

When our Group of Science Correspondents was in Canberra in March 1966, it was just 3 months after Australia had converted its currency from Imperial £-s-d to the new decimal \$-c system. It was known that Great Britain was to carry out a similar conversion 5 years later in 1971, and I therefore decided to visit the Commonwealth Mint in Canberra and the Secretary of the Decimal Currency Board in Sydney. The story I had written in Australia was published two months later in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Britain, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Fiji, Malawi and Bermuda were in 1966 the only countries 'unconverted' and obviously one could learn from Australia. It is seldom realised that the production of a new coinage requires a major industrial effort, and it meant replacing 3600 million old English coins by new ones. At that time the annual production of the Royal Mint was only 1000 million coins a year and it would obviously have taken 4 years to strike new ones. When Australia was faced with the same task in 1963, it went to the Royal Mint in England for help and when I saw Mr R.H. Osborne, the Superintendent of the Commonwealth Mint, he was looking forward to rendering a similar, very profitable, replacement service to the Royal Mint.

In both countries a new Mint had to be built, and in Canberra I saw the latest technology characterised by automation and far reaching mechanical handling by overhead cranes. The new Royal Mint was built in Wales. However the mechanical difficulties were small compared to the psychological ones to persuade a whole nation to change its habits. Australia took the 10 shilling base as its new Dollar value and thus many of the old coins could continue in usage, whereas Britain, for prestige reasons, retained the Pound Sterling base and was forced to strike a completely new coinage, except the florin, 2/- s, the 10 'new pence' coin.

I might mention here my own solution to Britain's conversion worries in 1971. Inspired by the circular paper slide-rules found in mediaeval astronomical books, the 'volvells', I thought of patenting mine. But my great friend, Lord Hanworth, [See Title 36] persuaded me quite rightly to produce and sell the gadget, as getting a patent would be lengthy and costly.

I therefore took my model to the General Manager of the Daily Telegraph, Mr H.H. Stephen, and he was delighted to produce and market it as a *Daily Telegraph* product. The 'New Currency Converter' is a circular cardboard disk of 11 cm diameter, with the two subdivisions of the pound sterling printed on it. [See Title 217] These two concentric circles, the new decimal on the outside, the £-s-d on the inside, are linked by a small transparent cursor which allows instant comparison of the new currency with the old one. It was sold by the ten thousands and I got a welcome royalty from my only invention. [See Title 78]