



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NUMBER 13. MAY 2021

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

UK COIN INTEREST SURGES

Whether it can be attributed to pent up funds being released, disillusionment with other investments or simply boredom during lockdown, the UK coin market is going through a surge of popularity with subsequent price increases across the board. From ancients and hammered, through milled silver to Squirrel Nutkin and beyond, this level of interest, whether it is investment driven or collector enthusiasm has not been seen for a number of years.



The downside of this, for both collectors and dealers alike, is firstly the sudden rise in demand, seemingly created by the imposed social restrictions has meant that collector coins, especially in the higher grades are difficult to find and when one is offered the price is often considerably higher than before lockdown. Recent record highs in the bullion value of gold and silver has also had an impact on coin prices. Of course the sudden demise of all coin fairs, club meetings, live auctions and other such events has also impacted heavily on the coin trade. Ironically, with welcomed demand at its highest the trade is now facing a shortage of new material. We live in uncharted times so who knows what the future of numismatics will be?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By the end of June, if things go according to plan, the Government is planning to lift all Coronavirus restrictions which have been in place since March 2020. The first issue of this newsletter was sent out at the beginning of May last year and the title 'Lockdown Newsletter' seemed quite appropriate at that time. If we decide to keep the newsletter running when things get back to some sort of normality, as has already been suggested, then the title banner will need to be changed to something less specific. If anyone has any ideas regarding a possible new name or suggestions about what form future newsletters might take, then please get in touch. It has already been put forward that future newsletters would make an ideal vehicle for recording five-minute papers, recent acquisitions and other ephemeral notes by members. To continue producing a newsletter in its present format on a monthly basis would not really be feasible given the amount of time involved and the pressure of finding fresh news items and articles for each issue. With this in mind it has also been proposed that any such future version could be issued on a quarterly basis. I am aware that this is only the May issue but we would need to have a new title and/or format in place by the middle of June for the sake of continuity.

FINDS TALK AT THE ATKINSON ON-LINE

The series of evening talks at the Atkinson in Southport has now moved on-line. The next talk, scheduled for 5th May at 7.00pm, will be by Heather Beeton, local Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The talk will introduce the Scheme, looking at its aims and successes as well as elements of the Treasure Act. She will also look in closer detail at some of the key discoveries made across Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. For further information and how to book, visit the Atkinson website www.theatkinson.co.uk

A SECOND 'ZOOM' COIN SYMPOSIUM

Eric Hodge

In conjunction with the EPNNES (Eric P. Newman Education Society), NNP (Newman Numismatic Portal (nnp.wustl.edu)) has held its second Symposium on the three days of Friday 19 March to Sunday 21 March 2021 incl. (the first was held between 28-30 August 2020).

This numismatic extravaganza covered every aspect of our hobby from ancients through medieval to modern coinage and notes including publishing, coin grading, books, a day in the life of a professional auctioneer, aspects of online numismatics, how to deal in coins, medals, counterfeits, how to collect etc. Each presentation (there were at least 36 presenters) was given via Zoom by either a professional in the subject or keen/knowledgeable amateurs wanting to spread the word. There were also presentations by and for the 'Younger Generation' alongside general discussion events. One of the most appealing aspects, certainly to me, was the fact that all these presentations were free. The instructions of how to register and operate the system were comprehensive and simple to follow. This mode of education is definitely the way forward allowing all sorts of subjects to be aired and discussed. Another most vital aspect of these presentations is that they are all recorded and available for viewing on the NNP under nnp Symposium.org again freely accessible.



It is recommended that one registers for Wayne Homren's weekly coin blog E-Sylum by sending an email to whomren@gmail.com (again free) where all aspects of numismatics are aired and where NNP has a prominent role in advising of the current state of the Portal and of future events. The site is American and as such does tend to have a USA coinage bias. Nevertheless, the weekly blogs do cover world coinage, including news of new discoveries and research.

'SHILL BIDDING' STILL PLAGUES ON-LINE COIN AUCTIONS

When you submit your maximum bid in an on-line coin auction only to find that another bidder surpasses it immediately, then this could be an example of 'shill' bidding. Bidders' names are usually kept confidential and you only see a random initial letter and number, separated by three asterisks, e.g. M***8.

The auction site Ebay defines 'shill' bidding as follows;

'Shill bidding is when someone bids on an item to artificially increase the price. Shill bidding can happen regardless of whether the bidder knows the seller. When someone bidding on an item knows the seller they might have more inside information that other shoppers aren't aware of. This could create an unfair advantage or cause another bidder to pay more than they otherwise should.'

Another common indicator of auction shill bidding is when a coin is knocked down for a much higher price than expected – then re-appears in a later sale with the excuse that 'the winner failed to pay'. When this happens the coin usually then sells for a more sensible price. This is a fraudulent activity which is proving difficult to positively detect and subsequently hard to police. The only course of action the honest collector can take is simply to bid only up to their own preset limit and not to go beyond. It's all very well to say this, but in the heat of the moment people often throw caution to the wind when bidding on a long sought after coin. However, it's well worth noting the code-names of suspected 'shillers' and avoid their future offerings.

COIN QUIZ No.13

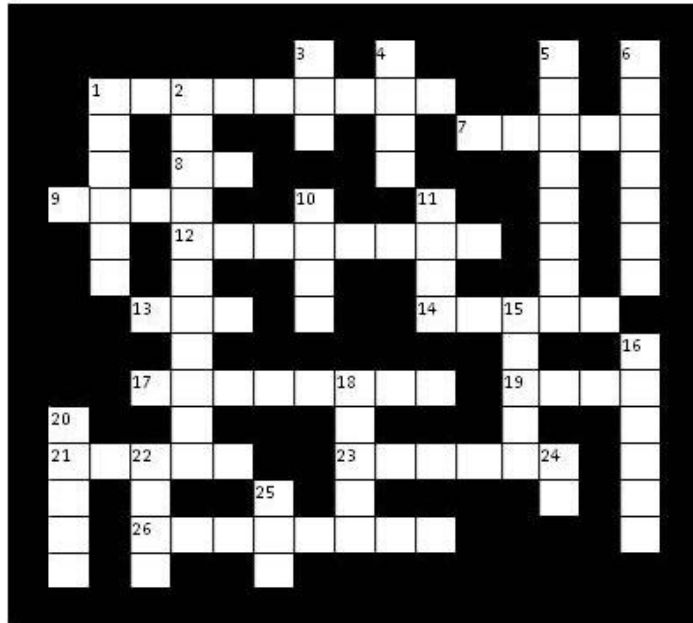
This time it features another crossword compiled by Lee Brown. A list of answers will appear in next month's issue.

ACROSS

- Decimal coin demonetized in 1984.
- Early Anglo-Saxon silver coin.
- Abbreviation for silver.
- Unusual coinage metal used in Germany.
- Emperor on 'Tribute penny' denarius.
- Name of profile on British copper coinage used between 1837-1860.
- Metal used for coin minted in 1684 with a value of 1/960th of a pound.
- Terrible Russian wire money.
- Mint that recently made the heaviest legal tender gold coin in the world.
- Unit of account occasionally used in shops prior to decimalization.
- The first Roman coins produced after the proto-currency.

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- Another name for a 'mule' coin.
- Royal Mint current location.
- First Roman proto-currency coins
- Queen Emma of Normandy allegedly struck this king's penultimate issue after his death.
- Less quality than proof but still a special finish.
- Emergency paper currency of Germany.
- Common name for the obverse of a coin.
- Long-cross coin mint town abbreviated to AED.
- Largest non-regal gold coin in 1649.
- Inscription type on rim of 'Cartwheel' coinage.
- A relatively pure piece of metal used for processing into a coin.
- Nickname for British Gold coin issued 1787-1799
- Flower on both sides of Charles I halfpenny.
- Large copper or copper-alloy Roman coin.
- Shortened name used for Roman double-denarius



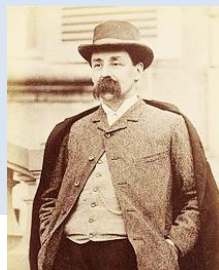
ANSWERS (Quiz No.12)

- Q1. *Bawbee; after the Laird of Sillebawbee who was at one time Master of the Mint.*
- Q2. *L.s.d. is from the Latin currency denominations librae, solidi and denarii.*
- Q3. *'Slug' = Unofficial gold coin issued in California during the Gold Rush.*
- Q4. *Copper coins changed to bronze in 1860*
- Q5. *Crondall type thrymsas issued c.620-645*
- Q6. *The Laurel was so called because the King is shown wearing an imperial laurel wreath on the coins.*
- Q7. *The silver groat was first introduced during the reign of Edward I in 1279, although not abundant until the reign of Edward III.*
- Q8. *The year of the 'dateless' 20p was 2008*
- Q9. *W.C.C. on certain George I shillings stands for silver supplied by the Welsh Copper Company.*
- Q10. *Mrs Emery May Norweb. A famous American coin collector and philanthropist.*



QUESTION 10.

Can you name this famous numismatic scholar?



USELESS COIN FACTS No.13

The excessively rare American 1804 silver dollar is not quite what it seems. In 1804 the US Mint struck 20,000 silver dollars – but all bearing the date of the previous year 1803. The Mint then stopped making silver dollars for almost three decades until President Jackson ordered a special striking of all circulating denominations as a diplomatic gift to the King of Siam. The Mint then produced a very small amount of dollars stamped with the date 1804, not 1803. These coins soon became a sought after collectors' item. Forgeries appeared but these were tracked down by the Mint and all, including the official issue were subsequently destroyed – except for one specimen. So, technically, the 1804 dollar in the Smithsonian Institute could be a forgery.

APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEPTIVE

As the Queen celebrated her 95th birthday on 21st April private mint companies have yet again seized the opportunity to market commemorative gold and silver 'coins' to the naïve general public. One particular offer being launched is described as "A magnificent new 24 carat gold coin for just £39 – post free." The illustration in the advertisement shows a sparkling gold coin 51mm in diameter, with a grained edge 2mm deep, and what's more bearing a denominational value of five pounds! The 'coin' had been apparently approved for issue by no lesser institution than Buckingham Palace.

Certainly impressive by anyone's standards. That is until you read the full text. There *had* to be a catch. Far from appearing to be far larger and heavier than a five guinea piece the end of the text states that the actual size of the coin is just 11mm diameter and weighing in at a mere 0.5g. Smaller and lighter than a Victorian quarter farthing, which has a diameter of 13.5mm. If such a piece is not issued by a known country then it would be classed as a medal or medallion. The advertisement gets round this point by stating that the 'country of issue' is the tiny South Atlantic volcanic group of islands known collectively as Tristan da Cunha. This spec on the map is known as the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world. The only inhabited island in the group (Tristan) has a total land mass of 38 square miles with a permanent population of just 250 souls.

The island, being a British Overseas Territory, uses the United Kingdom coinage system instead of the local St. Helena pound, yet the island does not even have a bank. Its main export (apart from spurious commemorative coins and stamps) is the Tristan Rock Lobster. So, it would be interesting to see the Tristan da Cunha locals queuing to spend their tiny gold five pound coins to support their subsistence agriculture or maybe a special treat of Lobster Thermidor - or maybe not, as it's doubtful the island even has a restaurant. Of course this is not a currency coin as the issuer points out it has "...a collector favourite proof finish" whatever that is?

Over the last few years the UK market has been bombarded by a plethora of commemorative so-called 'coin' offers, all purporting to be good value and all only legal tender in such places as Gibraltar or other overseas dependencies - although you would never find one in holiday change! It is easy to see the reasoning behind this advert, as if shown actual size it is doubtful if anyone would take up the offer of such a microscopic coin which, after all, can only be seen properly with a magnifying glass and has a gold bullion value, at the time of writing, of less than £19 and no numismatic credibility whatsoever. Will the public never learn?

'THERE ONCE WAS AN OLD COIN COLLECTOR ...'

Despite a rather lukewarm response to last month's suggestion of a numismatic Limerick competition a few entries have been received. They will all be published anonymously to avoid any accusations of dastardly favoritism and will appear over the next few issues. Here is a couple recently received.

*A collector spent time in a boat
Trawling an old castle's moat
He put in his net
And what did he get?
Just a nail, a can and a groat*

Then there is this slightly longer one –

*I thought I'd clean my coins, I applied some patent polish
Though many coin collectors would say that I was 'folish'
I thought I heard a fizzing as I drank my cup of tea
When slowly I turned round – and what did I see?
The Roman obverse visages had completely disappeared
The legends and the mint names were worse than I had feared!
Oh dear, but never mind, the reverse will be OK
Now I'll just keep them face down in my tray.*

Further submissions please! Send them by email, post, phone or even carrier pigeon. If you have any other ideas about how these newsletters could be improved - or in fact anything at all you wish to say, especially news items, then please email the secretary at amdawson@numsoc.net
The next issue will be sent out, in line with our meetings dates, on the first Thursday in June.

THE 1935 'ROCKING HORSE' CROWN

Chris Leather

The first officially commemorative coin issued in Great Britain was the Silver Jubilee crown of 1935.

The Deputy Master of the Royal Mint informed his Advisory Committee in November 1934 that he had invited Mr Kruger Gray and Mr Metcalfe to submit any 'good ideas' for a reverse which might occur to them, representative of modern art. After close competition and furious debate, the committee approved Metcalfe's Deco-style design; Kruger Gray's submission remains as three or four surviving pattern strikes (ESC3676)



Metcalfe's Deco-style crown of 1935

Although the launch was rather low key, it achieved national recognition and a great deal of interest. The first public acknowledgement that there was to be a special coin came with the publication of a supplement to the *London Gazette*, dated Saturday 4th May 1935, with the text of a Royal Proclamation giving the specification of a new crown coin to be struck during the year 1935 'in commemoration of Our Silver Jubilee' detailing the design and mandating that the edge inscription should be in incuse letters. The Proclamation was effective from that day.

News of the Proclamation had obviously been given to the press in advance, as many national and provincial papers carried the announcement, together with the information that circulating crowns would be available from banks on and after Tuesday 7th May – Monday 6th May being the official Jubilee Day. In fact, due to 'pressure of work' none was available before Wednesday 8th May and limited supplies meant that queues continued throughout May, even though customers could buy a maximum of only four crowns each. A total of 714,769 would eventually be minted.

It was also reported the Royal Mint would issue two 'pattern' versions of the crown though these would not be legally coins as the edge inscriptions would be raised, rather than incuse, which did not comply with the proclamation. There would be 25 gold pieces to be supplied in leather cases, at £50 each, and 2,500 'standard' silver pieces to be supplied in cardboard boxes at 7s 6d each, both post free. Applications, for a maximum of one gold pattern or four silver patterns, were to be submitted to the Deputy Master of the Royal Mint no later than 14th May in envelopes marked 'Jubilee Crown – Gold' or 'Jubilee Crown – Silver' in block letters at the lower left of each envelope. Payment was to be included for the gold pieces, but not for the silver. In the event of over-subscription, the gold pieces would be assigned by ballot, and the silver pieces would go in strictly first-come, first-served order.

A total of 1,329 applications for the 25 gold patterns had been received by the closing date, and the ballot was duly held. Winners were notified by post, and many provincial newspapers carried items about local people who had been successful. Interest was such that, as a result of a question asked in the House, the Chancellor of the Exchequer released a list of names of the successful candidates which was included in Hansard on 27th May. The Mint also supplied successful candidates with a list of names and addresses of the winners. By this time, it was being reported from London that offers of as much as £2,000 had been seen in the columns of 'a morning newspaper' for any of the gold pieces.

The silver patterns attracted almost as much attention. On 7th May, within hours of the list opening, the Royal Mint announced that the issue had been sold out and that no more applications would be accepted. The 2,500 examples were distributed as planned. By year's end, the silver patterns had also appreciated in value; Glendining's sold three on 19th December for £1.15s to £1.19s each.

In due course, unsuccessful candidates were sent a post card by the Royal Mint advising that, while the patterns had been sold out early on 7th May, a supply of specially prepared 'specimen' examples of 'the ordinary crown' with incuse edge inscription would shortly be available for the sum of 5s 6d each, post free.

The 'specimen' coins were produced to a semi proof-like standard, with reflective fields, and sold in the same red boxes as the patterns. General wisdom is that the issue total is unknown, but one on-line source quotes correspondence with the Royal Mint giving totals as either 14,382 or 14,398. If either of these is correct, this makes the 'specimen' coins rarer than the proof 1927 'wreath' crown.

The Chancellor, in his statement to the House of Commons on 27th May, refused to contemplate increasing the issue totals of the patterns to meet demand, as this would have altered the basis of the offer made to the original subscribers.

Day 21 at home and my dog looks at me like "See? This is why I chew the furniture!"

They say that money talks but all mine ever seems to say is good-bye!

TOP LOCK LOCAL TOKEN

David Lythgoe

Many a bargee travelling from Liverpool to Leeds by canal would have developed a serious thirst by the time he had navigated the 21 Wigan locks that raise the canal 200 feet within a space of two miles to Top Lock. At this point the canal makes a sudden change of direction from Northeast to Northwest, for this is where the proposed line of the Lancaster canal should have continued to Westhoughton and Salford.



The photos show the building known as Top Lock and a token no doubt used and issued by the publican for what would have been in the 19th century a considerable amount of passing trade. The Lancaster canal extension was never completed but Top Lock occupies a strategic location in the small township of Aspull where it was once said that every other house was inhabited by a retailer of beer!

The token details are:



Obverse: J.SOUTHERN. ASPULL, circling. TOP/LOCK in centre.
Reverse: BY G.DIPPLE 85 Gt. Hampton St. circling. 1½ with D above in centre. Diameter 25mm. Weight 5.15gms.

Southern is a common name in Aspull and in the 1869 Wigan Directory George Southern and Isaac Southern are both listed (separately) as beer retailers. Apparently the one-time half timbered Top Lock pub was taken over by Atherton and Johnson pubs and lasted as such into the 1960s. The building was given Grade 2 listing in 1988 as a lock-keeper's cottage. With a bit of research, even the humblest paranumismatic token can reveal some interesting asides to local history.

TRANSPORTS OF DELIGHT?

Chris Leather

Before a piece of metal can circulate as a coin, or as money, in the United Kingdom, it has to pass two legal hurdles. The first of these is defined in the Coinage Act currently in force. The Coinage Acts, approved by Parliament, set out in great detail the setting up of mints, establishing the standard weight, the least current weight, the standard fineness and the remedy, or permitted variation, for each of the standard denominations of coinage, arranging for Trials of the Pyx, and setting out what may be done by means of a Royal Proclamation. Blanks used for striking coins must comply with these specifications. Royal Proclamations are orders issued by the monarch with the advice and consent of the Privy Council, and do not require Parliamentary approval. Typically, the design, legend, and validity of any coin are specified in this way, and unless these criteria are met, pieces of metal are not, legally, coins. As examples of this in practice, the Jubilee Crowns of 1935 were specified with incuse edge legends in the relevant Royal Proclamation. The gold and silver patterns issued at the same time, having raised edge legends, were not in compliance with the Proclamation, and are therefore patterns and not coins. Similarly, the patterns for the gold coinage of King George VI remain patterns because they have a plain edge, whereas the Proclamation required a grained edge and these were never struck.

Does all this have any practical impact? It ought to.

The Proclamation for the coinage of Queen Victoria, issued on 5th July 1838, among other matters defined the obverse legend for all the silver coins of value one shilling and below to be as follows – set out precisely as in the Proclamation:

Victoria, Dei Gratia, Britanniar: Reg. F.D.

The obverse legend as it appears on the coins is as follows – set out precisely as before:

VICTORIA DEI GRATIA BRITANNIAR: REG: F:D:



Which is, of course, nothing like what was authorised in the Proclamation. So, from a legal point of view, the whole of Victoria's young head silver, from Maundy penny to shilling, is not, and never has been, money. All well and good? All these pieces circulated with no queries, but perhaps there should have been objections raised. We can take up the issue now!

Thousands of people throughout the decades of Victoria's reign will have been charged and convicted of the theft of coins, or money. The fact that what they stole was neither coin nor money means that they could not be said to be 'guilty as charged' and means that they were punished for something which they did not do. A legal fiction? Possibly, but you, as a convicted criminal, might have been transported to Australia for an act which was not the crime you had been charged with. Does this mean that the state had kidnapped and enslaved people who were legally innocent as charged? Do we owe posthumous apologies to the victims, or possibly a large number of return tickets to their descendants? Or should there just be a new Royal Proclamation retrospectively authorising the legend actually used?

THE INTRIGUING ART OF THE MEDALLION

Eric Hodge

As coin collectors and researchers we all know what it is like to hold history in your hands. How much better then to not only hold history, but a representation of it as well. That is what a collection of medallions can do. Medallions seem to have been a Roman invention, but the first truly modern example is believed to have been by Pisanello. Active in Verona and the Italian courts, the celebrated master was the inventor of the commemorative portrait medal. Inspired by Roman coins, with their portraits of rulers and allegorical representations on the reverse, the medals commemorated individuals or events and functioned as gifts and mementoes. This medal (Fig. 1) - the first to portray a woman - depicts Cecilia Gonzaga, the beautiful and learned daughter of Gianfrancesco

Gonzaga, Marquess of Mantua. Cecilia was an accomplished classical scholar. Refusing marriage, she became a Clarissan nun in 1445, just before this medal was produced. Pisanello chose to represent her here in secular court dress, suggesting that he was working from an earlier portrait or a sketch from life.



Fig.1

What about battles or important persons that represent battles? Here we have Horatio Nelson (Fig. 2) victor of many battles against Napoleonic forces in the 1800s culminating in his death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Here portrayed on a silver medal designed by a German, Abraham Abramson from Berlin. The obverse shows Nelson in a pigtail and uniform looking right with a medal around his neck, on the reverse a memorial consisting of a naval rostrum column, adorned with four prows of antique galleys and laurel wreaths from which anchors are suspended. A figure of Victory on the base. The legend of 'Famam qui Terminat Astris' (which is from Virgil) translates as 'Whose Glory reaches the Stars.' In the exergue is 'He vanquished the Spanish and French fleets, and died on 21 October 1805.' He died at the age of 47.



Fig.2

Of course we cannot ignore more modern medallions. Here (Fig. 3) is the Stephen Hawking science medal, a prestigious award which recognises the merit of popular science on an international level. The medal was sponsored by Starmus, an international science and music based organisation (hence the name 'star' and 'music'). It was founded by Garik Israelian, an Armenian astronomer and Brian May the guitarist from Queen. It holds science based conferences but music is also an integral part of the festival. Stephen Hawking lived from 1942 to 2018 and was a theoretical physicist and cosmologist widely considered to be one of the greatest scientists of all time. He was the first scientist to devise a cosmology that married the general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, and he made huge contributions to our understanding of black holes. He gained a first class honours degree in physics from Oxford University, aged 20, and then a PhD in Astronomy and Cosmology from Cambridge University. At age 21 Hawking was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, a motor neuron disease in which the nerves controlling the muscles become inactive. At the time he was given 2 years to live, but survived a further 53 years.



Fig.3

What is so interesting about collecting medallions is the wealth of knowledge gained when each is researched. A dream occupation in these trying times.

The next 'Lockdown Newsletter' will be sent out in the first week in June 2021 (issue No.14). Hopefully, it might be the penultimate issue, if all lockdown and social distancing measures are cancelled by the end of June and the *Eagle & Child* is once again open for meetings – Let's hope so.