



'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

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

MAJOR REVAMP OF BM'S ON-LINE COLLECTIONS



THE BRITISH MUSEUM houses one of the finest collections of coins and numismatic related items in the world. With around 800,000 objects, as this includes dies, weights, banknotes and medals, the project which aims to put them all on-line is quite daunting. The National Numismatic Collection spans the entire history of coinage from its

origins in the 7th century BC to the present day. The collection covers coinage from all countries of the world including commemorative art medals, military awards, tokens and even money boxes. Images of some 600,000 items can already be viewed on-line together with information such as provenance, weight and referencing details. Access is through www.britishmuseum.org, then follow the links to 'Collection' then type in 'coins'. When completed, this online reference facility should prove to be the ultimate tool for identifying by comparison.

CAESAR'S CELTIC ALLY

Alan Dawson

The Romans initially coined the word 'Gaul' to encompass the various Celtic tribes of what is now central, northern and eastern France. The *Belgae* tribes occupied land to the north of the rivers Marne and Seine. By the middle of the first century BC the northern Gallic tribe known as the *Remi* were a dominant force in the area centred Reims, which was their capital, occupying the area between modern Champagne and the Ardennes.

The *Remi* were apparently famed for their skillful horsemanship and were repeatedly in skirmishes with neighbouring tribes. In the second half of the second century BC they had developed quite extensive trade contacts throughout the Mediterranean world and soon built political as well as economic relations with Rome. Benefiting from learnt Roman skills and technology the *Remi* were the first people to issue coins in Gallia Belgica. They were gradually becoming 'Romanised', therefore it is hardly surprising that, following Julius Caesar's incursions into Gaul, they decided to ally themselves to Rome, rather than join an alliance with old enemies against an all-powerful adversary.



Cast potin unit of the Remi

Their decision was wise as it spared them the mass slaughter that ensued with Caesar's Gallic Wars and it also gave them opportunity to settle old scores, with the backing of the Roman army. Being so skillful in horsemanship and embracing Roman technology it is somewhat surprising that the commonest coin of the *Remi* is not a finely struck coin from well engraved dies but a cast potin unit depicting a striding warrior holding a torq and a spear and sporting a long ponytail of hair and wearing boots. The reverse of the coin does not show a horse, which would have also been expected, but a stylized image of a bear with a snake above. This rather pleasing cartoon-like imagery on the obverse sets these *Remi* coins aside from other Celtic issues of the period

WHEN IS A NICKEL NOT NICKEL?

Chris Leather

When the United States began to produce coins for the new Republic at the end of the eighteenth century, they introduced a decimal monetary system based on the Spanish American piece of eight, or eight reales, partly because this was as different as it could be from the system used by the hated British, and also because Spanish American coins formed the bulk of the coined silver in circulation. Five silver denominations were introduced: the dollar, half dollar, quarter dollar, dime and half dime. Only the top three had precise equivalents in the Spanish system, and this tells us why an amount of a quarter dollar used to be referred to as 'two bits' or two reales. The half dime was only struck on occasion, and never in large quantities. As a coin, it was too small to be convenient, weighing in at 1.24 grams – compare this with the British silver 3d at 1.41 grams.

So, in 1866, a new base metal five cent piece was introduced: 5 grams of cupronickel, 75% copper and 25% nickel. Nearly 15 million were struck the first year, compared to 120,000 of the silver pieces, though these did not finally cease until 1873.

The new coin was much more convenient, and was struck in much larger quantities; it met a need, and circulated widely. The design was changed in 1883, again in 1901 to the 'Liberty Head' design, and in 1913 to the 'Indian Head.' A final design change came in 1938 when the 'Jefferson Head' currently in use was introduced. During all these design changes, there was no change to the specification of the coin, which was by now universally referred to as a 'Nickel' rather than 'five cents' leading to those shops catering to a mass market being called 'Nickel and Dime Stores.'



1943 Jefferson nickel

The second world war started for the Americans in December 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (OK, that's how they spell it!) in their colony of Hawaii, and the spectacular ramping up of war production in the United States. Modern industrial warfare requires any number of strategic materials, and copper and nickel were two of these. The exigencies of the time resulted in the bronze cent being made of zinc coated steel in 1943 (very unsuccessfully) and nickel being withdrawn from the 'nickel' in 1942. The alloy was replaced with a most unusual substitute: 56% copper, 35% silver and 9% manganese – probably the only time that base metal coinage has been replaced by precious metal to meet a national emergency! The colour of this alloy was not greatly different from the regular coins, and to differentiate them the mintmark, usually a tiny letter to the right of Jefferson's house shown on the reverse, was moved to a much more prominent position above the dome of the building.

The war time composition lasted until 1945, and during this time the three mints of Philadelphia (P) Denver (D) and San Francisco (S) produced a total of 869,923,700 silver 'nickels.'

In 1946, the original specification was restored, and remains to this day. The US 'Nickel' of 2020 is exactly the same, designs only excepted, as the first 'Nickel' of 1866, a remarkable example of longevity. The silver nickels no longer circulate, of course, as they have a bullion value, but remain legal tender. But while 'Nickels' they are, nickel they aint!

SWISS MAKE THE WORLD'S SMALLEST GOLD COIN



Approx. 10 times actual size

The Swiss Mint has produced the smallest gold coin in the world. The coin is so small that you need a magnifying glass to see an image of Albert Einstein sticking out his tongue at you on the obverse! The state-owned Swissmint claims that the 2.96mm (0.12 inches) gold coin is the smallest in the world.

Weighing in at a mere 0.063g (1/500th of an ounce) it has a nominal face value of one quarter of a Swiss franc. Just 999 of these minute coins have been minted and will be sold for 199 SF each. A complementary (and quite necessary) magnifying glass accompanies each coin sold. If a coin tray was needed to house a dozen specimens it would be no bigger than a stamp.

COIN QUIZ No.5

- QUESTION 1.** In what year was hammered gold coinage demonitised?
- QUESTION 2.** What is meant by the term 'black money'?
- QUESTION 3.** What is a 'messianic' coin?
- QUESTION 4.** Where was the Victorian quarter farthing coin intended for circulation?
- QUESTION 5.** What is the origin of the word 'carat' used to grade gold?
- QUESTION 6.** What is meant by *scissel*?
- QUESTION 7.** What is a 'Type Muet' coin?
- QUESTION 8.** What is a 'hardhead'?



ANSWERS (Quiz No.4)

- Q1.** So called from the motto *FACIAM EOS IN GENTEM VNAM* (I will make them one people) referring to the union of England and Scotland.
- Q2.** 'Sweating' is the illegitimate means of obtaining precious metal by jostling coins together in a confined space, such as a bag.
- Q3.** Sexagesimal is a monetary system based on sixties, e.g. 60 shekels = 1 mina.
- Q4.** The most famous jettons were issued by the family of Hans Krauwinkel, between 1543 and 1635.
- Q5.** 'Archers' was the epithet applied to the silver siglos issued by Darius I of Persia (521-486 BC). It bore an image of the king armed with a bow and arrow.
- Q6A.** Obverse of a William & Mary halfcrown.
- Q6B.** Obverse of a silver tetradrachm of Alexander the Great.
- Q6C.** Obverse of a gold 'rider' of James VI of Scotland (1567-1625)

QUESTION 9.

Can you identify each of the following coins, when just a small part of the coin is showing?



USELESS COIN FACTS No.5

Drop a coin in water and most will instantly sink – but not all. A number of aluminium coins, such as the Japanese 1 Yen, Austrian 10 Groschen and Italian 1 Lire and more will all float on the surface tension of ordinary tap water. It might take a few attempts but you can get them to actually float. The tiny Nepalese silver quarter Jawa, weighing just 0.0002 mg, minted in 1740 is reputed to be the smallest and lightest coin ever made. It will also float on water. Although why anyone would want to do this in the first place is another matter.

A WEIGHTY PROBLEM

Peter Thompson

Throughout the East India Company's period of operation its staff involved themselves in private trade. Initially the Company was strongly opposed to this and tried banning it from time to time but soon accepted that, even with the threat of sanctions, they could never pay their staff sufficient salaries to lure them entirely from the temptations of serious profit. The Company therefore adopted a more relaxed approach allowing cargo space for crew members on their ships and allowing shore staff the opportunity to trade privately in the East on the understanding that some commodities were reserved for Company trade only.

The rules would be adjusted from time to time and caustic letters from London frequently suggested that their Factors and Merchants were paying more attention to their own business than to that of the Company. By and large though the system worked and the private trade networks that were established increased the Company's influence and trade.

Although profits, even fortunes, could be made in the East a major problem was how to bring home the bacon. Treasure could be sent home in the Company's ships for payment of freight but the safest method was to buy a bill of exchange on the Company payable in London at some future date. This benefitted the Company as funds paid into its treasuries in the East reduced the amount of bullion it needed to export from England. Individuals though were often reluctant to reveal to their employers exactly what they were sending home so other more risky methods were sometimes used. Bills could be bought on foreign East India companies (Dutch, Danish, etc.) payable in Europe or investments could be made in homeward cargoes. As a last resort individuals could carry their remaining wealth with them in their baggage when returning home or changing a posting.

Carrying one's wealth was obviously easier with gold coins than with silver and easier still with diamonds but all of these involved the obvious risk of loss by shipwreck, capture or theft. When travelling in this way a favourite method of keeping moderate amounts safe and ensuring that they would never be separated from their owners was to stitch coins or gemstones into garments but this sometimes had tragic consequences.

An example of this emerges from a letter to the Company from their Chief Factor at Hirado in Japan dated 14th January 1617. A Factor sent to Cochin China had been lost while landing when his boat overturned and the letter explains the circumstances:-
"Mr Peacock carried 50 or 60 rials of eight in his pocket, which was the occasion of his drowning as appeared some days after when his body was found."



A piece of eight reales similar to those in Mr Peacock's pocket.

One and a half kilos of silver was perhaps not a huge amount but how many others, Company servants or otherwise, must have gone to the bottom over the years clinging desperately to their wealth?

What's the best way to avoid touching your face? A glass of wine in each hand.

*"Daddy, why is my sister called Paris?"
"Because she was conceived in Paris, dear Quarantine"*

MY OTHER HOBBY

Frank Short

Following on from last month, when David Lythgoe revealed his interest in poetry, Frank Short gives an account of his other fascinating, unusual and skillful hobby.

“My fascination with heavy horses and wagons began as a child in my native Bootle, as there were still quite a number of them around until the mid 1950s. When they disappeared from our streets, I followed them at agricultural shows where I got to know lots of old carters, resulting in me being invited to become a steward in the Shire Horse section at the Royal Lancashire Show.



Frank with Clydesdales Benny and Davy

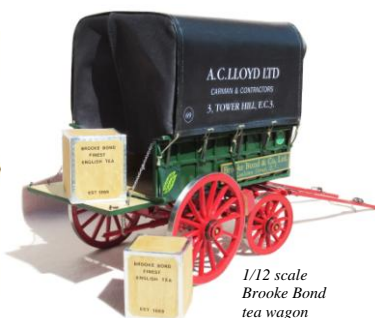


1/12 scale model of a wooden Scotch cart

I spent about fifteen years working for a carriage firm in Lydiate on Saturdays doing weddings and carnivals, working mainly with a pair of Shires and a horse bus with Albert, an old Liverpool carter. I even rode 'shotgun' on the back of the Liverpool Lord Mayor's carriage on numerous occasions. When that came to an end in the late 1990s I moved with Albert to Aughton to a farmer who had four heavies, two Shires and two Clydesdales and became a farmer's boy. I learned to plough and won two ploughing competitions for novices. However during this time I had started to make scale model vehicles, mainly farm wagons and carts from scratch just buying the plans. My first models were made of oak from an old sideboard which I varnished. The wheels are turned on a lathe, but being varnished the fellows (rims) have to be made in sections like a real wheel. The metal parts are made from brass strip and rod which I chemically blacken. The tyres are mild steel strip joined by silver solder. Later models I made from a variety of wood as I painted them. The springs I originally made from mild steel but later plastic card, which was easier and the paint hid them! Getting scale nuts and bolts for 1/12 scale is difficult, so rivets (used for making model locomotives) make good imitation coach bolts. I make and shape all the metals parts.



1/12 scale Monmouthshire wagon



1/12 scale Brooke Bond tea wagon

Eventually I decided to make a Liverpool team wagon that I remembered from my childhood which I knew they had one in the Liverpool Museum stores. I contacted the curator of the Land transport section of the museum with the view to photograph and measure the wagon so I could make my own plans. She happily obliged but asked me to send her a photograph when I had finished, which I did, and she seemed very impressed. I then measured up a Pantehnicon (furniture van) also in the museum stores. I made everything except the lettering which was provided by my printing ex-colleagues.

Then in October last year she contacted me to inform me of a coming transport exhibition due to open in February 2020 of vehicles made in and around the Liverpool area. The exhibition would be made up of cycles, motorbikes, cars (Ford and Jaguar Landrover) horse drawn carts and a 1910 Vulcan made in Southport. However to my surprise she asked if she could borrow my models as she had a glass case that she would love to display them in. To say that I was chuffed is an understatement!

What do you call panic buying of sausage and cheese in Germany? The wurst-kase scenario.

Are 'Pennies from Heaven' really just Climate Change?

He who dares wins

A coin collector from Tunbridge Wells in Kent was surprised to win a prize from a Royal Mint children's competition – which had closed 37 years ago in 1983! Mr. Warren Light was new to the hobby and had only been collecting for about a year when, pursuing his new found interest, he bought a 1983 year set on eBay together with an old coin folder. When the set arrived it also had some information enclosed about *National Coin Week* (1983) giving details of a young coin collectors' competition. It was dated 15th of April 1983. Mr. Light said “The folder was empty and the idea was to fill it with all the cupro-nickel dated shillings from 1947 to the end of the pre-decimal denomination. So, I thought it would be interesting to try and complete the task.” He soon managed to fill the folder and emailed a photograph to the Royal Mint, adding a rather cheeky note on the lines of “I wondered if you still had any unclaimed prizes from 37 years ago?”



Surprisingly, the Royal Mint replied saying that they were pleased to hear about his achievement and would be sending a small something in the post, as a goodwill gesture. In August this year a parcel arrived from the Royal Mint and Mr. Light was amazed to find it contained two 2020 year sets. This comprised not only a normal currency year set but also a set of the commemorative coins!

There must be a moral to this story; if nothing else it was certainly good PR for the Royal Mint and a welcome reward for Mr. Light.

A reminder: Next month's AGM will be conducted by email

BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE REMEMBERED ON 2-EURO COIN

The famous Battle fought between an alliance of Greek city-states, led by King Leonidas of Sparta and the Persian Empire of Xerxes I, is remembered mainly for the bravery and sacrifice by the Spartan '300'. Like Dunkirk and The Charge of the Light Brigade over two millennia later, Thermopylae ('Hot Gates') was celebrated as a heroic defeat, rather than a victory.

The vastly outnumbered Greek army of approximately 7,000 men marched north to block the narrow pass at Thermopylae in 480 BC. The Persian army was estimated at about 150,000 strong. The vastly outnumbered Greeks managed to hold off the Persian advance for seven days before the rearguard was annihilated in one of history's most famous last stands. 300 Spartans and 700 Thespians fought heroically to the death to protect their homeland, after being betrayed by a local goatherd.



This famous action is now commemorated on a new 2-Euro coin, issued by the Greek Mint. It features a helmet worn by the ancient Hellenic warriors and an inscription in Greek. The reverse of the coin is the standard generic euro denomination. Interestingly, the mintmark used by the Greek mint (a palmette) is in the obverse field.

WHAT A STORY TO TELL

Chris Leather

I have just had an experience open to few others in the country at present; I have bought a coin in a coin shop! This is the story of a denarius which I have just acquired from our own David Regan. Look in the 'bible' of Roman Coins and their Values, by David Sear, and you will find it was issued by Numerius Fabius Pictor in 126BC.

The coinage of the Roman Republic is quite fascinating; apart from anything else it provides virtually the only examples of coins issued on a regular basis by named state officials, as the position of moneyer was included on the Cursus Honorum, the progression of jobs held by the high flyers in the Republic on their way to becoming Consul.

The obverse shows the traditional helmeted head of Roma, together with two other items of interest. The first of these looks rather like a star, or an asterisk, but is believed to be a contraction of the value of the coin. Originally, denarii were valued at ten asses, hence the name, and bore the mark of value 'X'. Then in 141BC the value was changed to sixteen asses and the mark changed to 'XVI' and, over the next few years, was abbreviated to 'X' with an horizontal bar '-' superimposed. The second mark on the obverse is the letter 'M' which is described by Sear as being the first occasion when a control mark was used on the denarius coinage. Different dies carried different marks – for this issue these are alphabetic, though later coins show numbers or other symbols. Sear suggests that each mark identifies a particular die. This may well be the case, but looking on the internet at the relatively few illustrations of this type, another denarius with control mark 'M' can be found which, although similar, is definitely not the same die as my coin. So, what else could it mean? Suggestions on a potsherd please.

Looking at the reverse of the coin, we can see the identification of the issuer 'N FABI PICTOR' together with a representation of his ancestor Quintus Fabius Pictor. Quintus was the son of Gaius, a Senator and Consul, and led the Roman forces against the Gauls in 229BC. He was sent to Delphi by the Senate, to consult the Oracle following the Roman defeat by Hannibal at Cannae in 216BC, and was the first known Roman historian, though his works have since been lost. His image is shown in military uniform, but with some of the priestly attributes due to his position as Flamen Quirinalis or High Priest of the god Quirinus. To maintain his sanctity, the Flamen Quirinalis was not supposed to touch metal, ride a horse, or sleep outside the city limits of Rome.

All of which is well and good, but there is an alternative explanation. Quintus Fabius Pictor (obviously a different ancestor!) was appointed Praetor of Sardinia in 187BC but as the consecrated High Priest of Quirinus was not allowed to take up his position and was compelled by the Pontifex Maximus to remain in Rome. The Senate was not at all happy about this, and refused to accept the edict, appointing Quintus as Praetor Peregrinus, or walkabout-Praetor.

Which explanation is true? Suggestions on another potsherd please. Most, but not all, of the reverse dies of this issue also bear a control mark, in the form of a letter. This does not seem to bear any particular relationship to the mark on the obverse, and about which the same comments apply.



AR denarius of N. Fabius Pictor

The coins weigh, typically, 3.8 grammes which is about right for denarii of the period. Michael Crawford, a guru of the Republican coinage, has estimated that for this particular issue there were forty obverse dies and nineteen reverse dies used. A total of twenty five examples have been found in seven hoards, all in Italy.

So, what else happened in 126BC? The City of Tyre successfully revolted from the Seleucid Empire, taking advantage of the succession of boy-king Seleucus V Philometor, and the regency of his mother Cleopatra Thea. Phraates II, King of the Parthian Empire died, as also did Wang Zhi, Empress of Han China. Other than these facts, not a lot, really!

A HAPPY FIND

David Lythgoe

Some four or five years ago, while on a day trip from Bognor, where bad weather prompted me to agree with King George V who, when being told that he might have to return to the town on which he had lavished a regal appellation, is said to have exclaimed "Oh, b****r Bognor!" In an Arundel antique emporium, I came upon a numismatic gem. This was not, as you might expect, an coin, medal or a token, but a book – "Art in Coinage" by C.H.V. Sutherland, one time President of the Royal Numismatic Society and Deputy Keeper of coins at the Ashmolean Museum. It was published in 1955 with the sub-title "The Aesthetics of Money from Greece to the Present Day". The book is lavishly illustrated (in b&w), the frontispiece being an enlarged photograph of Thomas Simon's "Petition" Crown for Charles II. Not only is the book informative, but the quality of Dr. Sutherland's prose is so delightful that I feel a need to make it more widely known. But I must restrict myself here to offering you only two examples.

In his introduction he writes – "... the art-history of coinage has been to some extent neglected in the past while that of painting or sculpture has thrived, a reason is possibly to be found in the very small scale of the coins themselves. 'The art of the miniaturist' is a phrase often heard in connection with the visual arts. Generally, the expression has a faintly disparaging flavour, seeming to imply that a small work of art, however elaborate, however skilfully wrought, is somehow less remarkable, less praiseworthy, and even less difficult or exacting than a large one. But scale is not good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, in itself absolutely: it is good or bad as applied to a particular object created for a particular purpose." He expands on this theme by considering how the City of London grew around the rebuilt St. Paul's Cathedral.



Obverse of an AR tetradrachm of Amphipolis

In my second example, having opened the book at random (honestly), I find Dr. Sutherland discussing portraiture involving facing and profile heads and he writes – "We have already seen in what different ways the character of Apollo could be suggested by profile treatment. Two facing heads, each of the utmost technical perfection display the differences with redoubled emphasis. Thracian Amphipolis broke away from the domination of Athens' empire in 424 B.C. Steeped in the artistic traditions of Athens, now at their peak of excellence; wealthy from the proximity of rich silver mines, and so able to employ first class artists; and proud in the enjoyment of political independence, Amphipolis within a few years issued a coinage of full classical magnificence.

The three-quarter portrait of Apollo shows rounded forms – the lips soft, the cheeks almost heavy, the eye-lid a little drooped, the lower jaw lying full. The hair waves and curls, neither weak nor exuberant: at one side its mass is considerable, serving the purely technical purpose of relieving the nose from the full pressure of rubbing in circulation. Though the general effect is one of gentle grace, there is no effeminacy: this is Apollo the artist, as sweet in song as he was swift in his heavenly course.' Dr Sutherland goes on to contrast that portrait of Apollo with one from a coin of Catana by the artist Heracleides depicting Apollo as the sun-god ... 'a god of immense power, yet calm and undefiled'.

Beauty, so it's said, lies in the eyes of the beholder. For me there is beauty not only in the appearance of a coin but also in good writing about these magical examples of history, and I must add that I also find such at OWLNS. So, having said as much as I think is enough for now, I may even revise my opinion about Bognor.

Hopefully, this fifth issue of 'Lockdown Newsletter' has again hit the right note. This month sees welcome contributions from a number of members plus some numismatic news items and the usual sprinkling of humour. Please keep feeding this newsletter, as it might be with us for some time yet. **Until the next issue keep well and keep safe.**