JOHN KENT *British Museum*

John Philip Cozens Kent
1928–2000

JOHN KENT was Keeper of Coins and Medals in the British Museum from 1983 to 1990 and was the world's leading authority on the coinage of the late Roman empire. His achievement was to present the coinage of that complicated period in a modern and systematic way, credible to historians and archaeologists as well as to numismatists. This wider audience will be aware of his massive eighth and tenth volumes of *Roman Imperial Coinage* (*RIC* VIII and *RIC* X). Otherwise his characteristic output was the dense and pithy article, often in an obscure place of publication.[1] Sometimes it might be no more than a few pages long, even though the issue might be complex. The reader was expected to work hard.

John Kent was born on 28 September 1928 in Palmers Green, London, the only child of a senior railway official and a civil servant. While at school, one day towards the end of the war, he narrowly avoided being hit by a V2 rocket, and, having been awarded an Andrews Scholarship in Arts, went on to university at University College London. After his BA in 1949, he immediately embarked on a Ph.D. thesis, and on its completion in 1951, he proceeded to National Service, initially with the Middlesex Regiment. When limited sight in one eye precluded service in Korea, army logic saw him commissioned into the Royal Army Service Corps and despatched to serve as a Pay Officer. Later he was posted to an advanced battalion where he was responsible for the administration of a large company. On demobilisation he was appointed in 1953 as an

[1] For a full bibliography of his work, see A. Burnett, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 162 (2002), forthcoming. We would like to thank Roger Bland for his help in preparing this obituary.

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Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum.

His love of coins dated from his childhood, but his choice of period was influenced by two men, J. W. E. Pearce and A. H. M. Jones. The latter, a familiar name to all historians, held the chair at UCL where Kent was an undergraduate; Jones was then the supervisor of his Ph.D. thesis, on *The Office of the Comes Sacrarum Largitionum* (the chief imperial finance officer of the late Roman empire). Pearce is less well known, but, though a schoolmaster by profession, his knowledge of late Roman coinage was extraordinary. The ninth volume of *RIC*, published under Pearce's name in 1951 after his death, belies his contribution and only hints at his profound knowledge and instinct for the subject. Like Kent's own contribution—and surely not coincidentally—Pearce can be seen at his best in the series of incisive articles that he wrote in the 1930s, work that has not been replaced. Both in period and style the elderly Pearce had a lasting impact on the young Kent, who later dedicated his *RIC* VIII to him.

His career might have gone in a different direction, archaeology. His first publication, at the precocious age of nineteen, was 'Monumental brasses: a new classification of military effigies',[2] for which the year before he had been awarded the Reginald Taylor Prize and medal of the British Archaeological Association. The classification remains in use, and Kent was always pleased, many years later, at the surprise of colleagues when they realised that he was the author of this classic piece, and that it was not written by some ancient antiquarian after a lifetime of studying brasses. Throughout his life he kept up a lively interest in archaeology, building on early friendships with people like John Mann, John Emerton, John Wilkes, George Boon, and Ralph Merrifield. This interest in archaeology had three main products. First, he was active in the archaeology and excavation of greater London, especially in neighbouring Hertfordshire, excavating at Pancake Hall in Welham Green, Perrior's Manor, Cheshunt, and South Mimms castle. He was also a keen supporter of local societies in Hertfordshire, including—nearest to his home in Hadley Wood—the Barnet Local History Society, of which he was president for the last twenty years of his life. He played an active role during the difficult years of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, being its President in 1985–8, and was a long-serving member of its archaeological research committee.

[2] 'Monumental brasses: a new classification of military effigies', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 12 (1949), 70–97.

Secondly, he was always ready to use coins to bear on archaeological problems and sometimes solve them. He took a new harder look at the evidence of coins for the Roman occupation of Britain, reviewing in particular the contribution of coins to our understanding of Hadrian's Wall, the end of Roman Britain, and in the reassessment of 'barbarous radiates'. Barbarous radiates are crude and locally made imitations of late Roman coins, and it was thought that they were produced in the 'Dark Ages' of the fifth and sixth centuries after the Roman withdrawal from Britain just after AD 400. Kent was one of the first to overturn this dating, and demonstrate convincingly that the coins in question were in fact contemporary products, thereby removing them from any attempt to date archaeological sites to the later period. Equally important was his work leading to the dating of the Sutton Hoo ship burial (see further below). Thirdly, he was very interested in related methodological questions. The best example of this is probably his article on 'Interpreting Coin Finds', first published in 1974 and reprinted more or less verbatim 14 years later,[3] in which he demolished the assumptions that geographical patterns of the places in which coin hoards were deposited could be connected either with areas of fighting or with areas of wealth. It remains sad, however, that outside the British audience, his strictures have not had the lasting effect that they deserve.

RIC VIII was published in 1981,[4] and focuses on the coinage from the death of Constantine the Great in 337 to the accession of Valentinian I in 364. Much of Kent's work of the previous twenty-five years was preparatory. Articles on hoards, such as that ironically titled CHAOS,[5] and studies of rare individual pieces took their place alongside the definitive laying to rest of the old chestnut: the use of the mint mark CONS by mint of Arles rather than Constantinople; or the non-existence of one Carausius II, a supposed British usurper some 70 years after the Roman admiral who did indeed proclaim himself emperor alongside Diocletian. He also approached the work of producing a definitive catalogue with specific studies, and with more general considerations. He insisted, for example, following the great Austrian scholar of the early twentieth century Otto Voetter, that the way to study late Roman coinage was by the

[3] 'Interpreting Coin Finds', in J. Casey and R. Reece (eds.), *Coins and the Archaeologist*, British Archaeological Reports 4 (Oxford, 1974), pp. 184–200; reprinted with some additions in second edition (1988), pp. 201–17.

[4] *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. VIII, *The Family of Constantine AD 337–64* (1981).

[5] The intentional acronym of 'Constantinian hoards and other studies in the later Roman bronze coinage', which he published with R. A. G. Carson in *Numismatic Chronicle*, 6th ser. XVI (1956), 83–161.

chronological classification of the reverse designs by mint, and not by imperial effigy. This represented a major step away from the standard reference work then in use, Henri Cohen's *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'Empire romain*, which presented the coins in order of emperor and then alphabetically by the inscription on the coins' reverses. Cohen's order, though hallowed by usage and of convenience to collectors and antiquarians, obscured the proper chronological order and hence proper development of the coinage, thereby rendering it useless for historical interpretation and reducing its value for archaeological dating. The publication in 1960 of *Late Roman Bronze Coinage* killed off the use of Cohen for the bronze coinage. In *LRBC* Kent collaborated with his BM colleagues Robert Carson and Philip Hill to produce an extremely concise account of the bronze coinage of over 150 years in an astonishingly short 114 pages. The book requires several tutorials for the uninitiated to use and understand, was frequently reprinted and became a bible not only for numismatists but especially for archaeologists, who were delighted to find that a book costing only about £5 could tell them everything they needed to know to identify more than fifty per cent of the coins they would excavate from a site, thereby freeing them from the impossible task of searching through the endless specialist literature. Though the coin lists were replaced by more up-to-date ones in the later *RIC* VIII and X, *LRBC* remains an indispensable and much-loved tool for anyone trying to identify coins in the field. Copies have been spotted as far afield as Sri Lanka and Turkmenistan!

Further studies, on Magnentius, Julian, and medallions, were accompanied by his superbly illustrated general work on Roman coins and by catalogues of the Dumbarton Oaks collection and the British Museum exhibition, *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300–700*.[6] The exhibition was held in 1977, and Kent greatly enjoyed, *inter alia*, the trip from Cyprus in an RAF transport to accompany the Cyprus treasure on its way to London. The conclusion of all these works and studies fed into *RIC* VIII, which was eventually published in 1981. 'Eventually' because cataloguing was not Kent's natural forte, and Robert Carson, his colleague and editor, had to cajole him to complete the manuscript, and its completion was facilitated by a year in the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. This was followed by several problems in the production of

[6] *Roman Coins* (with M. and A. Hirmer) (1978); *Late Roman Gold and Silver Coins at Dumbarton Oaks: Diocletian to Eugenius* (with A. R. Bellinger, P. Bruun, C. H. V. Sutherland), *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 18 (Washington, 1964); *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300–700* (1977) (with K. Painter).

the book. The result, however, rose above the problems (apart from the poor plates, but that too is now being rectified with the current reprint), and the book came out to lead to Kent's appointment as Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum in 1983 and his election as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1986.

Twenty years later it is easy to take *RIC* VIII for granted. But it represented two great achievements. First, it enabled those who were not numismatists to appreciate what the coinage can, and just as importantly cannot, contribute to our understanding of the period from the death of Constantine in 337 to the accession of Valentinian I in 364. With the notable exception of the reign of Julian ('the Apostate') this is not a period which has attracted a great deal of interest from historians, since the written sources are thin and since it falls between the great periods of Constantine and Theodosius. But Kent could show how the period foreshadowed a number of the developments in the financial and administrative systems of the later period. Second, in terms of the coins and the *RIC* series itself, the volume represented a great advance—and not just because it weighed several kilos more than any previous volume! The additional length was, in part, accounted for by the complexity of the period, with multiple Augusti and Caesars in power and recognising or not recognising each other in a complicated pattern. But Kent also wanted to encapsulate as much relevant information as possible in one place, thereby making the book a truly effective work of reference. That does not mean that useless details were included, or excessive material repeated from previous studies, but rather he wanted to give a full account that would be comprehensible on its own terms (and hence remedying some of the problems in Pearce's *RIC* IX), while enabling the specialist to follow up the argument elsewhere.

In parallel to his work on the late Roman coinage, and almost as an interlude between *RIC* VIII and *RIC* X, Kent also took up the study of late Iron Age numismatics. He took over this role from Derek Allen. Allen, both as an Assistant Keeper in the BM and as Secretary of the British Academy, had been the leading light in the subject, and his death in 1975 left a void, specifically for the completion of the catalogue of Celtic coins, for which he left an unpublished manuscript. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Kent merely took over Allen's work, since although he edited two European volumes of the projected five-volume catalogue,[7] he transformed the discussion. A natural sceptic, he was

[7] D. Allen (ed. J. P. C. Kent and M. Mays), *Catalogue of Celtic Coins in the British Museum*, vol. 1, *Silver Coins of the East Celts and Balkan Peoples* (1978); D. Allen (ed. J. P. C. Kent and M. Mays),

unimpressed by what he regarded as the loose level of argumentation which he encountered in Celtic numismatics, and wanted to establish more clearly the limits of knowledge. He did this by organising careful distribution maps, rather than relying on traditional 'tribal' attributions, and by being much more careful with dates than had previously been the case. He did not publish much about British Iron Age coins, even though his knowledge was very detailed. But he had the same concerns with the British material as he did with the European, and was specially uneasy at what he saw as the disjunction between Iron Age archaeology, which had developed very fast, and Iron Age numismatics, which was still using an older set of concepts. As a result he became an ardent supporter of 'down-dating', even though at heart he remained fundamentally unconvinced about any of the so-called fixed points of the chronology.[8] Although he maintained his interest in the subject during the 1980s, he was content to hand over the mantle of Iron Age numismatic studies to a new and more numerous generation of scholars, preferring to return to his major interest in the Roman empire.

His second major contribution to the *RIC* series was volume X, published shortly after his retirement from the British Museum in 1990.[9] This dealt with a much longer and far more difficult period than *RIC* VIII. It covered the coinage from the division of the empire on the death of Theodosius in AD 395 until the fall of the western empire in AD 476, or, as Kent preferred, in AD 480.[10] The coins are much more difficult, partly because they are often rare and very poorly preserved,[11] partly because the typology became partially immobilised, and partly because the various people who took over parts of the empire (the Vandals, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths) made imitative coinages. The analysis of their style is the only significant way of distinguishing these non-Roman products from

Catalogue of Celtic Coins in the British Museum, vol. 2, *Silver Coins of North Italy, South and Central France, Switzerland and South Germany* (1990).

[8] 'The origin and development of Celtic gold coinage in Britain', *Centenaire de la mort de l'Abbé Cochet*, 1975. *Actes du colloque international d'archéologie* (Rouen, 1978), pp. 313–24; 'The origins of coinage in Britain', in B. Cunliffe (ed.), *Coinage and Society in Britain and Gaul* (1981), pp. 40–2.

[9] *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, volume X, *The Divided Empire and the Fall of the Western Parts, AD 395–491* (1994).

[10] 'Julius Nepos and the fall of the Western Empire', in R. M. Swoboda-Milenović (ed.), *Corolla Memoriae Erich Swoboda Dedicata* (Graz/Cologne, 1966), pp. 147–50. He argued that the recognition by Theoderic of Nepos after Romulus' death in 476 indicated that, until his death in 480, Nepos was regarded as the western emperor.

[11] *RIC* X includes over 300 unique pieces; anyone who has ever tried to get to grips with the fifth-century bronze coinage will know well the great difficulty of finding legible pieces.

their Roman prototypes or cognates, and Kent had an unrivalled eye for them, which he developed over a period of twenty-five years.[12] Much of his thinking on all these issues was developed and expressed as a series of five Presidential Addresses to the Royal Numismatic Society (1985–9), in which he took the picture back to Diocletian's reforms, discussing metrology and mint organisation, the extent to which it is helpful to think that late Roman coinage 'declined' and how we can approach the 'barbarian' coinages. The last was a typically dense Kent publication of only a few pages and a handful of illustrations, yet every word and picture has a broader significance, generally implicit.[13] Once, when challenged on a point, he would refer the correspondent to this article; when the response came that nothing was said on the point, he replied, 'but just look at the pictures!', as if the difficult point was obvious to all.

He would apply a similar methodology to his studies of the fifth- and sixth-century coinage. A sketch of the relevant aspect or period would be given in a few sentences, based on a wide knowledge of the written sources; this would be followed by a concise presentation of the coin material. The latter would be presented as a series of conclusions, with little attempt to argue the point. Readers, some of whom were irritated by this somewhat *ex cathedra* style of presentation, were expected to do what Kent had done: to make a painstaking collection of material from the great museums and from much material garnered from coins illustrated in sales catalogues, and then make a detailed stylistic analysis of it. The record cards on which these studies were based are now a valuable part of the British Museum's archive. Particularly good examples of this approach can be seen in his study of the coinage of Arcadius and Valentinian III,[14] as well as his treatment of the western coinage of Valentinian's successors.[15]

The climax of all these studies was *RIC* X, a book which astonishes by its breadth of coverage. The encyclopaedic and detailed knowledge of the coinage is matched by a sure grasp of the political and administrative

[12] His first such study was the identification of Vandalic silver in the name of Honorius: 'Un monnayage irrégulier du début du V^e^ siècle de notre ére', *Cercle d'Études Numismatiques. Bulletin*, 11, no. 1 (Jan.–March, 1974), 23–9.

[13] 'The President's Address', *Numismatic Chronicle*, Proceedings, 149 (1989), iii–xvi.

[14] 'The coinage of Arcadius', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 151 (1991), pp. 35–57; 'Solidi of Valentinian III: a preliminary classification and chronology', in H.-C. Noeske and H. Schubert (eds.), *Die Münze: Bild—Botschaft—Bedeutung. Festschrift für Maria R.-Alföldi* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), pp. 271–82.

[15] 'Style and mint in the gold coinage of the western Roman empire, AD 455–61', in M. Price, A. Burnett, R. Bland (eds.), *Essays in Honour of Robert Carson and Kenneth Jenkins* (1993), pp. 267–75.

history of the period. 'Bear traps' are effortlessly passed by (which Eudocia or which Theodosius?), and many new systematic presentations are made of material which was previously inaccessible, such as much of the bronze coinage, where many new discoveries—mostly known to Kent alone—greatly revised the picture painted in *LRBC*. Of greater importance is the way he arranged the catalogue. Previous volumes of *RIC* had already abandoned the nineteenth-century arrangement by emperor in favour of arrangement by mint, and this would have been an obvious option for volume X. But this would not have worked so well for the later period, given the complex political history with many short-lived emperors and usurpers taking the stage in an empire that was, in any case, divided into two. So Kent divided the book between east and west and then by period, thus enabling the user to have a much clearer view of the development of the coinage and its relationship to events. The result is that, a collector keen on the coins of, say, Honorius would find them scattered throughout the volume (depending on who recognised him and made coins for him), and—typically for a Kent publication—the reader has to work much harder to follow what is going on, but the advantages of this approach are very considerable. As remarked by one reviewer, 'where the coins of the . . . fifth century had seemed impenetrable, now they have been laid out with lucidity'.[16]

RIC X had much longer introductory chapters than was usual in the series, and these do much to alleviate the paucity of written work on the coinage of the period. As well as a masterly summary of the monetary system and a lucid presentation of the designs and legends used on the coins, he presented an extensive discussion of over 150 pages of the development of the coinage by reign. This is one of the few accounts of the subject that gives a clear sense of the changes and indeed subtleties of what had previously seemed an inaccessible and confusing body of material. It represents some of Kent's best work.

Kent's experience and knowledge of the coinage of the post-Roman period led to his being asked to undertake the study and publication of the Merovingian coins from the purse in the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 ship-burial. The site had been excavated in 1939 but the war and the difficult period thereafter meant that it was only in the early 1960s that the preparations towards final publication, led by Rupert Bruce-Mitford, got fully under way. Although other numismatic scholars had given their views on the coins when they first came to light, significant advances had been

[16] T. V. Buttrey, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 9 (1996), 587–93.

made in Merovingian numismatic studies in the interval, particularly by French researchers such as Jean Lafaurie, and it was clear that a fresh start had to be made. Kent's approach was characteristic: an unusually perceptive application from first principles of traditional numismatic method combined with scientific investigation chosen for its potential in the specific context. He saw that a key to the numismatic chronology here lay in the fineness of the gold used for the coinage which related the many regally anonymous issues to the few coins that bore the names of historically datable persons. It had long been recognised in general terms that the gold content of the Merovingian coinage had declined during the seventh century but no coherent framework had ever been devised. Appreciating that results would be statistically viable only if a wide body of material could be tested, the cooperation of cabinets outside that of the British Museum (in particular the French national collection) was required, and it would be forthcoming only if the coins were not to be damaged in any way. He saw that the specific gravity method, although seriously flawed in dealing with other alloys, was the answer here where the coins could not be sampled and were essentially of gold-rich binary alloys. He had the ready cooperation of his colleagues in the Research Laboratory in the British Museum, particularly Andrew Oddy and Michael Hughes, who developed a refined SG technique for use with the Sutton Hoo material. Contacts made through his own helpfulness with others' projects, together with his well-known talent for persuasion, overcame considerable difficulties in arranging the wider programme. It should be emphasised that analysis alone would not have brought about the successful outcome, and did so only because it was allied to his masterly re-ordering of the complex numismatic evidence.[17] Whereas the Sutton Hoo coins had been dated to the third quarter of the seventh century Kent concluded that the latest coin to enter the Sutton Hoo purse was minted *c*.620–5.[18] He was always most insistent that his role was to provide the terminus for the coins, not to date the burial, but his work revolutionised the interpretation of Sutton Hoo Mound 1 and its historical context, opening up the possibility of its identification as the grave of

[17] Preliminary studies: 'Problems of chronology in the seventh century Merovingian coinage', *Cunobelin*, 13 (1967), 24–9; 'Analyses of Merovingian gold coins' (with W. A. Oddy, M. J. Hughes, R. F. Coleman, A. Wilson, and A. A. Gordus with contribution by R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford), in E. T. Hall and D. M. Metcalf (eds.), *Methods of Chemical and Metallurgical Investigation of Ancient Coinage*, Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication No. 8 (1972), pp. 69–109.

[18] 'The coins and the date of the burial' (with S. E. Rigold, W. A. Oddy and M. J. Hughes) in R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton-Hoo ship-burial* (1975), pp. 578–678.

Redwald, the greatest of East Anglia's kings. His results also had important consequences for the chronology of the Merovingian and early Anglo-Saxon coins generally, and for dating archaeological contexts in which they are found. It has recently been suggested that the terminus for the Sutton Hoo coins may be a few years earlier still, but conclusive proof is lacking either way and the attribution to Redwald remains the most likely and authoritatively favoured.[19]

Although the medieval period had its own specialists in the museum throughout his career, the breadth of his interests and scholarship allowed him not only to contribute helpfully to discussions of its problems but to intervene decisively on occasion. Often a challenger of received wisdom, he could be equally resolute in its defence against unjustified revision, for example in decisively demolishing a reattribution of a gold Carolingian coin in the British Museum to Charles the Bald when it bore titles which he knew could belong only to Charlemagne.[20] Another of his early medieval papers discussed the derivation of Anglo-Saxon coin designs from Roman originals,[21] the choice of specific imperial prototypes informed, among other things, by his close familiarity with the issues most likely to have been available in Britain, considerations not always appreciated by those inspired to follow his lead in this area. An article on the surprising subject of farthings of Richard II[22] was prompted by an important reference to them in City of London records which had been overlooked by previous specialists.

The coinage and medals of the modern period from 1485 onwards was part of Kent's brief when he first joined the Department of Coins and Medals. He brought energy and fresh insights to several series within it which had been rather neglected, the English Civil War issues for example having become largely fossilised in the orthodoxies of a couple of generations earlier and the later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century issues hardly deemed, in some quarters, worthy of academic study at all. He produced a number of useful papers dealing with this period including an important one on Newark siege pieces,[23] but his output was dominated by

[19] W. A. Oddy and A. Stahl, 'The date of the Sutton Hoo coins', in R. Farrell and C. Neuman de Vegvar (eds.), *Sutton Hoo. Fifty years after* (American Early Medieval Studies, 2, 1992) pp. 129–47; M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo. Burial Ground of Kings?* (1998).

[20] 'Charles the Great or Charles the Bald?', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th ser. VIII (1968), 173–6.

[21] 'From Roman Britain to Saxon England', in R. H. M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins. Essays presented to Sir Frank Stenton* (1961), pp. 1–22.

[22] 'An issue of farthings of Richard II', *British Numismatic Journal*, 57 (1987), 118.

[23] 'Newark siege money and Civil War hoards', in *Newark Siegeworks*, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (1964); reprinted in *Cunobelin*, 15 (1969), 22–5.

the publication of treasure trove of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries (plentiful even before the advent of metal detectors). In the later milled series Kent broke new ground in investigating the phenomenon of the counterfeit coinages of the eighteenth century.[24] Issues from the territories of the British Empire were not forgotten and he threw new light on the Madras fanams of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[25] It is a pity, though inevitable, that the increasing demands of his work on the Roman coinage soon crowded out further detailed research in this period but he maintained an interest in the later English and British series throughout his career. His early faith in the validity as evidence of an illustration in a contemporary merchant's book showing an unrecorded variant type of the rare George noble of Henry VIII was vindicated when one turned up seventeen years later and was acquired by him for the museum.[26] More recently he published two papers on the circulation of foreign coins in England,[27] and he also enjoyed returning to this more modern period of coinage during the preparation of his retirement study of the coinage and currency of London (see below).

Kent had considerable interest too in the later Byzantine coinage which was developed in a memorable series of advanced extra-mural lectures but he did not have the opportunity to work up more than a few topics for publication.[28] His expertise in this area is conspicuous in the incisive reviews of publications by other British and overseas scholars in the field.[29] Less widely known was his work for the Barber Institute in the University of Birmingham. His happy and fruitful association was initially prompted by the augmentation of its existing strong holding of Roman coins by the bequest of the scholar's Byzantine collection built up

[24] He did not publish this work in detail although an abstract of his May 1957 paper was published in R. N. P. Hawkins, ed. E. Baldwin, *A dictionary of makers of British metallic tickets, checks, medalets, tallies and counters 1788–1910* (1989), pp. 892–8.

[25] 'Madras fanams of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Numismatic Circular*, vol. 70, no. 6 (June, 1962), cols. 133–4.

[26] 'A lost variety of the George noble', in 'Five Tudor notes', *British Numismatic Journal*, 32 (1963), 162–3. 'A new type of George noble of Henry VIII', in A. Detsicas (ed.), *Collectanea Historica: Essays in Memory of Stuart Rigold*, Kent Archaeological Society (Maidstone, 1981), pp. 231–4.

[27] 'The Circulation of Portuguese coins in Great Britain', *Actas do III Congresso Nacional de Numismática, Sintra 1985* (Lisbon, 1985), pp. 389–440; 'Continental Coins in Medieval and Early Modern England', in M. Castro Hipólito, D. M. Metcalf, J. M. Peixoto Cabral, M. Crusafront i Sabater (eds.), *Homenagem a Mário Gomes Marques* (Sintra, 2000), pp. 361–76.

[28] 'The Italian silver coinage of Justinian I and his successors', in S. Scheers (ed.), *Studia Paulo Naster oblata* I (Louvain, 1982), pp. 275–86.

[29] See, for example, his review of W. Hahn, *Die Ostprägung des römischen Reiches im 5. Jahrhundert (408–491)*, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 150 (1990), 284–8.

by Philip Whitting which Kent was anxious to see properly curated and used. As honorary adviser, his diplomatic skills were invaluable in helping the cabinet through a number of difficulties as was his expert advice and support in securing conservationally sound storage for the coins and advancing a programme of cataloguing. He also produced a short booklet[30] on its Byzantine collection, but his main contribution lay in the university lectures and seminars on a range of numismatic topics which he gave weekly during one term each session for many years, continuing into retirement and only giving up when the pre-dawn starts and long journeys became too much for his failing health. All this work he did without payment except for expenses which he kept to a minimum by purchasing a single on the first outward journey and returns from Birmingham thereafter as fares were cheaper that way round.

He spent much time identifying large numbers of coins from excavations, regularly deciphering apparently blank discs which had defeated others. Becoming concerned at unhelpful under- and over-conservation in some quarters, he welcomed the opportunity to participate in a conference which discussed the problem followed by a publication which established guide-lines for future good practice.[31] He was also keen to ensure that site-finds and coins should be properly evaluated and wrote a classic paper on their interpretation.[32] In recognising modern counterfeits he was in a class of his own. He was among the first to condemn the Beirut forgeries of late Roman and Byzantine gold coins and gave evidence in the famous Dennington forgeries case at the Old Bailey in 1969. His judgement on questions of authenticity was accepted by academic colleagues, collectors, and dealers worldwide.

He was a superb lecturer to audiences of every type. He gave a great deal, perhaps even too much, of his own time running evening classes in his earlier days and, throughout his career, lecturing to both national and local numismatic and archaeological societies as well as at several universities. He regarded these activities as part of his duty to his subject and profession, believing that they made an important contribution to the wider understanding of coinage as historical evidence, and in demonstrating the approachability of the British Museum's curators and the

[30] *A Selection of Byzantine Coins in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1985).

[31] 'The numismatist and the conservator—conflict, co-operation and education', in P. J. Casey and J. M. Cronyn (eds.), *Numismatics and Conservation. University of Durham, 1978* (Durham, 1980), pp. 10–14.

[32] See above, n. 3.

accessibility of its collections to all *bona fide* enquirers. As Keeper he encouraged his junior colleagues to maintain these traditions.

Kent was appointed to the British Museum as an Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins and Medals on demobilisation in 1953. The old Coin Room was still in ruins after being hit by an enemy incendiary bomb in 1942 and the collection, returned from its wartime cave in South Wales, was inconveniently housed in the East Residence. He was involved in its move back to the restored department in 1959. Under the keeper, the senior curatorial staff then numbered only four so that being 'at the receipt of custom' (dealing with all the general public enquiries in person and by letter for a week) occupied a considerable proportion of his time. He was promoted to Deputy Keeper in 1974.

In 1977 Kent was responsible for the first coin gallery in the museum since the war, '2000 years of British Coins' and its accompanying booklet.[33] Mounted in cases originally designed for Near Eastern antiquities and intended to be only temporary, no one regretted more than he that it remained in place ten years later with still no prospect of money being available for a replacement. It was during this time that he began his campaign to persuade other departments that coins should be part of their cultural and historical displays. With their cooperation, this has become an established feature of the museum's antiquities galleries alongside the permanent HSBC Money Gallery opened, two keepers later, in 1997.

Kent became Keeper of Coins and Medals in 1983, holding the post until his retirement in 1990. He was a strong keeper, but made himself constantly available to his staff, and was generous in his academic support. Shortly after he took over, the entire collection and library again moved, this time down into the basement while the department's accommodation was being expanded, and then back to its refurbished premises. Always a good delegator, he left the organisation to his capable deputy, and he was more directly responsible for the planning of the new accommodation, including enhanced security measures and better facilities for staff and student visitors alike. It was during his keepership that in 1986 London was host to the International Numismatic Congress with 600 world-wide delegates and this was organised within the department. To coincide with this event the department mounted a major exhibition entitled 'Money' which was accompanied by an innovative thematic catalogue.[34] Kent also encouraged departmental participation in an

[33] *Two Thousand Years of British Coins and Medals* (1978).
[34] J. Cribb (ed.), *Money. From cowrie shells to credit cards* (1986).

increasing number of large-scale museum exhibitions, loans to other institutions and the expansion of the department's role in the museum's education programme.

He was an active member of many societies both local and national serving on their councils and holding their highest offices. Among the presidencies he held were those of the Royal Numismatic Society 1984–90, the British Association of Numismatic Societies 1974–8, and he served on the International Numismatic Commission 1986–91, being elected an honorary member in 1991. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1961 and of the British Academy in 1986. Recognition of his achievement was marked by the world's leading awards for numismatic studies including the medals of the Royal Numismatic Society in 1990, the Huntington medal of the American Numismatic Society in 1994, and the British Academy's Derek Allen Prize in 1996.

If the publication of *RIC* X in 1994, shortly after his retirement, was the climax of his publications on Roman numismatics, he nevertheless pursued several directions of research during his retirement. One was writing up some of the odder aspects of numismatics which had fascinated him for many years such as the inscriptions on coins. He was always particularly interested in mistakes; his favourite was a coin of Vespasian inscribed *Iudaea navalis* and apparently (but not really) referring to a naval battle in Vespasian's war to crush the Jewish rebellion of AD 66–70, perhaps that on the lake of Gennesareth which is mentioned by Josephus.[35] He had a long-standing interest in the way Latin was used on coins and what coins could tell us about late Latin usage. An early article solved a puzzle of coins of the emperor Gallienus with the apparently oddly gendered inscription *Gallienae Augustae*. Later on, he presented a more general discussion of the linguistic forms used on coins and the way they reflected different Latin usages.[36]

The second project on which he embarked was the preparation of a new British Museum catalogue of 'sub-Roman' coins. This was partly

[35] As he pointed out *Iudaea Navalis* is a conflation by a die engraver of two separate coin inscriptions: *Iudaea capta* and *Victoria navalis*. See his article 'Getting it wrong; some errors of Roman die-cutting and their significance', in *Festschrift für Katalin Bíró-Sey und István Gedai zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. K. Bertók and M. Torbágyi (Budapest, 2000), pp. 209–20. He was alternately enraged and amused by the fact that he had not been sent proofs of this article and it contained numerous printer's errors!

[36] For the former, see his 'Gallienae Augustae', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th ser. XIII (1973), 64–8, where he showed it was a hyper-corrected form of the vocative; for his more general treatment, see 'Coin inscriptions and language', *Bulletin of the London Institute of Archaeology*, 29 (1992), 9–18.

intended to replace Wroth's flawed *Catalogue of the coins of the Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards, and of the empires of Thessalonica, Nicaea and Trebizond* (1911), but also to give it a greater focus by concentrating on the earlier period down to the eighth century and increasing the coverage to include missing groups like the Visigoths, Suevi, and Merovingians. This is an area of coinage which is very difficult to deal with but which he knew well, and much better than anyone else. Unfortunately, however, although he had spent much time rearranging the trays of the relevant coins in the BM, he had not committed anything to writing, and his death led to a permanent loss to our understanding of this difficult area of monetary history.

His attention became increasingly focused on the preparation of his book *Coinage and Currency in London* based on, but greatly expanded from, his presidential addresses to the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. This brought into play many of his wide-ranging lifetime interests and involved much original research in and beyond the city archives. It has resulted in a book which is uniquely informative on subjects not to be found in standard histories of the coinage. His typescript had gone through several drafts and was already complete when he died on 22 October 2000. It is being edited by his daughter and will be published shortly.

His outside interests were many: cricket, medieval architecture and music, the history of monumental brasses, early medieval music, archaeology, railways (both real and model), Restoration poetry and drama, and the songs of the Victorian and Edwardian music hall. His ability to talk long and learnedly—and with a relish for the ironic use of the cliché—on any of these topics was well known among his wide circle of friends and acquaintances; his colleagues were as well informed on the impact of the railways on the development of London in the nineteenth century as they were on the finer points of the mint attributions of the bronze coinage of Zeno. Those same colleagues presented him with a portrait medal (by Avril Vaughan) to mark his retirement. The reverse by his own choice bears the inscription *nil sine labore* which he enjoyed mistranslating as 'no sign of work'. In the centre is a rather enigmatic pyramid, a motif which he always declined to explain saying that its meaning should be obvious. After retirement he remained, in his words, 'a regular if unobtrusive' visitor to the department to which he had given so many years.

John Kent was a scholar of international standing who made a major contribution to the advancement of numismatic and historical knowledge.

His learning extended far beyond his own specialisms and he was generous with his time and ideas. His service to the British Museum, the academic community and the public was distinguished. He had an irrepressible enthusiasm for all he did and many occasions were enlivened by his infectious good spirits. He was devoted to his wife Pat (née Bunford) whom he married in 1961, their son and daughter and four grandchildren.

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