

OBITUARY

REMEMBERING MARION ARCHIBALD (1935–2016)

I first encountered my dear friend and colleague Marion Archibald in January 1985, on arriving to take up my post in the British Museum's Department of Coins and Medals. I was collected by the department's administrator and ushered into the peculiar temporary offices the staff then occupied while the department was being rebuilt into its current form. We worked our way down a windowless labyrinth to its lowest level. There I was greeted by Marion's beaming face and was immediately set at ease. From that time until Marion's retirement I worked with her on a daily basis and thereafter, until her death in April 2016, we remained in frequent touch, with her a regular presence in the museum as a volunteer, still working on her many on-going projects, and an unfailing presence at social events, from exhibition openings to the annual departmental Christmas party, where her exceptional meringues were an anticipated fixture, appearing as usual, though for the last time, in December 2015.

A number of commemorations of Marion's life and career have already appeared, in particular Andrew Burnett's appreciation of her in the volume published to mark her 70th birthday in 2006,¹ from his perspective as a long-standing numismatic colleague and latterly Keeper of Coins and Medals; and Leslie Webster's obituary in the newsletter of the Society of Antiquaries, as someone from the same generation as a British Museum curator and an early medieval specialist (and indeed as a woman among museum professionals). My personal perspective on Marion is as a younger colleague, the beneficiary of her unfailing encouragement, instruction and advice.

After reading archaeology at the University of Glasgow, Marion began her museum career at Birmingham City Museum (1959–63), with a developing interest in medieval coins ('as much time as I could get away with', as she recalled in her speech on receiving the RNS Medal),² before transferring to the British Museum in 1963, as the successor to Michael Dolley in the post of curator of medieval coins. In 1985 her post changed to focus on the early medieval period up to 1180, as part of a reshaping of curatorial responsibilities, and I arrived to take over both the later medieval and the early modern coinages in a post freed by the appointment of John Kent as Keeper of the department. She remained in this revised role until her retirement in 1997, overlapping for a year (in a rare and welcome practice) with her successor Gareth Williams.

From my perspective, Marion's importance across the range of numismatic activities in the UK was enormous, to a degree not perhaps always appreciated in its scope outside the British Museum. She was an engaged and committed curator throughout her career in all areas of core curatorial activity: administration, public enquiries, acquisition, collection care and organisation, exhibitions within the museum and beyond, support for colleagues in the British and international museum communities and perhaps above all the never-ceasing treadmill of Treasure Trove and (from 1996) Treasure cases, ever increasing as her career largely coincided with the development of the hobby of metal-detecting. She also invested considerable time dealing with coins found in excavations, in what was a boom period for rescue and investigative archaeology, as her bibliography published in 2006 clearly demonstrates,³ although some of her contributions (like other object reports) were hidden within

¹ A. Burnett, 'Marion Archibald – an appreciation', in B. Cook and G. Williams (eds.), *Coinage and History in the North Sea World c.500–1250* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 5–7.

² Quoted in 'The Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society 2011', *NC* 172 (2012), 407.

³ B. Cook, V. Hewitt and G. Williams, 'The publications of Marion Archibald to 2005', in Cook and Williams, *Coinage and History in the North Sea World*, pp. 723–9.

the misbegotten phenomenon of the microfiche appendix, and others await the publication of the excavation reports even now.

Across her career Marion would devote much time to exhibitions, in displays that ranged from long-lasting galleries, through major temporary exhibitions, the specialist temporary exhibitions organised by Coins and Medals from 1985 in the new display space designated Gallery 69a just outside the department, partnership exhibitions with the British Library in their dedicated gallery space, and a host of other even more ephemeral ones. To create a list of these is probably impossible now, but some of them are worth noting for their impact. Unquestionably important were the sequence of major medieval exhibitions that marked the 1980s and 90s: *The Vikings* (BM, 1980) *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966–1066* (BM/BL, 1984), *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200* (Hayward Gallery, 1984), *The Making of England* (BM, 1992) and *Heirs of Rome: the Shaping of Britain AD 400–900* (BM, 1997). In these she presented the relevant numismatic material in its broader context to great effect in both exhibition and catalogue. Among the Coins and Medals exhibitions Marion curated, particular mention should perhaps go to an exhibition on the application of science to numismatics, a tricky subject for display that nonetheless received good attendance and reflected her long-standing involvement with the subject and close cooperation with scientific colleagues in the British Museum; and her final exhibition, organised just before her retirement, devoted to coin jewellery, an area of particular interest to her which she always wanted to write about in extended detail, but in the event sadly never did.

Clarity, judiciousness and thoroughness were the hallmarks of her approach in virtually every part of her professional engagement, from answering a public enquiry, through exhibition labels and catalogue entries, to her research publications. She was psychologically incapable, it could seem, of not exploring and considering all possible directions and issues in the subjects she investigated: 'The best is the enemy of the good', she would ruefully admit, rebuking her own reluctance to let go, usually following up with 'Do as I say, not as I do'. Nonetheless, the quality, quantity and range of her output were wholly admirable, as discussed in the introduction to the 2006 volume in her honour and in Andrew Burnett's 'Appreciation' therein.⁴ There is more still to appear, in particular a volume of Anglo-Saxon hoards, for which she had at last cleared the decks of other commitments and was focussing on from 2013. She was assisted by Emily Wyatt, supported by a BNS student bursary, for a month in 2013, who also returned to assist further, at Marion's own expense, in 2014, with the result that the volume is very advanced.

One of Marion's great strengths was her engagement in what would nowadays be called outreach. She gave enormous amounts of time to meeting with and encouraging other numismatists who asked for her advice and she especially worked to encourage others to publish their work, an investment of energy on her part that left little overt mark outside footnote acknowledgments, but which was of incalculable benefit to the subject. The quality of her lecturing was always of the highest level. The number of occasions when she declined to give a paper, contribute to a festschrift, take up a role or otherwise support a numismatic occasion was miniscule, and little changed until long after her retirement, when age at last began to make its impact, despite (I confess) urgings by myself and others to say 'no' more often and perhaps focus on the things she really wanted to complete. She was a frequent lecturer for all the numismatic societies and had a particular connection with the British Association of Numismatic Societies, culminating in a term as its President, and gave talks to local societies across the country throughout her career. She was a longstanding member of the British Academy's Sylloge Committee, a frequent attendee at the Society of Antiquaries and served the Royal and British Numismatic Societies as an officer and council member on repeated occasions, as well as through consistent less formal support, above all the organising of society parties for many, many years. She was indeed a council member of this Society at the time of her death and had played a vital part as its Treasurer at one of the most difficult times in its

⁴ See n.1 and the Introduction to the same volume, pp. 1–3.

history.⁵ In terms of both her service and her academic output, it is right that she received the highest awards both societies can offer: the BNS's Sanford Saltus Medal in 1981 and the RNS Medal in 2011, following Honorary Fellowship in 1996. This Society recognised her 80th birthday in 2015 by dedicating the *Journal* to her, which pleased her enormously and would be her last accolade.

Marion would have scoffed at the idea of her as a feminist pioneer and would have quickly pointed out the major figures who came before her, especially Anne Robertson of the Hunterian Museum, of whom she wrote a warm appreciation.⁶ Nonetheless, she was the first woman to be a series curator in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum and only the second to be awarded the Sanford Saltus Medal (the first being Helen Farquhar back in 1911). She would recount with nothing but amusement the story of the day she arrived for work in fashionable stilettos, to be looked silently up and down by the then Keeper, John Walker: 'And I never wore them again!'. However, outside the Department, some of her closest professional friendships were with women in a similar position to her – not pioneers precisely, but still comparative rarities in male-dominated environments, such as Elizabeth Pirie, Brita Malmer and Jarmila Haskova.

No-one would claim Marion lived an extravagant life-style, but she had her indulgences and enjoyments: good seats at the opera, nice china and a collection of choice Victorian jewellery, which (always the curator) she kept with careful records of its provenance. A number of pieces from this collection were presented to the British Museum in Marion's memory by her sister Mary Louise, along with the medals Marion had been awarded. After her retirement she at last acquired a television and video player, and discovered BBC classic series. Being Marion, though, one of her biggest self-indulgences was to entertain other people. At her retirement, we organised a party and collection for her; she then in turn spent a fortune hiring a venue and organising a meal for all her colleagues and put the collection towards a new dinner service to give a series of dinners at her house in New Barnet even more frequently than before. She often also hosted numismatic visitors to London at her home, many becoming lifelong friends and continuing to visit long after her retirement. She dearly loved that house, a tall and thin three-storey townhouse she bought new in the 1970s, moving from her previous home, a flat in Archway; but even more she loved the garden, running down to the train line, so she particularly enjoyed organising summer parties that could move between indoors and outdoors. Virtually the last thing she said to me at what would be our final physical meeting, in late February 2016, was regret at how she had been neglecting her garden – alarm bells did ring.

Marion had very clear ideas about her legacy. She repeatedly expressed her wish not to have a memorial event with (for her) extreme vehemence – once she actually made me swear explicitly not to organise one, with my hand on my heart. Instead, she effectively organised her own memorials, in addition of course to the memories that survive with those of us who knew her well. Her extensive publications will continue to be used and more will join the list, as projects she left in an advanced state will be brought to completion and as more of the excavations reports she worked on make their way into the public domain. The numismatic community as a whole has been the main beneficiary of her estate, with bequests made to the Hunterian Museum and to the British Association of Numismatic Societies. Her major bequests will support a research fund of the Royal Numismatic Society (she always felt medieval numismatics deserved a place on an equal footing beside the various classical and Islamic funds that existed, so she made it happen); and an acquisition fund for numismatic material at the British Museum, where her name now sits in gold letters among the list of major donors that begins with Sir John Cotton, which she would have liked, and just after the Getty Foundation and Goldman Sachs, which would have made her laugh.

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⁵ H. Pagan, 'The British Numismatic Society: a history', *BNJ* 73 (2003), p. 31.

⁶ M.M. Archibald, 'Professor Anne Robertson', *College Courant* 27, no. 55 (1975), University of Glasgow, p. 39.

ADDITIONS TO THE PUBLICATIONS OF MARION ARCHIBALD

The following list includes material omitted from the 2006 list published in *Coinage and the North Sea World*, pp. 721–9, and material published by Marion between 2005 and her death.

1970

‘Coins from Nunney’, *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Historical Society* 115, p. 37

1985

‘Medieval coins and jettons’, in W.J. and K.A. Rodwell, *Rivenhall: Investigations of a Villa, Church and Village 1950–77*, vol. 2, York Council for British Archaeology Research Report 55, pp. 51–2.

2005

‘The Roman coins in Sites VI, XVI and XXX’, in N. Thomas, *Snail Down, Wiltshire: the Bronze Age Barrow Cemetery and Related Earthworks, in the Parishes of Collingbourne Ducis and Collingbourne Kingston; Excavations, 1953, 1955 and 1957*, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Monograph 3, pp. 234–5.

2006

‘Cotton’s Anglo-Saxon coins in the light of the Pieresc Inventory of 1606’, *BNJ* 76 (2006), pp. 171–203.

2007

‘Pseudo-Kufic base-metal coin brooches from England’, in M. Andersen, H.W. Horsnæs and J.C. Moesgaard (eds), *Magister Monetae: Studies in Honour of Jørgen Steen Jensen*, Publications from the National Museum, Studies in Archaeology and History 13, pp. 127–38.

2008

‘The medieval and later English coins and jettons’, in I. Caruano and G. Keevil, ‘Excavations at Carlisle Cathedral’, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 3rd series, 8 (2008), p. 54.

2009

‘The Anglo-Saxon and medieval coins from Flixborough’ and ‘Medieval and later coins’, in D.H. Evans and C. Loveluck (eds.), *Life and Economy at Early Medieval Flixborough, c.AD 600–1000: the Artefact Evidence* (Oxford), pp. 402–13, 450–2.

‘The coins’ and ‘Coin dating in the light of radiocarbon dating’, in C. Scull (ed.), *Early Medieval (Late 5th–Early 8th Centuries AD) Cemeteries at Boss Hall and Buttermarket, Ipswich, Suffolk*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 27 (London), pp. 241–2, 267–9.

2011

‘Alfred weight’, in J. Schofield, *St Paul’s Cathedral before Wren*, English Heritage (Swindon), pp. 150–4.

2012

‘Testing’, in J. Graham-Campbell, *The Cuerdale Hoard and Related Viking-Age Silver and Gold from Britain and Ireland in the British Museum*, British Museum (London), pp. 51–64.

With W.A. Oddy, M.R. Cowell and N.D. Meeks, ‘Forgeries of medieval English gold coins: techniques of production’, *Metallurgy in Numismatics* 5, in *NC* 172, pp. 235–54.

With M. Biddle, ‘Jewish counter or token’, in M. Biddle (ed.), *The Winchester Mint and Coins and Related Finds from the Excavations of 1961–71* (Oxford), pp. 699–704.

‘An aspect of die production in the middle Anglo-Saxon period: the use of guidelines in the cutting of coin-faces’, *VAMZ: Journal of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb*, 3rd series, 45, pp. 37–47 [volume in honour of Ivan Mirnik on his 70th birthday].

2013

‘The Wilton Cross coin pendant: numismatic aspects and implications’ and ‘The coins’ in G. Thomas, ‘A casket fit for a West Saxon courtier? The Plumpton Hoard and its place in the minor arts of Late Saxon England’, in A. Reynolds and L. Webster (eds), *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World: Studies in Honour of James Graham-Campbell*, The Northern World 58 (Leiden and Boston), pp. 51–72, 429–34.

‘The formation of the early Anglo-Saxon collection in the British Museum’, in A. Gannon, *British Museum Anglo-Saxon Coins I: Early Anglo-Saxon Gold and Continental Silver Coinage of the North Sea Area, c.600–760*, *SCBI* 63 (London), pp. 1–14.

‘Numismatics and the chronological models’, with comments by J. Hines and C. Scull, in J. Hines and A. Bayliss (eds), *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: a Chronological Framework*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 33 (London), pp. 493–516.

2014

'Islamic and Christian gold coins from Spanish mints found in England, mid-eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries', in R. Naismith, M. Allen and E. Screen (eds), *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn* (Farnham), pp. 377–96.

'The coins', in R. Cramp, *The Hirsel Excavations*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 36 (London), pp. 215–16.

'Medieval English coinage 1066–1279' in H.E. Manville, *Dictionary of English Numismatic Terms* (London), pp. 155–6.

2015

'The coin hoard', in P. White and A. Cook, *Sherborne Old Castle, Dorset: Archaeological Investigations 1930–90* (London), pp. 144–57.