REVIEWS


Mr. Dolley's admirable little essay on Anglo-Saxon Pennies is the first in a projected series of introductory booklets on aspects of British coinage to be published by the British Museum with the assistance of a subsidy from the Gulbenkian Foundation. It contains some 25 pages of text together with enlarged photographs of 48 silver pennies and 3 gold pieces. The author has designed it for students and collectors as well as visitors to the museum. To this end, the illustrations have been largely selected from coins acquired by purchase, treasure trove, or gift since the publication of the British Museum Catalogue seventy years ago: for example, from recent sales, the Trewhiddle penny of Eanred (Lockett), the joint piece of Berhtwulf and Æthelwulf (Ryan), the Langport coin of Harthacnut (Parsons), coins from twentieth-century hoards such as Chester and Morley St. Peter (the Ceolwulf II), and most usefully of all, pending full publication, the aureus bearing the name of Offa's moneyer Pendred presented by Mr. Blunt in 1962.

The text provides the neatest short general survey available of the last three centuries of Anglo-Saxon coinage, and the ready co-operation of others working in the field has ensured that it is as up to date as possible. Mr. Dolley has quite fairly excluded the Viking coinages of the British Isles which will form the subject of a subsequent essay in this series; and he starts his story with the broad penny of the later eighth century. The growth of the National Collection is outlined, and the relevance of Anglo-Saxon numismatics to history, archaeology, and philology is indicated. There follow chronological sections on the development of the coinage—its types, extent, and organization.

In subject matter there is little to criticize. However, to exclude the early pennies because until recently students have erroneously called them sceattas evades a question of continuity and nomenclature which needs to be faced.

Once or twice one has the feeling that the sense has suffered in the expression. For instance, remarks on p. 16 could be misunderstood to imply that Coenwulf was at first reluctant to grant Wulfred his coined rights or even that he did not do so until after the death of Cuthred (807); and the subsequent quarrel (817–21) between king and prelate can hardly be connected with the extension of royal minting beyond Canterbury.

Research moves so rapidly in this subject that to point out that even already one or two remarks need modifying is not to blame the author. Thus London seems now to have been a mint before 800 (p. 16). In general, the presentation of current ideas is thorough, balanced, and conservative—but did Æthelwulf really have a system of renovatio in mind (p. 18) when he standardized coin-types? With commendable fairness Mr. Dolley has acknowledged disagreement by others with some of his own published hypotheses by indicating a measure of doubt about, for example, the date of Edgar's reform or the identity of the birds on the reverse of the sovereign type of Edward the Confessor.

All in all, this is a tightly written and concise study which should not be dismissed by students for the modesty of its size and price. In the deceptively simple narrative are contained almost all the important views and reattributions which have emerged in the generation since the publication of Brooke's English Coins. Taken together with Mr. Blunt's presidential addresses to the Royal Numismatic Society, which supply the documentation, it now provides a reliable survey of the results of recent work to which Mr. Dolley himself has contributed so much. Anglo-Saxon Pennies is a happy vignette to close the chapter of his work in the British Museum, but, let us hope, only the forerunner of a full-scale synthesis of his work on the subject. Meanwhile it serves to remind us of the debt which the British Museum collection and the study of Anglo-Saxon numismatics owe to a worthy successor of Taylor Combe and Brooke.

I. S.


One of the several difficulties which face the collector of eighteenth-century tradesmen's tokens is to distinguish the genuine tokens from among the enormous number of pieces listed in
Dalton and Hamer's comprehensive work on the subject. Close on 7,000 varieties occur but it is well known that a very large proportion of these are spurious pieces of various kinds which—to quote from the preface to Mr. Bell's book—'has had the effect of disillusioning many collectors and discouraging others who would have liked to study the period'. Some collectors naturally wish to restrict their activities to the pieces actually issued and used as small change, as these alone have any historical interest. As early as 1796, Charles Pye recognized the need for a clear differentiation and the second edition of his book Provincial Copper Coins and Tokens issued from 1787 to 1801, published in 1801, has hitherto been the only reliable guide on this matter, but it is now very scarce.

Mr. Bell's book which is also concerned solely with the genuine trade tokens should prove a worthy successor, especially as it is enriched with much supplementary information on each token described.

Excluding Ireland, Pye listed about 550 pieces which he believed to be genuine tokens, but in the work under review this number is reduced to 257 including Ireland. The result of this drastic pruning is that no tokens now appear to exist for Cumberland, Derby, Leicester, Northampton, Northumberland, Westmorland, Worcester, Pembroke, Ayrshire, Cork, Drogheda, Munster, Galway, or Tipperary, while for Middlesex the number is considerably reduced—'but only after careful consideration' of the entries in A. W. Water's Notes on Eighteenth Century Tokens.

Mr. Bell is to be congratulated on bringing to our notice an important error which has been repeated in every work on tokens since the days of Pye, viz. the large series of Wilkinson tokens, hitherto wrongly assigned to Warwickshire, has been transferred to Shropshire.

The book is arranged in the usual manner in counties, alphabetically. Each token is given a 'Bell number', its D & H number and an illustration of the obv. and rev. (×1¼). Then follow the names of the diesinker and manufacturer, the quantity struck in cwt., and lastly comments comprising anything of interest (some of it only remotely) concerning the token and its issuer. Unfortunately for the methodical collector a number of interesting varieties of the main types are only referred to in the text, without Bell numbers.

Most will probably agree that the praise accorded by Mr. R. Taylor in his preface to the 'splendid plates' is unjustified. It is, perhaps, a little unkind to say so, but frankly they are among the worst that have ever been produced.

Most of the very interesting notes which accompany each entry have obviously been culled from the important, but virtually unknown, series of unsigned articles on tokens (by R. T. Samuel) published in the Bazaar Exchange and Mart between 1880 and 1889. These notes provide perhaps the main interest of the book and again Mr. Bell is to be congratulated on having brought all this matter to light, but it is rather unfortunate that he does not express more clearly his indebtedness to Samuel when discussing these articles in his introduction. Likewise, Mr. Bell's decision to include or reject the various pieces tallies suspiciously closely with the genuine trade token entries in A. W. Water's authoritative book mentioned above.

It is perhaps needless to add that none of these criticisms (except for the poor illustrations) detracts in any way from the usefulness of this book to anyone interested in tokens.

In conclusion, your reviewer, who possesses a complete copy of The Virtuoso's Companion, can set Mr. Bell's doubts (p. 306) at rest. It contains a four-page introduction—'Observations on Coins', by James Wright Jun, Esq. F.A.S.S and Perth.

C. W. P.