PRESIDENT’S REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2013

ROGER BLAND

It seems to me – and I hope you will agree – that our Society continues to run like a smoothly-functioning machine; for that we have to thank your officers and Council who between them put an enormous amount of effort into ensuring that this happens and I would like to pay tribute to them all this evening.

First of all I would like to thank our Secretary, Peter Preston-Morley, who continues to be a tower of strength to me and who conducts the business of meetings and Council with great efficiency. The Society is greatly in his debt. Thanks too to our Membership Secretary, Philip Skingley of Spink’s, not only for looking after our members so well, but also for generously enabling us to meet here. Spink’s have provided a wonderful venue for our November and May meetings and I think it is a move that has been universally welcomed. We continue to maintain our link with the Warburg, which houses our library, and still hold seven meetings a year there, but I think I can say that Spink’s has provided an excellent venue and our great thanks to Philip for arranging that – and also for so unobtrusively and efficiently organising our parties.

Our membership is now below the six hundred mark, at 563. This is still a healthy level, but we are currently on a downward trend: over this last year twenty-one new members were elected but that is balanced by eight deaths, eight resignations and thirteen amovals, so that we have had a net loss of eight members. Clearly we need to take steps to expand our membership and particularly to attract more younger members. Various ideas have been suggested in Council and we will be establishing a committee to come up with proposals in the new session.

On Philip’s initiative, Council has agreed to speed up the process of considering nominations for memberships. These are now circulated around Council by email instead of waiting for the next meeting to be tabled, thereby enabling us to elect new members more quickly than in the past.

As we have heard, our Treasurer continues to ensure that the Society remains in good financial health and we are extremely grateful, as ever, to our Honorary Auditor, Tony Merson, for his hard work on the accounts. This year has been rather quieter than the previous ones, which saw the completion of the great project to put all the back numbers of the Journal on the website and also the publication of three Special Publications. Thanks to our Treasurer’s careful management we have been able to hold our subscription level for eleven years now and our reserves have been steadily growing, so that they now exceed £200,000 and our income comfortably exceeds our outgoings. After the difficult days of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the Society’s finances were in such a precarious position that it was uncertain whether we could afford to continue to print the Journal, we clearly needed to build up sufficient reserves to ensure that this did not happen again. Thanks to an increase in members over thirty years (even though there has been a recent decline) and a drop in the costs of publication, we have now reached the point where we can consider being more proactive in the use of our funds. As a charity it is not appropriate for us to sit on ever-increasing financial reserves: we should make them work for us. Over recent years we have responded to requests for support for good causes that fall within our remit and this year we have launched a new bursary initiative, to which I shall come back. It may well be time to put our grant-giving activities onto a more organized footing by establishing a budget and the Finance Committee will be looking at that. I shall of course report on that initiative as it proceeds.

Another issue that has occupied Council’s time this year is the fact that the great success our Secretary has had in obtaining members’ email addresses has highlighted how expensive it has become to continue to send mailings to those members for whom we don’t have email addresses. This has become more acute as the cost of postage continues to rise: it costs around £3 to
service UK members without email, £5 for EU members and £7.50 for members outside the EU. We have considered introducing a two-tier subscription, with a higher rate for those 150 or so members for whom we do not have email addresses. While Council has decided to do nothing for the present – there were concerns that such a move might unduly impact on some of our oldest members – it is an issue that we need to keep under review.

The most important and lasting benefit that members receive from the Society is of course the Journal and our editors, Elina Screen and Martin Allen, commit a lot of their time to this role which is not always the most rewarding. Elina is retiring from her role as editor after six years and is also stepping down from Council and I would like to record our great thanks to her for her great contribution as editor and also for her valuable and sensible contributions to Council. Regrettably it has not been possible to find another person who is willing to replace Elina at this time. Since it is completely unreasonable to expect Martin to bear the whole work of editing the Journal and Special Publications on his own, Council has agreed that for the coming year at least, Martin should be supported by a paid copy editor. We estimate that the cost to the Society will be in the order of £1,000 per Journal; a similar arrangement will be needed for any Special Publications that come forward in the year ahead. We hope we may still find a volunteer to take on the role of second editor and so this arrangement is just intended to get us through this coming year.

Council is very grateful to Elina for her expert briefing on the issues raised by the Government’s policy on Open Access to academic publications. This is a complicated subject, which is still developing, but essentially all universities and publicly-funded research bodies are moving to a requirement that all research published by their staff, or with the benefit of their funding, should be available online free of charge. Although the Government cannot require us as an independent charity to follow these principles, the policy will have an increasing impact on those contributors to the Journal who work for universities and, in time, other public bodies such as museums. As a Society our initiative in putting all BNJS online has meant that we are ahead of the game, but we will need to watch this issue closely.

Turning to Special Publications, we expect that The Diaries of Leonard Wyon, edited by Philip Attwood, will be published early in 2014: our thanks to Philip Skingley for his work on that volume. Council has also approved a request from Philip de Jersey to publish his Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain, a definitive corpus of all hoards of those coins found in Britain. The catalogue is of this now in draft and we hope that it will be published in 2014. We have also agreed to publish a revised version of Richard Kelleher’s PhD thesis, ‘Coins, monetisation and re-use in medieval England and Wales: New interpretations made possible by Portable Antiquities Scheme’, and we are also glad to hear that our former President, Robin Eaglen, has completed the text of the second volume of his study of the mint of Bury St Edmunds. We also have a commitment to publish the study of the York mint, initiated by Bill Lean, although it is less certain when that will be completed. So members will see that there are a good number of publications in the pipeline even if we cannot at this stage say for certain when they will all be published.

I have already mentioned the great resource that has now been created on our website through the digitization of all the back numbers of our Journal. Since last year, our Website Officer Andy Woods has completed the project, and you can now download individual papers, rather than the whole of one year’s Journal; he has also added BNJ 78 and 79. You can now find individual papers if you enter the author and title followed by ‘BNJ’ into Google, so that the great wealth of numismatic scholarship available in our Journal is highly visible across the Web. Andy reports that the Digital BNJ section of the website had 3,661 unique visitors in the year from October 2012 to September 2013. This is a great achievement and our thanks to Andy for continuing to develop look after our website for us.

We thank our Director, Ian Leins, for organizing another varied programme of meetings this year and thanks to our speakers Philippa Walton, Richard Kelleher, Barbara Burman, Paul Stevens, Andy Woods, Julia Farley, Amelia Dowler and Professor Julian Hoppit. Our Joint Summer Meeting with the Royal Numismatic Society was held this year in York and we are very grateful to the Yorkshire Numismatic Society and especially their Chairman Tony
Abramson for organising it. The event was free and it attracted eighty-two people, which is probably a record attendance for a summer meeting. The theme of the day was ‘Coin Hoards and Treasure Finds’ and the speakers included Richard Abdy, Martin Allen, Edward Besly, Stephen Briggs, Eleanor Ghey, Sam Moorhead and Philippa Walton. It was an excellent day and our thanks to them all. Our Director has put together another excellent programme of talks for next year and the summer meeting will be held in Reading on 12 July, by courtesy of the Reading Coin Club which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. The theme will be ‘Thames Valley numismatics in a national perspective’. Gavin Scott is putting a programme together and further details will be available in due course.

We also thank Robert Thompson for looking after that very important asset, our library, with the help of a band of volunteers. Our library received an interesting addition this year, a bound volume containing correspondence between our Society and the Liverpool Public Library, a former institutional member, spanning the period 1903–1927. The volume was rescued from a skip in Liverpool earlier this year and now has a safe home in our library, and our thanks to Rory Naismith for his help in that.

I noted at the start of this Review that the Society has resources to respond to requests for support in activities related to our charitable aims. This year we gave a grant of £1,000 to the 60th anniversary Congress of the British Association of Numismatic Societies in Greenwich in April; £855 to fund three student places at the Summer School on Numismatics organised by the British Museum in July and last month Council agreed to give a grant of £500 to a conference co-organised by our Website Officer, Andy Woods, at York in June next year, while today we gave a grant of £250 to Tony Abramson towards the costs of typesetting Studies in Early Medieval Coinage vol. 3. We are also glad to see that the Fitzwilliam Museum has now established a Mark Blackburn scholarship: this will be an annual bursary for one month for the study of Anglo-Saxon or Viking coinage. Last year the Society made a contribution of £1,000 towards this.

These are grants we have made in response to requests from other bodies, but this year, thanks to a proposal from our Education Committee, we have ourselves launched a new initiative, a programme of bursaries to enable university students to gain work experience with a numismatic collection. Council agreed to establish three bursaries of £350 each and we are grateful to the British Museum, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge to agreeing to accept the first three placements, which were for a month each. The scheme attracted thirty-one applications. At the British Museum Emily Wyatt worked with Marion Archibald for a month in the Department of Coins and Medals. Rachel Wilkinson held the Fitzwilliam Museum bursary, where she worked on the cataloguing of Greek and Roman coins, as well as being involved in a wide range of other activities, while at the Ashmolean Museum Eleanor Smith divided her time between helping to prepare a special numismatic exhibition on the First World War and putting together a teaching collection on the kings and queens of England. We are very grateful to Megan Gooch for organizing this scheme, which has been a great success and one which I am sure we will want to continue with. Sadly Megan is stepping down from Council this evening, but we are very grateful to her for her work for the Society over the last three years.

I would lastly like to express my thanks to Frances Simmons who is also standing down from Council after three years’ service: Frances’s contributions to Council have always been most welcome.

We welcome the three new members of Council who have been elected this evening: Marion Archibald, Ken Eckardt and Bradley Shepherd.

Lastly it is my sad duty to record the deaths of eight members: Ross Blakey of London, Ontario, Canada, a member since 1987; Michael Ewing of Petersfield, Hampshire, a member since 1984; John Hooke of the United Arab Emirates, a member since 1964; Brian Pybus of Romsey, elected in 1963; Geoffrey Leonard Riddle of East Grinstead, elected in 2005 and Michael Bonser of Saffron Walden, a member since 1983, whose obituary by Tony Abramson was published in volume 83 of our Journal (pp. 323–5). Michael was a pioneer in recording finds of medieval coins made by metal detector users and was a major contributor to our
Journal’s Coin Register in its early days. This year we also lost Richard Doty of Washington DC, USA, a member since 1983, who died in June and we have also published an obituary on him, by Bill McKivor, in last year’s Journal (pp. 325–6). Lastly, Robert Seaman, who died in October, had been a member for forty-eight years and served on Council from 1967 to 1983. A stalwart of the Essex Numismatic Society, he had a particular interest in the coinage of medieval and Tudor periods, on which he published several papers in our Journal. Robert was our Treasurer from eight years from 1973 to 1981, at a period when the Society was not in such a sound position financially as it is today, and we owe him a great debt for his contribution at that time.

Finally I would like to express our thanks to Harry Manville for sponsoring tonight’s party. It is very fitting that we have honoured him with a dedication in BNJ 83.