

# THE COINAGE OF GRIQUA TOWN

## *Missionary coinage of South Africa*

F. K. MITCHELL

SOUTH AFRICA CAN BOAST THE FIRST – and probably the only – Christian missionary coinage of history.

### The Origin of the Griquas

Offspring of an illicit encounter between a Dutchman and a black slave girl, Adam Kok was born into slavery at the Cape in about 1710. His strong sense of duty, his industry, and no doubt his parentage, earned him his freedom and he was allowed to settle on a farm near St. Helena Bay. In about 1710 he moved to the Kamiesberg in Namaqualand, where he soon became established as the leader of a gathering clan of others of mixed blood like himself, and of Grigriqua and Namaqua Hottentots. The Dutch Government at the Cape recognised him as the head of this mixed group and presented him with a symbolic staff of office. The clan lived a primitive wandering life and subsisted on hunting and plunder. In 1795, the year of the First British Occupation, Adam Kok handed over the chieftainship, and his staff of office, to his son Cornelis.

Meantime the brothers Barend and Nicolaas Barends had likewise gathered around themselves a group mainly of mixed blood, and were gradually migrating northwards beyond the proclaimed limits of the Colony towards Prieska and the Orange River.

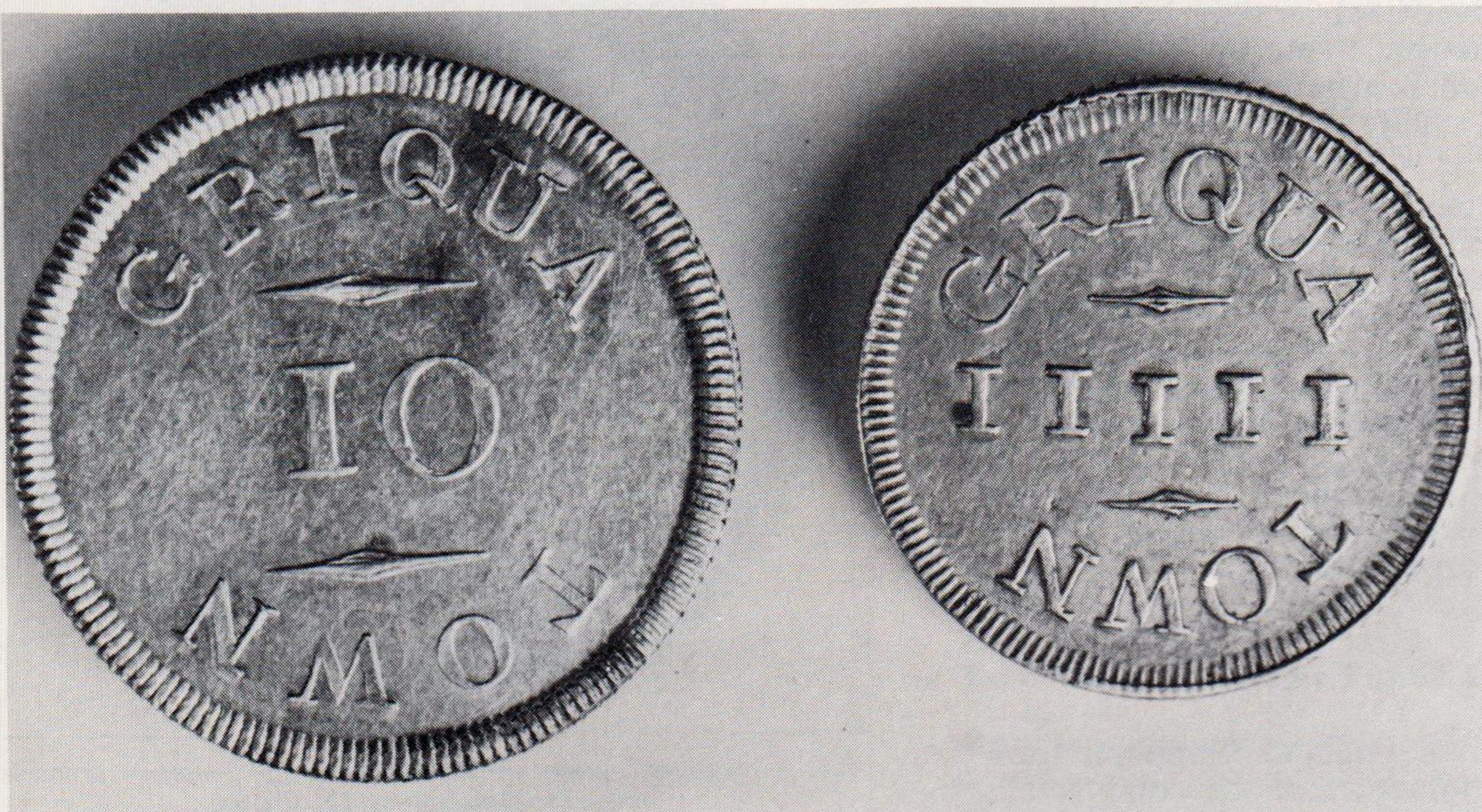
In about 1804 the missionaries William Anderson and Cornelius Kramer of the London Missionary Society gathered the various roving clans, and persuaded Cornelis Kok, the Barends brothers, and their respective followers, to leave their nomadic way of life and to establish a permanent settlement, with a church and cultivated lands, at Klaarwater, north of the Orange River and about twenty-five miles to the west of its confluence with the Vaal.

The early days of this settlement were not easy. The heterogeneous group, who became known as the Bas-

tards or "Bastard Hottentots", consisted of Hottentots, Koranas, Damaras, Bushmen and people of mixed blood like Kok. Some, including the Barends, soon moved on. Cornelis Kok handed over to his son Adam Kok II and himself returned to Namaqualand. Gradually, however, the new community took root, and Adam Kok II, having been chosen general leader, was duly recognised as an independent Chief by the British authorities at the Cape. Like his grandfather before him, he received a staff of office from the Cape Governor, the Earl of Caledon.



I. The obverse of the series – a Dove of Peace, bearing a small olive branch.



II. The decimal shilling of ten pence (25 mm. in diameter – silver); and III. The half-shilling of five pence (21½ mm. silver).

IV. A half-penny (25 mm. – bronze); and V. A farthing (20 mm. – bronze).



### The Rev. John Campbell

In June 1812, the London Missionary Society sent the Rev. John Campbell, one of their directors, to inspect and report on their various young mission posts in Southern Africa. Campbell travelled by way of Bethelsdorp, Grahamstown and Graaff-Reinet, eventually reaching Klaarwater early in 1813.

There he found an apparently settled and industrious community of some 2 600 persons leading what he regarded as reasonably Godfearing Christian lives, but lacking some of the basic attributes of civilised society. In particular he was distressed that they still went under the shameful name of Bastards. He decided to do something about it, and, as he described in his scarce published report *Travels in South Africa undertaken at the request of the London Missionary Society*, he convened a meeting to discuss matters.

"We had a meeting," he wrote, "with all the male inhabitants of the settlement who were in the town (Klaar Water) to consider various points, especially about regulations for the protection of the lives and property of the community.

After explanations "every person present considered that laws should be made . . . The whole people likewise resolved that henceforth they should be called GRIQUAS instead of Bastard Hot-tentots and the place called Griqua-town instead of Klaar Water.

"It was likewise resolved that as they had no circulating medium amongst them by which they could purchase any small article, such as knives, scissars (sic) etc., etc., supposing a shop to be established amongst them – which they were anxious there should be – they should apply to the Missionary Society to get silver pieces of different value coined for them in England, which the missionaries would take for their allowance from the Society, having Griqua-town marked on them. It is probable that if this were adopted, in a short time they would circulate amongst all the nations about, and be a great convenience".

By the early part of 1814 Campbell had completed his tour, and on the 13th February he set sail on his homeward voyage from Cape Town.

### The Griqua Town Coinage

Soon after his arrival in England Campbell took steps to arrange the manufacture of the coins which had been asked for. He seems to have acted largely on

his own initiative as no correspondence or resolutions are apparently to be found in the archives of the London Missionary Society. He commissioned the well-known die-sinker Thomas Halliday to prepare designs and to arrange for the striking of coins in four denominations – 10 pence and 5 pence in silver, and half-penny and farthing in bronze. On the obverse they showed the emblem of the London Missionary Society – a beautifully executed Dove of Peace, with, in her beak, a sprig of Olive. The reverse bore the name GRIQUA TOWN and the figure of the denomination.

According to old correspondence emanating from Halliday, a first consignment of the new coinage was sent out to Griqua Town in 1815, followed by a further batch in the following year.

Meantime, however, Campbell's high hopes of rapid progress to civilization in Griqua Town were not being realised. In 1816 the elder Cornelis Kok returned in an unsuccessful attempt to regain his former chieftainship, but, being rejected by the missionaries, took some of his followers with him and settled at Campbell, 30 miles to the East. Adam Kok II likewise gradually lost the confidence and support of the mis-



VI. A "pattern" penny of 1890, reverse (30.5 mm. – bronze), minted by Otto Nolte & Co., Berlin.

sionaries because he allowed his restless followers to take up their old nomadic existence and to go on raiding expeditions. Soon he too was persuaded to resign and he moved away with his family to Campbell, leaving Andries Waterboer, who had acted as Catechist since 1811 and had gained the favour of the missionaries by his strict and exemplary way of life, to assume the mantle of leadership in Griqua Town.

John Campbell's dreams of a thriving commercial centre did not materialize. Indeed, the primitive Griquas must have been confused to know what to do with their new "coins". They had no real use for money and it seems doubtful if the coins ever circulated. According to Halliday's later comments, most of the Griqua Town issue was soon returned to England, and, like other Colonial emissions of the time, melted down in the face of the fluctuating value of silver in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars.

Very few examples of the four coins of Griqua Town remain. Some years ago a worn and corroded half-penny was picked up on a kopje near Matjiesfontein, but this is the only piece I know of that has been found in South Africa. A few of our major museums can show the series. My own set was assembled from Britain and America after many years of diligent correspondence and searching.

The Coinage of Griqua Town occupies a very special place in our South African cultural heritage: First, it was the first coinage authorised by an independent South African authority, for Griqua Town, primitive as it was, was situated beyond the northern boundary of Cape Colony, and Kok was recognised as an independent chief; Secondly, it was the first South African attempt at a *decimal* coinage. Indeed, even internationally speaking, it was a very early attempt; and Thirdly, it holds a unique position as the first and only Christian Missionary Coinage of history.

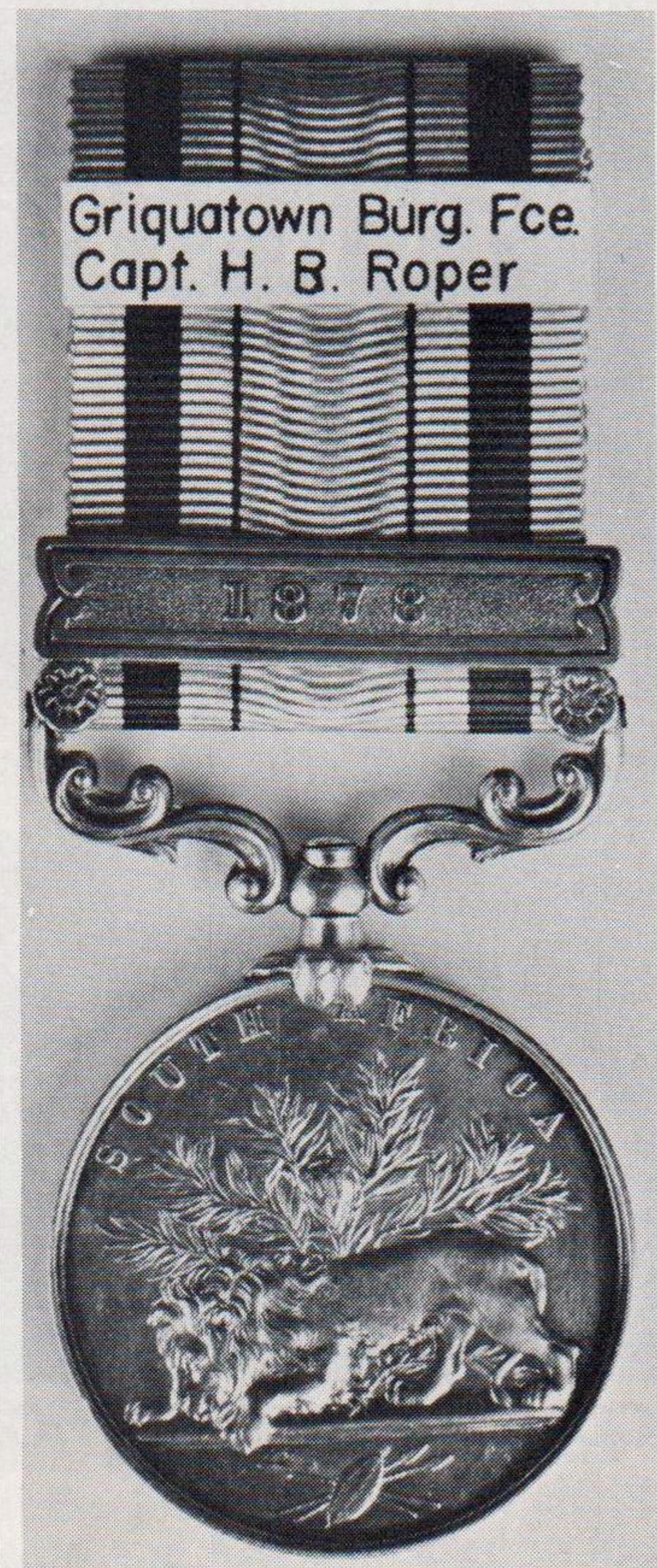
### Epilogue

For half a century the fortunes of the Griquas waxed and waned. Then came the discovery of diamonds in 1867, the establishment of the separate British Crown colony of Griqualand West in 1873, and its annexation to the Cape Colony six years later. After a brief "rebellion" in 1878 during which they laid siege



VII. The obverse of the "pattern" pennies.

VIII. Medal awarded to Capt. H. B. Roper, Griquatown Burgher Force for his service in the siege of Griquatown in 1878. Sir David Harris wrote to him: "Mr. H. B. Roper, who was then Civil Commissioner of the District, warned the rebels that he would defend the town, and that so long as the British Flag was flying from the mast he would not surrender. Mr. Roper displayed great courage, for there were only twenty-eight able-bodied men with rifles, with about 500 rounds of ammunition between them, as the rebels had broken in to the adjacent magazines and had seized all the ammunition and explosives." (Fortunately Harris's relief force from Kimberley arrived in the nick of time).



to their old capital of Griqua Town for a futile few days, the Griquas ceased to exist as a "nation".

Gone they were, but not entirely forgotten. In far-off Germany, in 1890, someone remembered that there was a "nation" at a place called GRIQUA TOWN which had once been sufficiently important to have a coinage of its own. Following the international excitement precipitated by the discovery of gold in the Transvaal, and having no doubt received reports of the preliminary issue of gold *staatsponden* by the Transvaal Government under President Burgers in 1874, an enterprising German coin manufacturing firm Otto Nolte and Co. of Berlin produced, between 1874 and 1890, a series of sample or "pattern" coins of various denominations and in a variety of metals for the Transvaal, for the Orange Free State, and for the Cape of Good Hope. Tenders were submitted (unsuccessfully as it turned out) to the three governments, offering to strike coins for them. In the same series two different pattern pennies for Griqua Town were struck in bronze in very small sample numbers.

These interesting pieces each bore on the obverse the portrait of Queen Victoria as a young girl, from two slightly different dies. On the reverse each showed the Dove of Peace of The London Missionary Society – one with the inscription GRIQUA TOWN (in two words) above and the date 1890 below; the other without date and with GRIQUA above the dove, and TOWN below. Both are very difficult to find.

Struck for a "nation" which no longer existed, these Griqua Town patterns have joined the original pieces of the missionary coinage as rare, valuable, and fascinatingly interesting items in our Africana numismatic heritage.

References: *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, Vol. 5; *The Coinage of Griqualand*, by H. Alexander Parsons (Spink & Son Ltd., 1927); *Notes on the Coinage of the South African Republic*: J. T. Becklake; *Pioneer, Soldier and Politician*: Sir David Harris.