

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

Switching sides in the plastic money debate was no small change of heart

Words: **Andrew Sawers**



So there I was, all set for a good rant about the relentless onward march of so-called technology, ready to fume and fulminate against the pernicious prospect of plastic Bank of England banknotes. Plastic! I mean, what's not to rant against? If the switch from proper paper to some form of polypropylene isn't good enough reason, then perhaps the fact that we're having to follow in the footsteps of plastic pioneers Australia and – wait for it – Romania ought to be enough to provoke your ire.

But then I broke the habit of a lifetime and read one of those mid-market tabloid newspapers. You know the type: the papers that boil every crisis in the world down to its impact on house prices. One columnist in particular (who, frankly, deserves to remain nameless) is the sort of chap who always helps me formulate my opinions on something I'm not quite sure about: whatever he's in favour of, I suddenly find that I'm against it. And vice, as they say, versa.

Said columnist opined: "When Britain was a serious country, we had serious money" – at which point I decided not to rant against plastic pounds. Dear reader, nay, I shall not be persuaded by such preposterous propositions. In fact, I shall embrace plastic pounds – and bid ye olde paper notes *adieu*.

After all, I ask you: was it the goat that made Britain great

equal to 1% of the area of Wales can itself contribute anything much to our national wellbeing – apart from acting as a poncho, perhaps.)

No one misses their half-crown, and it takes a beloved grandparent to explain why an old-fashioned bicycle was called a penny-farthing – so there are three more coins of this realm that are neither needed nor lamented.

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in the 14th century? It seems unlikely. Were we a stronger, better nation, when we had white five pound notes the size of a tablecloth? Hardly. In fact, our economic decline probably started round about the time of the Napoleonic wars when these 'white fivers' were first issued. Their disappearance seems to have coincided with the Suez crisis, though I don't suggest a line of causation, one way or t'other. (I do wonder, however, whether a banknote

Why not, then, add paper notes to the roll call of superannuated specie?

Thrupenny bits are a loss, I agree, if only because they make great wee treasures to hide inside a Christmas pudding, but also because they were just made for Cockney rhyming slang. Or so I'm told. By Cockneys.

Do the 'beautiful people' at Royal Ascot know how much money is 1,000 guineas? I'll bet 21 shillings they don't. And

children gazing upon the Mad Hatter must think 'In this style 10/6' is some sort of wonky size label. So be gone, antiquated cash, to a museum of currency curiosities.

Finally, I thought, the very phrase "What's that in old money?" is still occasionally trotted out by breakfast television presenters when the weather person reels off statistics in Celsius. But it's a quaint, quirky old question to anyone younger than, say, 35 (that's 95 degrees in old money or seven shillings, for cash).

So I've decided that I will, after all, gladly swap my tattered tenners for some pristine polymer pounds: a *quid pro quo*, if you like – just not status quo. ♥



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