



# A Numismatic Guide To Australia's 1957 PROOF COINAGE

A LACK OF ANY MELBOURNE BRONZE WAS MORE THAN COMPENSATED FOR BY PECULIAR PENNIES FROM PERTH!

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THIS article continues the series on Australia's predecimal proof coinage which was struck commercially with collectors specifically in mind. The nine year period (1955-1963) towards the end of the "baby boomer" years covers what's termed<sup>1-3</sup> the "collector proof series". These special strikes (of all their regular issues) were produced by the Perth and Melbourne branches of the Royal Mint for sale at a then significant premium over face value. The focus here will be on the 1957 Melbourne Mint proofs as the details of the complex Perth Mint bronze proof coinage have already been covered in a previous CAB article<sup>4</sup>. However, for completeness, a summary along with some new information on the 1957 Perth proof pennies is also included.

The aim of this series of articles is to provide, from a detailed study of many of the particular coins, a numismatic guide to Australia's commercially available predecimal proof coinage in digestible self-contained sections. The reader is referred to previous issues<sup>5,6</sup> of this magazine for detailed information on particular characteristics of the whole collector proof series, what to look out for and how to collect and store them. Some new observations are also included on the use of lustre to discriminate between proof and polished business strikes:

## Australia in 1957

1957 was the year Australia's population pushed towards 9.6 million, British nuclear testing was in full swing at Maralinga and Russia launched Sputnik adding a fillip to the cold war. The late Jørn Utzon won the Sydney Opera House design competition and Slim Dusty won his first gold record for *A Pub with No Beer*. Television and rock and roll were in their infancy and still too new to have an impact on Australian society. In 1950s Australia, the general population trusted science and law and order; they felt safe enough to let their children roam from their generally unlocked homes. Supermarkets and malls didn't exist; women resigned from work on marriage and were then home to accept delivery of all the time-critical basics such as bread and milk. Coin collecting was still in its

infancy with the bulk of the interest and demand in our better coins coming from overseas.

## The proof issues

1957 was also the first year in the collector series that no proof bronze coinage was issued by the Melbourne Mint. Unlike today, the branch mints could only prepare proof versions of their regular business strikes (*not to hinder the production of coin for circulation*<sup>7</sup>). The striking of proofs at the same time as their order for business strikes was economical and they could be produced when the best production coins were being obtained<sup>7</sup>. As the Melbourne Mint did not receive an allotment for pennies from Commonwealth Treasury, no proof pennies were struck there. The mintage was also reduced to the second smallest (after 1955) in the collector series at only 1,256 sets<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1). Treasury allotted the striking of all 1957 pennies to the

Perth Mint which in contrast to Melbourne, stepped up production of its proofs after very limited 1955 and 1956 mintages. 1,112 proofs were prepared to which one can add an additional 440 "specimen and selected" coins<sup>9</sup>. When combined, the total mintage of 1,552 Perth pennies made it the largest bronze issue in the whole proof series. Supplies of halfpennies must have been considered plentiful at the time as Commonwealth Treasury ordered none dated 1956, 1957 or 1958 from either mint.

The fact that the Melbourne Mint distinguished between minting numbers for proof and specimen coin for only their first two years in the series is intriguing. Both Rennicks and McDonald's catalogues provide proof mintage figures for 1955 & 1956 which are consistent with simply adding the listed mintages for proof and specimen types together and rounding the total. The mintage ratios for proof and specimen strikes in Figure 1

<u>PROOF &amp; SPECIMEN COIN ISSU. D.</u>												
<u>BY ROYAL MINT, MELBOURNE.</u>												
	PROOF.						SPECIMEN.					
YEAR.	2/-	1/-	6d	3d	1d	½d	2/-	1/-	6d	3d	1d	½d
1955.		350	329	311	319		851	680	733	1105		
1956.	1000	1000	1000	1007	1008		500	507	506	504	508	
1957.	1256	1256	1256	1256								
1958.	1506	1506	1506	1506	1506							
1959.	1506	1506	1506	1506	1506							
1960.	1509	1509	1509	1509								
1961.	1506	1506	1506	1506								

Figure 1 Typed list prepared by the Melbourne Mint in 1963 outlining the number of Specimen / Proof coins struck List taken from surviving mint correspondence replying to public enquiries regarding minting numbers for proof coin. Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of Public Records Public Record Office Victoria, Australia



Figure 2 An example of the simple packaging used for the 1957 proof set



The proof set in FDC revealing the Melbourne Mint's characteristic brilliant mirror finish. The florin reverse illustrates the broad cartwheel lustre revealed as a non uniform white band running vertically across the whole coin

Figure 3 The Melbourne Mint's 1957 proof set

roughly approximate those reported<sup>5,6</sup> for different dies identified by this author.

### The Melbourne Branch Mint

The late Bill Mullett was a long serving and senior Melbourne Mint employee given the task of overseeing the wind down and closure of its operations (1968-69) before his transfer to the RAM<sup>10</sup>. He wrote and self published four small books on the Mint's coinage and operations using records he took with him to the RAM and drawing on his own hands-on experiences. In 1957, the Mint not only produced proof sets but also reproduced<sup>7</sup> the design of the Kangaroo Office pieces (Port Phillip Pounds) but only as impressions on copper strip for the National Gallery of Victoria.

His first book<sup>7</sup> included information on **specimen** coins; the term **proof** was not used by Mullett. He wrote<sup>7</sup> these specimen sets and also sets of uncirculated coins were issued for the years 1955/1963. Both the dies and the blanks were polished for these "specimen" coins but W. Mullett states<sup>7</sup> "the dies were still suitable to produce coins for circulation. It was necessary to avoid damage to the blanks fed into the coining press and to the finished coins as they came from the dies. Before being carefully packed (see Figure 2) ready for issue the coins were critically examined for the slightest blemish".

Bill Mullett's assertion that the proof dies were still suitable to produce business strikes is numismatically significant. The dies used for Melbourne proof coinage were only given a simple polish instead of selective cameo frosting seen on the later (1957 Type II through to 1963) Perth bronze or modern proofs. This fact made it possible for their further use after the proof orders were completed and begs the question were any actually used for business strikes? Given the cost and effort in producing and setting up a die pair I suspect it was possible if not probable. The likelihood of proof dies being used would have further increased if the press used for proofs could be readily reset to normal fast coining mode.

Early research<sup>1</sup> into the series by Greg McDonald included a few insights from his interview with the late Ray Jewell (a highly respected collector and dealer). In this interview R. Jewell revealed that Melbourne Mint official's considered abandoning the series during 1957 due to an unacceptable inventory of unsold stock and broken sets. Apparently Ray Jewell's personal guarantee in committing to purchase any unsold stock at the end of each year assisted in saving the series<sup>1</sup>. These anecdotes help explain the low 1,256 Melbourne mintage whilst the "high" 1,552 Perth mintage resulted from their extensive and prolonged die development work. This die development was

undertaken by the Perth Mint in their efforts to produce bronze coin with “knock-out” eye appeal.

### Cart-wheeling lustre – an indicator for Melbourne proof strikes

Figure 3 reveals that the 1957 proof set in FDC has that characteristic uniform mirror finish associated with the whole Melbourne collector series. Broad cart-wheeling lustre is difficult to photograph but some of the coins (particularly the florin reverse) in Figure 3 do reveal it in part. The white reflection in a wide strip of non uniform width across the whole coin (fields and raised relief) is associated with this lustre. The same broad cart-wheeling lustre seen on choice business strikes is surprisingly, still seen when the corresponding proof coin is angled under brilliant light. Equivalent lustre is observable on business and proof strikes despite the proof coin having a more reflective mirror finish. This observation holds true when comparing equivalent CHU regular and proof coins across the whole Melbourne Mint collector series.

In comparison, the fields of Australia's modern proof coins have a deep full mirror finish which does not produce any cart-wheel effect. Modern cameo proofs do however, show some lustre on their raised designs (matte relief). The Melbourne Mint produced predecimal proof coins with a uniform, instead of cameo, finish from polished dies/blanks which retained sufficient surface texture to produce coins with broad cart-wheeling lustre. A simple test for the quality or depth of mirror finish is the reading distance test. The maximum distance between text and the coin at which the reflected text can still be read on the mirror surface of the coin is an indicator of the quality of the mirror finish. The greater this legibility distance, the better the mirror's quality in terms of flatness and reflectivity. Naturally, modern proofs score much higher (typically tens of centimetres) than the coins considered here (a few centimetres).

The search for lustre is a simple test for coins which are not heavily toned to confirm that a coin is actually a proof and not a polished business strike. Polishing a coin results in the removal of surface metal, thereby reducing the microscopic surface texture responsible for its lustre. Polishing leads to further broadening of the cartwheel lustre and ultimately to its complete disappearance into a flat mirror.

### The Perth Branch Mint

Paul Holland in his definitive article<sup>9</sup> on the Perth Mint collector proof coinage revealed part of a numismatically important letter dated 14th Feb. 1958 from Mr Harry G. Holder (later Superintendent) Perth Mint to Syd. Hagley. Mr S. Hagley



Revealing the all over icy smooth surfaces of the Type 1A penny in comparison to the slightly more textured (fine matte) finish of the Type 1B version

Figure 4 The Perth Mint's 1957 proof penny varieties – Initial uniform polished finish types

was a prominent Australian numismatist and major customer of proof coinage from both branch mints. For example, Syd previously purchased 100 each of the 1955 pairs and 1956 issues from the Perth Mint<sup>9</sup>. Mr Holder's letter stated in part: *Our first issue of 1957 proofs was insufficient to cope with orders and a further 600 coins will be produced shortly. The first issues were rather unpopular with dealers in the USA as they were accused with selling polished uncirculated coins. The next lot will have a matte finish and as I know you will require some of these, I will do my best to obtain 50 for you....* Paul's research<sup>9</sup> into the Perth Mint records revealed that only 470 proof pennies dated 1957 were actually struck in 1957 before the date of this letter and 642 afterwards, excluding 9 of the specially selected (inferior proofs) in 1957 and 431 during 1958-59. Paul concluded<sup>9</sup> that 30.9% of the 1957 dated coins should be smooth (i.e. Type I) and 69.1% matte or frosted (Type II). The market has long accepted the existence of two main types of 1957 proof pennies. Ray Jewell already listed<sup>11</sup> proofs described as **1957 Perth Polish** at £17/10/- and **1957 Perth matte** at £15 in 1965. The higher price charged for the initial strikes continues today with values in the

McDonalds catalogue<sup>12</sup> reflecting the comparative scarcity of the initial Type I issue\* with a 27.5% premium.

Instead of just the two main types, probing deeper revealed there are actually four readily discernable variations of Perth Mint 1957 proof penny (Figures 4 and 5). These four variants are distinguished by:

- the presence or not of cameo finish and
- the degree of surface texture in their fields.

In contrast to the uniform mirror lustre exhibited across the Melbourne proofs, these four Perth proof types exhibit a wide lustre variation. The amount of lustre varies dramatically in accord with their range of die treatments. The initial non cameo Type IA coins exhibit a polished mirror finish with no lustre. Moving onto the textured Type IB finish some weak lustre is apparent. The Type IIA coins exhibit tremendous eye appeal with what has been described<sup>4</sup> as pooling lustre in their fields. The final Type IIB coin is basically an ultra cameo version of Type IIA produced by additional die sand blasting<sup>4,9</sup> which markedly reduced its lustre.

\* Described in the McDonald catalogue as matte finish (produced in 1957)

The previous assignment<sup>4</sup> of cameo Type II A&B designations has been reviewed and swapped here for consistency with the Type I's in the progression to more textured fields from A through to B. The change in designation also reflects the time line<sup>9</sup> involved in their die preparation. The more sandblasted die reflects a later die state and hence a later alphabet character e.g. Type IIB (instead of the original IIA).

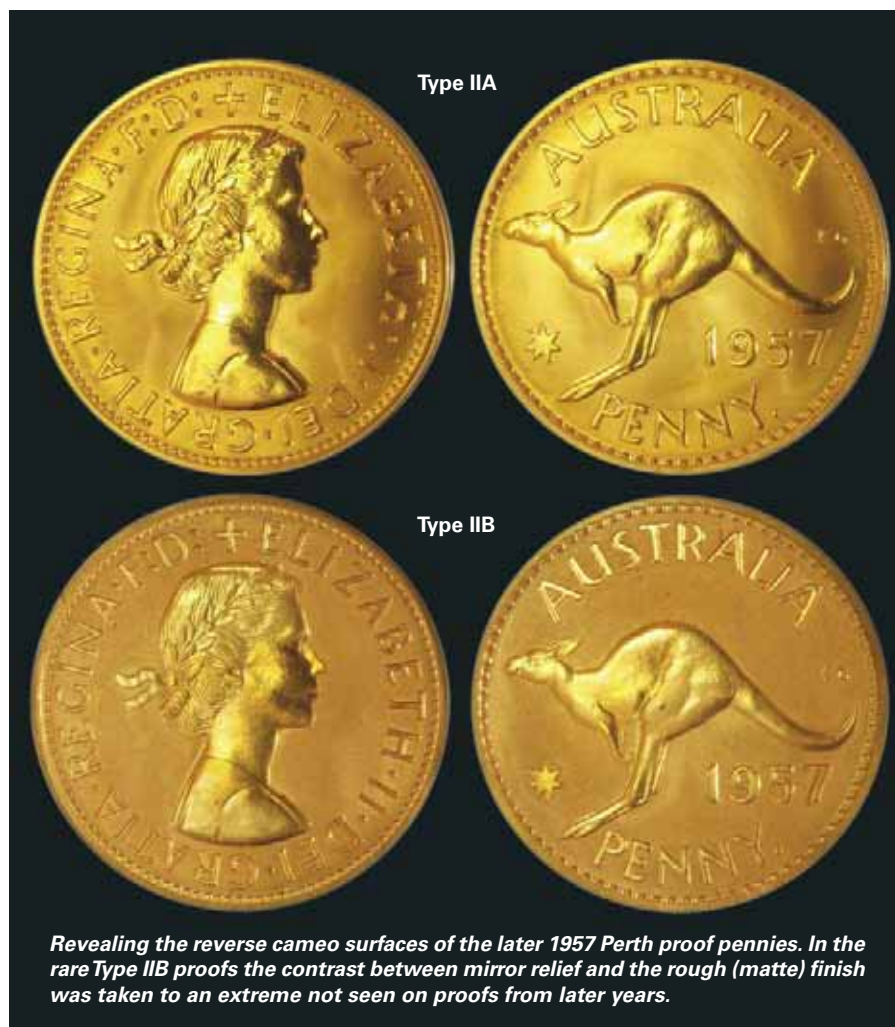
Disregarding problematic hairlines, the mirror finish on the Perth 1957 Type IA penny is comparable to that typically found<sup>5,6</sup> on the Melbourne Mint proof bronze. Perhaps George P. Knight, the man in charge of producing proofs at the Perth Mint<sup>9,13</sup> was trying to emulate the Melbourne finish despite the handicap of inferior equipment. The initial Perth penny types (I A & B) were both hand finished (polished) post strike (probably to mask surface imperfections) and untoned examples typically reveal myriad fine lines when angled under bright light<sup>4</sup>.

The polished coins were not well received by their sophisticated US customers and the Perth Mint was proactive in developing a new cameo finish for their proof coins. P. Holland speculated<sup>9</sup> that the textured surface was developed by the Perth Mint to hide the minor surface flaws associated with preparing dies on their relatively primitive equipment.

My own purchases of USA-sourced 1957 proofs including those in the original sets assembled by dealers in black Hollander custom holders has revealed both Type I finishes in accord with H.G Holder's letter which mentioned *issue(s)*.

The back orders of the 1957 proof penny (prepared in 1958-59) were of the matte or frosted cameo Type II finish<sup>4,9</sup>. The orange red colour, pooling lustre in the fields and contrasting relief (raised design elements) all combine to make the Type IIA coins arguably the most attractive bronze coins ever produced in Australia.

The Type IIB dies were heavily sand blasted to the point where no pooling lustre can be seen on their products. The field colour of these coins is also different with a shift towards red from orange due to their coarser surface. This experimental excessive die treatment procedure was abandoned in favour of that which produced the fine matte cameo contrast seen in the proofs dated 1958-59. Interestingly, proof coins for all three dates were prepared during the same period<sup>9</sup>. One may speculate that this made the Type IIB dies a likely source of the "selected" or slightly imperfect proof/specimen coins. These were sold at a discounted surcharge of 6d over face value compared with the standard florin per collector proof<sup>9</sup>.



Revealing the reverse cameo surfaces of the later 1957 Perth proof pennies. In the rare Type IIB proofs the contrast between mirror relief and the rough (matte) finish was taken to an extreme not seen on proofs from later years.

Figure 5 The Perth Mint's 1957 proof penny varieties – Final cameo types

### How to Identify the Melbourne Mint's Proof 1957 coins

In contrast to the blatant differences between Perth Mint business and proof bronze, the acquirer of Melbourne coins has to carefully ascertain that they are the rare proofs. Unlike modern proofs, the dies used to strike all the Melbourne proofs in this series did not have any selective cameo surface enhancements to readily distinguish them from regular strikes.

This lack of contrasting surface texture makes the Melbourne collector proofs appear at first glance, to look like exceptionally nice business strikes<sup>13</sup> which are hard to authenticate. A methodology to resolve this identification problem is outlined in this series of articles starting with an initial broad examination and direct comparison with business strikes followed by confirmation via an in-depth search for proof die markers.

**Initial broad examination:** Contact marks (particularly on the rims) are an excellent discriminator as business struck coins have had to endure the mint's standard collection and distribution system leading to inevitable damage from coins striking and rubbing against each other. Proofs being individually made and checked at

the Mint will not exhibit any such damage unless subjected to poor handling.

To help ascertain whether a 1957 silver coin is a proof – using Figure 3 and the pictures in the previous articles<sup>5,6</sup> as a guide, first closely examine the coins by eye looking for an even mirror finish on both sides across the whole coin. Proof surfaces have a lustrous consistent mirror finish (allow for toning), business strikes rarely produce this consistency unless they have been polished and then they wouldn't exhibit any lustre.

**In-depth search for die markers:** 1957 turned out to be one of the easier years for the detection of microscopic discriminating marks in the proof dies. Examination of the coins for the presence of die markers outlined in Table 1 should provide definitive confirmation of their proof status. These raised features were chosen because they are generally visible under 10X magnification. They are best observed with horizontal lighting across the face of the coin with the beam striking the feature side on (a 20X loupe or use of a binocular microscope is strongly recommended). There are other die markers on the 1957 coins but these are from the master dies for the year and are generally beyond the scope of this article.

### What constitutes a top grade 1957 set?

Quite simply look for originality in how close the set is to as struck condition. For Melbourne silver, lustrous mirror surfaces with no hairlines are the key quality indicators. The four coins should be free of planchet problems and handling marks including rubbing. Eye appeal is important and subjective; however, natural light toning can be very attractive, particularly peripheral hints of gold, red and blue. After 52 years one should expect some greyish toning on the silver, particularly as they were made from a quaternary alloy containing 40% copper.

The Perth bronze is adequately covered by including a uniform Type I coin with its characteristic feint hairlines and a cameo Type II. Both types should be free of spots and dark toning. The Type II is sometimes seen with a swathe of blue/purple toning at its edges, this feature in moderation, can further enhance its appeal.

Assembling an as struck six coin 1957 proof set covering the Melbourne silver and the two general Perth bronze types is an achievable challenge. The quality of the Melbourne proofs was still up there with Mints best year's i.e. 1955-56. This in combination with the moderate price of the Perth proofs (in comparison to those from earlier years) offers an explanation as to why the 1957

collector proofs are so attractive and popular.

Further research into the Melbourne mint's definition of the terms specimen and proof is currently underway. The contentious issue covering the use (or not) of these dies to strike regular coinage is also being investigated.

### Conclusion

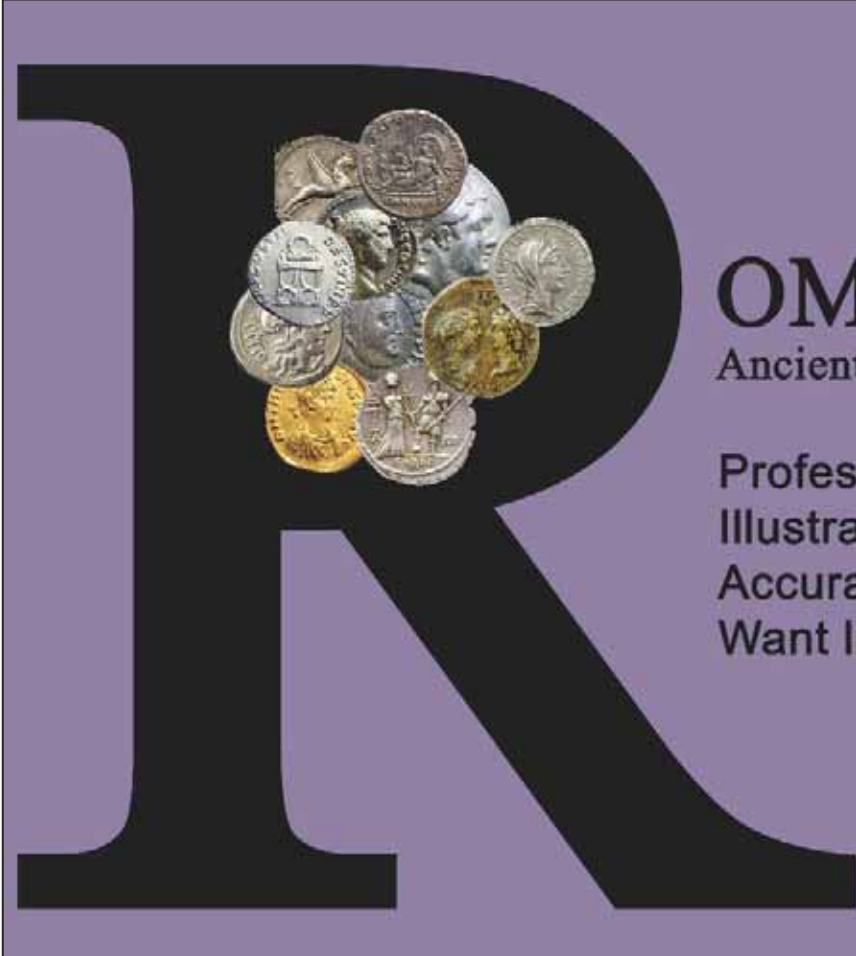
The Melbourne Mint's consistent approach to the surfaces of its proof coinage throughout the nine years of collector proof series is in stark contrast to the variation seen from its sister mint in Perth. Australia's 1957 proof coinage is special in that it includes, for the first time, a reverse cameo coin. The combination of the predictable quality of the first all "silver" Melbourne set is nicely complemented by the interest afforded from the inclusion of two types of bronze pennies from Perth to form a classic full or "long" six coin set.

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**TABLE-1 Outline of the Die Markers and Population Study for the 1957 Melbourne Proofs**

Die Pair* Obverse denoted by numerals (1-2) Reverse denoted by letters (A-B) Number in Survey	<b>Obverse die key features</b>		<b>Reverse die key features</b>	
1TP57 + ATP57 1957 THREEPENCE 13				
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Flat un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	eliZAbeth raised line edge to mid bead	marks base of wreath and ribbon knot	curved raised line denticles stalks thru P	ribbon right side blob on top edge
1SP57 + ASP57 1957 SIXPENCE 13				
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Flat un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	gratla blob between edge of rim and beads	abeth II blobs edge of rim before beads	multiple raised lines in denticles above S in Sixpence;	striations in 5 of date
1S57 + AS57 1957 SHILLING 10				
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Flat un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	beth II line in beads above II	rim damage above bethH	star below KG raised edge rim side;	
2S57 + BS57 1957 SHILLING 3				
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Flat un-ground rim with full wire. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	rim damage above reginA	raised line in beads below dEl through to rim, lathe line on rim	raised lines base of 9 and curl of 5	
1F57 + AF57 1957 FLORIN 13				
General Description*	Broad flat un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Broad flat un-ground rim with full wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	reGina raised marks on rim above both letters;	eth II Dei line in denticles, lathe lines on outer edge of rim	fIORin raised lines above denticles on flat rim	under 9 5 numerals & above tRA raised dot

The red arrows are location aids (back onto the whole coin) for the die markers which are indicated by the white arrows