

Spink's Numismatic Circular – A Personal Story

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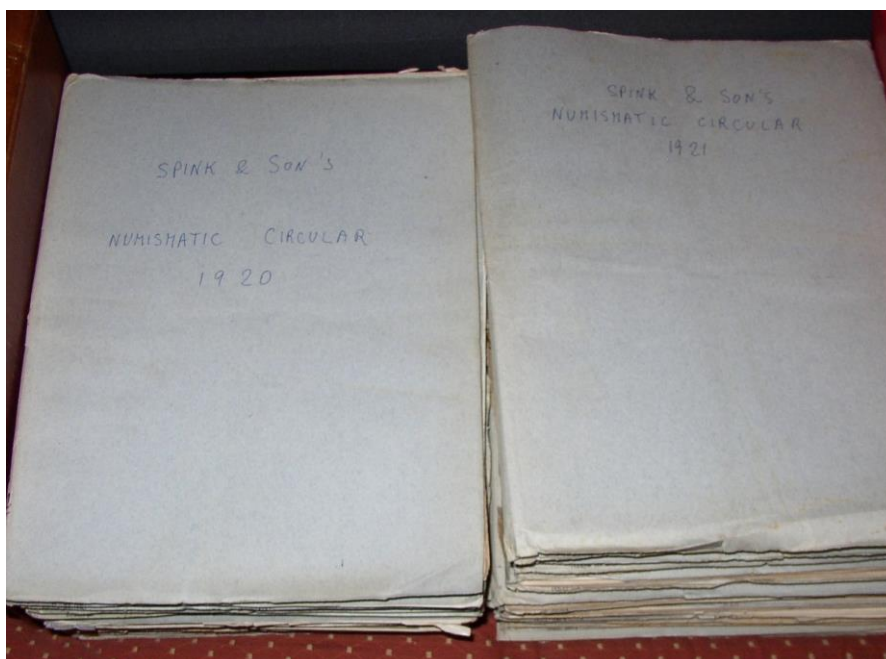
The recent acquisition of a block of loose copies of Spink's Numismatic Circular; 1911-1934, only lacking December 1912, has prompted me to look more closely at this publication. The group had been for sale on eBay in Italy for several months with a buy-it-now price and a surprisingly low FedEx shipping cost of £15. Whilst I already had a complete set of SNC back to 1947, a copy of Dave Greenhalgh's index⁽¹⁾, a few odd early single issues and a couple of early tatty annual volumes, I had never really considered going back further due to the difficulty of achieving completion.

A quick search of the usual suspects and the internet (Paul and Bente Withers at Galata, Douglas Saville, Chris Martin at Ancient & Oriental, AbeBooks (part of Amazon since 2008), BookFinder, and eBay) revealed an amazing coincidence. Between these sources it was possible to build a complete block from the first issue of December 1892 to December 1938, including the missing issue from December 1912! The prices were consistent and reasonable for a year's issue with a hardback binding, so the project began.

The 1911-1934 block was purchased, though this did not go un-noticed, receiving the following comment in Coin News "A buy it now listing by a seller in Italy, this works out at about £1.50 per magazine as it was probably not issued 12 times a year. No longer printed of course and greatly missed by many."⁽²⁾

This last comment resonated, as it was the absence of outlets for short numismatic research notes that prompted the creation of the Blog by the British Numismatic Society, to which the present note is submitted.

The weeks passed, the estimated delivery date approached, and concern was increasing about the infeasibly low shipping cost. Then, on the last day of the delivery window, two heavy boxes arrived (7kg each). On opening the boxes, it became clear that these SNCs had been together for the past century, in paper folders tied up with string. The two creases in each issue where they had originally folded for posting were still visible in many copies.

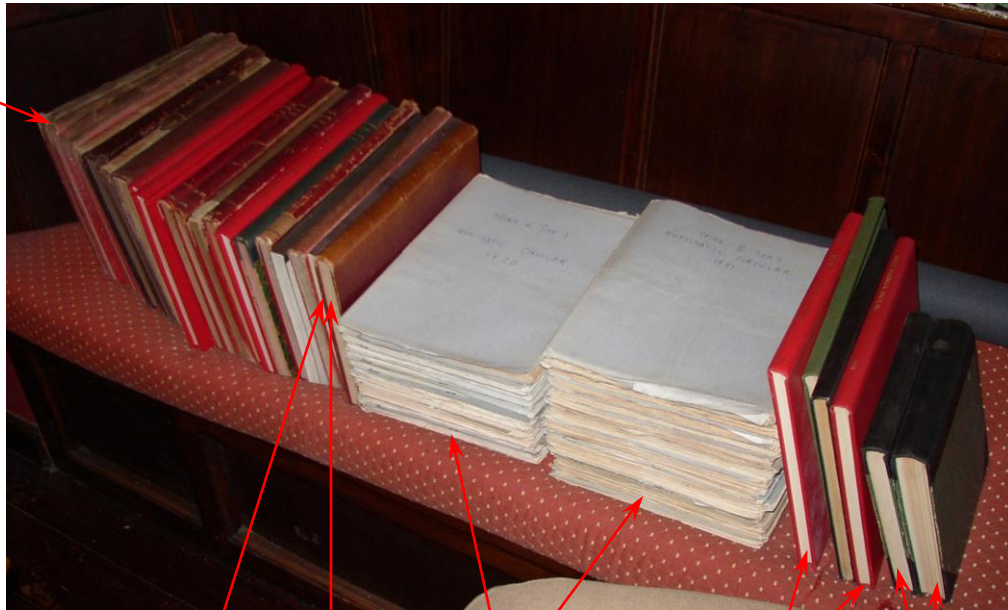


The outer leaves of many issues were quite fragile with many of the hinges torn and broken, so great care had to be taken when reading and turning the pages.

The second stage of the project began and while waiting for the other volumes to arrive, the loose copies were quickly scanned through and read to reveal a vast amount of previously unknown information. Whilst the index to SNC is good, it is not perfect, and for example the serialized Biographical Index by Forrer is only indexed by the title of each instalment and not the individual entries.⁽³⁾

A few weeks later and it was possible to take the photo shown below.

1892/3



1910

1912

1911-34

1935-38

1945-48

The unbound copies were definitely too fragile for repeated reading and could not easily be stacked upright on a shelf. For the bound volumes, the few with original Spink's red cloth were tatty at best and the other bindings very variable in materials, binding style and condition. A few had the bookplate of David Griffiths, along with less familiar names.

Thus all of the pages of the loose copies were repaired with archival tape and all of the old bindings removed in preparation for rebinding the whole group. The following pictures show the various steps required to bind the volumes.

Remove old bindings, stitch loose issues, cut new boards.



Add new endpapers and reinforce spine with mull and brown paper. Leave in press of 1 day to allow glue to dry. Plastic sheet in endpaper hinge to keep moisture out of the main block.

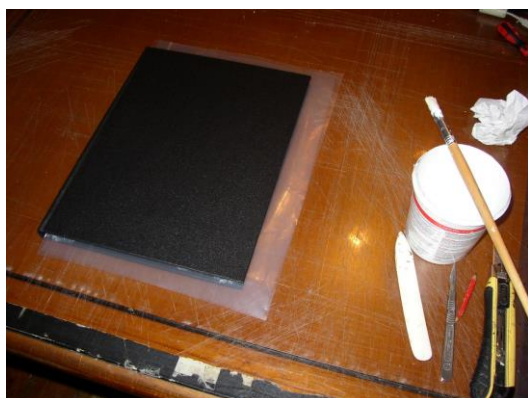
Guillotine top, bottom and foredges.



Cut cloth and spine lining.



Attach cover to volume.



Allow adhesive to set in press for 1 day.



Print and fix labels.



Prepare cover.



Press and set hinge for 1 hour.

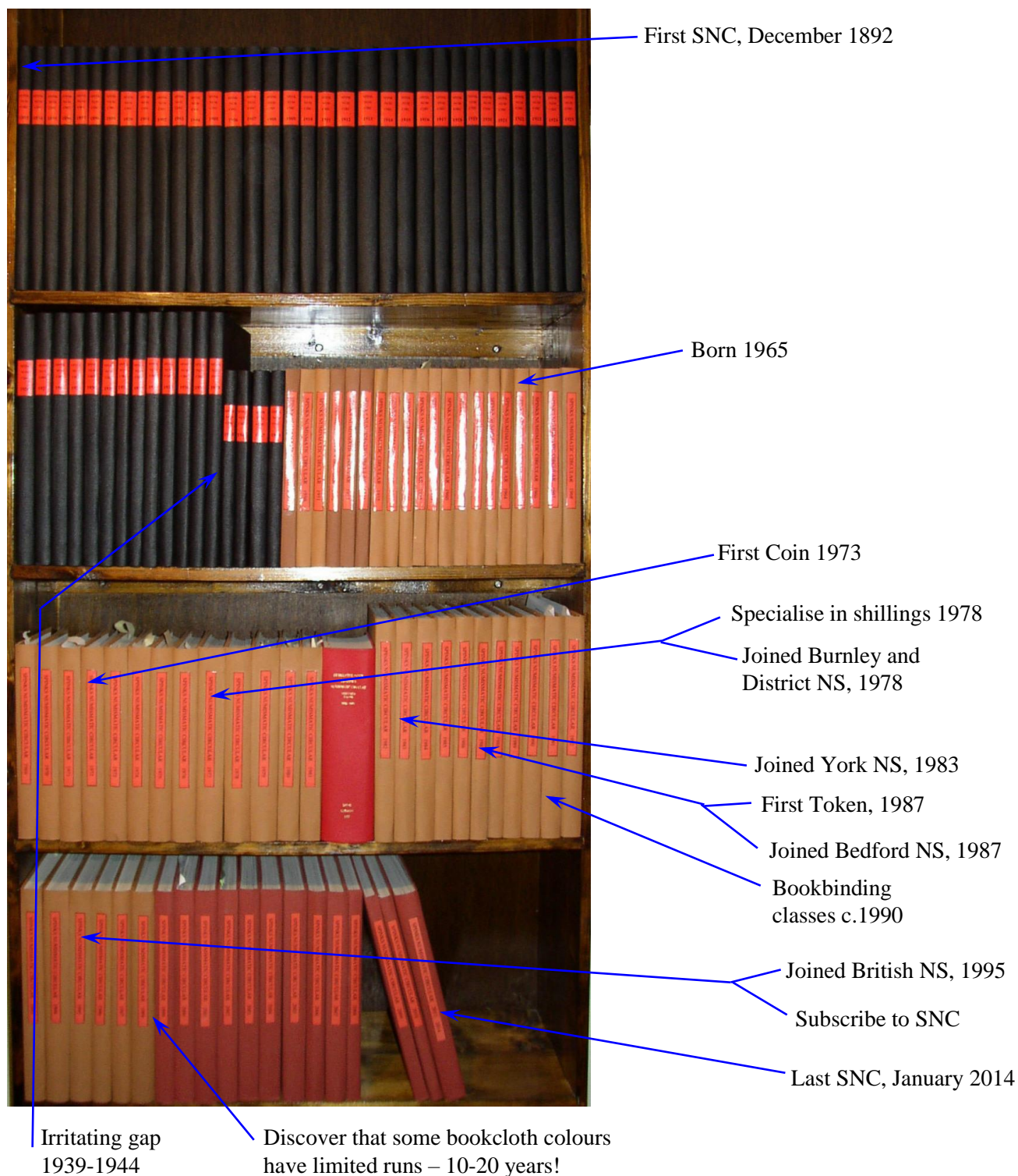


Allow boards, cloth and endpapers to stabilize (dry) for 1 week.



The old numismatic adage “buy the book before you buy the coin” might thus be extended to “bind the book before you read it”. It is also really important to not look inside a book while you are binding it, it leads to significantly slower progress!

This project has highlighted some of the limitations of the bindings I created for the later volumes over the past few decades and the lessons learned. All of the later volumes have been created from single issues, bought, or in many cases given by other collectors who wanted to reclaim shelf space! The issues after the 1990s, up to the last issue of January 2014, were acquired by subscription.



Having completed this project, I wondered how easy it might be for someone with a similar “enthusiasm” to repeat. A second search of the same sources was carried out. In the following table, available items are coloured in. I have not gone into the details of the issues that covered double months, or months without an issue. Complete years (bound or unbound) are in yellow and green, single issues are in orange and blue.

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Whilst completing this table a loose set of 1939 and three issues of the Spink Numismatic Circular List for 1940 were found (again in Italy). They and are coloured in red, as they are no longer available. They will be bound to match the others when they arrive! I suspect that at some future date the 1949-2014 volumes will have their bindings upgraded from greyboard and bookcloth to millboard and buckram to make a uniform series that should survive at least another century.

There remains an irritating gap between April 1940 and December 1944. However I do not anticipate this being completed any time soon, as a similar group (March 1940 – December 1943) once sold for an eyewatering £1200 + commission against an estimate of £60-80.⁽⁴⁾ A more recent sale had a complete run March 1940-May 1947, estimated at £100-150 and finally sold for £800 + commission.⁽⁵⁾

It would seem from the above table that it would be very difficult to put together another similar set and patience would be required in waiting for the other volumes to become available, either loose or bound. The loose issues are out there, they just need finding, and a box of about 100 post 1992 copies failed to sell at the 2022 Token Congress Auction.

Creating a reasonable run of SNC does come at a cost, as well as the purchase price, the binding materials in this quantity are not insignificant and the result weighs over 60kg and occupies about three yards of shelving.

To avoid this, the The Newman Numismatic Portal have started to scan volumes of SNC and they are available free on their website.⁽⁶⁾ The following dates have been completed at the time of writing.

[1893](#) [1894](#) [1895](#) [1896](#) [1898](#) [1900](#) [1902](#) [1903](#) [1904](#) [1905](#) [1906](#) [1907](#) [1908](#) [1909](#) [1910](#) [1916](#) [1919](#) [1922](#) [1925](#)
[1964](#) [1965](#) [1966](#) [1975](#) [1976](#) [1977](#) [1978](#) [1979](#) [1980](#) [1982](#) [1983](#) [1984](#) [1985](#) [1986](#) [1993](#)

It is likely that the NNP will complete the rest of the set in the next few years. The digital copies have been OCR'd so are searchable, but for me, it isn't quite the same as reading the paper copy and finding unexpected numismatic nuggets.

References and Notes

- (1) D.I. Greenhalgh. Cumulative Index to Spink's Numismatic Circular. Volumes 1-100. Spink, 1993.
- (2) Anon. A View of the Bay. Coin News, November 2022, p20, col. 3.
- (3) L. Forrer. *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists. Coin-, Gem-, and Seal-Engravers Mint-Masters, &c. With References to Their Works. B.C. 500 - A.D. 1900.* Originally SNC 1904-1930, reprinted in 8 vols by Baldwins in 1987 with new index in 2004.
- (4) Dix Noonan Webb Auction, 17 June 2010, Lot 336. The David Griffiths collection. The previous lot was SNC December 1892-December 1939 in 47 volumes in various states and bindings and the following lot included 1945, 1947-1949 and 1951-1983 in single and multiple year custom bindings. Lot 338 included various loose issues and duplicates, including the index.
- (5) Dix Noonan Webb Auction, 11 October 2021, Lot 1614. The Quentin Archer Library. Again part of an almost complete run of SNC in various bindings and states.
- (6) <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/publisherdetail/545955>



First SNC,
December 1892



Last SNC,
January 2014

Now just lacking April 1940 – December 1941 . . .