PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2003

D.W. DYKES

BEFORE I embark on my final Address as your President I must thank you all for the great honour you have done me this evening. Honorary membership of the Society is a rare distinction and one I did not expect, nor have any reason to expect. I appreciate your gesture very much and all the more for its being extended to me in our centenary year and, as it happens, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of my nomination to membership of the Society.

During the year we have elected thirty-one new members and, allowing for losses through death, resignation and amoval, we should end this session with 611 members (nine honorary members, 490 ordinary and 112 institutional). This is a net reduction of six on the total membership last November and is the first setback in growth we have experienced for quite some time. I am sure, however, that it is only a temporary check, for it was to be expected that there would be some loss of members as a result of the substantial increase in a subscription that had been stabilized for more than a decade, and I think that the number of elections this year – continuing the trend of the recent past – is a healthy indicator for the future. It is perhaps instructive, too, that well over half of the twenty-three resignations and eleven amovals have been of members elected in the past decade, emphasizing the overall continuity of membership that, as I have remarked before, is a formidable strength of the Society.

Unhappily, our losses have included three deaths: those of S.A. Bole (1994), Robert Lockron (1986–87 and 1996), and Barry Greenaway (1995), who died a few weeks after our last Anniversary meeting. I never met Mr Bole or Mr Lockron, but I was acquainted with Barry Greenaway, a well-known dealer in tokens and paranumismatics and a familiar and respected figure at numismatic gatherings. I should also refer to three former members who in their different ways all made a significant contribution to British numismatics. Douglas Liddell, a member of long standing, elected in 1947 and resigning only in 1999, was a former Managing Director of Spink and Son and for over four decades a considerable figure in the British coin trade. Joseph Corbitt (1955–89) was a partner in the Newcastle-on-Tyne firm of Corbitt and Hunter in the 1960s and publisher of Henry Mossop’s *The Lincoln Mint*, a series of useful numismatic handbooks and a number of Robert Bell’s books on British tokens. And Robert Bell himself (1965–74 and 1977–81), a distinguished consultant surgeon, who built up a notable collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century copper tokens and did much to popularize these series through the books he produced, drawing on the then virtually forgotten articles in the *Bazaar, The Exchange and Mart* by the Victorian collector Richard Thomas Samuel.

I had hoped that the special centenary volume of the *Journal* would have been available tonight. Unfortunately, despite every effort of the editors to cope with a very tight production schedule this has not proved to be possible. The volume is now at its final stage of printing and binding and should be ready for publication in the course of the next few weeks, although it may well not be practicable to dispatch it to members until after Christmas. I am very grateful to the authors, some of whom undertook chapters at very short notice, for their contributions to an analytic but refreshingly readable survey of the ways our understanding of British numismatics has been transformed over the past century. The value of the volume is enhanced by an authoritative narrative history of the Society by our Vice-President, Hugh Pagan, and a complete record of our membership since 1903 compiled by Mr Pagan and Charles Farthing. Editing the text and seeing it through the press has been a formidable and unenviable task for Nick Holmes and Gareth Williams, and my special thanks are due to them and not least to Charles Farthing, who has dealt

---

1 The figure of 490 for ordinary members includes three members in full-time education and/or under twenty-one years of age.
with the last-minute problems that have beset us. A particular debt of gratitude is due, too, to Messrs. Spink and Son, who in recent years have been closely associated with the production of the Society’s Special Publications, for a substantial subvention towards the costs of this volume of the Journal.

Our target of producing a Commemorative Medal to mark the celebration of the centenary of the Society’s foundation in July was happily met, thanks to the enthusiasm of the commissioning panel led by Robin Porteous and the diplomatic skills of Kevin Clancy, the panel’s secretary and our interface with the designer and the medal department at the Royal Mint. Six experienced numismatic artists were invited to submit designs for the project, and the panel – Philip Attwood, Graham Dyer and the numismatic designer, John Mills, a past president of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, in addition to Robin Porteous and myself) – chose the work of Danuta Solowiek-Wedderburn, one of the foremost medallic artists of her generation and someone who has been at the heart of the renaissance in medallic art over the last twenty years. Although one or two of us had some slight hesitation when we first saw her initial two-dimensional drawings, this was completely dissipated when, following some dialogue with the artist, her final work was revealed as a plaster relief. Our new commemorative piece is Danuta Solowiek-Wedderburn’s first struck medal and everyone I have spoken to has expressed delight with something that, while traditional in format, is at the same time arresting and innovative in its design. My warm thanks are extended to Danuta, to all those concerned in the production of the medal, and not least to Robin Porteous for his sensitive and characteristically urbane chairmanship of the commissioning panel, and to Kevin Clancy for progressing the venture through to such a successful conclusion. To enable you all to follow the choices before the panel, a note on the competition and the submitted designs has been included in volume 72 of the Journal.

Council has decided that specimens in silver, engraved with the recipient’s name, should be awarded from time to time – but very sparingly – as a token of esteem to those members who Council consider have made distinguished contributions to the study of British numismatics through the Society and its publications. The first medals have been awarded to Professor David Brown, Professor Peter Gaspar, Marvin Lessen and Harrington E. Manville, and I had the greatest pleasure in presenting Peter Gaspar’s to him personally at our special summer meeting.

The highlight of our year was the summer meeting in early July, held on this occasion not in a non-metropolitan setting, but at the British Museum to coincide very approximately with the Society’s foundation date. On Friday evening, 4 July, over a hundred members and guests attended an informal reception in the HSBC Money Gallery to toast the health of the Society. I imagine our founders would have found the choice of venue an odd one, bearing in mind that it was in part their perception of the Museum’s lack of interest in medieval and modern British numismatics that helped to precipitate the formation of our Society. But times have changed since 1903, and for decades now the relationship between the Society and the Museum could not have been more cordial or productive; nowadays, too, it would be strange indeed not to find members of the Museum staff intimately involved in our activities as Officers of the Society, members of our Council or contributors to the Journal. It was an excellent evening, at which, as I have mentioned, we were able to entertain a number of distinguished guests, including Danuta Solowiek-Wedderburn, to whom I was delighted to present an inscribed silver version of her medal. From my personal observation, everyone present enjoyed the function immensely. Saturday, 5 July, saw the Society in more formal mode in the Stevenson Lecture Theatre. In the morning the focus was brought to bear on some of the personalities who had helped shape the Society over the years, while in the afternoon, after a rather good buffet lunch, a series of shorter papers looked at the Journal and how it has inspired research and moved our knowledge of numismatics forward. That all the arrangements went so smoothly was due in large measure to the invaluable help given by Joe Cribb, the Keeper of Coins and Medals, and Virginia Hewitt and, of course, to the organizing skills of our Director.

A specimen of the Medal in bronze was also presented to the British Museum during the evening and subsequently also to other national museums.
These skills were brought into play again in the lecture programme he devised for the year. The appeal of a schedule that has to cater for the wide spread of our members’ interests was made manifest by the strong attendances that have been a feature of our meetings in recent years. The lectures ranged from John Creighton’s interpretation of the influence of the numismatic imagery of the ‘Augustan Revolution’ on the coinage of Celtic Britain to Harry Manville’s examination of the die manufacture of the 1787 shilling, from Peter Guest’s analysis of late Roman coin hoards in Britain to Philip Mernick’s fascinating talk on medieval jettons and their symbolism, and from Mark Blackburn’s review of aspects of the Hiberno-Norse currency to Alan Sawyer’s study of Tudor coinage letterforms. One talk I regret I had to miss because of complications following what I cavalierly thought was a minor operation was Anna Gannon’s discussion of the art of the Anglo-Saxon sceatta but, at least, I have had the consolation of reading her wide-ranging appraisal of the subject in her intriguing Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage. Last month Professor Peter Mathias brought our lecture programme to a close with the eighth biennial Linecar Lecture that he devoted to a characteristically penetrating analysis of eighteenth-century currency problems and the measures taken to overcome them. Professor Mathias’s Lecture appears earlier in the volume of the Journal carrying this address.

Mention of our Director reminds me that in March Graham Dyer retired from the service of the Royal Mint after more than four decades as its Librarian and Curator. The high mutual regard in which the Society and the Mint hold each other, and the degree of collaboration which has been developed between the latter institution and numismatic studies generally, owe more than a little to Graham, who has combined with his professional skills a degree of scholarship which has considerably advanced our knowledge of modern British coinage. Now a man of leisure, more work of the quality and discernment for which he is acknowledged will surely flow from his pen. His retirement, of course, did give me some qualms but these have been more than put to rest – and my pleasure made fulsome – by the appointment of Kevin Clancy as Graham’s successor at the Mint. I am sure we wish them both a very happy and fulfilling future.

As some of you know a significant part of my life has been spent in south Wales and, for more years than I now like to contemplate, in the National Museum of Wales. It gave me the greatest personal satisfaction, therefore, to be able in May to present the John Sanford Saltus Medal for 2002 to Edward Besly. Mr Besly, a popular Officer of the Society in a variety of guises for some eleven years, has made an impressive contribution to numismatic science over a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from Roman coinage to the English medieval series and the mints of the Civil War – the last an area in which he is undoubtedly the country’s foremost authority. He has also done much to bring the results of his work to the attention of a wider public through his lectures and more popular publications. He has now turned his attention to the National Museum’s collection of gallantry medals with the enthusiasm and precision that one has come to expect of him, and his picture book on the subject – For Those in Peril – is, I understand, on the brink of publication.3

May was a good month for the Society because that was also when Martin Allen’s The Durham Mint was published as the fourth volume in our Special Publications Series. As well as being a meticulous study of the Episcopal mint of the bishops-palatine of Durham from its establishment in the late eleventh century to its demise in 1541 it will, more generally, be a fundamental resource for students of later medieval English coinage and monetary history. It has been very well received and, in every respect, maintains the standards demanded of our Special Publications. Already our thoughts are turning to volume five, and I think I can say with reasonable assurance that this – Kevin Clancy’s The Silver Exchange of 1817: Origins, Conduct and Legacy – could well appear by the end of next year.

I have, of course, referred already to the special celebratory volume of the Journal. When you receive it you will see that it is numbered ‘73’. Volume 72, the volume carrying the year date of

3 The text of my citation on the occasion of the presentation and of Edward’s gracious reply will be published with this Address in volume 74 of the Journal.
2002, was to have appeared after the centenary volume, but as things are and due to the efficiency of our production editor, David Symons, it will now be published in tandem with volume 73 and the two volumes will be sent out as a single package. As I said earlier, I hope against hope that this will be before Christmas, but the vagaries of the post being what they are such a target may well not be practicable and we will probably have to wait until the New Year.

The 13th International Numismatic Congress was held in Madrid in September. Indifferent health that has plagued me for so much of the year prevented my attendance. I am pleased to say, though, that the Society was remarkably well represented by our Vice President, Hugh Pagan, and a strong contingent of members, while Robin Porteous kindly acted as my proxy at the Congress business session. One outcome of that session was that a decision was taken to hold the 14th Congress in Glasgow in 2009. It will mean a great deal of organizing work for Donal Bateson who, I am delighted to see, has been elected to the Commission’s executive committee, but I am sure we will all lend our support with enthusiasm.

As I have already remarked, this evening happens to be the fiftieth anniversary of my nomination to membership of the Society, my proposer being Anthony Thompson, a good friend and warm-hearted mentor at Oxford. The President in 1953 was Edgar Winstanley. A dental surgeon by profession, his major numismatic work was his ‘Coinage of Henry VII’ (with W.J.W. Potter) that extended over three volumes of the *Journal* in the early sixties, and for which he was eventually awarded the Sanford Saltus Medal in 1968. 1953 was a euphoric year, the year of the Coronation and the supposed dawn of a new Elizabethan age. The Korean War came to an end, Everest was conquered and England won the ashes. Numismatically, the year was significant for the discoveries of the Bootham Hoard at York and of a lead trial-piece of the Confessor at Winchester,4 and for the foundation of the British Association of Numismatic Societies, the success of which over the years has confounded those Jeremiahs who, at the time, saw the new organization as unnecessary.

And what of the Society? Our recurrent financial position, as has so often been the case, was not an easy one and the costs of the *Journal* were eating into our capital. A major recruiting drive was therefore about to take place; alas, this was not as productive as had been hoped. But the year was eventful for the Society not least because the renaissance in Anglo-Saxon studies was beginning to become apparent. Michael Dolley – to whose enthusiastic encouragement and imaginative thinking I, among many, was to owe so much – had spent his second summer in Stockholm, and as Winstanley said at the Anniversary meeting: ‘I fancy that Mr Dolley may before long be giving us quite a lot to think about’. And other new members, of an even younger generation, were making their mark, for in September the Society was treated to a second important paper on the Scottish coinage by the then eighteen-year-old Ian Stewart. Lord Stewartby cannot be here tonight but Stewart Lyon, Peter Woodhead and David Sealy, all of whom were members in 1953, are present. I spoke of continuity a little while ago, and it delights me greatly that of the 138 private members in 1953 ten are still of our number and at least six of them remain very active in numismatic studies today.

We are much stronger today than we were fifty years ago. As the Treasurer has already indicated, our finances are in good shape, our membership is thriving, our meetings are well attended, the *Journal* – the yardstick by which our claims to be a learned society must ultimately be judged – is recognized as authoritative and our Special Publications Series is now well established. All this is due to successive Presidents, Officers and Councils, who on several occasions in the past half-century have had to grapple with problems that at the time seemed intractable but which with the support of our membership were overcome. And so we have completed our centenary year, and for its success we owe a considerable debt to our Council and especially to our Officers who have put so much energy into making the year so notable. I have mentioned our editors but I must my express my gratitude once more to Nick Holmes, who has had to shoulder with considerable equanimity overall responsibility for two volumes of the *Journal* and a special publication in the

---

course of twelve months. Philip Mernick, now completing his second year as Treasurer, has again demonstrated not only his efficiency in husbanding our monies but in fostering a radical approach to our financial controls that speaks well for the future. Tony Holmes, our self-effacing Librarian, too, although burdened with remedial building works and storage problems, has pursued the cataloguing of our holdings so effectively that a complete list of our books will soon be available on CD. I have mentioned Kevin Clancy several times. He has carried a burden this year over and above that normally expected of a Director with zest and dedication. I am only sorry that he cannot be here tonight because he has been admitted to hospital. I am sure all our good wishes go to him for a speedy recovery. Of Charles Farthing, who took up office with me, novices together, I can say no more than that he has served the Society with unswerving loyalty, painstaking attention to detail and a seemingly magic ability to overcome the trickiest of problems. I once described him, in what I thought was a suitably nautical figure of speech, as the sheet anchor of the Society, an ultimate security you can rely on at all times; and I meant it.

Finally there are the Vice Presidents, always available for advice, with a fund of knowledge of past practice and always ready to give of their time and expertise. I will mention only one by name. Whatever our successes today we must never be complacent about tomorrow and I must thank Peter Woodhead – and the members of his Future Policy Working Party, Kristin Bornholdt, Norman Biggs, Philip de Jersey and Robin Eaglen – for the time and energy they have given to setting out a blueprint for the future direction of the society.

And I thank you all for your support of the Society and not least your personal kindness to me, a generosity of spirit that, I am sure, you will extend, equally unstintingly, to our new President, Mark Blackburn.

My very last duty as I stand down from the Presidency is to invite you all to join me, after the second part of my address, in celebrating once more the Society’s achievement of its first century but, more than this, since we must not wallow in retrospection, in toasting, too, the Society’s success in the years to come.

(The President then delivered a paper entitled ‘Some Reflections on Provincial Coinage 1787–1797’, the text of which is published at pages 160–174, above).