

History of the Bedford Numismatic Society (1966-1986)⁽¹⁾

G.E. Dawson[†]

The first meeting of the present society took place on 26th October 1966 when the formal decision “. . . to found a numismatic society . . .” was taken by the five persons assembled. D. Issitt was elected as the first chairman with D.J. Gaunt as Honorary Secretary and M. Davis as Honorary Treasurer, however, the latter person resigned early in 1967 and was succeeded by B. Jones. The meeting resulted from the efforts of local draper T.A. Daley and was held in his shop at 40 Greyfriars, Bedford (until recently Hatters Garden Centre). The subscription rates were fixed at 10/- (50p) for adults and 5/- (25p) for juniors but amended two months later to include an extra 1/- (5p) per member affiliation fee to BANS. Initially meetings were held every three weeks and were preceded by a business session but subsequently changed to the present system in 1968 although on the third Wednesday of each month.



40 Greyfriars Bedford.⁽²⁾

The first library book, “English Copper, Tin and Bronze Coins in the British Museum, 1558-1958” by C.W. Peck was purchased from funds in February 1967. Members paid a loan fee of 2/- (20p) to help offset the cost and the book had to be returned for each meeting. A copy of Friedberg’s “Coins of the British World” was also bought later in the same year. From this humble beginning the library has grown to the present list of 32 books mainly as a result of donations from members and coin dealers, in particular Messrs Seabys and Stanley Gibbons.

At the first auction on 1st March 1967, 33 lots were offered for sale and realised the sum £19 10s 9d (£19.54) with commission to the society of £2 7s 9d (£2.39). The treasurer, B. Jones reported a credit balance of £17 13s 6d (£17.67) at the first Annual General Meeting held on 27th September 1967. The principal officers were re-elected en bloc and it was noted that the membership stood at 32. Looking back it now seems incredible that in those days of the “change in your pocket” collecting one could obtain bronze coins from 1860 and silver from 1816 literally from change – quite the reverse of today.

Although not a member of the Committee at the time G.E. Dawson suggested the BNS publish a Newsletter. He was appointed Editor and the first issue of “Sovereign” appeared in February 1968 in a Large Post 4to (10”x8” (254x203mm)) side stabbed version consisting of 10 pages. I can recall that these early issues were run off on a hand-operated duplicator in the kitchen of my home.

An open meeting was held on 29th November 1968 in the Guild House to publicise the society. A total of 13 displays were mounted by members ranging in subject matter from Greek coins through Nuremberg tokens, traders tokens, right up to modern issues including the then relatively new decimal coinage. The meeting attracted much interest and in consequence many new members were enrolled.

The year 1968-9 was notable in that the society achieved its highest membership of 74 members, made up of 65 full, 6 part and 3 honorary. In recognition of his invaluable part in founding the society the President, T.A. Daley, was made the first honorary member but unfortunately departed from the area shortly afterwards. He was succeeded as President by A.C. King. Later in the same year the then curator of the Bedford Museum, F.W. Kuhlicke and Alderman R. Turner were also accorded honorary membership. An effect of the enlarged membership was the need for a more permanent, larger venue and in the autumn of 1968 the move was made from 40 Greyfriars to the Guild House in Harpur Street. Apart from a short period at Mander College from October 1970 to June 1971 the society continued to meet at the Guild House until December 1975.

As a complete departure from Numismatics and related subjects the society held a Social Evening and Dinner at the Bedford and County Golf Club, Clapham on 24th April 1970. Tickets were priced at £1 per head. A similar function was arranged the following year to mark the fifth anniversary and was held at the same venue on 12th November 1971, although the cost had risen to £1.25 per ticket! Only one further special function was held, this time at Beadlow Manor, Clophill on 10th April 1973.

Various society coin quizzes were held prior to the 1969-70 session but the then Chairman, D.G. Ayers, generously donated a cup in that year to be awarded annually for this type of competition and the first winner was J.G. Scott. I.J. Kemp likewise presented a cup in 1972 for the display competition but in this instance the initial awards were made retrospective to 1968 when G.E. Dawson won with a display of 17th and 18th Century Tokens.

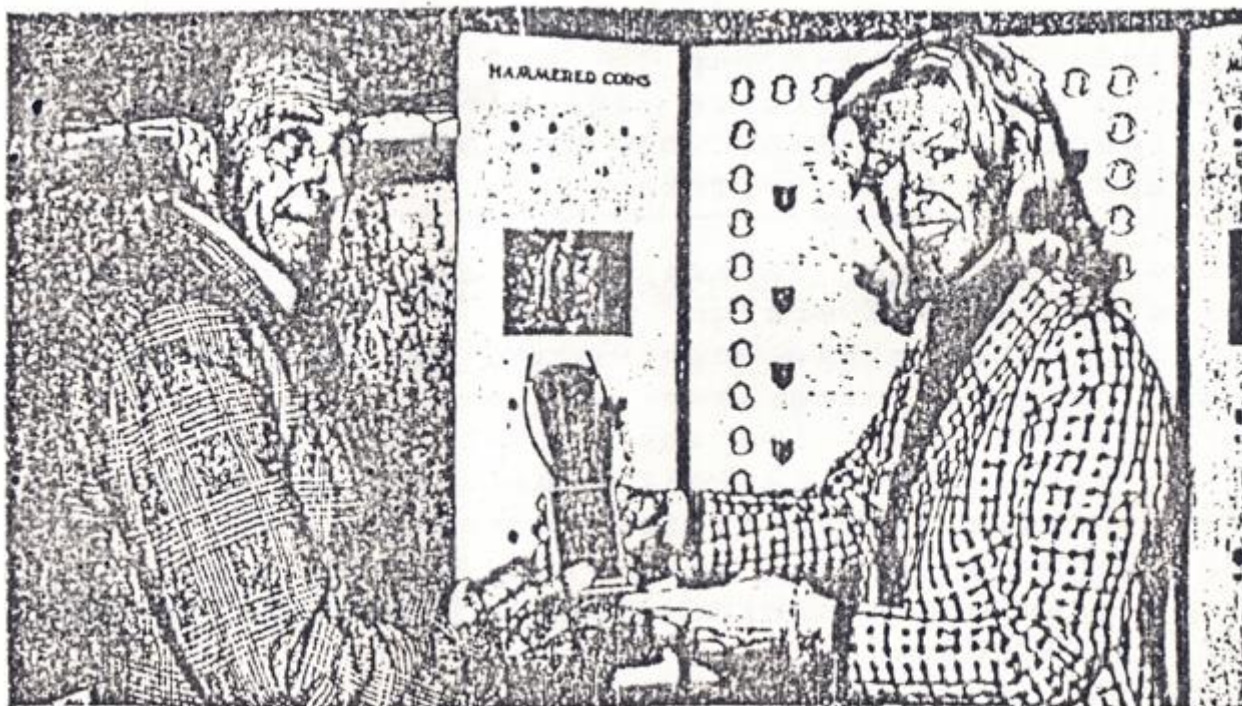
Before 1970 the details of each year's programme were published in "Sovereign" but it was considered that a more handy, pocket-sized card would be more appropriate so the first printed programme card was produced for the 1970-71 year. At the same time the format of "Sovereign" was changed to a single A4 size published quarterly to include short precis notes on future meetings plus other topical items. Subsequently early in 1972 the publication reverted to the previous 4to side-stabbed size and D.A. Humphriss took over as Editor.

By the time of the fifth anniversary the membership had decreased to 43. The subscriptions were raised at the AGM held on 15th September 1971 to £1 for adults and 30p for juniors to offset the anticipated deficit of between £7 to £10 by the end of the 1971-72 financial year.

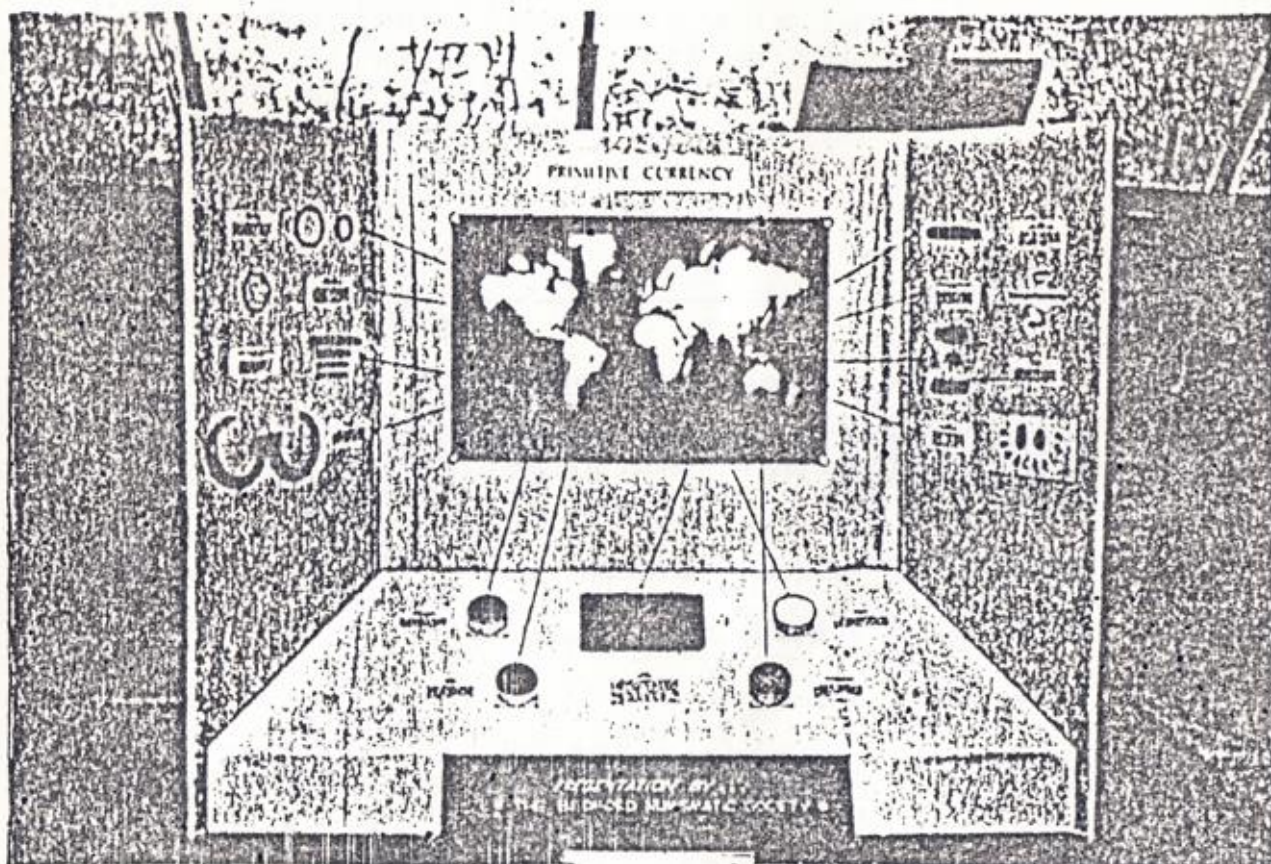
A joint exhibition was mounted with the Bedford Philatelic Society on 16th October 1971 at the Bedford Gallery, Cecil Higgins Museum from 10:30am to 5:30pm. In spite of being a typically wet, drizzly, autumnal day approximately 350 visitors attended. A total of 32 displays were on show, 19 from the society and 13 from the stamp club. Admission was free and a programme of the exhibits was available at a cost of 3p.

National industrial disputes affected the programme in 1973-74. The electricians strike and the implementation of the three day week in December 1973 was followed by the mine workers strike in February 1974. As a result two meetings, those in February and March, were re-arranged and held at the De Parys Hotel as the Guild House was temporarily closed during this period of power restrictions.

The society was invited to participate in an inter society coin display competition organised by the Numismatic Section of the Vauxhall Motors Recreation Club at Luton on 8th June 1974. First prize – the VMRC Numismatic Challenge Cup – was won by the BNS for a display of hammered and milled coins which flanked a mounted collection of medallions showing the monarchs of England and the Royal family tree. Societies from Northampton, Peterborough and Vauxhall also competed. Bedford was successful in the same competition the following year with a display on "Primitive Currency". Regrettably no further competitions were held although as a permanent memento the society was presented with a small inscribed shield.



A.C. King, President of the Bedford Numismatic Society, receives the VMRC Numismatic Challenge Cup from Olive Portsmouth, Editor of Coin Monthly.⁽³⁾



1975 VMRC Display "Primitive Money".⁽³⁾

Once again the format of the "Sovereign" newsletter changed in the autumn of 1974. On this occasion to an A4 side-stabbed version of 14 pages although only three issues were produced in this style and eventually it ceased publication in 1976. C.S. Green was Editor during this period.

The society was forced to change its venue in 1976 as the Guild-House re-let the room without prior notification and so the move was made to the Bunyan Church Meeting Hall in Castle Lane.

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the society in 1976 a very ambitious programme was drawn up consisting of a week of activities in September under the title of "The Bedford Coin Festival" but was subsequently cancelled due to a lack of support and financial resources. However, two events did take place. A coin exhibition was mounted in the Bedford Public Library from 27th August to 27th September. The display illustrated various aspects of basic numismatics together with electrotypes of English coins from the Anglo-Saxon period to George III loaned by Seabys. A combined open meeting and intersociety coin quiz was also held between Bedford, Luton and Northampton on 14th September at the De Parys Hotel. In addition, as a permanent memento of the festival, a silver medallion was to have been struck but only a few specimens were minted in lead. The medallion was designed in the style of a coin of Edward the Martyr c796 by Dr Sellwood. The legend read:-

Obverse EADPEARD . REX . A .
Reverse + BED : NVM : SOC : Mo BE with 1966-1976 between the angles of the cross.⁽⁴⁾



In the tenth year the BNS membership stood at 36 and a credit balance of £12.38 was reported on the accounts. Subscriptions were £150 for full membership, whilst juniors, students and pensioners paid 30p per annum. A notable feature of the membership was the number of juniors which reached the highest figure of six.

A fourth honorary membership was bestowed upon the retiring President, A.C. King, at the 1976 AGM in recognition and appreciation of his valuable work. Mr King was a founder member of the first Bedford Numismatic Society in 1946 and had served the present society for eight years. D.G. Ayers was duly elected to his office in his stead.

Founder Secretary D.J. Gaunt resigned in 1977 after serving for eleven years in that capacity. He has the distinction of being the longest serving member as a principal officer. At the AGM in that year he was elected Vice-Chairman.

Twenty organisations took part in the Silver Jubilee Leisure and Pleasure Exhibition at the Corn Exchange on 22nd and 23rd November 1977. The exhibition was organised by the Queen's Silver Jubilee Appeal Committee to show the wide range of activities available in the town and surrounding areas plus raising funds for the appeal. The society participated in the event with a small stand manned by members during the two days of the function.

As part of the society's need for more promotion the Committee agreed to participate in a Craft Fair organised by the Northamptonshire Youth and Community Service on 2nd July 1978 at Grendon Hall near Northampton. Although no new members were recruited a raffle for a sovereign was held which produced a profit of £8.55 for funds. We continued to support this event each year until 1981 when it was cancelled as part of the local government cutbacks on spending. The move to the present venue, the Mill Hotel, also took place in the 1978-79 year. Two motor rallies at this time were organised by the President, D.G. Ayers, which realised income of £40 for the society and in consequence a deposit account was opened to gain interest.



1977 Silver Jubilee Leisure and Pleasure Exhibition at the Corn Exchange Bedford.⁽³⁾

After a period of three years the Committee decided to resume publication of the “Sovereign” newsletter in the autumn of 1979 but this time in a saddle-stitched A5 format. A new editor, P.J. Blakeman, was appointed and has continued in this position up until the present. Also in the same year D.J. Gaunt achieved the distinction of becoming the first member to accomplish the double in the society’s competitions by winning the Ayers and Kemp cups. In 1979-80 G.E. Dawson repeated this feat and four years later A.J. Brown also won both cups.

The death of honorary member F.W. Kuhlicke occurred on 22nd October 1979. Like Mr King, our former President, Mr Kuhlicke was a member of the original BNS founded after the Second World War. He addressed the society on numerous occasions, the last time being on 2nd February 1977 when he spoke on “Coin Forgeries”. Furthermore he generously loaned items from the museums collections for use in coin displays.

Two outside fund raising activities were undertaken in 1980. The first being the “Leisure Life Weekend” at The Anchor, Tempsford on 30th and 31st August. A coin tombola at this event produced income of £23.24. Through the generosity of B.J. Facey the society shared a stand at the Roxton Traction Engine Rally on 13th and 14th September. Messrs C-Scope donated a metal detector as a raffle prize and the society received 50% of the proceeds (£23.70) whilst the remainder was given to Stoke Mandeville Hospital. During the afternoon some of the members on the stand were covered with smuts when one of the traction engines got up a head of steam! The monies from these events, coupled with the income from the motor rallies, were deposited in a new account, the Special Fund Account in 1983.

Research has proved difficult to make an accurate analysis of membership participation over the last two decades as the Attendance Book only commenced in September 1976. From this source we learn that the highest attendance by members was 24 plus 5 guests at the auction on 4th April 1979. This figure represented 63% of the membership in that year. At the opposite end the lowest figure was just 6 members (21% of the total) at the “Members Numismatic Queries” evening on 3rd December 1980. A total of 30 people were present at the talk

“Medieval Currency Forgeries” given by Miss M. Archibald in December 1981 but only 12 of those were members (42% of the total membership).

Fifteen years on from its foundation the society’s membership stood at 28, made up of 20 full, 5 part and 3 honorary. Assets of £206.26 were reported at the 1981 AGM. The full subscription rate was £3 and the rate for juniors, students and senior citizens £1.

Members competed in a different kind of quiz in 1982 when they played versus the Bedford Philatelic Society at “Call My Bluff”. The quiz was run along the lines of the popular television programme with two teams trying to guess the correct definition of words from the explanations offered applicable to each hobby. Although we won this quiz, the society was defeated in the March of the same year in a coin quiz by the Cambridge Numismatic Society. However the following month the BNS was successful in winning the inter society quiz at Northampton.

A sad event that occurred in September 1982 was the death of honorary member R. Turner just two months short of his 101st birthday. As the last two aforementioned honorary members Alderman Turner was also a member of the first Bedford Numismatic Society. An acknowledged expert and collector of coin weights he spoke to the society on “Some Coins in My Collection” on 6th October 1976 when he was 94 years old.

For the second year running, Bedford won the inter society quiz by beating teams from Banbury, Leicester, Mid Northants, and Northampton Numismatic Societies in 18th April 1983. The competition first started in 1981 when we were runners up to Banbury, but by 1983 was a more permanent affair with a trophy, the Inter-Society Quiz Challenge Shield, being contested annually. The BNS scored a further win the following year.

The membership increased slightly in 1985, albeit by only one, to 25. This was the first occasion that this had occurred since 1978 and in view of the state of other numismatic societies, represented a relatively healthy position. Unfortunately the overall downwards trend has continued this year as the present total is 23 members, consisting of 17 full, 4 part and 2 honorary.

After an interval of one year the society regained the inter society quiz title this year. Bedford won with a score of 40 points compared to their nearest rivals score of 25 points. The team consisted of D.J. Gaunt (Captain), A.J. Brown, G.E. Dawson and P. Russell with R.A. Quince as reserve.

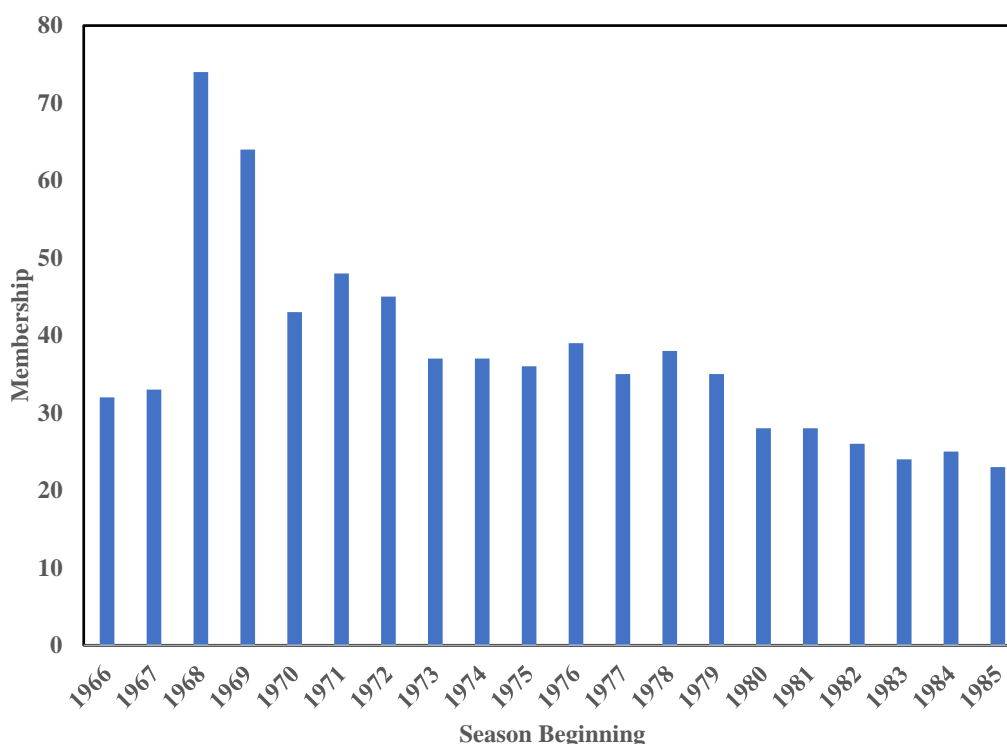
The society has always been progressive in its outlook and has achieved many notable firsts. Many eminent and well-known people have addressed the society over the last twenty years. The list is as follows: H.W. Linecar (1967 and 1977), P.A. Rayner (1968), K.A. Jacobs (1968, 1970, 1975 and 1982), P.G. “Maundy” Allen (1968, 1973, 1975 and 1976), P.J. Seaby (1868), Mrs M.E. Bussell (1969), G. Berry (1970, 1971, 1978 and 1984), F. Purvey (1971), R.A.G. Carson (1972), D.L.F. Sealy (1973), P.A. Clayton (1974 and 1979), C.C. Narbeth (1976 and 1977), D.G. Sellwood (1978), Dr M.J. Price (1978), Y. Beresiner (1979), M.A. Marsh (1981 and 1985), Miss M. Archibald (1981), M.J. Freeman (1982), F.S. Snow (1982), G.P. Dyer (1983), Revd. R. Plant (1983), L.A. Brown (1984), and G.L. Grant (1984).

Let us hope that the Bedford Numismatic Society will continue for a further twenty years, and beyond, with the help and support of the present and future members.⁽⁵⁾

Notes added by Gary Oddie

- (1) Originally published under the title “A History of the Society” in the *Bedford Numismatic Society Journal, Sovereign*, volume 8, Autumn 1986, pp11-21. George Dawson received much help from Peter Blakeman and the late John Gaunt in compiling the article. The article has been reproduced complete, with just a few minor typographic corrections.
- (2) Photographs reproduced from published article, originals not found.
- (3) This event was not noted in the pages of Coin Monthly.
- (4) Photograph shown twice actual size, taken from a specimen in the G. Oddie collection. Lead, plain edge, 24.4mm. The lead has not survived well and the surface has oxidised making it difficult to photograph.

- (5) The article also included a table of membership numbers which have been converted to a bar chart below.



It is expected that this is typical of the many societies that were formed in the second wave of numismatic societies in the late 1960s. The announcement of decimalisation resulted in an upsurge in interest in coins, ranging from change checking to the collection and study of more historical pieces and other series. The period also saw the introduction of popular magazines such as *Coins and Medals* (1964), *Coin Monthly* (1965) and *Irish Numismatics* (1968) and Seaby reprints of classic catalogues such as: Keary, Grueber & Keary, Williamson, Dalton and Dalton and Hamer, all to cater for this new generation.

- (6) After continuing a slow decline in the early 2000s membership has now risen to 10, meeting on the second Monday of the month.

