



Mysore coins countermarked "G. B."

by K. W. Wiggins

Over the years a number of Mysore 20 cash pieces (Craig 172) of the period circa 1823 - 1825, heavily stamped with the letters "G B", have come to notice. There are two in the writer's collection, others have been seen in several collections and further specimens have been reported. Their existence in numbers would appear to indicate that they were so stamped for a specific reason, the most likely being that they were used as a token, tally or check piece by some European Estate in the Mysore, Coorg and Coimbatore area.

The Mysore coins of Krishna Raja Wodeyar gradually went out of use from about 1845 to 1860, although contemporary writers comment on their abundance in the bazaars of the region for long after. It is probable then that the pieces in question were counter-marked and put into use during the latter half of the 19 th. century.

Pridmore¹ records two tokens of Ceylon bearing the initials "G B". They are attributed to George Bird, one of the earliest planters in Ceylon whose coffee estate was first opened in 1821 at Sinnapitya near Gampola. In the 1860's Bird was still at Gampola and specimens of his tokens have been found at Kandy.

It is unlikely, however, that Bird used the counter-marked Mysore coins in Ceylon for it appears that most specimens have been found in India. I have not heard of any from Ceylon. Many of the Ceylon planters also had estates in Southern India but I have not been able to trace any plantation owned by Bird in that area. One other name might be suggested as the issuer of these countermarked coins. George Badenoch was the General Manager in South India for the firm of Pierce, Leslie and Co. Ltd. from 1883 until 1898. His principal office was in Cochin but the firm had branches in Calicut, Mangalore and Tellichery on the Malabar coast, where there were coffee curing works. There were also other offices in the hinterland at such places as Coimbatore and Mysore and in the Wynaad and Nilgiris districts where native produce was received for shipment to the coast. It seems likely that a use could have been found for a token or check in such transactions and there are on record a number of machine made tokens for use by various firms in the South Indian Estates. Countermarked coins cannot be attributed with accuracy in the absence of documentary evidence and persistent research may some day reveal further details concerning these Mysore pieces.

¹ Pridmore, F., The coins of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Part II. Asian Territories (excluding India)