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# Walter Roth and the Missing Manuscript

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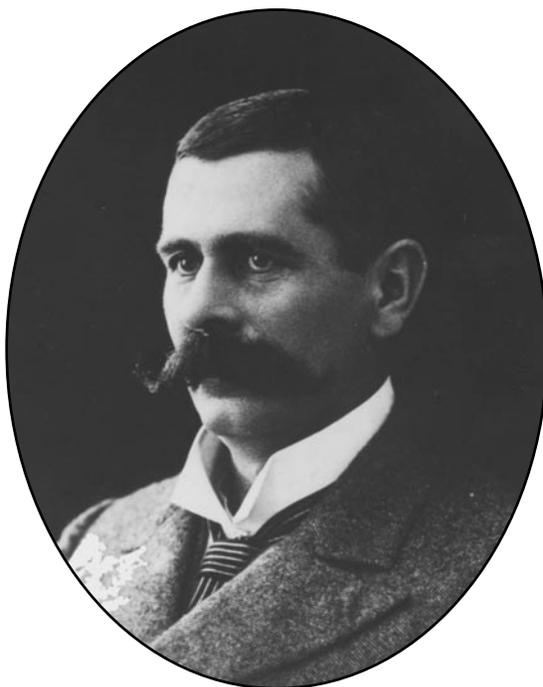


Figure 1. Walter Edmund Roth (1861-1933) as a young man. (Courtesy, the late Jane Roth)

Late in 1887, a young medical student from London began searching jewellers' shops in Sydney looking for copper tokens. Although tokens were no longer in circulation, jewellers had retained stocks of them because of the purity of their copper, which made them especially valuable for alloying purposes. It was mainly from these sources that the student, Walter Edmund Roth, was able to build up his collection.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Roth (Figure 1) had arrived in Sydney from England in 1887, and joined his brother, Dr. Reuter Roth, who was in medical practice there. In 1889, Walter Roth was appointed science master at Brisbane Grammar School, but soon moved to Adelaide to become foundation director of the South Australian School of Mines and Industries. This travelling enabled him to visit jewellers in Brisbane and Adelaide as well as other cities and so

The book was never published and indeed, some of the chapters remain as incomplete drafts. Fortunately, the manuscript of these chapters is now in the Mitchell Library under the title 'Colonial Currency'.<sup>6</sup> Hull later organised the typing of both the catalogue and the colonial currency chapters. Copies of this typescript are in the Dixson Library as well as in the Powerhouse Museum.<sup>7</sup> In addition, both the Dixson and Mitchell libraries hold various letters, papers and research notes from both Roth and Hull. These include re-drafts prepared mainly by Hull, of the beginnings of some of the chapters of the colonial currency text.

An interesting twist is that in 1899 Hull arranged for three copies of the title page of the proposed work to be printed at the Australian Museum, the cost of printing being met jointly by the two authors. These copies were presumably intended for proofing. Two are now in the Powerhouse Museum, together with the typed copy of the planned book (Figure 6). The third was taken by Roth to Guyana (then British Guiana) in South America, when he moved there to a new post in 1907. This title page together with a typescript copy of the catalogue is now in the University of Guyana Library in Georgetown.<sup>8</sup>

Roth also published articles on numismatics and in 1895 wrote a series of eleven chapters titled, 'A Numismatic History of Australia', for *The Queenslander*.<sup>9</sup> These illustrated chapters covered tokens, coins and medals and were designed for popular consumption (Figure 7).

### Andrews' handbook

In the preface of Arthur Andrews' handbook, 'Australasian Tokens and Coins', the librarian of the Mitchell Library acknowledges the author's debt to Roth and Hull when he states:

*Mr. Hull and Dr. Roth were able to procure first-hand information from individuals who had been actually employed in the production of Australasian tokens...*

Andrews himself acknowledges his debt to Roth as the gatherer of information on the Kangaroo Office pattern pieces.<sup>10</sup> He draws heavily on the research of Roth and Hull and quotes extensively from their manuscript chapters. For example, his account of Peek engaging Thornthwaite to produce the first Australian tokens is a thirty-three line quotation direct from the manuscript. In his discussion of the history of the Kangaroo Office, Andrews relies on a forty-line quotation from the manuscript. At various other points in his book, Andrews quotes word for word from the manuscript, though without acknowledgment; such 'borrowing' would have been common practice at the time.

### Why was Roth important?

There were various collectors active late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a number of them wrote catalogues and gave papers on their subject. So why was Walter Roth important? Why did he become interested in numismatics in the first place?

This second question is easy to answer when one looks at Roth's family and his later life. He came from a family

In 1893 Mr Walter Hull sold the collection of Colonial coins & tokens belonging to Dr Roth for £125 to Mr Mitchell among its contents were the Port Phillip Gold 10z  $\frac{1}{2}$ oz &  $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. Dr Roth gave Mr Hull permission to make casts of these & he accordingly got 20 of each made by Mr Clarke a jeweller working in Rowe St. who charged 7 each for the same. They were retailed by Mr Hull @ 7/6 ea.

Regarding the countermarked Spanish Dollars Mr Hull informs me that he had 8 or 9 & that they bore the Head of King George III surcharged in a reverse way to those of Carlos or Ferdinand.

attributed to  
[Morris Marks]

Figure 2. The Sale of Roth's Collection. This unsigned, undated note appears to be the only record of the sale of Walter Roth's numismatic collection to David Scott Mitchell. The note was found in a Mitchell Library copy of Stainsfield's *Descriptive Catalogue of Australian Tokens* (1883) and ascribed by Tom Hanley to Morris Marks, the early Sydney collector.

(Dixson Library, Mitchell Library, DL.88/623)

predisposed to collecting and indeed, to numismatics. His mother had two fine philatelic collections, one of which she was later to give to Walter's son, Vincent.<sup>11</sup> One of his brothers, Henry Ling Roth, was appointed Keeper of the Bankfield Museum in Halifax, England and later wrote a book on Yorkshire coiners.<sup>12</sup> The oldest brother, Bernard, became interested in early British

coins, publishing various papers on early English coins. He was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Vice-President of the British Numismatic Society, and built a very large collection that, after his death in 1915, took three days to auction.<sup>13</sup> Walter Roth's unexpected discovery of the stocks of tokens held by Sydney jewellers would have served as a trigger, inducing

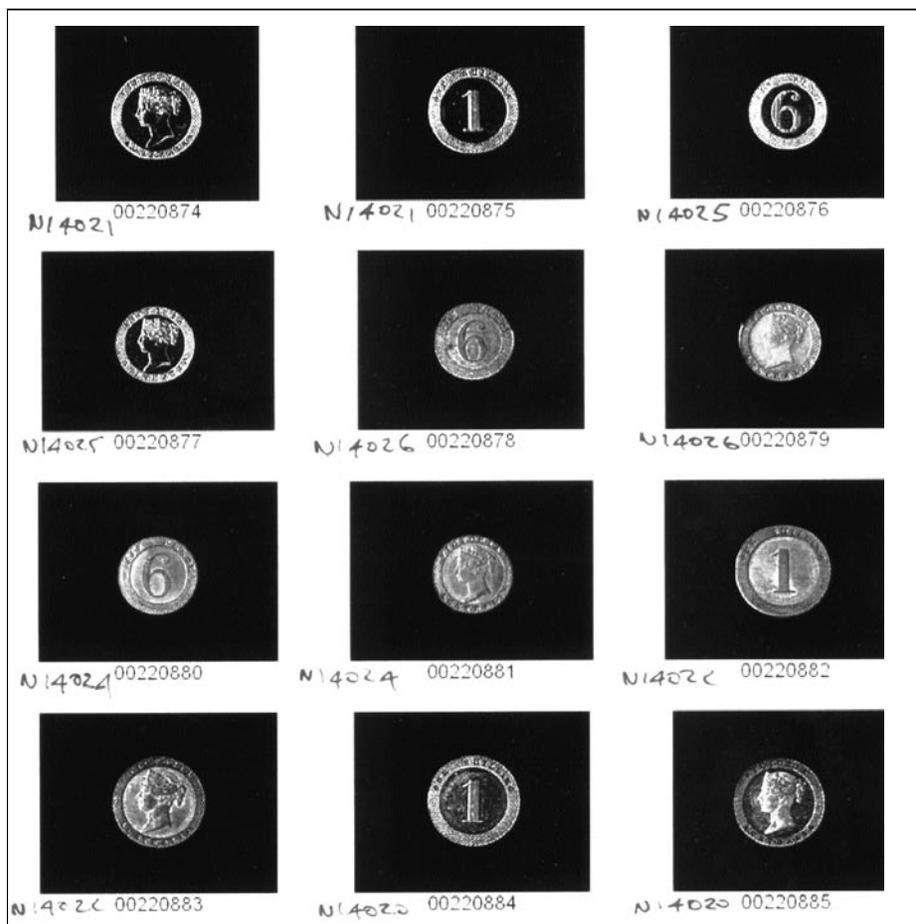


Figure 3. Pattern Coins. Roth's collection today forms part of the Numismatic Collections of the Powerhouse Museum. Because of its successive shifts, from Roth to Mitchell, to the Mitchell Library, to the Australian Museum and finally to the Powerhouse Museum, it is now difficult to identify individual pieces from the original Roth collection. The above, distinctive pattern shillings and sixpences are probably from that collection. (Numismatic Collections, Powerhouse Museum, NI 4020-22; 4024-26)

him to begin his collection of them.

Walter's importance to Australian numismatics took two forms. His collection provided the nucleus around which the Mitchell Library was subsequently able to build its own substantial numismatic collection. It is reasonable to surmise that

without Roth's collection, David Scott Mitchell would not have had a numismatic collection of note to transfer to the library and that the library might never have become active in this field at all. Without access to the significant numismatic collection in the Mitchell Library, it is

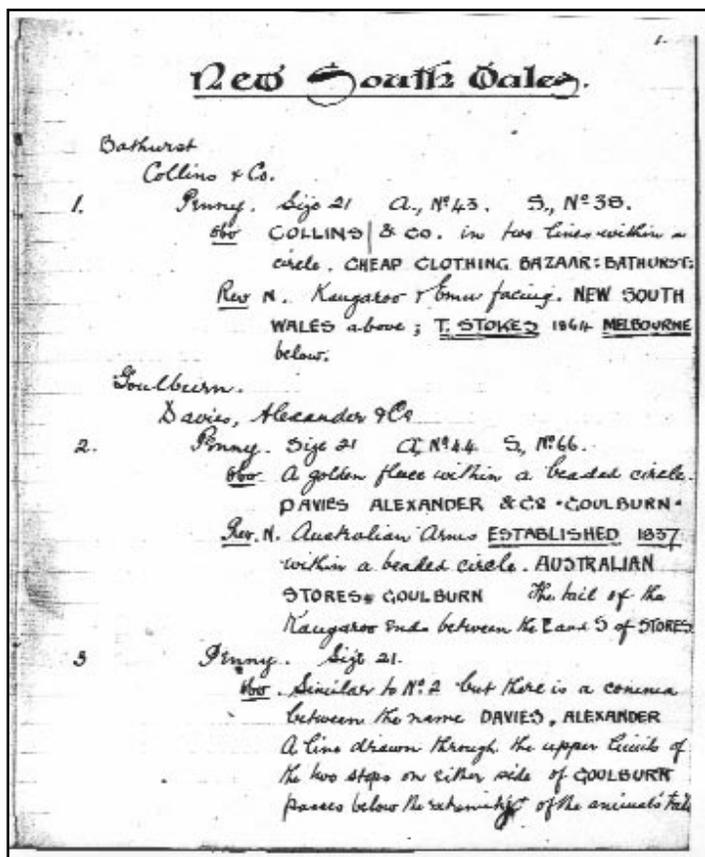


Figure 4. The Missing Manuscript. Page 1 of the second manuscript version of Roth's 'Catalogue of Australian Tokens'. Somewhere, perhaps in a private collection, is the original manuscript that Roth loaned around 1892 to the writer, William Astley, also known as Price Warung.

(Mitchell Library,

ML.B226)

most doubtful that Arthur Andrews would ever have published his comprehensive handbook of Australasian tokens and coins. It is also highly unlikely that the State Library would have been interested in supporting the publication.

Just as important was the contribution that Roth made through his writings. The heavy reliance Andrews placed on the work of Roth, and to a lesser extent Hull, makes clear that his handbook would

have been far poorer without these mainly unpublished sources and especially the direct observations they recorded. Later writers such as Myatt & Hanley<sup>14</sup> have drawn very much on Andrews and on these sources and would have been similarly handicapped. On a different level, Walter's series of articles in *The Queenslander* was intended for popular consumption and no doubt helped people to understand better the history of coins, medals and tokens in

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The "Kangaroo Office" Gold & Copper Coins  
Port Phillip 1853.

About the end of the Year 1852 or beginning of '53 news reached England that owing to the scarcity of gold coin & the large quantity of the precious metal already discovered, Ballarat gold dust was selling on the fields for £2-15-0 an oz. The idea of the promoters of this office was to start a large store in Melbourne, buy up the dust at the above price, & with it strike their own gold in pieces of 2, 1, 1/2, & 1/4 oz which in the course of their business they proposed tendering current respectively at 8, 4, 2 and 1. With this object in view Messrs, Hodgkin, Taylor & Syrdall chartered a full-rigged ship, the "Kangaroo" two Tons, which, with a cargo of Colonial stores, arrived at Hobson's Bay on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct. 1853. As managers of the store they sent out Messrs, Rignold Sciffe, & Morgan Brown; with them they brought the necessary dies, which had been cut by W. J. Taylor, the machinery & stamping press. This last however proved

Figure 5. 'Colonial Currency' extract. The first page of the 'Kangaroo Office' chapter from the unpublished manuscript 'Colonial Currency', also known as 'Early Australian Coinage...', quoted (with slight amendments) by Arthur Andrews in 1921, in his discussion of coins apparently from the Kangaroo Office.

(Mitchell Library, ML.B444)

add to his collection. In 1890, he returned to Sydney for family reasons and was appointed science master at Sydney Grammar School.

Late in 1890 Roth returned to London to complete his medical training at St. Thomas's Hospital, returning to Sydney by mid 1892. For the rest of the year he acted as locum for his brother who was going overseas. Roth then became a junior partner in a medical practice in the town of Young in New South Wales, where he stayed for most of 1893.

Throughout this period, Roth maintained his interest in Australasian numismatics and amassed a substantial collection of tokens, coins and medals. While a teacher at Sydney Grammar School in 1890 he gave a talk to the Science Club on the subject of Australian coins, illustrating this with specimens presumably from his own collection. He was a good speaker and no doubt would have been able to impart some of his enthusiasm for numismatics to his listeners. It would be interesting to learn whether this influenced any of them subsequently to become collectors themselves.

### **The Mitchell Library**

By 1893, Walter Roth's collection appears to have consisted of over 550 tokens together with 35 to 40 gold, bronze, copper and silver coins and an unknown quantity of medals. The tokens represented some 160 issuing firms from all States of Australia and also New Zealand. The coins included holey dollars and dumps, rare

pieces from Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, as well as Spanish dollars and Indian rupees and pagodas.

In 1893 Roth sold his collection for £125 to David Scott Mitchell through an intermediary, Walter Hull (Figure 2). Mitchell's Australiana collections of paintings, books, coins and tokens were later to form the basis of the Mitchell Library, named in his honour.

In an address to the Australian Numismatic Society in 1915, Hugh Wright, then librarian of the Mitchell Library, spoke on the Mitchell collection of coins and medals, 'the nucleus of which was the Roth Collection purchased en bloc by the founder of the Library'.<sup>2</sup> This statement, that the Roth collection formed the nucleus of the numismatic collection in the Mitchell Library, is supported by a comparison of two sources, the manuscript lists of Roth's coin and token collection (prepared 1892 or 1893) with the handbook by Arthur Andrews of the Mitchell Library collection. This comparison shows that Roth's collection of tokens, coins and medals was more than a nucleus; it must have formed the bulk of Mitchell's numismatic collection.<sup>3</sup>

During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mitchell Library was to add substantially to its numismatic holdings before transferring them to the Australian Museum in 1935 and 1937. In its turn, the Australian Museum transferred all its numismatic material in 1961 to what is now the Powerhouse Museum, where today it forms part of the Museum's considerable numismatic collection.

Neither David Scott Mitchell nor the

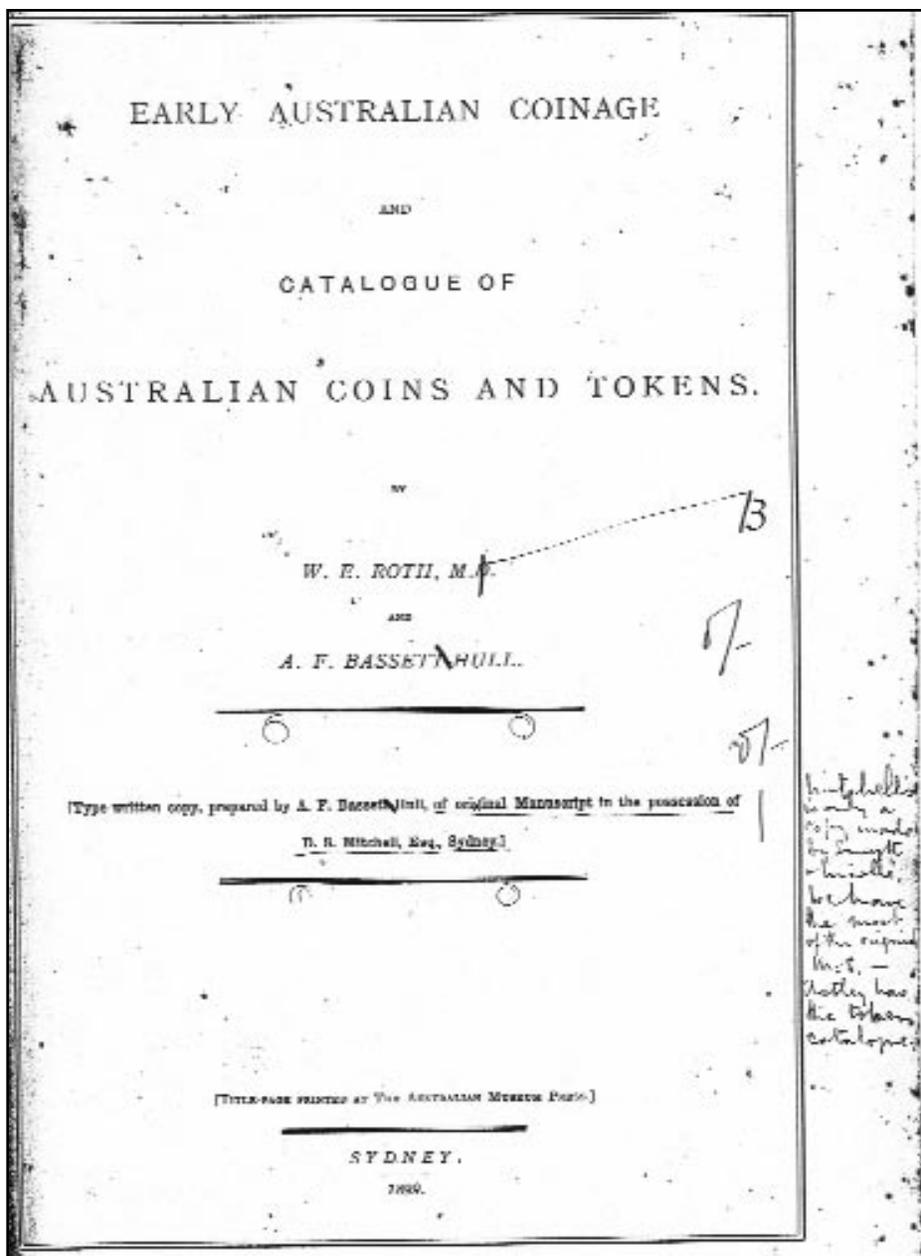


Figure 6. Title Page of 'Early Australian Coinage'. This title page for the proposed book on 'Early Australian Coinage' by Roth and Hull was printed by the Australian Museum in 1899. Hull made the correction marks and also the marginal note which reads: 'Mitchell's is only a copy made by Smyth & Nicolle. We have the most of the original M.S.— Astley has the token catalogue.' This is one of two copies held by the Powerhouse Museum; the third is in the University of Guyana Library, Georgetown. (Powerhouse Museum)

Mitchell Library kept detailed records of their numismatic collections and it is now almost impossible to identify items that formed part of the original Roth collection. Fortunately, some of the pieces were distinctive and Paul Donnelly, curator of the numismatic collection in the Powerhouse Museum, has been able to locate Kangaroo Office pattern shillings and sixpences that match the descriptions of those once in the Roth collection (Figure 3).

It seems that after the sale of his numismatic collection to Mitchell, Roth did not rebuild his collection and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had turned his interest away from numismatics to other fields.

### **Roth as a writer**

Walter Roth was also a prolific writer. By the time he had arrived in Sydney in 1887, he had already published one book, *The Elements of School Hygiene* and was completing a second, *Theatre Hygiene*. This led to his appointment as Honorary Surgeon to the Imperial Opera House and Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney. In later life Roth was to establish a strong international reputation for his numerous publications on the anthropology of Australian Aborigines and South American Indians.

It is not surprising that Roth also wrote on numismatics. In 1892, or perhaps 1893, he prepared a detailed 'Catalogue of Australian [actually Australasian] Tokens' (Figure 4). This was based on his own collection, but

also included significant items from other collections and sources. Roth followed the practice of the time in listing items by State, town and issuer. Measurements were in the Mionnet scale. In addition, each entry indicated the appropriate reference in Stainsfield and Atkins.<sup>4</sup>

Roth's numismatic catalogue suffered an odd fate. He lent the original manuscript to his writer friend, William Astley, and it was never returned. In 1883, Astley fell into financial difficulties and had to dispose of his large collection of books and other items on the history of Australia. No doubt, the catalogue manuscript was sold off as well, for Roth had to rewrite it. This copy is now in the manuscript collections of the Mitchell Library. Whether it is identical to the original, we do not know. The matter of the missing original manuscript is one to which I return later in this article.

In 1893, Roth and Arthur Basset Hull,<sup>5</sup> a philatelist and amateur ornithologist colleague, decided to combine to write a book titled 'Early Australian Coinage and Catalogue of Australian Coins and Tokens' (Figure 5). They prepared a number of chapters and appended a 'Catalogue of Tokens.' From the text, it is possible to determine which chapters were written by Roth, which by Hull and which were joint efforts. For example, it is clear that Roth wrote the chapter on tokens, while the chapter on the Tasmanian shilling was by Hull. Roth obviously also wrote the chapter on the Kangaroo Office, as it had been he, during his stay in London in 1891 and 1892, who had made a particular point of meeting people able to provide him with information on this subject.

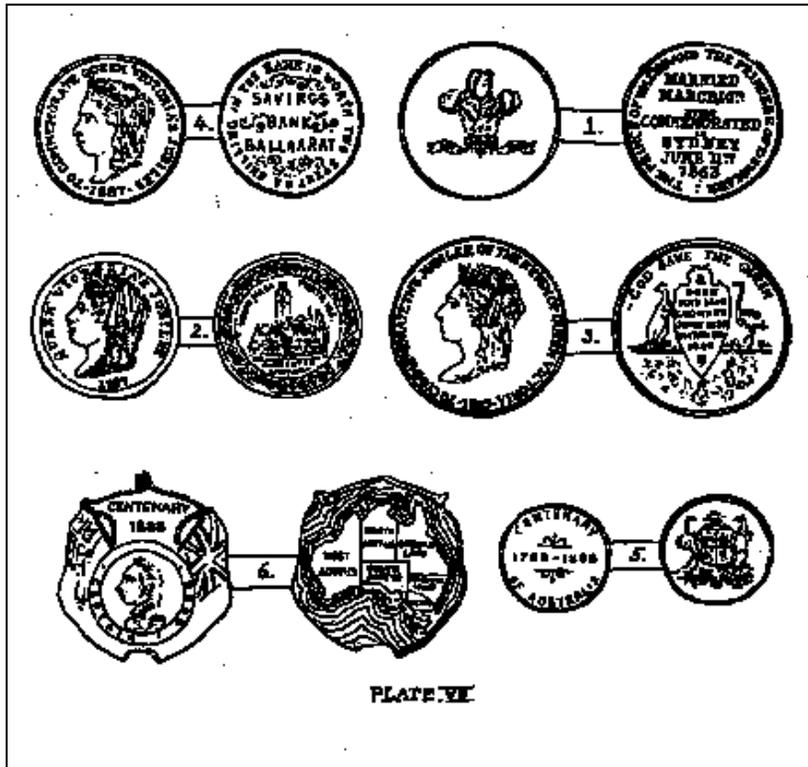


Figure 7. Plate from 'A Numismatic History of Australia'. This figure was copied from what appears to be the original photograph on which the plate was based. The plate accompanies chapter VII of Roth's 'A Numismatic History of Australia', published in *The Queenslander* in 1895, and depicts (1) Sydney commemorative medal of the Prince of Wales' marriage in 1863; (2, 3, 4) three 1887 Queen Victoria's golden jubilee medals; (5, 6) two 1888 Centenary of Australia commemorative medals.  
 (Dixon Library, Mitchell Library, DL.ADD.52)

Australia.

We are fortunate that the distinctive pattern pieces from the Roth Collection have now been located. It is unlikely however, that we shall ever be able to identify exactly which other pieces in the Powerhouse Museum originally came from this collection, though a careful analysis of the tokens, coins and medals in the museum might provide some unexpected results. It would be interesting also to learn whether any reader has one of the casts of

the Port Phillip gold coins made for Walter Hull (see Figure 2).

### The missing manuscript

One question does remain to be answered. What happened to the original manuscript of the 'Catalogue of Australian Tokens' that Walter lent to William Astley? (Figure 4)

It is possible that the original manuscript was destroyed. However, I believe that

it may still exist and it is my hope that it may yet come to light. The manuscript could well be tucked away in a collection or archive somewhere in Australia and the owner be unaware of its nature or historical significance. The manuscript is probably a hardback, lined, exercise book though it might also be in the form of loose pages. It may well have been untitled and bear no indication of the author's name. Figure 4 reproduces the first page of the New South Wales section of the catalogue; this might help to identify the missing text.

A comparison of the original with the later copy could possibly answer a few questions. How closely does the copy resemble the original draft and were any amendments made to the listing or to the comments? A comparison might also tell us the year in which each was prepared.

## Notes

1. See the entry for Walter Roth in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 11, pp.463-4, for an outline of his life and career. For information on others mentioned in the course of this article (Reuter Roth, William Astley, Arthur Basset Hull) the Dictionary is again a useful source.
2. Dixson Library DL.Q91/337, Report of the August meeting of the Australian Numismatic Society; manuscript, pp.4.
3. Andrews, Arthur. *Australasian Tokens and Coins: A Handbook*. Trustees of the Mitchell Library, Sydney, 1921. The manuscript lists are held by the Mitchell & Dixson Libraries at ML.Ac.165/1 and DL.ADD.52 respectively.
4. Stainsfield, CW. *Descriptive Catalogue of Australian Tradesmen's Tokens*, the author, London, 1883. Atkins, James. *Coins and Tokens of the Possessions and Colonies of the British Empire*, B Quaritch, London, 1889.
5. Hull, AF Basset. 'Australian Currencies', (abstract), *Report of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*. 1892. pp.591-9.
6. Mitchell Library ML.B226 'Catalogue of Australian Tokens'; manuscript pp.123. ML.B444 'Colonial Currency'; manuscript pp.169.
7. Dixson Library DL.ADD.39B. A typed draft of a book on Australian coinage, followed by 'A Catalogue of Australian tokens' by W.E.Roth; spring folder. Powerhouse Museum copy: 'Early Australian Coinage and Catalogue of Australian Coins and Tokens' by WE Roth, MD and AF Basset [sic] Hull. The faulty spelling of Basset was a common error. There are some differences between the two copies and between these and the manuscript text of the 'Catalogue of Australian Tokens'.
8. The title page bears a note in Roth's handwriting: 'This is one of only 3 copies published. W. E. Roth'.
9. 'A Numismatic History of Australia', *The Queenslander*. Brisbane, 1895 (in 11 chapters). Roth also published a series of articles on his trip to China and Japan in *The Queenslander* in 1894, entitled 'The Land of Chrysanthemums'. This eight-part series contains some discussion of the currencies of these two countries.
10. Andrews, pp.127, 10-11 & 124-5 respectively.
11. Bennett, Michael (ed). *A Life in Guyana* by Vincent Roth, Peepal Tree Press, Leeds, 2003, Vol. I, p.17.
12. Roth, Henry Ling. *The Yorkshire Coiners 1767-1783*, F King & Sons, Halifax, 1906.
13. *Catalogue of the...collection of...coins...the property of Bernard Roth...which will be sold by auction...Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 1918*. London (3 volumes).
14. Hanley, Tom & Bill James. *Collecting Australian Coins*, KG Murray, Sydney, (c.1966). Myatt, Bill & Tom Hanley. *Australian Coins, Notes & Medals*. Castle Books, Melbourne, 1982.

## Acknowledgements

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(If any reader knows where the original catalogue might be, I should welcome a call. Similarly, if any reader holds correspondence or material relating to

Contact Professor Barrie Reynolds, 40 Hume Avenue, Wentworth Falls, NSW 2782; telephone 02 4757 4725; email; [barrie.r@bigpond.net.au](mailto:barrie.r@bigpond.net.au) ).

*Barrie Reynolds is an anthropologist and museum specialist who has worked in Africa, Canada and Australia, and is preparing a major biography of Walter Roth. His numismatic interests are primarily in ethnographic currency. Barrie was Foundation Professor of Material Culture at James Cook University, North Queensland until his retirement in 1997, and is currently Adjunct Professor of Museums & Collections to Macquarie University. In 2003, he completed a Report on 'The Numismatic Collections and Papers of Dr. Walter E. Roth', 1903, Mitchell Library reference MLMSS 7378.*

Walter Roth, I do hope that you will get in touch with me. Sources such as these would be invaluable in shedding further light on this interesting character in our history and would tell us more about his numismatic work.