OBITUARY

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Dr. John Walker—the formula 'Dr. J. Walker' was ever anathema to him—was not formally a member of our Society, but it is fitting that we should here pay tribute to him as its friend. An Orientalist of international repute, the author of standard catalogues of Islamic coins, he brought to his Keepership at the British Museum a rare insight into the problems and needs of the too often overshadowed if never yet wholly neglected English series. Here it is possible to instance only a few manifestations of an unobtrusive but consistent solicitude. We may begin with his whole-hearted acceptance of the suggestion that our present President should be invited to publish his great work on the English copper, tin and bronze as a British Museum catalogue, and it is pleasant that he lived to see the vindication of this generosity when within four years and despite an unprecedentedly large initial printing a second edition was not only needed but the demand for it met. During Dr. Walker's Keepership, too, mediaeval historians had begun to exhibit a new interest in the Anglo-Saxon series, and it was of course Dr. Walker's benevolence that made it possible for more than one member of his staff to spend long hours inside and outside the Museum collecting the material on which the new understanding of the series is so largely founded. Not once was a request for special leave of absence refused, and facilities were also given for students to be trained in the new methods in the Coin Room itself.

Himself the author of an admirable report on an Anglo-Saxon hoard (NC 1945) Dr. Walker was keenly aware of the value of finds, and during his Keepership no mediaeval hoard—or parcel from a hoard—was dispersed without a proper record being made, and publication undertaken. A less conscientious scholar might well have grudged the time that his subordinates devoted to this service to posterity, while another of his contributions to British and Irish numismatics was the welcome which he extended as an Editor for many years of the Numismatic Chronicle to papers on British and Irish subjects which otherwise might have had to be held over for several numbers of our Journal. One ought to mention, too, not only his definitive sketch of the history of the Department of Coins and Medals (BMQ XVIII, 3), but also the encouragement he gave to Mrs. Martin's researches into a wide range of Museum archives, researches which have often thrown new light on a variety of aspects of the English series, and we may instance her discovery of the find-spot of the elimosina piedfort of Ælfric the Great (AJ/S Coins, pp. 230–231).

A major event during his Keepership was the dispersal of the great Lockett cabinet. Fortunately his predecessors had prepared the Trustees for this eventuality, but in an inflationary age all their groundwork might have been in vain had not the new Keeper been prepared to shoulder a fantastically heavy burden of administration. Funds had to be approached, the competing claims of different bodies adjudicated, important issues of principle evaluated, ruffled personalities soothed, and the generosity of the Lockett family and of other benefactors suitably acknowledged. One bulky file does not embrace a half of the paperwork, but a lasting monument will be found in the run of Lockett coins in the British Museum trays. As far as the mediaeval series is concerned the writer can think of only one coin which the National Collection really coveted and was not able to acquire, and in this case its non-acquisition was due solely to the piece fetching a price which could not have been anticipated in the conditions then obtaining. The same far-sighted policies were, however, manifest on less spectacular occasions, and over the years there were added to the Museum cabinets not only some splendid specimens from the more notable sales but also a large number of pieces which in the aggregate remedied what are occasionally quite serious gaps in the English series. One may cite here, perhaps, the Viking pieces from the Erskine collection (BMQ XXI, 3), and the group of Subsidiary Long Cross pennies of Æthelred II picked up for modest sums when Mrs. Smart first drew the Museum's attention to the significance of this hitherto unrecognized variety (see BNJ 1965). Such a discriminating policy as regards both coins and benefactors could not but have its triumphs, and it was appropriate that one of the last great acquisitions which the Museum made during his Keepership should have been the gold penny of King Offa, lost to scholarship since the seventeenth century. When the full story of this gift comes to be written, it will perhaps be fully recognized how
good a friend to English numismatics we have lost, and also how justified was his policy in reposing complete confidence in the Department’s trusted friends. Nor would it be proper to pass over in silence the happy relations continued or established with other institutions, and it is noteworthy that under his aegis and in a spirit of perfect unity final arrangements were made for the National Museum of Wales and the Ulster Museum to receive treasure trove found in their respective spheres of interest. Local museums, too, have reason to remember Dr. Walker with gratitude. Had he not been not only sympathetic but active on their behalf behind the scenes, the Norwich Museum might never have secured the great bulk of the Morley St. Peter hoard, nor the Belfast Museum (now the Ulster Museum) obtained the grants that made possible the acquisition of the entire Carlyon-Britton cabinet of Irish coins. It should not be thought, though, that the Keeper could be imposed upon where the legitimate claims of the British Museum were at stake, and he adroitly repelled with conspicuous success more than one injudicious, even if well-meaning, assault upon the English National Collection’s prerogatives in the matter of treasure trove.

A characteristic story tells how Dr. Walker astonished an Organization and Methods expert and his more pompous and Parkinsonian colleagues by suggesting that something must be wrong with their approach if the administration of their departments could not be confined to the period before morning coffee. Granted that the late Keeper was in his study considerably earlier than many of his confrères, and granted that there were times when a Lockett Sale might mean days on end of interminable correspondence and often tedious discussion, the tale has the ring of truth. He was a man who did not believe in keeping dogs and barking himself, and one of his secrets was to have confidence in his subordinates. Occasionally this trust may have been abused, but certainly we in the British Numismatic Society have especial reason to remember Dr. Walker with gratitude. He was always glad to allow members of his staff to serve as officers of our Society, and our Editors will testify to the further very substantial contribution which the Coin Room made in the way of casts and photographs to each and every number of our Journal. Dr. John Walker was proud of his Gaelic ancestry and loved a good story even against the Scots, and to end on a personal note, as may seem permissible in the case of so warm a personality, the writer will ever regret that at a very happy last encounter he forgot to remind him of another John the Scot’s icy ‘Tabula tamquam’ when the Emperor Charles the Bald essayed an already hoary witicism borrowed from Theodulf’s store.

\textit{Suaimhneas siorraidhe go bhfaighidh sé!}

R. H. M. D.