

A Numismatic Guide to Australia's 1958 Proof Coinage

**CONTRASTING BRONZE FROM PERTH AND MELBOURNE ADD VISUAL INTEREST
WHILST DIE COMPLEXITY ADDS SPICE FOR THE SPECIALIST!** by T. Vincent Verheyen

THIS article continues the series on Australia's predecimal proof coinage which was struck commercially with collectors specifically in mind. These special strikes (of all their regular coins) were produced by the Perth and Melbourne branches of the Royal Mint for sale at a significant premium over face value. The focus here will be on providing a guide to Australia's 1958 proof coinage covering their identification, typical condition and detailing the complex die variation observed in the Perth pennies.

This series of articles provides the reader with a numismatic guide to Australia's commercially available predecimal proof and specimen coinage. Prior to 1955, these premium coins were struck on an ad-hoc basis, with a regular program only developed for the last years of predecimal coin production. These predecimal coins represented the best quality that money could buy, ensuring their ongoing demand with current collectors and investors. In contrast to the perfection of modern proofs, their somewhat quirky appearance, sometimes enhanced by the passage of time, is a reflection of the technology and minting skills of the period.

Given this is an ongoing series, the author has attempted to strike a balance between boring regular readers with recycled information and giving new readers a holistic overview of the topic. Each article includes fresh information as research into this series is an ongoing process. The reader is referred to previous issues¹⁻⁵ of this magazine for detailed information on characteristics of earlier individual years and the whole 1955-63 collector proof series.

Australia and the world in 1958

Although the 1958 proof coins would not have been available until the end of that year, it is worth spending a moment covering what was happening around that time. For those of us too young to remember, a search on the internet reveals that 1958 was the year Johnny O'Keefe had his first hit with *Wild One*, although songs like *Tom Dooley* by the

Kingston Trio, *Catch a Falling Star* by Perry Como and *Volare* by Dean Martin topped the charts. Robert Menzies' Liberal/Country coalition handed out the biggest defeat since Federation to the Australian Labor party (under H.V "Doc" Evatt) courtesy of preferences from the DLP. Australia's first freeway - The Cahill Expressway in Sydney opened. To drive on it with a newish FC Holden would require a bit more than £1000 and the petrol cost just 4 shillings eight and a half pence a gallon. The average full time annual wage was £853 for an adult male with women earning significantly less at £580. Internationally, Nikita Khrushchev became Soviet premier, the EEC was created with 6 European nations forming a common market, the first American Express card was issued and Castro's revolutionary army began attacking Havana in Cuba.

Pioneer Coin Dealers

David Raymond was an influential Australian coin dealer during the late 30s to early 50s and a respected numismatist. Owen Fleming in an article⁶ on earlier numismatists for the 60th anniversary report of the Australian Numismatic Society included the following information on David Raymond:

David was a foundation member of the Australian Numismatic Society in 1913. His shop in 128 Bathurst St Sydney became a focal point for collectors and included philatelics and artifacts as well as numismatics. Customer interest in his stock led him to assist, via his address list, in the set up of the Numismatic Society of NSW in 1939. David took the key role of foundation president for the new society. He was a quiet man but unwittingly got into trouble⁷ with the Crown Solicitor's office for advertising to buy 1930 pennies at 10/- each in April 1945. Apparently it was an offence to pay, give or accept more than face value for a current coin! David passed away on 12/7/59 in his 75th year and was buried under his correct name of Barnett in the Jewish section of the Botany Cemetery. Fleming

concluded⁶ that because of his trade association Dave Raymond was at that time, probably Australia's most widely known numismatist.

Coin collecting in Australia was still in its infancy in 1958 with stamp collecting a far more popular and well established hobby. Dealers at that time were generally found only in capital cities and they traded coins as a sideline. Phil Downie⁸ and Max Stern⁹ were heavily focused on philatelics with Phil just starting to handle a few coins⁸. In Sydney, the late Martin Daniel¹⁰ was also a stamp dealer but had a head start in numismatic sales when he took over his friend David Raymond's extensive stock in the mid 1950s when David retired due to ill health¹⁰. These pioneer coin dealers could see the growing popularity in coin collecting in Europe and the USA and had started dealing about this time. However, the Australian boom did not occur until some five years later¹¹ in 1963-1964. This was when the public cottoned on to the imminent loss of their familiar shillings and pence due to the impending decimal changeover. In 1958, the bulk of the interest and demand in Australia's predecimal proof coins was still coming from overseas.

The proof issues

1958 marked the return of bronze penny production by the Melbourne Mint after only "silver" was struck in 1957. The mintage was increased back to the "regular" 1,506 sets after only 1,256 sets⁵ dated 1957 were made. The finish on the Melbourne proofs was their characteristic⁵ uniform mirror finish with broad cart-wheeling lustre (Figure 1). Peter Hutchinson in his buyers guide to the series¹² contended that the Melbourne proofs were different to those struck in previous years. He suggested 2 different die groups were used¹² with one revealing a more brilliant finish but neither as good as the previous 1955-1957 issues. In general terms, the surviving mirror finish on the Melbourne 1958 proofs is not as good as that from previous years, typically revealing a slightly cloudy appear-

ance¹³. Given their storage conditions would have been comparable; the reasons for this are problematic and may relate to variation in:

- the Mint's original packaging (corrosive vapours emitted from paper/plastic)
- planchet related (the amount of pickling and polishing done)
- die polish (the effort put into polishing the dies may have been reduced)

The Perth Mint in contrast to Melbourne, restricted production of its 1958 proofs to 1,028 pennies after its relatively

generous 1957 proof/specimen mint-ages¹⁴. For their 1958 issue, the Perth Mint had settled on the high rimmed spectacular reverse cameo finish perfected during 1958 and first applied¹⁴ to part of their 1957 dated proof issue.

The Perth Branch Mint

The late George P. Knight (Figure 2) transferred from the Royal Mint London to accept the position of Foreman of Mechanics at Perth Mint in the late 1940s¹⁵. He arrived¹⁶ with his wife and children in 1948 and went about improving the performance of its then dilapidated equip-



Figure 2 George Knight - Foreman of Mechanics at the Perth Mint
George Knight examining dies at the Perth Mint -1950s copyright Perth Mint



Figure 1 The Melbourne Mint's 1958 proof silver set
FDC set revealing the Melbourne Mint's characteristic uniform mirror finish and broad cart wheeling lustre underneath peripheral tone.

ment. The limited funds available and the Mint's isolation forced George to improvise and use local resources and manufacturers. During this time Geoffrey W. Robinson (Figure 3) was already on the Perth Mint staff and working his way up to become the second director (equivalent to the Deputy Mint master) of the Mint post its takeover¹⁵ by the State in 1970. Robinson was a numismatist and collector¹⁴ and the combination of front office support, technical interest and workshop know-how within these two gentlemen; was to provide the in-house impetus to get the Perth Mint's commercial proof production underway. The Mint was finally able to make its own dies¹⁶ in July 1951 and this led Knight to suggest the Perth Mint make proof coins for the collectors market in the USA¹⁵. Apparently, he later wondered if this was a good idea as he was the only person at that early stage in the Mint's production section with the expertise to detect flaws



Figure 3 Geoffrey W Robinson
Director 02/12/1976-23/02/1984 Perth Mint - copyright Perth Mint



Figure 4 Australia's 1958 proof pennies

The two Mint types - revealing the uniform icy smooth surfaces of the Melbourne proof in comparison to the cameo finish of the Perth version

in their proof coin's glossy finish¹⁵. This hand inspection of each individual proof was obviously an impost on the limited time he had available given his other duties at the Mint.

How to Identify the Melbourne Mint's 1958 Dated Proof 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 actually the rare proofs. Unlike modern proofs, the dies used to strike the Melbourne proofs 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 strikes¹⁷ which are hard to authenticate. The more subtle differences between proof and choice business strikes require a methodology which has been refined over this series of articles. The method starts simply with an initial broad examination and is then 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 distri-

bution 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 1958 coin is a proof – using Figures 1, 4 and the pictures in the previous articles^{5,6} 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), across both the recessed fields and raised relief features; business strikes rarely produce this consistency unless they have been polished which then results in a complete loss of any lustre.

In-depth search for die markers

Microscopic examination of a large number of these coins for the presence of die markers and selection of those most readily discernable resulted in the markers outlined in Tables 1-3. The presence of these markers on a coin should provide definitive confirmation of its proof status. No evidence was found for a second pair of dies being used to strike the Melbourne proofs in contradiction to Hutchinson's¹² assertion that two different die groups were apparently used.

The die markers in Tables 1-3 comprise raised features (incuse in the die) which

are generally tiny chips and scratches resulting from microscopic blemishes to the dies hardened steel surface. These can be attributed to either:

- Flaws in their casting which results in metal falling out during the dies preparation.
- Lathe and wire brush marks imparted to the die during its final preparation
- Die cracks have not been observed on Melbourne proofs in accord with their higher level of quality control and small mintages.

Those markers selected 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 1958 coins but these are from the master dies for the year and are generally beyond the scope of this article.

Research into the proof dies used by the Perth Mint to strike their 1958 proofs by Paul Holland¹⁴ revealed four pairs were used in five combinations (Table 3). This is a marked reduction after their experimentation with the 1957 proof which involved eight die pairs, several of which occurred in different states^{4,14}. The die pairings are outlined in Table 3 with the same coding as developed by Paul Holland. Research into these fascinating coins is ongoing and constrained by their limited numbers coming to market. There is a possibility that further dies or different combinations will surface over time.

Of numismatic interest is a die linkage between a 1957 obverse for the Perth Penny and one of the 1958 pairings. Likewise with the Melbourne proofs, the obverse dies for the 1958 sixpence and florin were originally used to strike their 1957 versions. The discovery of die linkages between different years confirms that at least for these dies, they were not used to strike regular coinage in their initial year.

What constitutes a top grade 1958 proof 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. The proof coins illustrated in Figure 1 were deliberately chosen to illustrate this impact of toning on eye appeal. Eye appeal naturally impacts on

price with attractive toned coins much rarer than dipped brilliant ones (discernable by their dull mirrors). After 51 years one should expect some greyish toning on the silver, particularly as they were made from a quaternary alloy containing 40% copper.

The 1958 Melbourne bronze penny is very difficult to locate in fully brilliant condition (Figure 4). Most seen in the market have blotchy irregular brown tone areas masking their original golden brilliance. For this year, hints of purple and green are typically embedded within the brown toning. Again eye appeal is a major factor with collectors on a budget willing to forgive toning if the surfaces still exhibit that characteristic underlying smooth proof sheen.

The Perth proof bronze penny (in contrast to the Melbourne issue) is generally seen with golden brilliance (Figure 4). Toned proof pennies from Perth are more heavily discounted than their Melbourne counterparts. Both types should be free of spots particularly the raised dark off-colour ones symptomatic of galvanic corrosion. Small jet black and generally flat flecks (which I suspect to have a microbial origin) are not as dangerous but still detrimental particularly if readily visible to the naked eye. The Perth cameo proof 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 1958 proof set covering the four Melbourne silver coins and the contrasting Melbourne and Perth bronze is an achievable challenge. The quality of the Melbourne proofs is slightly reduced when compared with the Mints best year's i.e. 1955-56. A possible explanation relies on the fact that the Mint reused some of their obverse dies from 1957; therefore less polish may have been applied to the reverse dies to ensure their surfaces matched.

Conclusion

Australia's 1958 proof coinage is unusual in that it includes a significant amount of die linkage back to the previous 1957 issues. The Perth proof penny is a standout in terms of its quality and when complemented with a rare untuned Melbourne penny and the four silver coins, they make a great match to the previous "long" six coin sets going back from 1957 (with its two contrasting Perth pennies plus Melbourne's 4 silver coins), 1956 (Perth and Melbourne Pennies plus Melbourne's silver), to the start in 1955 (Perth 1/2d, 1d & Melbourne 1d to 1/-).

Acknowledgments

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**TABLES 1,2,3 APPEAR
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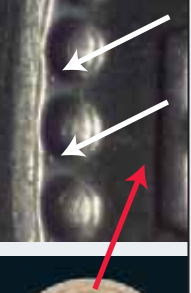
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TABLE-1 Outline of the Die Markers and Population Study for the 1958 Melbourne Proof Silver

Die Pair*		Obverse die key features			Reverse die key features		
1TP58 + ATP58 1958 THREEPENCE 7#							
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire, beading not all fully formed. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			Flat un-ground rim with full wire and sections with concentric lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			
marker	DEI Grat braiding between wire and flat on rim	dot between beads above elizaBeth		mark between 1 9 in date		striations between G in kg ribbon and 5 in date	
1SP57 + ASP58 1958 SIXPENCE 7							
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire, beading not all fully formed. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			Bevelled un-ground rim with partial wire and traces of lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			
marker	blob between beads and rim above gratTia	blob on bust at dress line below front neck		raised blob on roo thigh;		mark behind emu head	
1S58 + AS58 1958 SHILLING 7							
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with full wire, multiple concentric lathe lines above GRATIA REGINA. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			Flat un-ground rim with partial. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			
marker	Perpendicular raised lines above + on rim	raised tick behind top of eye		dot in top of A in strAlita		dot in fleeces below R in strRalia;	
1F57 + AF58 1957 FLORIN 7							
General Description*	Broad flat un-ground rim with partial wire. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			Broad flat un-ground rim with partial wire, denticles extend into inner rim in places. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre			
marker	raised line in beads above II Dei;	raised lines in beads above beTH		Oblique raised line from wire rim beside top lhs leaf near roo head		mark on 2nd leaf rhs pointing to roo shoulder	

*Obverse denoted by numerals (1-2) Reverse denoted by letters (A-B); # Number in Survey. The red arrows are location aids (back on the whole coin) for the die markers which are indicated by the white arrows

TABLE-2 Outline of the Die Markers and Population Study for the 1958 Melbourne Proof Penny





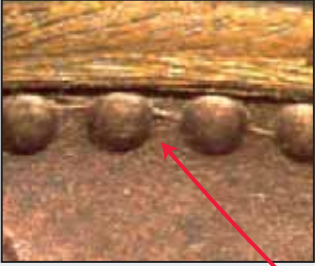
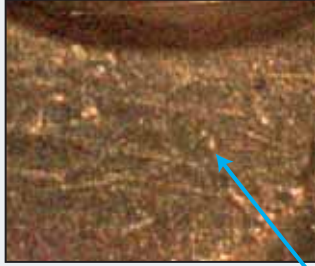

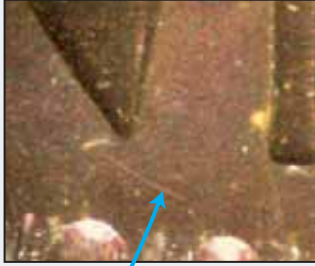
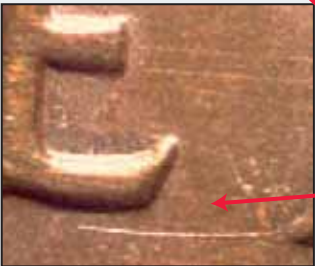
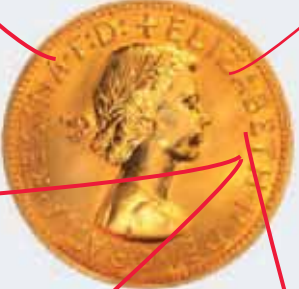
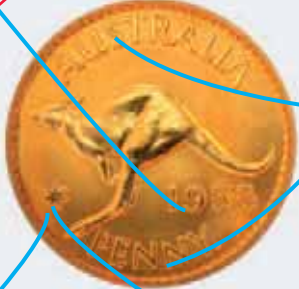


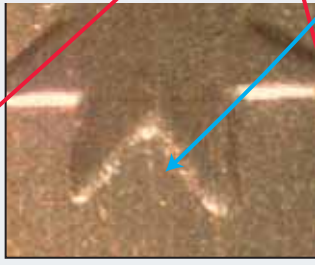
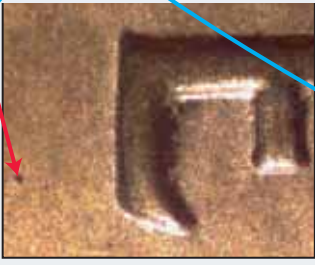

Die Pair*	Obverse die key features		Reverse die key features	
1P58 + AP58* 1958 MELBOURNE PENNY 7#				
General Description*	Flat un-ground rim with the odd trace of a lathe line. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre		Flat un-ground rim with full wire and sections of concentric lathe lines. Fine "texture" to mirror finish fields, exhibits broad cartwheel lustre	
marker	polishing lines on shoulder and into field	eLizabe line off denticle above L	striations behind jaw in roo's snout which is pointing down here	peNny raised blob top of N
*Obverse denoted by numerals (1-2) Reverse denoted by letters (A-B); # Number in Survey. The red arrows are location aids (guide the eye back on the marker's location on the whole coin) for the die markers which are indicated by the white arrows				

TABLE-3 Outline of the Die Markers and Population Study for the 1958 Perth Proof Pennies

			
8P57 +	AP58	1P58 +	BP58
			
2P58 + →			← + CP 58
			
2P58 +	DP 58	3P58 +	DP 58

Legend Table 3

<p>Obverse</p> <p>8P57 - Enhanced, filed rim, frosted fields, with raised crossed lines in the beads above A and F of reginA F:d.</p> <p>1P 58 - dot below Z of eliZabeth</p> <p>2P58 - raised line below ET of elizabETH</p> <p>3P58 - dot below second E of eliZabEth</p> <p>Reverse</p> <p>AP58 - a spike left of the tail of the 9 of the date and a thin line in the loop of the 9</p> <p>BP58 - thin curved line below NN of peNny</p> <p>CP58 - nearly smooth fields, a thin raised line in the U and the S of aUStralia - (photo reveals the line in S)</p> <p>DP58 - small dot (blob) below star.</p>	<p>Thirty one pennies were examined with the following statistics obtained for their die pairs</p> <p>7P57 + AP58 three coins (10%)</p> <p>1P58 + BP58 ten coins (32%)</p> <p>2P58 + CP58 one coin (3%)</p> <p>2P58 + DP58 three coins (10%)</p> <p>3P58 + DP58 fourteen coins (45%)</p> <p>All coins have a high turned rim and frosted fields. A varying degree of hand grinding of the rims was observed (remanent concentric lathe lines appearing on parts of the rims instead of flat surfaces) on several pennies with the same die pair designation.</p>
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