



VOLUME 13



JOURNAL OF THE
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA INC.

<http://naa-online.com/>

President's Report

International Perspective

Twelve months ago the NAA faced three major challenges; income to support our projects, Museum Victoria's down-grading of its numismatic collection and maintaining our annual journal. These challenges coupled with giving evidence at a South Australian Parliamentary Works Committee Hearing, meant that the council faced a very busy schedule indeed.

I would like to thank all council members for their support over the past year. The results outlined in this report are a direct result of their collective support.

Sponsorships

Council looked at ways we could best raise funds and came up with the concept of sponsorship. We wanted all dealers and issuing authorities to be given the opportunity to participate and offer them something in return over and above just advertising space. We came up with the idea of a three tiered sponsorship system where we offer potential sponsors exposure through our journal and website. We also offer them sponsorship certificates and copies of our journal. The sponsorships are linked to our journal and cover an initial three-issue period. To date three dealers have agreed to be sponsors: Noble Numismatics (gold), The Rare Coin Company and Max Stern (both bronze).

Parliamentary Hearing

The Old SA Treasury building, where in the 1850s Adelaide Pounds and Ingots were made, was handed over on a 99 year basis to developers to convert to a hotel. Due to a public outcry, the SA government which owns the building held an open hearing into the granting of the lease, to see if correct process had been followed in granting the lease. Along with the issue of the lease the historical importance of the building was raised. This is where the NAA and the Numismatic Society of South Australia were able to inform the hearing of the significance of the building to the State's economy and its numismatic history and thus extremely important heritage.

Museum Victoria

Our Association was very concerned with the museum's change of policy, which saw the departure of its numismatist as well as denying the public and numismatic scholars future unrestricted access to the numismatic collection. John Hope headed our sub-committee which consisted of John Chapman, Alan Flint, Gerhard Reimann-Basch and John Sharples. These members were conveniently located in Melbourne but as well, they brought a wide range of invaluable expertise to the various meetings. The sub-committee held meetings with the museum executive with positive results—the museum now has a consultant numismatist and we have some access to the

collection.

I thank John Hope for keeping me informed of the proceedings and seeking my thoughts on the various issues that arose from the sub-committee. All numismatists who in the future visit the Victorian museum numismatic collection can thank John Hope and his team for the effort they put in to facilitate access to the collection by collectors and researchers alike.

Overseas Tour

Late 2001 (after September 11) I visited major museums in America, England and Europe as a fact finding mission relating to the concerns the NAA had with the downgrading of the numismatic collection of Museum Victoria. As well, I was able to pursue my personal numismatic research.

Bishop Museum

My first stop-over was Hawaii. I made preliminary enquires as to what they have in the way of exploration medals as the Bishop Museum in Hawaii is the leading institution for Pacific Island research. The curator informed me that they had little in the way of these medals, only a bronze Royal Society Capt. Cook Medal and the fee to see it was US\$30 (approximately \$60 Australian). This fee was to cover their overheads and research and should they stand to gain from this viewing they would consider reducing or even waiving this fee. I decided against proceeding with the viewing, since I already possess an example in my own collection anyway. I must admit I was taken a-back by the fee. Having said that I visited the museum as a paying member of the public and was pleasantly surprised to see what they had on display. I found an important

collection of early ethnographic and tribal artefacts. The museum had one numismatic item—a large stone currency wheel from the Pacific island of Yap. The display cabinets were old, and possibly originally from the establishment of the museum c.1880s. I must say I found the cabinets appropriately attractive—they seemed more compatible with the exhibits than modern hi-tech display cases.

Smithsonian

The *Smithsonian Institution Museum* is in fact a series of about 12 specialist museums in and around Washington. Whilst they are all large they are not overpowering in size, thus allowing the visitor the chance to focus on the individual exhibits. What I mean by that is that if the buildings were very large, there would be a tendency to rush through the museum without actually looking at anything in detail with a relaxed mind, making the whole exercise something of a waste of time. The numismatic collection is housed in the *American Building* and holds the largest public numismatic collection in the USA. The public displays are arranged according to thirty nine individual themes which reflect the development of world coinage and in particular American numismatic history—for example *The First Coins*, *Indian Peace Medals* and *Paper Currencies of the World*.

Also in these ‘hallowed’ coin rooms is an exhibition of photographic portraits of eminent numismatists and people associated with coins and medals including the well-known scientist Isaac Newton, who was at one time mintmaster of the Royal Mint in London, Queen Christina of Sweden (collector), and Harold Mattingly (once Keeper of Coins at the British Museum).



Dr Doty with author left

The specimens are displayed close to the cabinet glass and mounted on boards that are upright and well lit, making them easy to view. The coins are attached to backing boards by museum wax and I was informed that this wax would have no detrimental effect on the surface of the coins. The museum lighting was of the type that did not emit UV rays and was therefore deemed 'safe'.

After viewing this monumental collection I concluded that the Smithsonian numismatic cabinet must be one of the wonders of the modern numismatic world. I was able to spend a few hours with its head curator, Dr Richard Doty, who showed me around a series of coin rooms and offices that housed the balance of the collection. Dr Doty unlocked the Australian cabinet and this enabled me to view some great rarities; a 1/- (one shilling) McIntosh & Degraeves token struck in white metal (4.737gm), Port Phillip gold 2 ounce & 1/2 ounce pieces, and an 1857 proof Sydney Mint sovereign.

Dr Doty is president of ICOMON (International Committee of Money and Banking Museums—see NAA special publication 2) and is actively interested in the role muse-

ums play in society and in particular in recent developments at Museum Victoria. He strongly supports our cause and was pleased to be shown details of our submission to the Museum Board. Dr Doty is concerned with museums being turned into 'theme parks' and thus devaluing and even ignoring important and irreplaceable collections that have taken a hundred years or more to build up.

As with museums the world over, the Smithsonian is constantly on the lookout for needed funds. Dr Doty tells of one story where a particularly astute past curator convinced the Federal Court to pass on to the Smithsonian a large quantity of 'pieces of eight' confiscated from a group of convicted smugglers. This windfall enabled the Smithsonian to gradually sell off much of this hoard to fund needed purchases.

After devoting a whole afternoon showing and explaining this major collection to me, Dr Doty signed up as a member of the NAA and even agreed to write an article for the NAA Journal, which he did and which appears elsewhere in this issue.

British Museum

The public 'money room' impressed me with its very well lit cabinets. The excellent lighting and easy-to-read labelling helped to enhance the choice and rare specimens in them. Greek, Roman, Byzantine, hammered, and tribal currency were just some of the display themes. Also in the room were two volunteers (not always numismatists) who allowed members of the public to handle selected ancient, medieval, and tribal items and provided background information on the pieces.

Coins and medals are extensively used in other areas of the museum to enhance the



The British Museum public coin gallery

subject on display. For example, alongside a Roman marble bust of an emperor, coins of the emperor depicting his head are used for likeness comparison.

Having pre-arranged a visit to the museum's numismatic research facilities I entered the inner vaults of their collection. David, the overseer of the numismatic study room remarkably remembered my name from my visits to the museum in 1968. It seems that David's former superior, conservator Keith Howes who retired ten years ago, had often spoken of me (favourably, I am told). Keith and I first met when we attended a numismatic symposium near Oxford. At that time I was working at Harrod's coin department and they gave me time off to visit the BM. Keith told me that since his retirement he had spent time in Athens helping with the conservation of the Greek national numismatic collection.

In the study room I saw about 450 love tokens (items that are close to my heart), most of which had been acquired through a *swap* dating back to 1953. The swap items at one time belonged to Mrs Ella Pierrepont Barnard and her collection was catalogued in the *British Numismatic Journal* in 1918.

The collection was sold some years later and about half of it is now in the BM collection. The remainder was widely dispersed. By good fortune I managed to acquire a convict love token from the Barnard collection; knowing this fact made the museum collection infinitely more personal to me. My token, (BNJ, 1918, no. 305) is illustrated in colour in *Convict Love Tokens* (NAA Special Publication 1, the Brownhill token). Another exciting discovery at the museum was a love token engraved on a half crown of George II for a John Nash, born at Baintree Essex in 1753. The reason for my excitement is that I also have in my collection a similar piece done by the same hand for his sister, Mary Nash.

I was permitted to handle the love tokens with my bare hands and when I asked to see the exploration medals (another pet interest of mine), I had to wear latex gloves, which in truth made handling difficult for me.

Ashmolean Museum

The Ashmolean Museum was established in 1683 in a building similar to that of the British Museum but smaller. The public numismatic room is an intimate space (about 40 x 50 feet) filled with great rarities in superb condition.

An enlarged photo image accompanied each coin so one could readily appreciate the art work of the coiner. To draw attention to certain parts such as mint marks, an enlarged photo in the shape of a cone points to the particular spot on the coin. The public can then easily identify the special feature being presented. Regretfully time did not permit me to see the numismatic study room.

Walking around the Ashmolean rooms was a very exciting experience for me. In par-



Sylvie de Turckheim-Pey holding up two exploration medals



Jean-Luc Desnier in his study

ticular I enjoyed the room that displayed English Delftware and I immediately bought some books on that subject. My visit had exposed me to some wonderful subject areas that offered me scope for further research. That night I could not sleep as I was thinking about all the things I had seen in the museum.

Bibliothèque Nationale

The national numismatic collection in France is housed in the national library. On public display was a wide cross section of predominantly ancient numismatic specimens.

In the study room is an exceptionally rare (and to me, up to that moment, unknown) gold La Perouse exploration medal (king's bust type). The medal had been acquired back in the late 1800s from an unknown source.

The numismatic library is held in the coin room and thus is readily accessible to anyone examining the coins or medals. During my visit, the numismatic curator Sylvie de Turckheim-Pey arranged for me to also see

the Paris Mint.

Le Musée De La Monnaie

The numismatic museum was established within the Paris Mint in the late 1980s. This collection is large and is spread over several floors. Many of the coins are displayed in hanging perspex mounts which allows them to be viewed on both sides (3 sheets are sandwiched together with the centre sheet holed to fit the coins). Also on display are about a dozen medieval dies. The museum also displayed a mid 19th century engraver's table and tools along with a painting of an engraver.

The curator of medals, Jean-Luc Desnier, showed me the museum's study room and took me to the die room where literally thousands of dies are kept. I was privileged to be able to inspect a number of the exploration medal dies.

Summary

The major museums I visited all have full-time numismatic curators who welcome

visitors and scholars alike. Considerable effort is obviously made by them to educate the public through effective displays using the genuine numismatic article.

Australian museums have worthwhile and historically important numismatic collections. We also have world standard numismatic curators; eg Dr Walter Bloom, Paul Donnelly, Roger McNeice, John Sharples and Dr Kenneth Sheedy. Using such resources we have the potential to setup numismatic museums that can both attract, educate as well as provide serious research opportunities. Such museum establishments would put us at least on equal footing with the rest of the world if not surpass existing standards, something Australia in the past has tended to do in many areas.

Peter Lane