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Materials and Forensic Science
Centre for Forensic Science**

**Metal deposition techniques
for the detection and
enhancement of latent fingerprints
on semi-porous surfaces**

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**Doctor of Philosophy (Science)
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Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
knowledge

(Holy Bible, New International Version)

To the glory of God, the source of all knowledge and
truth

With gratitude to those who have encouraged and aided
me in searching after the truth

Certificate of Authorship and Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Naomi Jones

5th July 2002

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Abstract

Fingerprints can provide critical evidence in the investigation of crime. Most fingerprints are latent, or invisible, and hence need detection and enhancement before they can be used in the investigation of crime.

While techniques exist for fingerprint development on a range of surfaces, the detection of prints on semi-porous substrates is particularly difficult. Vacuum metal deposition (VMD) and multi-metal deposition (MMD) were investigated for their ability to detect latent prints on such surfaces.

VMD is recognised as a very sensitive method of latent print visualisation but inconsistent results are commonly encountered. This research shows that reproducible VMD development is only obtainable when the amount of gold deposited is carefully controlled. The type and quality of VMD development obtained is influenced by a number of critical factors. These factors include the amount of gold deposited, the polymer type of the surface being treated, the nature of the latent print itself, and the presence of any other contaminants on the surface (whether due to the history of the exhibit or treatment with other fingerprint reagents).

MMD has not found routine application due to its complexity and mediocre results. Recent research that sought to overcome these problems resulted in the development of a new formulation known as MMDII. Several MMD formulations were trialled in this study and MMDII proved to be the superior formulation, giving better overall print detail. On non-porous surfaces, MMDII may offer further print development than that achieved with cyanoacrylate fuming (CAF) and luminescent staining, but VMD always gave superior results to MMD.

Polymer banknotes are a difficult semi-porous surface, causing particular problems for fingerprint laboratories. A procedure utilising CAF followed by VMD and finally luminescent staining enables successful print development on this substrate. Success on new notes was achieved with prints up to 18 months old; unfortunately, the possibility of successful print development decreases on used banknotes. VMD has

two important advantages for print visualisation on polymer notes: i) it is sensitive enough to detect the small amounts of residue remaining; and, ii) the zinc layer removes a significant amount of interference caused by the banknote design.

MMD and VMD were compared to standard techniques on other semi-porous surfaces. MMD proved to be the technique of choice on these surfaces. The ability of MMD to react with print residue within and on the surface is believed to be important to its success.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Fingerprints.....	1
1.1.1	<i>Valuable evidence.....</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1.2	<i>Fingerprint development.....</i>	<i>1</i>
1.2	Development Techniques.....	3
1.2.1	<i>Cyanoacrylate (Superglue) fuming.....</i>	<i>3</i>
1.2.2	<i>Vacuum cyanoacrylate fuming.....</i>	<i>6</i>
1.2.3	<i>Fluorescent staining.....</i>	<i>7</i>
1.2.4	<i>Vacuum metal deposition.....</i>	<i>8</i>
1.2.4.1	<i>History.....</i>	<i>9</i>
1.2.4.2	<i>Principles of VMD.....</i>	<i>10</i>
1.2.4.3	<i>Difficulties with VMD.....</i>	<i>12</i>
1.2.5	<i>Multi-metal deposition.....</i>	<i>14</i>
1.2.5.1	<i>Principles of MMD.....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.2.5.2	<i>Multi-metal deposition II.....</i>	<i>17</i>
1.3	Difficult surfaces.....	21
1.3.1	<i>Polymer banknotes.....</i>	<i>22</i>

2	Optimisation of Vacuum Metal Deposition.....	27
2.1	General materials and methods.....	27
2.1.1	<i>VMD unit.....</i>	<i>27</i>
2.1.2	<i>Comparison of print development conditions, techniques or sequences.....</i>	<i>29</i>
2.2	Factors affecting normal and reverse development on polyethylene substrates.....	30
2.2.1	<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.2.2	<i>Materials and methods.....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.2.2.1	Visual examination and densitometry.....	31
2.2.2.2	Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (ICP-MS).....	32
2.2.2.3	X-Ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy.....	32
2.2.2.4	Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy.....	33
2.2.3	<i>Results.....</i>	<i>33</i>
2.2.3.1	Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy.....	33
2.2.3.2	Densitometry.....	34
2.2.3.3	XRF spectroscopy.....	40
2.2.3.4	Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry.....	40
2.2.4	<i>Discussion.....</i>	<i>45</i>
2.2.4.1	Differences in development between polymers.....	45
2.2.4.2	Reverse development.....	48
2.3	Factors affecting VMD development.....	51
2.3.1	<i>Rate of gold evaporation.....</i>	<i>51</i>
2.3.2	<i>Polymer type.....</i>	<i>51</i>
2.3.3	<i>Empty prints.....</i>	<i>54</i>
2.3.4	<i>Print characteristics.....</i>	<i>56</i>
2.3.5	<i>Impact of CAF.....</i>	<i>57</i>
2.3.6	<i>Impact of staining.....</i>	<i>58</i>

2.4	Effect of zinc and air on thin gold films.....	58
2.4.1	<i>Introduction</i>	58
2.4.2	<i>Methods</i>	59
2.4.2.1	Experiment A.....	59
2.4.2.2	Experiment B.....	59
2.4.2.3	Experiment C.....	60
2.4.2.4	Experiment D.....	60
2.4.2.5	Experiment E.....	60
2.4.2.6	Experiment F.....	60
2.4.2.7	Experiment G.....	60
2.4.2.8	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS).....	60
2.4.3	<i>Results</i>	62
2.4.3.1	Experiment A.....	62
2.4.3.2	Experiment B.....	63
2.4.3.3	Experiment C.....	64
2.4.3.4	Experiment D.....	65
2.4.3.5	Experiment E.....	66
2.4.3.6	Experiment F.....	66
2.4.3.7	Experiment G.....	67
2.4.3.8	XPS.....	69
2.4.3.9	Summary.....	71
2.4.4	<i>Discussion</i>	72
2.5	Contributions to greater understanding of VMD.....	74
2.5.1	<i>Gold deposition</i>	74
2.5.2	<i>Polymer type</i>	75
2.5.3	<i>Reverse development</i>	76
2.5.4	<i>Empty prints</i>	77
2.5.5	<i>Effect of air and zinc</i>	77
2.5.6	<i>Effect of CA and staining</i>	78
2.6	<i>Conclusion</i>	79

3	Evaluation of Multi-Metal Deposition II.....	80
3.1	Introduction.....	80
3.2	Materials and methods.....	80
3.2.1	<i>MMD formulations.....</i>	<i>80</i>
3.2.2	<i>Comparison of MMD formulations.....</i>	<i>81</i>
3.2.2.1	Non-porous surfaces.....	81
3.2.2.2	Polymer banknotes.....	82
3.2.2.3	Porous surfaces.....	82
3.2.3	<i>Enhancement of colloidal gold by zinc deposited under vacuum.....</i>	<i>83</i>
3.2.4	<i>Sequencing of MMDII.....</i>	<i>83</i>
3.2.4.1	Non-porous surfaces.....	83
3.2.4.2	Polymer banknotes.....	84
3.2.5	<i>Comparison of MMD and VMD sequences on non-porous surfaces.....</i>	<i>84</i>
3.3	Results.....	85
3.3.1	<i>Comparison of MMD formulations.....</i>	<i>85</i>
3.3.1.1	Non-porous surfaces.....	85
3.3.1.2	Polymer banknotes.....	87
3.3.1.3	Porous surfaces.....	88
3.3.2	<i>Enhancement of colloidal gold by zinc deposited under vacuum.....</i>	<i>88</i>
3.3.3	<i>Sequencing of MMDII.....</i>	<i>88</i>
3.3.3.1	Non-porous surfaces.....	88
3.3.3.2	Polymer banknotes.....	90
3.3.4	<i>Comparison of MMD and VMD sequences on non-porous surfaces.....</i>	<i>90</i>
3.4	Discussion.....	93
3.4.1	<i>Comparison of MMD formulations.....</i>	<i>93</i>
3.4.2	<i>Porous surfaces.....</i>	<i>95</i>
3.4.3	<i>Practicality of MMDII.....</i>	<i>95</i>
3.4.4	<i>Sequencing.....</i>	<i>95</i>
3.4.4.1	Cyanoacrylate fuming.....	95
3.4.4.2	Luminescent staining.....	96
3.4.4.3	Optimum sequence.....	98

3.4.5	<i>Comparison of VMD and MMD</i>	98
3.5	Conclusion.....	99
4	Detection and Enhancement of Latent Fingerprints on Polymer Banknotes	100
4.1	Factors affecting latent print detection and enhancement.....	100
4.1.1	<i>Introduction</i>	100
4.1.2	<i>Method</i>	101
4.1.2.1	Comparison of different notes.....	101
4.1.2.2	Effect of CAF on standard notes.....	101
4.1.2.3	Effect of CAF on other types of notes.....	101
4.1.2.4	ICP-MS.....	101
4.1.3	<i>Results</i>	102
4.1.3.1	Comparison of different notes.....	102
4.1.3.2	Effect of CAF on standard notes.....	103
4.1.3.3	Effect of CAF on other types of notes.....	103
4.1.3.4	ICP-MS.....	103
4.1.4	<i>Discussion</i>	104
4.2	Uncirculated banknotes.....	108
4.2.1	<i>Method</i>	108
4.2.1.1	General.....	108
4.2.1.2	The Impact of CAF on VMD.....	108
4.2.1.3	CAF Times.....	109
4.2.1.4	Staining.....	109
4.2.1.5	VMD Conditions.....	111
4.2.1.6	Print degradation over time.....	112
4.2.1.7	Comparison of CAF vs. VCAF.....	112
4.2.2	<i>Results</i>	113
4.2.2.1	The Impact of CAF on VMD.....	113
4.2.2.2	CAF Times.....	114
4.2.2.3	Staining.....	114
4.2.2.4	VMD Conditions.....	117
4.2.2.5	Print degradation over time.....	117
4.2.2.6	VCAF.....	119
4.2.3	<i>Discussion</i>	119

4.2.3.1	CAF.....	119
4.2.3.2	Staining.....	120
4.2.3.3	VMD.....	121
4.2.3.4	Treatment time.....	123
4.3	Circulated Notes.....	123
4.3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	123
4.3.2	<i>Method</i>	124
4.3.2.1	Testing of initial procedure.....	124
4.3.2.2	Modification of procedure.....	124
4.3.2.3	Testing of modified procedure.....	127
4.3.2.4	Changes to Banknotes with use.....	128
4.3.2.5	Visualisation of VMD developed prints.....	128
4.3.3	<i>Results</i>	129
4.3.3.1	Testing of initial procedure.....	129
4.3.3.2	Modification of procedure.....	130
4.3.3.3	Procedure.....	133
4.3.3.4	Testing of modified procedure.....	135
4.3.3.5	Changes to Banknotes with Use.....	136
4.3.3.6	Visualisation of VMD developed prints.....	137
4.3.4	<i>Discussion</i>	139
4.3.4.1	Staining.....	139
4.3.4.2	Procedure.....	141
4.3.4.3	Effect of wear of banknotes.....	144
4.4	Conclusion.....	145

5	Detection and Enhancement of Latent Fingerprints on Semi-porous Surfaces.....	147
5.1	Introduction.....	147
5.2	Method.....	147
5.2.1	<i>Techniques evaluated</i>	147
5.2.1.1	MMDII.....	147
5.2.1.2	VMD.....	147
5.2.1.3	CAF/luminescent staining.....	148
5.2.1.4	Ninhydrin.....	148
5.2.1.5	Iodine-Benzoflavone.....	148

5.2.1.6	Physical developer.....	148
5.2.2	<i>Latex and nitrile gloves</i>	149
5.2.3	<i>Expanded polystyrene</i>	149
5.2.4	<i>Waxed paper</i>	149
5.2.5	<i>Polymer banknotes</i>	150
5.2.6	<i>Summary</i>	150
5.3	Results.....	151
5.3.1	<i>Latex and nitrile gloves</i>	152
5.3.2	<i>Expanded polystyrene</i>	154
5.3.3	<i>Waxed paper</i>	155
5.3.4	<i>Polymer banknotes</i>	156
5.4	Discussion.....	156
5.4.1	<i>Success of MMD on semi-porous surfaces</i>	156
5.4.2	<i>Comparison of VMD and MMDII on banknotes</i>	158
5.4.3	<i>VMD on waxed paper</i>	159
5.4.4	<i>Recommended procedures</i>	160
5.5	Conclusion.....	160
6	Conclusions & Recommendations	161
6.1	Understanding of VMD.....	161
6.2	Usefulness of MMD.....	162
6.3	Recommended procedures.....	163
6.3.1	<i>Non-porous surfaces</i>	163
6.3.2	<i>Banknotes</i>	163
6.3.3	<i>Other Semi-porous surfaces</i>	163
6.4	Further research.....	163
7	References	165

A1 Appendix 1: List of Related Publications.....	175
A2 Appendix 2: Development of Latent Fingerprints by Vacuum Metal Deposition.....	176
A2.1 Scope.....	176
A2.2 Definitions & abbreviations.....	176
A2.3 Principles.....	176
A2.4 Procedure for operating Vacuum Metal Deposition Unit.....	180
A2.5 Development of latent prints on polymer banknotes..	187
A2.6 VMD application on various substrates.....	195
A2.7 References.....	197
A3 Appendix 3: MMD Procedures.....	199
A3.1 Preparation of 30 nm Colloidal Gold Solution.....	199
A3.2 14 nm Colloidal Gold Solution.....	199
A3.3 Iron (II)/Iron(III) Physical Developer.....	200
A3.4 Silver Acetate/Hydroquinone Physical Developer.....	201
A3.5 Application-Saunder's Procedure.....	201
A3.6 Application-Schnetz's Procedure.....	202
A3.7 Application-FSS Method.....	202
A3.8 Siliconisation of Glassware.....	203

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Reaction of cyanoacrylate esters to form cyanoacrylate polymer.....	4
Figure 1.2	Schematic diagram of ideal VMD development.....	10
Figure 1.3	Approximate Structure of Thin Gold Films.....	12
Figure 1.4	Structure of Polymer Banknotes.....	23
Figure 2.1	VMD Unit: General view, interior of chamber and exhibit tray.....	27
Figure 2.2	Monitor position: a. Top view; b. Side view.....	28
Figure 2.3	Arrangement of deposited prints for comparison of development techniques.....	29
Figure 2.4	Normal development on LDPE.....	34
Figure 2.5	Reverse development on LDPE.....	34
Figure 2.6	No development on LDPE.....	35
Figure 2.7	a) Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by densitometry (absorbed light).....	35
	b) Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by densitometry (absorbed light) — expanded X-axis.....	36
Figure 2.8	Normal development on HDPE (Dark Green PE)	36
Figure 2.9	Over-development on HDPE (Dark Green PE)	37
Figure 2.10	Poor-quality development on HDPE (Dark Green PE) ...	37
Figure 2.11	a) Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on green plastic (HDPE) as measured by densitometry (reflected light).	37
	b) Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on green plastic (HDPE) as measured by densitometry (reflected light) — expanded X-axis.....	38
Figure 2.12	Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by densitometry (absorbed light) — effect of fast and slow gold evaporation rates.....	39
Figure 2.13	Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc deposition on green plastic (HDPE) as measured by densitometry (reflected light) — effect of fast and slow gold evaporation rates.....	39

Figure 2.14	Relationship between gold monitor reading and gold density on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by ICP-MS — effect of fast and slow gold evaporation rates.....	41
Figure 2.15	Relationship between gold monitor reading and gold density on green plastic (HDPE) as measured by ICP-MS — effect of fast and slow gold evaporation rates.....	41
Figure 2.16	Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc density on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by ICP-MS	42
Figure 2.17	Relationship between gold monitor reading and zinc density on green plastic (HDPE) as measured by ICP-MS	42
Figure 2.18	Relationship between gold density and zinc density on clear plastic (LDPE) as measured by ICP-MS — effect of fast and slow gold evaporation rates.....	43
Figure 2.19	Gold density as measured by ICP-MS for plastic samples treated at a constant gold monitor reading of 64 counts. (A, B, C and D represent samples placed at four different positions within the VMD chamber.)	44
Figure 2.20	Zinc density as measured by ICP-MS for plastic samples treated at a constant gold monitor reading of 64 counts. (A, B, C and D represent samples placed at four different positions within the VMD chamber.)	44
Figure 2.21	Comparison of structures of HDPE and LDPE.....	46
Figure 2.22	Schematic representation of the different stages of VMD development on LDPE substrates as the amount of deposited gold is increased.....	46
Figure 2.23	Schematic representation of the different stages of VMD development on HDPE as the amount of deposited gold is increased.....	47
Figure 2.24	Suggested difference between gold clusters on different plastic substrates.....	48
Figure 2.25	Recommended development conditions for a range of polymers.....	53
Figure 2.26	Empty Prints.....	55
Figure 2.27	The possible differences in fingerprint regions leading to the development of normal prints and to the development of empty prints.....	55
Figure 2.28	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Excess gold deposition (right) compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	62
Figure 2.29	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition and readmission of air (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	63

Figure 2.30	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Optimum Normal development from optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition without the readmission of air (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	64
Figure 2.31	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Reverse development from optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition without the readmission of air (left), compared to optimum gold deposition (right).	64
Figure 2.32	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition without the readmission of air or exposure to zinc (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	65
Figure 2.33	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Combined Deposition of combined gold counts amounts (excess + optimum) (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	65
Figure 2.34	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition and readmission of air and long exposure to vacuum (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (left).	66
Figure 2.35	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Optimum gold deposition after excess gold deposition, without zinc exposure, and readmission of air (left), compared to optimum gold deposition (right).	67
Figure 2.36	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Slightly increased optimum gold deposition (45 counts) after excess gold deposition and readmission of air (left), compared to optimum gold deposition (30 counts) (right).	68
Figure 2.37	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Half of optimum gold deposition (15 counts) after excess gold deposition and readmission of air (right), compared to optimum gold deposition (30 counts) (left)	68
Figure 2.38	Fingerprints on LDPE after VMD treatment: Double optimum gold deposition (60 counts) after excess gold deposition and readmission of air (left), compared to optimum gold deposition (30 counts) (right)	69
Figure 3.1	Comparison of MMDI and MMDII a) Left: MMDII Right: MMDI b) Left: MMDI Right: MMDII.	86
Figure 3.2	Comparison of 14 nm and 30 nm colloidal gold particles Left: 14 nm Right: 30 nm.	86
Figure 3.3	Comparison of Physical developer solutions Left: Silver Nitrate/Iron(II)/Iron(III) Right: Silver Acetate/Hydroquinone.	87

Figure 3.4	Re-treatment with physical developer Left: Retreated with PD Right: MMD only.....	87
Figure 3.5	Comparison of MMDII and PD on porous samples Left: PD Right: MMDII.....	88
Figure 3.6	Effect of CAF on MMD Left: MMDII alone Right: CAF/MMDII.....	89
Figure 3.7	Effect of staining on MMD: Left: CAF/Rhodamine 6G/MMDII Right: CAF/MMDII	89
Figure 3.8	Example of superior development by CAF/stain (left: photographed under luminescence conditions) over CAF/stain/MMDII (right: photographed under white light)	91
Figure 3.9	Example of similar development by CAF/stain (left: photographed under luminescence conditions) and CAF/stain/MMDII (right: photographed under white light)	91
Figure 3.10	Example of superior development by CAF/stain/MMDII (left: photographed under white light) over CAF/stain (right: photographed under luminescence conditions).....	92
Figure 3.11	Example of superior development by CAF/VMD (right) than by CAF/stain/MMDII (left)	92
Figure 3.12	Structure of Rhodamine 6G: i-positively charged site. ii-site of possible protonation (Brackmann, 1994).	97
Figure 3.13	Structure of Basic Yellow 40: i, ii, iii-sites of possible protonation (Registry Handbook, 1977).....	97
Figure 4.1	Gold counts vs. gold density for fumed and unfumed standard, uncoated and double cured notes.	104
Figure 4.2	Comparison of detail achieved on banknote by VMD (left) and CAF/VMD (right)	113
Figure 4.3	Detail obtained by CAF/Rhodamine 6G/VMD (left) compared to CAF/VMD/Rhodamine 6G (right)	115
Figure 4.4	Detail obtained by CAF/Rhodamine 6G/VMD (left) compared to CAF/VMD/Basic Yellow 40.....	116
Figure 4.5	Effect of time before CAF: CAF after 2 days (left) compared to CAF after 7 days (right), VMD treatment at the same time.....	118
Figure 4.6	Effect of time between CAF and VMD: CAF together, VMD at 2 days (right) compared to VMD at 2 weeks (left).	118
Figure 4.7	VCAF (left) compared to CAF (right).....	119
Figure 4.8	Effect of solvent systems: Rhodamine 6G in methanol (left) compared to current AFP Rhodamine 6G formulation (right).....	131

Figure 4.9	VMD before staining (right) compared to VMD after staining (left)	132
Figure 4.10	Rhodamine 6G (outside sections) compared to Basic Yellow 40 (inner section).....	133
Figure 4.11	Flowchart outlining the procedure for the detection and enhancement of latent prints on polymer banknotes.....	134
Figure 4.12	18 month old print on new banknote imaged with diffuse reflection and luminescence.....	135
Figure 4.13	Development of 10-month-old prints on category 1-4 notes	135
Figure 4.14	Changes to banknote thickness occurring with use.....	137
Figure 4.15	1 st and 3 rd impressions of 18-month-old prints visualised using diffuse reflection.....	137
Figure 4.16	1 st and 3 rd impressions of 18-month-old prints visualised using episcopic coaxial illumination.....	138
Figure 4.17	1 st and 3 rd impressions of 18-month-old prints visualised using ESEM.....	138
Figure 4.18	1 st and 3 rd impressions of 18-month-old prints visualised using Staining and Luminescence.....	139
Figure 5.1	VMD and MMDII development for 1-month-old prints on nitrile gloves.....	153
Figure 5.2	VMD, CAF/stain and MMDII development for 1-month-old prints on expanded polystyrene.....	154
Figure 5.3	VMD, CAF/stain and MMDII development for 1-month-old prints on waxed paper.....	155
Figure 5.4	Comparison of MMDII (outside sections) and CAF/VMD/stain (inside section) development for 1-month-old prints on a polymer banknote	156
Figure A2.1	Gold atoms congregate into clusters on top of the surface...	177
Figure A2.2	Basic principle of ‘normal’ VMD development.....	178
Figure A2.3	In the case of a large amount of gold, the gold clusters ‘protrude’ through the print residue, producing overdevelopment.....	178
Figure A2.4	Structure of polymer banknotes.....	188
Figure A2.5	Procedure for development of latent prints on polymer banknotes.....	194
Figure A2.6	Monitor Position: a Top view b Side view.....	196

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Effectiveness of some fingerprint development techniques on polymer banknotes (Flynn et al, 1999).....	24
Table 1.2	Development of latent prints on polymer banknotes by various fingerprint development techniques (McLeod & Siebert, 2000).....	25
Table 2.1	XPS results.....	69
Table 2.2	Published XPS data (Moulder et al, 1995)	70
Table 2.3	Summary of results from experiments investigating the effect of zinc and air on thin gold films.....	71
Table 3.1	MMD reagent combinations evaluated.	81
Table 3.2	Surfaces used for the comparison of MMD formulations... ..	81
Table 3.3	Porous surfaces used for the comparison of PD, MMDI and MMDII.....	82
Table 4.1	Summary of results from Kelly (2000)	106
Table 4.2	Modifications to the Rhodamine 6G solvent system that were tested.....	111
Table 4.3	Comparison between stains before and after VMD treatment.....	115
Table 4.4	Staining achieved with different Rhodamine 6G stain formulations.....	130
Table 5.1	Techniques evaluated on each semi-porous surface.....	150
Table 5.2	Summary of effectiveness of techniques on semi-porous surfaces.....	151
Table A2.1	Standard parameter values for gold.....	183
Table A2.2	Examples of increasing gold counts for successive VMD treatments.....	185
Table A2.3	Recommended initial gold counts on various substrates.....	195

Abbreviations

- AFM = Atomic Force Microscope or Microscopy
- AFP = Australian Federal Police
- APD = Average Particle Diameter
- ASAP = Automatic Standardless Analysis Program
- CA = Cyanoacrylate
- CAF = Cyanoacrylate fuming (or superglue fuming)
- CV = Co-efficient of variation
- DFO = 1,8-diaza-9-fluorenone
- DNA = Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid
- DOVD = Diffractive Optically Variable Device
- DMAC = 4-dimethylaminocinnamaldehyde
- ESCA = Electron Spectroscopy for Chemical Analysis
- FFC = Forensic Fuming Cabinet
- FT-IR = Fourier Transform- Infra-Red Spectroscopy
- HDPE = High-density polyethylene
- Hq = Hydroquinone
- ICP-MS = Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry
- IR = Infra-red Radiation
- LDPE = Low-density polyethylene
- MEK = Methyl ethyl ketone
- MMD = Multi-metal deposition
- MMDI = Original MMD formulation
- MMDII = New MMD formulation
- MMDIII = MMD formulation used by Forensic Science Service UK
- MMDIV = Fourth combination of MMD reagents
- NPA = Note Printing Australia
- PD = Physical developer

PE = Polyethylene

PET = Polyethylene terephthalate

PP = Polypropylene

PVC = Polyvinyl chloride

RBA = Reserve Bank of Australia

SEM = Scanning Electron Microscopy

UV = Ultra-Violet Light

VCAF = Vacuum cyanoacrylate fuming

VMD = Vacuum metal deposition

XPS = X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy

XRF = X-Ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy