MAURICE JOHNSON: AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NUMISMATIST

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In general the antiquities of the great mitred priory of Spalding, and of this part of Lincolnshire, are forever obliged to the care and diligence of Maurice Johnson, who has rescued them from oblivion.

William Stukeley on Maurice Johnson, 1755

WILLIAM Stukeley's tribute to the Spalding antiquary and barrister Maurice Johnson (1688–1755) amply alludes to Johnson's activities in recording local discoveries of antiquities. Nevertheless, despite these activities, his key roles in the establishment of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society in 1710 and the re-founding of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1717, and his reputation as a keen numismatist with a 'good cabinet of medals', Johnson has traditionally been overshadowed by contemporary antiquaries and numismatists such as William Stukeley and Martin Folkes.

Undoubtedly contributing to Johnson's obscurity is the fact that his major work on the coins of Carausius and Allectus was never published, whereas Stukeley's *Medallic History of Marcus Aurelius Carausius* (1757–59), which relied extensively on Johnson's work, was. Likewise the many hundreds of letters sent to Johnson and the Spalding Gentlemen's Society (SGS) during the first half of the eighteenth century and now in the collections of the SGS have only just been indexed and published. Michael and Diana Honeybone's *The Correspondence of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society* has begun to realign Johnson as a key antiquary and numismatist, and their publication highlights the importance of the Society's literary archive.

The archive comprises four main sources: the Society's minute book: the *Acts and Observances of the SGS*, which under Johnson ran from 1712 to 1755; a number of dissertations penned by Johnson on a variety of themes; the correspondence of the Society; and finally Johnson's unpublished notebook on the coins of Carausius and Allectus. Though the majority of the relevant letters in the SGS correspondence archive are in reply to Johnson they indicate the themes and concerns discussed by him. In addition, there is a small number of draft letters by Johnson. Drafting letters was common practice in the eighteenth century, particularly for those letters that were to be circulated among colleagues and read out at meetings.

The minute books and correspondence depict Johnson as a tireless antiquary who was equally generous with both his time and his knowledge. Described by Stukeley as a 'most polite and universal scholar' and again as a 'fluent orator and of eminence in his profession', Johnson was widely respected among his colleagues. Stukeley goes on to describe him as a 'lover of gardening, who had a fine collection of plants and an excellent cabinet of medals'.

Though Johnson's cabinet was dispersed soon after his death, much of the literary archive of the SGS concerns numismatics and provides us with a useful insight into his collection and the influences behind its formation. We read of Johnson's attempt to assemble a cabinet of English coins, his research into the coins of the mint at Lincoln, and his numerous discussions of the coins of Carausius and Allectus and whether the former was of British origin. In the

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1. Gough and Nichols 1812, 23.
2. Honeybone and Honeybone 2010.
3. The notebook is currently being translated from Latin and is being examined by Graham Barker.
4. Gough and Nichols 1812, 23.

index for the minute book for 1733, for example, thirteen of forty-four letters concerning Roman coins relate to Carausius.

The minute books reveal, unsurprisingly, that Roman coins were discussed far more frequently than coins of any other period. In the second place were broadly contemporary coins, the majority continental, in particular the silver and gold coins of Spain, especially those of
Ferdinand III. Other topics concerning foreign coins include a silver coin of the Venetian Republic and coins of the American plantations. Closer reading of the minute books and correspondence reveals lengthy discussions of Martin Folkes's forthcoming work on English coinage, *A Table of English Silver Coins from the Norman Period to the Present Time* (1745) and of William Stukeley's *Schemed Order of Collection for British History in a Chronological Series*, highlighting the widespread interest in British history at the time. In addition to the discussion of various numismatic themes, the correspondence also highlights the frequency with which casts of coins were requested and exchanged across the network of corresponding numismatists.

**Maurice Johnson and the Society at Spalding**

The major intellectual societies of early eighteenth-century England were, of course, based in London but gradually stimulated a growth of similar local organizations in the provinces. Mostly this occurred through ‘middle-ranking’ individuals such as Maurice Johnson, who as part of their work or during their ‘tours’ spent time with fellow antiquarians in London. Johnson was born in Spalding in 1688 and attended his local grammar school before transferring to Eton. He pursued a career in law, studying at the Inner Temple in preparation for his career as a barrister, after which he returned to Spalding to establish his career. As a barrister Johnson naturally spent time working in London and it was during these visits that he came into contact with fellow antiquaries, many of whom were to become life-long friends and correspondents. The discussions that occurred during the meetings of these early antiquaries – which initially mostly took place in coffee houses across London – inspired Johnson to found the SGS in 1710. Johnson intentionally modelled the SGS on the London Learned Societies, and described it as being for the ‘improvement in Literature and the passing our lives with more comfort’. In this act of promoting science amongst the ‘Fenn Men’ Johnson was encouraged by his corresponding colleagues in London to enrich the Society with the leading academic publications of the time. This he did, along with setting up a vast network of antiquaries with whom the Society regularly corresponded, particularly after 1724. The Society’s early years however were not so much concerned with antiquities, but rather between 1710 and 1724 members met to read the London periodicals – the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, and to discuss literary topics over a pot of coffee and some best tobacco. The early years saw members meeting at a coffee house in Spalding. In Johnson’s account of the origin of the Society he wrote that between 1709 and 1712 the Society ‘twas onely a meeting at a coffeehouse upon tryal how such an designe might succeed, to the time when it was fixed upon rules signed or subscribed in 1712’.

A set of rules were drawn up in 1712, and modified in 1714 as follows:

The Society must assemble at four.
When the season requires there must be a table, two candles, a pair of snuffers and a good fire during the society.
There must be a pot of coffee of an ounce to eight dishes, or in proportion.
There must be a pot of bohea tea of half an ounce to twelve dishes.
There must be twelve clean pipes, and an ounce of the best tobacco.
There must be a chamber-pot.
There must be a Latin Dictionary a Greek Lexicon.

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5 SGS Minute Book, 2.90, 3.21, 3.153, 3.28.
6 SGS Minute Book, 3.19, 3.152, 4.1.
7 SGS Minute Book, 2.58; 3.80.
8 Honeybone and Honeybone, x.
9 Evans 1956, 34–60.
10 Draft letter from Maurice Johnson to Dr Edward Green, 17 Nov. 1712, SGS Minute Book, letter 2, p. 3.
11 Johnson was encouraged to subscribe to, among others, the *Journal des Scavans Mercure Gallant, the belles lettres, monthly mercury, Fabritius – Bibliotheca Graeca & Latin* (letter from Edward Green to Maurice Johnson, 12 Dec. 1712, SGS Minute Book, letter 3, p. 4).
12 Honeybone and Honeybone, xiii; Owen 1981, vii.
13 Piggott 1985, 34; Owen 1981, x.
14 Owen 1981, ix.
All the printed papers order’d by the Society and not read publicly, and this book of Injunctions. The coffee and tea must be ready at exactly five and taken away at six, which done, the papers must be read by some member, then tankard of ale holding one quart and no more must be set upon the table. The President must always sit on the right side of the chimney and take care of the fire.\textsuperscript{15}

Subject matter for display and discussion in the Society’s early years was often sparse however, and letters by Johnson illustrate just how much the success of the Society at Spalding depended on him:

\begin{quote}
wee had so little brought in by any member save myself, who constantly attended, and whether in London at Terme time, or on the Midland Circuit or attending the Isle of Ely assize, there or at Wisbeach, took care to communicate something literary every meeting, that I could not much more out that I myself could produce.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Despite the Society being formed in 1710 it did not assume its distinctive character until 1724 at the earliest, at which point the formal minute books begin.\textsuperscript{17} The minute books show a revival in the Society both in terms of membership and the quantity of artefacts brought to the meetings. In a letter to the SGS dated 29 October 1728 the antiquarian William Bogdani wrote of his pleasure on hearing of the ‘success and progress of the Spalding Society’.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, the links formed by Johnson between the SGS and the London Learned Societies during the early 1720s led to the Society of Antiquaries referring to the SGS as their ‘Cell at Spalding’.\textsuperscript{19}

The varied interests of the SGS mirrored those of the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society, London, such as attending philosophical lectures, buying mathematical instruments and reading London scientific periodicals,\textsuperscript{20} while the minute books and correspondence reveal a thriving network of antiquarians sharing information. ‘We deal’ says Mr Johnson to Mr Neve in 1745/6, ‘in all arts and sciences, and exclude nothing from our conversation but politics, which would throw us all into confusion and disorder’.\textsuperscript{21} This act of emulation held agency for the formation and expression of individual and group identity. ‘To Provincial eyes, Enlightenment values offered a leg-up from rusticity, associated with barbarity and riot, towards metropolitan – indeed cosmopolitan urbanity’.\textsuperscript{22}

By early 1727 the Society had moved into two rooms in Abbey Yard, Spalding and it was here that the first Society museum was born:

\begin{quote}
On 5 January 1726/7 the Reverend the president and Mr. Day having viewed Mr. Sparke’s two rooms with the garden and offices made their report to the society that is in their opinion a very proper place to remove into and that the roomes are commodious, being one for a museum wainscotted and pressed around, the other a withdrawing room fi tt for our servants to attend in.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

The objects on display reflect the group’s broad interests in science, history and the natural world. A letter from Captain John Topham to Maurice Johnson lists a number of specimens donated to the SGS:

\begin{quote}
A Tygers Head
Hogg Fish
Piece of a Rhinoceros Skin
Three Claws of a Tyger
Snout of a fish
Gentoo Girls Love Letter in a Bottle
Severall little Scorpions
D\textsuperscript{e} Centumpes
Sucking Fish
A large Insect which I caught Flying.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Owen 1981, x.
\textsuperscript{16} Owen 1981, ix.
\textsuperscript{17} Owen 1981, vii.
\textsuperscript{18} Letter from William Bogdani to Maurice Johnson. 29 Oct. 1728 (Owen 1981, 41, no. 93).
\textsuperscript{19} Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, xv.
\textsuperscript{20} Owen 1981; Honeybone and Honeybone 2010; Jankovic, 2000, 79; Reed 1995.
\textsuperscript{21} Gough and Nichols 1812, 7.
\textsuperscript{22} Porter 1980, 27.
\textsuperscript{23} Owen 1981, xii.
\textsuperscript{24} Letter from Captain John Topham to Maurice Johnson, 7 Oct. 1732, in Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 71, no. 170.
\end{flushright}
Five plans for the Society’s museum dated around 1725 exist in the SGS archives. These plans indicate that the museum would have been a ‘museum in the eighteenth-century sense of a laboratory and workroom in which their collections could be studied’.\(^{25}\) However, documentary evidence tells us that the collections were exhibited in a systematic way. The ‘Rules and Orders’ of the Society (1745) states that ‘MSS, charts, maps, plans, drawings, prints, coins, casts, carvings, and other curiosities in nature or art [are] … to be kept in its classes in its museum under the rules and direction of this society’.\(^{26}\) The museum collection was eventually relocated to its current building in Broad Street, Spalding in 1911.\(^{27}\) The present-day museum still reflects the broad interests of the Society and includes collections of scientific instruments, ethnography, archaeology and numismatics. The Society also boasts an impressive library of antiquarian books and, perhaps most importantly, a vast collection of letters and minute books relating to the activities of the Society in the eighteenth century. It is clear however from the correspondence and minute books that a central interest of the Society in the eighteenth century was that of its founder: numismatics.\(^{28}\)

**Maurice Johnson, numismatist**

Maurice Johnson was a keen collector of coins and regularly exchanged originals, casts and information with fellow collectors. While the archive would indicate that Johnson was part of an established numismatic culture, there were, in fact, relatively few collectors or English translations of numismatic books in comparison to the continent.\(^{29}\) Indeed, even some forty years after Johnson’s death in 1755, the numismatist Joseph Eckhel was able to name only three great books on coins published in Britain since the Renaissance – Haym’s engravings of coins in the collection of the Earl of Pembroke (1726), Francis Wise’s catalogue of coins in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (1750), and Charles Combe’s catalogue of a selection of coins in William Hunter’s collection (1782).\(^{30}\) It is important to recognise the significance of the contemporary literary evidence for Johnson’s approach to numismatics, some 113 years before dedicated numismatic societies were founded: the Numismatic Society of London in 1836, the American Numismatic Society in 1858, and the Boston [US] Numismatic Society in 1860. The SGS’s archive of letters and minute books has the potential to inform us about numismatics and ways of seeing coins in a period of history when similar societies simply did not exist. In particular, the correspondence of the SGS provides an insight into how coins were sought and acquired in the early eighteenth century. Through the network of numismatists with whom Johnson corresponded he was able to build up his own personal collection of coins. In a letter from Samuel Addenbrooke to Maurice Johnson’s father, also called Maurice, dated 9 February 1715 (i.e. 1716) we read of Mr Addenbrooke seeking out Saxon coins for Maurice Johnson junior (founder of the SGS).\(^{31}\)

Sir,

I received the enclosed Scrip [not now enclosed, but relating to a legal matter] yesterday and my Father an other of the same. We desire your care of this matter. I have not forgot my promise to Mr Johnson your son, and have done what I can get [sic] him some coins; I have some in my hands but of what worth I can’t say; however when I have got two Silver Saxon peices which I have partly the promise of, I will send then by Berton of Peterburgh. I have by an unlucky fall been kept in my Chamber this two months or else had sent them before this. Mr Johnson promised me some directions in this matter If he please to send them me I shall be glad of the opertunity to shew that I am his & your most humble Servt

Chesterton Feb: 9 1715

S Addenbrooke

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\(^{25}\) Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 28.

\(^{26}\) Gough and Nichols 1812, 33.

\(^{27}\) Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 73.

\(^{28}\) Owen 1981; Honeybone and Honeybone 2010.

\(^{29}\) Burnett 2004, 126.

\(^{30}\) Burnett 2004, 126.

\(^{31}\) Letter from the Rev. Samuel Addenbrooke to Maurice Johnson, 9 Feb. 1715/16, in Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 11, no. 17; transcribed here courtesy of Michael and Diana Honeybone.
Johnson’s reply to Addenbrooke provides us with a detailed insight into his collecting methodology.32

[Maurice Johnson junior’s draft reply]

Rev’d S’

My Father was gone to London when your Letter came to our hands which my brother sent him the contents of by the first post after and you need not doubt but he’ll take all imaginable care ab[out] your concerns there & you was pleased to take notice in yours how mindful you are of me & that matter which we discoursed ab[out] when I had the happiness of your Company at Holbech. I though [sic] I could not doe less than acknowledg your favour by letter which I meant I intende to the time & place being then neither proper for the purpose I am heartily sorry for the unfortunate fall which you mention & hope you have suffered no more by it than being detained so long in yr Chamber. as you are pleased to require my directions in the business of old medals & Coines I may well hope you’ll excuse which I offer to yr consideration upon That Topick being a Study somewhat out of the way tho’ I assure my Self that I am able to observe very little to which you knew not of as well before. But first in regard to Roman Coines Give me leave to lay my own scheme before you by which I collect. Viz’ of the money made by the Romans the Medulists [coin collectors] divide them into 3 classes of different sizes the first ab[out] the Size of an halfpenny but as thick again generally speaking called the larger brass being either in that [p. 2] Metall or Copper, these if pretty fine are one with another worth six pence apiece. The 2nd size called the middle brass are of the same with farthingths but as Substantiall again also & of the same metal with the former if very fair worth 3d each. The 3rd sort is of silver for the most part Impure which the French antiques provide call Billon these are seldom if ever the size of a Teston [a shilling] & if fairly legible is that the constant purchase of them. These we call Sextaries. Give me leave Good S’ to note to you that if the generality of Roman pieces found in England are since & upon the decline of that Empire in [the] West are [sic] not so thick as what we term the middle brass & seldom so broad these are worth little or nothing unless they prove exceeding fair of a short reigning Emperor.

Yet S’ these Generall rules like all others admit of sundry qualifications for Instance these Emperours following in the larger copper or Grand Bronzo as the Italians term it is of much better value than the Common rate of Sixpence; viz All the 1st 13 from Julius Caesar to Nerva Inclusive are worth 1 s[hillng] each. Of which number, Otho & Vitellius can hardly be procured for any money by me. And these following Divus Pertinax (pius pater), Didius Julianus, Petronius Niger, Claudius Albinus, Septimus Geta, M. Opelius Macrinus, M. Opelius Ant / Didunius Julianus / C. Julius Maximus / M. Ant Gordianus Afr / C. Julius Balbinus / M. Julius Philippus / C. Messius Decius Trajanus / Q: Hor: Etr: / Mess: Decius Cæs / C. Vib: Trebonianus Gallus / Vibius Volusianus / Cæs. Emilius Emilianus/ Valerian / Publius Licinius Gallienus / M. Cat. Lat. Posthumus these are of each them worth 1s. a peice whatever the Emperours time. Posthumus are found of a larger size than our farthings as 2 which you mentioned to me I would give 2 shilling apiece for willingly. Now for the 2nd sort or size by the Italians Mezzo Bronzo or middle brass as we say these are seldom purchased for collections at more than 3d. each and if you meet with any very fair especially of the above named Emperours I would double that price out of Curiosity & for those since the 30 Tyrants 1d. esp. Gallienus or Posthumus age[?] I would except for Conipact, I can but the list of them which are never worth more than 3d. being the most plentiful if any one term except the Antonini. I omitted S’ to mention Brittish pieces which wee now dissallow of as some only term them annuletis are commonly of Gold & worth 3s. [?] their weight whatever Roman coins can be met with of Gold are worth as much & look prettily in a Collection otherwise seldom so good work or instructive as the Copper. But Gold & Silver make a fine show & set off such odd things as our Collections appear to the beaus & Ladys when they accidentally view them. As to the Saxon Coine it is by far more Intelligible than any ever went Current in this Realme at this Day. And the late AB [Archbishop] of Yorke [Archbishop John Sharp (1644/5?–1714)] was the only Antiquary we had who ever made any thing out like a Series of them.33 As yet I own to you I am not Master of one single piece between the time of Honorius who gave up this Island when the Roman Eagle could no longer shelter [us] under her wings to the Conquest of Wm the Norman Tyranny took place but shall be more [p. 3] obliged to y’ Industry in this part than any other & will willingly give a shining apiece or more for every Saxon or Danish peice in that age.

There are some very few in Copper or brass rather of that age & they [sic] worth 6d. a piece but the generality of such as goe for copper Saxon are nothing but Ave Mariés stampt in Greater Abbies in England, & Normandy Since Duke Wm Accession & they are not worth above a halfpenny each which is ab’ their weight. But above all what I most covet & what my poor Collection is likely to be most compleat in I entreat you my friend to procure for me whatever pieces of any sort fall in your way of our English Coines or Medals from the Conquest down to Q. Elizabeth exclusive of her. The Silver ones to Edward the 1st exclusive are worth in my judgemt 2s. 6d. each & all the Golden ones I beg you’ll use your own discretion in & purchase them as cheap as you can not byeing even gold it self too dear. All Scottish Coine before the accession of James the 6th or James the 1st are worth

32 Letter from Maurice Johnson to the Revd Samuel Addenbrooke, 18 February 1715/16, in Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 11, no. 18.
33 Archbishop John Sharp was born in Bradford and educated at Christ’s College Cambridge. Sharp was the author of ‘Observations on the Coinage of England’, which was later printed in Nichols 1790. See also Pagan 1987, 178–9.
for me double their weight either in Gold or Silver & so are all the medalls or Coines of the present Illustrious
family on the throne of Great Brittain.

Having frequently used the terme, Fair, give me leave to add that when I call the coine or Medall a fair one I
mean where the face & reverse are decernable & the legends round the rim or circular Inscriptions are legible &
this is an unerring rule that in all worke of this nature the higher releife or bossage of the worke the more valu-
able the pieces. I can't but imagine that great part of this is & must needs be impertinent. But as you Sr was so
friendly to require my thoughts I could not doe less than give them as fully as I could so to kind a friend & so
really willing to assist my undertaking. If I can serve you in any thing I shall be proud to be commanded by you & am

Rev'd Sr with much affection yo' assured

Friend & Serv'

Spalding 18 Febry 1715/6

Maur. Johnson

To the Rever'd Mr Saml' Addenbrooke
at his Fathers house in Chesterton near
Peterburgh

As well as the lengthy discussion on the relative values of Roman coins, Johnson appreciated
the information that coins could provide as chronological and historical indicators. In
William Moore's *The Gentlemen's Society at Spalding: Its Origin and Progress*, published in
1851, Moore gives us insight into Johnson's approach to numismatics, both as collector and as
story-teller: 'And when other subjects failed, – "on a pinch," as he says, “and to enliven our
chat,” he brought out in chronological order his own ample collection of coins, exhibiting
them “with some discourse”.'

Johnson's main concern, which mirrored that of his fellows at the Society of Antiquaries,
was the formation of a collection that represented the history of Britain. Johnson's methodol-
ogy emulated a larger project started by the Society. At a meeting of the Society on 1 April
1723, the group 'resumed the consideration of collecting all the Legends and accounts of
Coins that relate to Britain, from the earliest ages to the present, in order to describe an exact
Metallographia Britannica.' In order to fulfil this task the Society divided itself into commit-
tees, each of which was to focus on a particular class of coin. Members of each committee
were charged to 'communicate what comes in his way of any class,' and the SGS was among
the institutions that provided information and, in turn, was offered it. Moore provides greater
detail on how Johnson arranged his collection:

It appears that Mr Johnson entertained the cell with a numismatic history of the Kings of Britain from Julius
Caesar to the end of the Western Empire: a plan for disposing coins to answer his design of illustrating the
British History, reduced to 15 charts.

1. From Cassivelan to Boadicea.
2. From Boadicea to Adrian.
3. From Adrian to Severus.
4. From Severus to Carausius.
5. From Carausius to Constantius.
6. From Constantius to Maximus.
7. From Maximus to Vortigern.
8. From Vortigern to Egbert.
9. From Egbert to William the Conqueror.
10. From William the Conqueror to Henry VIII.
11. From Henry VIII to Elizabeth.
12. From Elizabeth to the Commonwealth.
13. From the Commonwealth to the Revolution.
14. From the Revolution to Queen Anne.
15. From Queen Anne to the accession of the House of Hanover.
There are few discussions recorded in the archive regarding Iron Age coins, though Moore’s comments indicate that Johnson nonetheless saw pre-Roman tribal rulers as important to Britain’s numismatic history. Not all of Johnson’s colleagues shared this view however, particularly Beaupré Bell, who was still struggling to understand what use non-classical coins were to understanding history:

I have not Tast to admire such rude performances as most of our English coins, especially the most Ancient, are; which give Light to no History, & are only standing proofs of the Ignorance and Inartifice of our Ancestors.

Letter from Beaupré Bell to Maurice Johnson, 3 September 1733

Correspondence reveals discussions on two coins of the late Iron Age. In 1716 an exchange of letters occurred between Stukeley and Johnson regarding a supposed coin of Boudicca in Johnson’s collection. Secondly, in 1740 an exchange occurred between William Bogdani and Maurice Johnson regarding the linguistic origin of the word ‘TASCIO’ on a British coin. Johnson used both of these coins as illustrations to his talks in an historical discourse. Johnson’s dissertation on the Learning and Politeness of ye Antient Britaine (17 August 1749) details at length the character and skills of the ‘Britaines’, and approximately half way through he discusses the design and ‘skille’ of coins of the British kings Cassibelan and Cunobel. At this point Johnson describes how he used coins from his collection to illustrate his points: ‘The coines Capitated, whose horse and epeda on 4, of Cassibelan who commanded against and drove the Dictator back to his ships with them, of Cunobelin his son and others here produced by Me in the course of my Readings to Y ee on the History’. It would appear from Johnson’s dissertation that he regarded the Roman expansion into Britain as an occupying force: a force from which the ‘brave Britons’ attempted to free themselves.

Johnson was not alone in his views on the Romans. To quote Dr Lucilla Burn, ‘A slight ambiguity towards the Romans was common to many scholars of the period. William Cole went so far as deliberately to ignore everything to do with Roman Britain. Others, while admiring the military achievements, and the superior literary and artistic talents of the Romans, and having been drilled from an early age in Latin to the extent that many were fluent writers of that language, still disliked having to admit that Britain had benefited from occupation by a foreign power’. Johnson alludes to this way of thinking in his writings. In discussing a coin of Carausius inscribed ‘VIRTVS AVG’ (Bravery/manliness of the Augustus) he comments:

I take to have been only VIRTVS AVG a frequent compliment to this great and very brave prince well deserving it from the Britains [sic] when he delivered and preserved by his coinage and conduct from the insolent Tyranny of Diocletian and avitious [sic] cruelty of Maximian.

Extract from Johnson’s unpublished manuscript Decennium Caraussi & Allecti

Johnson’s distaste for the ‘monstrous’ emperors of Rome was not limited to Diocletian or Maximian. Regarding the revolt of Boudicca in AD 60/61 Johnson draws inspiration from a coin and writes:

As to my Boadicea of which you was pleased to require an Account in a Letter which came to me to London, which I wrote You I had not by me there, but It was in my Boxes placed, upon your Judgement joyn’d with that of the Keeper of the Laudean Collection of Medalls at Oxon (who compared it with two others there & very obligingly gave mine the preference,) As that Heroines chronologically in my Box of the 1st Imperial, & whenever

38 Beaupré Bell (1704–41) was second cousin to Maurice Johnson through his mother Margaret Oldfield. Bell was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge and had a particular interest in Roman coins.
39 Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 78, no. 187.
41 William Bogdani (1699/1700–1771) was one of the Clerks to the Ordnance, and Lord of the Manor of Hitchin (Herts.). His wife Penelope (Bowell) is said to be a relation of Johnson (Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 224).
44 Burn 2011.
45 Maurice Johnson, Decennium Caraussi et Allecti Impii Britan Ex Fastis Inscriptionibus Status Signis Sigillis alisque Sculptis Monumentis Neconon Historici Illustratum a Mauritio Johnson, Item IV, Tracts Volume, SGS.
I view that Series of Monstrous Men It gives me great pleasure to reflect upon the true & Undaunted Bravery of that Royal British Widdow, brought into my mind by this her Amulett (for So Sir I begg You’ll give me leave to call It) as the Learned Lord Almoner hath taught me from Cæsar & Bartholine.46

Letter from Maurice Johnson to William Stukeley, 6 October 1716

46 Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 16, nos. 22–23. It is not certain what coin Johnson refers to: it is possible that the coin was a fake; forgeries were common in the eighteenth century.
To Johnson coins were evidence of political struggles between his ‘forefathers’ to the ‘Britons’ as he calls them in a letter to Dr Stukeley (in which he includes the break-away Emperor Carausius), and their oppressors, the Romans. Johnson’s distaste for the Roman Empire does however seem to be largely confined to the conquest period (mid to late first century AD), for

47 Letter from Maurice Johnson to William Stukeley, 6 April 1714, in Stukeley 1883, 24.
he ends his dissertation on a positive note, claiming that Agricola (under Titus – ‘that delight to Mankind’) placed a Christian British Lady in the Imperial Court in Rome. Johnson makes reference to Martial and identifies the lady as Claudia Caeraileis, wife of ‘Senator’ Pudens mentioned in II Timothy, IV.21, who according to tradition was of British birth. Johnson’s favouring of the Roman Empire after this time might be attributed to the widely-held conjecture that it was through Claudia’s brother’s line that missionaries were eventually sent to convert the Britons, but also perhaps because the story places a British figure in the political heart of the Roman Empire. Johnson’s faith was clearly deeply held, for in a letter between Johnson and his brother we read of Johnson complaining about members at the Royal Society laughing at correspondents should they mention the name of God:

the worthy Praesident Sr. Hans Sloan made a good Solem & serious oration to the Company which was very numerous Upon some indecent Liberties taken by some of the Members of laughing at what was communicated there if It didn’t happen to hit their Tast (sic), or was less accurate than a Man would have printed It, & more particularly if the well meaning Correspondent mentioned the name of God, which they ought to hear as well as pronounce with reverence & all their Efforts in the Enquiries ought to be as their Charter proposes Ad majorem Dei Creatoris Omnipotentis Gloriam (To the greater glory of God the omnipotent creator).

Letter from Maurice Johnson to his brother John Johnson, 15 December 1730

Johnson closes his complaint by remarking that:

every Ape & Monkey has the faculty of contracting Its muscles with a Sneer, as well as these forward Young Gentry, but use It with more discretion, in that They can neither intend to make a Jest of Religion or any Branch of Learning.

Letter from Maurice Johnson to his brother John Johnson, 15 December 1730

Given Johnson’s tendency to place coins within a religious narrative, it is possible that his views also reflect how England had to contend with the Continent, notably in the confrontation between Catholic European countries and Protestant England. A similar religious use of history is noted in Stukeley’s writings on religious practice at Stonehenge, in which he attempted to ‘verify the existence of the early British Church on grounds free from Roman Catholic ties’. It is interesting to note that Johnson held similar views to those of John Aubrey, and indeed William Stukeley, regarding Britain before the Romans. In his dissertation On the learning and politeness of ye Ancient Britaines Johnson asserts his support for Stukeley’s claims regarding the pre-Roman use of Avebury and Stonehenge by Druids. Like Aubrey, Johnson wrote on the technology, coinage and weaponry of the Britons, and spent much time on the subject of the Roman conquest of the island. Once again a political use of the past is detectable in his writings; in his dissertation Johnson compares the weaponry and tactics of the Britons warring against the Claudian invasion of AD 43 to the battles between the English and the Highland Scots, namely the battles of Sherifmuir (Dunblane, 1715), Prestonpans (1745) and Falkirk (1746). Just as modern archaeological interpretations often reflect contemporary concerns it would appear that Johnson’s interpretations reflected the profound changes that were occurring between England and Scotland at the time. It would appear from this dissertation that Johnson identified the ancient Britons with the Jacobites or Scots and the Romans with the English, though he does not elaborate on these associations any further.

Other influences on the type of coins Johnson collected – particularly influences of a political nature – are traceable in his collection. Within the documentary archive of the SGS is Johnson’s unpublished manuscript on the coins of the Roman usurpers Carausius and Allectus, entitled Decennium Caraussi & Allecti. Carausius established a separatist regime in Britain...
and parts of Gaul in 286 but was subsequently murdered by his finance minister Allectus in 293, who in turn was defeated and killed by an army of Constantius I commanded by the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus somewhere in Hampshire, in 295 or 296. The manuscript contains an illustrated list of coins of Carausius and Allectus and is bound with a number of letters relating to the compilation of the catalogue. Johnson's unpublished manuscript is the fruit of numerous letters and conversations also recorded in the minute books, mostly between Johnson, Stukeley and Beaupré Bell. This exchange of information, coins and casts resulted in both Stukeley and Johnson writing a volume on the coins and history of Carausius and Allectus, though only Stukeley's made it to publication. Both authors rely heavily on numismatic data derived both from their own personal collections of coins and those of others, tempered with information taken from classical sources and later histories of the emperors including Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-history of Britain. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the coins and the history of the period in which Carausius is named as a British Emperor and a prince of the blood royal of Britain.

It appears that Johnson collected specific coins of Carausius to support this conclusion. A short entry in the SGS minute books for 18 December 1733 describes Johnson examining the reverse of a coin to prove a British connection. On a coin inscribed LAETITIA AVG, Johnson misread the letters 'S – P' or 'S – A' for 'S – B', which he took to be an abbreviation for Senatus Benignitate. While Johnson's reading was in error, many of the symbols and abbreviations on the coins of both Carausius and Allectus such as FE, BE, SC and SP are still not well understood. Nevertheless, none of these inscriptions pertain to the emperor's place of birth, which is now known to be Gallia Belgica.

Carausius and Allectus, who eventually murdered him, had held a particular fascination among historians since the appearance of the Historia Brittonum ascribed to Nennius, in which Carausius was claimed to be of British origin. The connection between the usurper and Britain naturally led to Carausius becoming a popular hero like Boudicca, King Arthur and King Alfred. These heroes became 'powerful figures in defining national consciousness'. Consequently, various histories have been created about Carausius at various points in time in order to advance various political narratives.

This political use of heritage is also found in eighteenth-century descriptions of prehistoric stone tools and coins. The unification of Britain in 1707 undoubtedly influenced the perception of the past; antiquities were beginning to be seen from a perspective of national identity. For some, this led to a fascination with material and literary evidence for national heroes such as King Arthur and King Alfred. As we have already seen, for Johnson this fuelled an interest in Boudicca; it developed an interest in establishing that the Roman usurper Carausius was of British origin; and it lead to him praising Agricola for placing a Briton in the Imperial Court.

In a similar fashion Johnson compares the Roman usurper Allectus (293–95/6) to the 'usurping murderer' Oliver Cromwell. Clearly, those personalities of the past who promoted Britain were favoured by Johnson, and those who threatened it were seen with distaste. But it would be a mistake to assume that this approach was something that was overtly promoted by high society. Rather, the surge in feeling for Britain was something that 'emerged from a range of social and cultural changes during the eighteenth century', not least the unification of

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54 Cf Johnson's unpublished MS on the coins of Carausius: 'this great and very brave prince ... from the Britains [sic].
55 The mint marks RSR and INPCDA are discussed in de la Bedoyere 1998. Both abbreviations are suggested as referring to Virgil's Fourth Eclogue: RSR as an abbreviation for Redeunt Saturnia Regna ('The golden age is back'), and INPCDA as an abbreviation for Iam Nova Progenies Caelo Demittitur Alto ('Now a new generation is let down from Heaven above').
56 Casey 1995, 168.
57 Casey 1995, 170.
58 For example Stukeley's attempt to establish Carausius as a British naval hero at a time when Britain was more or less constantly at war (Casey 1995, 186).
60 Casey 1995, 170.
Fig. 4. Extract from Johnson’s Decennium Carausi & Allecti (photograph by the author; by kind permission of the SGS).
England and Scotland. The birth of the provincial Society at this time meant that such societies quickly became fertile centres for research. In their efforts to produce information that resulted in a greater understanding of the history of the nation, numismatic projects, such as Johnson’s, inevitably contributed to the new sense of national pride. Numismatics naturally, and perhaps for the most part unintentionally, became embroiled in helping to create and maintain national identities.

Johnson’s interest in the history of Britain did not overly influence his academic rigour however, as the ‘Oriuna’ saga clearly shows. In 1752 Stukeley published his *Palaeographica Britannica*, in which he discusses a coin of Carausius bearing an incomplete reverse inscription reading ORIVNA.\(^63\) Stukeley took this inscription to be evidence for the name of the wife of Carausius, the empress ‘Oriuna’ despite numerous objections from other numismatists including Johnson, who correctly read the inscription as FORTVNA. To Stukeley, Oriuna was another national hero; to Johnson she was the product of poor academic rigour tempered with a vivid imagination. A number of letters within the SGS archive document these arguments,\(^64\) and a fine illustration of the coin appears in Johnson’s notebook.

However, Johnson’s interest in numismatics extended beyond Carausius. The documentary evidence for how Maurice Johnson collected and interpreted his numismatic collection shows a strong preference for research into local and national history in accordance with the overall aims of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Johnson led the way in researching local history in the south Lincolnshire region; in a letter to William Stukeley, Johnson urges that ‘historical studies must always be considered in their geographic context’.\(^65\) In another letter we even find him reprimanding Stukeley for his unhealthy interest in Greek history:

Tho every thing You apply to my Friend comes with satisfaction out of Your hands & I shall (I promise my Self) receive much from Your reserches in Greece, Yet I must own I could have wishd You had not for the more

\(^63\) Stukeley 1752. For further information see Casey 1995, 180–1; Piggott 1985, 140.
\(^64\) Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, letter nos. 235, 515, 531, 558.
\(^65\) Piggott 1985, 36.
beautyfull & stupendous, have deserted the Enquirys You was Upon relateing to our brave, or great Ancestors
the brave tough, the bold, the Honest Britons.66
Letter from Maurice Johnson to William Stukeley, 3 April 1721

While Johnson and the SGS undoubtedly discussed other coins, particularly ancient and
contemporary foreign coins, there is little evidence to show that they were actively sought or
researched. Rather, attention was focussed on how English coins could help with the fact-finding
mission of constructing British history and research into local history such as the mint at
Lincoln. The SGS literary archive contains frequent references to local discoveries and though
the entries are often rather short, they nonetheless show an interest in the recording of new
discoveries of antiquities and an appreciation for context. The minute books and correspond-
ence record discussion on a variety of finds from Roman coins from Water Newton in
Cambridgeshire to Roman coin hoards from Lincolnshire, and even single coin finds. In the
SGS minute book for 1733 there is an interesting entry concerning the discovery of a 'middle
brass' coin found in the spring-head at Dunston, Lincolnshire. The entry goes into some detail
regarding the circumstances and provenance of the discovery:

Mr Johnson showed them a curious medal of the middle brass size of that fine metal commonly called the
Corinthian but not perfectly preserved having layen long in the head of Dunston spring about the middle of
Lincoln heath where it was taken up by some workmen employed by Edward Walpole Esq, Lord of that Manor,
when they cleaned and opened the fountain head and made a cold bath there, who gave it him on the one side is
the head of Antonia the wife of Nero Cl. Drusus Germanicus the mother of Germanicus Caes. & Ti. Claudius
afterwards Emperor, who then in honour of her caused it to be made of that metal as Aen. Vico in his augus-
tarum Imagines p. 59 says: ANTONIAE AVGSTAE 4 an (sic) human figure standing TI CLAVDIVS CAESAR
AVG on each side a letter S C.67

The SGS therefore became an important centre for the recording and discussion of local
finds of antiquities, and it was not long before similar societies became established in neigh-
bouring areas such as Stamford and Peterborough. The minute books of these societies and
the letters sent between members provided useful information on many finds such as the hoard
of Roman coins found in March, Isle of Ely (Cambridgeshire). This hoard was recorded by the
Society of Antiquaries in London and the Peterborough Gentlemen's Society,68 and a letter
dated 26 November 1730 from the Revd Richard Neve69 to Maurice Johnson survives in the
SGS archive which gives further details.70

Rev Richard Neve (P'boro) to Maurice Johnson 26 11 1730

I suppose you have heard of a great Treasure of ancient silver Medals lately found at March in ye Isle of Ely, by
a poor man who was levelling a little parcell of rising ground for mending part of ye way betwixt that town &
Wisbeach. He has found not far distant from each other, 3 or 4 urns, ye first was broken in ye taking up, ye oth-
ers are intire. One of them was full of small silver medals, most of 'em very fair. I've seen 13 or 14 of them which
were purchased by a Gentlemen of this town [P'boro] who chanc'd to be at March soon after they were found,
which were sold at first for 2d or 3d a piece, now they are all got into 2d or 3d hands & none to be had but an
extravagant price. The poor man that found them is almost out of this mind for selling them before he knew their
value. But he is resolv'd not to be bitt in his earthen ware, for he will come up to London with his 3 or 4 urns, &
does not doubt but to make it worth his while, & to have a good market there. There are two little hills or
mounds remain still to be levelled & they expect to find more Treasure there still.

I would give you a catalogue of those I saw, but I am too indifferent a medallist as to be able to give you a very
lame account. However, such as I can, you are welcome to your good nature will excuse mistakes.

The first then in order of time is a Domitian by a mistake I suppose in ye Die ye letters are inverted & no more
are to be seen y(?) AVG DOM ye reverse is a wolf suckling 2 children, and a little boat or basket under it, no letter
to be seen on y'side.

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66 SGS archive.
67 SGS Minute Books, 19 July 1733, in Owen 1981, 23. The letters written in bold were presumably those legible to Johnson.
The coin is probably a dupondius of Antonia, struck under Claudius (AD 41–54), mint of Rome, RIC I, 127, 129, nos. 92, 104.
68 Extracts of these letters are given in Robertson 2000, 67, no. 321.
69 Richard Neve (1694–1757) was educated at St John's College, Cambridge and became a fellow of the SGS in 1718. Neve
founded the Peterborough Gentlemen's Society in 1730 while serving as a minor canon of Peterborough Cathedral (Honeybone
and Honeybone 2010, 234).
70 Honeybone and Honeybone 2010, 57, no. 130.
2 The 2d thus IMP CAES NERVA...GERM...
Reverse a Genius or Victory with wings down to her heels. PM TRP COS IIII P P
3 ...NER TRAIANO PTIM AVG GER...
The Rev. The Emp. With a spear in his right hand & sceptre in his left. PN TR P COS VI P P S....
4 IMP CAES TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TRI
SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI a soldier sitting down in a melancholy posture
5 IMO CAESAR TRAIAN...
P M TR P COS III A figure with a spear in his left hand and a patera in ye right
sacrificing at his feet CLEM
6 TRAIANO AVG GER DAC PM TR P COS VI P P
Rev. SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI. The Palladium upon a Pedestal
Another Trajan...
7 Rev. A Noted figure sitting in a chair with a cornucopiae in her left hand in her right a Lotus under
FORTITUDO
8 another Trajan
The Rev. The Emp.’ sitting in a chair sacrificing with a patera in his right hand. PONT MAX TR POT COS...
9 ...an Adrian
Rev. – FIDES PVBLICA
2 of Mar. Antoninus and one of Faustina with this Inscription
FAVSTINA AVG III AVG, ye Reverse I forgot nor have I time to be particular. There is one other that I could
not make out whether it were a Vespatian (sic) or an Adrian. You will be so good as to excuse this very imperfect
account and accept it only as a Testimony of a grateful mind for many favours received.

Perhaps the most significant piece of work on local numismatics penned by Johnson is his
dissertation on the Lincoln mint, in which he discusses at length the types of coins minted
there. This, in fact, was the first piece of work of its kind on the mint of Lincoln, for which,
documentary evidence indicates, he was actively collecting:

I take leave to exhibit a few [Johnson writes regarding the coins from the Lincoln mint] but those very fair,
instances of the coins themselves in my own collection, which are sufficient and more satisfactory than sending
you to Occo,72 Mezzabarba,73 Banduri,74 or the cabinets of others...75

Extract from Johnson’s dissertation on the Lincoln mint, 1740

Although parts of the dissertation contain erroneous information, particularly on the attribu-
tion of the coins of Carausius and Allectus to Lincoln, Johnson nonetheless provides a
reasoned and well researched article. His research included actively collecting specimens and
making extensive enquiries into those coins held by fellow numismatists. Johnson’s dissertation
reveals that his collection included coins from Claudius to Edward I, many of which are
illustrated in the short catalogue contained in his work.

Fig. 6. Illustrations of coins of the Lincoln mint held in the Pembroke Collection in 1740 from Johnson's
Dissertation on the mint at Lincoln. 28 August 1740 (photograph by the author; by kind permission of the SGS).

71 Maurice Johnson, ‘A dissertation on the Mint at Lincoln, proved from undoubted monuments and money in several ages
there coined, with references to the places where they are still remaining, to records and other credible authorities. Communicated
to, and read at, the Gentlemen's Society at Spalding, on their anniversary meeting, 28 August 1740, and September 11’, in Nichols
1790, 58.
72 Adolphus Occo (1524–1606) was born in Augsburg and received a medical education before turning to antiquities. He
became an eminent writer on numismatics who authored an ambitious check-list of Roman Imperial Coinage, Imperatorum
Romanorum Numismata (1579) (Gorton 1838 sub Adolphus Occo (unpaginated)).
73 Count Francesco Mezzabarba (1645–97) published an updated version of Imperatorum Romanorum Numismata (see n.72)
in 1730 but the additions were of doubtful authority and it was not greatly relied upon (Crabb 1833 sub Adolphus Occo
(unpaginated)).
74 Anselmus Banduri (1671/75–1743) was born in Ragusa, Dalmatia, entered the Benedictine order and later spent some
years in Paris at the abbey of St. Germaine, where he published on the antiquities of Constantinople. In 1718 Banduri published
two folio volumes on the imperial coinage from Trajan to c.1453 (Puskaric 2006).
75 See n.71.
In his dissertation on the Lincoln mint, Johnson attempts to explain how reverse legends seen on the coins of Carausius and Allectus—L, LN, LC and ML—were to be understood as abbreviations for LINDVM COLONIA. Johnson’s dissertation makes admirable attempts to prove this connection, though unfortunately his interpretations were in error. There was in fact no mint at Lincoln during the Roman period. Nevertheless, the documentary archive shows a method of collecting coins that was rooted in local context. Such a methodology mirrored Johnson’s interest in local antiquities and the important role that the SGS played in recording them.

IMP. C. CARAVSIVS P. F. AVG. REV. PAX AVG. AVGG. BETWEEN S AND P IN EXERGUE MLXXI. WHICH THEY READ MONETA LINDICOLIAE, CUSTA IN OFFICIA AD NUM. CED. XXI. ABOUT A.D. 289.


So in many of them with different reverse m. l. with the same N. XXI. and sometimes s. c. sometimes s. v. SENATU PROBANTE VCL PERMITTENTE CUSTA XII. LINDI COLONIAE.

IMP. MAXIMANNVS. P. F. AVG.

GENIO PO. ROM. IN EXERGUE PR. N. ABOUT A.D. 300.

IMP. CONSTANTIVS P. AVG.

Fig. 7. Extracts from Johnson’s Dissertation on the mint at Lincoln, showing transcripts of coins of Carausius and Allectus wrongly attributed to a mint at Lincoln (photograph by the author; by kind permission of the SGS).

There is certainly much more to be gleaned from the literary archives of the SGS. Perhaps what the archive does best of all is to provide a snapshot of the complexity of the British numismatic network in the first half of the eighteenth century, during which the SGS became important institution for the recording of new discoveries in the East Midlands, such as the March hoard, and the fostering of regional and national networks of specialists. What the archive perhaps most clearly highlights however, is just how much the success of these early antiquarian societies depended on the zeal and encouragement of individuals such as Maurice Johnson.

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