



North York Coin Club

Founded 1960

**MONTHLY MEETINGS 4TH Tuesday 7:30 P.M. AT
Edithvale Community Centre, 131 Finch Ave. W., North York M2N 2H8**

**MAIL ADDRESS: NORTH YORK COIN CLUB,
5261 Naskapi Court, Mississauga, ON L5R 2P4**

Web site: www.northyorkcoinclub.com

Contact the Club :

E-mail: info@northyorkcoinclub.com
Phone: 416-897-6684

Member :

Ontario Numismatic Association
Royal Canadian Numismatic Association

PresidentBill O'Brien
1st Vice President
2nd Vice President
SecretaryHenry Nienhuis
TreasurerBen Boelens
Past PresidentNick Cowan

Executive Committee

DirectorDavid Quinlan
DirectorRoger Fox
DirectorVince Chiappino
Junior Director
AuctioneerDavid Quinlan
Auction ManagerMark Argentino
EditorPaul Petch
ReceptionistFranco Farronato
Draw PrizesBill O'Brien
Social ConvenorBill O'Brien
LibrarianRobert Wilson

THE BULLETIN FOR OCTOBER 2011

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello to all the members and friends of the North York Coin Club:

A sure sign that I'm getting older is that it seems like only last weekend that I sat down to write last month's President's message. It's quite amazing that 30 days can go by and you have a hard time remembering what you've been up to or trouble you've been in. One story I do recall I will share with you.

John, a very hard working individual had spent his day busting his ass so he could make some money to provide for his family. He enters a small convenience store to acquire a few items that he could buy with the small amount of money he received that day. "You should give that money away to charity," said the sales person, pointing to a donation box on the counter. John thought for a moment and said, "No, I'll buy my items, you give to the charity."

This story got me thinking about how it relates to our club. The lack of interested participants in the election this year at the North York Coin Club is underwhelming at best. The club needs you. Get over the idea that it is always someone else's responsibility to do all the planning, buying refreshments or keeping the books. Volunteer for one of the many positions within the club. The commitment will require at most a few hours a month to help the club run smoothly, and thus more enjoyably for all its members. But the real reason that you should run for one of the executive positions is the friendships that you will develop by working with these members and insights you will gain into the behind the scenes mechanisms of the club.

This opportunity to run for the Club's executive may also be a good chance for all those people who volunteered to help with the preparation for the 2014 R.C.N.A. convention here in Toronto to get their feet wet and participate in the club's operation. I know the convention is some time away, but with the elections only being held every other year it would be good to get everyone's involvement from the get go instead of just helping out the weekend of the event. Please see Terry O'Brien early on at our next meeting to put your name on the election list.

Enough about this subject—time to move on to other club items. The club's December dinner is approaching quickly and a decision must be made at our October meeting regarding this yearly event. Do we do the Swiss Chalet at the community centre, or, as it has been suggested, maybe our club can participate in a dinner out at a restaurant in conjunction with a sister club, the Mississauga-Etobicoke Coin, Stamp and Collectibles Club. The Swiss Pick Restaurant on Rexdale Boulevard (where we held the 50th anniversary dinner) has been suggested and Tuesday the 6th of December is available to us. One dinner at the restaurant would replace two smaller functions held on consecutive weeks in December at the two respective clubs. The cost of a complete buffet dinner with dessert would be approx. \$35.00 per person with an option that the clubs could help cover some of the costs. Think about it and, if interested, we must act now—so bring a deposit for your tickets to the October meeting.

NEXT MEETING TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25

We start gathering at 7:00 p.m. with meeting start scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

Identification Night

The October meeting will be a member participation meeting with a bit of a twist. By all means bring out some prized items for a show and tell, but this time we are suggesting something else as well. Following up on a suggestion at the last meeting, bring out an item or two that you have been unable to identify. Perhaps the members with their pooled numismatic knowledge will be able to assist you in your search for information. This should be fun and informative as well.

We appreciate all donations to our supply of draw prize material. Please remember to bring your auction lots if you would like an auction at this meeting.

A final item that requires a quick mention is my thanks to Terry O'Brien, Len Kuenzig and David Quinlan for accepting some important positions within the club that were vacant; it's volunteers such as these that are an extremely important part of the club's longevity and success. Thanks for everyone's support. Get out and enjoy yourself by attending one of the upcoming shows and I will see you on the 25th.

Bill O'Brien

North York executive and all members are reminded of our Executive Meeting in the Board Room at Edithvale on November 8 at 7:30 p.m.

MEETING NEWS OF THE SEPTEMBER 2011 MEETING

The 569th meeting of the North York Coin Club was held on Tuesday, September 27th, 2011 in the Gibson room at the Edithvale Community Centre, 131 Finch Ave. West.

The meeting was hammered to order at 7:32 p.m. with our President, Bill O'Brien, in the chair. There were 32 members and 3 guests in attendance.

The on-time attendance draw was the first order of business. Member Vince Chiappino was present to collect the draw prize of \$4.00. The prize will reset to \$2.00 for the October 25th meeting.

Bill asked the members present if they had noticed any errors or omissions in the minutes of our August meeting as published in the September newsletter. There being no changes noted, Nick Cowan made a motion to accept the minutes as published. This was seconded by member Andrew Silver. Motion carried.

The next order of business was to hear the Treasurer's report delivered by our treasurer Ben Boelens.

Bill O'Brien recognized and welcomed our guests this evening; Dave O'Brian, Walter Rodriguez and John Genova. Walter R. is from the Vaughan area and currently collects Canadian Decimal and World coins. John G. Is currently collecting coins with his son and adds the old coins he finds during his job renovating to their collection. Dave O. was our guest last month, he is still Norman G.'s friend- although we don't know why :-).

With the preliminary business taken care of Bill O'Brien introduced our guest speaker this month Gina Curro. Gina is the Manager of Fine Arts and Collectibles at Hugh Wood Canada Ltd. who specializes in the insurance of numismatic and philatelic collectibles. Gina's topic dealt with the why-and-how's of insuring your collection through Hugh Wood (HWI).

HWI offers collectors an all-risk, no deductible, policy for home or bank storage of your collection which is underwritten through certain Lloyd's of London underwriters. The basis of settlement for the policy is by market value at the time of loss limited by the amount of coverage you purchase from them. The policy includes cover against "all risks" of physical loss, destruction or damage to collections and numismatic material owned by you or held in trust by you at your residence, such as- theft, fire and water damage.

Coverage is also available for your collection whilst in safety deposit box at the bank, at exhibitions, coin clubs and whilst personally accompanying you or your representative on any trip or sending therein by mail or courier service. The policy does exclude loss or damage arising from:

- a) Wear-and-tear, gradual deterioration, insects, vermin, faulty handling or faulty workmanship;
- b) War and other related risks;
- c) Radioactive contamination, explosive nuclear assemblies

It is recommended that you insure your collection for the current market value plus

margin to cover normal; acquisitions during the year and any increase in value. The basic premium is currently \$0.60 per \$100.00 value with a minimum premium of \$50.00. For safety deposit box coverage the rate is substantially reduced to \$0.125 . If you need to increase your policy just call her up on the phone.

Gina cautioned that a standard homeowners insurance policy would only cover you for a loss of about \$1,000.00 and so it is recommended that you purchase extended coverage through her to protect your investment.

Gina also mentioned that HWI offers a separate dealer's policy which covers loss of your stock at shows or through the mail. It is rated by value and the number of shows that you attend a year. There is a deductible for loss through the mail of \$500.00. The premium rate is currently about 1.1% of the stock value a year.

During her talk Gina answered many questions from the members present, a great indicator that everyone listened with keen interest to her discussion. Bill O'Brien presented Gina with a certificate of appreciation at the conclusion of her thought provoking talk.

At 8:15 pm, Bill called for the refreshment break. Bill, now fully back in action as our volunteer refreshment committee chair prepared the refreshments- consisting of cookies, juice and coffee -for the evening. We would very much like to thank Carolyne-Marie Petch, Paul's wife, for taking over for Bill when he was mending his broken clavicle.



Ginna Curro from Hugh Wood Insurance explains hobby insurance products and answers questions from the membership



President Bill O'Brien presents Gina with a Certificate of Appreciation for her presentation

We resumed the business section of the meeting at 8:30 after saying goodbye to Gina. Bill reminded the members that we will be looking for dues for 2012. Ben Boelens will be more than happy to receive your payment starting immediately. He also mentioned that this year is a club executive election year. And he begged the members to play a more active role by running for office. Terry O'Brien has agreed to be this year's nomination chairperson, so please contact Terry with your nominations as soon as possible. The roster of candidates has to be identified by the November meeting for election in December.

Bill also reminded the club members that we had been given the honour, by the R.C.N.A. executive, of hosting the 2014 Annual R.C.N.A. convention. The dates we have chosen are August 13–17, 2014 at the Delta Meadowvale Hotel. Paul Johnson reported that, in his role as the R.C.N.A. executive secretary, he was in process of signing the contract with the Delta; the facility that the R.C.N.A. had chosen from the short list submitted by the club. Although it is still years away Bill commented that he felt things were progressing well!

Bill's next item dealt with the club auction. With the passing of Bob Porter we find ourselves without an official auctioneer. Remembering the fine impromptu job that David Quinlan did at our last meeting Bill asked David to consider taking over the role. David felt that Bob would be a hard act to follow but said that he was up to the challenge and accepted Bill's offer. Len Kuenzig volunteered to be the runner and Mark Argentino agreed to continue on as our auction manager.

With the last months of 2011 quickly approaching Bill indicated that it was time to consider reprinting our club business card. Henry Nienhuis mentioned that he had revised the artwork based on feedback he had been given and would send the updates to Bill for his review.

The final two items in Bill's list to discuss was a reminder that any member interested in running an ad in the Bulletin just needs to send the information to Paul Petch our editor. The service is a free benefit of membership in the club. And lastly he made a call for more consignments to our club auction. The club relies on the proceeds from the auction as partial income.

The next order of business was an update from Paul Petch on the status of our permit application for the current season. Paul mentioned that he was a bit late for the meeting because he was down stairs finalizing the permit with Betty Fallis-Trow. He reported that all the meeting dates, with the exception of our January 24th, 2012 meeting have been confirmed. There is currently a conflict on that date with the digital camera club who is requesting the room. We may need to move rooms or possibly move the meeting the 5th Tuesday. Stay tuned for the resolution to this. Paul mentioned that during his conversation with Betty she mentioned that some club members have been somewhat over enthusiastic by arriving at 6:00. She cautioned that our permit is from 7:00–10:00 pm and that they would greatly appreciate it if our members could plan their arrival for that time.

When asked about the status of the proposed collectible show to be held jointly with the Mississauga-Etobicoke club Paul mentioned that he was not able to follow-up with this during his meeting with Betty. He did confirm once again that the meeting would now have to be in the spring of 2012. Nick Cowan brought up the topic that the show needs to be properly advertised and well in advance of the show date. He said although he had sold 12 tables for the cancelled September meeting he would be hard pressed to sell anymore if the show was not publicized. After significant debate with excellent input from a number of people it was decided that we would continue with plans for a future show. Paul Petch took the action item to follow up with

Betty on availability of the facility for dates in March and April 2012.

Ben Boelens asked if we had a speaker lined up for our October meeting. Member Dick Dunn suggested that one meeting should be devoted to an "identification night." A night in which members could bring in items that they knew little about and perhaps learn something about the mystery item from other members in attendance. Everyone thought that this was an interesting idea, and it was decided to table it at the next executive meeting.

The last portion of the meeting was devoted to lucky draws and auction. Lucky draw winners were- (guest) John G., Terry O'Brien (2), Ben Boelens, Vince Chiappino (2), David Quinlan, Nick Cowan (2), Andrew Silver, Len Kuenzig, (guest) Walter R., Jayden Chen, Henry Nienhuis (2), Leon Saraga, and Tony Hine. The club earned \$29.00 through the sale of the draw tickets! The lucky draws were intermixed throughout the evening's auction, called by David Quinlan our new official auctioneer, and volunteer runner Len Kuenzig. Mark Argentino our auction manager reported that receipts from the auction added \$7.40 to the club coffers. We greatly appreciate David accepting the role as auctioneer, he is doing a fine job!

The club executive would like to send out a special thank you to club members for supporting the club through the purchase of draw tickets and for draw prize donations. Please mention your donations to the club secretary so that your support can be recognized in the minutes and newsletter. We would

especially like to thank Dan Gosling, immediate Past President of the R.C.N.A., and David Quinlan for their kind donations this month.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m. Our next club meeting is October 25th. Also please note: There will be a meeting of the club executive at 7:30 p.m. on November 8th in the Board Room at Edithvale.



"Smilin' Dave" O'Brian (left) with Norman G. Gordon and Norm's collection of spinner tokens. The collection is the result of over 10 years work on Norm's part, scouring dealer tables at coin shows and having the occasional lucky find at flea markets. Thank you, Norm, for sharing your collection!

COMING EVENTS FOR FALL 2011

OCT. 22, Oshawa, Durham Coin-A-Rama, Five Points Mall, 285 Taunton Rd E. Hours: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. *Free dealer, public, and membership draws, free admission. Featuring paper, coins, tokens, medals and many other items. Celebrating 50 years.* For more information contact Sharon at 905-728-1352, email papman@bell.net.

OCT. 23, Stratford, Stratford Coin Show, Festival Inn, 1144 Ontario St. Hours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$2, 16 and under free. Tokens, trade dollars, coins, paper money. For more information contact Larry Walker, telephone 519-271-3352, email lswalker@cyg.net.

OCT. 29 - 30, Toronto, Torex - Canada's National Coin Show, Hilton Toronto Airport Hotel, 5875 Airport Rd. Hours: Sat. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission \$6. Under 16 free! Official Auctioneer: Moore Numismatic Auctions, Charles Moore. The Hilton hotel is located directly across from Toronto's Pearson International Airport. For more information please call 416-705-5348. Website: <http://www.torex.net>.

NOV. 4 - 6, Montreal, QC, Nuphilex: Canada's Largest Coin and Stamp Show,

Holiday Inn Midtown, 420 Sherbrooke West. Hours: Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission \$3 Friday and Saturday, Sunday free. *More than 74 dealer tables of coins, stamps, paper money, tokens, military medals, jewelry and watches will be showcased. Come buy, sell, trade or appraise your valuables. Coin auction conducted by Lower Canada Auction in the Gouverner Room.* For more information contact Gabriel Sebag, 514-842-4411. Website:

<http://www.nuphilex.com>.
NOV. 5, Scarborough, 15th Annual Scarborough Coin Club Show, Cedarbrook Community Centre, 91 Eastpark Blvd. Hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. *Free admission and draws. Refreshments available. We are at the location where our club meets.* For more information contact Dick Dunn at cpms@idirect.com or PO Box 562, Pickering, ON L1V 2R7.

NOV. 13, Windsor, Windsor Coin Club, Caboto Club. The Windsor Coin Club will be holding its 60th Annual Fall Show at the Caboto Club, 2175 Parent Avenue, Windsor, Ontario. Hours are 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is \$1.00. Juniors admitted free.

Plenty of free parking. For more information contact Margaret Clarke at 519-735-0727. email: mclarke@wincom.net Website: <http://www.windsorcoinclub.com>.

NOV. 19, Niagara Falls, Niagara Falls Coin Club Show, Our Lady of Peace Hall, 6944 Stanley Ave. Hours: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free parking, admission \$2. *Free gold coin draw, coins, tokens, jewellery, paper money, medals, and more.* For more information contact 905-227-3534.

DEC. 4, Brampton, Brampton Coin Show, Century Gardens Recreation Centre, 340 Vodden Rd. E. Hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission \$3, under 14 free. *Free parking. Buy, sell, trade and appraise at more than 40 tables of dealers, featuring coins, medals, tokens, paper money, trade dollars, militaria. Children's table. Funds raised for Children's Charities.* Sponsor/Affiliate: B&W Coins & Tokens and the Brampton Rotary Club. For more information contact B&W Coins & Tokens, Willard Burton telephone 905-450-2869, email b_and_w@sympatico.ca.

Listings are courtesy of Canadian Coin News Coming Events

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE (FOR ONLY \$80,000)?

by Mark Duell, Daily Mirror and the Internet, September 16 2011

An extremely rare £1million bank note is expected to sell for only £50,000 (\$80,000)

when it goes under the hammer this month. But it's not as good a deal as you might think—

because the note issued by the Treasury for economic reconstruction 63 years ago is no longer legal tender.

It was one of only nine given to the UK by the U.S. in President Harry Truman's Marshall Aid plan after World War Two. Marshall Aid, named after U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall, was funding for Western Europe from the U.S. between 1948 and 1951.

The rare note will be sold this month by a British private collector and was issued on August 30, 1948,

before being cancelled on October 6, 1948. 'How it found its way from the bank in the first place is anybody's guess,' auctioneer Chris Webb told the Daily Mirror.

The green banknote is number seven of the nine given to the UK. It is believed two of the notes were later given as mementos to the respective U.S. and British Treasury secretaries at the time. Only two of them have survived—numbers 000007 and 000008. The latter went for £78,300 (\$125,000) at auction three years ago.

'This Treasury note entitles the Bank of England to payment of one million pounds on demand out of the consolidated fund of the United Kingdom' The notes were only in use for six weeks and were never meant for public circulation. They were only intended for internal use between financial institutions to track money, reported the Daily Telegraph.

Number 000007 was sold in a private sale for £8,000 (\$13,000) in 1977 and listed by the Guinness Book of Records as the highest denomination privately owned at the time.



Historic money: An extremely rare £1million bank note is only expected to sell for £50,000 (\$80,000) when it goes under the hammer soon

**ROYAL CANADIAN MINT COMMEMORATES THE CENTENNIAL OF PARKS CANADA,
THE BOREAL FOREST AND THREE NEW ANIMAL THEMES**

The Royal Canadian Mint capped off the celebration of Parks Canada’s centennial year on October 7 by unveiling five new commemorative circulation coins that immortalize Canadians’ legendary natural heritage. The commemorative circulation coins unveiled by Canadian government officials and representatives of Parks Canada and the Mint, at a public ceremony hosted at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec include: the 2011 Parks Canada Centennial one-dollar circulation coin; the 2011 Boreal Forest two-dollar circulation coin; and three new 25-cent circulation coins (half of which will be coloured) featuring the Orca, Peregrine Falcon and Wood Bison. The 2011 Parks Canada Centennial one-dollar coin will begin circulating in the coming weeks, followed by the remaining 2011 commemorative circulation coins later this year, and in early 2012.

“The Royal Canadian Mint is proud to help Canadians celebrate their country’s legendary natural heritage with five new commemorative circulation coins honouring our great outdoors and a century of nature conservation by Parks Canada,” said Ian E. Bennett, President and CEO of the Royal Canadian Mint. “I am very pleased that Canadians of all ages will be able to collect these coins as keepsakes of their fondest memories of our national parks, our forests, and our precious wildlife.”

“This new series of commemorative circulation coins from the Royal Canadian Mint captures the essence of Canada’s natural, historical and cultural treasures,” said the Honourable Peter Kent, Canada’s Environment Minister and Minister responsible for Parks Canada. “By creating the world’s first national parks service, Canada has made nature conservation a prized Canadian value and inspired countries around the world to protect their unique wilderness regions.”

2011 Parks Canada Centennial one-dollar coin to circulate first, followed by two-dollar Boreal Forest and 25-cent coins featuring the Orca, Peregrine Falcon and Wood Bison

Between October 7–8, 2011, the Mint will invited the public to trade their loose change to obtain the one-dollar Parks Canada centennial circulation coin at its boutiques in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Parks Canada will also offered it in a face value coin exchange at many national park and historic site locations across Canada during the Thanksgiving long weekend, from October 8–10, 2011. For more details, visit www.pc.gc.ca.

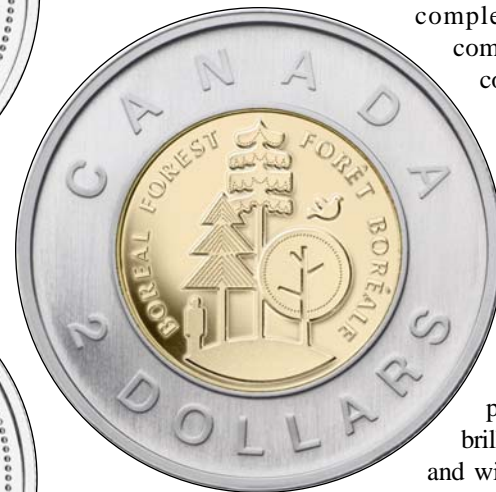
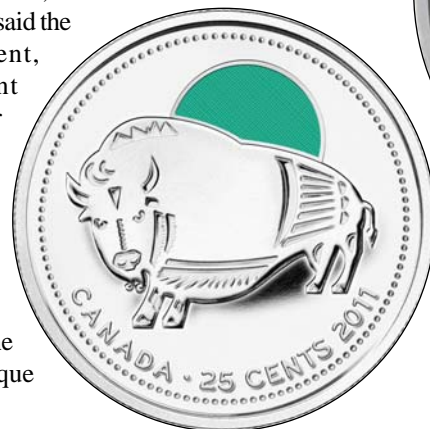
Starting with the one-dollar circulation coin commemorating the centennial of Parks Canada on October 7, Canadians will soon be able to find these coins in their change and collect all five in a special collector card to be available, free of charge,

on www.mint.ca/legendary this November. While supplies last, Canadians can also visit the Mint’s web site to exchange five dollars for special “circulation packs” of five new Parks Canada Centennial circulation coins. Collector Coins Coming Soon

The Mint will also be introducing a series of finely crafted gold and silver collector coins in early November 2011 to complement this series of commemorative circulation coins. Themes will include the boreal forest, the orca, the wood bison and the peregrine falcon.

In January 2011, the Mint also dedicated its annual silver dollar collector coin to the centennial of Parks Canada. It can still be purchased in proof and brilliant uncirculated finishes, and with selective gold-plating available exclusively in the 2011 Proof

Set, from www.mint.ca; the Mint’s boutiques in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver; and through their network of distributors, including participating Canada Post outlets.



GETTING HOLD OF THE ALEXANDER MEDALLION

Sunday Times and the Internet, September 25, 2011

Sri Lankan numismatist Prof. Osmund Boppearachchi recounts to Smriti Daniel his great find among the treasures of Mir Zakah

Embossed on the gold coin is the arrogant profile of Alexander the Great. On it, the young conqueror's features endure: his luxuriant curly hair and the crooked line of his broken nose; his elongated cheeks and large, unblinking eyes. Curiously though, his head is covered in the scalp of an elephant, its trunk curling triumphantly over his brow. Around his neck is the image of the Gorgon, the coiling snakes worn as an aegis. The horn of Ammon protects his temple. The striking image is valued for far more than its obvious beauty. It is believed to be the only portrait actually created during the lifetime of Alexander the Great to survive into modernity. This is Alexander as he saw himself—invulnerable, verging on godhood, immortalized in the moment of his triumph.

"It's exactly Alexander, there is no doubt about that," says Sri Lankan numismatist Prof. Osmund Boppearachchi. Having announced the find to the world, more recently Osmund co-authored a book with History professor Frank Holt which was published just last month titled 'The Alexander Medallion: Exploring the Origins of a Unique Artefact.' Written partly in defence of the authenticity of the gold medallion, the book describes the extraordinary circumstances that led to the unveiling of the priceless artefact. Its historical significance far outweighing the value of the precious metal itself, its history is both the subject of the book and of Osmund's long obsession.

At the centre of the story is a humble village in Afghanistan. Located in one of the most hostile political and geographical landscapes on earth, Mir Zakah lies along the ancient trail that connects Ghazni in modern Afghanistan to Gandhara in what is now Pakistan. Travelling in the company of a French journalist and 12 bodyguards, Osmund made his way there in 2004. As the temperature plummeted to minus 15 degrees centigrade outside, the men covered themselves with carpets to keep warm and brushed their teeth with snow. Despite the abject

Background:

Amidst the chaos of the Afghanistan War, a massive coin hoard was found in 1992 at Mir Zakah, an area in eastern Afghanistan. Mir Zakah is situated some 50 km northeast of Gardez and is not far away from the Khyber Pass Highway leading from Kabul to Peshawar, Pakistan. The hoard allegedly contained three to four tons of gold and silver coins and roughly 200 kg of jewelry, silver vessels, gemstones, and votive plaquettes. Another hoard had been found in 1947 at the very same site, which had been partly rescued by Afghani authorities and French archaeologists. Because both the Mir Zakah Hoards

poverty that surrounded them, in the evenings the numismatist would show his hosts pictures of incredible treasures—of gold, silver and bronze ornaments, vessels and coins—and ask them whether there were any among them they recognized.

The pieces he was showing them were in the possession of a Japanese museum.

The museum had been sold the pieces which had been deliberately misrepresented by corrupt agents as belonging to another set known as the Oxus treasure. Now, Osmund was unsurprised to discover the men had in fact seen many of the pieces before. After all, some of them had actually handled the objects themselves, pulling each piece fresh from the earth just a few feet away from where they now huddled together. Some shared their keepsakes with the visitors—on the palm of his hand, one man

contained roughly the same range of coin issues, it is rather obvious that they were parts of one and the same deposit. The mixture of coins and objects most likely composing a temple treasure is reminiscent of the famous Oxus Hoard. The Mir Zakah Deposit, however, is much larger than the Oxus Hoard, and might have included several war chests, with Greek Bactria well represented and the Indo-Scythian king Azes II making up the lion's share. The most recent coins are those of the Kushan rulers of the late second and early third century AD.

displayed a single diminutive gold coin. Unbeknownst to the Afghan farmer, the Indo-Scythian coin with the image of Azes stamped onto its face was a rarity, worth an estimated \$20,000. Yet, this was only one of Mir Zakah's treasures—and there are hundreds of thousands more.

The Mir Zakah deposit is believed to contain roughly 550,000 coins alongside hundreds of other, larger objects. "When you look at the composition you get everything—from North India to Southern Uzbekistan and North Afghanistan," says Osmund explaining that the pieces are equally diverse in their chronology, with some of the earliest dating to the 5th century B.C going up to the 2nd century A.D. How they came to be

tossed together in the same well remains a matter of speculation. Osmund himself imagines a scenario where an army of

Continued next page...



Alexander Medallion (Continued)...

Sassanians successfully plundered the treasures and collections of temples and cities but was then faced with a sudden challenge from a rival group. They would have been forced to ditch their loot before going to battle. If so, clearly they lost and their treasure was left to languish unclaimed for centuries.

When some of it resurfaced centuries later, many pieces would be routed through the bazaars of the Pakistani city of Peshawar, before they were smuggled out to America and Europe. The first coins appeared in the late 1940s and 50s, just after the hoard at Mir Zakah was first excavated. Intervening in 1948, French archaeologists attempted to collect and study some of the deposit's treasures, but political disturbances and violence in the region forced them to give up their hunt well before the hoard was exhausted. It would lie relatively undisturbed till a group of ambitious looters would dig up the well again in 1993–94. Again, they would leave the job half done. Violence and multiple deaths among those involved with the illicit dig would earn the Mir Zakah hoard a reputation for being cursed among locals. Soon the site would become altogether inaccessible to outsiders, as Afghanistan entered a prolonged period of unrest.

Still, what was dug up was enough to flood the markets of Peshawar with astounding quantities of artefacts and coins in particular. It was here that Osmund first encountered the treasures of Mir Zakah in person. Osmund remembers being entirely overwhelmed as sack after sack, each filled with approximately 50 kgs of coins, were poured over the floor before him. It was quite literally a 'pluie' or a 'rain' of coins, says Osmund, adding, "I suspect that no numismatist has ever seen so many coins in such a short space of time." Determined to get a handle on the composition of the hoard, he began what he describes as a desperate exercise. "I began to sort the coins into groups according to

the issuers, e.g. early Indian, Greek city states, Seleucids, Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians, Indo-Parthians, and Kushans."

It was an impossible exercise, as was the authorities' every attempt to confiscate or buy the loot of Mir Zakah—even as you read this, a known stash of three tons of valuable coins in Basel, Switzerland remains tantalisingly inaccessible to scholars. Instead wily smugglers have succeeded in ushering priceless artefacts into museums and private collections all over the world—not hesitating to create fictitious histories for their antiques if required. Alexander's commemorative medallion would find its way to London and into the hands of an anonymous collector who has no intention of parting with it, though he has allowed it to be exhibited.

For those familiar with coins from Ptolemy I's reign, the portrait of Alexander is not an uncommon one. Though the work is particularly fine, it could have arguably come out of a workshop in Egypt. However, the one obstacle to this interpretation is quite literally of elephantine proportions. On the back of the coin, where you might have to expect to find Athena brandishing a spear, you see instead an elephant walking on tiptoe. Issued in 326 BC to commemorate Alexander's resounding defeat of Porus, the King of Paurava by the river Jhelum in what is modern Punjab, the coin was intended to be a golden boast. It is a find that excited Osmund—he calls it "the missing link" that explained the baffling appearance of an Asian elephant on coins minted in countries where there were none about. It represented the attempts of other, later rulers to share in Alexander's glory.

Other silver coins issued around the

period flesh out the action of the battle. In one, Alexander, astride a horse, flings a spear at Porus on his elephant. In another, the King's men ride in four-horse chariots as they draw their awesome bows. These coins are evidence, that where historical records fail, where stories are forgotten, coins remain to tell the tale.

As for Osmund, the Alexander medallion is only a highlight in a very distinguished career. Reportedly, the only Sri Lankan numismatist to have a PhD in the subject, Osmund graduated with a B.A from the University of Kelaniya and has spent the last three decades in France where he is the Director of Research at the French National Centre for Scientific Research. Specializing in the coinage of the Indo-Greek and Greco-Bactrian kingdoms, he has catalogued numerous collections of coins, including one for the Smithsonian. A professor of Central Asian and South Asian archaeology and art history at the University Paris-Sorbonne, he is currently a visiting Professor at the University of Berkeley in California. He is also the author of nine books, the most recent being 'The Pleasure Gardens of Sigiriya. A New Approach.' Among others, he has been honoured with the Gustave Mendel Award, The Lhotka Memorial Prize and the Order of Constantine the Great.

In Sri Lanka, he is currently engaged in a search for the traces of an ancient sea port and settlement in Kuchchiveli in the Trincomalee district, but says that while he intends to juggle many projects, the coins from Mir Zakah continue to fascinate him. "From 1983 (when he was writing his PhD dissertation) until today, coins from both Mir Zakah deposits have been part and parcel of my life," says Osmund. There is much left to be done: the dig is incomplete and what has been already excavated is very poorly documented.

"As long as all the artefacts and coins dispersed in private collections are not made known to the world and the three tons of coins still lying in the Free Trade Zone of Basel are not exposed and studied, the story of Mir Zakah will remain untold," he says.



An artist's rendering of the obverse and reverse of the medallion

WHO SAYS MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES?

by Emma Reynolds from the Daily Mail and Internet, September 13, 2011

Coins mysteriously appear in trunks up and down the country

They say money doesn't grow on trees. But it certainly appears to do so on the mysterious coin-studded trunks dotted around the United Kingdom's woodland.

The strange phenomenon of gnarled old trees with coins embedded all over their bark has been spotted on trails from the Peak District to the Scottish Highlands. The coins are usually knocked into felled tree trunks using stones by passers-by, who hope it will bring them good fortune.

These fascinating spectacles often have coins from centuries ago buried deep in their bark and warped by the passage of time. The tradition of making offerings to deities at wishing trees dates back hundreds of years, but this combination of the man-made and the natural is far more rare.

It used to be believed that divine spirits



A money tree with copper and silver coins hammered into the wood near Ingleton, North Yorkshire

lived in trees, and they were often festooned with sweets and gifts—as is still done today at Christmas.

The act is reminiscent of tossing money into a fountain for good luck, or the trend for couples to attach 'love padlocks' to bridges and fences to symbolise lasting romance.

Some pubs, such as the Punch Bowl in Askham, Cumbria, have old beams with splits in them into which coins are forced for luck.

There are seven felled tree trunks with coins pushed into them in the picturesque village of Portmeirion, in Wales.

Meurig Jones, an estate manager at the tourist destination, told the BBC: "We had no idea why it was being done when we first noticed the tree trunk was being filled with coins. I did some detective work and discovered that trees were sometimes used as 'wishing trees'. In



Coins are hammered into trunks with rocks in the Lake District

Britain it dates back to the 1700s—there is one tree in Scotland somewhere which apparently has a florin stuck into it."

He said that a sick person could press a coin into a tree and their illness would go away. "If someone then takes the coin out though, it's said they then become ill.

We haven't publicised it at all, it's just happened," he added. "It's quite amazing really."

In Scotland, there is also a legend about a kissing tree. If a young man could drive a nail into a tree with one blow, he earned a kiss from his sweetheart.

Yoko Ono has used wishing trees in her artwork, and in 1877 Queen Victoria wrote about visiting an oak tree with coins stuck in it in the Highlands.



Woodland wonder: Trees are traditional sources of good luck as deities were thought to reside in them



A lucky money tree in Tarn Hows, Cumbria