OBITUARY

A. J. H. GUNSTONE

ANTONY John Harris Gunstone, whose death occurred at Lincoln on 31 March 1984 at the early age of 47, was the son of Gilbert John and Audrey Marguerite Gunstone, shopkeepers in Bath. He was born in Bath 27 January 1937, was educated at the City of Bath Boys' School and took his degree at the University of Birmingham in the School of Ancient History and Archaeology. After three years at Keele as Research Assistant in Archaeology and a short spell in the City of Bath Libraries Department, he moved to the Department of Archaeology, Ethnography and Local History at the Birmingham City Museum where he spent twelve active and fruitful years, from 1962 to 74, the last four as Departmental Keeper. It was here that his interest in numismatics developed. He quickly realised that nineteenth- and twentieth-century tickets, checks and passes, a series of particular interest to Birmingham, had been much neglected and set about building up the museum's collection in this series, encouraged, as he gratefully acknowledges in the introduction to his major catalogue of this material published in 1982, by Mr R. N. P. Hawkins. As a result, the collection of modern numismatic material at Birmingham, now including the C. W. Peck collection of coins of the Soho mint, numbers nearly 50,000 pieces.

In 1974 Gunstone married Rosemarie Chatwin and in the same year was appointed Director of the Lincolnshire Museums and Art Gallery. He could not have arrived at a more exciting time: in that year Sir Francis Hill presented to the City of Lincoln the remarkable collection of some 1,400 coins of the Lincoln, Stamford and Torksey mints that he had built up over fifty years. This most generous gift at once placed Lincoln among the leading coin collections in the provinces, something that was recognized by the county borough council which, as one of its last acts, built a strongroom at the Usher Gallery, primarily to house the Hill collection: Gunstone, it need hardly be said, played a major part in the planning and execution of this important project. As a result it is possible for these coins, many of great rarity, to be seen by the public in secure conditions.

Gunstone had already made two substantial contributions to early English numismatics in the publication in the British Academy series Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles of volumes on coins in Midland Museums (1971) and of West Country Museums (1977). These two volumes revealed, to most of us for the first time, the extent of the treasures that are, often hidden away, in local museums and, as every piece is illustrated and, wherever known, its provenance is recorded, have proved of great value to students, as well as providing a measure of security for the collections themselves; the risk of theft must surely be reduced when it is known that a fully illustrated record has been published.

Sir Francis Hill had been urged by Sir Frank Stenton to undertake, in the leisure of his retirement and when he became "less mobile", the publication of his collection. But leisure he never achieved: he remained as active in his retirement as ever, and he gladly accepted Gunstone’s offer to prepare the catalogue. This was first mooted to the British Academy in September 1975 and warmly accepted. By 1977 a third of the photos had been made and a text was foreshadowed by the summer of 1978. In the event it was about a year later that all went to the press. Publication was in 1981. The volume was acclaimed as a work worthy to stand as a monument to both donor and author.

While this volume was in the press, Gunstone had not been idle. Already in 1978 he was reporting that sufficient material was available in south-eastern museums (omitting London) to make a useful volume and that he would like to make a start on it as soon as the Lincoln volume was out of the way. Progress was made, but by the autumn of 1981 there is refer-
ence to ill-health, in spite of which he struggled on against ever-increasing odds. At his death he left a text in an advanced state (beautifully typed as ever by Mrs Gunstone) which it will certainly be possible to complete. Material for the plates is all there and mounting should not present an undue problem. Publication may be expected in 1987.

If I have dealt with this at some length it is because it so well reflects Gunstone’s highly professional and dedicated approach to his numismatic work. It is typical of him that he asked that anyone who wished to make a contribution in his memory should do so to the Society of Antiquaries of London. At the time of writing £310 has been received and this will go to the purchase for the Society’s library of numismatic books, each of which will contain a ticket recording that it has been given in Gunstone’s memory. His early death is a great loss to the subject and to his many friends and admirers. All will wish to offer deepest sympathy to his widow and two infant daughters.

C. E. Blunt