

The Ghost Coins.

About “ghosting” on coin faces.

Eeek! It’s a ghost!

Well, not quite, but you can see a “strike through” of the monarch as a ghostlike outline on the reverse on some coins. The best coins to see this on are the penny coppers around 1940 to 1945, although some other coins like halfpennies and threepences and 1960s’ pennies show the effect as well. Just like the “Spur” coins (see my article in CAB November 2005) the effect shows up to the best advantage on the poorest looking coins. The coin planchet faces are covered with ripples and waves, and this causes the poor look. These deviations don’t have to be of a great magnitude to appear unsightly.

The reason for the transfer of image from one side to the other is metal movement under pressure. This demonstrates just how deeply the shock wave and stresses of striking the image from both sides reflect in the metal. I theorise a short strike without much dwell time to allow the metal to stabilise and the type of alloy used at the time, may contribute to the effect as well. In those wartime years I don’t believe the niceties of planchet strike were that important. Punching out the coins and obtaining the longest die life would have been more important.

The penny also has flat field areas that are ideal for the stress lines from the other side to appear. A fussier reversed coin like the two shilling does not have the flat areas and cannot show the same effect. Having said that, someone will promptly send me a scan of a ghost “two bob” scuttling that notion completely!

I noted that threepences could show the opposite effect where the shield reverse side will show on the obverse in the flat field areas. I have tried to capture these “ghosts” with the camera to illustrate the variety.

Images

The first two images (top next page) show the whole effect quite nicely. The first is a battered old 1943 penny showing the “Ghost”. The second is the obverse but turned in mirror fashion. Note how nicely some of the King’s features show up. The neck, hair rolls and jaw line are well displayed on this coin, leaving no room for argument about where the image comes from. Looking closely at the obverse there is just the hint of the kangaroo bleeding through at the back of the King’s neck.

The 1960 penny (left centre) shows the outline of the Queen’s head as a large balloon like shape around and above the kangaroo. Compare to the image on the right, which is the obverse in mirror fashion and the lines can be matched up. None of the 1960’s pennies I have show the detail as well as the 1940’s. Halfpennies are definitely not exempt see the image bottom right, but I have not come across a sample of this smaller coin affected as much as the penny size. Image bottom left is the obverse of a pretty thin George V threepence. With a bit of study you may make out the kangaroo and emu. The emu protrudes from the King’s mouth and brow and the kangaroo stands upon the monarch’s shoulder.

The last image is to convince the sceptics, this just shows another penny, 1941 with the King’s image not so obvious but still there.

Frustratingly none of my lovely “extremely fine” or better grade coins shows any of these effects so that nicer pictures can be obtained. It seems that the daggier the condition, the better the “Ghost” image!



Summing up.

I can only speculate if other countries' coins display this same effect. *[Yes they do, a kind reader alerted me to the same problem with English copper coins in certain years. Owing to the reduction in the amount of tin in the alloy the blanks were softer than normal.]*

It does seem that the year the coins are affected are those where the presses were run hard to produce a large volume of coinage and where the beauty of the coin strike was not a priority. Having a fair amount of British and NZ copper I trawled through these, and could find nothing like this error at all. Not one ghost! I

must say that the coins from these two countries are much better struck; perhaps the striking standards were higher from the mints involved.

So there we are, a quirk in production that may be peculiar to the Aussie coinage. I'll bet the shoe boxes of clapped out coppers will once more be dragged out and I hope readers will find a few ghosts in their closets!