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# THE STARS OF KING GEORGE VI

by Michael Vort-Ronald

Star replacement notes of King George VI are identified by a hollow five-pointed star in place of the final digit position in each of the serial numbers on ten shilling and pound notes in three signature combinations: Armitage-McFarlane, Coombs-Watt and Coombs-Wilson.

According to a letter dated 15 December 1932 preserved in the Reserve Bank of Australia Archives, the cost at that time to the Note Printing Branch of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia annually for numbering notes to replace spoils was four hundred pounds. The numbering was performed by Harrild hand operated bench type machines which were 9" by 6" and cost twenty pounds each!

The "Starred" notes system involved the replacement of spoilt notes with those of a different series which had been specially printed for the purpose. The system obviated the need for giving replacement notes the same serial number as the spoilt note and thus resulted in a saving of time and manpower.

The substitute of a symbol (the star) for the last digit in a serial number was considered the most suitable position as it corresponded with the focal point of bank officers and others when checking or counting notes. In addition it was considered unobtrusive as far as the general public was concerned<sup>2</sup>.

It was the practice to replace spoilt ten shilling and one pound notes by starred notes where no more than five notes in a sequence were spoiled. If more than five consecutive notes were spoiled the replacement notes were numbered with the same numbers as the spoiled notes<sup>3</sup>.

Research into this series is not a simple matter. The records of the Note Printing Branch and Note Issue Department of the Commonwealth Bank, do not spell out the precise numbers or numbering sequences of

the early star notes printed or issued. Custodians of these records at the Archives of the Reserve Bank in Sydney are not permitted to offer interpretation of the legers which were written half a century ago. Further, an attempt to privately contact a long-serving Note Printing Branch staff member met with an official request not to contact staff. Finally has been suggested that it was highly likely that there was no-one left in service who could shed light on the system first used for starred notes.

For the records to be made available for private study they have to be at least thirty years old. Even then, some records are still not available having been either lost, destroyed or being still active.

For all of these problems, it has been possible to make some useful advances in our understanding of the early star issues and these are set out below.

While no specific summaries of early star notes printed have been located, there are ledgers recording totals of notes printed and totals of spoils. The first star notes used the same prefix as the spoiled notes they replaced.

As all the early star notes observed have low serial numbers, mostly below 10,000, it is reasonable to assume that the serial numbers for starred notes in each prefix commenced at 00001. None of the serial numbers observed on surviving notes have been higher than the total number of spoils given for each prefix, so that it is possible that the total number of spoils given represents the highest serial number for each prefix.

Later on, starred notes had specific serial number spans set aside for them, and the only unknown factor in some instances is the actual dividing line between signature combinations. To use up available stocks, some starred notes were issued to replace notes in the next signature combination.

#### Acknowledgments:

Staff of the Reserve Bank Archives, Sydney, for access to records and co-operation over many years. Ross and Carol Pratley who provided accommodation during some thirty-five days during the period of research at the Reserve Bank Archives.

- 1. P-9-288, letter dated 15.12.32.
- 3. P-9-288 memo from Sydney Note Issue Dept., 22.8.62.
- 4. This includes notes owned or seen by the author, notes recorded in auctions and dealers lists and details supplied to the author by collectors and dealers.
- 5. The highest serial number observed just exceeds the total number shown as printed.

2. N-a-592, letter McCracken to Governor 29.4.48.

Because note issues of Queen Elizabeth, including starred notes, still partly fall within the thirty year closed period for access to records, information available is not yet complete and will therefore be the subject of a separate paper in some years time.

On 26 August 1948 the Note Issuing Department of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia advised banks:

"In the printing of currency notes there is a percentage of printers' "spoils" which it is necessary to replace by other notes. Where this occurs after the numbering stage, it has been the practice in Australia to give the replacement note the same number as the discarded note.

The individual numbering of replacement notes and their insertion in the correct position in the relative bundles involves considerable loss of time and manpower. Some countries avoid this by replacing a "spoil" by a note which bears a different number which has a symbol prominently placed to indicate that it is a replacement note, and it has now been decided to adopt this procedure with Australian 10/- and one pound notes. Notes used for replacement purpose will have a five-pointed star in the position normally occupied by the last

figure on the serial number."

## Ten Shilling Star Notes 1. Armitage-McFarlane Ten Shilling



A sample ten shilling starred note G/44 41899 was sent to the Governor on 29 April 1948 and presumably it was approved<sup>6</sup>. On 9 August 1948 the General Manager of the Note Printing Department, McCracken, advised the Governor of the Bank in a letter that up to that date all starred notes forwarded to Note Issuing Branch had been of the one pound denomination, and the next series of ten shilling notes to be delivered, commencing G/50 000001, would have the spoils replaced by starred notes.

The first delivery of notes received as replacement for spoils in the G/50 series were received on 25 August 1949. They bore the facsimile signatures of H.T. Armitage and S.G. McFarlane. It seems likely that the first ten shilling star note bore serial number G/50 00001\* as all the star notes observed with prefixes G/50 to G/94 have low serial numbers commencing with a zero, see Appendix A.

The following totals are given in a register of Australian notes cancelled and destroyed which may represent the totals of star notes printed per prefix.

| printed per | picita. |                   |
|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Prefix      | Spoils  | Date destroyed    |
| G over      |         |                   |
| 50          | 09885   | 27 September 1948 |
| 51          | 05440   | 27 September 1948 |
| 52          | 06408   | 27 September 1948 |
| 53          | 08202   | 27 September 1948 |
| 54          | 14958   | 27 September 1948 |
| 55          | 10961   | 12 December 1948  |
| 56          | 05727   | December 1948     |
| 57          | 05988   | December 1948     |
| 58          | 07262   | December 1948     |
| 59          | 17138   | December 1948     |
| 60          | 10421   | February 1949     |
| 61          | 05107   | February 1949     |
| 62          | 05127   | February 1949     |
| 63          | 06022   | February 1949     |
| 64          | 13095   | February 1949     |
| 65          | 11277   | March 1949        |
| 66          | 07329   | March 1949        |
| 67          | 07024   | March 1949        |
| 68          | 10907   | March 1949        |
| 69          | 20077   | March 1949        |
| 70          | 11983   | May 1949          |
| 71          | 06978   | May 1949          |
| 72          | 09242   | May 1949          |
| 73          | 09775   | May 1949          |
| 74          | 17334   | May 1949          |
|             |         |                   |

Thus G/50 ten shilling notes could have been numbered from G/50 00001\* to G/50 09885\* and so on. A pencilled notation in the records alongside the prefixes for paper for ordinary notes shows "heavy paper" for G/75 to G/80 inclusive.

It was decided that a special serial number range would be reserved for star notes commencing with G/95 and continuing to G/99. A total of 100,000 starred notes was used for each of the five prefixes. Ordinary notes in the G series concluded G/94 1000000<sup>7</sup>.

The first delivery of starred notes of the G/95 series was made on 6 June 1949 and these notes were used as replacements for the ordinary series from G/75.

Ten shilling notes with Armitage-McFarlane signatures were confined to various notes with G/50 to G/74 prefixes inclusive, and to notes which were starred from G/95 00001\* to G/95 99431\*. The latter series replaced ordinary notes in the G/75 to G/84 series from August 1949 to June 1950. A total of 569 spoils were not issued. By 13 July 1953 a total of 99,059 of the G/95 starred series had been destroyed leaving 941 outstanding\*.

# 2. Coombs-Watt Ten Shilling



<sup>7.</sup> File N-a-5921.

<sup>8.</sup> NI O S-6, the Register of Australian Notes cancel;led and destroyed.

The following starred ten shilling notes occurred with Coombs-Watt signatures. Each star note prefix contained numbers 00001\* to 100000\*.

| Prefix<br>G over | Replaced     | Period              | Outstanding or<br>13 July 1953 |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 96G              | G/85 to G/94 | Aug. 49 - Sept. 50  | 1476                           |
| 97               | G/94 to G/99 | May 50 - Sept. 50   |                                |
|                  | A/10 to A/19 | May 50 - Apr. 51    | 2053                           |
| 98               | A/19 to A28  | Aug. 50 to May 51   | 1644                           |
| 99               | A/28 to A/42 | Nov. 50 to Sept. 51 | 2350                           |

The star note series then reverted to prefixes A/0, with A/0 to A/9 being reserved for starred notes (100,000 each). The general issue notes commenced at A/10 000001 with 1,000,000 in each prefix printed.

| Prefix       | Replaced Period    | Outstanding on |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| A over       |                    | 13 April 1955  |
| A/40 to A/52 | March 51 - July 52 | 866            |
| A/50 to A/64 | Aug. 51 - Nov. 52  | 1320           |
| A/62 to A/74 | Dec. 51 - July 53  | 1928           |

## 3. Coombs-Wilson Ten Shilling



The following starred ten shilling notes occurred with a facsimile of the Coombs-Wilson signatures. Each star note prefix contained the numbers 00001\* to 100000\* except the final prefix A/9 which was from 00001\* to 15301\*.

H.C. Coombs signed as Governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Ronald Wilson signed as Secretary to the Treasury, replacing G.P.N. Watt.

| Prefix       | Replaced Period     | Outstanding |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------|
| A over       |                     | by 1954     |
| A/75 to A/84 | March 52 - March 53 | 1483        |
| A/80 tp A/94 | July 52 - June 53   | 1664        |
| A/90 to B/4  | Oct. 52 - Dec. 54   | 2556        |
| B/0 to B/14  | Feb. 53 - March 54  | 3236        |
| B/10 to B/29 | Apr. 53 - Nov. 54   | 4875        |
| B/25 to B/47 | Oct. 53 - Oct. 54   | 12475       |
| B/45 to B/49 | March 54 to Oct. 54 | 5102        |
|              |                     |             |

9. N-a-592. 10. NI-S-7. A notation in the record states "Starred note A over 3 07694 cancelled and replaced by A over 75 000015 to make complete 100 specimens"<sup>10</sup>.

The final starred ten shilling note of King George VI was A/9 15301\*. The unstarred series commenced at A/10 000001.

# One Pound Star Notes 4. Armitage-McFarlane Pound



The first delivery of one pound starred notes to the Note Issuing Branch occurred on 26 July 1948<sup>11</sup>. Serial numbers commenced with the prefix K/45.

The first public sighting of a starred note was recorded in *The Sun* on 7 December 1948 which included a photograph of note number K/56 07723\*. It was stated that it had been taken from a bundle of notes where it had apparently replaced ordinary note K/56 199319. The newspaper item also stated that star notes had been introduced six weeks beforehand.

At that time it was estimated that spoils for ordinary one pound notes were between one and one and a half per cent.

A notation in the register states "Starred notes used as replacements in Series K45 to K84 – both inclusive – took the serial letter and number prefix of the notes being replaced. From K85 onwards special starred series were issued"<sup>12</sup>.

As with the ten shilling starred notes, the following totals of spoils may have been replaced by an equal total of replacement notes for the one pound denomination. This assumption is strengthened by the added notation " $K/49\ 00001^* - 07193^*$ " at the top of the  $K/49\ page$ .

It is presumed that each prefix commenced at 00001\* and the highest serial number corresponded with the total spoils for that prefix.

| Prefix | Spoils | Period          |
|--------|--------|-----------------|
| K over |        |                 |
| 45     | 8513   | 16 August 1948  |
| 46     | 7882   | 16 August 1948  |
| 47     | 6181   | 16 August 1948  |
| 48     | 9936   | 16 August 1948  |
| 49     | 7193   | 30 August 1948  |
| 50     | 5637   | 30 August 1948  |
| 51     | 6773   | 30 August 1948  |
| 52     | 10321  | 30 August 1948  |
| 53     | 6175   | 14 October 1948 |
| 54     | 4150   | 14 October 1948 |
| 55     | 5092   | 14 October 1948 |
| 56     | 9731   | 14 October 1948 |
| 57     | 6825   | 9 December 1948 |
| 58     | 352813 | 9 December 1948 |
| 59     | 4294   | 9 December 1948 |
| 60     | 8068   | 9 December 1948 |
| 61     | 10003  | 9 December 1948 |
| 62     | 5577   | 9 December 1948 |
| 63     | 5267   | 9 December 1948 |
| 64     | 8623   | 9 December 1948 |
| 65     | 8248   | 9 December 1948 |
| 66     | 4182   | 9 December 1948 |
| 67     | 5045   | 9 December 1948 |
| 68     | 8858   | 9 December 1948 |
|        |        |                 |

<sup>11.</sup> NI-S-38, written on inside of cover.

<sup>12.</sup> NI-S-15 and NI-S-16 Serial Register notes cancelled and destroyed.

<sup>13.</sup> The highest number recorded just exceed the number given here.

| 69  | 8785  | February 1949 |
|-----|-------|---------------|
| 70  | 4464  | February 1949 |
| 7 I | 6805  | February 1949 |
| 72  | 8530  | February 1949 |
| 73  | 8789  | February 1949 |
| 74  | 4486  | February 1949 |
| 75  | 6003  | February 1949 |
| 76  | 12075 | February 1949 |
| 77  | 8619  | March 1949    |
| 78  | 4293  | March 1949    |
| 79  | 5297  | March 1949    |
| 80  | 10295 | March 1949    |
| 81  | 8560  | April 1949    |
| 82  | 4263  | April 1949    |
| 83  | 6307  | April 1949    |
| 84  | 12773 | April 1949    |
|     |       |               |

On 21 December 1948 the Secretary of the Note Issue Department wrote to the General Manager of the Note Printing Branch and instructed him to allocate I/0 to I/9 for starred notes, while confining unstarred note numbers to I/10 to I/99. A total of 252,720 starred notes replaced spoils in the ordinary range I/10 to I/99<sup>14</sup>.

From K/85 in the ordinary series, spoils were replaced by starred notes commencing I/0 00001\*. The first delivery of the I series starred notes took place on 11 April 1949, replacing notes in the K/85 to K/99 ordinary notes from June 1949 to March 1950.

### 5. Coombs-Watt Pound



Starred notes with the facsimile signatures of H.C.Coombs as the Governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and G.P.N.Watt as Secretary to the Treasury commenced at I/0 87831\*15.

| Prefix<br>Lover | Replaced     | Period             | Outstanding on<br>25 January 1954 |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 0               | K/85 to K/99 | June 49 - March 50 | 2955                              |
| 1               | K/99 and     |                    |                                   |
|                 | I/10 to I/23 | Oct. 49 - Oct. 50  | 2673                              |
| 2               | 1/22 to 1/3  | Nov. 49 - Oct. 50  | 3845                              |
| 3               | 1/36 to 1/48 | Feb. 50 - Jan. 51  | 3553                              |
| 4               | 1/48 to 1/63 | May 50 - Dec. 51   | 4428                              |
| 5               | 1/62 to 1/78 | Aug. 50 - Dec. 51  | 4562                              |
| 6               | I/78 to I/93 | April 50 - Dec. 51 | 5192                              |
| 7               | I/91 to I/99 | and                |                                   |
|                 | W/9 to W/23  | Feb. 51 - March 52 | 6233                              |
| 8               | W/20 to W/35 | June 51 - Dec. 52  | 9544                              |
| 9               | W/32 to W/47 | July 51 - Dec. 52  | 8347                              |

W over

0 W/44 to W/59 Nov. 51 - Oct. 52 3449 1 W/56 to W/79 Feb. 52 - March 53 3658

There is no mention of the dividing line between this signature and the next combination but five starred notes of Coombs-Watt have been observed with serial numbers between W/1 01862\* and W/1 95098\* so it is possible that the numbers went to 100,000 in that prefix. No notes with the prefix W/2 have been observed so it remains uncertain if these were Coombs-Watt or Coombs-Wilson starred notes (though it is thought more likely that they were of Coombs-Wilson).

14. NI-S-43.

15. NI-S-17 and NI-S-18.

#### 6. Coombs-Wilson Pound



A letter from the General Manager of the Note Printing Branch, McCracken to the Governor of the Bank on 4 October 1950 advised that serial numbers W/0 to W/8 would be reserved for starred notes, with the unstarred notes series commencing at W/9 000001. As can be seen from the previous table, some starred notes with serial letter I replaced notes in the W series of ordinary issues.

Starred notes with the facsimile signatures of H.C. Coombs and Ronald Wilson were as follows (assuming W/2 was in this signature combination):

| Prefix | Replaced     | Period             | Outstanding on |
|--------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| W over |              |                    | 7 April 195516 |
| 2      | W/72 to W/91 | Nov. 51 - Apr. 53  | 4397           |
| 3      | W/88 to W/99 | and                |                |
|        | X/0 to X/7   | Aug. 52 - Aug. 53  | 5118           |
| 4      | X/4 to X/27  | Dec. 52 - Dec. 53  | 7255           |
| 5      | X/24 to X/5I | April 53 - Feb. 54 | 12145          |
| 6      | X/48 to X/55 | Aug. 53 - March 54 | 5020           |
|        |              |                    |                |

The final serial number for the King George VI starred one pound note series was W/6 39223\*.

General issue notes in the W series, including notes with signatures Coombs-Watt and Coombs-Wilson, used the following totals of starred notes<sup>17</sup>:

| W/0 to W/39  | 207,553 |
|--------------|---------|
| W/40 to W/69 | 230,947 |
| W/70 to W/99 | 185,108 |

There were a total of 100,000,000 notes issued in the series, including the star replacement notes, so the ratio of normal to star notes was 99,376,392: 623,608, or just about one star note for each 160 normal notes.

## Ten Shilling Summary

Ten Shilling star replacement notes may have occurred as follows:

| Signature          | Total Printing | Serial Numbers (Approximate) |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Armitage-McFarlane | 343,105        | Various G/50 to G/74 and     |
|                    |                | G/9 00001* to G/95 99431*    |
| Coombs-Watt        | 700,000        | G/96 00001* to G/99 100000*  |
|                    |                | A/0 00001* to A/2 100000     |
| Coombs-Wilson      | 615,301        | A/3 00001* to A/9 15301*     |

16. NI-S-38. 17. NI-S-43.

# **One Pound Summary**

| One pound star repl | acement notes | may have | occurred | as follows: |
|---------------------|---------------|----------|----------|-------------|
|---------------------|---------------|----------|----------|-------------|

| Signature          | Total Printing | Serial Numbers                                    |
|--------------------|----------------|---|
|                    |                | (Approximate)                                     |
| Armitage-McFarlane | 374,376        | Perhaps 286,446 in the K series and 87,830 in the |
|                    | - ,            | I series.   |
|                    |                | K/45 to K/84 and I/0                              |
|                    |                | 00001* to I/0 87830*                              |
| Coombs-Watt        | 1,012,169      | Perhaps 812,169 for I series and 200,000 for      |
|                    | , ,            | W series.   |
|                    |                | I/0 87831* to I/9                                 |
|                    |                | 100000* and W/0 00001*                            |
|                    |                | to W/1 100000                                     |
| Coombs-Wilson      | 493,223        | W/2 00001* to W/6                                 |
|                    |                | 39223   |

| Ten Shilling Star Replacement Notes Observed 1. Armitage-McFarlane |               |        |       | One Pound Star Replacement Notes Observed 4. Armitage-McFarlane |               |        |             |
|--|---------------|--------|-------|---|---------------|--------|-------------|
| Prefix   | Serial Number |        | Total | Prefix  | Serial Number |        | Total       |
|  | Highest       | Lowest | Seen  |   | Highest       | Lowest | Seen        |
| G/50   | 00562         | 01331  | 2     | K/49  | 00712         | 01669  | 2           |
| G/54   |               | 02759  | 1     | K/52  |               | 08822  | 1           |
| G/56   |               | 05256  | 1     | K/56  | 06178         | 07723  | 2 2         |
| G/60   |               | 03091  | 1     | K/58  | 00004         | 03537  |             |
| G/65   |               | 03466  | j     | K/65  |               | 08208  | 1           |
| G/67   |               | 02500  | 1     | K/68  |               | 06615  | 1           |
| G/71   |               | 01078  | 1     | K/72  |               | 00426  | 1           |
| G/73   |               | 08826  | î     | K/80  |               | 09400  | 1           |
| G/95   | 06426         | 98447  | 4     | 1/0   | 02696         | 86458  | 4           |
|  |               |        |       | 5. Coombs-Watt  |               |        |             |
| 2. Coombs-Watt   |               |        |       | Prefix  | Serial Number |        | Total       |
| Prefix   | Serial N      | lumber | Total |   | Highest       | Lowest | Seen        |
|  | Highest       | Lowest | Seen  | 1/0   | 90911         | 90912  | 2           |
| G/96   |               | 82475  | 1     | I/1   | 85177         | 93223  | 2           |
| G/97   | 62933         | 82275  | 3     | I/2   | 19936         | 94517  | 6           |
| G/98   | 02784         | 95987  | 6     | I/3   | 36505         | 41366  | 2 2         |
| G/99   | 11589         | 97141  | 4     | I/4   | 14394         | 71175  | 2           |
| A/0  | 07773         | 72708  | 3     | I/5   |               |        | 0           |
| A/1  | 00370         | 94345  | 13    | I/6   | 08294         | 11721  | 2           |
| A/2  | 19391         | 89755  | 8     | I/7   | 21912         | 96333  | 4           |
|  |               |        |       | I/8   | 16784         | 98864  | 6           |
|  |               |        |       | I/9   | 18197         | 96696  | 6<br>5<br>6 |
| 3. Coombs-Wilson   |               |        |       | W/0   | 00006         | 73594  | 6           |
| Prefix   | Serial N      |        | Total | W/1   | 01862         | 95098  | 5           |
|  | Highest       | Lowest | Seen  |   |               |        |             |
| A/3  | 45226         | 74078  | 4     | 6. Coom   | bs-Wilson     |        |             |
| A/4  | 29704         | 86939  | 3     | Prefix  | Serial N      | lumber | Total       |
| A/5  | 13576         | 49647  | 3     |   | Highest       | Lowest | Seen        |
| A/6  | 08711         | 37339  | 6     | W/3   | 16768         | 97519  | 6           |
| A/7  | 07779         | 83789  | 7     | W/4   | 20723         | 80658  | 8           |
| A/8  | 32591         | 97162  | 6     | W/5   | 16393         | 65536  | 8           |
| A/9  | 05489         | 05770  | 2     | W/6   | 13342         | 36334  | 2           |
|  |               |        |       |   |               |        |             |