

RUPERT JACKSON AND THE MOUNTAIN HOME *KENCE*

A great deal has been written about the tokens, or *Kence* as they were known, used by the trading firm of Strachan & Co. at their stores in East Griqualand. Strachan & Co. issued tokens in the denominations 3d, 6d, 1/- and 2/-. C.S. Balson and C. Graham in their work *Kence: The Trade Tokens of Strachan and Company* identified four types of tokens issued by the firm:¹

Type A:

Type A was made of brass with a raised rim and was pierced at the top. The words S & CO were printed on the token with the value, 3d, 6d, 1/- and 2/- below.

Type B:

Type B was similar to type A except that it had the letters MH printed between the words S & CO and the value.

Type C:

Type C was similar to A but had the words IN GOODS printed at the bottom of the coin.

Type D:

Type D was similar to C but the lettering and spacing were slightly different.

This short work is concerned specifically with the Type B tokens which were used at the Mountain Home shop. These tokens differed from Type A by the addition of the letters MH between S & CO and the value. The letters MH were added to the tokens on the insistence of Rupert Jackson, Donald Strachan's favourite nephew and co-owner of the store.² By looking briefly at Jackson's career as a trader and farmer we are able to draw some speculative conclusions about when the Mountain Home, as well as the Type C and D tokens, were issued.³

Rupert Ernest Jackson, son of William Jackson and Martha Hulley, was born on 1 March 1870 in Queenstown. His father, William, came to South Africa at the age of 4 with his parents, Samuel and Dorothy Jackson, on the ship *Albury* in Calton's part of 1820 settlers. William Jackson married Elizabeth Barnes who died in childbirth in 1864. Three years later he married Martha Hulley on 5 June 1867. William and Martha had three children:

Richard Percy Jackson (b. 28 May 1868)

Rupert Ernest Jackson (b. 1 March 1870)

Edith Emma Jackson (b. 5 April 1872)

William Jackson died on 23 October 1871. (His daughter Edith was born seven months after he died). In 1876, at the age of six, Rupert came to East Griqualand with his mother and siblings to live with his maternal grandfather Richard Hulley on the farm *Hopewell*. In the mid-1880s, when Rupert was in his early teens, he moved with his mother to Strachan & Co.'s Ibis store which they managed. His mother was a sister to Donald Strachan's wife Jane. In the late 1880s he moved to Swartberg to assist his uncle Isaac Edgar Hulley who was in ill health run his farm *Vaalfontein*. After his uncle's death in 1892 he leased the farm *Woodsville* near Swartberg. In 1904 he moved back to Umzimkulu and managed and co-owned the trading store on Donald Strachan's farm *Mountain Home*.

In 1874 Bishop Henry Callaway bought the farm *Riverbank* from the Griqua government. Callaway sold this farm to Donald Strachan in order to raise funds for the Clydesdale Mission Station. Strachan later swapped this farm for *Mountain Home* and *Riverbank* became part of the Mfulamuhle location. It seems that the store was only built in 1904 when Rupert went into partnership with Donald Strachan. From 1904 to 1907 Strachan & Co. went through a period of rapid expansion and bought or opened 6 new stores in a three year period – Mountain Home, Singisi, Gugwini, Mahobe, Cabane and Waterfall. The company was able to expand because of the cattle diseases which spread through the country at the time. The Rinderpest in the 1890s and the East Coast fever, a tick-borne cattle disease which was rampant for a decade reached East Griqualand in 1906, were the most destructive. The Rinderpest and East Coast Fever greatly weakened the economic independence of African people and allowed traders to expand their businesses. Traders also made good profits buying the hides of cattle which died from the Rinderpest and East Coast Fever and this gave them the capital to expand their existing stores as well as buy additional shops.

Rupert managed the store until 1927 when he bought the farm *Mooifontein* at Swartberg from Strachan & Co.⁴ He was a successful farmer and built up one of the best herds of shorthorns in the district. Rupert died on his farm *Mooifontein* on 13 December 1942.⁵ He was a bachelor and the bulk of his estate was left to his two nephews and a niece.

We can draw two conclusions about Strachan & Co.'s tokens from what we know about Rupert Jackson and his time at Mountain Home. Firstly, the Mountain Home tokens must have been struck sometime between 1904 and 1927. It would make sense that the tokens were struck shortly after the store was established, and factoring in the time for the tokens to be ordered and sent out by sea from England we can speculatively date them to about 1907. On 27 July 1907 an employee of Strachan and Co., E.E. Rieher, wrote the following brief note to F.L. Thring, a lawyer in Ixopo dealing with overdue accounts:

*Should any of the men whose accounts you are dealing with tender any of our tokens in payment will you please accept them at the face value i.e. 3d, 6d, 1/-, and 2/-, as the case may be. All are brass and stamped S & Co above the market value as these tokens are to be accepted only in payment of our accounts.*⁶

Balson and Graham point out that the letter makes no reference to the inscription "In Goods". This is either because he was referring to the Type A tokens or it was unnecessary as Rieher was emphasizing the identification marks.⁷ Now that we know Rupert Jackson only moved to Mountain Home in 1904, we can conclude that the tokens described in the letter were the Type A trade tokens. Secondly, we can conclude the Type C and Type D tokens date from post 1907. The company bought a number of stores during the First World War and then again in the late 1920s as the depression hit and other traders were forced to sell their shops. These periods of growth could be clues to when the Type C and Type D tokens were ordered. Balson and Graham point out that most of the Type D tokens they handled 'were in uncirculated condition'.⁸ This indicates that the tokens were probably only struck in the late 1920s, a few years before the use of tokens was stopped in 1932.

We will probably never know exactly when the Strachan & Co. tokens were struck, however, we can conclude with a certain confidence that Type B were in use soon after 1904, Type C just before the 1920s and the Type D later in the decade.

Notes

¹ C.S. Balson & C. Graham, *Kence: The Trade Tokens of Strachan and Company* (1978), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ The details of Jackson's career come from his obituary in the Kokstad Advertiser and his estate papers which are in the Cape Archives but were provided by Mr John Powell of the United Kingdom.

⁴ The exact time Jackson was at Mountain Home has been worked out from the Natal Almanac and Directory in the Pietermaritzburg Archives.

⁵ The author's grandfather, Milner Pedlar, was a witness to Rupert Jackson's will, which was drawn up on 6 September 1940.

⁶ Quoted in Balson & Graham, *Kence*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.