

REVIEWS

Gaulish and Early British Gold Coinage, by John Sills (London, Spink and Son Ltd., 2003). xi + 555 pp., 17 pls.

In recent years the intellectual pace in Iron Age and Roman numismatics has been set by the archaeologists – the followers of John Collis and Richard Reece in their respective fields. In 2003 the numismatic historians fought back on both fronts, in the shape of two mighty works. In his monumental *Arma et Nummi* (Vienna, 2003) the young Austrian scholar Bernhard Woytek has devoted 631 pages to tell the story of just nine years of Roman history in the 40s BC, weaving his narrative together from a detailed study of the literary sources and exhaustive investigation of the coins. John Sills has performed a similar operation, no less meticulously but, by page count at least, rather more efficiently, covering approximately 250 years of late Iron Age coinage and history within the space of only 350 pages of text. For this great, if relative, mercy, this reviewer, who is assessing both books this year, is immediately grateful to Sills, for a remarkably brisk and concise treatment of an obscure and poorly evidenced period of European history, and for its ground-breaking presentation of the complexities of the numismatic material.

The book consists of a detailed and systematic survey of the development of the earliest gold coinages produced in Gaul and Britain in the period of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, in the last three centuries BC. Its structure is admirably simple and easy to follow. Ten chapters cover three phases or ‘generations’ of coinage: the earliest northern European copies of Greek gold coins of the third century BC; the earliest Gallo-Belgic coinages dated to the early-to-mid second century BC; and the later Gallo-Belgic, Parisian, and pseudo-mussel gold coinages of the later second century and the first half of the first century BC (Gallo-Belgic D and E are not dealt with in detail). To each of the major series within each generation is devoted a numismatic chapter. Each generation also receives a chapter dealing with questions of history, chronology and function.

Philip de Jersey has covered the numismatic aspects in his review in *Spink Numismatic Circular* 112 (February 2004), pp. 13–14. Suffice it to say here that, having observed the skill with which Sills has assembled his material, unearthing new pieces from old published sources or reconstructing the contents of missing hoards, and now having read his crystal-clear presentation of his findings in the numismatic chapters, catalogue and hoard list, this book is exemplary in its technical method.

Following in the footsteps of Simone Scheers and her 1977 work on Gallo-Belgic coins (*Traité de Numismatique Celtique II. La Gaule Belgique*, Paris), Sills takes a wholeheartedly numismatic approach, assembling an extensive corpus of each type, conducting detailed typological and chronological analysis based on die-studies backed up by findspot evidence. Because his work relies on a greater body of evidence than previously

assembled, more rigorously examined than ever before, his conclusions need to be taken seriously, particularly with regard to the relative chronologies of the different series.

Where more caution needs to be exercised is where Sills has attempted to translate all this evidence into a coherent, absolutely dated, historical narrative. For this book is numismatics as history, in the tradition of George Brooke, Derek Allen, and Daphne Nash, who sought to create simple explanations for the phenomenon of early Celtic gold coinages. For Brooke and Allen the dissemination of various Gallo-Belgic types within Britain stood for the successive migration of different ethnic groups across the Channel. For Nash and now for Sills, early Celtic gold coinages represent the medium of payment for mercenaries favoured by the peoples of Iron Age Europe and, conversely, their appearance in the material record is predictive of mercenary activity. This perfectly plausible, but far from unchallengeable, hypothesis is set forth in the first four pages of the work as a given, and everything thereafter hangs on this brief exposition. From here it follows that the object of the study is relatively simple: to identify episodes of military activity that best relate chronologically and geographically to the observed numismatic phenomena.

The first generation of third century BC gold coin production, Sills argues, attests to early mercenary wars between Gauls and intrusive Germans. The next, second century, generation is explained with reference to further Germanic invasions into Gaul, which provoked the purchase of mercenary help from Britain, hence the presence of early Gallo-Belgic coins across the Channel. The third generation finds its martial cause in the Cimbric invasions and their aftermath in the early first century BC.

In taking this tack, Sills is by his own admission making good use of the sparse classical sources available on the history of late Iron Age northern Europe, which tend to concentrate on military affairs. And he may after all be right. But in assuming from the beginning what surely needs to be shown over the course of the work, Sills has arguably committed a fundamental error of argument which is then compounded throughout by a monocular approach to historical explanation. The author knows how it was. Alternative approaches are rarely engaged with, having been rejected at the start, which perhaps explains why the book manages to be so concise and detailed at once.

This is a weakness of argumentation in what is nevertheless a monument of patient scholarship. It will inevitably form an indispensable reference for all who work in this field for the next generation, and beyond. One of the great frustrations of operating in the vibrant world of Iron Age coins is that we are so few, not enough in fact to cope with the ever-increasing body of material. A scholar such as Sills whose work draws it all together appears all too infrequently. What he has done in his

chosen field is to transform the accessibility of an intractable body of material, by bringing the evidence together in one place and bringing the rest of us up to date with what is actually out there.

JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Medieval Money Matters, Diana Wood (ed.). (Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2004). ix and 86pp., 5 b/w plates. £18.

THIS slim volume consists (with one exception) of papers delivered at a one-day conference held in Oxford in 2002. As the editor's brief introduction explains, the conference – and the book – set out to illustrate what can be achieved when historians and numismatists come together to make use of each other's work.

The first contribution (pp. 1–15) is from James Bolton, who begins by asking 'what is money?' and 'what is a money economy?' His account is generally succinct and interesting, although it is something of a surprise when he asserts (p. 3) that gold and silver are 'light in weight and high in value. Coins struck from them can be carried around and stored fairly easily, unlike those made from iron or other heavier metals ...' As Bolton rightly points out, the circulation of coins is not necessarily the same thing as a money economy, and he makes a brave case that England can only be considered to have developed a real money economy in the second half of the thirteenth century, because there was simply not enough coin in circulation before that for coin-use to have been regular and day-to-day. This is not a conclusion everyone will agree with, but his arguments should be read and carefully considered.

Along the way, Bolton makes a number of interesting suggestions. One is that the estimated amount of coin per head of population can serve as a 'useful guide' to the degree of monetisation, although such estimates can only be as accurate as the estimates for population and money supply on which they are based. Bolton's own estimates are that in the earlier eleventh century there were 4.5*d.* to 12.8*d.* per head in circulation (the lower limit is given as 4*d.* on p. 10, but this should be corrected as shown, based on Bolton's own figures), 17*d.* to 20*d.* per head in 1205, 21.3*d.* to 24*d.* by 1247–50, and 36*d.* by 1300. Bolton also makes the important point that recent estimates of the coin supply in mediaeval England do not tell the whole story and that, in the fifteenth century at least, the money supply was probably being bulked out (to a currently unknown extent) by paper, for example in the form of transfers between accounts in Italian banks in London and possibly by assignments of debt.

Next up is Richard Britnell (pp. 16–30), who addresses the use of money in mediaeval Britain, considering it as a means of exchange, as a measure of value, and as a store of value. Most of the article is devoted to the first of these functions. Britnell sees the twelfth–thirteenth centuries as marked by a greater use of coins than before, with a move to money rents and dues, the growth of an urban population that relied on coin for wages, purchases and to pay rents, and the creation of an extensive network of markets. Of course, all things are relative and, as he points out, there appear to have been regional differences in the availability of coin and there were certainly enormous differences in income – around 1300 a leading nobleman could have an income running into thousands of pounds a

year, while an urban labourer might take home just 9*d.* for a full week's work. Coins thus probably passed through most people's hands pretty quickly, but the rich could accumulate enormous hoards (the Earl of Arundel had £60,240 *in cash* in his possession when he died in 1376!).

On p. 24 Britnell states: 'From 1279 the mints often produced halfpennies, and the people had the option of cutting pennies into halves and quarters to produce halfpennies and farthings. Edward I declared it illegal to refuse fractional currency of this sort'. This is simply an error – Edward's introduction of round halfpennies and farthings in 1279–80 was specifically designed to *stop* people cutting up pennies. There are also two typographical errors that need to be corrected. First, on p. 23, the 30 acre peasant had an average income of 16½*d.* a week, not 18*d.* as stated (see p. 16 for the correct figure). Second, a mark was worth 160*d.*, not 180*d.* as appears on p. 26.

The third contribution, the one that was not presented as a paper at the original conference, is by Martin Allen (pp. 31–50). He gives a clear and concise exposition of the main features of the English coinage system and its administration between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Although this may be more familiar ground to readers of this journal, Allen makes a number of interesting points that deserve attention. For example (on pp. 36–7) he comments on the decline that can be seen in the average weight of the pennies in circulation *before* this is recognised by an official weight reduction; on the possible impact of the despatch of coin abroad and of high levels of royal taxation (both frequently associated with war); and on the reasons for the failure of Henry III's attempt to introduce a gold coinage in 1257. He is also clearly sceptical about the suggestion that jetons, found so commonly on mediaeval sites, may have had a secondary use as small change, pointing out that they enjoyed a well-documented use as counters in board games. This reviewer shares his scepticism and whole-heartedly agrees that other explanations are to be preferred, including their use for their primary function, as mathematical aids.

Allen is followed by Pamela Nightingale (pp. 51–71), who examines the working (and impact) of credit in the late mediaeval English economy. She points out that credit was essential for many purposes at every level of society, and in a fascinating discussion (pp. 62–6) attempts to estimate just how much credit there was in the economy in the fourteenth century. She comes up with a figure of c.£450,000, equal to about half of the circulating coinage of the time. However, it was equally true that everyone also had to have access to at least some coin, to pay rents, dues and taxes, to buy essential goods, to pay wages, and to buy at fairs and markets. The thrust of Nightingale's article is an examination of the question whether, when there was a crisis in the supply of money, an increased use of barter and credit could help to overcome this, as some historians have argued.

In a particularly interesting section of her paper, Nightingale uses evidence drawn from the account book of Gilbert Maghfeld, a London iron merchant, which illustrates his use of cash, barter and credit. The book covers the period 1390–5, which was marked by economic crisis. Nightingale suggests that the crisis was caused by a catastrophic decline in the amount of silver coin being struck at the London mint (from c.£2,500 p.a.

in 1389/91 to just £184 p.a. in 1393/5), aggravated by the steady loss of silver coin to the continent. A shortage of silver coin meant customers scaled back their purchases, which impacted on retail traders, who therefore could not pay their wholesale suppliers, who cut back on purchases of raw materials. Thus prices for these fell, output declined, unemployment rose, and so on. Did a merchant like Maghfeld respond by increasing his use of barter and credit? He did not. Instead, to protect his capital, he actually *reduced* the amount of credit he gave to business partners and used his money to make large, long-term loans to men who had good security in the shape of land or possessions. Nightingale's conclusion is that, rather than 'coming to the rescue' when the money supply fell, 'credit acted as a multiplier, reflecting merchants', and consumers', fears about a shortage of coin, or their confidence when it appeared to be abundant' (p. 67).

The final contribution is by Nicholas Mayhew, who discusses coinage and money in England 1086–c.1500 (pp. 72–83). Mayhew begins by pointing out that, while credit and barter each had a role in the mediaeval economy, it was the supply of coin that really mattered – 'Credit and barter were ways of getting by without money, rather than another form of money' (p. 72). However, much of his paper is taken up with an attempt to apply the Quantity Theory of Money to the mediaeval period, using the equation $MV=PY$ (*money supply* \times *velocity of money in circulation* = *population* \times *GDP*). As he admits, 'It is, of course, insane to pretend that we can know what England's GDP was in 1100. Even today such estimates of current national output are notoriously subject to regular revisions. Nevertheless, I feel quite strongly that this impossibility does not absolve us of the duty to think out loud about it, because in doing so, we can stimulate debate and begin to move towards a very approximate idea of what sort of figures are possible.' A number of scholars will disagree with this approach, but this reviewer does not and thinks that Mayhew is to be commended for making the attempt. It is obviously impossible to go into the results in any detail here, but it is worth highlighting the estimates that Mayhew produces for *V*, which are to be found in a table on p. 79 (and not 'in the following table' as it says on p. 81).

This book is an important and interesting contribution to the subject which reminds us that behind the coins we study are fascinating economic and social questions. That said, the price seems steep, particularly when the so-called 'perfect binding' fails to live up to its name and you are left holding loose pages the first time you open the book.

DAVID SYMONS

Small Change IV: The Halfpennies and Farthings of Edward IV–Henry VII (Galata, Llanfyllin, 2004), 56 pp, illus. throughout; and *Small Change V: Small Silver, Henry VIII – the Commonwealth* (Galata, Llanfyllin, 2004), 52 pp., illus. throughout, by Paul and Bente R. Withers.

WHEN considering volumes 2 and 3 in Paul and Bente Withers' *Small Change* series in *BNJ* 72, this reviewer looked forward 'with confidence' to the swift appearance of future additions, a confidence which was in no sense misplaced. Now there are another two new volumes in the series on English coins to take on board, a volume on Irish

coins has also appeared (see the following review), and only one more – to cover Scottish coins – is now outstanding. Words such as 'indefatigable' and 'zealous' almost come to seem like faint praise in the light of such productivity.

Volumes 4 and 5 maintain the broad structure already established in the earlier ones. The authors begin with a quick identifier, structured to serve the material to follow: thus in volume 4 they list the sequence of initial marks, which is the hallmark of the currency of the later fifteenth century, together with illustrations of the principal symbols and forms of crown which will be encountered; volume 5 covers the principle types in each denomination for the successive reigns. An historical note introduces the main text, and subsequent similar inserts describe each reign or period: the authors offer disclaimers on their historical approach which are probably justified, since this reviewer pursed his lips at a few things here and there when the approach seemed too partisan, incautious or anachronistic (a comment which will probably cause them nothing but mirth). However, this is not remotely what the *Small Change* series is about, and soon we move to safer ground: the main classification of the material.

With volume 4, devoted to the fractional denominations of the Yorkists and Henry VII, the medieval tradition of small change is essentially wrapped up, since the farthing of good silver was about to become physically too small to be a functional coin, and its issue would soon cease. The book works through the issues of the period chronologically, with the coins of the restored Henry VI in their place in the sequence. The relatively broad types outlined in North, which encompass multiple initial marks and variations, are now broken up systematically into a sequence by mint and denomination for each of the reigns: Edward IV, Henry VI restored, Edward IV restored and Richard III. The types in this sequence are usually based on the initial mark, but in combination with other marks, usually by the neck, when these are available: thus, for Edward IV's heavy issues, type 2 halfpennies have initial mark rose with no additional marks, while type 3 have initial mark rose with annulets by neck. The general description of the type is followed by a division into subtypes, which are based on known variant details, principally the legends and the presence of extra pellets. This is a sensible approach that will allow new material to be absorbed easily into the system.

The traditional way of structuring the coins of Henry VII is to follow the style of crown, and this is continued by the Withers. The primary division is again by mint, within each of which their type 1 has the open crown, type 2 the double-arched crown, and type 3 the single-arched. Each type is subdivided, usually by the same criteria of initial mark and marks by neck used earlier, although the system for type 3 is more complex: 3B, for example, is defined by its punctuation (rosette and/or trefoil stops) and encompasses initial marks rose, lis or none. All three main types are known for London and Canterbury, but only type 3 is found at York.

Volume 5 covers the end of the English tradition of utilising good silver for its fractional denominations, as the farthing disappeared in the middle decade of the sixteenth century, and the halfpenny limped on until the Commonwealth. Yet, of course, there was still a major

role to be played in the currency for coins worth these sums, and a great deal of time and ingenuity was exercised by a lot of people throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to answer the longstanding problem of the supply of small change. The 'small change problem' as such was not uniquely English (see, for example, Sargent and Velde's 2002 study *The Big Problem of Small Change*), but it did have a very particular local emphasis, created by the refusal to employ base-silver 'black money' in the continental, or indeed the Scottish, style, and the sustained reluctance to admit copper to the officially-provided regal currency. Obviously, the format of the *Small Change* series would not have allowed a lengthy consideration of this, but a bit more of the monetary context, instead of the more general history, might have been a useful addition, to this particular volume especially.

The detailed listing is reasonably straightforward: Henry VIII's issues are listed by coinage and mint, and then there follows the sequence of types, although there are relatively few to consider, and more variety is apparent in the subtypes (usually defined by the successive initial marks), since there is rarely more than one type and never more than two for each coinage/mint of the reign: at Canterbury, for example, the second coinage halfpennies are divided into two types, type 1 being the issues of William Wareham (subdivided into 1A (im cross patonce, with 1 version) and 1B (im T, with 4 variants) and 1C (uncertain im)) and type 2: those of Thomas Cranmer (with 11 variants, a-k). The subtypes are often subdivided like this to list the variant legend readings.

The later coinage covered by the volume is relatively straightforward and laid out appropriately. During the first decades of Elizabeth I's reign, up until 1582, an ingenious new approach to small change was taken, with halfpennies and farthings replaced by three-farthings and three-halfpence denominations. Used in concert with pennies and half-groats, their addition was intended to ensure that transactions worth a halfpenny or farthing could take place without there being actual coins to those values. Given this, it is perhaps a little unfortunate not to include the three-halfpence in the survey, though obviously this would have broken the remit of the series to cover denominations below the penny. The experiment was discontinued in 1582, and the issue of the halfpenny was recommenced.

The details of these and later issues are not for the most part problematic, and the main varieties are supplied by initial marks, and occasionally when one of these was superimposed on another as some existing stocks of made-up dies were amended to be used after a change in the mark: this also accounts for similar corrections to some of the dates found on the Elizabethan three-farthings (though some seem to be simple mistakes of the die-sinker, e.g. an inverted 2 corrected on a coin of 1572). The authors point out the possibility that 'missing' coins of James I's reign (halfpennies with the initial marks trefoil, tun and plain cross) may yet be discovered (p. 45). Their examination of the punches used to make the London and Aberystwyth issues of halfpennies under Charles I indicate that these issues may only have been struck around 1639-40.

Throughout these volumes the authors have been happy enough to face up to problematic differentiations.

They register the impossibility of separating the last of the heavy issues and early light ones of Edward IV, coins which share the same initial mark and identifying features (initial mark rose and saltires by neck) and have very variable weights (vol. 4, p. 22). They recognise that no-one can identify coins produced during the few weeks of Edward V's notional reign, when the mint was simply continuing the last issues of Edward IV (vol. 4, p. 36). They also flag up the difficulty of differentiating between some of the halfpennies of Henry VII and Henry VIII (vol. 4, p. 40 and vol. 5, p. 20) and the impossibility of separating the issues of Henry VIII's third coinage from the posthumous issues at this level of the currency (vol. 5, p. 32).

Each volume concludes with a concordance between the Withers classification and the established standard ones: Seaby/Spink, North, and the relevant specialist studies, where these exist, and each also has a useful bibliography. At the start of each is reproduced the tribute to David Rogers, whose collection formed the basis of the authors' research, but in addition each is dedicated to someone who has provided help and support to them: volume 4 to Marion Archibald, who Paul Withers credits with getting him to write about coins, and volume 5 to Peter and Barbara Rossiter for generously supporting the production of the series. Meanwhile the Scottish volume is forthcoming and the authors have other series in their sights.

B.J. COOK

Small Change VI: Irish Small Silver, John-Edward VI, by Paul and Bente R. Withers (Galata, Llanfyllin, 2004), 56 pp., illus. throughout.

THIS is the sixth booklet in the very useful Withers/Galata popular series on small change, and the first to move beyond England to cover the Anglo-Irish issues. These range from the earliest coins of John of the 1180s up to the first emission of Edward VI, ending about 1550. However, the issues of John, first as Lord of Ireland only and then as King of England, and those of Edward I make up the bulk of this catalogue.

It is pleasing to note that the work is dedicated to Patrick Finn, who contributed so much to Irish numismatics and whose own *Guide Book to the Coinage of Ireland From 995 AD to the Present Day* (with Anthony Dowle, Spink, London, 1969) led the way in collectors' catalogues over thirty years ago. The Acknowledgements and Preface indicate the range and depth of research undertaken by the authors. A section with enlarged photographs and drawings, letter forms and inscriptions is designed to help the collector read the coins and this is followed by a rather racy historical background. A minor point is that there is no town of Lecale, which refers to the area between Downpatrick and Dundrum. More jarring is the consistent use of lower case initials for Irish, English, French, Norman etc.

The catalogue is illustrated throughout by a large number of good quality, clear photographs, which being enlarged at 2:1 contribute greatly to its usefulness. Periodically they are accompanied by those at 1:1 which serve to remind the reader of the actual size. As the authors point out, it is frequently difficult to see the details of such pieces published at 1:1. Average weights and

diameters as well as a complete list of all readings met with are provided. The first, 'profile', coinage of John, probably struck on the occasion of his first visit to his lordship of Ireland in 1185, sets the style for the rest of the catalogue.

These first Anglo-Irish coins are rare and it is only with the second, 'dominus' issue that the coins were struck in any numbers. They are divided here into types 1 and 2, following the normal grouping derived from the use of a cross potent or cross pommee on the reverse. At the start the coins were issued on larger flans at Dublin only by the moneyers Norman and Rodbert. The subsequent smaller flans were issued at Dublin as well as at Limerick, Waterford, Carrickfergus and Kilkenny by a total of fifteen moneyers. The degree of detail given for the readings and their combinations is comprehensive and such has not been available since W. O'Sullivan's *Earliest Anglo-Irish Coinage*, published by the National Museum of Ireland in 1964. A comparison of the two listings would be interesting to show how many new varieties have emerged since then.

In a work devoted to small change it perhaps needs to be emphasised that these halfpennies were the largest values struck, unlike the contemporary English Short Cross issues where only pennies were struck. Dolley suggested this may have been done to indicate that Ireland was not a kingdom and at the same time to provide a currency for local use rather than trade. Farthings with a simple mascle on the obverse and the moneyer's name in the angles of the cross on the reverse accompanied the type 1 halfpennies. Here the second coinage is dated 1190-9 with no attempt, as elsewhere, to give more specific years to the individual types.

Next come the issues of John de Courcy in Ulster, the earlier bearing the names of St. Patrick and de Courcy himself, the later anonymous farthings replacing de Courcy's name with the mint names of Downpatrick and Carrickfergus. These issues are rare, indeed only two specimens of the halfpenny are known, both in the Ulster Museum. Some indication of rarity might therefore be helpful.

In 1199 John became King of England and issued his third Anglo-Irish coinage. This now consisted of pennies as well as halfpennies and farthings though the first are excluded as not being 'small' change. All bear the image within a triangle and only the English title but with the mint signatures on the reverse: Dublin, Limerick and Waterford for the halfpennies and Dublin and Limerick for the farthings. The Limerick farthing of Wace is an addition to the record. The authors date this issue about 1210 against the more questionable start of 1205.

The Irish coinage of Henry III consisted only of pennies and therefore is not deemed to come within the scope of a work on small silver. It is noted briefly. These Long Cross pence are known to have been struck between October 1251 and January 1254. Small change was obtained by cutting the pence into halves and quarters. Were official cut coins issued by the Dublin mint? It would be interesting to have some indication of the frequency of cut Irish coins.

Edward I's Irish coinage is comparatively large. Even the halfpennies and farthings are not uncommon – and like their English counterparts complicated. North examined them in the pages of volume 67 (1997) of this journal and the Withers have built on this to produce a

very comprehensive listing of the issues between 1280 and 1302. Detail abounds. The drawings of the crowns are particularly helpful. Now halfpennies and farthings are dealt with together for the mints of Dublin and Waterford – Cork producing only the former.

Thereafter there were few issues of Irish small silver, even among the extensive issues of Edward IV. However, the latter did issue several types of base metal farthings and half farthings and their exclusion does leave a gap in this examination of Ireland's medieval small change. The work ends with a page of 'Fakes, Funnies and Forgeries' and a useful bibliography.

The small denominations often receive as little attention from cataloguers as the moneyers were wont to give them in production. It was to remedy this and to allow the Anglo-Irish lower values more ready identification and referencing that this guide was undertaken. It very successfully achieves this aim and will be a great boon to collectors. In addition anyone interested in the series or needing to check a relevant coin will find it useful and at a modest price can have it readily to hand.

J.D. BATESON

For Want of Good Money: the story of Ireland's coinage, by Edward Colgan (Wordwell Ltd., Bray, Co. Wicklow, 2003), x + 208 pp., numerous illustrations in text.

FOR time out of mind there has been a need for a good narrative history of the coinage of Ireland, from its beginnings in the tenth century to modern times. Forty years ago and more when the present reviewer first became interested in the Irish series there were only two such guides to help the newcomer: James Simon's *Essay* (1801 edition) and John Lindsay's *View* (1839), and, for the benefit of its excellent collotype plates, Grueber's *Handbook* (1899). The absence of any more modern overview sprang very largely from the scholarly neglect of the medieval coinage of Ireland since the days of Aquilla Smith. Excellent work had been done on Irish base-metal coinage and on the issues of the Tudors and the Civil War period but the lack of any up-to-date scholarly examination of the middle ages – apart from Liam O' Sullivan's valuable contribution, *The Earliest Irish Coinage* (1949) – meant that no general synthesis was feasible. This situation changed dramatically in the 1960s with the publication of two *Sylloge* volumes, Michael Dolley's *Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum* (1966) and that on the Anglo-Irish coins from John to Edward III in the Ulster Museum by Dolley and Wilfred Seaby (1968), and O'Sullivan's *The Earliest Anglo-Irish Coinage* (1964). Dolley's own seminal researches and the unflagging enthusiasm with which he encouraged the work of others rapidly established a firm base on which a new synthesis of the medieval series could be undertaken. This resulted in his own *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins* in 1972, an important and stimulating work, that idiosyncratic and tendentious as it was in part, provided for a wider audience a crucial historical synopsis of Irish medieval coinage. It took account not only of printed work but also of research in progress, some of which, particularly on the fifteenth century, has still not been published. It was enhanced, too, by its record of hoards and of foreign coins circulating in Ireland and its critical bibliography.

Still, Dolley's book did not include the Hiberno-Norse coinages and stopped in 1607, but for the earlier and later periods the student and collector at least had the guidance of the illustrated outlines afforded by Anthony Dowle's and Patrick Finn's *Guide Book* (1969) – which had considerable input from Dolley – and the successive editions of Seaby's *Irish Catalogues* (1970 and 1984). The need, nevertheless, remained for a narrative overview of the Irish coinages as a whole and, with the passage of time, this has become more pressing. It is this that Mr Colgan attempts in his new book.

He has been well served by his publishers. His book is elegantly bound in cloth and printed on quality paper in a type that is easily readable. It is amply provided with illustrations that, appropriately interspersed in the text, make for ready convenience. Apparently scanned from a variety of sources, they lack some evenness in tone and a number of the earlier coins illustrated are difficult to read but this may result as much from the intractable nature of the coins themselves as from their reproduction; for the later pieces the images, on the whole, are of excellent quality although in some instances they are taken from specimens much rarer than the ordinary coins they relate to in the text.

Mr Colgan covers the entire sweep of Irish coinage over eighteen chapters and writes fluently and with obvious enthusiasm. There is though a journalistic tincture about his approach and something of an appetite for sensationalism, brought to the fore in his repeated, and increasingly grating, references – forty-one in all – to prices achieved in Whyte's 'Millennial Collection' sale that are misplaced in a work of this kind. More materially, there are tedious mistranscriptions from coins to text – 'DWT' for 'dwt' in the case of the so called 'Inchiquin Money' of the Lords Justices as an example – several textual misprints, and incorrect captions to some illustrations, all of which suggest haste in composition or careless proof-reading. But there are more serious criticisms. The book is naturally derivative but in those areas that are reasonably familiar to me Mr Colgan does not always seem to have assimilated the fruits of modern research and has uncritically repeated the misconceptions and errors of earlier writers. He seems to imply, for instance, that prior to the twelfth century the native Irish had no use for coin as money, a hypothesis discredited by Michael Kenny's work on Viking Age coin hoards, a reappraisal that should have been taken on board. More specifically, he confidently attributes a rare 'EDWARDUS' farthing in the National Museum of Ireland to Edward I, later, somewhat grudgingly but correctly, ascribing it to Edward III's minimal coinage of 1339. He gives 1755 as a mintage date for George II halfpennies, production of which ceased in 1753, not to be resumed for another seven years. While these, and several other solecisms easily put right by even a superficial reading of the relevant authorities, might just be slips, they undermine one's confidence in the factual basis of the book.

Much of Mr Colgan's appraisal of the medieval series is based on Dolley's *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins* and unfortunately he incorporates not only the best of this still indispensable – though long out of print – book but also some of its more capricious conjectures. To take one instance, Dolley's 'evidence' for dating the start of John's 'REX' coinage to 1205 rather than 1208/9 is weak, but

one would not appreciate this from its recapitulation here. Similarly, Colgan's too ready adoption – if only as a 'suggestion' – of Dolley's interpretation of the Lord John's striking of halfpence as signifying 'the inferior status of the Lordship' is a quixotic politicization that flies in the face of monetary reality. One suspects that Lord Stewardby's perceptive review of *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins* in volume 41 of the *Journal* must have escaped Mr Colgan's attention. And to put the record straight one should stress that the *estoile* and crescent of John's 'REX' coinage has more to do with the imagery of his Aquitanian and Tholosan ancestors than any association with his patron saint.

This is not the place to detail all the factual shortcomings of this book but one startling error in Mr Colgan's résumé of the more modern period must be mentioned. He refers to Wood's Irish coinage as having been struck in 'Bath metal'. This was not the case: it was struck in copper, the quality of which – as is well known – was attested by the Mint at the time. There are some proofs and patterns in silver and a pattern 1724 halfpenny in bell metal but Wood used 'Bath metal' only for his 'Rosa Americana' pieces. One should be wary too of dismissing too forthrightly the later circulation of Wood's Irish coinage in America.

A good, stimulating introductory survey of a subject must, in its nature, contain a bibliography that will be of value to a newcomer who is spurred on to further study. Mr Colgan's – which, he revealingly tells us, lists 'all the authors consulted in preparing this book' – is limited and uneven. Although for some reason he includes Ackerman's *Numismatic Manual* (1840) there is no mention of Lindsay's *View* (1839); nor is there any reference to Aquilla Smith, Symonds or Nelson, all of whose contributions are still necessary to a proper historical understanding of the coinages of Ireland. And if they were dismissed because it was thought their work was subsumed in that of more modern authorities, why is there no reference to Dolley's work on Edward I's mints (1968), Kenny on Viking Age hoards (1987), Seaby's *Sylloge* volume on the Hiberno-Norse coins in the Ulster Museum (1984), North's studies of the Edwardian coinages (1991, 1995 and 1997), and Goodwin's vital analysis (1936) of the background to the Wood furore? And, in respect of Wood, if a biography of Swift has to be introduced why should it be Victoria Glendinning rather than Ehrenpreis (1962–83), Nokes (1985) or Davis's essential edition of the *Drapier's Letters* (1935)? And, among the works listed as historical background, why is there no mention of the *New History of Ireland* to the first volume of which Dolley contributed a chapter on the Irish coinage, 1534 to 1691 (1976)? Quite properly Whyte's 'Millennial Collection' sale catalogue (2000) is listed but why not that of the Irish portion of the Lockett collection by Glendinning in 1957?

Perhaps one is being too rigorous but, even at a more minimal expectation, the bibliography in Spink's *Coins of Scotland, Ireland and the Islands* (2002) will be found far more serviceable. This is a *vade-mecum*, too, which, with Paul and Benté Withers' recent handbook on *Irish Small Silver* (2004), must be used in tandem with Mr Colgan's book for, readable, informative and attractive though the latter is, it must be treated with some care.

DAVID DYKES

Weights and Measures in Scotland: a European Perspective, by R.D. Connor and A.D.C. Simpson, edited by Alison Morrison-Low (NMS Enterprises with Tuckwell Press), 872 pp., 8 colour and 315 b/w illustrations.

CONNOR and Simpson have produced a substantial work, covering all aspects of Scottish metrology, as well as its links with other European countries, and England in particular. Many of the matters discussed have important implications for numismatists and this review will focus on them.

The earliest formal record of Scottish metrological standards is usually referred to as the Assize of David I. There is general agreement that, although it may well contain elements dating from David's reign (1124–53), it has (in the words of Connor and Simpson) 'clearly been modified for fourteenth century use'. Their conclusion is based upon a careful analysis of the text and the provenance of its sources, and all this is comprehensively detailed in the book. This methodology itself represents a welcome trend in historical metrology: the traditional simplistic assumptions have been set aside, and more rigorous tests of hypotheses are now being deployed. The synthesis of documentary and artefactual evidence must be the key to understanding.

In numismatics, the implications of the status of the Assize of David I are relevant to the question of the relationship between the early Scottish and English weight-standards for coinage. If it is assumed that at one time Scottish pennies were struck on the basis of a 'troy' ounce of 31.1 g, then it is possible to argue that they were intended to be heavier than the English ones. However, Connor and Simpson reject this assumption. Their analysis leads them to believe that the early Scottish pennies were based on a 'tower' ounce of 29.1 g, and were therefore intended to be of the same mass as the English sterling penny.

The summary in the preceding paragraph ignores numerous complications, which are fully considered in the book. Obvious difficulties arise when we take into account the long series of reductions in mass of the silver penny, beginning in the fourteenth century. More significantly, the argument involves a revision of the orthodox view that the English 'troy' weight-system originated in Saxon times, as set out by Connor in 1987 in his *Weights and Measures of England*.

When this reviewer became interested in the subject, he was surprised to find that the only evidence for this view was the existence of a few atypical artefacts that could be claimed to represent fractions (usually rather awkward ones) of a 'troy' pound. Somewhat inconveniently, these items could equally well represent fractions (different ones) of a Carolingian pound, or indeed any other supposed unit. Based on cursory survey of the documentary evidence, it seemed likely that the English troy ounce was introduced by the London goldsmiths in the second half of the fourteenth century. At that time the tower ounce was still the standard for mint operations, and a commercial (avers de pois) pound of 454 g was beginning to replace a number of special-purpose pounds, such as the spice pound. The new troy ounce may have been an attempt to ensure that there was a firm relationship between the weight-standards used, on the one hand by the Mint and the goldsmiths (two

different systems), and on the other hand by traders in market goods (many and varied systems). It is worth noting that although this worthy aim dates back to the time of Aethelred (c.985), the relationship between the troy and averdepois systems was not explicitly defined in English law until 1824.

Prior to the publication of the present work, the most detailed analysis of these problems was that of Gemmill and Mayhew in their *Changing Values in Medieval Scotland* (1995). They adopted the view, mentioned above, that the early Scots penny was based on an ounce of 31.1 g. Like Connor and Simpson, they were also concerned with the links between the units of weight and the units of capacity, which were in many cases defined by an explicit relationship. Since the prices of many goods were expressed in terms of the capacity units, the study of prices clearly depends on the magnitude of these units, and there is thus a complex relationship between the various pieces of documentary evidence. Doubtless many more pages will now be written on the subject, but the work of Connor and Simpson offers some hope that order will emerge. Unfortunately the almost universal tendency of people to use 'customary' measures will always serve to confuse and infuriate those who like to find logical coherence in metrological matters.

A new era in Scottish metrology was initiated by the Assize of James I (1426). Among other things, this introduced a Scottish troy pound of 16 English troy ounces (whereas the English troy pound comprised 12 of these ounces). Connor and Simpson believe that around 1500 the troy ounce was reduced slightly in Scotland, probably to the level of the Paris ounce at about 30.6 g. This came at a time when there was a strong French influence in the Scottish court. The sixteenth century saw a proliferation of denominations in the Scottish coinage, and it can be argued that these denominations are based on weights in the Paris ounce system. When James VI became the first king of that name in England he tried to unify the coinages of the two nations, with some success. But reconciling the weight-standards used in the London and Edinburgh Mints created enormous problems. In 1618 there was a valiant attempt to combine the systems of troy weight and commercial weight in Scotland (but not in England), apparently basing the system on an ounce that was intended to be equal to the Paris ounce. The system was expounded in a semi-official publication written by Alexander Hunter in 1624. He said that the English troy pound was equal to 12 ounces 3 drops and 21 grains in the new Scottish system, which seems to be consistent with the view that the Scottish ounce was intended to be the French ounce. However, despite the precision of the official intention, there remains some doubt about the exact magnitude of the weights. The physical standards that were distributed may have been inaccurate, and in the case of the commercial weights, many localities continued to use their customary units. Many physical standards from this period survive, and a fair proportion of them are in good enough condition to make careful examination worthwhile. A substantial portion (200 pages) of Connor and Simpson's book is devoted to inventory of artefacts, and the authors have carried out an extensive scientifically-based examination of them. They conclude that the commercial unit turned out to be slightly larger than intended. The Edinburgh Mint continued to use the

Paris ounce, not only for its bullion-purchasing operations (with an allowance), but also as the standard for coinage despite the fact that the London Mint used the English troy ounce. Not surprisingly, these matters remained troublesome throughout the seventeenth century.

The Act of Union (1707) decreed that the weights and measures of Scotland should be the same as those of England. The English weight-systems (troy and averdepois) had been fairly well-established since 1588, but there were two major defects. First, there was no statutory definition of the relationship between the two systems: an averdepois pound was believed to be 'about 7000' troy grains, but figures such as 7002 were often quoted. Secondly, the physical standards were not unique, there being over 50 sets distributed around the country, in various states of preservation. Both these defects were repeated in 1707, when standards were distributed to the Scottish counties and burghs. The surviving examples are listed in Connor and Simpson's inventory, with their usual careful scientific evaluations.

In effect, the Act of Union marked the end of a distinct Scottish coinage, so subsequent problems with the weight-standard used for coinage (and there were problems) could be attributed solely to the English. But the Scots retained numerous regional variations in the weights and measures used in commerce. Furthermore, the Scottish goldsmiths continued to divide the troy ounce in their customary way, 16 drops of 36 grains, rather than 20 pennyweights of 24 grains, meaning that the English and Scottish grains were still different.

This review has only scratched the surface of a major contribution to quantitative economic history. Several chapters have been totally ignored, while others have only been summarised in a very simplistic way. In addition to the important inventory of surviving standards, the book has many appendices, one of which (especially useful to collectors) is a list of Scottish makers of scales, weights, and measures. In summary, this is a seminal work that will remain the standard reference for a very long time.

NORMAN BIGGS

Public House Tokens in England and Wales c.1830-c.1920, by Yolanda C.S. Courtney (Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication No. 38 (Spink, London, 2004)), xvi + 272 pp., 23 plates.

THE study of numismatics throws up many mysteries, from the shadowy Celtic rulers known only from the names on their coins, to the precise economic reasons for the absence of an adequate regal coinage that led to the production of millions of trade tokens between 1785 and 1815. The activities of landlords in the taverns of Victorian England might not be thought equally enigmatic, but this is indeed the case, and Yolanda Courtney's new volume is the first extended exploration of the several mysteries surrounding the production, distribution and use of pub tokens.

The dearth of written evidence about artefacts from such a comparatively recent past may seem surprising, but the humble origins of so many of their issuers and users, the pedestrian nature of their standard design, the huge numbers of types, and perhaps a feeling amongst middle class antiquarians that their clear encouragement of

intemperance made them an improper field of study, seems to have inhibited almost all contemporary numismatists. When compiling his *Token Coinage of Warwickshire* in 1895, W.J. Davis decided to ignore the thousand or more inn tokens from his favourite county, while sustaining a claim that in varieties it exceeded every other except Middlesex, even though this required a continuance of earlier writers' misattribution of the John Wilkinson Ironmaster series.

The tokens themselves can assist the researcher to a much greater extent than most small artefacts of similar age and ubiquity. They are resistant to destruction even when buried, but they usually give the precise location where they were used, and they frequently give their place of manufacture too. Documentary research can produce fairly close dating evidence about a named innkeeper since his tenure was often brief, possibly a result of the addictive nature of the goods he stocked. It is therefore often possible to focus their use closely in terms of both time and space. Although textual evidence remains sparse, Dr Courtney has managed to discover far more than this reviewer would have imagined possible; she is also able to employ techniques bordering on the archaeological to extend fully the exploration of her subject.

So, all of the mysteries are solved? Certainly not.

These tokens, checks or tickets (call them what you will) are both common and rare, since there are over ten thousand types, but more than half of these are each known from but one surviving specimen. In some areas they seem to have been used in hostels on almost every street corner, in others they are unknown. Excepting London itself, a line from Portland Bill to the Wash separates an abundant west from a meagre east.

Some state an explicit function, with entertainment as simple as a game of bagatelle or as tempting as admission to a glittering concert hall, but most are entirely mute. Collectors are naturally intrigued by such phrases as 'Knock em down', 'Well aired beds' or 'An ordinary every day', but, as the author is careful to emphasise, even when such examples are added to all references to games, to friendly society meetings, and to live entertainment, they still amount to only a small percentage of the totality of issues: the great majority remain entirely silent as to function, apart from frequent references to the ale and other goods obtainable on presentation.

Their curious geographical distribution is clearly illustrated in the book with a series of national and county maps. To some extent it can be explained by the discovery that there were just three important manufacturing sources for all the series, based on Birmingham, Exeter and London. The author musters cogent arguments for her conclusion that a large number of firms named as apparent manufacturers on the token reverses were no more than agents for the major Birmingham manufacturers.

The book explores the manner in which a publican who might wish to obtain tokens, or be persuaded to order them, came into contact with a distant workshop with no obvious facilities for national marketing. The existence of local agents, who might or might not arrange to have their names on the tokens, supplies one solution. It may also explain concentrations of issues in certain localities, through the canvassing of an area by such an agent, helped by the tendency for neighbours to copy a successful innovation by their competitors. Even so, anomalies

remain that seem inexplicable. For instance, out of 263 tokens for the county of Nottinghamshire, no less than 236 (89 per cent) are from Nottingham or Newark, yet the population of these two towns accounts for only forty per cent of the county as whole, and Mansfield, twice the size of Newark, has not one reported inn token.

On the manufacturing side, only London provides a simple picture, since one maker, W.J. Taylor, accounts for over ninety per cent of the known issues, and Dr Courtney has discovered that the next in frequency, Neal, obtained inn token orders as an almost accidental adjunct to their virtual monopoly of London market tokens. Although in total over 600 metropolitan types are known, this is small in relation to the population in comparison with many Midlands and western counties.

The distinctive series based on Exeter has been the subject of earlier publications by the same author. The adoption of a smaller diameter (not the norm in Birmingham or London) may originally have been accidental, but it became an invariable practice with all the Devonshire agents/manufacturers and illustrates the tendency for innkeepers to prefer tokens in a style similar to those of their neighbouring competitors.

Issues of Birmingham manufacture are of much greater complexity, and the extensive data provided in the main text and in numerous appendices will help to unravel the tortuous interactions of firms that usually competed with each other, but sometimes worked in co-operation, and their relationships with agents nearby and at a distance.

The book does not contain a conventional bibliography or index, but the works most frequently cited are detailed on pp. ix-x, while others are fully described in footnotes as references to them occur in the text. Some of the most original insights are contained in the forty-nine figures within the main text. These are listed on pp. vii-viii, but an indication of the page on which each appears would have been useful. The work is completed by ten appendices and twenty-three plates, preceded by a key.

It is refreshing to find a volume devoted to a highly specialised aspect of numismatics that is able to relate its study to a wider world of contemporary objects, but, most of all, the growing number of enthusiasts for the multiplicity of post 1820 British tokens will be grateful for such a thoroughly researched and well-presented work on a series replete with rarities to track down and puzzles still to be solved.

JOHN WHITMORE

For Those in Peril: Civil Decorations and Lifesaving Awards at the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, by Edward Besly (Cardiff, 2004), 110 pp., illustrated in colour throughout.

ANY book that deals with the history of civil lifesaving awards represents a welcome addition to the collector's and student's bookshelf and few books on the subject have been as handsomely produced as this. Drawing upon the rich collections held by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, this well-illustrated monograph outlines the history of many of the nation's most fascinating and hard-won awards, a process which is rendered all the more exciting and immediate for the reader by the amazing tales of individual courage reproduced between its covers. Not only are the medals

themselves illustrated in full colour, but many of the recipients are likewise celebrated, often alongside images of the places where their honours were earned. Understandably there is a Welsh bias to the book, although the inclusion of medals awarded for services during the Hong Kong Plague (1894), Messina Earthquake (1908) and the wreck of the *SS Drummond Castle* off Ushant in 1896 add an international aspect.

The volume draws upon a broad range of sources to illustrate not only the history of the various medals discussed, but also to record the acts of heroism that led to their being awarded. As such, it provides an eloquent tribute to the courage of the working men and women of the Principality. While the author is generally on firm ground when discussing the evolution and history of government instituted awards, the book does unfortunately contain some errors of chronology and fact when it turns to discussing 'unofficial' medals.

By way of example, while delays in the supply of suitable dies meant that medals were not available for distribution until 1844, the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society's marine medal was formally instituted in February 1841, with the first award – in gold – being voted to Captain Clegg. The oval medal of 1867, which consciously borrowed from the design of the newly-instituted Albert Medal, was replaced in 1873, whilst neither the Camp and Villaverde nor the Bramley-Moor medal was issued for specific incidents. The former was named in honour of two Spanish seamen who had displayed great gallantry in rescuing the passengers and crew of the steam packet *Tweed* in 1847, whilst the latter took the name of John Bramley-Moor, a major benefactor of the Society. Both medals were established in 1872 and were awarded on numerous occasions over many years. Likewise, in discussing the medals of the Royal Humane Society, Besly omits all reference to the issue of 'large' (51 mm) bronze medals from 1838 and repeats the story that the 'small' (38 mm) medal was introduced in 1869 in response to official permission being granted for the Society's medals to be worn on uniform. The smaller medals were in fact introduced in 1867 and accordingly pre-date the granting of permission to wear.

The quality of the photography and design are consistently excellent. The medals in particular are exquisitely reproduced. It is especially interesting to see images of similar medals reproduced alongside each other. The Albert Medals presented to William Beith and Isaac Pride for their courage in rescuing the victims of the Tynnewydd Colliery disaster are especially informative. Awarded for the same incident and representing the second and third examples of *Albert Medal, Land, First Class* to be awarded, they reveal clear evidence for the pressure under which medallist Phillips of Cockspur Street was working. The VA monogram on Beith's medal has been mounted upside-down, whilst in each case the buckle of the surrounding belt has inadvertently been inverted. The same buckle error can be seen on the second class medals awarded to Rees Thomas and Isaiah Thomas for their roles in the rescue. Elsewhere, the photographs of Royal Humane Society medals to William Beith (1877) and Henry Everson (1909) highlight some of the subtle variations to be found on medals struck by different private contractors (in this case Warrington's and Elkington's respectively).

The book concludes with a useful 'further reading' section. A surprising absentee from this list is any reference to the *Journal of the Life Saving Awards Research Society*. As the primary research journal in the field, the fifty-two volumes published to date represent an essential resource for anyone studying lifesaving awards. Likewise it might have been helpful to direct readers towards the publicly accessible archives of some of the societies mentioned in the text. These minor caveats notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that this book represents the best general introduction to lifesaving medals currently available. It represents a valuable addition to the available literature and, until such time as a broad corpus of these under-appreciated awards is published, it will remain a standard work of reference.

CRAIG BARCLAY

The Monetary History of Gold: A Documentary History, 1660–1999, edited by Mark Duckenfield (London, 2004), xix + 536 pp.

THE stated objective behind collating the documents in *The Monetary History of Gold* is to 'raise awareness among journalists, scholars and the informed public of gold's role as a monetary asset'. Through three main sections – the rise of the gold standard, 1660–1819; the heyday of the gold standard, 1820–1930; and after the gold standard, 1931–99 – key documents tracing the monetary adventures of gold during the last three centuries are reproduced in whole or in part, often accompanied by a brief explanatory note placing the documents in context. The work of the editor, and of those others who have helped in the long gestation of the project, has resulted in the accumulation in one volume of a substantial body of important original source material, primarily government reports, legislation and the views of well-placed commentators, that should inspire the serious researcher and allow those with a less studied interest to come to terms with the main issues. The foundations of the gold standard are laid bare and the massive impact the system has had on the world economy can be discerned through the judicious selection that has been made.

There is a healthy balance between the three sections, with no undue weight being accorded to any period of time. In dealing with the eighteenth century the focus is rightly on Britain and the evolution of its unofficial gold standard, arrived at almost as a by-product of other monetary policy considerations. Equally, when a broad treatment is called for, as in dealing with the discussions over the international coinage of the later nineteenth century, Dr Duckenfield obliges with a series of documents that reveal the extent of the progress that was being made by policy makers in several countries towards a form of single currency a century before the European Union. Indeed coverage of the late nineteenth century is particularly good. The section on the heyday of the gold standard is illustrated with reference to how the United States wrestled with the issue of bi-metallism versus gold, while detailing the content of the Report of the Select Committee on the Depreciation of Silver of 1876, which contains an enormous amount of information on movements and production of gold and silver throughout the world, is of real value.

The final section, too, constitutes a fascinating account in which economic changes after the Second World War were such that gold could no longer support the liquidity that was necessary in the world economy, and the role previously played by precious metals was taken over by fiat currencies. Yet in view of gold's continuing involvement in supporting the international currency system, and in forming an important element of the reserves of central banks, there is clear justification in taking the story on to the end of the twentieth century. In this new role the history of gold is traced through exchange systems whose changing character is played out against the shifting balance of power in world affairs. If, for example, a reader were looking for an introduction to the setting up of the International Monetary Fund, in one of the lengthier extracts in this volume the original articles that define the objectives and obligations of member states are reproduced. The rise of the United States, as well, to a position of dominance is observed here through official documents whose enormous weight is belied by their matter of fact style.

Much useful work was done in the Bank of England's archive in locating and making available internal reports on Britain's decision to abandon, or rather suspend, the gold standard in 1931, and how the United States dealt with the same issue in the early 1930s is also covered in some detail. Throughout, the sources are handled with confidence, making it a convenient book to use and, at the same time, the appropriate selection is enhanced by a clear format which includes introductions to individual documents that do not intrude by being over-long but rather set the scene with additional historical details or succinct interpretations.

In one volume it will never be possible to include material on the monetary history of gold over a three-hundred year period that will meet with everyone's approval. Some documents might have seemed to exclude themselves by virtue of their length, but Dr Duckenfield has reproduced a number through brief extracts. The omission, however, of any reference to Lord Liverpool's relatively substantial *Treatise on the Coins of the Realm* is a little curious. It represents a key statement on a range of monetary questions at the end of the eighteenth century and formed the basis of the Coinage Bill of 1816 that finally established Britain on the gold standard. It was acknowledged in this vein by the Prime Minister, admittedly Lord Liverpool's son, when the Coinage Bill was introduced in the House of Lords and, from correspondence between the likes of John Ramsay McCulloch and David Ricardo, it is clear that Liverpool's work cast a long shadow over leading economic theorists. By the same token some mention might have been made of the writings of the Treasury official William Lowndes which formed a key element in the debate surrounding the Great Recoinage legislation of the 1690s. A more minor point of detail that should not escape note is that the end of Sir Isaac Newton's mastership of the Mint is given as 1723 at one point, rather than 1727.

In casting an eye over the eighteenth century it is remarkable how few pieces of legislation were passed in Britain respecting the coinage, and this dearth is reflected in the selection of documents presented in the first section of the book: there are no documents reproduced dating from the mid 1730s to the mid 1790s. At the end of this period there was the crisis surrounding the suspension of cash payments and reproduced here are accounts of the

extraordinary events of February 1797, which readers of this journal will remember from Graham Dyer's article in *BNJ* 72, when government had to swing into action late on a Saturday night and the King had to be summoned to London early on Sunday morning, such was the gravity of the decisions to be taken. But this was a moment of high drama which contrasts sharply with much of the rest of the eighteenth century. While the imbalance between the value of gold and silver so disrupted the supply of silver coins that it dried to a trickle, it is evident not only from the statute books but also from debates in Parliament that legislators seemed disinclined to act. The absence of material from the middle of the eighteenth century in *The Monetary History of Gold* is therefore an accurate reflection of the political mood of the time. But if there was legislation that defined the British government's commitment to an unofficial gold standard in the eighteenth century more than any other it was that covering the recoinage of gold in the 1770s. Faced with the dilemma of a gold coinage showing worrying signs of wear and of a silver coinage in a state of collapse, the government chose to attend to gold, investing heavily in a massive recoinage that restored the condition of guineas and condemned silver to the effective status of a token coinage forty years before the Coinage Act of 1816 confirmed matters. In omitting any reference to the reforms of the 1770s, this volume has missed an opportunity to draw attention to an often neglected defining moment in the history of the gold standard.

Through its several hundred pages, the book places gold in the context of its domestic and international settings, ultimately throwing up its somewhat incongruous role in a world economy based on credit, plastic and trust, a position that has more than once resulted in tensions between stability and liquidity. Gold's role has changed from being an actively circulating element of a currency to that of a symbol of stability, exercising the more theoretical function of supporting the system. Its position seems at once arcane and necessary, a situation that appears to be acknowledged on the final page of the book, before the index, through an extract from the Second Central Bank Gold Agreement of March 2004. The signatories, including many of the principal western central banks, agreed that 'gold will remain an important element of global monetary reserves'.

K. CLANCY

The Gold Half-Sovereign, by Michael Marsh (Cambridge, 2004, 2nd edn), 128 pp., 45 pls.

THE second edition of *The Gold Half-Sovereign* has been long anticipated by collectors in this field, more than twenty years after the publication of the first edition in 1982. Most readers will no doubt compare it with the 1982 edition and consider how the study of Half-Sovereigns has progressed over twenty years.

The book consists of a long preface followed by the listings of milled Half-Sovereigns for each king and queen, from the first in 1817 in the reign of George III through to Elizabeth II. Each reign is introduced with a discussion of changes in design and varieties; the Half-Sovereign entries are then tabulated, and followed by the plates, some of which are in colour for the first time. There are twenty-six new varieties listed in this edition, of

which fourteen belong to the Jubilee Half-Sovereign series of Queen Victoria. Strictly speaking these are not all new discoveries, since the fourteen differences in Jubilee head types are discussed in the first edition, but they did require further research. So in essence we are looking at only twelve new varieties in this series.

In the book as a whole there is a great deal of new text, and many of the introductions to each reign have been elaborated, although the basic framework is based on the first edition. The preface gives a potted history of the denomination of the Half-Sovereign, first introduced as a coin in the reign of Henry VIII. The text is written perhaps a little too much in the first person, with a great deal of Mr Marsh's own opinions of what he thinks of each king and queen without any justification of why he holds these views. There are no historical references given to back up his opinions, but then on the other hand not many people will be buying the book just for this historical preface. Throughout the book, in the preface and in the introductory discussions, Mr Marsh has decided to christen the references as 'M.A.M' numbers, which was not the case in 1982. Ever since 1982 dealers and auctioneers have either called the book 'Marsh' when quoting a reference, or merely 'M'; it is unlikely that they will change now.

The introductions to each king and queen are well written, and it is interesting to note how values have changed. For example, in the first edition a Half-Sovereign of George III is quoted at £500, compared with £400 in this edition. This trend continues through the early kings and the value in this edition only increases for the coins of Victoria's reign, £140 in 1982 and now £200; an interesting study in itself showing the way the coin market has changed over twenty years or more.

After the introduction is a description of the design of the Half-Sovereign giving obverse, reverse, edge and any other relevant information, although the description of edge for George III has been omitted. In 1982 edges were described as 'cross-graining' but have now been changed to merely 'milled'. In the tabulated section the date of the coin is listed with variety and remarks, and a rarity rating given for each entry. This is based on the well-established scale devised by Seaby for the English Silver Coinage many years ago. Some rarity ratings have been changed since 1982 and perhaps corrected, but some are curious: for example, it is generally accepted that the 1818 Half-Sovereign is rarer in commerce today than the 1820, but Mr Marsh quotes the opposite. The majority appear quite correct, however, and the ratings throughout the book provide a useful guide. The plates to illustrate each reign follow the relevant tabulation, and although the images are excellent they might perhaps have been better laid out.

Some points in the text are worth considering in more detail. Examining the section on George IV, the introduction has been re-worded and there are three new varieties, all listed as 'A' numbers tacked on to their relevant chronological positions. The extra tuft of hair variety on the second bare head design for the late 1820s is a useful insertion. The rarity of the 1821 has been increased dramatically from R2 to R5, which seems very ambitious as these coins are seen in commerce with surprising regularity.

The reign of William IV has an expanded introduction and includes some good new photographs, including the

sixpence obverse variety of 1836. Victoria is also re-worded and in the young head series we find nine new varieties listed in their chronological positions. However one potential new variety appears to have been missed out: in the table for the young head Victoria, it is noted that there are two obverses for 1858, and yet these have not been deemed important enough to warrant separate entries, when other 'A' numbers have been applied to less significant design changes. A similar bust change is correctly noted for the Melbourne Mint Half-Sovereigns of 1877 and 1882 with relevant 'A' numbers, although the text here is somewhat confusing. After more than twenty years in fruition the consistency of entry could be a little better than this.

During Victoria's reign we encounter the interesting series of die numbers on the coinage, which also occurred on Half-Sovereigns for the purpose of tracing which operator at the Mint was responsible for each individual coin. Mr Marsh decided long ago to endeavour to list all the known die numbers of each date in the first edition, a thankless but useful task. There are thirty new numbers listed in the second edition, across the whole date range, but four numbers have also disappeared since 1982 with no explanation as to why this has happened. There also appear to be a number of known die numbers not listed, which have been seen on lists and in auction catalogues since 1982: there are some seventeen additional numbers on the Spink records alone. It is to be hoped that just because a die number is not listed in this book that people do not necessarily think it is rare.

One of the most useful sections of the book is the addition of the Australia type Half-Sovereigns. This consists of four new pages and fifteen new entries. To conclude Victoria's reign, the Jubilee head section contains a number of entries for the complicated J.E.B. varieties, and the book is most useful for the colour plates at this point, which clearly show the variations, although the different kinds of letter J – which are the most useful defining feature – are not sufficiently emphasized. The old head coinage has an extra page of introduction but no new varieties.

Edward VII contains one new plate with an extra paragraph of text, and two of the table entries are now split further to encompass varieties of the B.P. on the reverse. George V has one more page of text, and then new to this edition are the reigns of George VI and Elizabeth II, amounting to sixteen pages overall. George VI was not considered relevant to the first edition as there are no currency pieces of his reign, but only the proof edition for the Coronation year. The book closes with a new section on para-numismatics, discussing the merits of Sovereign and Half-Sovereign scales, weights, balances, and cases, much as in the Sovereign book by Mr Marsh.

This new edition certainly improves on the first, and it is still the only book concerned solely with Half-Sovereigns; Marsh numbers are widely quoted in dealers' sales lists and auction catalogues, and the additional new plates in particular make this book worthwhile, especially for students of the Jubilee Head coinage of Victoria. All the varieties known today are listed, if not all with reference numbers, and the additional text is most welcome if not a little opinionated at times. For anybody who collects the series it is a must-have.

STEPHEN HILL

A Simple Souvenir, Coins and Medals of the Olympic Games by Peter G. Van Alfen (American Numismatic Society and the Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA), New York, 2004), x + 146pp., with numerous colour illustrations in the text.

This handsome, though odd-sized (24 × 22 cm) book, was written in conjunction with an exhibition held at the new New York headquarters of the American Numismatic Society, and arranged to coincide with the 2004 Athens Olympics. The book is not an exhibition catalogue, but more a visual story commencing with the Olympics of Ancient Greece, followed by the story of the revival and the dream of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Like so many sporting events, the new Olympic Games was in reality the invention of an Englishman, one Dr William Brookes Penny. The first games were held in Much Wenlock in 1849, and whilst the Wenlock Olympian Society still thrives in Shropshire, the book serves to demonstrate just how much it lost out to Coubertin.

As a curator in the American Numismatic Society, Van Alfen is well placed to have access to much original material, especially the coins of the ancient world. Other material has been illustrated from two private collections, one of which is well known to the reviewer. The text is well-researched and, though it comes with a fair sprinkling of footnotes, it steers away from the strictly academic viewpoint. The subject lends itself to gems of information and facts – the Olympic medals of 2004 were adapted from a medal of the first (1896) games, while Giuseppe Cassioli's medal, in constant use since Amsterdam in 1928, has been 'rested'. A photograph of Chaplain's Winner's Medal from 1906, with its panoramic view of the Acropolis, has been enlarged for the front cover of the dust jacket (if a book is to be judged by its cover, then this is splendid). Leonard Forrer, in his *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists* (vol. IV, p. 623), records that Pittner's produced 21,000 samples of Nikephoros Lytra's souvenir medal for the 1896 Olympics, but Van Alfen has not picked up on this, nor indeed pondered as to why, with such a large mintage, the medals are so comparatively rare.

After an introductory essay, the modern games are taken in chronological order, the numismatic content interspersed with splendid images from posters to cigarette cards. The 1936 Olympics, the games which continue to have a fascination for all of us, gets more pages than most. As for British numismatics, the 1908 Games are well covered, but not so those of 1948, when it is clear that post-war austerity put paid to any original medallic flair.

If the book has a fault it is that it is neither a catalogue, nor an academic corpus, nor indeed quite a picture book. The illustrations are, however, quite simply superb. There is a full bibliography (six pages), but no index. The eleven pages on the Ancient Olympics provide an excellent numismatic essay, though one suspects that it is the material in the later pages, covering the games since 1896, that most readers will enjoy.

Peter Van Alfen is to be congratulated for giving us such a well-illustrated and readable book.

D. FEARON