
PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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REVIEW OF THE YEAR

This Society, born of schism, moved partly by self-regarding patriotism of seventy years ago, has outlived all the rancour and contentiousness of those days, yet preserves the tradition of our founding fathers—and mothers—such as W. J. Andrew or Helen Farquhar, of combining coins with humane and documentary studies, a tradition that lives in the work of Mr. Blunt, without mentioning our younger, but scholastically very mature, members. The Society, it is clear, does not need artificial respiration, but it does need sustenance, and for this reason I am putting it to you, on behalf of Council, that we raise the nominal value of the subscription. I need not remind this audience that £6 in 1973 bears only a remote historical relationship to the subscription of the 1900s and in real terms is a much smaller sum.

I shall come to other ‘facts and figures’, for which, as ever, I am entirely dependent on our industrious officers and Council, but my first duty is to recall those that we have lost—only two, I believe, but outstanding. Divers strands of civilization consciously joined in Gustaf VI Adolf, King of the Swedes, Goths, and Vandals, the last of our Royal Members—perhaps the only one whose contribution to art-history and archaeology was considerable, and the only Westerner to have entered Peking by the Imperial gate, who promoted the most spectacular work of nautical archaeology as a monument to his adoptive Wasa forebears, who expounded before the Académie the enduring constitution of his French ancestor, and who disarmed the professed republicanism of the party dominant for forty years, since they had to admit that the obvious first president of Sweden would be Dr. G. A. Bernadotte.

The other loss is too close to us to call for rhetoric, Clifford Allen, our able treasurer for only three or four years, though it seems much longer. I can only extend once again our sympathy to his wife, who was also his qualified helper in accountancy, for which the Society too is grateful. His loss was sudden and, personally, irreparable, but we are fortunate in that Mr. Robert Seaman was ready and able to step immediately into his place.

The tale of membership, after the resignations and amovals you have just heard, is now 512, of which 14 junior and 138 institutional. The great national archaeological societies weathered the horse-latitudes of the later nineteenth century with barely half that number, publishing massively, but present economics demand little less than 500 and I hope the new subscription will not damage it. Eleven members were able to represent the Society (and our sister society) at the International Numismatic Congress in New York and Washington, and seven of these read papers. There were other papers of British interest, mainly small stuff, but I shall be interested to read that on ‘Numismatic
References and Problems in Shakespeare. In connection with the conference a *Survey of Numismatic Research, 1966–71* has been published, with a ‘good showing’ from our members on Ancient British and medieval themes, and the *Polish Numismatic News* put out a special issue with articles in English, especially on statistical methods. Our Librarian, who supplies these details, hardly misses any bibliographical matter in our field. Besides his routine business, with two rare and ephemeral provincial numismatic periodicals among our new acquisitions, his works of supererogation have included answering queries from Essex to Honolulu. Among new publications we must notice the *Sylloge* of his own collection by our senior member Commander Mack who, if that were not enough, has also produced an outline of *The Bath Mint*, to further that city’s laudable and single-handed endeavour to commemorate what officialdom has so stupidly ignored, the millennium, or at least a good symbolic millennium, of the English monarchy itself. Several members have contributed to the Olof von Feilitzen Festschrift, *Otium et Negotium*. Among new works on tokens, Dr. Boon has published two excellent *corpora*, on seventeenth-century, and on later, Welsh tokens on behalf of the National Museum of Wales, and Mr. and Mrs. Judson have relisted those of Essex. There have been some reprints of colonial works and also of Snelling’s *A View of the Coins at this Time Current throughout Europe* (1766). The most, literally, conspicuous new issue has been Dr. Sutherland’s *English coinage, 600–1900*, odd, perhaps, in its allocation of space to various periods, but fully cognisant of recent research and splendidly, even lavishly, illustrated.

Of our own programme I think we can congratulate our Director on its ‘balance’. We have had the description of one great hoard of last year—Lincoln, and several of us are painstakingly filling in the details of old hoards from scattered records. 1972–3, I mean the more or less academic year we observe in reporting hoards, has not produced a bumper harvest. No ancient British, to my knowledge. Those pestilential metal-detectors are responsible for a base-radiate hoard in a bronze bucket, from Beachy Head, as well as for the continued wrecking of a number of important sites, especially ritual ones, for coins, while their detection and the enforcement of legal sanctions against them remains difficult. The following provisional list, from November to November, is based on information kindly supplied by Miss Archibald, supplemented by notices collected by our Librarian. Only Little Wymondley sounds specially remarkable.

COINAGE AND THE MYTH OF THE RENAISSANCE

When I use the word ‘myth’ I am not suggesting that the phenomena we associate with the word ‘Renaissance’ are imaginary or insignificant. It is the syntheses and constructions, made of them and upon them, that are ‘mythical’—fictitious yet spiritually fertile, and hampered by the assumption that they add up to one renaissance, *The Renaissance*, usually introduced by the equally fugitive, originally astrological, word ‘influence’, which implies some causal connection beyond analysis. Every man builds his own Renaissance out of the data to hand and you may object that I am simply offering you mine. No, my intentions are purely destructive, to show up the inconsistencies and paradoxes in other people’s.

One inconsistency goes beyond personal interpretation to the very order of definition—a bounded historical period versus an eternal idea. For some historians *The Renaissance* ends with the sack of Rome in 1527 or that of Florence in 1530, and Burckhart, the prophet of Renaissance studies, went little further. For others, and particularly for the artists that worked within the atmosphere of the myth, down to the eighteenth century and beyond, it is typified by those more or less interchangeable names for it, all beginning ‘Re-’, rebirth, revival, renewal. There can be neo-Gothic and to those outside the myth, neo-Classic, but there cannot logically be neo-Renaissance. It is ‘neo’ by definition, never ceases from renewing itself on its original terms. However various their works may look to posterity, these artists claim to be the full heirs and exponents of *The Renaissance*.

What, you will ask, has this to do with coins, and, in particular, with coins of northern Europe? Once Renaissance elements enter a coinage, after c. 1530, there is change but usually no turning back. Any exceptions that I shall notice are all the more significant. Before the 1530s, however, the appearance of such elements deserves different treatment from those when the idiom has become accepted and the myth articulate. It may be deceptive to look teleologically or retrospectively, from the point of view of 1560 as much as 1860, at northern coins struck during the springtide of the Italian Renaissance. There are novelties indeed, but their connections with any interpretation of the Renaissance must be examined each one on its own terms. The ‘standard text-books’ often talk as though there were already a *Gesamtstil*, recognizable at sight. To Oman the early issues of Henry VII are medieval, the latest ‘pure Renaissance’. Craig heads his chapter on the Tudor kings ‘Renaissance and Debasement’ (an interesting conjunction, to which I shall return) and calls Henry VII ‘patron of the new art of the Renaissance’ for introducing that most Gothic of coins, the sovereign. Dr. Sutherland, more circumspectly, as befits one who has discussed fifteenth-century medals, calls the corresponding chapter in his latest book ‘Innovation and Debasement’ and stresses the virtues of the profile portrait, which is fairly characterized as ‘Italian’. Yet still we have Renaissance influences under the same king, in ‘art-forms and learning’; the ‘frozen conventions’ are characterized as medieval, the realistic portrait as *such* (not simply the profile) as diagnostic of the Renaissance.
I hope I am not guilty of over-conflation if I see in these and many similar citations a set of assumptions, all but one of which are quite defensible, but none of which is self-evident:

(a) The Renaissance is both a ‘movement’ without *termini* and a circumscribed period, excluding the Middle Ages. It is not something that happened in the Middle Ages, nor, contrary to what Vasari implied, is high or even late Gothic art part of the Renaissance.

(b) Yet, while medieval coinage is branded, with justice in some periods, as barren and unoriginal, a really good Gothic piece may be accorded an honorary place in the Renaissance.

(c) Renaissance art and learning are concomitant and both received their ultimate impetus from Italy: or, to put it more usefully, what can be traced to Italy can be claimed for the Renaissance.

(d) Naturalism and rationalism march together.

Only the last of these theses, in my view, is quite untenable. The quintessentially ‘Renaissance’ art of the Quattrocento was concerned with ideals and the mathematics of perspective. Northern art of the time, whether counted in the Renaissance or out, was objective, realistic, but un-rationalizing. The thesis simply ignores the second great question of definition: whether or not, or at what stage, should this vigorous creativity be classed, as by the custom of the Victoria and Albert Museum, with ‘Northern Renaissance’, be it entirely Gothic in detail; or whether some of it should be included on the score of superficial classicisms. We are not just concerned with the passing assumptions of numismatists; such matters are clothed by professional art-historians in rhetoric worthy of Hermogenes or Leonardo Bruni. While Puyvelde was anxious to take that most Italianate of northern painters, Mabuse, out of the Renaissance and to claim him for the North, O. Benesch upbraided the subjects of the only less Italianate Matsys for dwelling in the *gloom of sombre old houses in the shadow of Gothic* . . .’ and treated his *Northern Renaissance* in terms of War in Heaven: Italy, rational, enlightened, clean, versus the obscurantist, superstitious and dirty North. This for the land of Erasmus and Calvin, that for the mumbo-jumbo of Platonic mysteries! In the face of such prejudice we must see which side the Angels are on, and look at that most diagnostic of Henry VII’s new designs, which is neither the sovereign nor the testoon, but the reformed angel, in which alone it might be argued that Alexander of Brugsal had a creative part.

The previous angel, the only original English, ‘Perpendicular’ coin type, was vigorous and well organized, if ruggedly executed. The new one is lazier and sleeker, in the tradition of French court art since Jean Fouquet. It is only Italian in a few details and a vestigial Giottesque solidity. I think its model must have been a larger image, now lost. We have seen some remains of this courtly manner in the Richard III exhibition. Call it ‘Franco-Flemish’ if you wish: it has moved some way from Flemish burgess art when it gains English patrons in the 1470s, and by the 1490s, when it is reflected not only in the coinage but in such things as the Fairford glass, it reaches its apogee in the princely retable of Moulins. Despite its Italian elements, it is schooled in something earther than the levitated mathematics of Piero della Francesca. Those who accept the extreme Italian version of the myth might ignore it as barbarous; others might call it ‘pure’ Renaissance. It is neither: it is one of several grand alternatives.
I suggest that we take these strands in the myth about which there is least dispute, in the order in which they become articulate and thus, at least from that moment, historically attested, and test them for their numismatic import.

First, the idea of revival, originally in language and literature only. But this included calligraphy and epigraphy, and, as I shall show, lettering is the soundest test of ‘Renaissance’ intention on coins.

Second, and a little later, the *rinascimento del’ antichità* in art and architecture. No new thing, this was a recurrent preoccupation of the Middle Ages, but the Italian quattrocento thought it was doing it better, and so too did later centuries. Experiment counted as much as imitation and what was Italian was thought to be either in the antique mode or ‘as good as’. Since in coin-design there was experiment but hardly any antiquarianism, and relatively little in medals too, we must accept anything Italianate as ‘Renaissance’, but not everything within the no less controversial term ‘Mannerist’.

Thirdly, the much-vaunted cult of personality and the concept that Burckhart calls ‘the State as a work of art’, both implying the legitimacy of self-advertisement on coins or elsewhere, and, in particular, of portraiture. However, for most princes the orthodox restraints remained: even in Italy the effect is limited before the ‘Mannerist age’; elsewhere it is conspicuously rare and in *Sondergotik* dress more often than in Italian.

Finally, the flowering of art, as seen by Vasari from his Mannerist perch. Thinking only of Italy and only of painting, he takes his story back to Cimabue and Giotto in the thirteenth century. Students of sculpture took it back to Niccolo Pisano, and had they thought it possible that the Reims Visitation could out-classicize him, they would have included that too. In any case Vasari, explicitly or implicitly, includes the whole of Italian late Gothic painting and its ‘International’, courtly relations. Pisanello, the pioneer of medallic art, was basically one of its exponents, with a strong strain of northern realism, and very little of Rome. The same test that gives him his place in the Renaissance would also admit the Henry VII sovereign, save that it, and the ‘grand Ryal’ type in general, is old-fashioned, hieratic, and probably deliberately so. It is, as we shall see, perhaps the most enduring of those late, innovatory types, which seem to protest the dignity of Gothic against the vulgarity of humanism, and are to be distinguished from the coinages which remain conservative, and in a certain sense ‘medieval’ as a token of their stability. In fact, the overwhelming majority of coin-types until the seventeenth century—in Spain and Portugal until the eighteenth—remain heraldic or non-figurative and admit little room for the Renaissance except in their lettering. In such designs the transition from Gothic to Classic is a matter of detail and for Vasari, too, it is a matter of fashion, not a major factor in the progress of art.

I suggest, then, too that we ignore the odd arabesque and terminal as a sign of the Renaissance, much as we would on a prefabricated panel in a Gothic building, and examine four elements only in coin-design—lettering, heraldry, portraiture, and figure-work. These should show either when design, of whatever idiom, replaces immobilized habit on coins, or when the designers consciously enrol in the battalions of humanism. Of these, lettering is the most widely applicable test: Lombardic was almost universal on medieval coins, even when superseded on other objects, and lent itself admirably to punched dies; the change to Roman was at some cost and usually abrupt, though novel but unclassical ‘intermediate’ alphabets appear occasionally, outside Britain. Heraldry, of course, is of medieval origin, but was not thought obsolescent in the sixteenth
century. Renaissance or Italianizing heraldry is therefore a genuine concept, expressed not in the content of the blazon but in the shape of the shield or the disposition of the achievement. *Stampe*, those personal, but non-heraldic, symbolic compositions, such as the tortoise on palm-tree of Mary and Darnley, stem entirely from Renaissance Italy. Of portraiture and of figural designs, larger than busts, on obverse or reverse, it is enough to stress their relative rarity and the need to test each design not only by Italian standards but by those of other styles, whether or not we assign them to the ‘Northern Renaissance’. There is a vulgar belief that English and Scottish coins are backward and un receptive of Renaissance motifs when compared with what is lumped together as ‘continental Europe’, supposedly basking in the Renaissance for decades before and decades after a fleeting enlightenment under Henry VII. But Italy is one thing, this side the Alps is another and, between c. 1480 and c. 1510, is generally as conservative as Britain, with no greater share of innovations, and these not necessarily Italianizing. I cannot notice them all here, for the next generation is the really critical period, by the end of which it is fair to say that a Renaissance idiom is universally accepted, while England alone stands briefly aloof and even tries to ‘put the clock back’. In the next generation there is an even more determined reaction. To show this I will apply my four tests in turn but the first should be enough to prove the case.

**Lettering.** Generally the issue is simply Roman versus Lombardic, but I must also distinguish, not only the ‘intermediate’ alphabets of *Sondergotik* origin, generally characterised by a double-bowed E (_checksum), but the ‘compromised Roman’ alphabet, with a flat-topped A. The larger coins may use the Roman or ‘intermediate’ (as on the thalers of Kursachsen) relatively early; so may ‘humanistic’ types, as most French testoons from c. 1514. Gold may run ahead of silver, as at Nürnberg, which changes letter c. 1517 and c. 1527 respectively. But the object of the test is to find the final abandonment of Lombardic on any denomination. In much of Italy it was c. 1460: on the Roman *ducata* under Pius II (1458–64). On the papal coins of Avignon it was not till Sixtus IV (1471–84), which matches the French royal mints near Italy, such as Aix, before 1483. The other French mints behaved differently, each a law to itself: according to Blanchet and Dieudonné the process was hardly complete by 1550; even at Paris the *Blanc au Salamandre* used Lombardic in 1540. Besançon changed in 1537, Nancy soon after 1544, but on other French marches it was earlier—in Navarre just before 1516 and at Lausanne just after 1517. In fact, many mints, over a wide area that extended as far as Götzitz in Lusatia, changed about 1516, including the Ducal mints in the Low Countries. Yet, Charles of Egmont’s great series of *Snaphaans* apparently used Lombardic to 1538, Louvain to c. 1539, the bishopric of Utrecht until it was taken over in 1528, Liège until Cornelius of Berg (1538–44) and Münster until 1539, which is not untypical of north Germany. In Sweden the low values change in 1534, using ‘compromised’ lettering at first, in Denmark and Norway between 1535 and 1537. In Castille the change is associated with a convention in 1537, in confirmation of which the dies sent to Mexico for the first issue in the New World (1536–8) are Lombardic, those for the second (1539–40) Roman. To summarize, many mints abandon Lombardic c. 1516, and nearly all the remainder in 1537 ± 3 years.

Beside these Scotland is right up to date. The last coinage of James IV used ‘compromised’ Roman and though there is some reversion to Lombardic and ‘mixing of fonts’ under James V, the change is finalized in 1539. England is the ‘odd one out’.
A slightly irregular Roman alphabet is found, generally 'mixed', on the earliest coins of the 1526 issue and promptly abandoned. No more is seen of Roman until just before the death of Henry VIII, but it is universal on the base issues of 1546–51, to be followed by the most obvious and deliberate return to Lombardic, which lasts into Mary’s reign. The final change comes over with Philip in 1554 and is respected by Elizabeth except on the frankly archaic ryal. Contrary to what we hear, there was no 'progressive tendency to substitute Roman for Lombardic': there was revolution and blind reaction. Out with Somerset, the intellectual with his dreadful, classical palace, who even makes the Reformation speak a foreign tongue! Lay inflation and such knavish tricks at his door! Good old Sterling means good old lettering and everything else in memory of the Good Old Times.

Heraldry says the same. The round-bottomed shield, a typically 'Franco-Flemish' or 'Northern Renaissance' form replaced the ogival, 'heater-shaped' shield on the redesigned angel. It was used on the profile type and throughout the reign of Henry VIII. It is found on continental coins with both late Gothic and classical detail, but is quite distinct from the Italian shapes and the complex Sondergotik and northern Mannerist shapes found in Germany. Then, in 1549, on both gold and base silver, appeared a cartouche-shield with voluted strapwork, more Italian than anything yet seen on a northern coin. In 1551 it was duly replaced by plain, safe, round-bottoms. That was not the end of the voluted cartouche: it came back, in more delicate form on that most cosmopolitan, Italianate, even Tridentine, of coinages, the silver of Philip and Mary, with lettering and portraiture to match, and once more under Charles I, as though a symbol of 'creeping Popery'. In the interval the 'Queen's middle way' leads in something subtle and distinct from either, ogee-tipped, sometimes ornate but not Italian—northern Mannerist, with a touch of Gothic romance, like the Faerie Queene.

Portraiture is a formidable subject. Understand first that to question whether portraiture was ever attempted on a strictly late-medieval coin is not to say there was no portraiture then in any medium. There was unquestionably portrait-sculpture, even if the works of van Eyck and his kind are given entirely to the 'Northern Renaissance', and only if they are so given can the first clear case of portraiture on coins outside Italy in this age be called other than medieval. The 1485 groats of James III demonstrably bear a stamped version of a Flemish-type three-quarter panel-portrait, of which copies exist, and may be compared with the early engraving of the portrait of Edward IV (crown again replacing hat). It has no connection whatever with antiquity, nor with Pisanello. In its time it is unique, but is a forerunner of many transcriptions of full-face or three-quarter portraits into coin-dies in the Mannerist age and later.

The profile-portrait of Henry VII is nearly as remarkable. By this time there have been several such issues outside Italy, but not many—those of the Reyes Catolicos and more or less Sondergotik ones, beginning with Sigismund of Tirol. Henry's has a finesse more Italic than any, yet its truncation and balance are unusual in Italian medals and reminiscent of the South German school when first fully assimilated to the Italian idiom—the medallists Hagenauer, Gebel, and Hans Schwarz, none of whom was out of his apprenticeship in 1504. One group of medals seems to provide a common source, that associated with Niccolo Spinelli, called Fiorentino (the Florentine working out of Florence), whose tiny signed œuvre Bode expanded into hundreds, with a Frenchman and an Englishman among the subjects. More than one artist surely made these works, which