

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FIVE
SHILLING PIECE : BY J.P. ROUX. :

In an official minute, 20th May, 1946, Treasury appended for my comments the following extract from a letter, dated 15th May, 1946, addressed to the Minister of Finance by the South African Numismatic Society :-

"We beg to commend to your kindly consideration the striking of a commemorative coin in honour of the forthcoming visit of the King and Queen to the Union of South Africa. Doubtless there will be a special postage stamp and medals issued and there is much that can be said in favour of a special coin. Commemorative coins have the prestige of great antiquity. They have been issued for at least twenty-five centuries. They are still issued by many states including Canada, New Zealand and Australia in the British Commonwealth. The United Kingdom issued a special crown piece for the jubilee of King George the Fifth, some of which were struck in gold. The United States of America issue commemorative coins two or three times each year and they are sold by the Mint at a price above face value, though each issue necessitates a special act of Congress.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could receive say two of our members who would endeavour to show you from their collections what has been done by other nations in the way of commemorative coins.

If you so desire we would be very pleased indeed to submit suggestions for the design of a commemorative coin for the Royal Visit. The most handsome coin would be a

/crown piece.

crown piece. While millions of half-crowns have been issued since Union, it is strange that no crown has ever been made since the days of President Kruger. Many young South Africans must never have seen a crown piece. England, Australia, and New Zealand still issue them though they do not seem to get into general circulation."

The suggestion that a crown piece should be minted received my full support; and in my reply to Treasury I recommended that a Springbok be depicted on the reverse of the proposed new coin.

Five sculptors were invited to submit several designs (drawings on paper) depicting a Springbok in a manner suited to the somewhat exact requirements of coinage art. (Joan Kendall, Coert L. Steynberg, H. Potgieter, James Gardiner, E. Naylor.)

The Right Honourable J.H. Hofmeyr, Minister of Finance; Dr. J.E. Holloway, Secretary for Finance; H.R. Wilkos, Secretary to the Treasury; and J.P. Roux, Director of the S.A. Mint, constituted the committee responsible for the selection of the most suitable design.

One of the designs submitted by Coert L. Steynberg, A.R.C.A., was finally decided on. (One of Joan Kendall's designs was second).

Due to the fact that the first five-shilling issue should be a Royal Visit commemorative one, it was decided to limit the number of coins to be struck as follows :- (a) five-shilling pieces, 300,000 and (b) specimen five-shilling pieces, 5,600. (2,600 of the pieces mentioned under (b) were included in specimen sets consisting of all denominations from the 1d. upwards).

The previous five-shilling pieces struck in South Africa were issued by the South African Republic, Transvaal, in 1893. They were struck in the Staatsmunt, Pretoria.

The 1947 five-shilling pieces were struck on two old presses formerly used in the Kruger Staatsmunt. These presses are No. 8975 and 8976, respectively, and were made in 1891 by Ludw-Lowe, Berlin. (During the recent World War the South African Mint was in urgent need of Coinage presses and thus the old Kruger presses were overhauled, their clutches modernised, and they were brought into service again. What is more, they are still running very satisfactorily on production at the present time. When they have terminated their useful lives they will be placed in the Mint's museum).

The obverse design on the five-shilling piece is similar to that on the other coins. The modelling in Plaster-of-Paris of the reverse of the five-shilling piece was done by Coert L. Steynberg A.R.C.A. The design depicts a full grown running Springbok ram just on the point of "Pronking" (showing off). Its general expression is somewhat proud, which is indicative of our great, but young country. The depiction of the Springbok is only slightly heraldic, probably "artist's licence", is a more correct description.

In order to depict the Springbok accurately, photographs of wild Springbok and paintings by well-known game artists, were consulted; and actual specimens in Museums were studied. I found J.E. Millais' immortal work "A Breath from the Veldt" very helpful, particularly the prints of Springbok on pages 16, 24 and 29. The work of other authorities, such as Captain Cornwallis Harris and Slater and Thomas, were also found helpful. The

Springbok will "pronk" (show-off) for various reasons - starting a run, when gambolling, when frightened, when pulling up from a run, etc., etc. When showing off, it unfurls the long snowy white hair on its back and haunches.

In the foreground, below the front legs of the Springbok on the five-shilling piece is shown Aloe Claviflora. It was first described by John William Burchell, the celebrated British Naturalist, in the first volume of his work entitled "Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa", page 272, 1822. He had collected the material and made notes relating to it on the 24th August, 1811, when camped at Rietriver in the Fraserburg district of the Cape Province. His published note reads as follows :-

"We halted for the night in a rocky situation near a small river where the fine scarlet flowers of a new kind of Aloe decorated the barren rocks, and gave a certain gay, cultivated look to a spot, which, without them, would have appeared a rude, neglected waste."

Aloe claviflora has magnificent scarlet flowers, the full bloom being somewhat like an inverted club, it is very widely distributed in the Karoo, and arid parts of the central and northern sections of the Cape Province, extending into the southwestern portion of South West Africa, and it is also found in the Orange Free State. I feel that by having embodied Aloe claviflora in the design of one of our coins, the South African Mint has made its greatest contribution towards perpetuating the adventurous spirit and good work of our early explorers.

Technical details of the five-shilling piece are as follows :-

Standard Weight	436.36363 millesimal grains.
Standard Fineness	8/10 fine silver, 2/10 copper or millesimal fineness 800.
Remedy Allowance	Weight per piece, 2 imperial grains, millesimal fineness 6.
