



# Western Cape Numismatic Society

## Seven short questions to a Fellow Collector

**Question 1: Tell us about yourself.**

I am John Watson and I was issued at One Mill Hospital in Pretoria. I worked as a Non-destructive Testing Technician in the aviation sector - a fancy way of saying I checked for corrosion and fatigue cracks on aeroplanes and cleared them to return to service. After moving to Cape Town 15 years ago, I studied Interior Design and now design and manufacture custom furniture under my own brand.

**Question 2: How and when did you become interested in collecting?**

I believe a true collector is born with the "collecting gene." Even when you finally find that special item you thought you could never live without, there's always something else that becomes a "must-have." As a child, I was always looking at the ground for shiny rocks and crystals — especially while hiking in the Magaliesberg or on a trail in the veld. This collecting habit soon spread to old car badges, stamps, and eventually coins, after discovering a small suitcase of coins in the back of my grandfather's wardrobe.

**Question 3: What did you collect in the beginning?**

One afternoon, my grandmother mentioned that my late grandfather had a forgotten collection of coins stashed away somewhere. We immediately started looking, and I still clearly remember the excitement when we discovered the hidden treasure. A few things really stood out to me: the sheer size and age of the single and double cartwheel pennies; the long string of peculiar coins with holes in them; the simple obverse design of the ZAR coins; and the incredible lustre, colour, and lack of toning on one coin with the bust of a young Victoria. These coins, along with mostly old Rhodesian and British coins, formed my first collection. I aimed to collect coins as early as possible, always amazed by the idea of holding something so old in my hand. However, the more modern, international side of my collection naturally grew faster.

**Question 4: What do you collect now, and why?**

Every coin is a tangible piece of history. It is not just a small piece of metal (or paper), but an object with an entire story waiting to be uncovered and that can be traced back to a specific time and place. I am therefore passionate about collecting all forms of currency that was produced for circulation, including the weird and wonderful. Ancient forms of currency are especially interesting - whether it is Roman, or Chinese spade and knife money. Another fascinating category I like to collect for its designs and artwork is German emergency paper money and porcelain coins. But most of all, I enjoy collecting all South African circulation coins, including its proof versions. I am incredibly proud of our countries' rich numismatic history.

**Question 5: What is the biggest challenge you currently face with your collection?**

Being passionate about numismatics, it is easy to justify paying far more for a special item than might seem practical. A major part of my collecting strategy, though, is considering the item's future value and investment potential. I have always wanted to add some Krugerrands and other gold coins to my collection. Unfortunately, either the grade or the price has usually discouraged me. With the gold price constantly hitting new highs, this might take a while. We have also recently seen a massive increase in the sale prices of certain coins, and in general, it has become more difficult to find a good deal.

**Question 6: What advice would you give to new collectors?**

The catalogue is a collector's best friend. Even though information is now more readily available online, a catalogue remains an invaluable tool and source of quality information. Even after decades of collecting, I still rely on my series of Krause Standard Catalogues. Hern's is, of course, another must-have. As one delves deeper into the fascinating hobby of numismatics, it is a good idea to acquire more specialist books and other sources of information. Two fundamental factors for the new collector are to be able to distinguish between the different grades of coins and thus being able to determine its value more accurately using a catalogue. This information will help avoid overpaying on items from uninformed, and sometimes, unscrupulous sellers. Fortunately, it does not take long to build up a list of trusted and helpful sellers and dealers.

**Question 7: If you were to take up a new hobby, what would it be?**

Apart from not having enough time and space for another hobby, numismatics - along with gem and mineral collecting – already ticks all the boxes for me. The most important being to satisfy the unquenchable hunger for knowledge and new discoveries, and the other, being able to share it with likeminded people. It is heartwarming to see how our hobby has grown in popularity, especially over the past few years and it is exciting to see where it might lead to next.

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