

# A History of the Numismatic Society of Ireland (Northern Branch)

The inaugural meeting of The Numismatic Society of Ireland took place on 3 March 1961 in Dublin, when it was decided to form a Society having for its objects the study of numismatics in Ireland. The first office bearers were: Chairman, the late Dr A E J Went; Hon. Treasurer, the late Miss Alice Neary; and Hon. Secretary, the late Mr S N Lane. Its early meetings were held at Newman House, St Stephen's Green, Dublin. It currently meets in Ely House, 8 Ely Place, Dublin, 2.

Shortly after the first meeting, it was mooted that a "Northern Branch" of the Society be established in Belfast.

The inaugural meeting of the Northern Branch took place in the Ulster Museum, Belfast, on 6 December 1963. Joint Presidents were the late Wilfred (Bill) Seaby, Director of the Ulster Museum; and the late Professor Dolley, Chair of Numismatics, the Queen's University of Belfast. John Rainey is the last surviving founder member, having joined the Society in 1963 as a junior member. Alan Dunlop, our current Chairman, joined in September 1964.

The Society's first meetings were in the Ulster Museum under the auspices of Bill Seaby, who 'let us in'. With the onset of the Troubles, this casual approach had to cease and the Museum insisted on security guards for each meeting. They were only paid up to 9:00pm, and were keen to usher us out. Our meetings were necessarily curtailed, although sometimes we adjourned to Prof. Dolley's rooms at Queen's to continue the discussion over coffee. Sometimes meetings ended abruptly because of the occasional bomb scare. This could not last, and, to have a venue nearer the city centre, we moved to Maysfield Leisure Centre beside Belfast Central Station, where we stayed for some years until it closed down. We then moved to our present 'home' at Shaws Bridge Sports Association.

The interests of the Society members are many and varied – coins, tokens, jetons, medals (bravery and commemorative), banknotes, cheques, etc. – Classical, Medieval and Modern : Ireland, Isle of Man, UK and further afield – and we are seldom short of speakers for our meetings.

The Northern Branch is a member of the British Association of Numismatic Societies (BANS), and our members attend the BANS Congresses (around Easter) and Autumn Weekends (early September).

## **The Society on Tour**

From the very early days of the Society there has been the occasional urge for members to go on the road and see what numismatic gems lay outside their stuffy meeting rooms. Since the very beginning members have been involved in visits to places of numismatic interest or visiting collections at various destinations throughout Ireland and Great Britain.

The first trip that was reported was on 12th September 1964 when eight members from Belfast joined eight members from Dublin on a visit to Clongowes Wood College where they were able to see a collection belonging to the College which included a cabinet of Roman and Greek coins as well as a fine series of Irish and English coins which was particularly strong in Irish 14th century issues.

During the late 1960s there were visits to Carrickfergus Castle and further afield to The National Museum in Dublin. On one such trip a detour was made to Newgrange where visits were a little more rough and ready than they are today.

The first 'overseas' trip was in 1989 to the newly opened Royal Mint at Llantrisant in Wales. Five members of the Society and a couple of guests arrived in Liverpool and set off in a hired coach for Llantrisant. There they were welcomed by Graham Dyer who took them for a tour of the mint. They were shown the processes from cradle to grave – die production from plaster models using a reducing machine, metal smelting and rolling, production and annealing of the blanks, the presses, the bagging of the finished coins, etc. It was probably the first and only time the members will see over £2 million in bagged pound coins in one place. They were shown the reduced size five penny pieces which had not yet been released for circulation, and proof coins being struck for Gibraltar. They then had a tour of the medal department and finished with a tour of the Royal Mint museum where they were shown (and handled) many rarities, including a 1933 1d.

The next mention of a trip by the Society was a report in the 1<sup>st</sup> and only edition of *Irish Numismatic Bulletin* published in December 1994. This time the destination was Scotland, the main purpose to visit The Hunterian Collection in Glasgow where a former member Donal Bateson was curator. The members were treated to a feast of numismatic delights which included a series of gold aurei of the Twelve Caesars, pennies from the period of Stephen and the Anarchy, and a Petition Crown. A look around the rest of the museum and a visit to the nearby Macintosh House concluded the visit to Glasgow.

The following day was spent at Stirling Castle and on the way back to the ferry a brief visit to The Burrell Collection was made. All those who were on the trip had a most enjoyable time.

The next trip to be organised was in 1996 to the Isle of Man where they were generously hosted by Frank Cowin. During the tour of the island stops were made at the Douglas Museum, Castle Rushen, Peel Castle and Kirk Michael. The numismatic highlight was the Kirk Michael hoard of Viking silver which contained coins from France, Ireland and England confirming the importance of the island to the Vikings as a trading centre. The historical highlight was the visit to Castle Rushen in Castletown. All in all, this trip seems to have been a most successful and enjoyable one.

Since the late 1990s it has been an almost annual ritual for some members to travel to the BANS conferences around Easter each year. These are held at different locations throughout Great Britain and Ireland and include lecture programmes on the widest possible range of numismatic topics as well as providing the opportunity to meet and chat with like-minded enthusiasts. The venues included Glasgow, Chester, Manchester, Bury St. Edmunds, Worthing, Bournemouth, Cwmbran, Dublin, Scarborough, Southport, Greenwich and, of course, Belfast in 2002.

As part of our 50th anniversary celebrations we went on three field trips; the first to Carrickfergus and Downpatrick; the second to Trim, Drogheda and Carlingford; and the third to Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford. The Society hopes to pursue its Field Trips' Programme to the remaining medieval Irish mint towns later this year. A detailed report on the anniversary trips can be found here [<link to pdf of anniversary trips>](#).

## **BANS**

The Society has been a member of the British Association of Numismatic Societies since [... someone to supply the date?..]. We have hosted the BANS Congress twice in recent years, in 2002 and 2015. On both occasions we organised a varied and, we feel, interesting programme of lectures and social activities which placed much emphasis on the social side of the weekend.