OBITUARIES

A. H. F. BALDWIN

No one who frequented the London coin dealers as assiduously as I did during the years 1937 to 1959 can fail to have retained a clear cut recollection of Mr. A. H. F. Baldwin.

To the other members of that so friendly family business he was inevitably and invariably ‘Uncle Fred’. My early impression was of a rather square-cut person whose appraisal of one through his gold-rimmed spectacles was a little intimidating. It was evident that his knowledge of coins was all embracing. Were you at Robert Street merely in the hope of picking up a rare piece, you were made to feel that he didn’t really approve of you. Like the photograph of his father over the mantel shelf—the G.O.M. and founder of the firm—respectfully referred to by everyone as ‘Grandfather’, you were given a severe disapproving look.

But once Mr. Fred realized that you were a student and wanted to learn, then the ice thawed and he became genial and benevolent. How many times did he produce a discreet paper package from some dusty corner of that large room—‘Something’, he would say, ‘that Grandfather had put aside for his own collection.’ One was free to examine and to gloat over such treasures, though to get them priced on the spot was difficult, though one never had to wait many days.

Then came the day when Mr. Fred took me in a taxi to visit Mr. Lockett to see his coins of Henry VII. This was a kindness done to me because Robert Street had accepted me as a bona fide student, and because Mr. Fred appreciated what immense benefit I would derive through Mr. Lockett generously letting me ponder and pore over his coins.

Mr. Fred was a master of his craft. His working knowledge of the English series was only to be equalled, and perhaps surpassed in later years, by his nephew Albert.

I recall too an invitation to visit Uncle Fred at his Richmond home in company with C. A. Whitton. We were not shown many coins—just one modest tray of groats of the Plantagenets and Tudors that kept us gaping and gasping for most of that afternoon.

Mr. Fred was a bachelor and told us an amusing story of the frightful penalties he was ready to inflict on his housekeeper should she dare to enter and disturb the ordered untidiness of his personal coin room.

This Society had a good friend in Fred Baldwin. Always eager to recruit new members among the genuinely studious of his clients, he was, in the early days of my visiting Robert Street, a regular attendant at this Society’s meetings. He was on the Council in 1938–9 and gave the Council sound practical advice in those difficult days.

He was a keen golfer and played regularly until well into his gathering old age. A life of hard work and regular doses of fresh air and exercise kept him young looking until well into his eighties. I remember noting on the last occasion that I saw him, when he was semi-retired and came to Robert Street less regularly, that the hand of time had been gentle with him. The hair was quite white, the physical frame a little shrunken, but his posture and carriage still upright.
OBITUARY

There must be many regular visitors to Robert Street who could fill in more interesting details than these random recollections. They would all agree that with the passing of Uncle Fred the coin student has lost a good friend and the coin business a prominent figure.

E. J. W.

J. D. A. THOMPSON

JAMES DAVID ANTHONY THOMPSON, whose death took place on 3 September 1970, was born 29 July 1914, the only child of the late Revd. J. M. Thompson and of Mrs. Thompson. His father was a distinguished theologian and in later life devoted himself to history.

Anthony Thompson went to Radley, but after a year there his health broke down and his education was continued at home and with a tutor, a Mr. Goldie, a keen Roman numismatist. This, coupled with the gift of a small family collection of coins, started his interest in the subject. Between the ages of 15 and 16 he went to the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford where he spent five or six happy years under Albert Rutherston and Barnet Freedman. He planned to become an artist but, encouraged by J. G. Milne, and E. T. Leeds, his interest in numismatics gradually developed, stimulated by an already considerable love of history.

The sea was in his blood: his maternal forebears had been sailors, captains of their own small trading schooners, and on his father's side there had been Samuel Paget, a ship-owner. In 1797 the Dutch fleet under Admiral de Winter was reported out of port and Paget supplied the English fleet with fresh water in the 'amazing short time of twenty-four hours', so that it was able to put to sea and meet the Dutch fleet the next day to win the battle of Camperdown. Paget was awarded a gold medal (perhaps the only civilian to have been given a naval medal) and, in publicly thanking him, Admiral Lord Duncan said 'This is the man who won the battle.' It is sad to end this story by having to record that the medal was stolen from one of the family in 1926.

Thompson himself would dearly have liked to join the navy, but his health did not permit it; so he did the next best thing by pursuing his studies on naval history and medals, on which he wrote in various journals including our own.

In 1936 he started to work in the Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum on a part-time basis under Milne, and during the Second World War devoted the remainder of his time to the P.O.W. Educational Centre. From 1957 until his death he was an assistant keeper in the Coin Room, primarily engaged on the medieval and modern series.

In 1950 three members of the Heberden Coin Room staff joined in writing a book for young collectors. Dr. Milne wrote the Greek section and Dr. Sutherland the Roman; Thompson contributed the largest section, dealing with medieval and modern coins of the British Isles, the continent of Europe, and the British Empire as well as a chapter on tokens and jettons. This book has been aptly described as remaining one of the best of its kind.

Thompson early recognized that an index of hoards from the British Isles was one of the tools most needed by students of the series and for many years collected material
to fill this need. The result was the publication in 1956 by the Royal Numismatic Society, as the first of its Special Publications, of his *Inventory of British Coin Hoards A.D. 600–1530* in which he recorded nearly 400 finds. How wide he cast his net in seeking these out may be gauged from the bibliography that appears at the beginning and, in addition to examining county journals, he was able to record some finds that were known only from hitherto unpublished accounts. The book has, at times, been subjected to criticism, but it is probably fair to say that some of this fails to take adequate account of the great advance that has been made in English numismatic studies since it was written or to give sufficient recognition to the pioneer nature of the work. It would, however, be equally fair to say that were it to be undertaken today—and a revised edition would be a welcome contribution to our studies—a number of corrections would fall to be made, and it would be wise not to attempt to record the hoards in the detail Thompson sought to do but to leave it to the student himself to refer back to the original sources. But such a judgement is made with the benefit of hind-sight and there can be little doubt that most students of the series find themselves frequently referring to a book to which so much industry was applied.

Thompson’s other important work was the publication in 1967, in the British Academy series *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, of a catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon pennies in the Ashmolean Museum. The museum houses one of the great public collections and has been brought to its present position largely by the deposit there of the coins belonging to the Bodleian Library and those of many colleges, though discriminating purchases have not been lacking. It is pleasing to be able to record that this catalogue has met with universal approbation.

Finally a word must be said of Thompson, the man. He was a person of considerable sensibility and this made him easily discouraged by criticism. Equally, he responded readily to encouragement. He was particularly sympathetic to inquiries and was prepared to go to great pains in dealing with them, whether they came from a scholar or student of standing or from the veriest tyro. His knowledge was wide-ranging and was readily offered to anyone who sought it. He was essentially a likeable man and will be greatly missed by his many friends who were so often indebted to him for help and advice.

C. E. B.