

## President's Letter

### Portland Coining Demonstration

by Edwin Johnston

For me, there isn't anything more exciting than a coin show that features a coining demonstration. And from all reports, the American Numismatic Association's (ANA) National Money Show in Portland, Oregon carried out an exciting and successful series of minting events in mid-March of this year. I was personally unable to attend that show in the Pacific Northwest, but I regularly correspond with Greg Franck-Weiby, who served as the medals chairman for the show, and who graciously provided me with a profusion of details surrounding the minting activities. I was also fortunate to recruit fellow Greater Houston Coin Club (GHCC) member, John Barber, to pick me up some specimens of the handiworks produced at the show in Portland while he attended. That's him wandering through the background in this first photo....



Ancient Greek style hot striking Photo: Doug Mudd/ANA

The ANA has included coining demonstrations at many of its shows and conventions over the years. I just recently learned of an artist named Charles D. Arceneaux (coincidentally a prior member of the GHCC), who provided ancient Greek style hand-hammered coining demonstrations in New Orleans during the ANA convention in the summer of 1981. And one of the most memorable coining demonstrations on record was at the ANA 109<sup>th</sup> convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 2000. That's when the crew from the Gallery Mint Museum (GMM) was on hand, not only hand hammering in the ancient style, and minting pewter tokens on their signature mobile screw press, but also producing medals on the Philadelphia mint's very own first steam engine press of 1836, that the late Joe Rust of GMM had recently refurbished for the ANA. In my opinion, the recent Portland show provided a top notch performance of the minting arts that will long be remembered.

Coin minting involves a series of discreet steps, since it is a mechanical process. And the coining demonstrations in Portland involved the use of technology representing various eras of coin making, so I need to break it all down a little, starting at the beginning. The first step in coining is developing the dies to strike the coins. The most difficult work involved carving the ancient Greek-style dies to mint hot struck silver coins. The obverse design is based on a Corinthian stater of the period 350-306 BCE, and features a helmeted portrait of the patron deity of Corinth, Aphrodite. This die was cut by Greg Franck-Weiby, who goes by the name of Ian Cnulle, Minister of the Moneyers' Guild of An Tir in the Society of

Creative Anachronism (SCA). Carving that die was especially delicate and time consuming since the fields are deeply concave, thus the die itself is dome shaped.

Close up of medieval design die

Photo: Janna Silverstein



The reverse die features an opening rosebud design copied from a silver hemidrachm of the Island of Rhodos of the period 167-88 BCE. This die was engraved by Arion the Wanderer (modernly known as Dr. Dave Peters, PhD), journeyman of the SCA Moneyers' Guild. Each engraver also added a privy mark to their respective designs, Cnulle added an ANA "Lamp of Knowledge" and Arion included a trident.

The production of the remaining dies for the pewter strikes was more straightforward, and they all came out of Cnulle's workshop. The designs for the medieval hand-hammered English style pennies are my favorite, as a wonderful example of the humorous use of postmodern irony. The obverse combines the short-lived ANA logo image from the US peace dollar Liberty portrait of the 1920s-1930s, but outfitted in Elizabethan garb with a ruffled collar. The reverse is a "Tudor" rose copied from a Stuart Dynasty coin of James I. The rose petals were created using a punch with a repeatable design.

The obverse die for the early modern screw press (or flypress) strikes features a portrait based on the late 18<sup>th</sup> century US half dime, which was originally hand engraved by Ron Landis of GMM. That portrait was hubbed some time ago by Tom Maringer (SCA: Will Whitfoot) on a hydraulic press and then provided to Cnulle, who did the die sinking of the letters, which also came from a set of Landis carvings hubbed by Maringer. The reverse of the early modern is another Tudor rose, but the lettering is smaller and more modern than the medieval design. The early modern piece also recognizes the two local coin clubs that co-hosted the show, the Pacific Northwest Numismatic Association on the obverse and the Willamette Coin Club as initial letters on the reverse.

In terms of the strikings, the actual demonstration part of the event, the ancient Greek style coins used a three person team. One person prepared the quarter ounce silver blank, which was initially melted on site with an oxy-propane torch to over 1760 degrees Fahrenheit, then poured into a mold. After it solidified, it was placed on the anvil die, then the second person placed the hammer die over the blank and the third person struck the hammer die with an 8 pound sledge hammer two times in rapid succession. Once enough silver strikes were produced, the die holder could just turn around on his stump seat to the other die setup, this one for the medieval cold strikes. This is usually a one person task, but since the Tudor rose punches were sunk so deeply, it required two persons to get a hard enough strike. At the end of the line was the flypress, which was operated by a single person.



Flypress operator

Photo: Janna Silverstein

To add a bit of flair and authenticity to the demonstration, all the members of the coin crew dressed in period costumes. Ian Cnulle was outfitted in mid-18th century suit, w/black great coat and tricorn hat, suitable for the era of the flypress. Journeyman Moneyer Arion the Wanderer dressed as 4th century BCE Celtic, the era of the ancient style coining. Guild Master William Bjornsun (mka Bill Dawson) dressed at 10th century Norse. Fellow of the Guild (i.e. Master craftsman) Derian Le Breton (mka Brian Fergusson) donned early 14th century togs and Journeyman Moneyer Armand de Force (mka Paul Cooper) was dressed in later 14th century French garb to cover the medieval era.



Guild: Armand de Force, Ian Cnulle, Arion the Wanderer,

William Bjornsun, Derian Le Breton Photo: Eric Holcomb

The best thing about these types of coining demonstrations is that you can get an eyewitness education of the technological processes for making coins throughout history. On top of that, you can return home with the very product of that education; the hand made medal. It is not only a piece of art in itself, but a literal reminder, the veritable evidence, of precisely how things were made. How cool is that?



Portland Demonstration Medal Set



New Blanks from the blanking station Photo: Gil Menendez

Authentic coins from which the designs came:

