

# On the Money

## Aboriginal Representation on Our Currency

Fifty years ago on the 14 February 1966, Australia introduced decimal currency. In came dollars and cents and out went pounds and pence. The Royal Australian Mint which opened in 1965 in Canberra undertook this mammoth change.

Decimalization provided Australia with the opportunity to create an entirely new currency that would reflect a new change in the post war era of growth and prosperity. The new design of notes and coins were also to reflect Aboriginal people's representation on them.

A public competition was held to seek names with a unique Australian name. Over 1000 suggestions were received with names such as the 'Austral', 'Oz', 'Boomer', 'Roo', 'Kanga', 'Emu', 'Koala', 'Digger', 'Zac', 'Kwid', 'Dinkum' and 'Ming' (nickname of Prime Minister Menzies).



'Dollar Bill' and the brochure outlining the currency conversion.

Although Menzies wanted to name the currency the Royal, emphasizing a strong link to the Crown, it was overturned in favour of the 'dollar.'

The new \$1, \$2, \$10 and \$20 banknotes and the 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cent coins were issued on

14 February 1966 in line with the timetable set three years earlier. A \$5 note was issued the following year.

Compared to the previous currency note series, the decimal banknotes were more clearly 'Australian'. This was the crucial condition in the plan given to the designers.



Early/initial design of the new Royal banknote

The new one dollar note featured a design by the artist David Malangi (1927 – 1999) who came from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. He used more prominent brush strokes than his other counterparts from Arnhem Land. In 1988 he travelled to New York as part of the Dreamings exhibition of Aboriginal artworks from Australia and in 2004 his work was displayed at the National Gallery of Australia called No Ordinary Place.

Yet his artwork on the one dollar note depicting the mortuary feast of the ancestral hunter Guumirringu was used without his consent or permission. The Reserve Bank later acknowledged this mistake of copyright (which opened up other issues of Aboriginal copyright) and Malangi was financially compensated for this error.



The back of the one dollar note was distinctive with an interpretation of an Aboriginal bark painting by David Malangi.

In 1988, a ten dollar note was released that featured new technology by the nations' peak research body, the CSIRO, to prevent counterfeit reproduction. This was the first of the plastic or polymer notes that we all know today and at the time, it was a world first for this type of bank note circulation.



An Aboriginal youth in ceremonial paint, a Morning Star Pole and other artwork designs are depicted on reverse side of this note.

The distinct gold colour of the fifty dollar note features Aboriginal 'inventor' David Unaipon (1872-1967), born in South Australia. For many years, Unaipon was an employee of the Aborigines' Friends Association. He travelled widely and lectured on his ideas, gave sermons on Christianity and talked about Aboriginal legends and customs. His original manuscript of the publication, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines* features on this note.



The note also features drawings of his inventions including the patent application for an improved mechanical hand piece for sheep shearing in 1909. Unaipon was also absorbed with the principles of perpetual motion. His theories around polarized light and helicopter flight earned him the moniker as Australia's "Leonardo" (da Vinci). He made patent applications for inventions that included centrifugal motor, a multi-radial wheel and a mechanical propulsion apparatus. Unaipon was awarded the Coronation Medal in

1953. He travelled around Adelaide and country areas in South Australia, often on foot. At times, he was refused accommodation because of his race.

By the 1980s, high inflation had become a problem and there was need to replace the paper one and two dollar notes with coins. During this period, the higher denominations of the fifty and one hundred notes were also introduced.

The two dollar coin featured an Aboriginal Elder Gwoya Jungarai (1895 – 28 March 1965), also known as 'One Pound Jimmy', from central Australia. However, the design was not meant to depict any Aboriginal person in particular. The coin also incorporates the Southern Cross and the native grasstree called the Xanthorrhoea.

Gwoya Jungarai's image appeared on an Australian stamp in 1950, although only his picture appeared titled 'Aborigine' with no reference to his actual name. His image also appeared on the front cover of the tourism publication 'Walkabout Magazine' in 1936 and again later in 1950. Yet the man responsible for using the image of Jungari in the magazine actually supported the White Australia Policy doctrine and he saw Jungari as a symbol of a dying race. In some respects, Jungari's image may have just been a stereotype appearance of who the 'Australian Aborigine' was at the time.

There is some conjecture how he derived the name 'One Pound Jimmy' but as a respected and well-informed individual, he would charge the fee of one pound for his guidance. Of course, two dollars was the equivalent to one pound.

Two of his sons, Cliffard Possum Jungari Tjapaltjarri and Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri were notable artists in their own right.

Interestingly, of the currency discussed, the Aboriginal people depicted are all male.

