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William Gale 1934–2007

Founder of the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies



Dr William L. Gale died in Sydney in February 2007. He was one of the most important figures in the history of the study of numismatics in Australia. In 1999 Macquarie University accepted his offer to fund the first research centre in the country to be dedicated to the study of ancient numismatics. In order to ensure the success of this centre he also lent (and donated after his death) his world class collection of ancient coins. The Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS) is now one of the leading centres in Australia for the study of ancient history. It has an international reputation

for its research, its publications, and its teaching.

Bill Gale was born and grew up in Coogee, Sydney. After an Arts and Law degree at the University of Sydney he worked in law and then decided to join his father in building and managing home units. He married Janet Blake in 1973. The success of his business interests allowed Bill to retire early and devote himself to his real passion, the study of ancient history. In 1995 he enrolled in an Arts degree at Macquarie University. He stayed with Macquarie's Department of Ancient History, eventually submitting

his doctoral thesis, 'Procedure in the Roman Republic Senate', in 2005.

Bill began to seriously collect ancient coins in the 1970s. He determined on three areas: the Greek cities of South Italy, the Roman Republic, and the Emperor Hadrian. He was extremely disciplined in this—and rarely bought a coin that did not fall into these three categories (though at one point he decided he should have a separate collection of one coin from all Roman emperors to assist with his studies). He and Janet travelled widely throughout the Mediterranean but they were especially keen to explore Italy. His fine collection of South Italian coins (some 1,267) benefited from his extensive knowledge of the towns in this region. He once told me that he considered the coins of Sicily, in contrast, to be overpriced, and never wished to buy one. In 1995 he privately published his one book on numismatics, *The Sacred Tripod. Kroton and Its Coins*. This little volume presented a catalogue of the Kroton coins in his own collection; it was, as he notes in the introduction, 'a labour of love'. His collection of Roman Republican coins undoubtedly received further impetus from his studies at Macquarie University (his teachers, Tom Hillard and Lea Berness, were later to act as supervisors for his doctorate). The emperor Hadrian was a personal hero of Bill's and he used the coins to explore the many aspects of this ruler's complex history. These collections, over two and a half thousand coins, were bequeathed to Macquarie University in his will.

both Bill and Janet served on the Centre's board. They took a keen interest in its progress. Bill had a vision of a centre that would allow students of ancient history to employ ancient coins as a key part of their study and research strategies. The collection and exhibition of ancient coins were not to be the ultimate goals. He wanted the centre to facilitate the study of numismatics by students (mostly from Macquarie) and scholars who would otherwise have to travel overseas to find the same opportunities. Today ACANS offers an annual senior research position, two junior fellowships, and an MA unit in Numismatics that is open to all post graduate students.

The research program of ACANS was one of Bill's key concerns. He was pleased when ACANS was able to launch the Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Australia project that would endeavour to see to the publication of all ancient Greek coins in Australian public collections. The very first of these volumes, which will publish the Gale collection of South Italian coins, is now in preparation.

Despite all his ambitions for the study of numismatics in Australia, Bill Gale was a very modest man. He was rarely given to talking about his collections or his donations. Aside from his academic studies, he perhaps got most enjoyment out of attending public lectures organised by ACANS at which the latest research was unveiled. He liked to meet the visiting scholars. But he usually tried to avoid the regular public acknowledgement of his generosity which made these events possible.

Following the establishment of ACANS

He and his wife Janet were also

important donors to the Museum of Ancient Cultures and have given many fine objects to its collection. They have been strong supporters of the university library. More recently Bill and Janet saw to the establishment of a series of traveling scholarships for Macquarie University students of ancient history; the most important of these provides for the residence of a graduate at the British School in Rome.

Bill is survived by Janet, who remains an active member of the ACANS board.

Kenneth Sheedy