

And Then There Were Eight

JON SAXTON REPORTS ON AN EXCITING FIND BY A KALGOORLIE COLLECTOR

There is nothing new in this article so if that is what you are looking for, you may as well stop reading right now. This article talks about something old, something eighty-three years old to be precise. It is about an Australian penny, well circulated but still in pretty good nick considering the number of pockets, purses and tills that it inhabited since 1920 when it was a youngster, fresh from the coining press.

Regular readers of *Australasian Coin & Banknote Magazine* may recall that the March 2003 issue carried an article of mine concerning the copper coins of 1920. In that article I enumerated the seven varieties of the 1920 penny which were known to exist. These varieties are combinations of two obverse patterns and five configurations of the small dots which appear on the reverse. Here is the table exactly as it appeared in March.

Variety	Obverse	Reverse	Dots
1C-//	London	Calcutta	None
1C-./	London	Calcutta	Below lower scroll
2C-//	Calcutta	Calcutta	None
2C-./	Calcutta	Calcutta	Below lower scroll
2C-./	Calcutta	Calcutta	Above lower scroll
2C-//	Calcutta	Calcutta	Above upper scroll
2C-./	Calcutta	Calcutta	Below lower and above upper scroll

In June this year, something happened which made this table obsolete. An extra row needs to be inserted after the second:

1C-./	London	Calcutta	Above lower scroll
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This comes about because Geoff Raynes, a collector from Kalgoorlie, was looking for some coins in Perth and ... well, you may as well read the story in his own words:

Wednesday 18 June 2003 was a memorable and remarkable day for myself. Being an avid collector of pre-decimal pennies, I decided to browse through the outlets in Perth in search of a 1920 Indian die penny with a dot above the upper scroll. This variety in my opinion is by far the rarest of the Indian die pennies. I was unsuccessful in obtaining one of these varieties so I thought the next best thing to spend my money on would be a London die plain penny as I did not have one of these in my variety penny collection. Again I was unsuccessful in obtaining a copy so I decided to spend my money on a packet of 1920 pennies that were being sold for \$65.

The following day I decided to categorise the pennies into their various groups, as I have always accepted [that there were] 7 varieties (5 Indian and 2 London). The London die varieties have always been advertised and accepted as being the rarer of the two dies with approximate mintages of only 100,000 for the plain and 140,000 for the dot below bottom scroll.

In the packet I purchased I was fortunate enough to find three of the 1920 London die pennies and I commenced to categorise these. It's a pretty simple procedure to categorise the London die pennies because if there is no dot below the bottom scroll then it can only be a plain no dot. My three samples yielded the following

Plain no dot x 1

Dot below bottom scroll x 2

I was particularly chuffed with the plain penny as it was the first for my variety collection plus it is in above average



Figure 1. Geoff Raynes with a well-earned grin.

condition. The obverse is particularly nice with the head-band displaying 6 nice pearls plus a full centre diamond plus a hint of the 7th and 8th pearls. I graded the coin as gVF and proceeded to place the coin in the coin holder then into the album. I was feeling pretty happy with myself as all you variety collectors out there will appreciate.

A couple of hours later I was still thinking about the coin in question and decided to admire it once more [and] to look for any detracting marks which I overlooked to do previously. This is when my heart started to beat very quickly and I could not believe what I was seeing. There sitting ABOVE THE BOTTOM SCROLL was the most beautiful dot I've ever seen.

So Geoff never did find his P20M-1C-// but he wasn't exactly disappointed (fig. 1). It is not every day that one discovers a hitherto unpublished variety of a coin that has been so thoroughly studied.

I had the privilege of examining this coin in early July. It is 30.9 mm in diameter and weighs 9.19 g. The weight seemed a little light given that the nominal weight of a penny was 9.45 g so I took the trouble of comparing it with other circulated King George V pennies. I weighed each coin in two samples, one containing randomly-selected dates, the other comprising just 1920 pennies. The results are presented below:

	Mixed dates	1920 pennies
Number of coins	16	23
Lightest	9.06 g	9.12 g
Heaviest	9.56 g	9.39 g
Average	9.30 g	9.27 g
Standard deviation	0.11 g	0.07 g

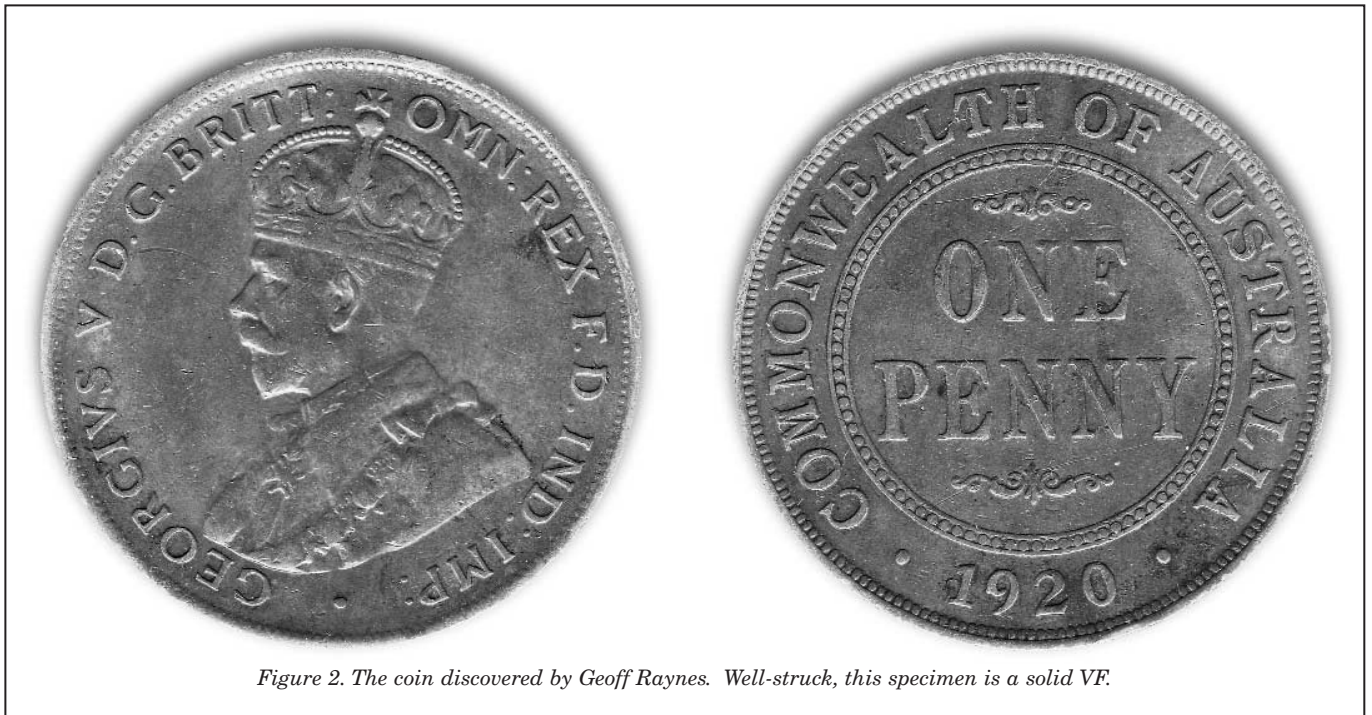


Figure 2. The coin discovered by Geoff Raynes. Well-struck, this specimen is a solid VF.



Figure 3a. A close-up of the top of the obverse showing the features which identify it as a London pattern. 1: Short tail on R, 2: Wide gap between O and cross, 3: First leg of N points at a rim denticle, second leg points at a gap.

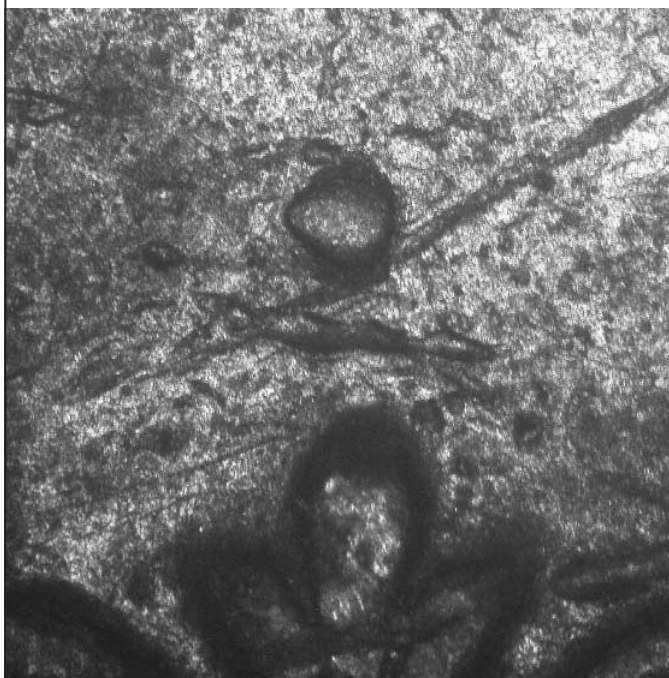


Figure 3b. A micrograph of the dot on the reverse. The dot is surrounded by a slight depression and is typical of the dots on the 1920 pennies.

9.19 g is about one standard deviation lighter than average in each case which means that it is within reasonable expectations and nothing close to exceptional. In other words, it is perfectly normal.

Figure 2 shows both sides of the coin and figure 3 presents some detail of each side showing that the coin does indeed have a London pattern obverse and that there really is a dot above the lower scroll. The dot is a little larger than usual and is a bit pear-shaped but given that these dots were added by hand to soft working dies, that is not unreasonable. It is even possible that the dot received a mild impact some time after coining and that could account for its odd shape. Meanwhile Paul Holland pointed out that the obverse is uncharacteristic of Sydney-minted pennies in that the denticles are distinct instead of being fused with the rim. On the other hand the obverse die is of a quite different origin from the normal dot-over-lower-scroll variety so we probably shouldn't draw any conclusions from that.

In short, there is nothing in my observations and measurements which gives me any cause for suspicion. In my opinion the Raynes coin is a perfectly well-adjusted, 100% genuine 1920 penny. As soon as I was satisfied, notice of Geoff's discovery was sent to Graeme Petterwood for inclusion in TNS Online¹, the electronic journal of the Tasmanian Numismatic Society.

So what does it all mean? Apart from being worth a lot of money to a variety collector, the mere existence of this coin poses quite a few numismatic questions, none of which I intend to answer.

Research published by John Sharples in 1985² suggested that 1920 pennies with a dot over the lower scroll were almost certainly products of the Sydney Mint. All twenty pairs of dies supplied by the Calcutta Mint were finished and hardened in Melbourne and were eventually sent (in two batches) to Sydney. There is some strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that Melbourne punched a little dot over the lower scroll onto the dies before hardening to indicate their Calcutta origin. Melbourne had been supplied with a pair of punches and would later produce working dies in-house and these would be stamped differently.

Now all twenty of those obverse dies supplied from Calcutta would have been the Calcutta pattern so if the Geoff Raynes penny was struck in Sydney, how could it have a London pattern obverse? On the other hand, if it was struck in Melbourne, how could the reverse have a dot over the lower scroll?

Again, the work of John Sharples yields a clue. In 1920 the Sydney Mint had been commissioned to strike pennies but by the middle of the year had received no dies so it ordered some 1919 dies from Melbourne. That these arrived in July 1920 is confirmed by the Sydney die records³. It is possible that these dies were actually used to mint some 1919-dated pennies in 1920 to get a jump start on the order but the ceremonial first strike occurred on 6th October by which time Sydney had received the dies from Calcutta and again according to Sharples, the specimens shown to the Australian Numismatic Society just after that date had a Caclutta obverse. Could the Sydney mint have struck a few 1920 pennies using one of those 1919 London pattern obverses? If so, why are they so scarce that only one specimen has turned up so far?

Every fact and every question seems to raise yet more questions. Anyone harbouring the idea that the study of Australian Commonwealth coinage is a dead subject should reconsider.

Meanwhile, congratulations to Geoff Raynes on his discovery. I am pleased to have been the one to authenticate this coin but since I live in New York, you can imagine the tension here and in Kalgoorlie while the coin made its transit. Again in the words of Geoff Raynes:

As you could imagine, I was very reluctant to part with the coin especially sending it to New York. Leaving the coin in Jon's capable protective care was never a worry but the transportation worried me immensely. After much thought I decided to send the coin to Jon and I despatched it on 23 June 2003. It seemed an eternity for the coin to reach New York but finally on 04 July 2003, I received that long awaited email from Jon saying that he had received the coin.

As I write this article, the penny is on its way back to Australia and I am anxiously awaiting confirmation that it is safely in the custody of its owner. Meanwhile, start looking at those pennies again. There are probably a few more out there somewhere and a few minutes spent searching for something you didn't even know existed could prove very rewarding.

Geoff plans to keep the coin unless someone makes a substantial offer. He can be contacted via e-mail as rachel@kalnet.com.au

13 July 2003

Even as Geoff's coin was in transit a second example of this coin was discovered by Peter Andrews in Melbourne. It is different from Geoff's coin in that it has the fused obverse rim beading typical of coins with the "dot above lower scroll" reverse. Also, the dot is not pear-shaped as in Geoff's specimen.

Links to pictures of both coins can be found on my web site⁴. Peter comments that his coin shows a "moat" around the dot and says that this is unusual for coins with a dot over the lower scroll. However Geoff's coin also has a small depression around the dot.

17 July 2003

Received word that Geoff's coin was safely back in Kalgoorlie.

1. <http://www.vision.net.au/~pwood/july03.htm>
2. John Sharples, "Australian Coinage 1919-1924" in Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia, Volume 1, July 1985
3. Die Account Book, Handwritten records of the Sydney Mint, 1920-1926, currently held by the Royal Australian Mint, Canberra
4. <http://triton.vg/P20.html>

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