

The most common question we keep getting asked is, how do we spot a fake? Well, this depends on the quantity of coins to be checked and the amount of fakes we want to find.

If it's just to check the coins in our pockets, then we would have a look at the inscription. If it's to check hundreds or thousands and we only wanted to find the really bad ones, then we would use a coin validator.

However, despite quantity, if we want to find as many fakes as possible, then we would visually inspect every coin. The following explains how we carry out a visual inspection of the coins and what we class as a "definite fake".

At the beginning, we did not know exactly what to look for, so decided to see if there was any information on the Royal Mints web site. Their site mentioned things such as: -

- Coins with errors such as the wrong reverse or edge inscription for the year, and/or poor quality edge inscriptions are forgeries.
- Forgeries are generally plated metal of poor quality or made of brass and that these can sometimes be identified by a slight difference in colour.
- The inscriptions may be less clear than normal, but states that some early designs of genuine coins wear very badly, so this is not a sole indicator of being a forgery.
- A sure test is to examine the bottom of the incuse edge inscription with a powerful lens. Genuine coins show a clearly defined flat base to the hollows forming the inscription, which is almost certainly absent in a forgery.

Next we searched the web and found various newspaper articles explaining how to check for fakes. We then combined all the information we had found, and drew up two lists of things to look for.

First was a list of to find coins that we classed as "definite fakes". These coins have errors such as: -

- A date and design that did not match, as per example 1;
- An inscription that did not match the date or design, see example 2;

Second, was a list to find coins that we classed as "odd balls". These include coins with errors such as: -

- The Queen's portrait not lining up with the reverse design;

Example 1.

F363



The Oak Tree pictured here was only minted in 1987 and 1992.

This coin must be a fake as it is dated 1988.

- A poor or strange looking inscription;
- The Queen's portrait not in the middle of the coin;
- An incorrect depth to the Queen's portrait and/or reverse design;
- A strange colour.

We know that to classify an "odd balls" as a "definite fakes", we would need to carry out a much more detailed examination of the coin.

Now all we needed to do was to check some coins. So what better than to visually inspect the 2,000 coins we had withdrawn from the bank.

Example 2.

F209



The Dragon passant inscription should be the Welsh Pleidiol Wyf I'm Gwlad.

This coin has the English inscription, so must be fake.

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- Electronic coin validators;
- Electronic change-givers;
- Cashless payment systems;
- Coin validator computer interfaces;
- Escrows;
- Hoppers;
- Anti pin systems;
- Steppers;
- Timers;
- Power supplies;
- Displays;
- Mechanical coin validators;
- Tokens.

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At first, we just checked the coins randomly however, we found this very time consuming.

After carrying out some experiments, we decided that a quicker way to check that, the date, reverse design and inscription matched, was to sort the coins by their years of mintage.

However, sorting each coin by looking at the date was also time consuming, we decided that a more efficient way would be to split the coins into smaller groups.

The following explains how we split and sorted them: -

Step 1. Was to sort the coins into the 14 different reverse designs;

Step 2. Was to sort each group into smaller groups by using the Queens' portraits.

It was at this point that we realised that the different mintage years of the Leek and Flax plant had the same portrait of The Queen (1985 - 1997);

Step 2.



1983-1984
Arnold Machin



1985-1997
Raphael Maklouf



1998 to date
Ian Rank-Broadley

Step 3. Was to sort the Leek and Flax plant coins by the date;

Step 4. Was to check the date on all the other groups of coins;

Step 5. Was to check that the inscription matched the design. We did this by: -

- a. Selecting 4 or 5 coins from a particular group;
- b. We then turned the coins so that the inscription text was the same way up (For those who were not aware, the inscription can be either way up);
- c. We then lined up the mint marks;
- d. We then slowly turned the coins checking that the inscription wording was correct, that the word spacing was the same, that the typeset was the same and that nothing looked odd.



Step 5b.



At a quick glance the inscription on these coins look good. However, look very closely at the coin in the middle, this coin is a fake.

If you had nothing to compare with, do you think that you would be able to spot that it was a fake?

This method of checking netted us 68 "definite fakes" and hundreds of other coins that fell into the "odd balls" category.

Now all we needed to do was to find a way of making sure we had not missed any fakes and to prove if any of the "odd balls" were indeed counterfeit.

To be continued.....

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