

## OBITUARY

### LAURENCE BROWN, LVO (1931–2012)

LAURENCE BROWN, author of *British Historical Medals 1760–1960*, sadly died on 18 June, aged 80. Laurence was born on 26 August 1931 and joined B.A. Seaby Ltd in 1947 at sixteen, shortly leaving to do his National Service, and then returning to work with that respected firm under the guidance of Bert Seaby and Emily Cahn. Mrs Cahn had a vast knowledge of European coins, having come from the firm of German auctioneers of the same name who were eminent in the pre-war years. On her death in 1968 Laurence took over the foreign coin department, later becoming Assistant Managing Director and, on the retirement of Peter Seaby, Managing Director. He subsequently worked for the coin department of Christie's, and when Christie's took over Spink, Laurence became consultant and cataloguer for Spink, working into his late 70s. He then contented himself with writing the occasional article. Most of his articles related to medals, but they included a very useful index to *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum*, the twenty-volume corpus of Italian coins. His last article appeared in the *Circular* only two months before his death. Laurence joined the BNS in 1946 and was a founder member of the London Numismatic Club in the following year.

Laurence will be particularly remembered for his corpus of British commemorative medals *British Historical Medals 1760–1960*, the sequel to *Medallic Illustrations*, which was published in three volumes between 1980 and 1995 and will surely remain the standard work on the series. Faced with a lack of reference works on the subject he decided to create a card index of all the medals he saw, initially only for his own use. The project grew, a book was suggested to him and he subsequently catalogued all of the British commemorative medals he could trace in major private and museum collections, in England and on the continent, over a period of many years. Prize medals were excluded, as Laurence felt that the work would never be finished or possibly approach completeness if they were included. It is meticulously written and remarkably complete, especially for a first edition. Normally in such works one can only aspire to some degree of 'completeness' when, as a consequence of publication, collectors and museums contact the author with unrecorded items, and then a second, enlarged edition is produced. However, the phrase 'not in *BHM*' is very seldom seen, and only then usually by cataloguers who have not appreciated the parameters by which he defined what should or should not be included. Laurence did not need a second edition. No supplement was ever planned; there was nowhere near enough material.

It was while doing research for his book at Windsor Castle that he noticed that the Royal Collection was not then organized. He offered to take it on, working voluntarily at Windsor one day a month from 1973 to 2009, refusing expenses, meticulously recording everything in the Collection, but at the same time trying to keep up with the increasing flow of new items from the Royal Mint. As it became known that there was a numismatist on the staff more and more items were brought to him, or reported in display cabinets around the various Royal residences, and it was only as he retired that it was finally concluded that the project was up-to-date and complete as of that moment.

On his arrival at the Royal Library he suggested to the Librarian that some suitable cabinets be installed, and Laurence contacted Tim Swann who came out of retirement especially to design, construct and install some built-in cabinets in 1975. Laurence asked the British Museum to test alternative felts for suitability, and the Queen herself became involved when it was realised that the best rosewood was now on the protected list and not normally available. In a chance conversation with the Queen about the problem of obtaining the right wood a visiting dignitary volunteered that when in India he had been presented with a whole log of the precious wood, where it remained as he was unable export it, and he would be happy to

present it to her. It was arranged that as it was for Her Majesty, and for that specific purpose, the log could be exported. It had to be in Her name, but for expediency it was delivered direct to Tim Swann's workshop. The log was consequently labelled 'Her Majesty the Queen of England 3 Hexham Road Hedden on the Wall ...' (*sic*). The Queen on this occasion was indeed amused.

Laurence had been ably assisted by his wife Ann, who input his handwritten cataloguing onto index cards and then later into the somewhat complex Windsor Castle computer system. When his family moved north and a grandchild arrived he moved home to be near them, and found the long journey taxing and asked for some assistance. After explaining to me the Royal Collection set up, his approach to cataloguing, and the computer system, we had just reached the point of working at the Castle in alternate months as originally planned when he suffered a serious heart attack and it became clear that he would not be continuing. He was granted the Royal Warrant as Numismatic Adviser to the Queen in the 1970s, and was awarded the LVO for this work in 1996, an award of which he was very proud. After two years of failing health he finally passed away on his fifty-second wedding anniversary.

This private work was typical of the modest gentleman we knew, who declined to have his own name quoted as a title for the reference to his book, but who will be known by future generations simply as the author of *BHM*. He is survived by his wife Ann, two daughters, Adrienne and Penny, and a grandson. Only last year he attended a reunion of ex Seaby staff, a very happy event attended by many people, including several from the Continent. Laurence was a link to the past and will be sadly missed.

JEREMY CHEEK