PRESIDENT'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2015

ROGER BLAND

The Society has enjoyed another active and productive year and I should say right away that the credit for that belongs entirely to your officers and Council.

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, but also for enabling us to meet here four times a year. Spink’s have provided an excellent venue for our February, May, June and November meetings and we are very grateful to Philip for arranging this – and also for organising our parties so well.

At an Extraordinary General meeting in February the Society agreed a number of measures to bring in new members, especially younger members.

First, we have introduced a reduced subscription rate of £15 for ordinary and student members for the year of their election and the following year, and we are extending the age limit for student membership from age 21 to 25 and terminating the reduced subscription rate currently applying to those aged 26 and over in full-time education. At the same time, the normal membership subscription will remain at £32 in 2016 (unchanged for twelve years running).

Secondly, in addition, we are giving two years’ free membership to all those who apply for one of the Society’s bursaries and last month we elected eighteen members under that provision.

Thirdly, we also agreed to commission a professional re-design of the Society’s website, as this is an essential vehicle of communication and publicity. We would like to do this next year. In addition, David Guest, our Publicity Officer, has rightly pointed out that we should have a presence in the social media and I hope that we can also take that forward next year. Our thanks to Andy Woods for establishing a Twitter account for the Society: he used it to advertise the late change of venue for last month’s meeting.

We also want to make the Society’s presence more widely known by approaching leading UK auction houses to see whether they would carry small advertisements for the Society and we have produced a new membership leaflet which we hope to send out with Coin News – thanks to our Secretary for organising that. We have also set a goal of having three younger members (under the age of 35) on Council by 2017, and we welcome Murray Andrews and Caroline Holmes to Council: you elected them this evening.

In order to implement these changes it was necessary to make some alterations to the Society’s By-Laws (see pp. 297–304) and the first group of changes was approved at EGM in February, while you have just agreed some further changes at another EGM this evening. I am grateful to our Vice Presidents Hugh Pagan and Robin Eaglen for their work on this.

So, as a result of this activity, for the first time during my term as President, I am glad to report that our membership has shown an increase by nine members to 553 and it is important to have halted the decline. We have elected 24 ordinary members over the last year but have lost 15 through resignation, six through death and 15 have been amoved. So our numbers would have continued to decline had it not been for the fact that we elected 18 bursary applicants to free membership for two years last month. We hope that some at least of those additional members will want to continue as paying members at the end of their two years.

As we have heard, our Treasurer continues to ensure that the Society remains in good financial health; we should remember that it was not always like this and we are very grateful to him for Philip for looking after our finances and also to our Honorary Auditor, Tony...
Merson, for his work on the accounts. Thanks to our Treasurer’s careful management we have been able to hold our subscription level for thirteen years now while our reserves remain stable at around £210,000. Our income exceeds our outgoings, even though since last year we have adopted a policy of setting aside £5,000 a year to donate to good causes within the Society’s remit. I would like to thank our Vice President, Robin Eaglen, for his help on budget-setting.

Of course the most important and lasting benefit that members receive from the Society is the Journal and this year Martin Allen has nobly held the fort as our sole editor, responsible both for the Journal and for Special Publications. The Journal is printed so regularly every year and to such a high standard that it is easy to forget all the work that Martin puts into editing it and seeing it through the press with typesetters and printers and we congratulate him on producing yet another excellent volume, 85, which is now printed and is in the course of being distributed to members. Thanks to Martin also, this year also saw the publication of another Special Publication: Philip de Jersey’s Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain, a corpus of all Iron Age coin hoards from Britain, which will be the definitive reference for many years to come.

Turning to our meetings, we thank our outgoing Director, Ian Leins, for organizing another varied programme of meetings this year and thanks to our speakers Ian himself, Murray Andrews, Graham Dyer, Eleanor Ghey, Philip Mernick, Sam Moorhead, John Naylor and Chris Scull, and Casey Petroff. Our Joint Summer Meeting with the Royal Numismatic Society was held this year in York in collaboration with the Yorkshire Numismatic Society and the York Museums Trust and was attended by forty-two people. The theme was ‘Beyond the Vale of York’ and we are grateful to the speakers Philip de Jersey, Eleanor Ghey, Natalie McCaul, Carl Savage, Barrie Cook, Rachel Cubitt and Matthew Ball and, above all to our Website officer, Andy Woods, for organising it. Next year Richard Kelleher is organising a Summer Meeting in Cambridge on 16 July: details will be circulated in due course.

We are also for the first time holding a meeting outside the UK, as we will be holding a meeting at the New York International Numismatic Convention in January, at which our Secretary shall speak. This is a new initiative for the Society and we hope that by having a presence at one of the leading numismatic gatherings in the world we will be able to attract more members from the USA.

Ian Leins has resigned as Director and we are very grateful to Rory Naismith for taking over the role. He has put together another excellent programme of talks for next year.

We also thank Robert Thompson for looking after that very important asset, the joint library, which we share with the Royal Numismatic Society.

Two years ago we launched a programme of three bursaries to enable university students to gain work experience with a numismatic collection. We were very fortunate to receive an anonymous gift of some £3,500 from the US for the Society’s bursary programme, and this very welcome support enabled us to increase the grants from £350 to £500. As in previous years we supported three bursaries and we are grateful to the Historic Royal Palaces, Norwich Castle Museum and the York Museums Trust for hosting the interns this year and to Sam Moorhead for administering the scheme. It is very encouraging that thirty-five applications were received for the three places. Riccardo Caravello worked at the York Archaeological Trust studying Roman coins from excavations in the city in the 1970s and coins from the Peter Wenham archive at the Yorkshire Museum; Emma Harper worked on a collection of sceattas in Norwich Castle Museum and also on a website on Norfolk tokens, and Gemma Hollman worked at the Tower of London, cataloguing Historic Royal Palaces’ handling collection. While on the subject of our charitable activities, we also gave out £1,750 in grants to four individuals to support their attendance at the International Numismatic Conference in Taormina in September, working jointly with the RNS, and we are very grateful to their secretary, Sushma Jansari for administering this on our behalf.

It was a great pleasure to award the Sanford Saltus medal to Professor Nick Mayhew in May. We had three new medals struck this year, so we have a stock that will last until 2020. Tonight you also elected two new Honorary Members: Peter Mitchell, formerly of A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd and Vice President of this Society, and Professor James Graham-Campbell, Emeritus Professor of Medieval Archaeology at University College London and a great authority on all things Viking.
I would lastly like to express my thanks to Thomas Anstiss, Jeremy Cheek and John Rainey, who are standing down from Council by rotation as well as Ian Leins, who has resigned as our Director. We welcome the three new members of Council who have been elected this evening: Murray Andrews, Roger Barrett and Caroline Holmes. In addition Professor Gaspar has stood down as our Corresponding Member for North America and we are grateful to Allan Davison for agreeing to take his place.

Lastly it is my sad duty to record the deaths of six members: Dimitri Gregory Loulakakis of London, a member since 1998; Sir John Greenaway, of Towcester, a member since 1963; Michael O’Hara of Leighton Buzzard, a member since 1966 and a dealer and specialist in Byzantine and early medieval coins, particularly the early Papal issues; Jeffrey Gardiner, of Darlington, a member since 2003; Harry Manville of Seattle, USA, an honorary member; and, on 29 October, our past president Peter Woodhead, about whom David Dykes has just spoken. Peter was a member since 1952 and an honorary member since 1999 and was President of the Society from 1976 to 1980. Peter was an expert on later medieval coins: his lasting monument will be his catalogue in three volumes of the very important Herbert Schneider collection of gold coins. His collection of Short Cross pennies was sold by Spink in 1990. Harry Manville, who had a career working for the U.S. Government, became fascinated by British coinage and he will be remembered for his five great volumes which together comprise an encyclopedia of British numismatics. These started with a bibliography of British numismatic auction catalogues (1986), then came two volumes indexing numismatic references in non-numismatic periodicals (1983 and 1987), a numismatic guide to British and Irish printed books (2005), a biographical dictionary of British and Irish numismatics (2009) and finally a dictionary of English numismatic terms (2014). An obituary of him by Hugh Pagan and Douglas Saville has appeared in BNJ 85 (pp. 327−9), and there is one of Peter Woodhead by Robin Eaglen, with a bibliography by Robert Thompson, in this volume of the Journal (pp. 287−9).

Finally, I would like to express our thanks to Stewart Lyon for sponsoring tonight’s party in celebration of the seventieth anniversary of his membership.