PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2002

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It is customary in this Society for a President at an early stage in his review of the year to reflect upon the state of our membership. At our last Anniversary Meeting it seemed that what had become an achievable – if somewhat artificial – millennial target of 600 members had proved elusive by just a smidgen. In the event, by the actual close of the calendar year, we had reached this figure and, indeed, exceeded it – by one! With the election of thirty new members during 2002 the steady growth that the Society has experienced over the past decade has been more than consolidated. Allowing for the 5 amoivals reported earlier and 9 resignations we should end this session with 617 members (eight honorary members, 497 ordinary, two junior and one hundred and ten institutional). For the first time in my Presidency I do not have to announce the death of any current members but I should refer to two former members of long standing who resigned only within the past few years and whom many of you will remember with regard: Henry Grunthal (1965–98), a former Corresponding Member of Council for the United States of America (1965–82); and Alex Stone (1957–99), the co-author with the late Howard Linecar of English Proof and Pattern Crown-Size Pieces in 1969.1

This expansion of our numbers and the continuity of membership underlying it are very encouraging. They are a material measure of the Society’s health and reflect a growing appreciation of the pivotal role played by the Society in fostering and furthering the study of British numismatics in its widest compass. Awareness of our existence and of our aims is, moreover, rapidly extending beyond the confines of the British Isles. In part this is due to our web site. Still very much a tyro operation, set up only two years ago, it is a something that your Council is determined to develop and make into a truly valuable and effective resource. For what we have achieved so far, though, I am grateful to our Honorary Secretary and to our friends in the Fitzwilliam Museum. Without their help and expertise our ascent into cyberspace, if that is the right dimension, would not have been possible.

What is disappointing, though, is our continuing failure to attract the interest of younger recruits. I have remarked upon this before and it was with this problem very much in mind that, as I presaged last year, a working group, under the chairmanship of our Vice President, Peter Woodhead, was set up to examine the future shape and direction of the Society, our promotion of research, our role in education and the encouragement of young numismatists, and our productive harnessing of the computer and its associated wizardry. Mr Woodhead’s colleagues were Professor Norman Biggs, Dr Kristin Bornholdt, Dr Robin Eaglen and Dr Philip de Jersey and it says much for the expedition with which they approached their complex task that the group was able to submit its final report to Council earlier this evening. It will be the subject of urgent and detailed consideration by Council next year.

What became obvious at an early stage of the working group’s deliberations was that the constitutional changes to our By-Laws that you approved earlier this evening would be a necessary prerequisite to the more general modernization it had in mind. Apart from an up-dating of our rules to bring them more into line with current practice – for example, changing the accounting year to end in December (XIV.2f) – the main changes are a revised and simplified – but no less rigorous – method of electing new members (II.3), the abolition of a separate category of junior membership and the introduction of reduced subscriptions for those in full-time education and/or under the age

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1 Sadly, a few weeks after the Anniversary Meeting, Mr B.M. Greenaway – a member of the Society since 1995 – died suddenly. As at 31 December 2002 the membership of the Society thus stood at 616: eight honorary members, 498 ordinary and junior, and 110 institutional members.
of 21 (IV.1), and the creation of specialist roles within Council for the advancement or improvement of the Society (XVI.9). Mr Pagan – with his considerable knowledge of our history – and Dr Eaglen – with his legal expertise – have both, together with the Secretary, Mr Charles Farthing, played a critical role in the revision of the By-Laws and Mr Woodhead and I are deeply appreciative of the contribution they have made to the effective deliberations of the working group.

As you have heard from our Treasurer the Society’s finances remain resilient despite the fall in our investment income that was envisaged last year. Operationally, our major item of expenditure is the Journal, the cost of which we have traditionally tried to contain within the return from members’ subscriptions. Despite the savings in production costs that we have achieved over the past two years the need to preserve the Journal’s high academic standing, its style and range of content have necessitated inroads into our general funds, which is why Council has recommended, and you have tonight approved, an increase in our subscription to £32. I hope that the subscription may be maintained at this level for some time at least but I doubt that we will be able to match the eleven years’ stability that has now come to an end.

One way in which we would be able to augment our income at no extra cost to members is through Gift Aid Benefit that, to all intents and purposes, replaces the old covenant scheme. The Inland Revenue has agreed that the Society qualifies for this scheme and it should, therefore, be possible for the Society, as a Registered Charity, to claim a proportion of tax paid by members. A Gift Aid Declaration Form was sent to all United Kingdom members in the summer. The response, I have to say, was not as heartening as I would have wished, and I do hope that eligible members will return completed forms to the Secretary if they have not already done so. I cannot but repeat the catch phrase of what I believe is the country’s leading supermarket: ‘every little helps’.

As I explained in my summer Newsletter since little use was being made of the Thursday opening of the Library it was decided to discontinue that facility and to open instead on certain Saturday afternoons, chosen to coincide with major coin fairs. Experience so far suggests that this arrangement is proving useful especially for country members who come to town on that day. The Library is, of course, regularly open each Tuesday from 12 to 5 pm. The key holders are willing to come in on other days, if members – those coming from a distance, for example – cannot get to the Library on the Tuesdays when it is regularly open but it would naturally be helpful – and courteous – to have reasonable notice to arrange for someone to attend; and the more notice that is given the easier it will be to find someone to come in.

To turn to more personal matters, in May I had the great pleasure of presenting the Council Prize for 2002 to Kevin Clancy, Assistant Curator at the Royal Mint, a member of the Society since 1993 and our Director for the past year. Dr Clancy is, of course, well known to an audience extending well beyond our own membership through his frequent lectures and his published work which, I hope, before very long, will be joined by a version of his substantial PhD thesis which he is now revising. The words I used in making the presentation will be published in the volume of the Journal carrying this address. I was delighted, too, to learn in the autumn that the 2002 Book Prize of the International Association of Professional Numismatists was to be awarded to Harrington E. Manville for his book on countermarked foreign silver coins, Tokens of the Industrial Revolution, the third volume in our series of Special Publications. The words I used in making the presentation will be published in the volume of the Journal carrying this address.

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Mention of COINEX and Vice Presidents reminds me of another debt we owe to Mr Woodhead who organized a BNS stand throughout the exhibition, ably supported by Dr Eaglen, Mr Tony Holmes and Mr Merson. I am very grateful to them all for their efforts in enhancing the Society’s visibility at this prime event in the collectors’ calendar – the first time, I believe, that the Society has been formally represented there. I don’t know whether our presence at COINEX has resulted in potential members coming forward but certainly a great deal of interest was shown in the Society and its activities.

The broad sweep of the Society’s interests to which I referred at the outset of this address was adroitly reflected in the lecture programme our Director devised for the year. Ranging from the
coinage of Allectus to the imagery of British paper money and from sceattas to nineteenth-century campaign medals, it brought into our perspective, too, the documentary evidence for the Scottish coinage of 1707–9 and the operation of the first lustre of the Treasure Act. Most of our speakers were very well known to us but it was especially agreeable to welcome Roger Holmes, the recently retired Deputy Master of the Royal Mint and a consistently good friend of the Society, and Athol Murray, a former Keeper of the Records of Scotland.

I should say that throughout the year the numbers attending meetings were particularly gratifying and notably so on those occasions when London’s transport system was disrupted and evening travel was to be relished even less than usual.

Our Special Summer Meeting, this year, was held at the Guildhall in Bath on Saturday, 6 July. Its theme, ‘Coins and Ceremony’ – appropriate to the cult centre of the goddess Sulis Minerva – was the non-monetary usage of coins, a subject that attracted a large and appreciative audience, confirming – if confirmation were at all needed – that the summer gathering is now an established and popular event in our calendar.

Turning again to our publications, the final proofs of volume 71 of the *Journal* are now with the printers and the volume should be published shortly after Christmas. It should, therefore, be with members resident in the United Kingdom in the New Year. I may just add that the Secretary is listing the names of those members who would be prepared to collect the *Journal* from the Library in lieu of posting. It is an arrangement that will help to reduce costs and anyone who would like to participate in the scheme is asked to let Mr Farthing know as soon as possible.

There have been some unavoidable delays over Martin Allen’s *The Durham Mint*, our fourth Special Publication but the final proofs have been corrected and the expectation is that the work will now be published during the spring.

Next year – my final year as your President – will mark the centenary of the Society. To commemorate the hundred years of our existence a special volume of the *Journal*, containing a narrative history of the Society by Mr Pagan and a series of articles by members focusing on the advancement of knowledge in the Society’s fields of interest over the past century, will be published, I hope, in time for the Anniversary Meeting in November. In addition a Centenary Commemorative Medal is being commissioned and in early July, to coincide very approximately with the foundation date of the Society, the Special Summer Meeting – combined with a reception – will be held in the British Museum on the theme of the development of British numismatics over the life span of the Society. I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend.

Again, I conclude as always with a word of thanks to the Society’s Officers for their hard work throughout the year. I think, perhaps, it is only when one is President that one fully appreciates the considerable degree of effort that the Officers put in to their various tasks and the measure of responsibility they carry. I am very grateful to them all. As indeed I am to the Council generally for its help and advice.

In the normal course of events, I should, at this point, have invited you to join me, after the second part of my address, in toasting the health of the Society, a gesture that would have been made possible this evening through the generosity of Lord Stewartby and Mr Woodhead who, this year, have each completed fifty years’ membership of the Society. Alas, because of the strike by the Fire Brigade Union the rules of the Warburg Institute preclude our festivities tonight. I have every hope, nevertheless, that the party will take place on another occasion and before too long.

(The President then delivered a paper entitled ‘The Token Coinage of William Fullarton’, the text of which is published at pages 149–163, above).