THE PRESIDENT’S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Counting tonight’s elections the membership of the Society stands at 459, of whom 322 are ordinary, 17 are junior, and 120 are institutional members. During the year we have elected 32 new members, and we have lost six by resignation and six by amoval.

With much regret I have to report the deaths of five members: A. H. F. Baldwin, L. L. Kay, W. Laing, Colonel E. C. Linton, and J. D. A. Thompson. Anthony Thompson’s death is a serious loss to the Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum, where he had worked for thirty-four years and had been an Assistant Keeper for the last thirteen. He joined the Society in 1946, served on Council for the years 1950–3, and contributed a number of papers to the Journal. As an author he will, however, probably be best remembered for his Inventory of British Coin Hoards A.D. 600–1500 which, whatever its errors and omissions, deserves to be recognized as a pioneering work. It is to be hoped that, as a tribute to him, a second edition will be prepared which will take account of subsequent work in the field of hoard reconstruction.

Mr. Baldwin, usually referred to as ‘Uncle Fred’ to distinguish him from other members of his family, was well known to several generations of collectors and students. He was called back from semi-retirement to see his firm through a difficult reorganization after the untimely death of his nephew Albert in 1967. He joined the Society in 1923 and served on Council from 1932 until after the war; he was one of our most senior members.

Colonel Linton was elected in 1950 and served on Council for the years 1952–6; he contributed several short notes to the Journal. Mr. Laing had been a member since 1956; Mr. Kay, who lived in the United States, was elected as recently as 1967.

No major changes in the Society have taken place during the past twelve months. Meetings have been well attended on the whole, with an exceptionally large turnout last month for Miss Marion Archibald’s lucid account of the 1968 Colchester hoard. An unusual contribution to our proceedings was the talk in May by Mr. John Bannon on the salvaging of the Dutch ship De Liefde and its treasure, as seen from the point of view of a director of a commercial enterprise. It was clear that the interests of commerce and scholarship need not be irreconcilable when it comes to salvaging wrecks which have been broken up by the action of the sea, though it might be another matter where the wreck was largely intact.

The Librarian reports that loans to members of the two Societies have risen by more than 25 per cent compared with the previous year. Purchases for the library include H. Bertil Petersson’s Anglo-Saxon Currency; Michael Dolley’s Irish Mints of Edward I; the Manx Museum’s catalogue of the J. D. Clucas collection; and issues of the local historical/archaeological journals of Cork, North Munster, Chinnon, and Somerset containing articles of numismatic interest. Volumes donated during the year include further fascicles of the Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles, representing Part II of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (English coins, 1066-1279) and Part III of the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, National Museum, Copenhagen (Anglo-Saxon coins of Cnut). Mention should also be made of The Lincoln Mint c. 890-1279, compiled by
H. R. Mossop and edited by Veronica Smart; and the collected papers of Sir Frank Stenton Preparatory to ‘Anglo-Saxon England’, edited by Lady Stenton, which includes Sir Frank’s lecture to the Society on Anglo-Saxon coinage and the historian, given on the occasion of our first meeting in the Warburg Institute. Later series are represented by a number of new publications, including Philip Whitting’s Coins, Tokens and Medals of the East Riding of Yorkshire; George Berry’s Discovering Trade Tokens (probably the best introduction to those of the seventeenth century); and Part 3 of Seaby’s Standard Catalogue covering the coins and tokens of Ireland. Among reprints of old works, Seaby’s reprint of the British Museum catalogue of Anglo-Saxon coins is very welcome, and the new impression of Mr. Peck’s catalogue is a testimony to the widening appreciation of its value.

In thanking our Librarian, Robert Thompson, for supplying me with information about these new publications, I should also like to mention the contribution he has made towards recruiting new institutional members by circulating information about our Journal to 600 public and university libraries and selected national and special libraries in the British Isles. Although the circular was only sent out a few months ago we have already had several applications for membership as a direct result of it.

We were pleased to learn that Michael Dolley’s painstaking work on the Swedish viking-age hoards had been rewarded with membership of the Royal Swedish Academy. We were therefore particularly glad to welcome at one of our meetings Dr. Nils Ludvig Rasmusson, chief antiquary in charge of the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm, and his charming wife. Dr. Rasmusson will be retiring at the end of the year and will be settling in the historic town of Sigtuna.

Preparations are nearing completion in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland for the replacement of the shillings and pence to which we have been used since Norman times (and perhaps even earlier) by new pence on a decimal system. The transition will take place in February 1971. It has so far caused no more than a ripple across the calm surface of the Society. Personally I have considerable regrets at the passing of the duodecimal system, not only for nostalgic reasons but also because the duodecimal has some advantages over the decimal. However, because of the thoroughness of the preparation (as exemplified numismatically by R. G. de Glanville’s study, published by the Central Statistical Office, of The Numbers of Coins in Circulation in the United Kingdom) I have no doubt that the change will be swift and that it will be a matter of days rather than weeks before the housewife is completely attuned to the new system—the young housewife, at least. And our younger children will have simpler sums to do.

Before I end my fifth and last annual review I should like to say a few words about the future of this Society. I am prompted to do so by the remarks of Mr. Derek Allen on the subject earlier this year in his final address as President of the Royal Numismatic Society. As a past president of our own Society he rightly felt that he was in an especially favourable position to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the two societies. Our great strength, as Mr. Allen recognized, lies in our Journal, for it is in its pages that the major advances in the study of British numismatics during the past forty years are recorded. But, paradoxically, for most of this period we have had to worry about the financing of the Journal. Initially this was because of a declining membership; latterly the membership has grown steadily but costs have risen just as fast. We have
The President's Review of the Year

had to leave special publications on British numismatics to the Royal Numismatic Society and to the British Academy. At the same time the R.N.S., which is concerned with coinage throughout the world and in all ages, has given relatively sparse coverage to British numismatics, both at meetings and in the pages of the Numismatic Chronicle. This is undoubtedly due to the existence of a separate society—our own—which specializes in this field. It is possible that, as a result, the very high quality of recent research in the British series is not as well known abroad as it should be, since the circulation of the Journal is more restricted than that of the Chronicle.

Mr. Allen suggested that the time might be drawing near when a merger between the two societies would be in the interests of both. He had in mind a system under which the two publications would be maintained and members of the joint society could subscribe to either or both. His suggestion deserves to be explored by the councils of the two societies, negotiating on equal terms.

A merger might be considered favourably by our members if it was expected to result in increased financial resources being placed behind the Journal and in further special publications on the British series. I think, however, that it would be necessary to have two programmes of monthly meetings in replacement of the separate programmes of the two societies. Although there is a shortage of research workers in the British series, enough material appears to be forthcoming to make up a worthwhile programme and much detailed work remains to be done throughout the series. Even in the Anglo-Saxon period, where intensive research has been carried out in recent years, we have only begun to scratch the surface of some of the numismatic problems which this research has uncovered. There is considerable scope, in this and later periods, for more general research along the boundary—if boundary there be—between numismatics and economic history, and the detailed examination of particular issues of coins is a necessary prelude to it.

It can, however, be argued that the present division between British and other coinages (incomplete though it is, since the Chronicle publishes a number of papers on British numismatics) is arbitrary and tends to encourage an insular approach. This, in turn, prevents the analytical skills which have been developed by British numismatists working in the medieval field from being applied to related continental coinages such as the Carolingian. Perhaps the solution would be for separate programmes—and separate periodicals—to cover ancient coinages on the one hand and medieval and modern coinages on the other.

Whatever the merits and demerits of a merger on these lines, there must be a danger of a conflict between emotion and logic. The factions which led to the formation of our own Society in 1903 no longer exist, but many of our members have given a lifetime of service to the Society and are intensely loyal to its tradition. It is always easier to break away than to reunite, as has been demonstrated to us recently in other fields. Any scheme of union must therefore be very carefully planned if it is to succeed, and the whole must be of greater value than the sum of its parts. My personal opinion is that there is nothing to be lost, and perhaps much to be gained, in agreeing to any proposal which may be made by Mr. Allen's successor for the establishment of a joint working party to look into the whole question and report to the two Councils. It goes without saying that any decision to amalgamate could only be taken by the members at a General Meeting.