

Bedford Numismatic Society Open Day – 23/10/2022

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Introduction

The following notes are a cryptic summary of the events leading up to the Bedford Numismatic Society Open Day that was held at the Eagle Bookshop in Bedford on 23rd October 2022. This was an event that everyone in the society was involved with in some way and we were pleasantly surprised by the results of a successful and fun day.

Hopefully this will provide some ideas and stimulus for other societies to follow and possibly the creation of new societies.

The Society and Background

The Bedford Numismatic Society was founded in 1966 and a few notes have been published on its early history.^(1,2) The last 20 years have been typical of many local societies with a gentle decline in membership. When attendance dropped to 5 or 6 per meeting an extraordinary AGM was held with the proposal to wind up the society. Many past members attended the meeting, with several proposals for reinvigorating the society and attracting new and younger members.

From this, nothing actually happened. None of the action items were followed up and we stopped having an annual programme and formal speakers.

The numbers then fell to 4 or 5 per meeting and the society finances could no longer support having a formal venue. As we all knew each other quite well, the format then moved to having a monthly meeting in each other's houses – taking it in turns to host and provide a meal during the meeting. The annual membership fee was discontinued. Each month was a show-and-tell, with something from an old collection or a recent acquisition, interspersed with one or more courses of food!

New members were “acquired” by word of mouth and the numbers gently grew. New members had to be recommended by existing members, but once numbers exceeded 6 or 7 regularly, in-home catering became a problem as some members did not have the facilities and providing meals was now a non-trivial cost.

A new home was found for the society, annual subscriptions were reintroduced, and the old bank accounts resurrected. The latter was far from trivial – with the banks initially denying that the accounts existed!

With numbers regularly reaching 9 or 10 and surviving on a show-and-tell, recent acquisitions, tea and biscuits, a little more structure was added to the meetings. The show-and-tell would be themed: Victoria, Britannia, best acquisition, worst acquisition, oldest, smallest, biggest, bronze, foreign etc. etc. Many of the evenings would last for the full allocated three hours, the time flying by. This format has the advantage that everyone has an opportunity to speak or display something every month and the rest of the members join the conversation and share their knowledge. Sitting around a table provides a very different interaction than members sitting in rows facing a table with the chairman and committee members as is typical in many societies. New members, who now travel many miles to our meetings, have openly commented that this is far more welcoming than some more formal societies.

An unexpected consequence of the meeting structure was that, when it was suggested in September 2021 that the club should have a recruiting drive and open day, all 10 members present volunteered to be involved. On the day, to be described below, 8 members took time to attend the open day and the remaining 2 had very good reasons to be elsewhere. This level of participation was also pleasing and an unexpected consequence of the long-term informality.

Organising The Open Day

Once it had been agreed to have a Society open day, discussions began on choosing a venue. Options included hiring a room in a pub, club, hotel, etc. and ultimately an obvious choice became clear. The Eagle Bookshop in Central Bedford. Several society members already knew the owner – Peter Budek - quite well, so the approach was easily made. The shop is large, well-lit and has already hosted external events, such as book launches.

So as to minimise the disruption to the normal running of the shop, a date for the open day was set for Sunday 23rd October – the shop is normally open, but is quieter on Sundays.

At the next society meeting discussions took place as to how to advertise the event. Posters and flyers could be designed and distributed to libraries, museums, antiques centres, history societies etc, but in order to reach a younger demographic, local schools and colleges could be formally approached, and the event also announced online via Facebook.

The posters and flyers were designed, printed and given out to members at the September and October meetings and distributed to the various places and groups. Details were also sent to Coin News to publicise the open day.

Ancient Coins

The earliest coins date from 500BC, with the classical civilizations and most countries since then producing coins



Athens tetradrachm 5th century BC



Celtic gold stater, 1st century BC



Nero bronze as, 1st century AD

Bedford Numismatic Society

Open Day



Eagle Bookshop

16 - 20 St Peters St, Bedford
MK40 2NN
Sunday 23rd October 2022
11:00 am – 4:00 pm

Coins

We cover a broad area of British coins



King Canute Silver Penny



Queen Victoria Farthing



Kew Gardens 50 Pence

Tokens

Where coins are issued by Monarchs and Governments, tokens are issued by private tradesmen and businesses. Bedfordshire has many different issues of tokens



17th Century Tokens



Farmers and Market Gardeners' Tokens



Co-operative Society Tokens

Medals

Military medals often include the name. This allows the life and military career of the recipient to be researched, sometimes with interesting and surprising results.

Banknotes



Foreign Coins



Meetings

The Society was established in 1966 and meets monthly on the second Monday at 7:00. The evening usually includes displays, discussions, and identification. We have occasional speakers on specialist topics as well as the opportunity to buy, sell and swap coins.

If you are interested in joining the BNS please call **07555 048859**
Or email bedfordcoinclub@gmail.com

The Event

On the day we convened at the Eagle Bookshop in the hour prior to opening and set up four tables of displays and a display board. The content of the displays represented the full breadth of the hobby with material provided by several members. The Token Publishing team kindly provided a small pile of back issues to be given away as freebies.



The doors opened at 11am and people arrived steadily for the first hour, with a lull over lunch then a steady flow for the rest of the afternoon. In all over 20 people came especially for the open day and we have potentially 6 new members, including two juniors.



Also amongst the visitors were Dave Greenhalgh (Grunal the Moneyer) who had stayed on after the 8th *International Symposium in Early Medieval Coinage*, held in Cambridge the previous day and Kai Towe from the Havering Numismatic Society, who both got into the spirit of the event and joined the conversations through the day.



Observations

There are plenty of collectors and interested people out there – the “English Hammered and Early Milled Coin Collectors” and “British Hammered & Milled Coins – Buy, Sell & Auction” groups on Facebook have 13,000 and 10,500 members respectively, though with many members likely in both. An advert was placed on the second and received positive comments and encouragement. One interesting reply bemoaned the absence of a coin club in southeast London.

Whilst the numbers are large, the percentage that actively get involved with the Facebook pages is quite small and it is an even smaller percentage that will get involved with local numismatic societies.

Most of the visitors were asked how they had heard about the event and it is not clear that the flyer campaign brought any people on the day, though local advertising had brought one person a week early! The numismatic Facebook adverts had been seen by a few and several had found out from the local (Bedfordshire and Bedford) Facebook pages and several more from the announcement made on the Eagle bookshop Facebook page.

Acknowledgements

The first thankyou must go to Peter Budek at the Eagle bookshop for supporting the event from the beginning and during the day. Also to the other bookshop staff and customers who were there on the day and had to work around us.

Thanks also to Token Publishing and the Coin News team for sending a package of back issues to be given away to the visitors.

A final thankyou to Kelvin Brosz, administrator of the “British Hammered & Milled Coins – Buy, Sell & Auction” Facebook page for uploading the advert and for keeping it at the top.

Thanks to all of the members of the Bedford Numismatic Society: Ray (Chairman), Simon (Secretary), Nigel (Treasurer), Ron, David, Ron and John on the day and Steve and Roger in the build-up who couldn’t attend on the day.

I will update this note in a few months' time when the dust has settled and we can count the new members that resulted from this open day.

Postscript (14 February 2023)

The Open Day was reported in *Coin News*⁽³⁾ which resulted in a few enquiries from other Societies about its operation.

Allowing a few months for things to settle, it is clear that the recruiting drive and Open Day has had a significant impact. Maybe half of the people who came to the event are now members of the society doubling the membership in one step! Even with four of the regulars absent, the February 2023 meeting had 14 members present including two juniors.



References

- (1) D.J. Gaunt† and G. Oddie. History of the First Bedford Numismatic Society (1946-1948). BNS Blog 20 June 2022. <https://britnumsoc.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/258-beds-ns-history-blog-001.pdf>
- (2) G.E. Dawson† (ed. G. Oddie). History of the Bedford Numismatic Society (1966-1986). BNS Blog 22 June 2022. <https://britnumsoc.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/260-beds-ns-history-blog-002.pdf>
- (3) G. Oddie. "Successful Day for Bedfordshire N.S." *Coin News*, December 2022, p21.

