

# Foreign Coins Minted in South Africa

By Joel Potgieter



# Introduction



- It is widely known that the South African Mint issues all South Africa's circulation coins today.
- It is less well-known that the Mint makes, and has made, many coins for countries across the globe, sporadically for the last 80 years.
- While researching this topic, I made several fascinating finds, and one truly astonishing discovery. (More on this later)
- This presentation is about some of these international issues, particularly those minted during World War 2, and their history.



# The 5 Main South African Mints

- 1) **The ZAR Mint in Pretoria, 1892 to 1900.**

This mint, built by order of President Paul Kruger in 1892, issued all the ZAR coins, besides some of the 1892 coins (which were made at the Berlin Mint), and the veld ponde.

- 2) **Pilgrims Rest Veld Mint, only 1902.**

The only coins struck at this emergency mint were the veld ponde.

- 3) **The Pretoria branch of the Royal Mint, 1923 to 1941.**

First commissioned in 1922, this mint never minted coins for other countries, with one possible exception (more on this later). In July 1941, the Mint was given over to the Union government and was renamed the South African Mint.



# The 5 Main South African Mints (*continued*)

- 4) **The South African Mint, 1941 to 1978, then 1978 to 1992.**

This mint handled the first foreign coinage orders from 1942 – 1949 and helped in the emergency wartime production of ammunition. In the late 1970s the mint buildings were demolished, and new buildings were constructed on the same site. The mint was officially reopened in 1978 but closed permanently in 1992.



- 5) **The South African Mint, 1992 to date.**

This mint was opened in 1992 at a new location in Centurion, Gauteng, and is still operating today.



# The Foreign Coinage Orders of World War 2.

- One of the lesser-known effects of the War was that it became increasingly difficult for the British Mint in London to supply enough coins to their overseas territories and other Allied countries who relied on them to strike their nations' coins for them. Because of this, the South African Mint was asked to assist in the production of coins for other Allied countries.
- During war, the demand for currency actually increases due to the increased economic activity needed to support the war. According to one of my sources, the demand for coins in South Africa during WWII was at one stage 4 times the average.
- Between 1942 and 1949 the South African Mint received orders from 10 different Allied countries/territories and minted over 550 million coins for these countries during this 7-year period.
- In comparison, the Mint struck only 91 million coins for South Africa during the 15-year period from 1923 to 1938.

# The coins of Belgium Congo

- During the War, only 3 different coins were minted at Pretoria for this territory. These coins are the 1944 silver 50 Franc and the 1944 and 1945 Brass 1 franc coins.
- However, in the years immediately following the end of the War, South Africa minted 5 franc, 2 franc and 1 franc coins (all in brass) in various years from 1946 to 1949.
- 8 Known patterns exist for this series, including a 1946 dated 50 cent piece, which is very interesting as no 50 cent coin was struck for circulation. All are stamped “PATT” after the manner of the South African pattern coins.



# The coins of Belgium Congo (*continued*)



Images by PCGS

The only silver coin minted for this country was the 50 franc coin of 1944. This coin is slightly larger than a standard South African half crown and catalogues at \$150 in AU55 and \$425 in MS63, according to NGC (September 2023).

A complete collection of these coins would include one 50 franc (1944), one 5 franc (1947), two 2 francs (1946 and 1947) and three 1 franc coins (1944, 1946 and 1949) for a total of seven coins.



All images by Numista

The brass 5 franc, 2 franc and 1 franc coins all have the same elephant design on the obverse as the 50 franc coin.

# The coins of British West Africa

- The territory of British West Africa originally had all its coinage needs met by the mints back home in England. However, with the wartime and post-wartime strain on Britain's entire infrastructure, the South African Mint was asked to handle some of the coinage orders.
- Only the 1 penny coin was minted in South Africa, and only in 1947 and 1948. These coins can be distinguished by the small SA mintmark on the obverse just under the centre hole
- Interestingly, the coins struck in 1947 and 1948 were dated 1946 and 1947.





# The coins of British West Africa (*continued*)



Photos by Coins by mail, BoBshop

With only 2 coins for this territory minted in South Africa, it might seem like it would be easy to find them.

However, the 1946 penny is actually a very scarce coin with a very high catalogue value (\$500 in VF and \$750 in XF, according to NGC's World coin price guide)



Image from eBay

The only example of the 1946 SA penny I managed to find for sale was one on BoBshop for R9,000.

The 1947 SA penny is much more common and worth between \$4.50 and \$7.50 in MS, according to NGC's world coin price guide.

# The coins of East Africa

- As with British West Africa, the British Mint, under enormous strain due to the war, could no longer produce all the hundreds of millions of coins needed for its territories all over the world, so certain territories - like East Africa - would place an order at the South African Mint for more coins.
- The Pretoria Mint struck coins in the denominations of 5 cents, 10 cents, 50 cents and 1 shillings between 1942 and 1946.



# The coins of East Africa (*continued*)



The silver coins were minted in a 25% silver, 5% manganese and 70% copper alloy. As this was the first time that the SA Mint had to manufacture coins in this particular alloy, there were many difficulties in the production of these coins, and as Mr J. P. Roux (the director of the Mint at the time) reported, it took several weeks of experimentation to produce large numbers of high-quality bars for coining. The copper coins were minted in a simple bronze alloy.

A complete collection of these coins would consist of 4 silver coins and 4 bronze coins, none of which are very rare, but the 1944 50 cents can be considered scarce.

Images from NGC, PCGS and eBay

# The coins of Egypt

- In 1942 the Egyptian government under King Farouk I placed an order to the South African Mint for 10 million silver 2 Qirsh coins.
- During the war, Egypt experienced a shortage of silver coins because of widespread hoarding. This became even worse when the 2 Qirsh coin's silver value exceeded their face value, resulting in many being melted for scrap.
- To combat the shortage of 2 Qirsh coins in circulation, the government placed a second order at the SA Mint, but this time they were struck in a 50% silver alloy and were hexagonal instead of round.



# The coins of Egypt (*continued*)



- With a mintage of 10,000,000 for the 1942 coins and 31,586,000 for the 1944 coins, they are quite common and are readily available in high grades.
- The 1944 issue is (as far as I have been able to determine) the only hexagonal coin ever minted in South Africa.



# The Free French Africa coins

- After the defeat of France by the Nazis in 1940, General Charles de Gaulle started rallying support in France (using radio broadcasts from London) to continue the fight against the German occupation (a movement known later as the Free France movement – or France Libre).
- While most of the French territories and overseas colonies remained loyal to France (which was now essentially a puppet state under command of the Nazis) a few of their former territories, including French Equatorial Africa sided with the new Free France movement.
- Following several campaigns in central Africa, the previously Nazi-France territories of Chad, Cameroon, the French Congo, Ubangi-Shari (present day Central African Republic) and Gabon all became part of this movement.
- But, as the mint back in France would certainly no longer manufacture coins for these countries, they needed an alternative source of coinage.

# The Free French Africa coins (*continued*)

- The first coinage order at the South African Mint for any international country was placed early in 1942 by the Free French authorities for 1 franc and 50 centimes coins for French Equatorial Africa. These coins were struck in a standard brass alloy.
- All sources that I have checked confirm that 3 million of the brass 1-franc coins were minted.
- However, the different sources disagree on how many brass 50 centimes coins were struck, with one claiming 2 million, another 4 million and another 8 million!



# The Free French Africa coins (*continued*)

- In 1943 the Free French again ordered several million coins for some of their African territories, namely Madagascar, French Equatorial Africa and Cameroon, only this time they were struck in bronze instead of brass.





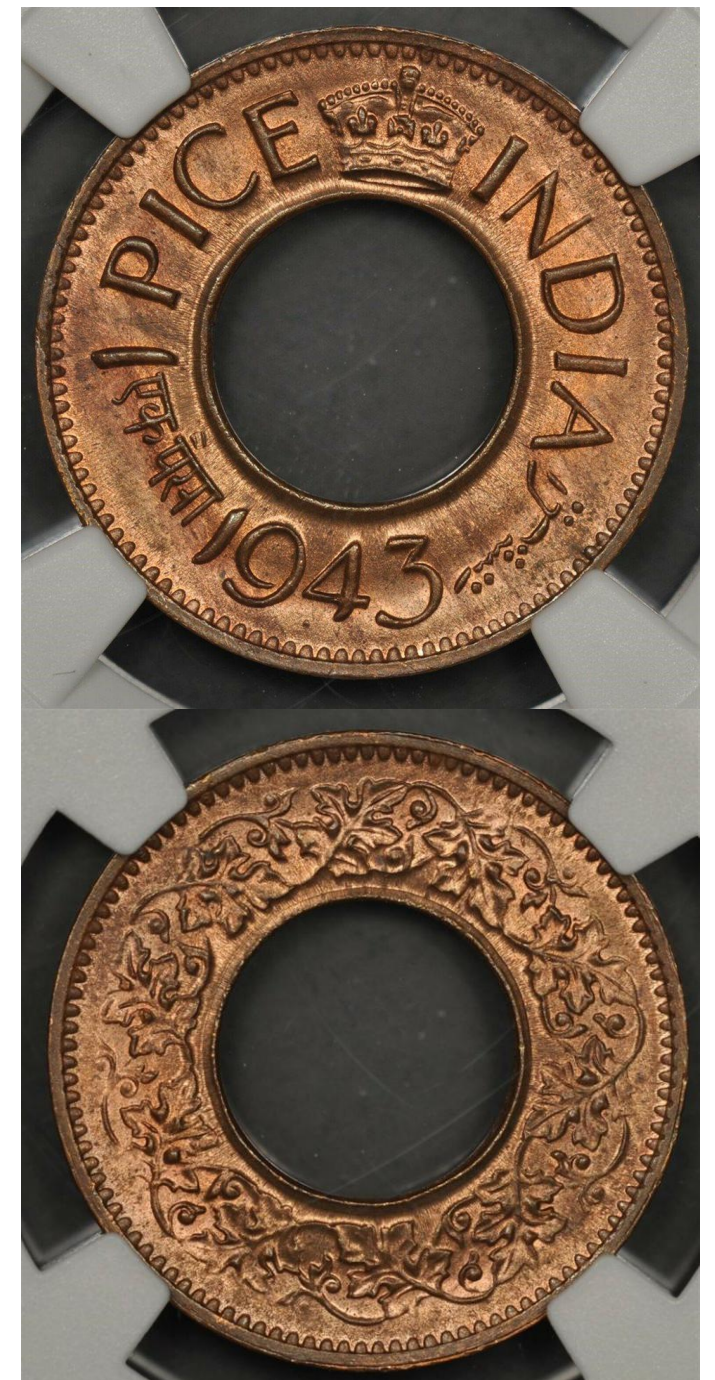
# The Free French Africa coins (*continued*)

- The honour of being the most difficult coins (as far as I know) to ever have been manufactured by the South African Mint belongs to the 25, 10 and 5 Centimes coins minted for French Equatorial Africa in 1943.
- The reason for this was that these coins were minted in an unusual Aluminium-bronze alloy, which presented major problems not only in the casting of the bars, but mostly in the rolling out of the bars to the required thickness.
- As this alloy hardens very quickly, the bars had to make about 50 passes through the rolling mill. Several times, in between the some of the passes, the bars had to be annealed to soften them.
- For comparison, the silver bars for our Union 6 pence coins need to make only 4 passes through the same mills.



# The coins of India

- The Pretoria Mint struck a total of 240 million of these small 1 Pice coins for India in 1943 and 1944
- I was unfortunately not able to find any detailed account of the production of these coins.
- The mintmarks on these coins are not easy to distinguish from each other. The South African mintmark is actually a small dot instead of the letters SA, and as the coins minted in Bombay have a large dot as their mintmark, they can sometimes be confused with each other. The mintmarks are found beneath the date on the obverse.



# The coins of India (*continued*)



Flat crown

High crown

- There are 2 different main varieties in the South African coins. These are the Flat crown and High crown varieties.
- To assemble a complete collection of these coins, you will need 1 of the 1943 (High crown only) and 2 of the 1944 (both High and Flat crown varieties), none of which are catalogued at more than R100 in circulated condition.



# The coins of Mauritius and Seychelles

- A fairly simple series to collect, these coins are not very expensive and are not very hard to find. However, the mintage figures of almost all of them are low.
- None of the dates of the 2 cent or 1 cent coins even have mintages over 520,000 and some are as low as 250,000.
- The 5 cent coins are more common, with the lowest mintage being 940,000 in 1942 and the highest being 1.5 million in 1945.



# The coins of Mauritius and Seychelles (*continued*)



The most interesting fact about this series is that some of these coins were not made for Mauritius at all, but rather for the Seychelles islands. Unfortunately, the coins were minted from the same dies and cannot be distinguished.

A complete collection of these coins would include 13 different coins, more than most of the other series mentioned previously.



Images from eBay

# The South African Sovereign

- The 1923 – 1932 full sovereigns and the 1923 – 1926 half sovereign coins are unique in the history of our coinage, as this was the only time South Africa ever minted a legal tender coin with the design of a foreign coin.
- I consider these coins as somewhere between an international issue and a truly South Africa coin, partly international because it is technically a British coin, but partly South African because they were made in South Africa with gold mined from the Witwatersrand and they have the SA mintmark.



# The South African Sovereign (*continued*)

- These coins also circulated freely in South Africa, unlike the other coins on this list.
- A complete set of the South African half sovereigns would contain only 3 coins, including the 1923 proof, and a complete set of the full sovereigns contains 10 coins, also including the 1923 proof.
- Interestingly, the rarest sovereign in the entire world is the 1923 South African sovereign in MS, with a mintage of only 64 coins.



Image by Pierre Nortje



# The last coin struck at the ZAR mint



Image from Schulman b.v.  
Auction house

- How was it that the last coin struck at the mint of the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek, was minted more than 10 years after the mint was abandoned when the ZAR fell??
- I found only one reference to this coin, an article which reads as follows:

“In 1932 officer José Cardoso visited the old mint in Pretoria **{The original mint of the Z.A.R.}**, which had not been operating since 1902 **{1900}**. Inside, he discovered several coins and dies for a hitherto unknown 50 Centavos-piece of the Portuguese province of Mozambique. All pieces were struck over silver Rupees of German East Africa.

When inquiring about the coins, he was told that during World War I, the British troops in the Transvaal and the Portuguese troops in Mozambique cooperated against the Germans **{In German East Africa}** and the British were allowed to establish military bases in the Portuguese colony.

However, since the British forces lacked local currency, it proved difficult to make payments there. It was then suggested that the German silver Rupies could instead be used as they were similar in size to the old Portuguese 500 Reis. Since then, British payments were made in Rupies, now considered equivalent to 500 Reis or 50 Centavos.

It is not known with certainty how these overstruck pieces came to be. As far as is known, the Rupies were received with little opposition, thus making recoinage seemingly unnecessary. Possibly, there was a greater reluctance to accept the Rupies than previously believed and the allied British and Portuguese wished to remove German imagery from their currency.”



Reverse side



Obverse side

Die shaft (obverse)

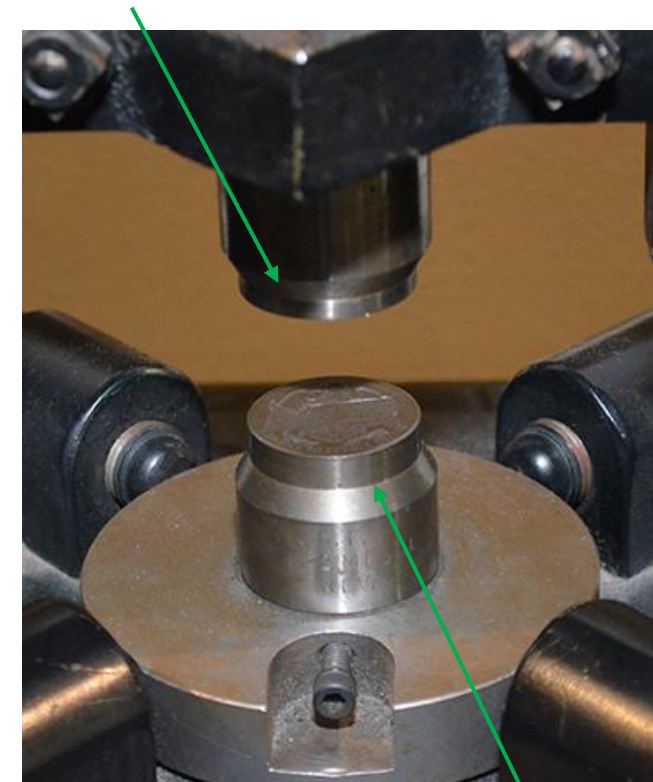


Image by the U.S. mint

Bottom die (Reverse)

- We can get some idea of how these coins were minted by examining the coin in detail.
- The first thing that stands out is that the coin was struck 3 times, each strike with a slightly different die alignment. Note the faint over struck letters of Provincia Moçambique pointed out by the red arrows.
- The reverse does not exhibit evidence of multi-striking like the obverse, so we can deduce that this side was fitted into the bottom die and that the obverse was struck by the die shaft.
- If the upper die shaft is allowed to rotate slightly between strikes, then either the equipment was not functioning properly, or more likely the operators, possibly soldiers, did not have the technical knowledge to operate the machines properly.

Thank you very much, I hope you enjoyed it!