

COLLECTIONS and COLLECTORS and some reflections on numismatic books, their content, design and usefulness.

Around four or five years ago we bought a large accumulation of books. They were largely the duplicates from the personal library of Philip Grierson, which he willed to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, on his death, along with his marvelous collection of European medieval coins.

In Cambridge, Professor Philip Grierson was a remarkable man in a city of remarkable men. I first met him one summer day on a visit to the Fitzwilliam Museum, when the late Mark Blackburn, another eminent scholar, was Curator of Coins and Medals. At the time Grierson was about to celebrate his 90th birthday. Dr Martin Allen, who was looking after us that day, told us that the great man was coming in and arranged us so that our piles of books and trays of coins we were looking at and photographing did not conflict with Grierson's important work of checking one of the volumes of *Medieval European Coins*.

We were a little in awe of the person who was about to come in, we knew that he had simultaneously held three important academic posts in no fewer than three countries. In addition to the chair of Numismatics in Cambridge, he had been professor of numismatics at Brussels university, in Belgium. The third country was the USA, where in 1953, Grierson was one of the founding instructors at the American Numismatic Society's annual summer school. He returned the following year, and in 1955 was invited to become honorary adviser and curator at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington DC, managed by the trustees of Harvard University. The task was to use the centre's resources to build the world's finest collection of Byzantine coinage, and publish it, which he did. Therefore, at the height of his productivity, Grierson spent the Michaelmas, Lent and Easter terms each year in Cambridge, Christmas and Easter in Brussels and eight or nine weeks of the summer in Washington.

In addition to the above, he had carried out the normal college and Cambridge university functions that his job demanded, and he was also a syndic of both the University Library and the Fitzwilliam Museum, and chairman of the library management board. As well as these, from 1945 to 1955, he was literary director of the Royal Historical Society*. From 1961-5 he was president of the Royal Numismatic Society, and Ford's Lecturer in Oxford from 1956-57. He was made a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1949, when I

was still wearing short trousers and did not know what an antiquary was; let alone a fellow of the British Academy, to which honour he was elected in 1958. An important person indeed !

As well as his distinguished reputation, my wife and I knew that he was old, so I guess that I was expecting a sedate academic wearing a business suit. We were certainly not prepared for someone who turned up sweaty and wearing khaki knee-length shorts because he'd arrived on a racing bicycle. Otherwise, he was quiet and self-effacing. We were even more impressed because he was not in the least bit old, stuffy or pompous.

Initially arriving in Cambridge to study medicine shortly after the end of WW1, he was to later to produce an unrivalled flow of scholarship, though he soon changed his field of study from medicine to history.

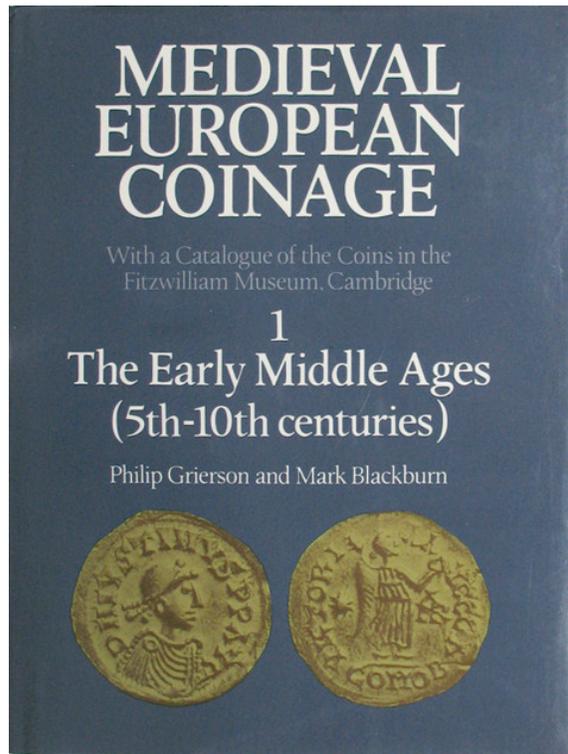
His earliest research was on ecclesiastical history and he won the Lightfoot prize in theology !

It was the chance find of a Byzantine bronze coin in one of his father's desk drawers in 1944 that inspired him to visit Spink's in London, where he bought £5 worth of coins for students to handle in his lectures and tutorials

Reportedly, by the end of 1945 he had 1,500 coins, and a year later 3,500. Eventually his collection had more than 20,000 and is perhaps the finest representative collection of medieval European coins in the world. Although, for security reasons, the collection was kept in the Fitzwilliam Museum for many years, ownership only passed to the museum on his death, it being retained as his own property, so as to enable him to sell pieces as and when he saw an improved specimen. His books too, remained his property, and bear a neat name label.

He had started collecting coins at a time when London numismatic dealers were awash with material which had come from the sales of the enormous collection of Lord Grantley. Post-war economic conditions meant that these coins were available at a fraction of their pre-war price.

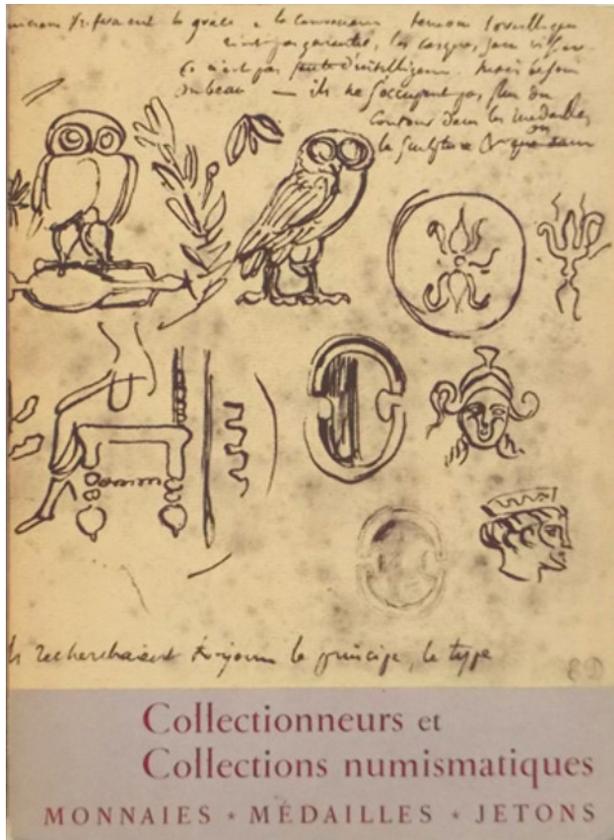
Not a wealthy man, Grierson was a careful, selective buyer, though in later years, he could spend substantial amounts when it was necessary. He also bought significant material from continental dealers at a time when most Europeans, including the British, were subject to rationing, and more concerned with buying food than coins.



In 1982, Grierson arranged funding to publish his now substantial and significant collection. *Medieval European Coinage* was initially envisaged as a twelve-volume definitive catalogue and text on the coinage of Europe. The first volume, which appeared in 1986, discusses the coinage of all western Europe up to the tenth century. It remains the standard catalogue and study of this difficult to understand period. The number of volumes has also increased !

His work and studies were eclectic to say the least, involving not just wide and detailed historical knowledge of ancient and medieval numismatics, but covered other diverse skills and branches of knowledge such as mathematics, statistics, metallurgical analysis, economics in an impressively wide range of languages. His library reflected all of these. Now I have to stress that we did not buy his complete library, only its duplicates, but apart from really rare and precious things, Grierson had kept duplicate copies in his rooms, for those moments when the museum was closed; so what we have is not just dross.

I have no doubt that there are treasures in this collection. Although they are not all immediately available, one by one, the contents of the forty-odd boxes of books will be catalogued and be offered for sale on our website for your delectation.



One good book that is for sale almost immediately, as it came out of the first box that we opened is *Collectionneurs et Collections Numismatiques : Monnaies, Medailles et Jetons*.

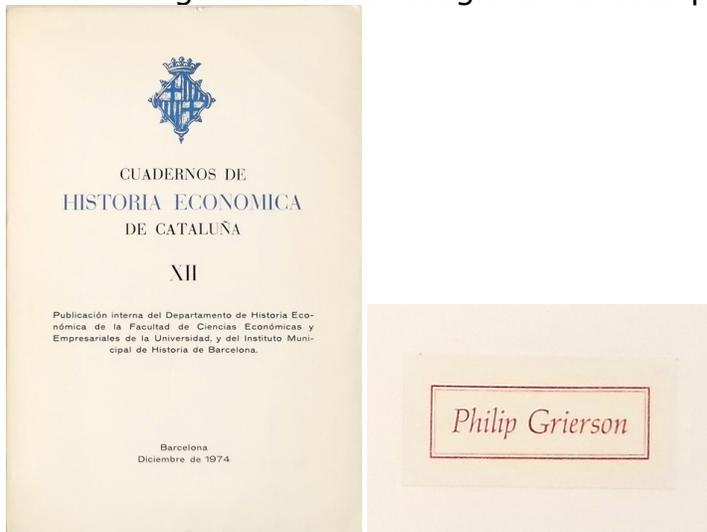
This is a Catalogue for an Exhibition/Competition organised by the Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, jointly with the Société française de numismatique, and the French Mint, and its museum. It was held at the Musée de la monnaie, Paris, May - September, 1968. This large paperback, xxx + 361 pages, 180 x 238mm, which is well illustrated throughout by numerous plates and in-text illustrations presents to the reader many of the pieces in the exhibition.

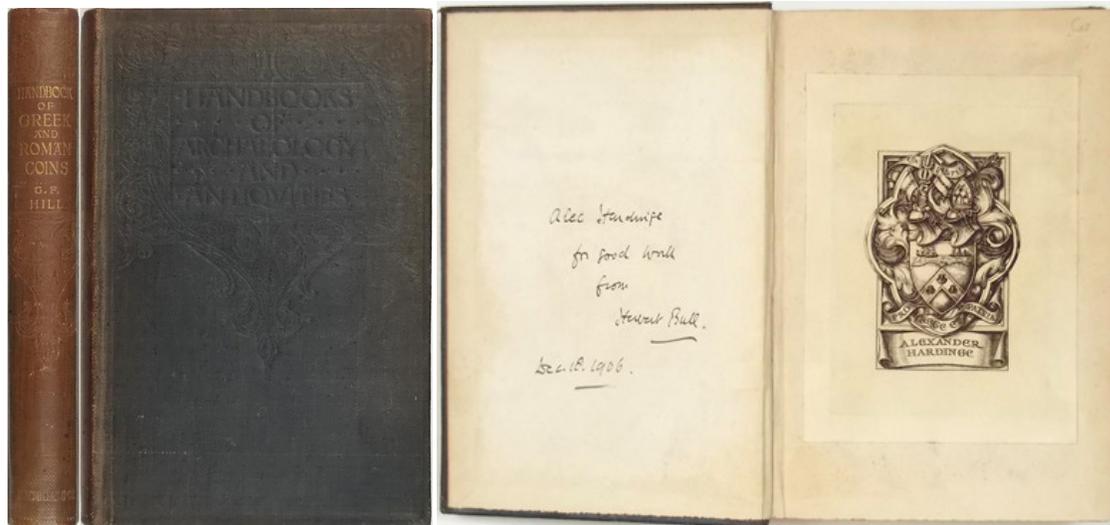
It is not just a large book, but also a wonderful example of 1960s French pomposity meeting arty-farty design and Gallic obfuscation. For example, the four-page long list of contents, that length due to the overly large 'artistic' typeface employed, is cunningly hidden at the rear of the book where the listing of officials and self-important political functionaries ought to be, if at all !

Nowhere to be found among all the preliminary crap is the really important bit - the name of the person who had the job of editor ! Now this is a shame. Why ? Well, for a start, the name deserves a little

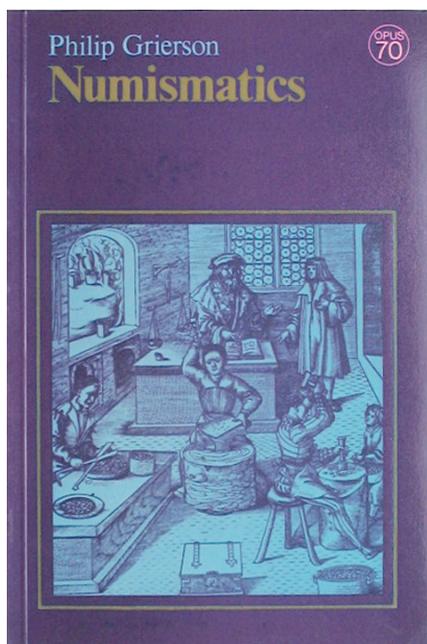
fame, if only (perhaps?) posthumously, for without the name of the editor, it does not appear on several internet websites as those sites require the name of an editor before an entry can be found ! This is a monumental error as it is a book that is worthy of further notice ! Alas, even though it is from Grierson's library, it does not have his name sticker in it, but even so it should be in someone's library, perhaps it could become yours, to bear your ex-libris ?

Books that do have his name sticker are several volumes in the series *Cuadernos de Historia Económica de Cataluña*. Now, with a title like that and coming into the category of *Periodicals* it is unlikely to attract much attention, and will probably languish until a Spanish-speaking bibliophile, with a penchant for historical economics, realises their true worth and gets as much delight from their pages as Prof. Grierson did.





Another book from his library that does not bear his name tag is G F Hill's *Handbook of Greek and Roman Coins*, perhaps because it already has an impressive bookplate and an inscription that indicates that it was given as a prize. I wish that I could say that I immediately knew who its previous owner was. However, a little research revealed that Alexander Hardinge was quite a celebrity in his day, having been personal private secretary to Edward VIII at the time of his abdication in 1936, and afterwards, for a short while, continued as PPS to his brother, who became George VI.



Not from his library at all, is his own book *Numismatics*. This 220 page paperback is one that he wrote to provide his university students who were newcomers to the subject of numismatics. Whilst an entry-level book, it is certainly not for the stupid; it looks at what he

considered to be the essentials, including the division between east and west, and describes most of the types of object that are found in excavations that are neither coins, nor money, and therefore confuse people. It is certainly a book that everyone should read, especially chapter 9, on the subject of numismatic scholarship.

To see what delights are available, enter the word Grierson into the FIND box and look at what comes up. Even with all of the other things that we do, such as writing and editing our own publications, we hope to get between 10 and 30 new items from the Grierson library listed each week.

* For those who do not know about the Royal Historical Society, should note the name, for publications associated with it are uniformly excellent, and whatever their subject are a good read, though sadly, they are not plentiful.

One such that sits on my shelves is *Handbook of British Chronology*, edited by F M Powicke, which should sit on everyone's shelves. My own copy of this was bought 30 years ago from a secondhand book shop. It was priced at £1, and I got a generous discount. Why did I get a good discount ? Perhaps because its top is dusty, its cover heavily sunned and it is damp damaged, but after all these years, I would not part with it, because I have grown used to its little foibles such as its bowed front cover. Why do I like it so much ? Perhaps because I love books and its 440 pages contain such valuable chapters as Saints' Days and Festivals used in Dating, Regnal Years, Provincial and National Councils of the Church in England to 1536, an Alphabetical list of Dukes, Marquesses, and Earls 1066-1603. Rulers of England from 1066, Rulers of the Isle of Man, English Officers of State. A List of Chief Governors of Ireland 1172-1939. A list of Bishops of England, Wales, etc., and more. It has become an old friend, and I know that I can trust it !