We are told that pets are not just for Christmas. Similarly, an organization’s objectives should not be just a shallow formality. When I became President, two years ago, I set out my priorities as follows:

1. to uphold the scholarly standing of the Society
2. to keep it in rude financial health, and
3. to enhance its public image, thereby promoting both membership and, more generally, the pursuit of numismatics.

Tonight I would like to examine how far the Society is living up to those aspirations.

In terms of scholarship, our Director has continued to arrange fascinating and varied programmes and in 2010, for the first time, issued a brief summary of the lecture content, an idea we shamelessly borrowed from the RNS. A highlight each year, especially when there is no Linecar Lecture, is the joint Summer Meeting with our sister society. This year it was held in Norwich Castle Museum. The theme, Saving Money: Currencies and Creeds, gave rise to creative and even surprising contributions from a distinguished panel of speakers. The venue for next year will be the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.

The Journal continues to be supported by excellent contributions from members. As you will recall, financial problems encountered by our printers caused a delay in distributing BNJ 79 until February this year. The editors were determined that BNJ 80 would appear before this Christmas but in the summer the earlier problems resurfaced. By prompt action an alternative printer was engaged and the Journal will be sent out to members immediately after Christmas. It is dedicated to our John Sanford Saltus Medallist and immediate past President, Dr Mark Blackburn.

The Society is eager to add to its list of Special Publications and the pipeline of prospective works is both impressive and tantalizing. I say ‘tantalizing’ because the gestation period for each work is almost always far longer than originally hoped for or expected. In seventeen years between 1994 and now, there have been five SPs. It is therefore gratifying to announce this evening the publication of two new titles. The first is Derek Chick’s monograph on The Coinage of King Offa and his Contemporaries. It is already available from Spink to members at £30 a copy and may even be ordered this evening. The second, entitled Viking Coinage and Currency in the British Isles, consists of collected papers by Mark Blackburn originally published in the BNJ and elsewhere, with additional material. It will appear in the New Year and thanks to generous financial support from the Dorothea Coke Fund will be offered at a very attractive price. Apart from the usual publicity I shall be giving more particulars of both works in my forthcoming Newsletter.

Those of you used to waiting at bus stops will have had the irritating experience of a long delay followed by the arrival of two buses together. Fortunately, no such irritation should greet the proximate publication of two SPs. This is indeed reassuring because 2011 is likely to see two further titles added to the series: Churchill and Thomas’s volume on the Brussels Hoard, where the precise timings are in the lap of our co-publishers, Baldwins, and Rory Naismith’s The Coinage of Southern England 796–865.

The authors of the SPs published in 2003 and 2006 respectively were the first recipients of the North Book Prize. At its October meeting Council unanimously agreed to award the Prize for 2009 to Lord Stewartby for his splendid English Coins, 1180–1551, published by Spink. I shall look forward to presenting the award to his Lordship early in the New Year. Whilst on the subject of awards, in 2010 Council also agreed to add the names of Keith Sugden and,
jointly, Bente and Paul Withers as recipients of the North Award for Services to British Numismatics. It is satisfying to see that the Withers' energies are undiminished with the recent publication of their priced guide to British tokens.

Turning from scholarship to finance, you will have gathered from the Accounts to 31 December 2009 and our Treasurer's comments that, despite the ambient financial crisis, the Society's funds remain healthy. The amount carried forward into 2010, at £179,600, was £3,100 higher than the figure carried forward into 2009. There had been, and still remain, two major concerns: the effect of the credit crunch upon interest rates obtainable on the Society's deposits, and the possible effect of belt tightening on membership numbers. The former has indeed resulted in a significant fall in interest income in the current year. However, the potential harm has been neutralized by other factors, including an anonymous donation of £5,000, resurgent revenues from advertising in the Journal and savings in administrative costs through greater use of internet communications with members. Approximately 400 members have now agreed to be contacted by email and the number is steadily increasing.

The impact on membership has so far not been as great as feared. At the beginning of 2010 there were 638 members. During the year 25 have been admitted, 33 have resigned or been amoved and 5 have died, resulting in a current total of 625, representing a fall of two percent over the twelve months. Those who have sadly passed away are James O'Donald MA YS (aged 91), Ian POSTLETHWAITE (aged 68), John WEIBEL (aged 94), a Council member on three occasions, Robert COOK (aged 68) and Major Clement LISTER (aged 90), also a Council member and nephew of the late Helen Farquhar.

You will be pleased to hear that I do not expect the Society's assets to show any depletion in the Accounts for 2010. This, allied to our wish to encourage continued membership of the Society, has led Council to recommend keeping the subscription unchanged for 2011, which the meeting this evening has endorsed.

On promoting the Society and numismatics in general, modest progress has been made. We have tried to raise the profile of the BNS by closer contact with the numismatic press and our stand at major coin fairs. Our correspondent for the Americas, Professor Gaspar, is now joined by Colin Pitchfork for Australasia. I also recently embarked on a series of goodwill visits to local numismatic societies.

One challenge continuing to exercise my mind is how to stimulate the interest of younger generations in numismatics. In reply to a recent CCNB survey half of the respondents were aged 65 or over. It is also chastening to note that our Society has just acquired its first junior member for some years. It is not all gloom, of course. There are outstanding numismatists in their 20s to 50s, a number of whom are active in this Society, but they are a select minority. And there must be concern how far academic and curatorial openings, as a major forcing house for young talent, will be affected into the foreseeable future by funding reductions.

I am convinced that a way into the hearts and minds of younger persons can be found through the internet, which is an integral part of their lives and it is to our website that I now turn. For a number of years it has been generously hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum. However, during 2010 we have developed a programme for membership details to be entered in a database. The Membership Secretary, Secretary and Treasurer obviously will need access to keep the database up to date. This has necessitated the Society to set up its own site, still named britnumsoc.org for its publicly accessible content. It has also prompted the Society to ponder ways in which the site could be more widely and enticingly deployed. Tonight I will mention just two of these.

Firstly, Council has decided to scan and make other than the most recent BNJs freely available online to everyone. This project will start in the New Year. It will obviously cost money and in my next Newsletter I shall formally launch an appeal for contributions from our members towards the cost. Some members have already generously responded to a mention of this project in my last Newsletter.

The second application relates to attracting younger persons into numismatics. I propose to set up in 2011 a working party to identify effective and affordable ways in which we can do so.
Finally, it is customary for the President to thank the Officers and Council for their support during the year. By repetition this can unfortunately appear to be merely a conventional courtesy. If so, it is an impression I wish to dispel. Everyone on Council has played a part and the Officers have been particularly dedicated and responsive. I believe the Society has made good progress in less than auspicious times and we have the loyalty and dedication of Council to thank for that.

Every year, of course, brings changes. This evening both Dr Kevin Clancy and Dr Philip de Jersey step down. Kevin has served the Society as its able and imaginative Director for nine years, especially broadening the scope of the lecture programmes. Philip has served as an Editor of the Journal since 2005, and I have personal experience of the skill and judgement he has brought to that demanding role. Kevin will be succeeded by Ian Leins, who is curator of Iron Age and Roman coins at the British Museum, and Philip will be succeeded by Dr Martin Allen who will work alongside Dr Elina Screen to maintain our high editorial standards. We are also sorry to lose two Council members who have completed their three year terms: Emily Freeman and Nick Holmes, recently retired as Curator at Edinburgh. They will be replaced by Frances Simmons, who returns to Council, and by Andrew Woods, currently a PhD student working from the Fitzwilliam Museum. I am thus confident that in the midst of inevitable change we shall enjoy continuing progress.

The President then delivered the second part of his address, ‘The illustration of coins: an historical survey. Part 2’, printed at pages 165–80 above.