

The history of the 7 piece Z.A.R.

'Blank' coins

By Sam Lieberman

References:- Trends. Standard Catalogue of the Coins of South Africa. P 20.
Herns's Handbook on South African Coins. Pages 32 and 33
Alec Kaplan's The Coins of South Africa (All editions from 1950,
Pages 9, 11, 12 & 13)

The people who figure prominently in the story of these blanks are Mr. Edward Perrin, Mint Master 1899, Mr Royle Baldwin, the son of of the founder of the famous London Numismatic firm, A.H. Baldwin & Son Ltd, Mr. J.T. Becklake, who was the last Deputy Master of the Royal Mint in Pretoria and the first Director of the South African Mint, and Dr. Alec Kaplan, who, in 1950 was the first professional numismatic dealer in South Africa.

These coins known as "Veld Blanks," was used during the Boer War by the "State Mint in the Field" to pay the soldiers. Blank coins were never minted in the "Veld". They were removed from the Transvaal Mint, Pretoria, (just prior to the occupation of Pretoria by the British) in different stages of manufacture, and were part of the mystical "Kruger Millions." All the coined gold and silver, the few blanks and a quantity of gold bar, were taken by train, together with the attorney-general and a few officials to Middelburg.

Just before the outbreak of the South African War the South African Republican Government seized all the gold in the banks, and from the few mines that were at work. The bullion was melted down into bars of 300 to 500 ozs., with which the Government paid for large consignments of goods, particularly provisions from storekeepers, whenever coined money was lacking. The Government also had ponds struck at its own expense in 1899 and 1900. Because the 1899 dies were seized at Delagoa Bay and never reached Pretoria, they used the 1898 dies and inscribed "99" on the obverse. This was to maintain the continuity. One hundred and thirty were so inscribed. Those of the latter part of 1900 were blanks ("disc-ponds") because the dies had broken and the new dies ordered from Europe were intercepted by the British. These "disc-ponds" or "blanks" were removed at different stages of manufacture for distribution, hence the rimmed and rimless coins. Blank pennies are said also to have been issued in 1900. Only a few blank tickies, one sixpence, one half crown and two gold 1/2 ponds with rim were minted and kept by the then Mint Master, Mr. Edward Perrin. Mr. Perrin who was a local assayer, jeweller and coin collector, was appointed to the position of Mint Master in 1899 in the closing days of the South African Republic. It was probably Mr. Perrin, as a jeweller, who made the perspex holder for the 7 piece blank set.

When President Kruger withdrew from Pretoria and the last Government records were packed up for removal to the new “capital” of the South African Republic, then located in a moving railway train, other dramatic incidents took place in the old mint. Mr. Edward Perrin went around collecting, not only all stocks of finished and unfinished coins, which were loaded on to the train due to leave for Komatipoort, from Pretoria station, but even the shavings and melted gold and the rubbish that contained gold dust. These unfinished gold coins or blank discs that had not yet been put through the coining press, were later circulated and became known as the “Kaal Pond”.

The Government made Middelburg the “Capital” for about 2 weeks before moving to Machadodorp, to Waterval Boven and finally to Hectorspruit. To quote Mr. P.J.Kloppers, as published in J.T. Becklake’s book, “In the three latter places I saw the ‘Government on Wheels’ myself: at Machadodorp and Waterval Boven, where I had to receive the salaries for the officials in the Noordkaap district; at Hectorspruit, when our commandos passed through. The salaries, which were paid out to me at Machadodorp and Waterval Boven, were paid 75% in ‘blue backs’ and 25% in properly minted gold coins.”

At that time no blanks were given as salaries. Only later when there were no more properly minted ponds left, did the officials issue blanks to themselves and to the soldiers. Most of the soldiers were not happy with the blanks, because they could not spend the gold coins that had no indication of their value and traded them for what ever they could get. Some of the soldiers kept them as curios. That being the reason for most of them in E.F. condition.

Because the blank ponds were slightly overweight, the mint had them concentrically scrapped to reduce the weight. These scrapper marks are more prominent on the flat coin (commonly called the Rimless) and is evidence of genuineness. I have seen a few poorly attempted forgeries.

According to all the research that I could make, only 2 pieces of the “Blank” half-pond exist. Both being identical. The one in the set weighs 62.63723 Grains; 3.99409 grams. (Confirmed by an original Mint Certificate) The other weighs 61.67 grains; 3.994 grams. (Weighed by Natalie Jaffe of City Coins, Cape Town). I was assured that it is identical in looks to the one in the “7 piece set” by Mr. D.G. Liddell of Spink & Sons, London.

It is possible that both ½ ponds were taken by Mr Baldwin to England. One of which was in the set of 7 blanks and the other sold to Mr. Richard J. “Dick” Ford of America in June 1975 that he in turn sold in S.A. by auction, through City Coins, of Cape Town, in association with Spink & Son, Ltd and A.H. Baldwin & Sons, Ltd, both of London, on the 31st May 1985. I don’t know who bought that ‘blank’ ½ pond, I would be most grateful to the owner of that coin if he would give the opportunity to examine it.

Some time prior to 1934 the late MR. J.T. Becklake was shown the Z.A.R. collection of Mr. R. Baldwin. Hence the reference to the Blank ½ pond in his book where he said

“No opportunity has occurred of inspecting any until recently, when I examined one in Mr. Royle Baldwin’s collection.”

I examined one that belonged to a very well known collector in Johannesburg some years back but found that the colour and weight were not the same as the 1900 blanks. Another that belonged to a dealer, was rimless and of different weight and colour. I have still to see the ½ pond other than the one in the 7 piece set.

The blank “Pennies” are more common, and probably minted from the remaining bronze left over from the 1898 coinage. These are known as “Rocking” pennies because they have a slight curve and do not lie flat, and are also identically matched in metal and colour to the other Z.A.R. pennies. These ‘blank’ pennies were most likely given out as souvenirs to clients and friends of the National Bank, of which one, was Mr. Royle Baldwin. (Son of the founder of the Baldwin Bank, London.)

The silver “Blanks” was not minted as blanks but were rather taken from the mint before final minting. The only known “Silver Blanks” is the Tickey, Sixpence and Half-Crown. I have not seen (besides another tickey) any other silver blanks that conform to, or match looks, colour, weight and metal content to the “7 piece set”. Therefore the silver blanks are as unique as the Half-Pond piece. No shilling nor 2 shilling blanks exist.

The penny, tickey and sixpence blanks are with raised rim, while the half-crown is flat or rimless.

The tickey has tiny “bubbles” The weight in grains is 21.81818 and in grams is 1.41381.

The sixpence’s weight in grains is 43.63636 and in grams is 2.82763

The half crown’s weight in grains is 218.18181 and in grams is 14.13818 and is known as the “laminated” half crown because of the laminated like marks on the coin.

The ½ Pond’s weight in grains is 61.63723 and in grams is 3.99409.

The Ponds (both rimmed and rimless) weigh in grains is 123.27447 and in grams is 7.98818

The late Mr. Royle Baldwin (born 1894) came to South Africa in 1929 for health reasons and stayed for 4 years. As there were very few serious coin collectors in S.A. at the time, he was able to pick up numerous rarities during the 1930’s, taking back to England the finest collection of Z.A.R. coins in the world (which included this 7 piece “blank” set). This has been confirmed by the following well-known numismatists Peter Mitchell U.K., Edward Baldwin U.K., Frank Mitchell S.A., Alec & Stan Kaplan S.A., Douglas Liddell U.K., Dr Felix Machanik S.A., Dr. Bob Morris S.A. and Peter Bowles S.A. I believe that a large portion of this collection is back in the hands of South African collectors.

Between 1942 and 1946 Dr. Alec Kaplan purchased from the late Mr. J.T. Becklake his entire Z.A.R. coin collection. Subsequently, Dr. Alec Kaplan sold the collection (but not the “7 piece Blank set”) to a school teacher in Nylstroom. He, in turn, sold that collection to Mr. A. Bickel, who was the founder of Bickles Coins, and became one of the best known dealers in the country. The 7 piece Z.A.R. set was enclosed in a Perspex hand made holder in which they

now still remain. Dr. Alex Kaplan kept this set in his own personal collection, until his son Stan, who took over the running of the family coin business of Alec Kaplan & Son (pty) Ltd., advertised and sold the set in 1981.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becklake, J.T., Notes on the Coinage of the South African Republic. Reprinted from the "Numismatic Chronicle" Fifth Series, Vol. X1V, London 1934

South African Museum Cape Town. A History of Currency in South Africa. Guide No. 5 1956

Alec Kaplan & Son. Letter sent to me by Dr. S.M. Kaplan F.R.N.S. dated 19th March 1981

Spink & Son Ltd. Letter sent to me by D.G. Liddell dated 4th June 1985.

Any further information that could be supplied to me regarding this subject, particularly accurate dated, would be greatly appreciated.

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