



North York Coin Club

Founded 1960

MONTHLY MEETINGS 4TH Tuesday 7:30 P.M. AT
Edithvale Community Centre, 7 Edithvale Drive, North York

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R.P.O. Yonge & Finch, 5576 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, M2N 0B6

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Member :

Canadian Numismatic Association
Ontario Numismatic Association

PresidentNick Cowan
1st Vice PresidentBill O'Brien
2nd Vice PresidentShawn Hamilton
SecretaryTony Hine
TreasurerLen Kuenzig
Past PresidentRobert Wilson

Executive Committee

DirectorTony Hine
DirectorRoger Fox
DirectorVince Chiappino
Junior Director
AuctioneerBob Porter
Auction ManagerMark Argentino
Co-EditorsPaul Petch/Tony Hine

Receptionist
Draw PrizesBill O'Brien
Social ConvenorBill O'Brien
LibrarianRobert Wilson
Program Planning

THE BULLETIN FOR AUGUST 2008

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hi again, fellow members:

Well, here we are in August, slowly slipping away in the fall and then . . . well, we won't speak about that.

I understand that, after this next NYCC meeting, construction will start on the new centre to upgrade the Edithvale site. However, given that this is a government project we are talking about, these plans may change several more times yet before we see any action. If we could all depend on what our elected governmental representatives told us, then what a different country we would live in.

As part of a short one-week holiday, I visited the C.N.A. Convention in Ottawa. In short, it was fabulous: a great hotel and a not so shabby bar that produced for me a wonderful bottle of Merlot — one that is not available at the LCBO. I got the name of the importer through the L.C.B.O and ordered a few cases. This is one of those rare wines that need to be laid down for a year or two. It is going to be hard for me to leave them alone for so long.

Anyway, back to the Convention: great crowds, lots of North York friends and the bourse was busy with a lot of buying and selling on both sides, dealers and customers. Silver was going at a premium, about \$4.00 over spot. There were several 1,000 oz. bars and a lot of 100 ounce bars being traded and sold. Interestingly enough, there was very little gold available.

NEXT MEETING - WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20

We start gathering at 7:00 p.m. with meeting start scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

Our August meeting will be on this special date because of the limited time Edithvale is open when on summer hours. Those members able to attend are invited to bring show and tell items to contribute to an impromptu program.

Our supply of draw prize material is very low and we appreciate all donations.

Also, please bring some items for the auction.

Paper money seemed to be very active, at least on my part and for some reason; there was quite a large amount of graded coins being sold off at bargain prices, why I do not know.

Anyway, as Henry was our official representative, I will not steal any more from his report. What will not be in his report were a couple of wonderful conversations I want to share with you.

I had the pleasure of meeting Stan Clute, a former Torontonian now living in Alberta. I have only heard his name and never actually met him, so this made the contact with this past NYCC president even more fun. He sends his regards to all his old friends at the Club that he does not keep in touch with and promises to one day come to a meeting during a Toronto visit.

In addition, I had dinner with Terry O'Brien on the Friday. It was wonderful to spend time with her since the care giving time she has had to devote to her ailing husband has prevented her from attending our meetings as she once did. She is really going through

a difficult time right now and could use some contact from her Club Friends.

Following the Convention, my wife and I drove to Quebec City, saw the Paul McCartney concert, and ate and drank our way through the city for three more days. It sure was expensive there. I think that as this is the 400th anniversary, they have "seasonally adjusted" their prices.

However, no matter the price, it was worth the trip and the money was well spent. I have proof of that in the extra weight I gained, yet again.

I will see a lot of you next week and just as a footnote, I will bring up the matter of our Christmas dinner at the September meeting. I have taken the liberty of reserving the Legion hall again, now we have to discuss food and such matters, like who will pick up Bob Porter and the Bingo game.

See you on August the 20th or in September on our usual Tuesday night.

Nick

MEETING NEWS OF THE JUNE 2008 MEETING

The 537th meeting of the North York Coin Club was held on Wednesday July 23, 2008 at the Edithvale Community Centre, 7 Edithvale Blvd. North York, Ontario.

President Nick Cowan called the meeting to order at 7:30p.m. Twelve members and one guest were in attendance. Member Robert Porter observed that three members had arrived on Tuesday in confusion over the date, but the building was not available, and the group dispersed by 8:15p.m.

Norman G. Gordon won the on-time attendance draw of \$2. The pot remains at \$2 for the August meeting.

Because of the light summer turnout and the absence of mailed bulletins, the President elected to postpone the review of June's minutes until September to allow all members to comment on the minutes in the bulletin. The Treasurer presented a financial report.

Member Henry Nienhuis will deliver a C.N.A. convention report in September if a laptop projector is on hand.

Because it was believed the ONA is converting educational programs to DVD, there was discussion of purchasing a projector to

allow programs to be viewed by the club. Some members pointed out that projectors have a price point close to \$600.00, while kids versions are closer to \$100.00 because of lower resolution. The president said that the new Community Centre promised "state-of-the-art" audio-visual facilities, and he was reluctant to spend club funds on some technological thing we would soon receive for free.

A member (?) circulated a 1921 silver fifty-cent replica ordered on eBay from China with a group of other replicas. A group of replica purchases from eBay sellers in China were all shipped from the same Hong Kong address!

A member (?) related that eight years ago thieves stole a volume of merchandise from a United States coin dealer who had stopped to repair a punctured tire while driving home from the Florida F.U.N. show. Recently the same dealer recognized the stolen material on eBay and notified police. The eBay seller told police he had purchased the material at a flea market in good faith and denied any wrongdoing. It is difficult to prove ownership of stolen material after eight years even if the victim's memory is accurate.

The President noted that the club's fiftieth anniversary would occur in 2010 and invited members to consider striking a commemorative medal for the occasion. He also asked members to consider donating material for door prizes and to the mint box reserved for juniors.

A coffee break was held with thanks to Bill O'Brien who generously provided coffee, cookies and juice.

In the absence of Mark Argentino the auction manager and the small turnout, there was no auction.

Sale of door prize draw tickets yielded proceeds of \$15.00 to the club. Door prizes were won by the lucky Norman G. Gordon (3) and Tony Hine.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday August 20th at 7:30p.m. at the usual location. Beginning with our September meeting, we will return to meeting the fourth Tuesday of every month except July, August and December.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50p.m.

COMING EVENTS FOR SUMMER / FALL 2008

AUG. 24, Woodstock, Woodstock Coin Club Annual Show, NEW LOCATION. Woodstock Community Complex, 381 Finkle St. Hours: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. *Door prizes and displays. Admission \$1, kids free.* For more information, contact Woodstock Coin Club, 41 Masefield Cr., London, ON N5V 1M9, (519) 451-2316.

SEPT. 6, Guelph, South Wellington Coin Society Fall Show, Colonel John McCrea Legion, 919 York Rd., Guelph or Hwy 7. Hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. *One of Southwestern Ontario's biggest shows, 50 dealer tables, free parking, fully accessible. Large display area, hot meals. Admission \$2 for age 16 and up. Free gold coin draw.* For more information, contact Lowell Wierstra, 8 Smart St., Guelph, ON, N1G 4K9. Phone (519) 824 6534.

SEPT. 14, London, London Numismatic Society 16th Annual Coin Show, Ramada Inn, 817 Exeter Rd. [off Hwy. 401]. Hours 9 a.m.

to 4 p.m. *Draws for prizes with admission of \$1 - children free. Free parking. Displays, and dealers for coins, tokens, medals, paper money and more.* For more information, contact Len Buth, 519-641-4353. Email lbuth@webmanager.on.ca.

SEPT. 21, Essex, Essex County Coin Club Fall Show, Essex Retirees Social Club, 32 Russel St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. *Admission 50-cent, hourly door prizes, 15 tables, free parking.* For more information, contact president and show manager Dan Jones, djones33@cogeco.ca, (519) 733-6296.

SEPT. 26 - 28, St. Catharines, TNS, Quality Hotel, 327 Ontario St. TNS, Quality Hotel, 327 Ontario St. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., on Saturday and Sunday *Daily admission is \$4, Show pass is \$20.* For more information, contact Rick Simpson, Jo-Anne Simpson, rscoins@cogeco.ca (905) 643-4988, fax (905) 643-6329.

OCT. 4 - 5, Cambridge, TLC Show, Future Inns, 700 Hespeler Rd. Hours: Sat. 10 a.m. to

5 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. *Admission Adults \$4, \$2 seniors (65), students 16 and under free. Free parking.* For more information, contact Linda Robinson (289)235-9288, lindarobinson@cogeco.ca or Tom Kennedy (519)271-8825.

OCT. 18, Oshawa, Oshawa Coin Club COIN-A-RAMA, Five Points Mall, 285 Taunton Rd. E. Hours: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. *Free dealer public, and membership draws. Free admission. Featuring paper, coins, tokens, medals & many other items.* For more information, contact Sharon at 905-728-1352 or e-mail papman@idirect.com.

OCT. 19, Mt. Elgin, 46th Annual Tillsonburg Coin Show, Mt. Elgin Community Centre, Highway 19. Hours: 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. *Admission \$1. Free parking, lunch available.* For more information, contact Wayne MacFarlane, (519) 842-6666, waynemacfar

SECRETS OF OLYMPIC MEDAL MINTING

FROM CHINA.ORG.CN BY ZHANG MING'AI AND YANG XI

All 6000 medals for the 2008 Olympic Games have arrived in the capital from the Shanghai Mint, ready for their debut on August 8.

The Shanghai Mint, under the China Banknote Printing and Minting Corp, works mainly in casting metal coins for circulation, and precious metal badges. It is the provider not only of the medals for the Olympic Games and Paralympics, but also of the medals for demonstration events, and commemoration badges.

For the first time in Olympic history, the medals for the Beijing Games blend metal and jade. The technique of inlaying jade into metal can be dated back to the Han Dynasty almost 2000 years ago.

Blending metal and jade is a new technique in minting coins. It is not easy to bond jade perfectly with metal. The key to the process lies in the inner layer of the medal metal and the groove of the jade ring. A seal ring is put between the inner layer and the groove to join the metal and jade together. The seal can also buffer the effect of vibration to protect the jade against impact.

The jade ring must be matched with the medal metal, so it must meet with the necessary outer and inner diameters. Jade rings used for casting Olympic medals have been subject to rigorous quality controls, and those not up to the standard have been discarded.

To make use of those jade rings that do meet the quality criteria, metal medals were produced to fit the jade rings, and more than ten different sizes of seal ring were designed.

To avoid any loosening of the jade rings due to aging of the seals, glue has been used in casting the Olympic medals, a painstaking manual process.

Experts from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were concerned about the risk of fragility when the jade ring design was proposed. The IOC required that jade rings should be strong enough to withstand a 2-meter drop test. The Shanghai Mint raised that standard to three meters.

A considerable effort has been made to bond the Jade rings successfully to the medals. Medals can survive a 3-meter drop test with only minor cracks on the jade rings, proved through destructive experiments.

The unique feature of the medals for the Beijing Olympics—the inlaying with jade—is commonly regarded as the most difficult

process in making the medals. However, Liang Dekui, chief of the production division of the Shanghai Mint, does not share this view, “There are 30 steps in making the gold medal, and the jade inlay is only one of these. The major challenge is in the processing of the metal because we are not familiar with two thirds of the process.”

Medal production differs greatly from the traditional production of coins. Since production of a limited series is very different from mass production, the Shanghai Mint encountered a range of practical difficulties in producing the Olympic medals.

According to Liang, the biggest single problem was welding the medals to their clasps at high temperature without producing any change in the color of the metal.

The names of the individual sports were engraved on the medals after pressing. The following process involved spraying lacquer over the medals to protect their surface. However, the lacquer had to be evenly sprayed without changing the color and luster of the medal’s surface.

Because the jade rings did not arrive in Shanghai on schedule, much of the jade inlay work had to be carried out in June, the rainy season in Shanghai. Indoor humidity reached 80–90 percent. Moisture and sulfur in the air might easily have altered the surface color of the silver and bronze medals.

In response, the Shanghai Mint urgently equipped four powerful moisture-reducing machines to lower the humidity level. In addition, all workers were required to wear face-masks to prevent breath and saliva from harming the medals. “The medals represent a lifetime’s achievement for the competitors. It would be disappointing if the colors were to change with the passage of time. So we took great care.”

Olympic medal production is subject to zero defects. In order to meet the standard, the gold plating had to be strictly controlled. “The gold medal is not of pure gold. It is made of pure silver, plated with no less than six grams of gold. Any medals with less than six grams of gold plating were rejected.”

In order to ensure the exact weight of the plated gold, the workers had to control the duration of the electroplating and the strength of the electric current. Additionally, uneven color distribution over the medal surface was not acceptable.



Each medal was weighed before being put into the electroplating bath. To better control time and achieve the right finish, medals for electroplating were batched together according to weight. Eventually each medal was plated with 6 to 6.1 grams of gold.

In order to improve the look of the medals, the top end of the ribbon clasp was designed with a point. During bulk production processes after the clasps had been welded, there was a risk of medals scraping against each other. To avoid medals being scratched, the staff at the Mint designed a number of protective measures such as the “safety bag”—each medal was stored in a soft paper bag.

All the staff at the Mint treated the Olympic medal-making task with the utmost seriousness. They had not only to guarantee the quality of medal production within their time deadlines, but also to ensure the security of the medals. Strict quality control measures were implemented to guarantee the safety of the materials and the quality of the final product. Employees also signed a non-disclosure agreement forbidding them from talking to their families about the making of the medals.

MORE ADVICE ON COIN CLEANING

BY MIKE THORNE, COINS MAGAZINE

In my last column, (appearing in the April 2008 Bulletin) I talked about coin cleaning with abrasive methods, which should almost never be employed, and with coin dips. If you follow the directions on the container, the acid-thiourea dip method will produce satisfactory results on high-grade coins, as long as you don't do it repeatedly on the same coin and you take care to neutralize the action of the solution.

I should note that you should never use this method on a copper/bronze coin, as the coin will turn a pink color that gives it a decidedly cleaned appearance. Also, keep in mind that this method involves the loss of some of the surface metal of the coin, which makes it "cleaning that is abrasive only some of the time," according to Scott Travers.

What about non-abrasive cleaning? According to Travers, such methods are "being recommended increasingly before long-term storage." That is, coins are inherently dirty, whether we realize it or not. Thus, before we commit a new coin in our collection to some form of encasement or housing, we need to "purify" the coin's surface as much as possible.

In an earlier column, I mentioned a customer who told me that he boiled all his coins before putting them in holders. Perhaps there was method to his madness after all.

For years, the non-abrasive method of choice was a chemical named trichlorotrifluoroethane (try saying that 10 times fast), which removed surface impurities without attacking the coin's surface. You couldn't use it to remove tarnish, but it would take off the PVC residue (green slime from storage in soft plastic holders), dust, grease (oils from your fingers), and tape residue.

Unfortunately, trichlorotrifluoroethane, sold under the brand name Dissolve, damages the ozone layer in the atmosphere, so it is banned by the government. (I still have a can of it, but I suspect I won't be using it anytime soon. My question is, how do I get rid of it in an environmentally safe manner?)

Fortunately, according to Travers, E&T Kointainer of Sydney, Ohio, the same company that made Dissolve, now offers a new

product called Koinsolv for the same purpose for which Dissolve was employed. Given the lengthy list of exotic chemicals in Koinsolv, I wouldn't look for this to be a permanent solution to the nonabrasive cleaning problem.

You can also clean coins nonabrasively with an ultrasonic cleaner. As J.P. Martin writes, "Ultrasonic cleaners with distilled water and a little detergent can be used to remove heavily encrusted dirt from a coin, as well as coral encrustations from sea-salvaged coins. Used in connection with a dip they can be very effective in removing heavy tarnish but the reaction will take place faster than you think, so be very careful not to leave a coin in too long."

Of course, if you use the ultrasonic cleaner "in connection with a dip," then you're right back to an abrasive form of cleaning.

My only experience with ultrasonic cleaning was somewhat negative. Back in the early days of certification, I had a Good-6 1913-S Barber quarter that I wanted to have certified. The only service available at the time was the American Numismatic Association Certification Service, and it was strictly geared toward authentication, not grading.

I sent in my coin and got a note back telling me it had some crud around the mintmark and asking me for permission to clean the coin ultrasonically so that they could inspect the mintmark area. I gave my permission, the coin was ultrasonically cleaned, and they decided it was genuine.

Unfortunately, I never liked the coin as much after the cleaning as I had liked it before. Before the cleaning, the coin had a completely natural appearance. In other words, it looked just like it should have looked as a well-circulated Barber quarter. Afterward, the coin didn't look shiny or harshly cleaned, it just had a slightly unnatural appearance.

I guess I thought it looked "too clean" for its low grade. I kept it awhile but eventually sold it along with the rest of my Barber quarter set.

Martin also mentions using olive oil to clean copper or bronze coins. He doesn't



specify the type of olive oil to use, so I would go with the cheapest variety available.

If you like for your cleaning action to occur immediately, you're going to be disappointed with the olive-oil method, as the instructions are to let the coin soak in the oil for at least 24 hours. After this, you wipe off the oil with a soft cloth, such as a cotton t-shirt. Martin notes that because of this light rubbing to get rid of the oil, you should not use this method on uncirculated or proof specimens, as hairlines will result.

Martin ends his article on coin cleaning with a brief paragraph on the "safest cleaner" of all, "plain old Ivory soap," which you apply "gently by hand" and rinse thoroughly in cold running water. I have no experience with this method.

Martin's final paragraph suggests that you apply any method you're interested in using on common coins first, so that you can see how to do it and what problems might occur. Actually, I've read this warning many times in articles on coin cleaning, and it makes perfectly good sense to do this, but somehow I never have. I guess I've always been in too big a hurry to apply the cleaning chemicals to the coin that I thought needed cleaning.

Finally, virtually everybody who's ever written anything about coin cleaning ends with the following admonition: If you have any doubt about either your ability to employ a cleaning method or the final effect it will have on a particular coin, then don't do it. Probably a hundred coins have been ruined for every coin that has been helped by cleaning, particularly if the cleaning is done by someone who's not extremely familiar with the technique and its likely results.

Royal Canadian Mint Issues 2008 Lucky Loonie



Mint products include first day of mintage packaging and keychain



On July 23, 2008, with the Beijing Olympic Games and Beijing Paralympic Games just around the corner, the Royal Canadian Mint issued the 2008 Lucky Loonie, the latest in its extensive Olympic themed circulation coin program. The one-dollar coin, which features the familiar loon landing in water and the official emblem of the Canadian Olympic Team, enters into circulation today.

“Canadians from coast to coast can wish our athletes luck by keeping special coins produced by the Royal Canadian Mint, including the 2008 Lucky Loonie,” said Ian E. Bennett, President and CEO of the Royal Canadian Mint. “The Mint has provided each member of the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Teams competing in Beijing with a Lucky Loonie as their own personal good luck charm.”

Ten million 2008 Lucky Loonies, designed by Quebec wildlife artist Jean-Luc Grondin, have been produced and will be distributed exclusively by RBC Royal Bank and are available at RBC branches across the country. RBC is a Premier National Partner of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Canadians can also look for these special coins in their change.

The Mint and RBC also invited the general public to obtain their very own 2008 Lucky Loonie by attending coin exchanges held on July 29, 2008 from 11:30 am – 1:30 pm at various RBC branches across the country.



TOO-SHINY TOONIE RAISES COLLECTOR'S SUSPICIONS

BY HANK DANISZEWSKI, LONDON FREE PRESS

Counterfeiting: It Would Be A First In London

Even the humble toonie isn't immune from counterfeiters.

A suspected counterfeit \$2 coin, the first reported in London, turned up in a vending machine at a plant in the city earlier this month.

Martin Hodgson, a vice-president at Williams Form Hardware on Industrial Road, became suspicious when a toonie jammed a pop machine inside the plant.

A collector, Hodgson said the toonie didn't get past the magnetic sensors in the vending machine because it wasn't magnetic like the real coin.

He said the toonie didn't look or sound real and he suspects it's made of aluminum.

“It was too shiny and it sounded different when you dropped it on a desk—sort of a clunking sound” he said.

The suspect toonie appeared slightly thicker than normal and the engraving was a bit

sloppy when examined under a microscope, Hodgson said.

He called London police, who sent the toonie to an RCMP counterfeit lab in Ottawa for testing.

Until test results are confirmed, it's still a “suspect” toonie, said London Cont. Amy Phillipo.

If it were a fake, it would be the first one to turn up in the London area, she said.

The bogus toonie might have originated in Quebec, said RCMP Sgt. Marc Laporte.

In late 2006, the RCMP and Quebec police busted a counterfeiting ring operating out of a factory in Repentigny, northeast of Montreal

At the time, an RCMP official said the quality of fake coins was excellent. The officers weren't sure how long the counterfeit ring had operated.

About 800 fake coins from across the country have been turned in to the RCMP lab in Ottawa during the past year, Laporte said. It's not known if all the bogus coins were

turned out by the Repentigny ring.

Cpl. Elaine Laverne of the Quebec RCMP says a few other small counterfeit coin operations have been investigated in the province.

Laporte said the RCMP considers counterfeit coins a “rare” problem compared to fake bank notes, because of the machinery and expertise required and the much lower profit margins.

“They are so costly to produce it can outweigh the profit. It's not like making \$100 bills” said Laporte.

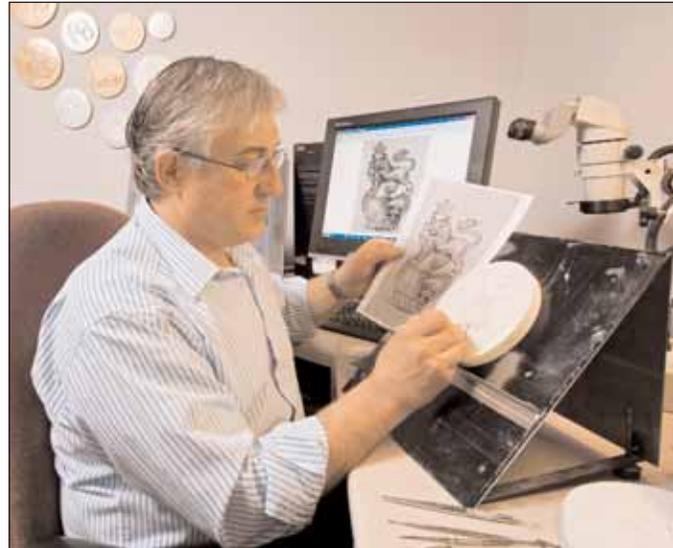
Alex Reeves, a spokesperson for the Canadian Mint agreed counterfeit coins are relatively rare.

“You need good metal-working skills and equipment,” said Reeves.

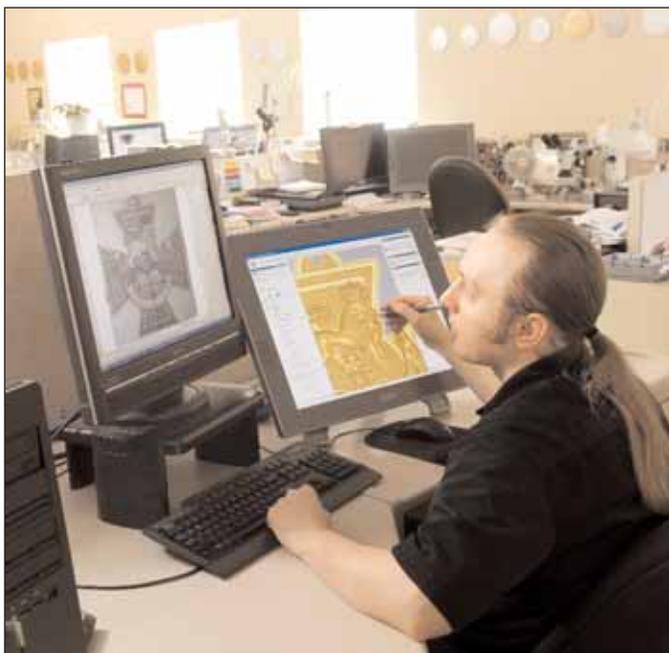
He said each real toonie and loonie has a magnetic “signature” that can be detected by vending machines.

PRODUCING THE CANADIAN VICTORIA CROSS AT THE ROYAL CANADIAN MINT

Did you know that since 1993 Canada has had its own version of the Victoria Cross? The original Victoria Cross was created by Queen Victoria in 1856. This is a British decoration and a total of 94 have been awarded to Canadians and Newfoundlanders, the last in 1945. Thus far, the Canadian Victoria Cross has not been presented.



Royal Canadian Mint Master Engraver Cosme Saffioti sculpts the central features of the Victoria Cross



Royal Canadian Mint Apprentice Engraver Konrad Wachelko electronically sculpts relief on the Victoria Cross



Royal Canadian Mint Engraving Technician Marc Dagenais sets up a steel block for production of a die for the Victoria Cross Medal



Royal Canadian Mint Master Engraver Cosme Saffioti removes excess casting material from a Victoria Cross medal



... and then engraves the final enhancements on the Victoria Cross



BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY CRITICISED FOR SELLING REPLICAS OF VICTORIA CROSS

BY CHRIS IRVINE

The B.N.P. has been accused of insulting troops by selling replicas of medals including the Victoria Cross for £12.



In Great Britain, sales of the fake crosses by BNP has been criticised as disrespectful

Although not illegal, the Ministry of Defence has condemned the sales of the fake honours as “an insult to both the Queen and our brave personnel.”

MPs similarly criticised the far-right party for exploiting the sacrifices of servicemen for financial gain.

Also for sale on the party’s official website are replicas of three World War II campaign medals and a World War I medal.

The Victoria Cross is the highest military decoration for valour in the face of the enemy to members of the armed forces.

Under strict military rules, only armed forces heroes who have won the cherished medals in combat—or their widows—are allowed to wear them.

Tory MP and ex-Army officer Patrick

Mercer called on Defence Secretary Des Browne to make the BNP sales illegal.

He said: “This is utterly shameful. Medals for gallantry and campaigns are absolutely nothing to do with any political party. The Defence Secretary should look at this to see whether legislation should be introduced to forbid it.”

BNP deputy chairman Simon Darby however defended the party’s action, arguing: “We don’t get donations from dodgy foreign businessmen or the trade unions—so we raise money in other ways.”

Private Johnson Beharry became the first VC recipient for more than 20 years in 2005, after he saved 30 members of his unit in Iraq after his five-vehicle convoy came under attack.

He told The Sun: “Selling fake VCs is very disrespectful. The honour of the medal and its history shouldn’t be tarnished like this.”

TOOLS OF THE COUNTERFEITER

BY ALAN HERBERT, COINS MAGAZINE

The term “soft dies” seems almost to be an oxymoron, since dies have to be hard in order to shape or form the material that the dies are used on. Actually, the term is not used in the normal course of events producing a struck coin. A soft die is one of the common tools of the counterfeiter.

The average collector or dealer is not likely to run across the term, certainly less likely than two or three decades ago when the detection of fake and altered coins seemed to be still in its infancy. With the advent of specialists and more and better knowledge of the minting process, the chances of a fake slipping by are steadily decreasing. As an aside, one of the problems is that these coins turn up a quarter of a century or more later, kept hidden in a collection for all that time.

Just what is a soft die? A soft die is a tool made of aluminum or hard plastic used to alter a coin.

To make a soft die, it's squeezed or hammered onto the surface of one coin. After hardening, the resulting incuse image is used to alter another coin, again by hammering or squeezing the die against the already struck coin.

The method used was similar to that used to fake the multi-strike 1964 cents, many of which are still around. That particular alteration underscored the overall lack of knowledge of the minting process at the time.

The key element was that the obverse of the coin exhibited multiple images of the obverse design. The reverse, in contrast, showed only one image.

The experts of the day were divided sharply over whether this was genuine or not. If my notes are correct, Walter Breen testified in the legal action against the alleged makers of the coin that the multiple images were genuine, a position he later had to abandon.

The key fact here is that only one side of the coin was affected. We know now that it simply couldn't happen.

A multi-struck coin has to exhibit similar doubling on both sides, or evidence of an intervening planchet or coin on one side. This is one of the fundamental rules of the minting process. The government was able to prove its case, and the coins were declared to be altered, using a soft die.

There is an aluminum alloy often used for soft dies, which becomes almost as soft as

butter when heat-treated and then hardens overnight to equal soft steel. I have no idea how long they have been altering coins in this fashion, but I would suspect back at least to World War I.

Coins restruck with soft dies can usually be detected by the spreading out of the design, because both the die and the coin expand as the die is being made.

There is another famous incident of an altered coin, the 1977/6 overdate cent. The piece was a hoax, which was featured by a hobby publication after the Mint officially declared it genuine. When it was too late to retract the story, the Mint did some further checking and found that the coin had been faked.

A soft die had been used to apply the 7 to a genuine 1976 coin. Two Floridians were arrested for making the altered coin and other similar pieces.

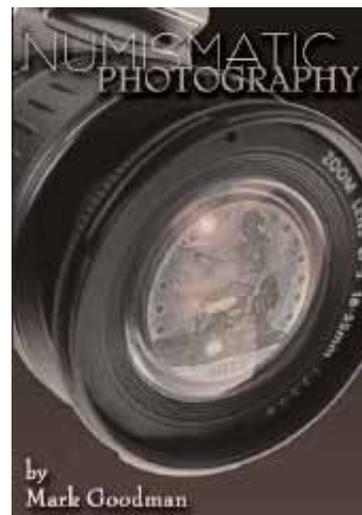
Soft-die alterations should not be confused with altered coins that were a major problem in the hobby in the 1970s and 1980s, which were produced with normal dies that had been sold for scrap metal. The dies had been cancelled by grinding off the design, but a number of the dies were found to have as much as 40 percent of the design still intact, where the grinding was incomplete.

The dies with a partial design were used to strike a number of fake minting varieties. One that I remember vividly had four equidistant “ears” struck on an already struck coin. This and other fake “errors” were produced by a group I dubbed the Southern California Underground Mint, or “SCUM” for short. Dozens of collectors and several dealers were stung by the alterations.

Have you ever seen a “small cent”? The correct diameter of a U.S. cent should be .750 of an inch, so the immediate suspicion is that the smaller cent has been altered, as there is no normal way of striking an undersized coin. It would require the special manufacture of a pair of dies and a matching collar.

The collars used by the Mint to surround the planchet as it is struck by the dies can vary only a couple of thousandths of an inch before they are discarded. Thus we have to look in another direction for a cause for your small cent. One possibility is that the coin has been forced through a tapered tube, which will reduce the diameter.

BOOK TEACHES HOW TO CAPTURE COINS



As the Internet and electronic visual media play increasing roles in the coin industry, Mark Goodman answers the call on how to correctly photograph coins with his new book, *Numismatic Photography*.

The book, published by Zyrus Press, released on July 15.

Numismatic Photography teaches the reader in an easy-to-read and visually rich guidebook format how to capture quality photos using a digital camera.

Goodman addresses typical problems faced by the photographer, recommends ways of improvements and offers specific tips and techniques for raw and slabbed coins.

“[Mark] Goodman's first numismatic book is an impressive addition to the coin collector's arsenal of knowledge,” said Roger Burdette, author of the *Renaissance of American Coinage* series.

Some of the chapters included in the book are *Imaging Concepts*, *Color and Luster*, *High Contrast Coins*, *Low Contrast Coins*, *Toned Coins*, *Special Imaging Techniques* and *Image Presentation*. It also includes two appendices: a *Troubleshooting Guide* and *General Rules for Coin Photography*.

The 160-page paperback is 7 by 10 inches in size and holds more than 300 full color images. Suggested retail price is \$29.95.

Numismatic Photography will be available in bookstores nationwide, at local coin shops and online at www.amazon.ca. To order from Zyrus Press, call (888) 622-7823 or visit www.zyruspress.com.