

“The Collection of Transvaal Coins and Medals”.

New Years Day, 1903, 1 Plowden Buildings, Temple, London.

About a month or so, after the conclusion of the War in South Africa on 31st May 1902, and whilst at Kroonstad, Orange River Colony, awaiting orders for home, I conceived the idea of forming a collection of Transvaal coins and medals by way of occupying the spare time in camp. My first purchases were made in July 1902, after which, finding information regarding the coinage and the more rare specimens difficult to obtain from local sources. I was constrained to write to, and advertise in, the leading Transvaal newspaper. Fortunately, my first letter to the “Transvaal Leader” brought a private reply from Mr. A.L Snell of Krugersdorp who most kindly forwarded a copy of an article contributed by him to “The Sphere” containing valuable information on the Kruger Coinage. Owing chiefly to Mr. Snell’s courtesy, I was thus enabled to obtain a complete collection of Transvaal coins and medals, many in Mint state and all in excellent condition, by the end of August 1902, just two days prior to the departure of my battalion from Kroonstad for England.

On arriving in London from South Africa in October 1902, I found that Kruger money was cheaper in England than in South Africa. This however, cannot be regarded as any criterion of its real value, very few of the rare specimens exist in really fine condition and there are certainly not many in London. The recent low value of Kruger coins in London was doubtless due to the hitherto small demand for them, their comparatively plentiful influx during the recent war and the very imperfect condition in which the rarer specimens were usually brought over. In France very large prices are being paid for the genuine “Burgers Sovereign” and for all the double shaft Kruger specimens. Not only are these described as desirable curiosities, but also as reminiscences of the great struggle, both financial and political. The Kruger coinage is certainly handsome, it will most assuredly be recalled ere long and the future value of a complete set of Transvaal coins and medals therefore, cannot at present be estimated.

This collection was gathered together at a cost of £95.16.6, though it is probably now worth £203.19.6. Mr. C Allon values the imperfect collection described in “The Sphere” at £100. As times roll on, the value of a perfect collection of these coins and medals must necessarily increase, even if the specimens be regarded from a purely historical standpoint. The paucity of this coinage alone should tend to enhance its value from a numismatic point of view. It will probably never be repeated, notwithstanding its sentimental association.

The Transvaal coinage appears to have been struck essentially for circulation and not for show, and was utilised by the Burgers of the Orange Free State in common with those of the State responsible for its origination. Proof coins were never issued to the public and the more rare specimens of the early coinage are very hard to procure in perfect condition. To obtain them in Mint State is exceedingly difficult. Doubtless, the enormous quantity of dust, the commonest product of the Transvaal and Free State, circulated at various seasons of the year is to a great extent responsible for the worn condition of the modern coinage. The “Burgers” sovereigns of 1874 are rare and highly valued. With the exception of the one in this collection I was only offered two genuine specimens. One, an imperfect coin at £10, the other, a fair specimen only at

£30. Very high prices have been paid for these coins and the recent war seems to have given them a sentimental value on the continent, especially in France, Germany and Switzerland. Some few "Burger" sovereigns that were not struck in 1874 among the original 837. These however, are readily detected as modern productions, when compared with the genuine article. Dealers usually ask £15 for the modern "Burgers" sovereign. An aluminum counterpart of this coin also exists, it is beautifully struck but, needless to say, worthless.

During the recent war Kruger coins, especially the double shaft sovereign, half sovereign and crown, and the single shaft crown of 1892, were sought and collected with extraordinary zeal by the troops. On some few occasions, when in isolated districts, certain fortunate individuals received single shaft crowns at face value by way of change. Such transactions were matters for congratulation, and were subsequently referred to with much appreciation by those interested. The sets of Kruger money usually "made up" (i.e. collected) for sale by dealers in South Africa contained the double and single shaft sovereigns of 1892, the double shaft half sovereign and crown, single shaft crown, half crown, florin, shilling, six penny piece, three penny piece and penny of 1892 and the sovereign of 1900. These sets, representing as they do the first and last issues of Kruger money, sold readily from £17 to £20. Good specimens sometimes fetched higher prices. Even the 1892 penny was at one time selling readily at 25/-. The 1893 half sovereign is rare and valuable. Half sovereigns of every date were selling at a considerable premium in 1902, as also were all the silver coins of 1892. The sixpenny and the three penny pieces of every date were eagerly sought by collectors, numbers of these coins were purchased at many times their face value during 1902.

The 1898/99 sovereign is a great curiosity. There is a mystery connected with this coin that has yet to be fathomed. It is rumored in Pretoria that the 1899 dies miscarried, but when, how, or by what means, I have been unable to ascertain though I have written many letters of enquiry on the subject. With regards to the two plan discs value £ each, made in Pretoria in 1900 and circulated from Machadodorp by Burghers, one of them has a plain edge, the other a raised rim. No disc was struck at any time with a "milled edge". The Burghers were given to describing the raised rim as a "milled edge", hence the erroneous report that a plain disc with a milled edge had been struck.

The Z.A.R 1902 or the Pilgrims Rest sovereign is one of the most interesting coins in the collection. It even "talks to one" of the last efforts of a dying Executive Government to perpetuate its gold currency. This coin may become priceless in time. At all events it may justly be regarded as a characteristic full stop to the history of what might, under other circumstances, have been a wealthy and a dominant nation in South Africa.

The three Pretoria Delagoa Bay Railway medals issued in 1895 are very difficult to procure. The large silver medal one of only 50, being highly valued and regarded by many of the Burghers as symbolizing the acme of progression, therefore priceless. These three constitute the only medals issued by the Transvaal Government. Towards the end of the recent war a rumor was current to the effect that a medal had been struck by the Burghers. It was reported to bear on the obverse the arms of the Transvaal combined with those of the Orange Free State, and to have been intended for issue to the Burghers of the Federal Boer Forces in the event of their having been

victorious. This rumor, though doubtless, founded on intention, had no foundation in fact, as many of the more prominent and educated Boer Commanders assured me.

As far as it is possible for one to gather from careful enquiry, it would appear that this collection of 59 Transvaal coins and medals is the only complete one in existence. To procure it necessitated a great number of letters, telegrams and many interviews, together with the exercise of some amount of patience and perseverance.

Nevertheless, it afforded me considerable amusement during July and August 1902, and that it may contribute to the pleasure of the appreciative numismatist or keen collector, or to that of frequenters of some British Institution is the sincere hope of.

Signed, Lt Col Eldin Sergeant, 1903