

Stewart Lyon began collecting at the age of 14, in 1940, buying from jewellers and pawnbrokers in his native Liverpool, mostly English milled, although one notable exception was an 1816 halfcrown of George III, rescued from his mother's sewing box at the family's Christmas celebrations that year – now 81 years ago.

His first contact with the London coin trade was in September 1941, when for the princely sum of 25 shillings he acquired a very presentable treaty period quarter-noble of Edward III from Spink.

In 1942 he bought three Anglo-Saxon coins, the prelude to a lifetime spent collecting and studying the series for which he will be best remembered. But he continued buying coins of other series, both before qualifying as an actuary in 1954, and later. Tempted by British coins with eye appeal – Stewart is fondly remembered as having a good eye for a coin – he put together a representative group – what we might call today a type collection. During the War London dealers habitually sold nice examples of common coins for three times face value, so an 1819 George III crown in about EF condition entered the Lyon collection for 15 shillings, and a very attractive Godless florin of 1849 for 6 shillings.

Although Spink was the London source for many early acquisitions, Stewart had started buying from Seaby in Great Portland Street by the autumn of 1944, soon becoming well-known to Peter Seaby and, later Frank Purvey. At Spink Stewart first dealt with the company's former chairman, David Spink, and his younger colleague, Douglas Liddell, later enjoying a firm friendship with Patrick Finn, then a fellow resident of Guildford. But it was to Baldwin, and their trays of Anglo-Saxon coins, that Stewart graduated in the wake of the first two Lockett sales in 1955-6. Albert Baldwin, grandson of the founder, became a mentor to him from 1956 and, after Albert's early death, Peter Mitchell and Michael Sharp acted for Stewart at many of the notable auctions of the day.

The Spink connection lasted probably longest of all, peppered as it was in the mid-1980s by the auctions of David Spink's collection of coins and tokens of Surrey. David Spink and Stewart had competed for coins of the Guildford mint over many years, with David's deeper pockets tending to rule the day, but I fondly recall Stewart telling me in advance of the Spink Guildford coins I had catalogued for sale in March 1986 that all good things come to those who wait, and they duly did – three of David Spink's Guildford pennies that day became Lyon coins. A few years earlier I remember a metal detectorist turning up at the Spink counter one Monday morning with a rather buckled portrait penny of Offa that he had found the previous day on an allotment in Shalford, just outside Guildford. Patrick Finn promptly bought it, placed the coin between sheets of blotting paper and applied the trusty Spink screw press, which flattened it into a very presentable item, and offered it to Stewart, who was very happy to secure it as a local find!

Spink sold Stewart's general collection in June 2008, in an auction masterminded by our Director, William MacKay.

On a personal note, I first met Stewart when, as our President, he formally admitted me as a member of the Society, as was the custom in those days of ballot boxes and firm handshakes, in September 1970. I'm pleased to say that we enjoyed a convivial friendship over the years, and latterly I was twice asked by him to provide valuations for insurance purposes for his coins on loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum. One of my prize numismatic possessions is a copy of the 1961 Stenton festschrift, signed by Michael Metcalf, Michael Dolley, Philip Whitting, John Kent, Christopher Blunt, Philip Grierson and Stewart – all numismatic greats that I am pleased to have known.

His name will always be synonymous with the best of British numismatics.

Peter Preston-Morley  
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