

OBITUARY

DR MICHAEL DOLLEY, MRIA, FSA

The death of Michael Dolley on 29 March 1983 at the early age of 57 has brought to an untimely close an important chapter in the study of the numismatics of the British Isles. It has also deprived the Society of one of its most able and active members. Elected to membership of the Society in May 1951, Dolley became a member of Council in 1952, Secretary in 1954 and Director in 1956, a post he held for seven years. In 1959 he was awarded the Sanford Saltus Gold Medal. Early in 1964 Council appointed him as its corresponding member for Ireland and he remained so until 1977. He served a final year on Council in 1977-8 and in March 1981 was elected to Honorary Membership.

He was an editor of this *Journal* from Volume 33 (1964) to Volume 47 (1977) inclusive, originally taking office to assist with the transfer of the printing of the *Journal* from Oxford to Dublin, which he had been primarily responsible for negotiating. His record for personally introducing new members to the Society is probably unsurpassed.

Born in Oxford on 6 July 1925 with a twin brother, he was baptised with the names Reginald Hugh. At his confirmation he adopted a third name, Michael, by which he later chose to be known; he added the M to his initials in 1953 and after fifteen years dropped his baptismal names. His father, A.H.F. Dolley, was a civil servant; his mother, Margaret (née Horgan), came from an Irish family although she lived all her life in England. He was educated at Wimbledon College and King's College, London (where he read ancient and medieval history), and in 1950 he married Mary Harris, who had been a fellow student at King's. To their five children born to them (three girls and two boys) they added a sixth, by adoption, so that their youngest daughter could grow up from her earliest days with a twin 'sister'. It was an inspired choice that she should be of African origin.

Dolley's first official appointment was in 1948 as Assistant Keeper of Oil Paintings at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. At university he had developed a special interest in Byzantine maritime history and had intended to take a PhD in that subject. In the event his duties at Greenwich precluded this, but he published a number of papers, the first of which - written while still at King's - remains the authoritative account of the Byzantine *dromon*.¹

In 1951 Dolley joined the staff of the British Museum as an Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins and Medals. This was a turning point, not only for him but also for medieval British numismatics, the field in which he was designated to work. He found that the study of the later Anglo-Saxon coinage was ripe for development and he quickly injected it with a sense of purpose and urgency, not least through his early participation

in the preparations being made in Stockholm to publish the vast quantity of material from the Swedish hoards of the Viking Age.

In all this he drove himself extremely hard and expected others to work under similar pressure. 'Taking tea with the vicar', his euphemism for other calls on the time of at least one of his pupils, exasperated him. By the same token nothing was too much trouble for him when it came to advising and encouraging students. He was able to obtain permission from a wise Keeper (John Walker) for those engaged in serious research to have direct access to the relevant cabinets at special times, and this made for rapid and exciting progress which he himself continually stimulated. Those were the days when trust was respected, not abused; such intimacy of access to the National Collection would be difficult to concede today.

From the start, Dolley demonstrated that fast progress required good teamwork. He was generous to a fault in acknowledging help; the substantial number of joint papers amongst his prodigious output provides eloquent testimony to this. Sometimes the part played by the co-author was quite minor, but in many cases the co-operation was real and essential. In an obituary of Francis Elmore-Jones, the chartered surveyor who, although Dolley's senior by more than 25 years, was one of his closest collaborators, Peter Mitchell has written that:

Michael Dolley's arrival at the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum was a turning point. It was FEJ's unrivalled knowledge of the coins combined with Dolley's academic genius and enthusiasm which led to a virtual re-writing of late Anglo-Saxon numismatics through frequent papers in the *Journal*. Without Dolley's stimulus and drive I am not sure how much, or how little, of FEJ's knowledge would ever have been put to paper.²

Probably the most important single result of this partnership found expression in a joint paper in 1956, 'An Intermediate Small Cross Issue of Aethelraed II and some Late Varieties of the Crux Type'.³ In recognising that there had been an abortive attempt to replace the Crux issue by reverting to the Small Cross type of Edgar's reform, Dolley and Elmore-Jones had discovered the key to the final ordering of Aethelred's types. There followed a detailed analysis by Dolley of the three Small Cross issues, in which he demonstrated for the first time the extent to which the cutting of dies was decentralized.⁴

The strongest and most sustained numismatic influence on Dolley was undoubtedly that of Christopher Blunt. Already a past president of the British Numismatic Society by the time Dolley arrived at the Museum, Blunt had recently turned his attention from the fifteenth century to the Anglo-Saxon series. He quickly recognised Dolley's potential and so began a working friendship that was to last for the remainder of Dolley's lifetime. The combination of established numismatist and impatient academic created a tidal wave that swept all before it and led to the transformation within a decade of the status of Anglo-Saxon numismatic studies. Their first major collaboration concerned the Chester (1950) hoard of the mid-tenth century, leading to a paper which was read to the Society in January 1953 prior to publication.⁵ There followed seven years later a review of the hoard evidence for the coinage of Alfred.⁶ The length of the intermission is deceptive, however. For five years from June 1956 Blunt, a merchant banker by profession, was President of the Royal Numismatic Society and three of his annual addresses were devoted to a review of Anglo-Saxon coinage, with considerable emphasis on Dolley's work. Blunt had also created at his Wiltshire home regular opportunities for serious dialogue between numisma-

tists, led by Dolley and himself, and outstanding historians of the day, most notably the Stentons and Dorothy Whitelock.

This dialogue made a profound impression on all concerned. As early as April 1958 Sir Frank Stenton, addressing the British Numismatic Society on the occasion of its first meeting at the Warburg Institute, was able to say:

Through the work of numismatists - of collectors, of museum specialists, and the like - a situation has now been reached at which the historian concerned with Anglo-Saxon England is compelled, whether he likes it or not, to take notice of the main conclusions which are indicated by the study of coins. That development has come about, I think, very rapidly...and...from the historian's point of view...the need for a conscious and continuous alliance between numismatists and historians has never been so urgent. [Of especial] importance [is] the numismatic evidence for the last century of the Anglo-Saxon state which is being dealt with largely by Mr Michael Dolley. For there the evidence of coins is suggesting conclusions, I think undoubtedly convincing, which give a new sharpness of definition to our old conception of the Anglo-Saxon state in the last generations before the Conquest, [namely] that England from 973 or 974...possessed a managed currency, a currency controlled by a centralised authority and decentralised in distribution and exchange to a degree which is most remarkable.⁷

In his turn Dolley's immense regard for Stenton led him to organise and edit an essentially numismatic *Festschrift* to mark Sir Frank's eightieth birthday. Published in 1961, *Anglo-Saxon Coins*⁸ contained major essays on important but hitherto ill-published parts of the series from Offa to the Conquest, including five papers of which Dolley was a joint author. But the most significant practical result of the dialogue between numismatists and historians was the commitment by the British Academy to the publication of a *sylloge* of coins of the British Isles, the early fascicules of which would be devoted primarily but not exclusively to issues of the pre-Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Norman and early Plantagenet periods. The inspiration was Blunt's, but Stenton was the catalyst which enabled the project to proceed. Primary responsibility for planning and organising the work lay with Blunt and Dolley as members of the Academy's *Sylloge* Committee. They were also the general editors of the thirty fascicules that have so far been published, starting in 1958; latterly they were joined by Mark Blackburn. Dolley himself was the author or co-author of five.

Not content with the plans to publish the surviving material, collection by collection, Dolley first persuaded and then taught others to prepare detailed corpuses of the issues of individual mints, including comprehensive die-analyses. Quite the most remarkable achievement in this field was the publication in 1970 of Henry Mossop's study of the mint of Lincoln.⁹ For the first time numismatists and historians could obtain a clear impression of the way in which a major Anglo-Saxon and Norman mint operated, the changes in staffing, die-cutting and metrology that took place during the period, and the extent to which the chances of survival have distorted the visible pattern of the coinage. Mossop, a Lincolnshire farmer, was not a trained scholar but was more than willing to undertake the enormous task of compiling a fully illustrated corpus of the material, inspired and guided by Dolley and helped in the editorial stages by another pupil of his, Veronica Smart (née Butler).

A high proportion of the material surviving from the late Anglo-Saxon period is in the public collections of the Scandinavian countries, the greater

part in Sweden. Indeed there are more than 150,000 coins from the Viking Age, mostly Arabic, German and English, in Swedish public collections, primarily in the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm. Catalogues of the Anglo-Saxon coins in the Cabinet had been published in 1846 and 1881 by Bror Emil Hildebrand, but it was not until after the Second World War that serious steps were taken to prepare for publication a corpus of all the known Viking Age hoards. Research on the Arabic coins had begun at the Royal Coin Cabinet in the late 1930s and German scholars started work on the material from their country in 1949. In 1952, when Dolley visited Stockholm for the first time, the project was extended to the Anglo-Saxon coins.

Dolley took up this challenge with characteristic energy, greatly admiring the main architect of the project, the late Nils Ludvig Rasmusson, who was then Keeper of the Royal Coin Cabinet. A regular programme of visits from England was established with finance from the Swedish Humanistic Fund (now the Humanistic Research Council), and Dolley set about recruiting a team of helpers. The most regular of these were to be Gay van der Meer (from The Hague) and Veronica Smart, with occasional visits by the present writer and others.

Apart from the routine work of recording the Anglo-Saxon coins in the identifiable hoards and checking weights and dies, Dolley's visits to Stockholm invariably resulted in a stream of papers or notes for publication in *BNJ*, *NC* and elsewhere. He was a prolific writer and found it easiest to commit his thoughts instantly to paper, even if this meant that some of his conclusions were open to challenge. And challenges were not slow in coming. They related particularly to the date postulated for Edgar's reform of the coinage (Michaelmas 973) and to the hypothesis that the design of the coinage was changed every six years thereafter until the death of Cnut (except for a hiccough at the end of Aethelred's reign) and subsequently at intervals of three years.

The argument on these two related issues has continued now for twenty-five years and has tended to generate more heat than light. It has also tended to obscure Dolley's major achievement, which was to establish that Edgar's reform resulted in the periodicity of types and in the effective demonetization of the old type when a new one was introduced. It has to be remembered that the standard textbook of the time, G.C. Brooke's *English Coins*, was able to say of Aethelred's coinage that it 'represents an incomplete stage in the development of the type-changing system, when the first type continues while other types appear in succession; the reason for this peculiar feature may be found, if we have rightly interpreted the coinage of previous reigns, in a conservative regard for the type introduced by Edgar.'¹⁰ Recognition of the system of periodic recoinages provided an essential key to the understanding of the late Saxon and Norman coinages. In particular, it has facilitated the study of the economic aspects of the monetary system, such as metrology and estimation of mint output, a field which has seen significant advances in the last fifteen years, but in which we have still a great deal to learn. The periodic system also has the potential to allow much closer dating for the loss of coins found in excavations and elsewhere, provided it can be established that the *renovationes* were substantially complete and there can be agreement on the dates of the recoinages.

As yet, however, it is too soon to judge whether Dolley's precise dating of Edgar's reform to Michaelmas 973 is likely to be correct, but the extent of the reformed coinage seems to be against those who insist - as Stenton did not - that Roger of Wendover specifically placed it in 975, in which year Edgar died on 8 July. Time is also needed to judge whether the

different period-types which followed were broadly of equal duration and whether in every case period-types involving a *renovatio* have been validly distinguished from systematic but limited changes in design made for some lesser purpose of monetary control. The present writer and the present President are among those who have entered the lists on these latter questions and have emerged battered but unpersuaded. The key, if one can be found, seems likely to lie in placing within an historical context a wider statistical analysis of the hoard evidence than has so far proved possible.

When his ideas were challenged, Dolley had an unhappy tendency to react polemically, both in conversation and in subsequent writings, particularly if in his opinion the challenger, however distinguished, had insufficient knowledge of the series in question or its historical setting. This inhibited rational discussion and, in later years, when his general health was declining and the problem was becoming increasingly serious, it tended also to deter the promulgation of dissenting opinions, so giving the impression that on some topics his views were more widely accepted than was in fact the case. Frustration over some perceived action (or inaction) of a friend or colleague could also exacerbate him beyond reason. Thus his years in the rather introspective environment of the Coin Room cannot have been comfortable for his professional colleagues. At all events, after he left the Museum in 1963 to take up a lecturership in medieval history at the Queen's University of Belfast, he did not obtain during vacations the help and co-operation from the Coin Room that his scholarship taken on its own would have justified. This caused him much mortification. More importantly, it also put back until after his death any prospect of a *sylloge* fascicule covering the late Anglo-Saxon coins in the National Collection.

There were, however, significant works still in the pipeline, among them two Gulbenkian handbooks, published by the British Museum in 1964 and 1965 and written for the general reader. The first, *Anglo-Saxon Pennies*, filled a serious gap in that it summarised clearly and concisely the modern view of the series. The second, *Viking Coins of the Danelaw and of Dublin*, was a necessary companion in what should have been a Museum trilogy, but regrettably by 1966 he had to find an outside publisher for *The Norman Conquest and the English Coinage*. Happily, he had prepared while at the Museum his SCBI fascicule, *The Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum*, which was duly published by the Trustees in 1966. Not only does this contain a masterly analysis of the Hiberno-Norse coinages from c.995 to c.1150, but it is also an essential work of reference for the coin hoards of the Viking Age from the British Isles and the context in which they were deposited.

Although the bulk of Dolley's work was on the late Anglo-Saxon and related coinages, he did not neglect the earlier and later periods. The number of his published articles on these would be regarded as exceptionally large from any other pen, and he joined with David Brown in a bibliography of hoards of the sixteenth century onwards from the British Isles.¹¹ His excursions into foreign medieval coins, apart from the early issues of Scandinavia, were few. The most notable was a study of Carolingian coins with Karl Morrison, leading to a catalogue of the British Museum collection of those pieces.¹²

Dolley's move to Belfast in 1963 was not as strange as it may have seemed at the time. Due to his mother's Irish origins and his own very strong Catholic faith he had long been deeply concerned about the partition of Ireland and felt that his own destiny was bound up in it. He threw himself with his usual energy into his work at Queen's, where in a difficult situation his genuine concern for his students was quickly evident. In 1964

he was elected a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, which he was later to serve as Senior Vice-President (1972-73). Although the regular visits to Scandinavia and the consequent writings continued, he began to turn increasingly to later Irish numismatics. He established a close relationship with Wilfred (Bill) Seaby, then Director of the Ulster Museum, who gave him his friendship, collaboration and open access to the important coin collection there. Together they compiled an *SCBI* fascicule of Anglo-Irish Plantagenet coins, published in 1968.¹³ Of Dolley's own work, particular mention should be made of his *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins* and an historical textbook on Anglo-Norman Ireland, both published in 1972.¹⁴

By 1978 the strain on Dolley and his family of the deteriorating political situation in Northern Ireland was noticeably affecting his health and despite having been awarded a personal chair in historical numismatics in 1975 (following a readership in 1969) he decided to leave Belfast and settle his family in Devon. He himself accepted a post in Australia at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, which led in 1981 to an associate professorship. This was not a happy time for him; the isolation from Europe was not conducive to good scholarship yet the urge to write was still in him. Nor was the separation from his family good for his health, and retirement became inevitable later in 1981. He was a shadow of his former self, prematurely aged, when he received the medal of the Royal Numismatic Society in the same year, but there were inner reserves that he could somehow draw upon when his participation in important meetings was essential (such as the Oxford Symposium on the Coinages of the Northern Lands), or a Scandinavian or Irish visit had to be undertaken. The firm friendship of Mark and Fiona Blackburn during this last period was invaluable.

In addition to the two premier numismatic societies in this country, Dolley was a medallist of the Swedish (1979), Norwegian (1982) and American (1983) Numismatic Societies. He was also a foreign corresponding member of the Royal Swedish Academy and a foreign member of the Royal Danish Academy. A few months before his death he received a DLit from the University of London and it was while on his way to accept an Honorary DLitt from the National University of Ireland that his final illness struck him, in Cork. His destiny had been fulfilled.

He was buried in Cuckfield, Sussex, in his mother's grave, his family and closest friends attending the service. The wide respect and warmth of feeling for him in Ireland was reflected in the large congregation which attended the requiem mass in Belfast, arranged by the University and presided over by Cardinal O'Fiaich, primate of All Ireland.

It is fitting that one of the last of his papers to be published in this *Journal* was a full exposition of his views on the date of Edgar's coinage reform.¹⁵ That it was substantially written 'a whole indiction ago', as he said in a footnote, does not detract from its appropriateness. Bearing all the hallmarks of Dolley's scholarship of that earlier time, it nevertheless gives us a clear valedictory message on the subject with which he is most clearly associated and his authority most widely recognised, namely Edgar's reform and its far-reaching consequences for the numismatic history of the British Isles and all the northern European lands.

Pie Jesu Domine, dona ei requiem.

Stewart Lyon

NOTES

1. R.H.Dolley, 'The Warships of the Later Roman Empire', *JRS* 38 (1948).
2. *NCirc* 90 (1982), 52.
3. *BNJ* 28 (1955-57), 75-87.
4. R.H.M.Dolley, *Some Reflections on Hildebrand Type A of Aethelraed II* (Stockholm, 1958).
5. C.E.Blunt and R.H.M.Dolley, 'The Chester (1950) Hoard', *BNJ* 27 (1952-54), 125-60.
6. C.E.Blunt and R.H.M.Dolley, 'The Hoard Evidence for the Coins of Alfred', *BNJ* 29 (1958-59), 220-47.
7. F.M.Stenton, 'The Anglo-Saxon Coinage and the Historian', in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by D.M.Stenton (Oxford, 1970), 371-82 at pp.371 and 374.
8. *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Historical Studies presented to Sir Frank Stenton on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday, 17 May 1960*, edited by R.H.M.Dolley (London, 1961).
9. H.R.Mossop, *The Lincoln Mint c.890-1279*, edited by V.Smart with contributions by M.Dolley and C.S.S.Lyon (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970).
10. G.C.Brooke, *English Coins*, 3rd edition (London, 1950), p.67.
11. I.D.Brown and M.Dolley, *A Bibliography of Coin Hoards of Great Britain and Ireland 1500-1967* (London, 1971).
12. R.H.M.Dolley and K.F.Morrison, *The Carolingian Coins in the British Museum* (London, 1966).
13. *SCBI. Ulster Museum, Belfast, Part 1, Anglo-Irish Coins: John-Edward III*, by M.Dolley and W.Seaby (London, 1968).
14. M.Dolley, *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coins* (London, 1972); M.Dolley, *Anglo-Norman Ireland* (Dublin, 1972).
15. M.Dolley, 'Roger of Wendover's Date for Eadgar's Coinage Reform', *BNJ* 49 (1979), 1-11.