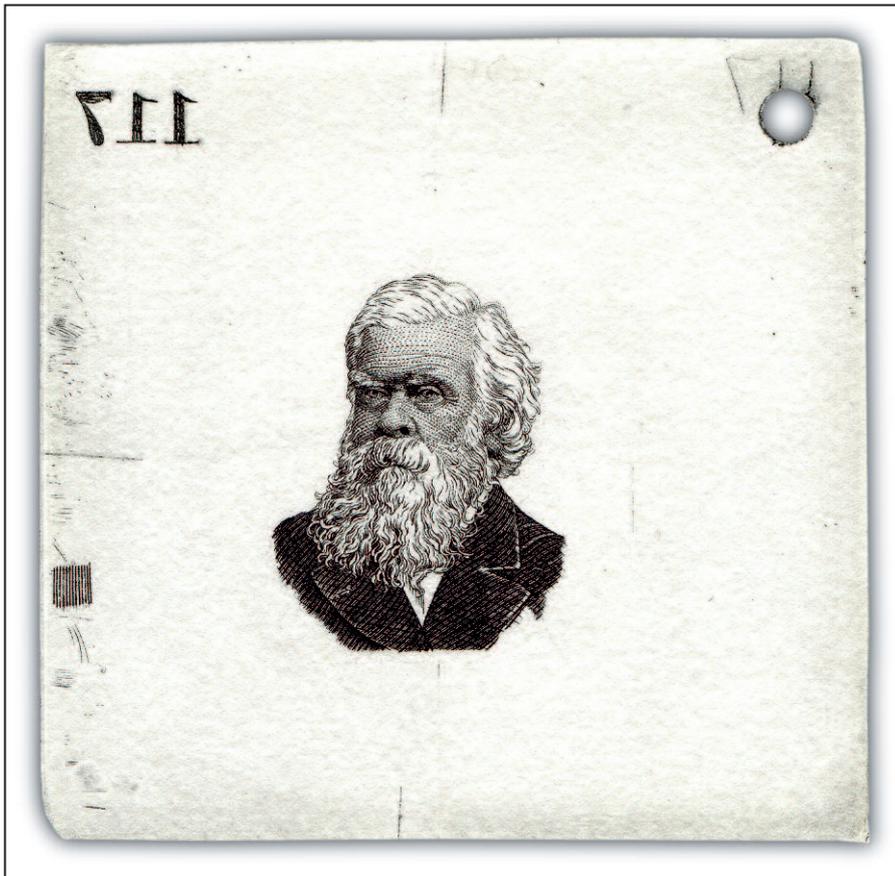
Printing the plate

Printing plates are made for the sole purpose of creating images, and this plate

was produced especially for printing images by the intaglio printing method. This process is restricted to the printing of high definition artwork and security documents. With the advent of digital processing, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find ways of producing prints from these intaglio plates. This is in addition to the situation that arises when such images might be part of a security



Printing press at the College of Fine Arts University of NSW



The finished print from the press

printing plate, such as is used for paper currency. My hunt for a way to produce an image from this plate was made easier by a contact already made with the College of Fine Arts, a faculty of the University of New South Wales.

When I contacted Michael Kempson, Senior Lecturer and Director of Cicada Press, he was very open to my suggestion that I bring the plate in to see if a print could be taken. He was particularly interested as his students rarely saw this sort of item and were unused to inking and

producing prints from plates such as these. A further reason for interest is that today there are of course very few presses that are capable of producing intaglio prints, due to the heavy pressure required to force the ink from the plate onto the special paper. I made a presentation to his class of student print makers and introduced them to the hobby of banknote collecting, illustrated with some notes, and of course the intaglio plate.

After several attempts to get the inking right and to adjust the press levels, just

five copies of the print were selected, and all others that came off the press were then destroyed, to maintain the integrity of the print that will now be put on public display.

The new resting place

For the time being, this new discovery will be housed in the Sir Henry Parkes Memorial Museum, at the Sir Henry Parkes Memorial School of Art in the country town of Tenterfield in northern New South Wales. The museum, circa 1875, is owned by the National Trust and operated by the Tenterfield Shire Council. The museum, already emphasising the history of Sir Henry Parkes and the speech that he made in Tenterfield on 24 October 1889 earning him the epithet "Father of Federation," will gain a special numismatic gem to join the polymer \$5 issued in the year of the Centenary of Federation and the \$1 coin issued the same year. All of these items feature images of Henry Parkes and make the museum a must see for all numismatic collectors and visitors to Tenterfield.

Acknowledgments

Shane, for bringing this numismatic treasure to light

Virginia MacDonald, Museum & Archives Consultant, Reserve Bank of Australia, Sydney.
Mr Ken Halliday, Curator, Sir Henry Parkes Museum, Tenterfield NSW.

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AUSSIE NOTES PROVIDE SIDESHOW AT AIA 16 APRIL SALE



Cerutti/Collins ten shillings overprint, McD10, R03b, that realized \$7,080 at the Archives International sale. Image Archives International.

A small group of collectable Australian notes featured at the fourteenth Archives International Auctions' sale held in Fort Lee, New Jersey, in April.

Top price of \$7,080 was scored by a PMG graded VF30 Cerutti/Collins 10 shillings half sovereign overprint with bold prefix/suffix letters, N and Q, McD10, R03b. Someone got a bargain. McDonald's prices this note in this grade at \$9,500.

A VF, if somewhat grubby Coombs/Wilson \$2 star replacement was snapped up for \$350, with \$330 paid for an UNC example of a P&T one shilling specimen postal note c.188x. A complete 1974 Phillips/Wheeler Type 3 specimen set, \$1-\$50, was passed in.

Full catalogue details and prices realized can be found at www.archivesinternational.com

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