

Old money can be good money

By Detective Sergeant Steve Moore
Northern Region

WHEN Queensland Police went to a Wellington Point house in Brisbane to search for drugs they did not realise that they would uncover a clever coin counterfeit ring.

Queensland Police Drug Squad officers went to a house on Old Cleveland Road East on suspicion of finding drugs.

They didn't find any drugs but located some pre-decimal coins. In a workshop they also found what appeared to be equipment for making counterfeit coins. There was a furnace, a kiln and melted zinc and copper coils.

Counterfeiting is a Commonwealth offence and the Queensland Police called their local AFP counterparts in Brisbane. AFP officers attended and spoke to one of two brothers, Charles Coulter, 51, who lived at the house.

When he was interviewed, he admitted to making a couple of coins "to use in jewellery making". He was charged with making and possessing counterfeit coins. His younger brother, Geoffrey, was not home at the time the warrant was executed.

Over the next two weeks, AFP Detective Constable Laurie Kelly and Detective Sergeant Steve Moore received several telephone calls from southern coin dealers who believed that they had purchased counterfeit coins from a Brisbane man. About this time, some coin dealers from the Brisbane and Redcliffe areas began contacting the AFP to say they had either bought or been offered rare pre-decimal coins by a Brisbane man.

A profile began to take shape and photos of the type of coins and the possible suspects were sent interstate and distributed locally.

A coin dealer in Sydney then told the AFP officers in Brisbane that he had met with a Brisbane man at a room in the Sydney Hilton and bought some rare coins from him. He was able to identify the man, Geoffrey Coulter of Brisbane, from a photo supplied by the AFP.

A Brisbane coin dealer identified Geoffrey Coulter as a man who had recently attended several coin dealers meetings and had approached him to buy and sell coins. Another Brisbane dealer said he had bought coins he thought were legitimate from Coulter.

The main coins subject to the AFP inquiries were the 1923 halfpenny, the 1938 florin and 1921-22 overdated threepence. Such a threepence in good condition could be expected to fetch over \$1200.

It had become rare because in 1922 the Australian Mint had decided to mint threepences using the 1921 mould, a move which turned out to be unsuccessful as the 1 in 1921 could still be seen on the 1922 production. This of course made it a sought after collector's coin. Nevertheless, several were released before the production flaw was noticed.

On the October 6, 1992 the AFP prepared its own search warrant. Based on the amount of information being provided and AFP inquiries it was suspected that many more coins than the few first located were hidden.

Again the officers led by Detective Sergeant Moore gained a quick entry to the Wellington Point house using the search warrant but found little further evidence except for one very important item, a safe deposit acknowledgement advice form. One alert police officer found the small form in the name of Geoffrey Coulter in the back of a wallet which had been left in a drawer.

While the other officers stayed at the house, one officer returned to the office and prepared another search warrant for the Westpac Bank at Geebung where the safe deposit box was located.

Detective Sergeant Moore thought it was strange that the advice form was for a bank which was not Coulter's normal bank and which was on the other side of town. Also, the safe

deposit was registered to a false address.

On opening the safe deposit box at the bank police found it contained a metal box. This was not opened but taken back to the AFP office.

Coulter refused to come to the AFP office but did agree to leave a key for the box at the Mt Gravatt post office. When opened by the AFP it revealed a Pandora's box of goodies. There were 16 rubber coin moulds, a passport in a false name of Ron O'Neill, business papers and hundreds of counterfeit coins, some in excellent condition and others of various quality. The officers also found some poor quality \$2 coins. This was believed to be the first time any serious counterfeiter had tried to make \$2 coins as normally the cost involved would not make it viable. Geoffrey Coulter and his brother Charles were charged with a number of offences under the Crimes (Currency) Act.

It was found advertisements had been placed in some Australian coin magazines using a false name offering the coins for sale. Coin dealers throughout Australia were warned. Some had bought the coins thinking they were genuine.

The AFP was advised by coin experts that some of the pre-decimal coins were assessed as being of a very fine quality which could and had deceived some dealers. It was also understood that some buyers were being offered full coin sets which were a mix of mostly genuine coins and some counterfeits.

A brief of evidence was completed in which the AFP went through a vigorous committal before Geoffrey Coulter finally pleaded guilty before the Brisbane District Court. He was given a suspended jail sentence and ordered to reparate the coin dealers to whom he had sold the counterfeit coins.

The charges against Charles Coulter were withdrawn by the Crown. The counterfeit coins and associated equipment were confiscated.