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PERTH MINT PROOF RECORD COINS

1940 - 1954

by John Sharples

The concept of the modern proof coin, beautifully struck and packaged for sale to collectors, did not simply spring fully formed onto the corporate marketing desks of mints around the world. It emerged by trial - and sometimes error - from earlier traditions of proof coin production.

The modern proof coin probably had its beginnings in the eighteenth century and had developed most of its present characteristics by the end of the nineteenth. The principle change wrought in the nineteenth century was that of proofs becoming not just presentation pieces but sets struck on a large scale for the public to collect.

These sets for the public were however viewed as exceptions, commemorating rare and important celebrations. The concept of annual large scale production for collectors belongs to the twentieth century. The annual production of proof coins in the nineteenth century was linked to a separate tradition - that of exhibiting ones products in the hope of attracting business. It saw the production of small numbers of proof coins both by mints and by the artists who designed the coins.

One significant aspect of this line of development was the production of proof coins for display at International Exhibitions. It was partly through such exhibitions that the proof concept came to Australia.

In 1879 and 1880 the mints at Sydney and Melbourne wished to show the quality of their work by exhibiting it alongside examples of the best from overseas. The Royal Mint in particular was happy to strike proofs for such an exhibition, and repeated the process in 1888 for the Centennial Exhibition at Melbourne. Indeed from that time the Royal Mint began producing a series of proof or specimen striking of each years work to be deposited in major public collection in Britain and the Colonies.

These have become known as the Royal Mint Proof Record series. They represent the work of the Royal Mint from 1880 until the series ended in 1963 and, as they were made for only a few institutions, are invariably rare (production of most types was in the 25 to 50 piece range).

The Australian mints, at Sydney, Melbourne and Perth were all formed as Branches of the Royal Mint in London. The workers at the Australian mints were British Civil Servants and could easily transfer between any of the Branch Mints, the traditions of the Royal Mint were their traditions and they were proud of its long and illustrious history.

The production of proof record coins was a part of that tradition and whenever a demand arose, or a collector of coins occupied a position of authority in the mint, Australian proof and specimen record pieces were struck.

The Melbourne Mint struck regular proof (and specimen) record coins from about 1916 when the production of Commonwealth silver began there. The 1916 M silver proof set was a commemorative issue celebrating the first striking of Commonwealth coins at Melbourne. The early Melbourne proofs are generally so rare that they are little heard of by most collectors and include such pieces as the proof 1923 halfpenny and 1930 penny.

The Perth Mint was a little more generous in its production and distribution lists than Melbourne and so one more often hears of pre-1955 Perth mint proof coins being offered for sale. I was recently given permission to examine the record of the old Perth Mint by the management of GoldCorp and took the opportunity to try to find out a little more about the extraordinary series of Proof and Specimen Record coins struck between 1940 and 1954.

To be honest, I had some preconceived ideas about what I would find. I thought, for

instance that the series began in 1945 with old dies, from as early as 1941, being brought back into use (I was aware that the Royal Mint and the British Museum received record coins from Perth in 1945). I thought that the reason for proof production was that a collector and member of the Perth Mint's management wanted to return a favour done for him by his superiors in London after he visited them at the end of the war- they were sending him examples of their Proof Record coins. The records of the Perth Mint showed that I was wrong on both counts.

The background of the Perth Mint Proof Record coins is much more straight forward. In early November 1940 the Australian government requested Perth to undertake coining of bronze penny and halfpenny coins. Melbourne, with the added pressures of the War effort could no longer meet requirements. By the end of November Perth had ordered from Melbourne the dies necessary to strike the new coins.

Melbourne was able to supply three pairs of penny dies dated 1940 - and marked the dies with a small dot between the letters KG to indicate that they were used at Perth. No halfpenny dies were available. Later 1941 penny dies were sent but it would seem that the tiny dot in the KG was not a clear enough mark and a small additional dot was added at the top of the Y after the word PENNY may have been tried. Finally the mint mark of Perth which was to last into the 50s, a stop after PENNY, was adopted.

From Perth's point of view, these tiny details were not important - they were producing coins again! Perth had been a non-coin producing mint since 1931 when the last sovereign was struck (shortly after the mint was notified that their sovereigns were being melted as soon as they reached London).

Normal working strikes with the 1940 dies had begun at Perth on 22 November 1940. Such an important event had to be commemorated. The Mint records show that specimens bearing the 1940 date were distributed in 1945 but do not seem to record exactly

when they were produced. However there is a record which shows that on 11 March 1941 specimen coins were struck from 1941 dies. Those I have examined all bear the K.G mint mark. A pair of 1941 specimens was sent to Melbourne on 12 March 1941 and was displayed at the National Gallery of Victoria, both were unfortunately involved in a theft from the Gallery in the early 1960s and cannot now be examined.

In 1945 the Deputy Master of the Perth Mint reported that he was now forwarding specimens of the Perth Mint's coin production during the war years to the British Museum and the Royal Mint. The Perth Mint records contain a copy of the letter sent with the coins. It is dated 15 June 1945 and lists that the parcel contains for both the Royal Mint and the British Museum:

Date	Penny	Halfpenny
1940	1	
1941	1	
1942	2 (from circulation)	2 (specimen)
1943	2	
1944	2	
1945	3	

I have examined both the 1940 K.G and 1941 K.G coins in the British Museum and my notes describe them as a specimens. I was not able to see the 1940 piece sent to the Royal Mint, but the 1941 was in the tray and is also a specimen - I described it at the time as "the worst proof I had ever seen, clearly from a heavily polished die and with low relief and poor distinction of every detail but the dot between KG which may even have been re-punched". The 1942 pennies were described in the letter as "from circulation", the British Museum does not seem to have retained the piece offered to them, but the Royal mint example seemed uncirculated and well struck, I suspect that "from circulation" was an abbreviation of "from the circulation strikes" ie. that they were selected uncirculated coins rather than specimen strikings. The

later pieces in both British collections are what we call "Perth Mint proof" in our auction and sales catalogues.

In 1958 the Perth Mint records contain a list of all public Collections and Numismatic Societies who were authorised to receive examples of the Proof coins up to that time. They were:

- Royal Mint, London
- British Museum
- Royal Mint, Melbourne
- Perth Mint Collection
- Director, Japan Mint
- Australian War Memorial
- Art Gallery of Western Australia
- National Gallery, South Australia
- National Gallery, Victoria
- Victorian Numismatic Society (NAV)
- South Australian Numismatic Society
- Australian Numismatic Society

In addition, it is believed that at least two private collectors received examples of the pre-1955 proof record coins. Going through the letters - out books, no additional names were found associated with any issue between 1940 and 1954. One might therefore suggest that the production of Perth proof record piece was in the order of 28 to 30 coins.

An examination of the actual distribution of specimens from the letters-out books up to 1950 are tabulated below. A second number in brackets lists the number of examples recorded by the author and, if larger than the mint records can be taken as the minimum number struck:

Date	Penny	Halfpenny	Shilling
1940	5 (1)		
1941	7 (3)		
1942	8 (11)		
1943	8 (12)		
1944	8 (12)		
1945	8 (11)	8 (7)	
1946		6 (13)	4 (6)

Date	Penny	Halfpenny	Shilling
1947	8 (19)	8 (13)	
1948	10 (16)	14 (18)	
1949	10 (16)		
1950	8 (15)	8 (15)	
1951	(14)	(8)	
1952	(15)	(16)	
1953	(20)	(20)	
1954	(15)		

The Coin that should not exist

Among the coins listed in the specimen distributions was the 1946 Perth shilling. I found only four notes of distribution recorded in the letters out book but was surprised to discover that the denomination should never have been struck in the first place. The Commonwealth Government had asked the Perth Mint to prepare in case a need for additional shillings occurred and Perth arranged for dies marked with a dot before the word Shilling to be provided. They then proceeded to strike the coins using silver recovered from their gold processing work. When notified the Commonwealth authorities were not pleased immediately ordering production to be stopped. The Commonwealth agreed to accept the coins already struck although they had actually never ordered them.

I found records of the issue of only four 1946 shilling specimen shillings being issued and have so far been unable to see any of these. However, the Melbourne Mint collection, which I did not find among those to whom specimens were issued, did contain examples of this shilling issued from Perth. They do not have a highly polished finish like the bronze proofs, but are I suspect characteristic of the specimen shillings in the Perth records.