PREFACE

This special volume of the British Numismatic Journal is a contribution to the celebration of the centenary of the foundation of the British Numismatic Society in 1903. In addition to an authoritative narrative history of the Society by our Vice-President, Mr Hugh Pagan, it comprises a series of invited chapters focussing on the ways our understanding of British numismatics has been transformed over the past century; a transformation accomplished, in large measure, through studies by our own members in papers published through the medium of this Journal. To bring out the full significance of the advancement of knowledge in their particular fields, however, it would have been impossible for the authors to ignore the major contributions made by non-members or to confine their assessments to the Society’s own publications. It is hoped, therefore, that their surveys will provide a valuable overall guide to the scholarly achievements of the past century and serve as a boost to further research. The contributions naturally reflect the writers’ own individual method and style and indeed their personal opinions. As such they are refreshingly positive and, in approach, diverse; hence the volume as it now appears. The Society is grateful to the authors and especially to three who undertook their papers at very short notice. Thanks are due, additionally, to Mr Pagan who, with the help of Mr Charles Farthing, carried out the considerable research necessary to compile the prosopographical record of members since 1903 that is included as an appendix.

As Hugh Pagan brings out so vividly in his introductory chapter the Society’s genesis was an outcome of the disquiet felt by our founding fathers – and notably that of the combative Major Carlyon-Britton – with the Royal Numismatic Society’s seemingly perverse neglect of the study of post-Roman British coinage. Coupled with this was their perception of a lack of interest in the medieval and modern series on the part of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum – so closely associated with the Royal and somewhat unfairly personified in the unfortunate Herbert Appold Grueber – and its supposed disdain of the amateur collector/student of those series. For many years now the Society’s relationship with these two bodies could not be more different. There is a healthy common membership with the Royal – the great majority of the contributors to this volume are also Fellows of the Royal Numismatic Society – and at institutional level the societies share their Library holdings and work together in a variety of numismatic concerns. Relations with the curatorial staff at the British Museum could not be more cordial or productive either – indeed some of the most important research in the British series over the past half century would not have been feasible without a high degree of personal collaboration between the professional curator and the independent scholar. Nowadays, too, it would be considered odd if no member of the Museum staff was a member of the Society’s council. This personal involvement in the Society’s activities is demonstrated here by the fact that four of our authors and one of our editors are or were Museum curators; two of the authors – Virginia Hewitt and Barrie Cook – being among those who were prevailed upon to write for this volume of the Journal at very short notice.

The Society likewise has had a long and happy relationship with the leading London coin dealers and auction houses and a particular debt of gratitude is due to Messrs. Spink and Son, who in recent years have been closely associated with the production of the Society’s Special Publications, for a generous subvention towards the costs of this volume of the Journal.

This book chronicles the achievements of the Society over the past hundred years and the contribution that its members have made to the study of British numismatics since 1903. But while it is retrospective it should be thought of also as a prelude to achievements yet to come, laying down a challenge to future generations to maintain the standards of scholarship that the Society has cultivated hitherto.

David Wilmer Dykes
President