

Mid-Month Visit – December 2024

My November 2024 Newsletter related the story about the coin, the '1899 Kruger Single 9', and I received many favourable comments – mainly from people who had never heard about the coin before.

A few months ago I was approached by a friend, who had recently read about Pilgrim's Rest, and as a result wanted to purchase a Veld Pond, as this rare coin, produced during the Boer War, had created a 'I must have one of those' interests.



So, although a medal collector, this newsletter will deal with two other coins with 'Boer War connections', to round off the '1899 Kruger Single 9' story.

The book 'A Tourist Guide to the Anglo Boer War 1899-1902' by Tony Westby-Nunn has a comprehensive write-up on the history of Gold Coinage in South Africa, prior to the Boer War, which ends off with the following on the Veld Pond (page 7) – *"The final chapter in the history of the coinage of the Transvaal belongs to the Z.A.R. VELD POND. Eight hundred and ninety-six of these historic pieces were struck in romantic circumstances from handmade dies at the 'Staatsmunt te Velde' at Pilgrim's Rest during the closing phase of the war, in March and April 1902.*



Picture: The Veld Pond

Manufactured from gold recovered at the local alluvial diggings, they bear on the obverse the monogram Z.A.R. 1902, and on the reverse the value EEN POND. They were properly authorised and ordered by the Republican Government in the field and rank numismatically as 'siege pieces'. Their gold content is probably slightly in excess of their face value."



Today the old town of Pilgrim's Rest looks almost identical to what it looked like during the South African War (1899-1902), and one can still visit and 'experience' the old alluvial gold diggings. The Times History Volume 5 records (page 463) – *"In September (1901) Viljoen and his Lieutenant, Muller, who were not on the best of terms, made a rough division of their forces and settled down in different districts. Viljoen set up his headquarters at Pilgrim's Rest, a hamlet lying some twenty-five miles to the north-east of Lydenburg in a secluded little valley, protected on the south by the Mauchberg and on the east by outlying spurs of the Drakensberg."* The Times History continues – *"Pilgrim's Rest had been occupied once by Buller in 1900, but after that date the sound of war never penetrated the quiet valley."*

One of my tours – 'What happened to Buller after Ladysmith', bypasses Pilgrim's Rest, but if there was a demand and/or interest, a visit to the town could be accommodated.

And the coin – one only has to try and source a Veld Pond to realise their value. With less than a thousand in circulation, those who have them are fairly reluctant to let them go, and with the price of gold at its peak at present, owners are holding on tightly.

So now we have dealt with the Gold Coins of the War, however, the smallest valued coin in South Africa, after the War, the Farthing, has an interesting link to the War, and relates back to the Concentration Camps.

In the Concentration Camp at Bethulie, also known as the Camp of Hell, a total of 1 734 women and children died within the space of 13 months.

The theme for the Bethulie Concentration Camp in the south of the Orange Free State was Matthew 10 : 29-31 – *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*



Picture: The Memorial at the Concentration Camp in Bethulie

In the camp, Anette Marais sat on a stump amongst tired and destitute women and opened her bible to read to the women. The previous night she had begged God to send her scripture to inspire the women. She opened the Bible and read Matthew 10 : 29-31 to the women. As she was



reading a small sparrow flew over them and landed on Anette's shoulder. Over the next months the sparrows became the beacon of hope for the women and children at the Camp of Hell.

After the war, the Boer women who had survived the Concentration Camps, expressed a wish to Jan Smuts and Rachel Steyn (wife of Orange Free State President Steyn), that the humblest coin in the South African coinage should bear the emblem of the humble sparrow, to remind us of the verses in Matthew's Gospel, which tells us of our worth in the eyes of God.



Picture: The 1923 South African Farthing

Their wish was fulfilled when a design of two sparrows on a Mimosa branch, by Kruger Gray, an engraver at the British Royal Mint, was depicted on the South African Farthing in 1923, during Jan Smuts' first term as Prime Minister.

The Farthing depicted the sparrows until 1960 and then they were depicted on the half cent coin from 1961 until 1964. A new sparrow design by South African engraver Tommy Sasseen appeared on the South African half cent and one cent coins from 1965. A design by William Lumley, based on the Kruger Gray design, was depicted on the South African one cent coin until the early 2020's, when the coin was discontinued.

As I have said, I am a medal collector, but a member of my family, in trying to get him into an interest, was given a collection of Farthings a number of years ago. Hopefully it can still be found, and hopefully, this newsletter will stir the interest to get something worthwhile in life started. Who knows, there could be a coin of value in that basic collection – and there could be, after reading this newsletter, many medal collectors who would like a single coin, with a Boer War connection, in their collection.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) for regular updates and news.

Allan Gordon