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# The *proof* (specimen) Australian 1930 penny

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In the last two years the *proof* 1930 penny has gained much publicity in the popular media with the high profile offering of Australia's most expensive coin through a leading Melbourne coin dealer. That this coin is outstanding in both its quality and rarity is beyond question, and begs the question of the provenance of all six such coins that were known to have been produced. This article continues the study of John Sharples, former Curator of Numismatics at Museum Victoria, on the 1930 penny circulation strikes,<sup>1</sup> by identifying the six known specimens, documenting the known provenance for each of the three specimens in private hands, and identifying a hitherto unrecorded die fault. It also discusses the label *proof* when these coins should properly be referred to as *specimen strikes*.

The story of the 1930 penny is quite intriguing and has been well explored by Sharples. It began at the Royal Mint Melbourne Branch, when Mint staff were experimenting with die production (for this and other facts concerning the production of coinage at the Melbourne branch of the Royal Mint, we refer to the detailed report of the late William

J Mullett, a former Senior Technical Officer of the Mint and, before WWII, its Acting Superintendent).<sup>2</sup> In fact the Mint staff had as early as 1919/1920 started to produce their own dies, distinguished by having a dot below the bottom scroll on the reverse (and for some dies above the top scroll as well). The reason for doing so was quite simple, the shipping time for dies from the Royal Mint in London was so great that at times its Melbourne Branch just ran out of working dies. The experimenting included different steel types and the production of hubs from working dies. By 1929 the Mint found itself at a time of low production, at the start of the Great Depression, and it was the beginning of the Royal Mint Melbourne Branch embarking on a path of independence from its British parent for its day-to-day work.

The starting point for John Sharples' paper was the following letter (167/30) to the Deputy Master of the Royal Mint Melbourne Branch, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1930, from A Bolle, Secretary to the Treasury:

*Referring to your letter dated 6 March, No. 63/30, in which you ask that you be advised as to the*

*probable requirements of Silver and Bronze Coin for the current calendar year, I have to inform you that no additional supplies of Silver or Bronze Coin will be required by banks during the ensuing year.*

For a long time the Royal Mint didn't even admit to the existence of the 1930 penny, and then it conceded that a few were struck. Hagley, writing in 1950 by memory about his acquisition of his 1930 specimen (see below), wrote

*My first contact with the 1930 penny occurred about fifteen years ago when I acquired a specimen from the Art Gallery duplicates; this was a proof ... It was not until about five years later that my friend, Fritz Schafer, of the Melbourne Gallery told me that he had discovered two specimens in circulation.<sup>3</sup>*

Here *specimens* is synonymous with *examples* and refers to ordinary strikes.

Some sixty years later Gilbert Christoph Heyde wrote in his memoirs:

***The 1930 Penny:** About 1942 Sydney Hagley told me there was an Australian 1930 penny, and he had been shown one. The Mint said that none had been made or issued that year.<sup>4</sup>*

Both these two statements were written some years after the event, which would account for their inaccuracies. This is not unusual when trying to recall years later exactly what

was said and when.

Sharples deduced from the Melbourne Mint records that: the 1930 penny was minted in 1930; there were two different obverse dies; the number of 1930 pennies struck is still unknown; and the 3 in the date shows evidence of overdating. Mullett wrote:

*The production of 1930 pence might be:*

*(a) In August, 1930, there were struck 12 specimen pieces and the discards in producing and selecting these. The obverse [bead] count was 178 and the reverse 174.*

*(b) In August, 1931, there were experiments involving the three 1930 reverse and obverse of two types.<sup>5</sup>*

It has always been thought that there was some possibility of visitors having received coins from one pair of dies. This was dismissed by Mullett in his publication *Australian Coinage* because of the location of the dies and the small number of visitors during the last four months of 1930, but he later goes on to allow the possibility of visitors having received coins from one pair of dies.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be no evidence for this one way or the other.

One thing that is certain is that the so-called *proof* 1930 pennies are in fact *specimens*, and indeed this is the term used by Mullett for twelve such pieces (as we will see, only six are known to exist). The difference between *proof* and *specimen* has been discussed in various

forums; Carlo D'Angio writes:

*The term "Specimen" describes coins which have been created from working dies in limited numbers and individualised for inspection. Only a small number of coins are carefully struck (once only, unlike proof strikes), and individually handled..."*<sup>7</sup>

The known six specimen 1930 pennies have been recorded as follows. Three museums were sent two examples each and all institutions have parted with their duplicates. The first in each group, the piece presently held at the museum, is labelled with a 1, and the second, the piece that is now privately held, labelled with a 2. In this way it is easier to track the provenance of the privately held specimens.

In 1930 two specimen 1930 pennies (MM1, MM2) went into the Melbourne Mint Museum collection (then co-located with the National Gallery of Victoria) and two were sent to the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA1, AGSA2), and in 1931 two (BM1, BM2) arrived at the British Museum. There is no trace of the remaining six mentioned by Mullett.

The six known specimens are as follows:

#### **MM1**

Accession Number NU 5310 was stolen by Aldo Massola in 1963, but was retrieved after being shown to Ray Jewell by a dealer who had purchased it; this is now held at Museum Victoria

(Melbourne Museum). The Age Newspaper, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1964, has some details of the case.<sup>8</sup> This coin was returned to the Melbourne Mint Museum, then in 1978 it went to the Science Museum in Swanston Street, and then in about 1982 to Museum Victoria, which is an amalgamation of the Melbourne, Immigration and Science Museums. There is general tarnishing but it is in fact brighter than AGSA1 below (this isn't clear from the printed image).

Aldo Giuseppe Massola (1910–1975) has an entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography,<sup>9</sup> which includes these sentences:

*In those impecunious years, Massola (Note: then Curator of Anthropology at the National Museum of Victoria) doubled as honorary numismatist for the then co-located National Gallery of Victoria. On 6 December 1963 he was charged with the theft of rare coins. Convicted in 1964 on three counts of larceny, he received a two-year gaol sentence, but was released on parole after twelve months. On 6 January 1965 he was dismissed from the museum. In the following year he was charged with six further counts of theft from the National Gallery. Again convicted on three counts, he was fined \$110 and costs. According to the sympathetic stipendiary magistrate, Massola was 'an obsessed collector rather*



Figure 1. MM1 (© Museum Victoria).



Figure 2. MM2 (privately held).

*than a thief in the ordinary sense’.*

## **MM2**

This coin went missing sometime in the 1960s and later appeared on the private market. It was described as sharply and squarely struck, cabinet friction on the high points of the obverse, mostly brown with traces of red, the reverse nearly fully brilliant with a small area of carbon spotting, otherwise nearly FDC and extremely rare, this specimen unpublished. This ex-Melbourne Mint specimen sat in an old private Melbourne collection for decades, and was known to have been sold in 1997 (see provenance below).

## **AGSA1**

Accession Number 25613, which was purchased from the Melbourne

Mint through Deputy Master Mr W M Robinson on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1930, is held at the Art Gallery of South Australia. It was noted as being received on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1930, with diameter 39/32” and weight 144.5 troy grains. It has an ink blob behind the King’s head, tiny raised flecks on the obverse, the orb on head crown is clear but not sharp, and there are three significant stains on the reverse, one above the top scroll, one below the bottom scroll, and one at the top stroke of the letter ‘L’ in AUSTRALIA together with some minor ones including one on either side of ‘N’ in ONE, and another to the right of ‘E’ in ONE.

## **AGSA2**

Accession Number 25614, which





Figure 3. AGSA1 (© Art Gallery of South Australia).



Figure 4. AGSA2 (privately held).

was purchased from the Melbourne Mint through Deputy Master Mr W M Robinson on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1930, is listed in the AGSA records as having diameter 39/32" and weight 146 troy grains. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1941 the duplicate was de-accessioned and Sydney Hagley purchased it from the Gallery. There is evidence of cleaning on the reverse between the 'A' and 'L' of 'AUSTRALIA'.

#### BM1

1931-3-2-3 was purchased from the Melbourne Mint, accessioned in March 1931, and is held in the British Museum.

#### BM2

1931-3-2-2, which was accessioned at the same time as BM1, went missing

from 1931 to 1976 (as it turned out, it was sitting unnoticed in the duplicates cabinet for 35 years!) and was exchanged in October 1981 with Spink (Australia) for an 1852 Adelaide pound with cracked die (1981-10-19-1). The Adelaide pound was Lot 368, Spink Auctions (Australia), Sale 5, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1981.

The codes used by the British Museum are:

- 1931 - year of acquisition
- 3 = March - month of acquisition
- 2 - second group of objects acquired that month
- 1, 2, 3 etc - sequential numbering within the group

The acquisition register records that for the group 1931-3-2 (the acquisition



Figure 5. BM1 (© Trustees of the British Museum).



Figures 6a and 6b. BM2 (privately held).

from the Melbourne Mint) there are two 1930 pennies listed, one of which is marked as having been removed as a duplicate. They are described in the register as “ordinary Australian type”, but on the ticket under BM1 it is noted as a *proof*. The minutes of the department show that the two pennies were purchased along with a sovereign and two halfpennies for £1-1-9 from the Deputy Master of the Melbourne Mint. The British Museum used to have a policy of exchanging duplicates, but this has long since ceased.

### **Provenance of the privately held specimens**

#### **MM2**

*Private collector*, 22<sup>nd</sup>–24<sup>th</sup> July 1997,

Spink Auctions (Australia), Sale 54, Lot 1437.

#### **AGSA2**

*Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery of South Australia*, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1930, Melbourne Mint (D W Robinson).

*Sydney V Hagley* (Adelaide), 31<sup>st</sup> March 1941, National Gallery of South Australia.

*Dr Curtis R Paxman*, around 1970, private sale.

*Dr Alec Dobbin* (Sydney), 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> November 1974, purchased through auction of the Paxman Collection from Bowers & Ruddy (Los Angeles).<sup>10</sup>

*Laurence Nugent* (Adelaide), 19<sup>th</sup> November 1981, Spink Auctions (Australia), Sale 6, Lot 957.

Spink Auctions (Australia), 1982,

Laurence Nugent (private sale).

*Douglas J Moran* (Sydney), Spink Auctions (Australia) (private sale).

*Private collector* (Melbourne), 29<sup>th</sup> March 2000, Noble Numismatics (Sydney), Sale 63, Lot 1377.

*Coinworks* (Melbourne) recently sold this coin.

AGSA2 has for a long time been incorrectly described as originating from Albert Malet Le Souef, Deputy Director at the Melbourne Mint, 1921–1925. This could not have been the case as the acquisition date and the date of Le Souef's Deputy Directorship don't match, and in any case this coin doesn't appear in Sharples' catalogue of the Le Souef Collection.<sup>11</sup>

## BM2

*British Museum*, March 1931, Melbourne Mint, (D W Robinson).

*Spink Auctions* (Australia), October 1981, British Museum (exchange).

*Private collector*, May 1987, Spink Auctions (Australia).

*Spink Auctions* (Australia), 20<sup>th</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> March 1996, Sale 50, Lot 1550 (unsold). *Private collector*, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> November 1999, Spink Auctions (Australia), Sale 62, Lot 1602.

## Denticle fault above 'F' in 'OF'

There is a fault on the reverse above the 'F' of 'OF' (Fig. 7: a minute round blob (B) near the edge, between the denticles and a badly formed denticle (A) to the left of this). The five of the six 1930 specimen pennies for which the author has detailed reverse images exhibit this fault, and it is quite possible that all 1930 pennies do, but it is virtually impossible to detect this on lesser grade coins. Figure 8 is the finest known circulation strike of the 1930 penny and the denticle fault isn't clearly evident. This can probably be explained that it was an earlier striking, whereas the specimen versions were struck late in 1930 by which time this area of the die had deteriorated.



Figure 7. Denticle fault (AGSA1).



Figure 8. Denticle fault (finest known circulation strike).





Figure 9. Overdate (AGSA1).

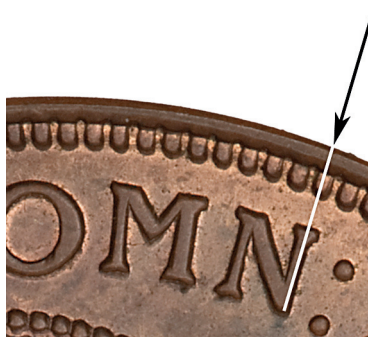


Figure 10. Indian die obverse.

### **Overdate of the '3' in 1930**

Sharples has already observed that the 1930 pennies show an *overdate* of the '3' (Fig. 9).<sup>12</sup> The four of the six 1930 specimen pennies for which the author has detailed date images exhibit this quite clearly, as does the penny shown in Figure 8.

### **Die combinations**

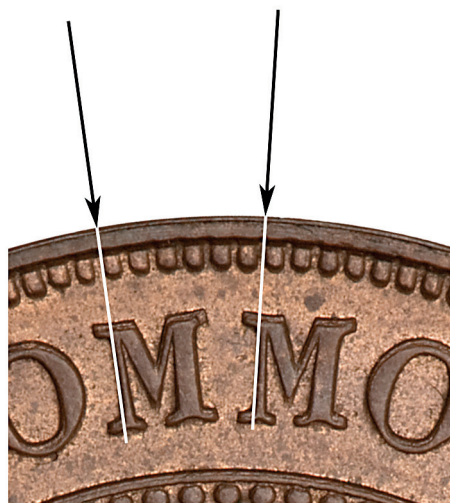
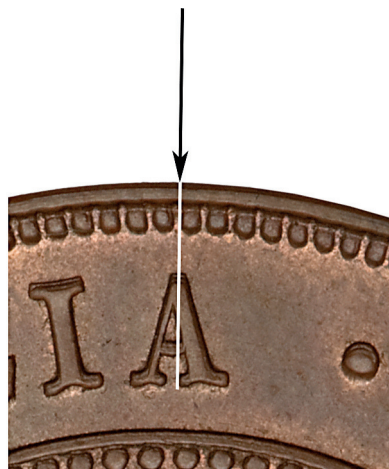
Sharples has identified two die combinations for the 1930 penny, all with the London reverse, and with both the English and Indian obverses represented. All the 1930 pennies discussed in this article have the Indian die obverse (Fig. 10).

These also have the London die reverse (Figs 11a and 11b).

Finally, note that all but one (MM2) of the 1930 pennies discussed in this article have curved-base letters on the reverse.

### **Conclusion**

The six known specimen 1930 pennies have similar characteristics on



Figures 11a and 11b. London die reverse.

the reverse, with the marked denticle fault and the *overdate* of the 3, and in theory this would provide a relatively straightforward way of detecting forged 1930 pennies, but in practice only those of high grade show this fine detail. The die combinations' approach, as outlined by Sharples, is not so dependent on grade and can be used to identify those forged 1930 pennies in the case where the last digit has been altered from a penny minted between late 1931 and 1936.

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### Notes

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