

THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



Newsletter

January 2007

**From the President
Dr Mark Blackburn**

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Dear Member,

Here we are at the opening of another year, which I expect again to be a busy one for the Society, as it continues to go from strength to strength. Membership has reached another record level, up 17 on last year to 636. Attendance at our monthly lectures is excellent – the lecture theatre at the Warburg Institute often seems comfortably full. Our finances are in very good health. Since the increase in subscriptions in 2003 and with an increasing membership our general reserves have grown by 50% to £48,218, and our special funds, earmarked for our publications, awards and names lectures, stand at £86,648.

I regard this *Newsletter* as an important means of keeping members informed of activities and developments in the Society, especially for those who cannot get to our regular London meetings. So here is some of our news.

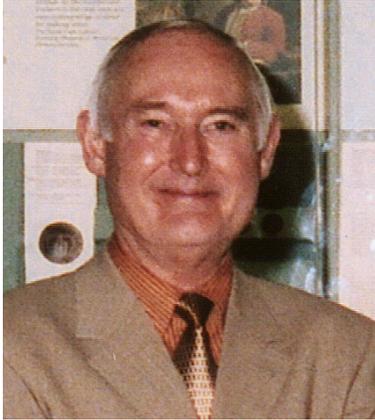
Martin Allen awarded first North Book Prize

The first award of the North Book Prize, established last year in honour of Jeffrey North, has been awarded to Dr Martin Allen for his book *The Durham Mint* (2003). This was one of four short-listed books considered by Council, having been whittled down by an advisory committee from some 40 eligible volumes on British numismatics published since 2003.

Martin's book, which gives a detailed account of minting in Durham from the 11th to the 16th century, was the fruit of many years research which earned him a PhD in 1999. It was accepted for publication in our Society's special publication series, and copies are available through Spink for £45 (£33.75 for BNS members). The prize of £500 will be presented at the April meeting.



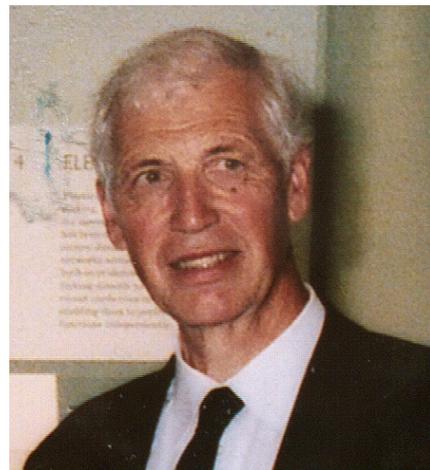
Charles Farthing and Tony Holmes retiring



At the Anniversary Meeting our two longest serving officers stood down. Charles Farthing is well-known to many of the members, and much liked for the helpful and enthusiastic way in which he has dealt with enquiries and resolved problems, whether relating to the Society's affairs or more general numismatic matters. He became Secretary in 1999, and in the following years he thoroughly overhauled our record keeping, making use of computers, and brought a systematic approach to the job characteristic of his naval background. The office of Secretary has always been a great burden for one person, and the more so with a substantially larger membership to support, so when after six years he proposed that the role be divided between two people, effectively a meetings secretary and a membership secretary, his suggestion was readily accepted by Council.

He continued in the latter role for another two years, while helping Elina Screen become familiar with minuting the meetings and more general secretarial tasks.

Tony Holmes has also been a very popular officer, holding the post of Librarian, also for the RNS, for no less than 12 years. Tony's own numismatic interests are very broad, which has meant that he has been comfortable managing the wide range of books in our joint library and in answering questions (quite beyond the call of duty) sent by members and others. With an excellent team of volunteers he has provided regular supervised access for members under arrangements he set up some years ago after the discovery of some thefts from the library. Although he himself is not a regular computer user, he has planned and overseen the production of a computerised catalogue of the library, which should shortly be available on our website. We are enormously grateful to Tony and Charles, and wish their successors, John Roberts Lewis and Roland Hewson, well in following in their footsteps.



Celebrating Stewart Lyon

After the Anniversary Meeting in November, members and their guests adjourned downstairs to the common room in the Warburg Institute to enjoy a reception sponsored by Dr Stewart Lyon to mark both his 80th birthday the previous week and his 60 years of membership of the Society, which fell in November 2005 when he was abroad. Although Stewart had generously provided champagne and nibbles, the Society had commissioned a cake, which was ceremoniously carried in during speeches complete with sparklers blazing – well actually the sparklers barely lasted beyond the door into the common room. He recalled his early days in the Society, and working with Christopher Blunt, Michael Dolley and Ian Stewart (Lord Stewartby, who was present). He said that the hobby of numismatics had given him enormous pleasure and he would always be striving to repay the debt he felt he owed. Previously, the five other Past Presidents and I, with members of the British Academy's SCBI Committee, had given him a lunch at the Athenenum, and the forthcoming volume of *BNJ* will carry a dedication to him.



These are fitting celebrations for a man who has made a tremendous contribution to British numismatics and to the Society in particular, serving as Secretary, Treasurer, Director, President and Vice-President for a total of 43 years.

60 Years Ago

Looking back 60 years, at the same meeting that Stewart was elected as a junior member, Christopher Blunt was elected as the new President, bringing energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas to lead the Society out of the doldrums into which it had sunk in the 1930s and the difficult war-time years. One of his first innovations was to replace the rather dry 'Report of Council', read by the Secretary, by a more personal Presidential Address. In the first of these given in November 1946, following an upbeat review of activities during the year, Blunt surveyed the state of research in English numismatics, highlighting 'certain directions in which those studies could be usefully developed'. There were already important projects underway – Derek Allen's work on Celtic finds and his *BMC* of Henry II's Tealby coinage, and Humphrey Sutherland's monograph on the Crondall hoard – but there was also a strong hint of things to come, in particular Blunt's own shift of interest to the Anglo-Saxon series.

He spoke of a proposal that the Society should make a photographic record of major private collections prior to their dispersal, and launched an appeal to establish a Publications and Research Fund to finance this. Two results flowed from this initiative, the publication of sets of study photographs of the Lockett collection and, in due course, the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* series, which was initially envisaged as a BNS project but in 1956 was adopted by the British Academy.

Finally, Blunt lamented the end of silver for our currency issues – 1947 saw its replacement with cupro-nickel, as silver was required to repay the bullion loans made by the USA during the War. It was the beginning of a new age, in many different respects.

Programme and Summer Meeting in Chichester

Returning to the present, the lecture programme for this year is once again wide-ranging, presented by some excellent speakers, including for the Linecar lecture in September Prof. Simon Keynes, one of the country's leading Anglo-Saxon historians, and a keen advocate of numismatic evidence.

The Summer Meeting in July will be held in the delightful market town of Chichester in Sussex. For the second time, it is being held jointly with the Royal Numismatic Society, and it will comprise seven papers on the theme 'Currencies in Crisis', looking at the changing fortunes of monetary systems through economic or political crises.

In contrast to last year's 14th-century venue in York, this year's meeting will be held in a stunning 21st-century architectural extension to the 18th-century Pallant House Gallery in Chichester. This modern art museum holds one of the finest collections of 20th-century British art in the country. It is sure to be a popular occasion, so please book early.

BNJ 2006

A special bumper edition of the Journal should come flying through your letterbox by the end of January or early February. With 480 pages, including 60 plates, this is the largest volume to be published since 1908. The reason for its spectacular size is that it has been extended to include a substantial report on the Roman hoard from Rogiet in Monmouthshire written by Edward Besly, which has been subsidised by a grant from the National Museum of Wales. There is a lot more beside in this volume and we hope that members will find it stimulating. The Journal will be despatched by Spink. In case of non-delivery, please contact Philip Skingley (0207 563 4000; PSkingley@spink.com).

May I wish you a fruitful and harmonious year in 2007, and I look forward to seeing many of you at our meetings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Introducing Roland Hewson, Our New Membership Secretary

It will be a difficult task to maintain Charles Farthings' high standards, but I will endeavour to do so.

My interest in coins started when I left St Clement Danes Grammar School in the late 1950s to go to work in a bank. This was aroused when in the change one day I discovered a William and Mary halfpenny, an unusual occurrence even then! As a schoolboy philatelist this appealed to the collector in me which has continued to the present day. My wife and I are avid collectors in areas other than coins and pursued differing careers within the public sector – she being a retired teacher of geography, geology, geomorphology and environmental studies, and me an auditor developing into the head of contract compliance and the quality unit.

From these posts we retired to pursue 'leisure' activities, ostensibly in my wife's case Chinese brush painting and photography, and in mine, golf and horology. For me this was a complete change from mere cerebral activity and decision making to getting my hands dirty repairing and restoring clocks. Never one to enter into commitments lightly, I nevertheless became an 'apprentice' to an elderly horologist who gave of his time and patience generously to the point where I am now a member of the British Watch and Clockmakers Guild.

Small incidents sometimes stick in the mind and one especially may be of interest; prior to the American War of Independence most of their brass came from England, which, naturally, was curtailed at the start of the rebellion. (They then made movements from cherry wood.) The 'kipper-box' type of American Wall Clock was weight driven, the weights running down out of sight either side of the frame. Imagine my surprise when in repairing one such



clock I discovered the weights augmented by old English pennies, coins defaced and worthless, but put to good use!

I have as an addition to my professional life also undertaken for the last 25 years the 'part-time' role of Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer to a parish council, which is why just at present I am unable to attend the Tuesday meetings (my council meets the same evening but hopefully that will change after the next annual meeting in May). My current parish being Colnbrook with Poyle; Colnbrook a name well known to Cromwellian historians! King John's Palace is long gone though the site now contains apartments within the conservation area and the listed building is still known as King John's Palace.

I opened with a reference to Charles. His assiduous attention to detail, continued support and assistance, coupled with that of Mark and Elina epitomises the kindred spirit of the Society in the furtherance of its objectives. Numismatism (or misering as my wife calls it jokingly) has helped concentrate my mind during the last two years through family bereavements, and if I can give a little back I am happy to do so.

Roland Hewson