

THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



Newsletter

January 2008

**From the President
Dr Mark Blackburn**

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Dear Member,

IN MY review of the year at the AGM in November, I was able to report that the membership had increased yet again and now stands at a record 649, up 14 on last year. This has been part of a progressive climb since 1985, when membership stood at around 500, the only exception being a brief two-year decline following the subscription increase of 2003. It is encouraging that this is a long-term trend, for it augers well for the stability of the membership base which is important for the continuing financial health of the Society.

What is perhaps concerning is that while personal membership has been growing, the number of institutions (effectively libraries) has been flat or very slowly declining over the last 30 years. We are not alone in experiencing this, for where library budgets have been cut or not kept pace with demands to diversify library holdings, so established journals have often been discontinued. Over the years the proportion of libraries in the UK taking the *BNJ* has declined, while the slack has been taken up by better-funded libraries in American universities. This would be encouraging if it signalled an increase in interest in British numismatics among American college students, but I have seen little evidence of this.

The Ulster Museum is the latest casualty among our long established institutional members, and it may be no coincidence that they recently lost their numismatic curator, Robert Heslip, and there is no current prospect of replacing him. Over the last decade or so curators with numismatic expertise have been lost from museums in Leeds, York and Liverpool. Numismatic expertise is now concentrated more than ever in the National Museums (London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Dublin) and University Museums (Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow and Manchester), with Birmingham one of the few survivors among the Municipal Museums.



Yet there are hundreds of museums up and down the country with significant coin collections – in the first 50 volumes of the *SCBI* series there are coins from 150 different British collections represented. Clearly there is a need to support those museums without access to experienced numismatists, and it is a shame that the British Museum's bid to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) for money to set up a Specialist Subject Network for numismatics failed last year.

However, if numismatic expertise among curators is becoming scarcer, it has developed significantly among archaeologists, thanks to the success of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). Apart from its Head, Dr Roger Bland, the Scheme employs two numismatic specialists and thirty-nine Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) all of whom have received training in identifying Iron-Age, Roman and Medieval coins. Yet the Scheme faces an uncertain future, as the Government's funding for it is channelled via the MLA which will have its own budget cut by 25% over the next three years. Any cut in real terms to the PAS's funding would risk a loss in FLO posts that could jeopardise its ability to cover all parts of the country adequately. A letter expressing concern signed by seventeen leading Archaeology professors was sent to the Secretary of State before Christmas. Supporters of the Scheme have tabled a Parliamentary Early Day Motion urging the Government to maintain funding, which has gained strong cross-party support among MPs, thanks partly to people writing to their MPs, and an E-Petition has been opened on the 10 Downing Street website (<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/PAS-Funding/>).

Archives

The Librarian, John Roberts-Lewis, has been reviewing the Society's archives, which are rather sparse. Even the minute books are not complete since our earlier records, lodged in the British Museum for safety during World War II, were destroyed in May 1941 when an incendiary device hit the Coin Room. There is some correspondence from the first decade after the Society's foundation, mainly soliciting prominent members, but we have little in the way of printed meetings cards or other material, or other correspondence from any period. This is surprising considering that we are primarily a group of historians and collectors!

We would like to take steps to build a collection material to document and illustrate the history of the Society. If any Members have items that they are willing to offer for the archive, such as printed material or significant documents or correspondence relating to the Society, please let John know with a list of what you have. He can be contacted by e-mail: librarian@britnumsoc.org, or c/o Warburg Institute, Woburn Sq, London WC1H 0AB.

Medal for Services

In the last Newsletter I reported that the Council had decided to establish a medal to be awarded to people who have made an exceptional contribution to the organisation and promotion of British numismatics. This was a project that I had discussed with Jeffrey North in 2006 as an alternative to establishing a book prize, and when visiting him in Shoreham during the Autumn he told me that he would very much like to make a further donation to the Society to fund the design and production of the Medal for Services. The Council was delighted with this generous offer, and in recognition of this we have decided call it the *Jeffrey North Medal*.

An artist has been commissioned to work up suitable designs for a large cast bronze medal, and we hope that the first medals will be awarded in the Autumn.



A new Agnus Dei penny of Æthelred II (Malmesbury, moneyer Ealdred) that came to light last year, sold privately by Spink – the seventeenth known of the type.

Books Eligible for North Book Prize

This will be something of a bumper year for prizes, as by chance all of the Society's other awards also fall to be made during the course of 2008. The Sanford Saltus gold medal will be voted upon by Members in November, but earlier the Council will have awarded both the Blunt Prize for younger numismatists and the North Book Prize for the book that has made the best contribution to British Numismatics. To be eligible for this Book Prize a book should have been published since January 2005, and a copy have been received by the Librarian or the Editors for review in the *BNJ* or *NC*. If you have a book that you think should be considered, please arrange for a copy to be sent in the next few weeks by contacting the Librarian, as above, or Editors at editors@britnumsoc.org.

Cambridge Summer Meeting

Our Summer Meeting, arranged jointly with the Royal Numismatic Society, will take the theme of *Art in Coinage*, and there is an impressive line-up of speakers, with art historians specialising in the Roman, medieval and modern periods, a numismatist with many years experience on the Royal Mint's advisory committee, and one of the country's foremost coin designers. The Meeting will be held on Saturday 5 July in Cambridge, in my college, Gonville and Caius, using an auditorium with seating for 96. Coffee, lunch and tea will be included in the fee of £20. Accommodation will also be available in College, for those who would like to extend their stay and do some sightseeing in the city. Further details and a Registration Form are included in this mailing, or can be down loaded from our website.

Society Dinner

For some while we have been talking in Council about arranging a formal dinner for BNS Members and their spouses or partners. Venues in London that we investigated for a large private dinner we found to be expensive. So we have taken the opportunity to combine it with the Summer Meeting, making use of the facilities offered in Cambridge. A special dinner will be held on Friday 4 July, the evening before the Summer Meeting, in the Fellows' Dining Room at Gonville and Caius College. You are very welcome to come just to the Dinner if you are unable to attend the Summer Meeting. Numbers will be limited to 48, so if you wish to come I would advise you to complete the attached Registration Form and return it promptly. I very much hope that this will be well supported, and that it may set a precedent for further dinners and social events.

Studies in Early Medieval Coinage Symposium at Leeds IMC

Following the success of the first Symposium, held in Cambridge in 2005, our Member Tony Abramson is organising a sequel as part of the annual International Medieval Congress at Leeds University. There will be thirteen short papers discussing English and Continental sceattas and coins of the Viking Danelaw. They will be arranged as four sessions of the Congress, taking up a full day on Tuesday 8 July. For more information, contact Tony Abramson (t.abramson@ntlworld.com). Proceedings of the first Symposium are due to be published later in this year.

Publication of the *BNJ*

The 2007 volume of the *British Numismatic Journal* has been printed and is now at the binders. It should be despatched by Spink during late January and early February. Those Members who collect their own copies should contact Spink in February.

Yours sincerely,



RICHARD KELLEHER – NEW SECRETARY

My background and training is as an archaeologist, and it was in the field that I became aware of the contribution numismatic evidence could make to the site narrative of many excavations. This was first apparent to me while digging a Roman site at Springhead in Kent where, along with an amazing quantity of finds (including coins), we excavated several new buildings including a *nymphaeum* with surviving walls and stratigraphy up to 1.5 metres in depth (www.wessexarch.co.uk/projects/kent/ctrl/springhead/).

But it was while subsequently working at the Heathrow Terminal 5 site that I began to get interested in medieval coins, a modest few of which had been recovered from medieval field systems on site.

The first numismatic project which I undertook was my MA thesis which surveyed numismatic provision in UK museums. This gave me the opportunity to both explore some of the ways in which museums use their collections to engage with different audiences and also to get a feel for the potential that numismatic evidence has to offer other related disciplines.

Since 2004 I have been working as an assistant in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. I have a broad interest in medieval coinage with particular



emphasis on the period from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries and the application of numismatics in interpreting sites at a national level. This is a theme I intend to develop in the coming years.

My numismatic work to date has included articles or notes on the high Middle Ages, the Tudor period, Northumbrian stycas and coin assemblages from archaeological sites, and I have been a co-editor of the *CCNB Newsletter*. I am currently finalising an article on the medieval coins from the Vintry site in London and, in the longer-term, gathering together a gazetteer of all post-Roman coin finds from excavations in England which I hope to complete within the next couple of years.

I am pleased to have been elected Secretary of the Society and hope that in the coming months and years I will be able to meet more of the membership.

Richard Kelleher

Visit the Society's Web site: www.britnumsoc.org