OBITUARY

HERBERT SCHNEIDER

HERBERT Schneider, who died in January 1989, was a universally acclaimed expert on the subject of English gold coins ranging from Henry III to date. He was born in Brunswick to parents of British nationality and moved to Zurich when he was sixteen where he completed his education. As a linguist he spoke fluent English, French and German to which he later added Flemish. He also had some knowledge of Spanish and Italian and maintained a remarkable knowledge of Latin.

His career took him to Antwerp, where he joined the family firm which had trading and petrochemical interests in Belgium and elsewhere. He soon took charge of the financial affairs of the group where he remained for his working life.

As a very young man he became interested in English gold coins and over the years he built up an extremely important collection, starting first with the hammered series and then extending to the milled gold coins. With his background he was always interested in Flemish gold coins which he also collected, although his main activity lay with the English series.

During the war, Herbert was actively engaged in the British Army, in the Secret Service and operations of the S.O.E. It was not until 1947 that he was able once more to turn his attention to numismatics. At about this time the gradual dispersal of the old famous collections began, and he was fortunate to be able to add very considerably to his own from Raynes, Ryan, Lingford, Carter, Lockett and others. He also purchased many coins from the collections of Capt. Vivian Hewitt and Gordon le Mare. The latter, in particular, gave him the opportunity to expand his milled coins to include all the coins with symbols such as Elephant and Castle, VIGO, LIMA, and EIC which he had not previously collected. His milled collection reached a point of total completion as far as all varieties of coins struck for circulation was concerned: he did not generally include patterns and proofs.

In the hammered series Herbert Schneider extended his interest to include die varieties in certain areas, and in this respect he was particularly strong in the Restoration coinage of Henry VI, the Flemish imitation nobles of Edward IV, and the hammered coinage of Charles II. He made a special study of the coins of Charles I and his best known numismatic paper was devoted to this reign. The scope of his collection of the coins of this reign is perhaps best illustrated by the presence of twenty examples of the Oxford triple unites, representing all varieties.

It is not always the case, however, that major collectors are also serious students of numismatics. Herbert Schneider was a strong exception, however, and he developed a knowledge of his subject second to none. Although he only collected gold coins he had a considerable knowledge also of the silver and copper coins of the period in which he was interested, as is evidenced by his review of the late C. Wilson Peck's great work on copper, tin and bronze coins. He was a prolific correspondent, despite many other claims on his time, and he was never happier than when studying his coins and either writing articles or corresponding with other numismatists. There can be few, if any, students of this particular series of coins who were not aware of Herbert Schneider and his formidable collection.

Herbert was elected a member of the British Numismatic Society in 1944 and appointed a Vice President in 1968. He would surely have been President had he lived in England. He was awarded the Sandford Saltus medal from the BNS in 1965 for the numerous works and articles which he contributed to the British Numismatic Journal. In his own words he referred to this medal as the 'Victoria Cross of Numismatics'. At the end of this obituary notice will be found a list of his numismatic publications, from which the extent of his
interest in, and knowledge of English gold coins will readily be seen. The most important works are those on the Tower gold of Charles I, published in four parts, and the hammered coins of Charles II. These works are, and will remain, the standard work of reference for these coins.

I came to know Herbert Schneider personally in 1946 and over the years we formed a strong association in numismatics and a very close friendship. He was a man of great modesty and charm who was unfailingly polite and helpful to everybody. He was possessed of a delightfully impish sense of humour which came out strongly in the voluminous correspondence we conducted over the years: the files relating to his instructions for the Lockett sales alone would fill a useful sized volume.

A sylloge of the Schneider collection of gold coins is under preparation and it is hoped that this will prove a fitting memorial to a great numismatist and a much loved friend.

D. G. LIDDELL

PUBLICATIONS OF HERBERT SCHNEIDER

1950
‘Modern Sovereign Forgeries’, NCirc 58 no. 12 (MSC), 732.

1953

1956

1957
‘The five guinea and two guinea pieces of George II, listed by dies’, NCirc 65, no. 1, 8–12 and no. 2, 43–55.

1958

1959

1961
‘The ‘Regina’ coins of James I and Charles I’, SCMB (December, 1961), 469.

1962
‘Mr Schneider’s Review of Mr Peck’s Catalogue’: (A translation over the initials M.M.O’D of Mr Schneider’s review published in RBN, 1961.) NCirc 70, no. 9, (1962), 187–88.

1964

1965

1967

1968

1974

1979

1983
HELEN, she never used her other names Diana Isabella, was born on New Year's Day 1940, the only child of Nora and George Frizzell of 7 Hexham Road, Heddon-on-the-Wall, a few miles west of Newcastle – an address which was to be her home all her life. She attended the local school in Heddon, and later, a private school in Newcastle. When she was fifteen years old, her father, George, who had seen service in the Royal Marines, died at the age of 53 years. She was christened and later confirmed at St Andrew's Church, Heddon, where her funeral service was held, just around the corner from her lifelong home.

On leaving school she worked at the Ministry of Pensions, big in Newcastle. It was there that she got to know a paraplegic who was confined to a wheelchair – it was not until Helen arrived that she found anyone to push her up to the canteen for lunch. Typical of the Helen we all got to know.

After some years, Helen went to work for a coin dealer in Newcastle, and in 1968 came to London to run their newly opened London office.

I first met Helen early in July 1969 when, after work one afternoon, she came to see me about a job, prompted by a coin dealer here to-day who used to call on her, and who had gleaned that she would like a change. I well remember the interview, for money, usually the vital ingredient, was not mentioned. She was committed to one month's notice to her employer, would then take two weeks' holiday, and start on 11 August. Little did I know what the future was to hold.

Baldwin's is a small firm and has only ever employed one person in a secretarial capacity; so, when the need arose, Helen was also emergency tea lady, post clerk, book-keeper or what have you, as, indeed, we all were in a firm at most ten strong. From the beginning she impressed me very quickly how reliable she was when attending London coin auction sales, where she became a familiar face, be it at Glendining's, Sotheby's or Christie's.

Soon after Helen's arrival, we moved office into 11 Adelphi Terrace, a rather more pleasant building with plenty of natural daylight, and where Helen found it easier to meet clients. As time went by she got to know more and more of them, sometimes visiting them, sometimes being wined and dined by them. And very soon, Helen was running her own numismatic parties, playing the role of cheerful hostess to a complete cross-section of coin buffs, national museum curators, government ministers, Uncle Tom Cobley and all. There was always one such gathering in October for Coinex, the London Coin Fair, and another before Christmas – and very lively affairs they would turn out to be.

I know there were similar gatherings for other circles of friends, carefully chosen, matched if you like. I well remember being invited to lunch one Sunday. Did I really want to come into town on a summer Sunday to meet an unknown client, a colonel and his lady? Well, it was late enough for me to have my Sunday morning outing on the river in the VIII beforehand. And it would be Greek, so the boss had better turn up clutching bottles of retsina and sweet wine from Samos. Lunch finished at around 7 o'clock, and Bill and Angela were to be our guests at Henley. Many of you, I know, can tell a similar tale.

How she managed to do all her entertaining on her own, latterly from the cubby-hole of a kitchen at St George's Square was little short of amazing, though a furniture mover or wine waiter was often pressed into service! Although she was getting weaker by the day, and had only just returned from what must have been an exhausting trip to New York, she still threw her usual party last Christmas.

And yet Helen was a very private person, and her activities and friends were
compartmentalised which is why this tribute might be considered rather one-sided. Others
would view Helen from another angle, a different compartment. One very soon realised
that what most, and certainly I, would consider of general interest and knowledge, Helen,
with regard to herself, would consider absolutely confidential. One hardly dare ring her
door bell without prior arrangement, so much so that my co-executor did not dare do so
when her car broke down outside Helen’s door!

In early days, I remember, she seemed to manage to get to many London shows, concerts
and the like, but one never knew, until one might overhear her recommending a particular
show to an American customer. One February, returning from holiday as brown as a nut, it
was evident we were not going to be told where she had been. Perhaps two years’ later, in
conversation with an American collector, he let slip that Helen had been to Cuba. And
some while later, in a relaxed moment, I was shown a snap of Helen wrapped in the arm of
a large athletic Cuban. It was Juantarena, no less, the Olympic gold medallist, a greater hero
than Castro.

Helen came further into her own when the firm’s telephone system was re-organised, and
all incoming calls were routed through her. Hitherto, she had chatted to people when she
saw them, but now everyone was greeted before they were put through: softened up, some
might say. The friendliness was not always limited to greetings – our accountant, with a
self-admitted terrible sense of honour, always had diet of black bullets, local Newcastle
mints, after a visit. And outside the office, the company car was soon put to constant use,
often to the benefit of clients, as Helen played the willing chauffeuse.

Helen loved travel, used, one might think, as a medium for meeting people. Not that I
was always party to where she might have been. On several occasions she attended the
annual congress of the international dealers’ association – held at Whitsun at some pleasant
or exotic spot – where she could not have been more popular. But then I always said that she
knew far more people in the coin business than I did. For three years she worked the tannoy
at the International Coin Fair in New York in December, and I often wondered whether any
American realised that he was being addressed in a Geordie accent. I have heard of
travellers’ tales too numerous to mention, of meeting Daniel Fearon’s former neighbours on
the Great Barrier Reef, and in America asking someone for the local drugstore and going
back on holiday the next year to stay with the same someone. Her address book was always
handy.

Only last September, accompanied by Lynne Abbess, she stayed as a guest at a Greek
customer’s holiday home on Santorini, virtually gatecrashed an academic conference, which
she knew was being held on the island, introduced herself, and in turn was introduced to
many more academics. And at all times, especially when travelling, she enjoyed using her
camera. No one need ever lack for a group photograph when Helen was around to operate a
camera. And in spite of all these activities, Helen would be the first to say that she was shy.

The move to St George’s Square gave her a small terrace with space for flowers, from
which she got much enjoyment. Since surgery she often stayed in Sussex with friends with a
large garden, and got much pleasure from visiting places such as Sissinghurst.

For many years she attended meetings of the British and Royal Numismatic Societies and
recently became very involved with the newly formed British Art Medal Society, being
made responsible for fund-raising and sponsorship of their excellent, and thus expensive,
biannual journal. All three societies are remembered generously in her will.

Summer 1988 Helen told me she had problems with cancer and underwent major surgery
in the September. On hearing the news, one Californian client had Berry Bros and Rudd
deliver a case of champagne to St George’s Square. Helen didn’t drink champagne –
doubtless some of you benefitted. Another, from the West Indies, effectively paid her clinic
bills for her. And it was typical of Helen, the straight-talking Geordie, that she wanted no
visitors in hospital, which some found hard to understand; I do believe, some were turned
away at the ward. It was on the ward that I first met Helen's mother – after twenty years! A
grand old lady I only wish I had been given the opportunity to meet before. The subsequent
prognosis was not encouraging. Helen adopted a very aggressive attitude to her problems
and one did one's best to support and encourage her. She certainly did not let on; many,
even at a late stage, had no idea that she was terminally ill. As late as February she took
encouragement from a nasty attack of shingles, in that shingles became the problem, not
cancer.

On 4 March, Helen entered a clinic in Kidderminster, whence, on the 10th, I received a
note giving details of a rather bleak future, but that 'the little devil inside me doesn't realise
he's dealing with a Geordie'. Ten days later, she passed away in Westminster Hospital.

When one looks back on Helen's life, one sees a forthright, friendly Geordie who led an
extraordinarily full life, full of action and full of people. And yet she maintained a very close
relationship with her widowed mother, and close contact with her home and friends in
Heddon. Although she constantly underplayed her role in the firm, latterly introducing
herself as 'dogsbody', I would like to think in large part she enjoyed her work as well.
Certainly the people in the coin world enjoyed her. Of some three hundred letters received
by her mother one, perhaps, speaks for us all, and I quote 'Of all the many women it has
been my pleasure to have contact with in my professional and numismatic life, none has
been more outgoing, more genuine or positive than she. Being a northerner myself means
perhaps that I was well placed to appreciate her cheerful, forthright manner, but her wide
circle of friends can leave one in no doubt of how generally popular and appreciated she
was. We shall miss her very much.'

PETER MITCHELL