



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

'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!

BNS TO LOOK INTO LECTURES ON-LINE

AFTER 118 YEARS since its founding, the British Numismatic Society seems to have finally realised that only a very small percentage of its 620+ members are actually able to attend the monthly meetings held in central London.



The current Coronavirus crisis and its resulting lockdown has meant that most societies have had to re-think, not only their programme of meetings, but the way in which they are conducted.

In a recent BNS newsletter to members the society's president, Dr. Kevin Clancy, stated that the current crisis provided renewed impetus to explore how lectures could be made accessible on-line, either through recordings subsequently aired or live streaming. A sub-committee has now been formed, to look further into the matter.

This would certainly be a welcome move and, hopefully, the Royal Numismatic Society might be keen to follow suite with their meetings. The internet has now changed from being an optional medium for discussion and sales to both the method of choice and an outright necessity for societies in general and collectors in particular.

IS IT SAFE FOR US TO HOLD MEETINGS?

Despite central government advice, most people are still rather wary about entering a closed environment, such as pubs and restaurants, even with the safety precautions of a face mask and social distancing. The *Eagle & Child* is at present open to business, albeit with a strict protocol in place. However, as a venue for meetings, the upstairs room is not particularly well ventilated and keeping a sensible distance apart would be challenging. On top of this, guest speakers who are already booked are understandably reluctant to fulfil their engagement. So, as things stand at the time of writing, it unfortunately looks as if the whole year's programme of meetings might need to be put on hold until such time as the situation changes favourably.

A CAST IRON LUCITANIA

Chris Leather

On 22nd April 1915, the Imperial German Embassy in the United States placed newspaper adverts in some fifty newspapers in the US, including New York, warning potential passengers that the waters around Great Britain were a war zone, and they entered it at their own risk. The advert appeared immediately below the notice from Cunard regarding the forthcoming sailing of the *Lucitania* to Great Britain, on 1st May 1915. Notwithstanding the warning, 1,266 passengers chose to board the vessel. Good time was made across the Atlantic until the ship reached a point only an hour out from her first port of call, Queenstown, in Ireland. The ship was torpedoed by German U-boat U20, shortly afterwards sinking with the loss of 1,198 passengers and crew.

There was immediate outrage on the Allied side, especially as a number of neutral US citizens were among the dead. The German authorities responded by claiming that the *Lucitania* had been carrying armaments, in contravention of international agreements. This was denied by the Allies. In Germany, an well-known medallist, Karl Goetz, produced a powerfully descriptive medal showing, one one side, the

sinking vessel with guns and other contraband on deck, and on the other side, crowds queuing at the Cunard ticket office, being sold tickets by a skeleton, and the inscription 'business above everything'.

The medal had a limited production in Germany, but examples soon found their way to Great Britain, where Selfridges, in co-operation with the Ministry of Information, produced cast iron replicas which were sold in a cardboard box, with a propaganda leaflet, for one shilling each, the profits to go to war charities. It is believed that 250,000 examples may have been issued.

Was the *Lucitania* carrying weapons? The answer is 'yes' and 'no'. The cargo lists indicated that large quantities of cartridge cases and shrapnel shell cases were in the holds. Not weapons in themselves, perhaps, but essential components of weapons.



The *Lucitania* medal

GETTING REALLY HAMMERED

Alan Dawson

In medieval silver coinage a 'pair' of dies usually consisted of one obverse and up to three reverse dies. It used to be thought that the reason for this was that the reverse (the 'trussel') was hand held and received the hammer blow; thereby wearing out quicker than the obverse die (the 'pile') which was usually mounted in a wooden block to absorb the shock. However, recent research by experimental moneyer David Greenhalgh has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case. Repeated hammer blows to the top of the trussel cause the iron to spread, like a mushroom. Over time, this mushroom expands and the shaft of the trussel becomes increasingly shorter, until it is impossible to firmly grip. In consequence, the reverse die becomes *unusable* rather than excessively worn and has to be replaced more frequently. Experimental numismatics, like experimental archaeology, can frequently offer sound answers to queries that would otherwise be left to speculation.



Dies for Edward I coins (c.1278-1307)

'America sure is having a run of bad luck at the moment – It's almost as if it was built on an ancient Indian burial ground.'

A HIDDEN TALENT

Some people really do hide the light of their talents. Our long time member David Lythgoe is known to most of us for his interest in Wigan related paranumismatica and Russian coins. What is not generally known is that David is also a published poet of some renown. In 2003 he won first prize in a prestigious poetry competition organized by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Swan Hellenic*. The competition, which was to find the best poem under the title of 'discovery' was judged by no lesser person than Andrew Motion, the then Poet Laureate. David's chosen prize was a two-week cruise around the coast of the Black Sea – as he thought this would enable him to practice and brush up his Russian language! A man of many talents. David has written the poem below to give a different take on the current crisis affecting us all.

Coronavirus by David Lythgoe

*Deserted streets and empty roads
are silent now except for symphonies
of song from birds that haven't heard
about the need for distancing.
They congregate around the feeders that I fill.
They wait impatiently to jump the queue.
They squabble hungrily. Their only care is food.
Blue Tits snatch a morsel, race for refuge,
wait a moment, then return
to take their chance with life or death.
Unseen beyond my garden fence
the hunting sparrow hawk will choose.*

COIN QUIZ No.4

QUESTION 1. Why is a James I gold 'Unite' so called?

QUESTION 2. What is meant by the term 'sweating' gold coins?

QUESTION 3. The term 'Sexagesimal' refers to what system of coinage?

QUESTION 4. What family firm dominated the making of the famous Neuemburg jettons in the late medieval period?

QUESTION 5. The nickname 'owls' was synonymous with Athenian coins. So what were 'archers'?

ANSWERS (Quiz No.3)

Q1. *Castle Rising (Norfolk) mint. One of the rarest of all Norman mints.*

Q2. *The halfcrown was finally demonetised in 1970, ahead of decimalisation. The metal retrieved was used to mint 50p pieces.*

Q3. *COMOB is an abbreviation of two words; COM (Comes monetarius) and OB (Obryziacum) meaning 'pure gold'. By comparison the word CONOB stands for an issue of the Constantinople mint.*

Q4. *A small silver coin introduced by Constantine I, so called from being one-thousandth of a pound of gold (a double siliqua or one-twelfth of a gold solidus).*

Q5. *The money generated from this tax was used to pay for the Great Re-Coinage of 1695/6*

Q6A. *Cromwell crown, with characteristic obverse die-flaw.*

Q6B. *James II 'Gunmoney' shilling with a decorated J and R either side of the crown.*

Q6C. *Henry VIII testoon of his third coinage, the ravages of his lifestyle clearly shown in his bloated and aging face.*

Q6D. *Port of Ostia (Port of Rome) reverse on a setertius of Claudius. The same reverse type was also used by Nero.*



QUESTION 6.

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



USELESS COIN FACTS No.4

Yap, one of the South Pacific Caroline Islands, until quite recently still had a native currency of Cowry shells. The capital wealth of the island was reckoned in 'Fei' being a curious relic of the Stone Age. These are enormous cut discs of limestone, each with a central piercing, resembling mill-stones. The smallest is about 6 inches in diameter, whereas the largest is 12 feet across and weighs nearly 5 tonnes. However, they are not hewn from local quarries, but come from the Pelew Islands 200 miles away

NEW EVIDENCE CONCERNING THE KNOWSLEY COIN ACCUMULATION

The ongoing saga of finding the source of Lord Derby's Knowsley Hall Coin Accumulation has just taken on an unexpected twist. Lord Derby recently received a letter from a Mr. Owen Taylor, a local amateur historian, stating that many years ago he interviewed a 102 year-old lady who remembered that in 1874 a small number of Roman coins were found when workmen were clearing a well at Brow Farm (now Stanley Farm) Bickerstaffe. The coins were duly taken to Knowsley Hall and presented to the 15th Earl of Derby. What happened to these coins is anyone's guess, but in an insurance inventory of 1926 'some coins' were valued at just £10, including a mahogany cabinet. They could well form part of the accumulation.

WHEN IS A PROOF NOT A PROOF?

Chris Leather

The coins which we regard as being of Queen Victoria's Jubilee issue of 1887 had been in train since 1879, and resulted from a general dissatisfaction with the existing young head designs. After much agonising and trialling, a portrait by Joseph Edgar Boehm was adopted, with a most curious miniature crown sitting precariously on the Queen's head. The design was widely ridiculed, and lasted only six years before being replaced by the Old Head.

Irrespective of the quality of the design, the Royal Mint had decided to produce sets of proof coins, both in silver and gold, with the Jubilee designs. The coins they produced are of the highest possible technical quality, and are obviously the result of the most careful preparation and manufacture. However, the Mint had little recent history of producing proofs, and it may well be that they required a little practice beforehand.

The Jubilee sovereigns for circulation were all produced between 4th and 28th June 1887, and the results showed up problems with the positioning of the bust and the legend on the obverse. These were changed slightly for subsequent years and also, significantly, for the 1887 dated proofs. The changes, though minor, are immediately obvious to the naked eye and cannot be mistaken, even on worn coins. The use of the second obverse for the proofs suggest that these were produced after the circulation strikes, which may help to explain the existence of a few coins, struck to circulation standards with the first obverse, but with proof-like mirrored fields, obverse and reverse, quite unlike the usual matt finish to normal circulation strikes. These give the coins something of the appearance of proof coins. I have sent one of these from my collection to the Royal Mint for clarification. They confirm the coin is genuine, that they had seen a similar die-identical example in 1984, and concluded that the polished fields represented 'something which was happening that year which we do not yet fully understand.'

My theory is that these proof-like polished dies were in the character of practice pieces for the workmen who went on to produce the superlative dies for the actual proofs. There is, at present, no proof (!) of this theory, but there is evidence of the care taken with the production of the 1887 coins: the gold used contained a proportion of silver, replacing some copper in the alloy, to give better striking qualities, and some 33% of all the 1887 London sovereigns struck were rejected as being sub-standard. Proof enough?

A LETTER FROM OUR CHAIRMAN. . . .

David Regan

Hello to all club members and their families. I hope you are all keeping well, catching up on those jobs that you have been promising to do for months and enjoying the newsletters. A big thankyou to the members who have contributed interesting and thought provoking articles and quizzes to keep our brains functioning. I am back at work now and dealing with collectors suffering withdrawal symptoms and others needing to sell items due to cash shortages. Fortunately for me the bullion market is at an all time high so I have been keeping very busy. My brain has been kept in gear thanks to buying a big Roman collection in the first lockdown week. I do hope that it will not be too long until we can all meet up again but we must all be patient.

'There is going to be a new 50p coin commemorating Brexit. It's nearly ready, they just can't decide what to do with the border'

FIRST DATED COINS

Chris Leather

Throughout history, man has needed dating systems to refer to particular years. The means chosen to do this have varied according to custom and practice. In Ancient Rome, for example, a common method was to quote the number of the year since the foundation of the city – a base which we now express as 753BC. Often, in England as in other societies, dates were only really needed for official and legal purposes, and the regnal year of the current monarch usually sufficed. A trace of this system operates in the UK to this day, with commissions and other documents being dated ‘In the Xth year of Our Reign.’

With the growth and spread of Christianity, the practice grew of referring to the year by reference to the birth of Christ, the Anno Domini, or Year of Our Lord. This started in 525AD with Dionysius Exiguus of Scythia Minor, and became more widespread following its use to date events in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, by Bede, completed in 731AD.

The first known coin to be dated with Anno Domini was issued by the Bishop of Roskilde, in Denmark, and bears the legend ‘Anno Domini MCCXXXIII’ or ‘the year of Our Lord 1234.’

English coins did not bear, or even need, AD dates, however, as control of the Mint was exercised using the periods between successive Trials of the Pyx; at each Trial, the fineness and weights of the coinage were tested against the fixed standards, and all of the coins struck in one period carried an identifiable privy mark. It was all that was needed.

By the fifteenth century, however, more European coinage carried dates; the starter for this period is often ascribed to the Hungarian silver denars, about the size of an English penny, dated from around 1450.



Edward VI shilling dated XLIX (1549) on the reverse

The first coins issued from the Royal Mint with anything like a date were the later issues of sixpenny groat struck for Ireland by Henry VIII. Some of these included the numbers 37 and 38 in the King’s titles, being Henry’s regnal years for 1545 and 1546.

It is to Edward VI, however, that the honours go for the introduction of ‘real’ dates. The coinage history of Edward’s reign is quite complex and interesting, with his first issues continuing the heavily-debased coins of Henry VIII, even to the extent of retaining Henry’s name and titles. The new King, though only a boy, took a significant interest in his coinage as his ministers struggled with the ways to repair the damage done by Henry’s debasements. It may seem counter-intuitive, but the method finally chosen was to issue even-more-debased coins in order to generate the profit needed to pay for a restoration of standards but, in the event, it worked. Greatly debased shillings were issued in 50% silver bearing the dates MDXLIX (1549) MDL (1550) and then, for a brief period, in 25% silver dated MDLI (1551)

As is well known, the fine silver halfcrowns and crowns issued as part of the restoration of standards were dated 1551 onwards, and it is from then that the dates we would recognise formed a regular part of coin design, though it was not until the machine made coins of Charles II that all coins were dated.

GLASGOW AND BEXLEY NUMISMATIC SOCIETIES CLOSE DOWN

Sadly, both the Glasgow & West of Scotland Numismatic Society and the Bexley in Kent Coin Club have announced that they are closing down for good. A recent decline in membership and a lack of interest seem to be the main reasons for their demise. Both societies were formed over fifty years ago and were leading lights in their heyday.

Prediction:
If lockdown continues, in eight weeks time 88% of all ‘blondes’ will disappear from Earth

BACKYARD DIGGERS

David Lythgoe

An article in the *Daily Telegraph* dated Monday July 20th recorded that an unexpected consequence of the lockdown has been the number of small finds being reported under the British Museum’s portable antiquities scheme. The find of an Edward III groat in a garden in Stoke-on-Trent, in turn has prompted a couple of letters to the paper. On Tuesday, a correspondent reported that in the Sixties a London bus fare was increased from threepence to fourpence and there was a call to reintroduce the groat. The BBC decided to see if a groat would be acceptable and sent a reporter with a Victorian groat to try it out. The conductor who took the fare looked at it and told the reporter ‘I’m a coin collector. I’ll keep this and pay your fare.’ The reporter had to go back and tell the BBC that he’d lost their groat.

On Wednesday, a correspondent wrote in to say that in his youth, while waiting to begin his paper round a boy entered the shop with a single coin wanting four penny lollies. The newsagent told him that he didn’t have enough but the boy insisted that his mother had told him that he had. Closer examination convinced the newsagent that it was a groat and not a silver threepence as he had at first thought.

Although I live within three miles of the site of Lathom House I haven’t even come up with a musket ball!

NEW ANGLO-SAXON MINT DISCOVERED

Alan Dawson

The discovery of a new mint town from any period in history has to be of major significance. The town of Louth in north Lincolnshire had long been suspected as a possible site for a late Anglo-Saxon mint, but hard evidence, either in documentary form or coins had never been found. That is until recently. In 2017 a detectorist in Suffolk discovered a hoard of 99 eleventh century coins, which were duly declared as treasure trove, then sent to the British Museum under the rules of the 1974 Treasure Act. The hoard comprised specimens from the reign of Aethelred II (978-1016) most of which were in almost ‘as struck’ condition. The hoard could be due to Viking raides, which had forced the King to pay tribute in the form of ‘Danegeld’ in an attempt to stop the attacks, but without much success.

It is also suggested that the hoard, buried around the year AD. 999, could have been formed by a pilgrim making penitence, due to worries about the impending apocalypse of the first millennium. Amongst the 99 silver pennies in the find were coins from two extremely rare mints; the first being Melton Mowbray and the second was a previously undiscovered mint based in the town of Louth, Lincolnshire.



Aethelred II penny of Louth mint

Louth had been a ‘burgh’ or fortified settlement in the tenth century, with a church containing the remains of St. Herefrith, so it certainly qualified as a regional place to strike the King’s money. At this time over 86 mints were operating around the country, employing hundreds of moneyers to make the coins.

After the authorities had selected certain specimens to be retained for museums the remainder of the hoard was disclaimed and returned to the finder. It ended up being sold by DNW auctioneers in London for over £90,000 in total. Two of the four coins minted at Louth (two were retained by the British Museum) were sold for £10,540 and £6,820 respectively, which was well above the pre-sale estimates. Proceeds of the sale have been split equally between the finder and the landowner.

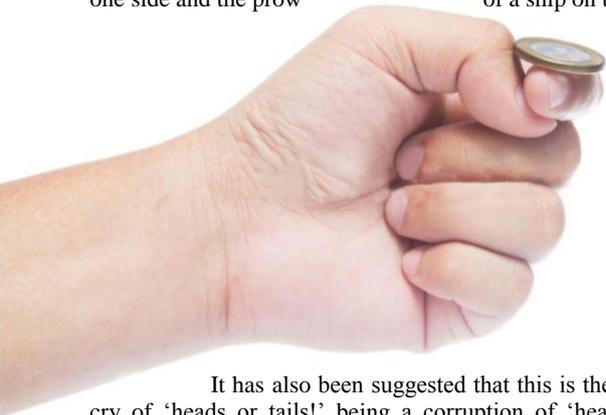
The Louth pennies, which are of Aethelred II’s ‘Cruz’ type, show a profile image of a king surrounded by the legend EDELRED REX ANGLO (Aethelred, King of the English) The reverse of the coin has the letters C. R. V. X. in the quarters of a voided cross, surrounded by the legend DRENG MO LVDE (moneyer Dreng, working at Louth) The ‘D’ (with a bar through it) in both the king’s title and the mint name, is the Saxon letter ‘eth’ which was pronounced ‘th’. An extremely rare mint, and not one to be found in most collections – until the next discovery?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 'COIN FLIP'

Alan Dawson

We've all done it at some time or another – that is, flip a coin in the air to make a decision or settle an argument. The practice of throwing or flipping a coin in the air, then checking which side is showing when it lands, is almost as old as coinage itself.

The interpretation of the 'coin flip' was seen in the ancient past as an expression of divine will, a result which could not be challenged. The action gives a choice of only two alternatives, that is 'heads or tails', the cry for each being made when the coin is actually airborne. Like most things the 'cry' has changed over the centuries. There is no mention of the practice in Ancient Greece, which is somewhat understandable as the earliest coins were more globular than disc shaped, making the flip and subsequent spin rather difficult. In Roman Times the coin flip was commonplace in either settling disputes or making a random decision. Roman coins, especially copper, were ideal for the practice. It was known to the Roman world as *Navia aut Caput* ('ship or head') as the early bronze asses features the head of Janus on one side and the prow of a ship on the reverse.



It has also been suggested that this is the origin of today's cry of 'heads or tails!' being a corruption of 'heads or sails'. This theory is based on the fact that the use of the plural 'heads' could refer to the double-faced head of Janus. A far more likely explanation would be simply anatomical. The head is at the opposite end of the spine to the coccyx, which would be the tail. Hence the well known expression describing confusion '... I could make neither head nor tail of it... '.

In Australia the coin flip has evolved into a gambling game of chance called 'two-up'. This involves placing two Australian bronze pennies on a flat board then flipping them in the air. The basic outcome is the same except the use of two coins gives rise to a complexity of different results. The game was so popular during both the World Wars that the authorities tried to ban it, as soldiers were losing all their pay to the addiction of a game of chance. But is it really a game of chance? Recent scientific research has shown otherwise. How the coin or coins land is largely down to the relief image on either side; the heavier the relief gives more chance of the other side being the uppermost when it lands, a bit like weighted dice. However this has not stopped people choosing the coin flip to make major decisions in many aspects of life and especially in international sporting events.

MINT STATE PROTECTION

Toward the end of March the Royal Mint began mass manufacturing of medical visors, exclusively for the NHS to help address the immediate shortfall of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The mint is now producing over 5,000 medical visors a day at the facility in Llantrisant. The Mint answered the Government's appeal for help with PPE and quickly turned the visitors' café into a dedicated production area. Within seven hours their engineers had designed a visor and within 48 hours it was ready for mass manufacture.



WHERE ARE THEY?

According to the Royal Mint there were about 1.7 billion round £1 coins in circulation before they were officially demonetized in October 2017. They were replaced by the new 12-sided bi-metallic issue, which was designed to be harder to counterfeit. However, an estimated 131 million old pound coins have yet to be returned to the mint! So, where are they?



'Are overworked employees at the Royal Mint the only people likely to strike because they want to make less money?'

AN EXCESSIVE RARITY

Graham Jones

Described as 'amongst the most attractive in the whole English coinage' (Stewartby, 2009) and '...an excessively rare coin of national importance' the gold half Florin or 'Helm' of Edward III certainly commands much acclaim for a coin that was struck in 1344. It was struck between January and July that year, and was almost immediately withdrawn and condemned to the melting pot. The consensus view for the withdrawal was that the coins were overvalued in relation to silver, and the King's profit or seignorage of £1 per lb weight was too large and they were not acceptable in trade. The other gold coins of the Florin series, the *Double Florin* or *Leopard*, valued at 6/-, and the *Leopard*, 3/- (the Helm being 1/6d) were also failed attempts to produce a suitable gold coinage equivalent to French and Italian gold coins in use at the time.

Britain had not had any gold coinage in circulation since the failed gold pennies of Henry III. But why were these gold coins struck in the first place? There are a few reasons which may hint at an explanation. Edward's alliances had proved costly and by the 1340s he was nearly bankrupt, indeed he defaulted on a massive 1.365 million Florentine florins loan, ruining the bankers.



Edward III gold helm

Edward's credit worthiness with continental bankers would certainly have been suspect and reliance on foreign specie dubious. Did he keep the defaulted loan to fund his own coinage, effectively laundering the cash? The appointment of Bishop William Edington who, as Treasurer of the Exchequer, (1344-56) turned Edward from an embarrassed bankrupt into a wealthy man. This may have been a further impetus for the gold coin issue. Also in 1344-5 Edward was preparing a major offensive into France. The Earls of Derby and Northampton were sent with forces to Aquitaine and Brittany, requiring a more reliable source of funds to finance the expeditionary force.

There again, there may have been a more esoteric reason for the Florin production. In 1344 Edward held the great Arthurian-themed Windsor jousting tournament involving over 200 knights and the Helm, in particular, which has been described as 'the high water mark in gothic design' contains all the elements of the chivalric code that were meant to impress the attendees. Certainly the Helm would have raised a few eyebrows, as it was the first time the fleur-de-lis had appeared on the obverse of an English coin. This clearly stated Edward's claim, via his mother, to the French throne. Whatever the reasons for its issue the Florin series, soon replaced by the Noble series, remains excessively rare, enigmatic and worthy of further research.

Hopefully, this fourth issue of 'Lockdown Newsletter' has again hit the right note. This month's contributions are quite a mixed bag coupled with more numismatic news items and, of course, a sprinkling of humour throughout. *Until the next issue keep well and keep safe.*