

THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



Newsletter

January 2006

**From the President
Dr Mark Blackburn**

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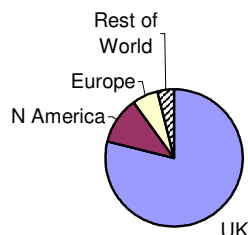
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Dear Member,

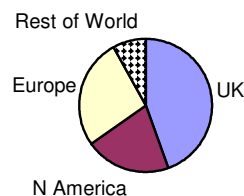
It is the time of year for me to write to let you know what has been going on in the Society. It is an opportunity that I am pleased to have to speak directly to those many members who are unable to get to our monthly meetings in London or our Summer Meeting in the provinces. Recently, we extended the circulation of the *Newsletter* to include our members abroad and our institutional members as it is important for us to keep them informed about the Society and its activities.

Overseas members account for about 20% of individual members and 55% of institutions, and we particularly value their support. Over the New Year break I amused myself doing some calculations based on our membership lists. As you can see from the pie-charts below, among individuals North America is the largest overseas group (11%), with Europe accounting for just 6% and the rest of the world 4%. Among institutions – mainly libraries and museums – Europe fares better representing 27%, with North America an impressive 21% and the rest of the world 8%. It is encouraging to think that the *BNJ* goes to libraries in at least 20 countries worldwide, and that it reaches individual members in a further nine countries. On the other hand, there are a significant number of countries in which there is no copy of the *Journal* available for consultation. In the whole of Africa there is only one member, in South America one and in Asia five, but not a single library subscribes for the *Journal* in any of those continents.

Individuals (504)



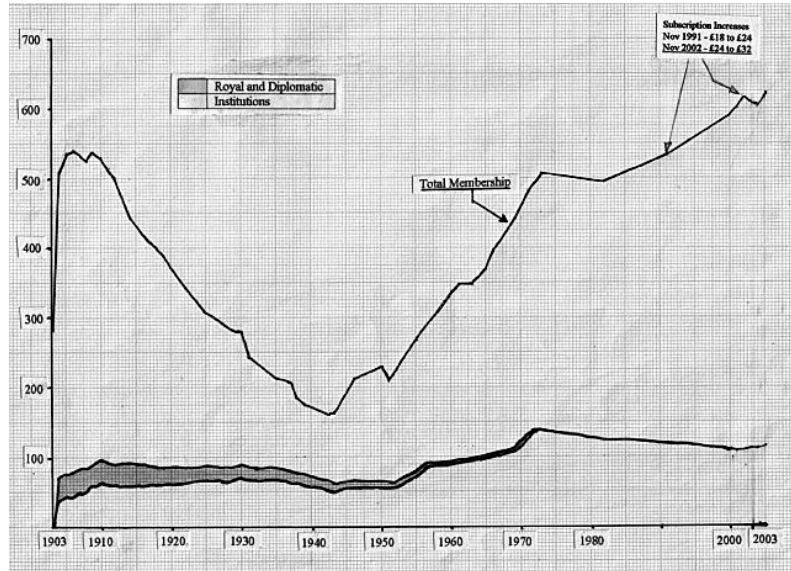
Institutions (115)



Record membership

The membership of the Society currently stands at an impressive 619, which exceeds the previous record of 616 reached in 2002. The membership had dropped back following the subscription rise of January 2003, but we have now restored the deficit largely through the success of our table at the COINEX fair in October 2005. There Charles Farthing and other helpers succeeded in recruiting no less than 19 new members, who were elected at our November meeting. This was the largest number of elections at a single meeting since 1909, when the Society was in its infancy and establishing its membership.

The chart here, drawn by Charles Farthing, shows how the membership has fluctuated over the years (lower band institutions; middle band royal and diplomatic members; upper band individual members). You can see how the vigorous recruitment drive of the first three years took membership to 538 members, but there was then a rather relentless erosion of the membership until in 1942 it reached an all-time low of 167, of whom only 91 were individual ordinary members. The number of institutions that were members had remained much more stable. Happily, since then, there has been a steady growth in numbers, apart from a worrying period in the 1970s, when the Society was in some financial difficulty.



The members of the 1940s and '50s were loyal and long-lived, as witness the remarkable number that have maintained their membership for more than 50 years. There are currently 18 members of this 'club': John Porteous and Rev Kenneth V Hewitt (elected 1955); Prof I David Brown, Dr David Dykes, Major C W Lister, Peter Mitchell and J D Gomm (1954); Prof Peter Berghaus and David Sealy (1953); Prof Peter Spufford, Lord Stewartby and Peter Woodhead (1952); John Weibel (1950); Prof Philip Grierson (1947); Laurence Brown and the Hon. Robert Erskine (1946); and Dr Stewart Lyon (1945), who has just passed his 60th anniversary and who has talked to me about it (see below). But Stewart is not our longest-standing member; that accolade goes to Mr Patrick Irvine King (1938) who has been a member for 67 years. Yet, at 82, he is by no means our oldest member. Even Philip Grierson at 95 is well beaten by Mr Charles MacKechnie-Jarvis of Salisbury who was born in 1907. Which only goes to show that numismatics must be good for the health!

Prize Fund Appeal

I have been overwhelmed by the generous support our Prize Fund Appeal has received from a wide range of our members and it has now comfortably exceeded the minimum target we set. As we bring the appeal to a very satisfying close, we have raised £8,195 in cash donations, and in addition Christopher Blunt's son and two daughters have very generously pledged that during their lives they will pay every third year the £300 to be awarded to the recipient of the Blunt Prize. The income from this fund should fully support both the Sanford Saltus Medal and the Blunt Prize for the foreseeable future, and allow for the capital to increase in line with inflation. Baring some financial catastrophe, then, these two prizes should be protected and will not be a burden on the Society's general income.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all who have supported this appeal, on whatever scale. It demonstrates the vigour of the Society and our willingness to provide for the future of our subject.

Sanford Saltus Medal awarded to Peter Woodhead

In the first ballot conducted under the new regulations, the Sanford Saltus Medal was voted to Peter Woodhead. The new rules enabled his two magnificent Sylloge volumes on the Schneider collection to be taken into account. We offer our congratulations to Peter, while complimenting the two runners-up, who were also excellent candidates. The medal will be presented to Peter at our May meeting, which will be followed by the annual Council sherry party. Do come along.

Summer Meeting in York

You will see from the card that the Director has arranged another interesting programme, spanning the Iron-Age to modern periods. The Summer Meeting should be particularly popular. For the first time, it is organised jointly with the Royal Numismatic Society, and it takes as its theme 'Power, Politics and Coinage'. The venue is the Bedern Hall in York, a wonderful 14th-century building that originally served as the refectory for the Vicars Choral of York Minster. Located just a stones' throw away from the Minster, the meeting will provide a good excuse for you to renew your acquaintance with this beautiful city.

BNJ Publication Date

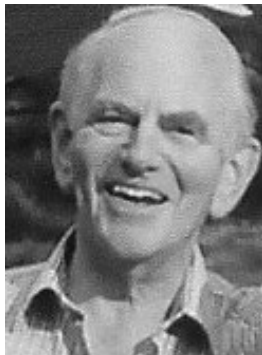
There has been a short delay in the publication of the *Journal*, but it is now at the binders, and should be despatched by Spink by the end of January or early February. In case of non-delivery, please contact Philip Skingley (0207 563 4000; PSkingley@spink.com).

Yours sincerely,



STEWART LYON, 60 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP

Dr Stewart Lyon is one of the Society's longest-standing members; elected in November 1945, at the age of 19. Alongside a busy career as an actuary, becoming a Director of Legal & General and President of the Institute of Actuaries, bringing up a large family, supporting various charities and following other interests, he has found time to



become a leading authority on Anglo-Saxon coinage. He has held all the offices of the Society (Secretary, Treasurer, Director and President), and is now our senior Vice-President. Recently, I asked him about his early days in the Society.

Q. When did you start collecting coins?

A. My first acquisitions were a small selection of hammered and milled English coins in November 1940 from a jeweller in Liverpool, my native city, using my 14th-birthday money! I still have one of them – a William IV Britannia 4d. In the following September I started to buy from London dealers, including a quarter-noble of Edward III from Spink for

STEWART LYON, 60 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP (CONT.)

£1:5s and, early in 1942, my first Anglo-Saxon coins: a *Long Cross* penny of Æthelred for 8s. from Spink and a styca of Archbishop Wigmund from Seaby for 3s.

Q. Why did you join the Society in 1945?

A. It was suggested by Spink and I was proposed by Leonard Forrer (senior). As I lived far from London he may not have realised that I was under 21, so I was put up for ordinary, not junior membership, as Hugh Pagan has pointed out in the centenary volume of *BNJ*.

Q. What were meetings like in those days?

A. They were conducted on essentially the same lines as today, though in a more formal atmosphere. I found my first meeting, at 21 Bedford Square, quite forbidding. It must have been as a guest, before my election, and one of the last occasions when H.W. Taffs was in the chair. A particular feature of meetings in those days was the number and range of exhibitions by members.

Q. What led you to do research?

A. By the time I completed my actuarial examinations in 1954 I had built up a collection that included about 130 hammered coins, of which 55 were pre-Conquest. Having worked in London occasionally during my training, I had had some opportunities to attend meetings of the BNS and visit the BM's Department of Coins and Medals, where I could not fail to be enthused by Michael Dolley, then a newcomer to the Department. A career move to London in 1955, free from exams, meant that I had spare time and was easy prey!

Q. Why did you start with Northumbrian stycas?

A. One reason was that they were readily available from dealers' stock ex H P Hall or Lingford, so it was easy to build up a sizeable collection quite quickly and inexpensively. I began to realise the abundance of die-linking and its potential for creating a more scientific classification of the series than had hitherto been published. Fortunately, in those days I had no difficulty in obtaining permission to take rubbings, through carbon paper, of the stycas in public collections, particularly the British Museum and the Yorkshire Museum, as well as those held by dealers. King Eanred

and Archbishop Wigmund apart, rubbings were made on pages of an album arranged so as to facilitate a comprehensive die study; as such it could claim to have been a precursor of the late Elizabeth Pirie's *Coins of the Kingdom of Northumbria*.

Q. Were there any individuals who particularly influenced you in numismatics?

A. Yes, indeed. The first must have been Dr F.T. ("Freddie") Wainwright, who tried to teach me history and English at Liverpool College and with whom I had many informal chats when we were on firewatching duty. I had been cataloguing (or, rather, listing) one of the school collections of coins, principally imperial Russian kopecks, and besides encouraging me in that task I think that Wainwright, being (though I was not aware of it at the time) a pupil of Stenton's and an authority on the Viking attacks on north-west England in the early tenth century among a wide range of other things, must unwittingly have pointed me in an Anglo-Saxon direction. Sadly he died tragically young, without knowing of my own incipient research into the coinage of that period.

The strongest influence was undoubtedly that of Michael Dolley, with whom I worked closely on visits to Stockholm in the 1960s. Then, of course, there was Christopher Blunt, who always gave help and encouragement to other students, however young. He and I and Ian Stewart (Lord Stewartby) formed a very close working team in the 1970s and 1980s. And it would be wrong to forget the Saturday Club in the days of Albert Baldwin, and the opportunity it provided for examining and discussing particular coins with him and others such as Elmore Jones. Buying and selling seemed far from our minds!

Q. What has given you most pleasure in numismatics?

A. Believing that, working with others, I could help to expand the frontiers of knowledge and, sometimes, technique in my chosen field of Anglo-Saxon coinage. And I like to think that, even after 60 years' membership, perhaps I still can.

Thank you, Stewart, and congratulations. I find it astonishing that later this year you will be celebrating your 80th birthday, and yet you and Elizabeth remain more active than most people half your age. Long may that continue!

MASB