

CHECKED YOUR WALLET LATELY?

by Keith Livingston

DETEKTIVE Sergeant David Davidson has money "on the brain".

He is the AFP's expert on money, whether it's Australian currency or from overseas.

Sergeant Davidson's interest in money goes beyond his pay packet and into the world of counterfeiting.

With almost six years experience in dealing with counterfeit money behind him, he is the longest serving member of the Currency Branch, based at Southern Region HQ.

He lifts a folder from a security cabinet, removes a \$20 note and hands it to me.

"See this," he said, "it's a rather poor \$20 forgery . . ." I look at it closely and agree. The colour is faded and crease lines are easily seen across the surface of the paper revealing the white background where the "ink" has been rubbed off.

Not even I would accept this forgery as the real thing! Or would I?

"This has obviously been in circulation and remained undetected for some time," Sergeant Davidson said.



Det Sgt Dave Davidson uses a magnifying glass as he examines a counterfeit \$100 note.

The leading currency man has a problem when it comes to talking openly in public about the fake notes he and his colleagues examine as part of an investigation. An upsurge of counterfeits usually appears after publicity.

"There's always someone willing to give it a try," he said, "despite the very severe penalties attached to those who produce, handle, tender or import the counterfeits.

"Nevertheless the counterfeiters have an uphill battle in this country, because the inbuilt security features of Australian paper money are so good."

And he urges the public to be more careful with their money. "Familiarity does breed contempt, especially when it comes to money, and people should remember that the larger denomination notes are most often the favourites of the 'get rich quick' merchants.

"A quick glance to find the metal thread or the water mark is all that's needed to prove whether you're in possession of the genuine article," he said.

Busy takeaway food outlets seemed to be a favourite uttering (passing) point for counterfeiters because they could take a punt on the cashier's haste to attend to customers quickly.

"The \$100 note has got through a few times as a forgery," he said.

"That's really annoying, because the second or less it takes to check for the metal thread or watermark means the difference between someone being caught in the middle of a criminal act, or getting away with it.

"It's not a victimless crime, because the loss is carried by the person who happens to be holding the note when it is passed on as payment," Detective Davidson said.

Currency Branch members travel across Australia to investigate cases of fake currency.

They have an enviable record of successful investigations and subsequent prosecutions.

Investigations extend into the realm of foreign currencies as well and recently Sergeant Davidson's team apprehended a man in Victoria who had allegedly uttered false \$US100 notes in three states.

FOOTNOTE: Offences against the Crimes (Currency) Act 1981 carry maximum prison sentences of: making (printing) — 14 years; uttering (passing) — 12 years; possession — 10 years.