



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NUMBER 10. FEBRUARY 2021

email: amdawson@numsoc.net

What have you all been up to? Any chat, photos, news, recent acquisitions etc. by members for future issues please!

IRON AGE GOLD COIN HOARD

A keen birdwatcher was walking in the Suffolk countryside and keenly following the 'dogfight' between a buzzard and a magpie when the buzzard landed on a freshly ploughed field. He then looked down and noticed something golden lying on top of the plough soil at the edge of the field. He picked the object up and, after rubbing away the adhering soil realised, to his astonishment, that it was actually a gold coin. Being also a keen metal detectorist the finder, whose identity has not been revealed, hurried home to collect his metal detector to see if the area contained any more coins.

After several hours of searching, he had unearthed almost 1300 coins, all of which are believed to date from AD40 – 50. Digging to a depth of about 18 inches he came across the rim of what appeared to be a copper or bronze vessel. Below was the mother lode of a hoard of Iron Age gold staters. The finder carried the coins home in two supermarket carrier bags, hoping all the time that the plastic handles would support the weight. He then promptly informed the local Coroner's Office, which he was required to do by law. According to a preliminary assessment of the find it seems the coins were minted by the Icenic tribe, whose territory comprised most of Norfolk and parts of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. Their most famous leader was Queen Boudicca, whose revolt against Roman rule in AD69 is already well documented. Scientists, historians and numismatists hope to learn even more about the period from this newly discovered cache of coins.



An Icenic gold stater from the hoard, 2:1

As the hoard has yet to go through the due process of a Coroner's court, as with all important historical finds, a full report revealing the exact types and their subsequent value is still awaited. In the meantime, although there has been considerable speculation in the press about the overall value of the hoard, judging from available photographs the average condition of the coins does not appear to be too good. Regardless of grade the find is still of great national importance. In terms of size, 1300 pieces is certainly the largest hoard of Iron Age gold coins yet found in Britain; beating the previous largest hoard of 850 gold coins found near Wickham Market, also in Suffolk.

When the entire hoard has eventually been assessed and valued by the Treasure Trove Valuation Committee, the reward to the finder should be the market value of the coins. This amount will of course have to be shared equally with the landowner, assuming the finder had permission to dig in the first place.

MEETINGS REMAIN CANCELLED

Despite mass vaccinations it looks as if it will still be well into summer, if not later, before we can return to anything like normality. Safety must always be paramount and at present meetings in a confined environment are simply not safe. Let's hope we can all meet up again before too long.

WARNING ON FAKES AND DODGY SLABS

The British Numismatic Society's latest on-line 'blogs' include some important notes about Anglo-Saxon, Norman and early Plantagenet forgeries which have appeared on the market in recent times. There is also an interesting post about buying 'slabbed' coins, with a warning that not everything in a slab is what it is stated to be by a third-party encapsulation service. It's well worth visiting the site to read more.

ONE DAY WHICH SHOOK THE WORLD

Chris Leather

Reaching once again into the dark recesses of my numismatic bookshelf, I find a well-read copy of a fascinating 278-page paperback published by HMSO in 1973, at a cost of £1.90, titled 'The Decimalisation of Britain's Currency.' This is the official history of the how, why, where and when we ended up with the coinage system we enjoy at present. It is a story having its origins as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when newly enlightened mathematicians proposed a monetary system based on 'decimall arithmeticke.' The idea didn't catch on, really, until in 1849, as a sop to the decimalists, halfcrowns were discontinued and new florins 'one tenth of a pound' were issued instead. Some years later the halfcrowns returned, but the florins continued.

By the 1960s, the white heat of technology meant that the business machines of the time - being rather clunky by our standards - were finding it difficult to deal with duodecimality, especially with halves and quarters thrown in. So, the future had to be properly decimal, and a committee was established in 1963 to report on the best way forward. Of course, it wasn't simple. Bureaucracy never is, but to give a few examples of the questions which had to be answered: Should the decimal system be based on the £, divided into 100? With or without a ½ minor unit? Or the £ divided into 1000? Or should the system be based on a new 10-shilling-sized unit divided into 100?

Having concluded that the £ divided into 100 with a ½ was the way to go, details then came to the fore. Should the minor unit be called a cent? Or something else, such as a 'new' penny? Having chosen the new penny option, it was then necessary to decide what denominations would be needed. The shilling and florin fitted in neatly as 5p and 10p pieces; the halfcrown would disappear again, as would the bronze penny and halfpenny. The sixpence, or 2 ½p was left in limbo. But what else should be done? It was agreed that there should be ½, 1, and 2p coins, but should the 2p be a larger bronze piece or a smaller cupro-nickel piece? We know what was decided! But of much more concern were the higher denominations. It was thought that in the name of economy, the 10 shilling note should be replaced by a coin, but there was much agonising over the size and shape before the equilateral curve heptagon was chosen, and equal agonising over what metal to use. But this in turn created another problem. It was thought that there would be a need for a 20p coin. The original proposal was to replicate the Victorian double florin of 1887, but doubts as to the acceptability of such a large piece surfaced very quickly. But then, a 20p in weight/value relationship to the 50p would be too similar to the size of the 5p. This was all thought to be too difficult, and was left undecided.

The pre-decimal halfpenny and penny had not been in a weight/value relationship with each other, but the decision was made that the new bronze pieces would be. This led, unfortunately, to a ½p which was too small to be practicable, which together with its low value meant that its demise was foreseen even before its introduction. A major concern was the inflationary effect of changing the price of 'spending a penny' as the new coin was too light to operate mechanical door locks!

A White Paper was presented to Parliament in 1966 which resulted in the Decimal Currency Act of 1967, which in turn set D-Day as 15th February 1971. A Decimal Currency Board was established which oversaw a major campaign of preparation and public relations. All-in-all, the transition went as well as hoped, marred principally by an extended postal strike.

So now we are at the 50th Anniversary of the changeover, with a suite of coinage as full of inconsistencies as it is possible to imagine. But to do anything about it properly would require a changeover almost as fundamental as the original decimalization, and so it would appear likely that we are stuck with a system which has seven circulating denominations, in six separate tiers of metal/weight/value relationship (or not, as the case may be.) Could it be that we should think the unthinkable and start again with a simplified suite of coins? After all, the United States seems to manage with only three denominations in regular use: 5c, 10c and 25c, which in terms of size and weight all date back to the 19th century.

Quote: 'A coin in the hand is worth two on the Internet' Anon.



ANCIENT COINS SEIZED

Police and Customs officials in Istanbul, Turkey have apprehended criminals and seized 480 ancient coins which were about to be smuggled out of the country. The coins, some of which date back thousands of years, are of copper, bronze and lead, from the Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman eras. The coins have now been handed over to the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Like many

countries around the Mediterranean, Turkey has become increasingly aware of its ancient heritage and has taken stringent steps to prevent its antiquities being illegally exported.

COIN QUIZ No.10

QUESTION 1. What is another name for a 'mascle' on Henry VI coins?

QUESTION 2. What is the engraver Simon Passé famous for?

QUESTION 3. In whose reign did true Scottish coinage begin?

QUESTION 4. When was the denomination 'third-farthing first struck?

QUESTION 5. In what year was the famous 'Tealby' hoard discovered?

QUESTION 6. What is 'Anchor Money'?

QUESTION 7. What coins were the biblical '30 pieces of silver'?

QUESTION 8. What are the three dates of Edward VI silver crowns?

Please note: An apology for question No.4 last month. Some newsletters were sent out with a different question; therefore the answers to both questions appear below.

ANSWERS (Quiz No.8)

Q1. Due to poor silver pennies in circulation snicking the edge to check the silver became common practice. Coins were often snicked at the mint so they would be accepted

Q2. The letter 'M' was the Greek numeral for 40, showing the coin to be of the value of 40 nummi.

Q3. A small Anglo-Saxon copper coin struck for the Kings and bishops of Northumbria.

Q4. Armeria Maritima, commonly known as the 'thrifi' plant, or Silphium plant.

Q4A. St. Edmund's pence were issued by the Scandinavian settlers of Danish East Anglia.

Q5. A succession of dots or curved lines, in place of the usual straight milling.

Q6. A 'scilling' was an Anglo-Saxon unit of account and not a coin.

Q7. The Venetian gold Zecchino was first issued in circa 1280.

Q8. Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-1579) Master of the Mint.

Q9. Sarah Sophia Banks (1744-1818) sister of Sir Joseph Banks. Her collection is in the British Museum and The Royal Mint Museum



QUESTION 9.

Can you name this famous English archaeologist and numismatist?



USELESS COIN FACTS No.10

In Greek mythology Charon was the aged ferryman who ferried the souls of the deceased across the sacred River Styx in Hades. As in real life, ferryman didn't work for free and needed payment even in Hades (the underworld). The number of 'souls' could be quite considerable, especially after an armed conflict. It became customary in the fifth and fourth centuries BC to place a small coin or coins, such as a silver obol, in the hand or mouth of the dead. This bizarre practice carried on through Roman times and was even practiced during the medieval period, despite the western world's conversion to Christianity. Of course this archaic ritual was frowned upon by the Christian church as it had obvious pagan origins. Nevertheless, old customs and habits die hard and newly converted Christians still wanted to hedge their bets when it came to funeral rites. When the body of King Cnut (1016-1035) was exhumed in Winchester Cathedral in 1766 the corps's hand was found to be clasping a silver penny. How long the practice carried on nobody knows but it probably existed into the later Middle Ages. Personally, I think it's quite a nice idea as it proves that you *can* actually take at least some of it with you!

AN ODE TO NONCONFORMITY

David Lythgoe

In the recent article by Chris Leather on 'Looking back....' In which he wrote: 'I refuse to be politically correct here; chairs are something to be sat on, not spoken to.' This sparked in my memory a poem I had written and published, about twenty or so years ago, on that very subject. It might amuse readers, as it expands somewhat on Chris's acidic observation:

ON NOT BEING PC

I'm not a PC person, I'm not PC at all,

I'm a PC social outcast with my back against the wall.

I'm chairman of a local group and they want to call me 'chair'

but since I've only got two legs, it doesn't seem quite fair.

Four legs are what most chairs have got and since I've only two,

It only makes me half a chair, because I've two too few.

My pair of legs make me a man. They shan't call me a chair

because if I was made like that, I'd have another pair.

I'm used to being sat upon but I'm still not a chair.

It really is a liberty and more than I can bear.

Maybe because I'm getting old, my pins aren't what they were.

These new PINS are confusing me and no-one seems to care.

I don't own a phone or PC and emails leave me cold,

my letters all arrive by hand as in the days of old.

I don't want to join the EC for I'm British to the core,

But I fear the PC PCs will come knocking on my door.

I'll always be an outlaw for I'll never make the grade,

so I'll live alone with nine bean rows beside a bee loud glade.

I'm not a PC person so there I'll find some rest

where a PC social outcast can get things off his chest.

INDIAN 'GOLD RUSH' FOR BRONZE COINS

Following the recent discovery of ancient coins in a river bed in India the area has witnessed a massive influx of would-be treasure hunters. The coins were first discovered by fishermen in the banks of the Parivati River, which runs through Madhya Pradesh. The coins appear to be from the Mogul era, spanning two centuries from 1526. Rumours about hidden treasures quickly spread causing hundreds of people to descend on the region in the hope of finding more coins.



A typical bronze 'dam' coin of the period, 2.5:1

Residents of the local area became so concerned about the volume of people that they asked the police to intervene. Authorities have tried to downplay the many rumours about 'a wealth of coins just waiting to be discovered' amid fears about public safety. Archaeologists and local coin collectors have all said that, being bronze, the coins have very little value, but this doesn't seem to have been heeded by the treasure seekers. Many, in the hope of getting rich quickly are said to be working in shifts throughout the day and night digging away at the river banks. Local police have said these determined treasure seekers simply don't believe the archaeologists and coin collectors views on valuation and regard it as spreading disinformation, so they can keep all the coins themselves.

Quote: 'Melancholy and Utopia are heads and tails of the same coin'

A SAD EVENT IN SOUTHWARK

Peter Thompson

Samuel Pepys's diary gives us a wealth of information on life in 17th century London much of it covering the period when huge numbers of tokens were being issued from almost every street and alley in the city. Pepys occupied an important position as the Secretary to the Navy Board, a position which involved him in a great deal of public duty, meeting many people and dispensing contracts. Much of his business was conducted in coffee shops, taverns and ale houses across the City and his diary reveals that he rather enjoyed this. There are frequent descriptions of the food and drink consumed, the people he met and, sometimes, the proprietors of the taverns he visited.

Some years ago George Berry gathered all the information he could find in the diaries concerning taverns that issued tokens and published the very useful 'Taverns and Tokens of Pepys's London' (1978) – a veritable mine of information that included references to all the relevant entries in the diaries. As noted above these entries show Pepys to have been a bit of a bon voyageur but what the diaries in general also make plain is that he had a bit of an eye for the ladies, something his long suffering wife stoically put up with for many years. One young lady who caught his eye was Frances, the wife of Abraham Browne at the White Horse in Lombard Street. On 8th March 1666 Pepys writes:-

'Here by chance I saw the mistress of the house I have heard much of, and a very pretty woman she is indeed, and her husband the simplest-looking fellow and old that ever I saw.'



Fig. 1: Site of the Bear at the foot of London Bridge

No tokens are known of the White Horse and it was burnt down in the Great Fire of 1666. The Brownes then took over the Bear at Bridge Foot where a previous proprietor had already issued tokens. This was on the south side of the river at the southern end of London Bridge and owed its fame and fortune to its position (figure 1). London Bridge was the only road out of London to Canterbury and the south and the Bear was a frequent meeting place for people coming from or going to overseas postings via Dover, Portsmouth and elsewhere. Abraham Brown continued the practice of issuing tokens (figure 2). Over the years, in his official capacity, Pepys arranged several meetings at the Bear and frequently passed it by boat on the river. On 24th February 1667 he sadly records:-

'This night, going through the bridge by water, my waterman told me how the mistress of the Beare tavern at the bridge-foot did lately fling herself into the Thames and drowned herself, which did trouble me the more when they tell me it was she that did live at the White Horse tavern in Lombard-street: which was a most beautiful woman, as most I have seen.'



Fig.2: The token of Abraham Browne. The obverse legend reads ABRAHAM BROWNE.AT.YE. with a picture of a bear, which effectively continues the legend.

It is unlikely that Pepys himself would have handled halfpenny tokens. His entertainment would have involved larger denominations and would usually have been paid for by others. The lovely Frances though would have handled these every time she cashed up and it is this sort of personal connection to the people and places of the past that is the fascination of the tokens we can collect today.

*My husband purchased a world map, then gave me a dart and said "Throw this and wherever it lands – that's where I'm taking you on holiday"
It turns out we're spending two weeks behind the fridge!*

Quote: 'There are certain ways of laughing which have the sound of counterfeit coins'
Edmont de Goncourt

ANOTHER MEDIEVAL CHINESE COIN FOUND IN ENGLAND

This seems to have been a year for metal detector discoveries. Another early Chinese coin has been discovered at Buriton in Hampshire. The copper-alloy coin was issued between AD 1008 and 1016 during the reign of the Emperor Shenzong of the Northern Song Dynasty. The find was made by a metal detectorist in a ploughed field nine miles from the coast and, as with a previous find of a medieval Chinese coin, which was made in Cheshire in 2018, it doesn't appear to be part of any suspicious grouping of finds or a deposited collection. The field in question has also yielded a coin of King John (circa 1207) and other cut fractions of English medieval coins. Two fragments of one or more medieval vessels were also recovered from the find site. It certainly seems credible that this Chinese coin could be viewed as a medieval period loss which could have arrived in this country at any time in the early 11th century up to the early 13th century.



Copper-alloy coin (2 cash) of the Chinese Emperor Shenzong (AD.1008-1016)

The fact that two specimens have been recorded from medieval sites in England, albeit some distance apart, adds credence to the case for considering them as genuine ancient losses. Another discovery, 20 miles away from the coin finds, was the only confirmed fragment of Chinese imported pottery to appear in a medieval archaeologically dated context. This was a sherd of blue-and-white porcelain from a small cup or bowl dating to the fourteenth century. The pottery fragment was discovered at a dig in Lower Brook Street, Winchester. Even such a small fragment is regarded as evidence that people had, or may have, travelled to England from East Asia during the thirteenth century. Chinese pottery and coin finds west of India are known but not common, as trade between the west and Asia had been going on for centuries. This discovery could be another clue to the vast trade routes of earlier times.

SIR WALTER SCOTT £2 PIECE

Since his birth 250 years ago Sir Walter Scott has been commemorated on medallions and banknotes, marble effigies, books, and just about every media possible, with the exception of currency coins of the realm. Now the Royal Mint has issued a £2 coin dated 2021 to mark the 25th anniversary of the birth of this famous Scottish novelist, poet, historian and biographer. Scott's most famous titles were *The Lady of the Lake* (a poem) and novels *Rob Roy*, *Old Mortality*, *The heart of Mid-Lothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* and of course *Ivanhoe*.



The new 2021 Sir Walter Scott £2 piece

In line with all current £2 pieces the coin is bi-metallic and the reverse, designed by Stephen Raw, bears an image of Sir Walter Scott with the words NOVELIST HISTORIAN POET, surrounded by the legend 250th ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH. Wording on the incuse edge inscription reads 'THE WILL TO DO. THE SOUL TO DARE' which is probably one of the most famous of the author's prolific number of quotes. The obverse depicts a right-facing portrait of Queen Elizabeth II by Jody Clark. This coin is one of five new designs commissioned to celebrate the Queen's 95th birthday. Politically, it seems strange that the Government in Westminster should sanction the honouring of such an iconic and patriotic Scotsman in this way, considering the fervent determination of the Scottish independence movement, as Westminster seems determined to thwart any breakup of the union of Great Britain.

LIBRARY MUSINGS

Eric Hodge

We are again entering a period of quarantine when our minds turn to other activities. Some of us will dust off our exercise bikes, other will open up some long forgotten jigsaw and even some of our specialists will fine tune their dance steps (that really impressed me Jim!) Whatever you turn to it will help distract from the activities we would prefer to do, but that are currently restricted.

Me? Well I turn to my library. Some books are for reading, other are for reference, but whatever, they all allow one to dip in and find that morsel of interest that keeps one mesmerised until, suddenly, one has read two chapters and an hour has gone by. Take for instance *The Art of Coins and their Photography* by Gerald Hoberman, published by Spink in 1981 (though on the Amazon site it shows publication date as 1789!) Nearly 400 pages of fantastic photos and interesting detail. For example on page 287 is 'In about 1400 AD rich gold and silver deposits were discovered on the island of Sado off the coast of north west Japan and were traded in the form of small roughly cast ingots and gold dust. The first Japanese gold coins were introduced during the Tensho era between 1573 and 1592.'



Gold coin of the Tensho era (1573-1592)

Then on page 288, describing the obverse of a USA silver quarter dollar of 1834 it states 'She wears a Phrygian slave cap which has a broad band bearing the Liberty inscription. In this design the apex of the conical peaked cap is folded forward and, therefore, the coin is referred to as the turban variety. The Phrygians of the ancient Greek world, once conquered by the Lydians, did not manage to regain their independence and the name Phrygia became synonymous with slavery. However, in Roman times Phrygian caps were worn by freed slaves to signify their emancipation and came to represent Liberty.'



American 1834 silver quarter dollar, showing the 'Phrygian' cap

My hand falls onto *Ancient Coins - Riches of yesteryear*. Treasures of today, by Pierre Boussac and Jean-marie Delangre published by Les Editions De L'estampille in 1976. On page 94 I read 'Peter the Great was the architect of a new "Greater Russia" strong enough to stand up to any other European power. Catherine II finished the work Peter has begun by introducing into Russia new philosophies, and in particular those of Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot, the last two of whom she actually invited to visit her in Saint-Petersburg. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the great majority of the coins bearing the effigies of the Tsars were withdrawn and melted down by the Soviet government; this explains their rarity today.'



Russian 1 ruble of Tsar Peter the Great (1682-1725)

Now what is this? Wow this is quite exciting. Oh dear, I find that I have reached my allotted number of words for this article. Never mind, I shall make a note and raise the issue at the next Coin Society discussion evening. Remember them?

CROMWELL GOLD HITS RECORD PRICE



Cromwell 50-shilling piece, 1656

An extremely rare and very attractive gold 50-shilling piece of Oliver Cromwell has sold for a record £471,200 at DNW's sale of part four of the Marvin Lessen Collection. This was against a pre-sale estimate of £150,000. The coin, which was designed and engraved by Thomas Simon in 1656, was described as extremely fine and rare. It is one of the finest of just twelve known surviving examples.

Quote: 'Flattery is really a base coin which is only current through our vanity' Francois de la Rochefoucauld

BANKNOTES IN SCRAPBOOKS

Dr. Richard Underwood

In 1958, I was studying medicine in Liverpool University when I met my first and only girlfriend, Betty. We started going out together and I bought a large hardback scrapbook from W H Smith's shop. I used this to record our excursions and to store paper memorabilia, such as bus tickets, concert tickets, sugar labels etc. In 1961, we qualified as doctors and got married. Thereafter, we started going abroad for our holidays. In 1966 we went to Yugoslavia and had a day excursion to Albania. There, I came across a low-value Albanian 5 Leke banknote, illustrating a steam train crossing a bridge over a river. It was such an interesting representation of the old-fashioned train that was characteristic of the out-of-date vehicles that were common in the backward country of Albania. I decided to bring it home and put it in the scrapbook.



Albanian 5 Leke banknote (left) illustrating a steam train crossing a bridge over a river

South Korean 1000 Won banknote, my most recent acquisition



That was the start of a long-lasting tradition of bringing home at least one banknote from each foreign country. The South Korean 1000 Won banknote is the most recent foreign banknote. I acquired it in May 2017 on a fascinating Noble Caledonian ship tour of South Japan and South Korea. In some countries, I found more than one interesting note and would bring home two, three or even four, that I considered were worth keeping. For example, Cambodia issued four notes depicting ancient temples and monuments. In 1970, I put into my scrapbook the then current ten shillings Bank of England banknote. I did this because we were due to travel to the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony in the Pacific Ocean. We were going to be Touring Medical Officers covering 25 islands in the Colony and would be there for two years. We knew that in February 1971, the Bank of England would be changing from the Sterling system to a decimal system. The ten-shilling note would then be obsolete and we would never see it again after returning to England.

In 2002, the European Union instituted the Euro as the new currency for every nation in the Union, with the sole exception of the UK. Consequently, whenever we visited an EU country from 2002 onwards, we would never see that country's previous currency notes. Some parts of the UK have issued their own banknotes for local use. Scotland, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey have their own issues and of course I always acquired those whenever we visited these areas. So, all this is what intrigued and inspired me to start a collection of world banknotes; a hobby which was to give me great pleasure over a number of years.

The next issue of 'Lockdown Newsletter' will be March 2021. Anyone with anything to say is welcome to contribute.