

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY.

Vol. 5 No. 11.

February 1964.

NEWSLETTER.THE SECOND SOUTH AFRICAN NUMISMATIC CONVENTION.

The 7th of January, 1964 was a red-letter day for the South African Numismatic Society. At 10 o'clock that morning thirty-five registered delegates and approximately one hundred and fifty invited guests gathered in the restored Legislative Assembly hall of the Old Supreme Court building in Cape Town, to enjoy a preview of our comprehensive Numismatic Exhibition and to hear our patron, the Honourable Dr. T.E. Dönges, Minister of Finance, open our Convention. Let us say straight away that we are proud of the Exhibition which we were able to put on. Despite the fact that we were only given occupation of the Exhibition rooms by the builders a short three and a half days before the opening hour, and notwithstanding the fact that we had to work like navvies to get the cases into the hall even before we could tackle the enormous task of setting out the exhibits, the final result was most attractive and of great interest to everyone who saw it - both layman and expert numismatist.

We have no hesitation in claiming that this was the finest Numismatic Exhibition that has ever been staged in southern Africa, and our plans to make it as comprehensive as possible in relation to South African numismatics, succeeded beyond our wildest hopes. We had two excellent exhibits of the coins of the early Cape; a representative selection of British coins used in the Cape and South Africa generally between the second British occupation and the first Union coinage in 1923; a beautiful and complete set of the Kruger coinage of the South African Republic; and a complete circulation set of the Union series from 1923, together with almost all the Union specimen sets. A small selection of South African patterns illustrated one important section of South African numismatics, and a carefully chosen exhibit of tokens, another. Excellent exhibits of South African and African bank-notes filled one room and much of the main foyer.

There were numerous exhibits of general coins, most of them of a high standard. Outstanding were coins of the New Testament; a magnificent collection of British crowns; a comprehensive exhibit of ancient coins. Coins of Germany, United States, Scotland, England, Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and an exhibit of odd and curious moneys of the world, provided fare for every taste. A special exhibit of modern coins of the world arranged specifically to illustrate and guide our thinking on the proposed changes in our South African coinage, attracted particular attention. Several exhibits of commemorative medallions, though not as comprehensive as we would have wished, gave more than an introduction to this important and interesting field.

Let it not be thought that military decorations and medals were neglected. Introduced by two famous South African V.C. groups, namely, to Andrew Beauchamp Proctor and to Quentin

Smythe/... ..

Smythe, we had case after case of beautifully arranged military medals, mainly South African, to interest the layman and the old soldier and to make the medal connoisseur shake his head in disbelief.

It is not the intention in these few paragraphs to try to catalogue our Exhibition, but a detailed catalogue we have - a 135-page printed document which, thanks to the tremendous hard work of member Bill Hibbard, will be a permanent souvenir to those of us who were lucky enough to see this outstanding Exhibition. But this catalogue is more than just a souvenir, it is a valuable work of reference which should find a place on the bookshelf of all who are interested in our country's coins and medals. We make bold to forecast, in fact, that it will in years to come be much sought after, not only by numismatists both here and abroad, but also by the growing host of collectors of Africana books.

The best advice which we can give to those of our members who through force of circumstances were unable to join us at the Convention, is at least to ensure that they acquire a copy of this valuable book which is available from the Secretary for R1.00 (ten shillings) post free. We can assure you that you will regard it as a rand well spent.

After a hasty preview of this magnificent Exhibition - which in truth took many hours to digest - the assembled company adjourned to the adjoining yellow-wood ceiled Convention Hall where, after addresses of welcome by Senator van Zyl, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the South African Museum, and by the President of our Society, our patron Dr. Dönges had some nice things to say to us and chose our gathering as a suitable occasion for his most important pronouncement on the Government's proposals in regard to our new coinage which has already been widely reported in the South African press. After a suitable expression of thanks to the Minister by our own past-President and present President of the Transvaal Numismatic Society Mr. J.P. Roux, we returned to the Exhibition Hall where our wonderful wives helped us round off a most successful morning with tea and sherry delightfully served.

But let it not be thought that this memorable morning and our great Exhibition was the end of the story. Far from it. Shortly after lunch we got down to work and for two and a half days we were treated to an academic feast which proved to be no less successful than our Exhibition. More than a score of papers, all of a high standard, were presented on a wide variety of numismatic subjects. Titles and speakers are recorded in the catalogue, to which reference has already been made, and it is hoped that as soon as our somewhat shaky finances have recovered, we will be able to put most, or all, of them on permanent record in the printed journal for which we are all working.

For all of us our Convention week was an unforgettable experience. Those most closely involved put in a tremendous lot of hard work, but it was well worth the effort. We enjoyed and profited by the opportunity to get to know one another better, and when we say one another, we mean not only members of our own Society, but also the delegations from the Transvaal and Natal, who gave the Convention and Exhibition such wonderful support. Furthermore, we have a great sense of satisfaction, because we are convinced that we have put the Society and numismatics in South

Africa/.. ..

Africa as a whole, on the map. Almost two thousand people came to view our Exhibition during the five days it was open, and all of them were unstinting in their praise. We have lived up to the primary object of our constitution - to stimulate knowledge of and interest in numismatics in our country - and as we look back on an exhausting but memorable and satisfying week, we look forward to the 3rd South African Numismatic Convention in Natal in two or three years time with a firm resolve that we will be there!!

Dr. Dönges' address, (as reported in "The Cape Argus" of 7th January, 1964).

" NEW COINS: S.A. LOOKS 100 YEARS AHEAD.
NICKEL TAKES PLACE OF SILVER.

Any change in the South African coinage system would have to be permanent because the number of coin-in-the-slot machines would increase so rapidly that future changes would be impossible, the Minister of Finance (Dr. T.E. Dönges) said when he opened the second South African Numismatic Convention in the Old Supreme Court Building, Cape Town, today.

Explaining South Africa's decision to replace silver by nickel in the coinage system, Dr. Dönges said: 'It is naturally with a great measure of nostalgia that we, who are the biggest diamond, gold and platinum producing country and potentially one of the richest countries in the world, must now withdraw from silver as a coinage metal.

'But if it is in any way a consolation, I would like to say that even the few countries which still mint silver coinage are almost certain to have to discard it within a short while.'

Dr. Dönges said the revision of the coinage series would be worked out in detail by a select committee during the coming parliamentary session.

PRICE HAS SOARED.

He said the price of silver had increased from 27c an ounce in 1923 to 76c last year, and the current price was 93c. In spite of the fact that the percentage of silver in South African coins had been reduced from 80 per cent to 50 per cent in 1951, it was now costing the mint 18½c to make a 20c piece.

There were more than 75,000 automatic cigarette and sweet machines, parking meters, weighing scales, and entertainment machines in South Africa and they were increasing daily.

Unless the coinage system was changed immediately, the amount of money in circulation in the automatic machines would make it impossible for a change to be effected.

FUTURE NEEDS.

It was of the utmost importance that any changes in coinage made now should cater for the needs of the next 100 years.

'The coinage series must, therefore, be so designed that in spite of price and cost increases during the next 100 years, and in spite of possible metal shortages that

may/..

may arise, it can supply our needs unchanged far into the future.'

The present 'silver' coins, which contained 50 per cent silver, quickly showed wear and tear and had already become unsightly.

The minters were fortunate in that they had a metal which was in many respects just as satisfactory as silver and in its pure form was 20 per cent cheaper.

This metal - nickel and its alloys - was already being used in 118 coin denominations by 47 countries. It had more resistance to wear and tear than silver, was far more difficult to counterfeit successfully, and was mined locally in sufficient quantities.

SELECT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT.

The Select Committee appointed by Parliament to report on the new coinage proposals has invited our Society to submit its views in memorandum form, and possibly also to give oral evidence.

A memorandum is being drawn up by the Executive Committee and will be submitted to the Select Committee before the deadline - 29th February, 1964. The main representations to be made by the Society will be a vigorous plea that as a silver producing country (for every 100 ounces of gold, approximately 10 ounces of silver are produced by the gold mines of the Witwatersrand and the O.F.S.), and as a gesture of national pride if for no other reason, at least our major "silver" coin should have a silver content of not less than 60%. We accept that the size of the 50 cent piece must be reduced, but we feel that its smaller replacement should be of silver.

Certain suggestions regarding denomination, size, shape, alloy and design of the minor coins will also be made.

Editor,
Dr. F.K. Mitchell,
P.O. Box 1073,
CAPE TOWN.