

**Standing Conference of National Period Societies**  
1996 HAS SEEN yet another professional body emerge onto the national archaeological scene — the so-called Standing Conference of National Period Societies. The new 'conglomerate' consists of the four bodies (the Prehistoric Society, the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, the Society for Medieval Archaeology and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology) representing the principle epochs in archaeological time. The four period societies in British archaeology have been brought together for the first time under the auspices of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) to form a new and broad-based forum for the discussion of issues of common interest and concern to archaeologists working across the chronological spectrum. The establishment of the new body reflects a formal recognition in British archaeology of the pivotal role of the four National Period Societies as umbrella organisations in the promotion and direction of scholarly research in their fields. The Standing Conference also seeks to represent the collective voice of a wider constituency of archaeologists and researchers on government policy or professional matters which affect the multi-period landscape, including national and regional research priorities. It is hoped that through the Standing Conference the period societies will be able to establish a more formal procedure by which vital research issues on key sites can be integrated into the planning process.

The Standing Conference has met on two occasions during the course of 1996 to discuss the parameters of the new group, and has already responded collectively on professional policy matters, such as the English Heritage document *Frameworks for Our Past* (1996). One immediate outcome of the initial discussions of the new group was the CBA offer to host individual pages for each of the National Period Societies on its World Wide Web (internet) site. Watch this space.

David Gaimster

**Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Ancient Egypt**  
THE BRITISH Museum *Ancient Faces* exhibition is a fascinating and moving look at people from Roman Egypt (1st to 3rd centuries AD). It contains nearly 200 mummy portraits of men, women and children on wooden panels, linen shrouds, gilded cartonnage masks and plaster masks. These portraits were incorporated into or over the wrappings of the mummy, or in the case of the plaster-masks, were angled upwards to form part of the coffin lid (which I found rather spooky!). The exhibition is beautifully set out (by site) and is compiled not only from the British Museum's own collection but from collections loaned from other museums in Britain, including the Petrie Museum, and world-wide. To help put the mummy portraits within their background, other tomb-objects are on show, i.e. jewellery, toys, combs, spindles, boxes, wreaths, shrouds, sculpture and papyri. Thus, you can see a golden diadem similar to the one worn by the rather stern-looking, bearded man on the front cover (from Hawara, c. 140-160 AD). The display also contains a number of C.A.T. scans of mummies which enable the visitor to see whether or not the skeleton within the mummy is in good anatomical order, which I found interesting as it appeals to my sense of curiosity. There is also a 3-minute video of the lady Hermione which reconstructs how she may have looked using 3-D computer-imaging, which built upon the C.A.T. scans of her skeleton.

The highly individualistic portrayals certainly suggest that they represent a fair likeness of what the deceased had actually

looked like in life. What is surprising about these is the youthfulness of the faces which stare out at you; indeed, there are very few portrayals of old people (only two, that I can remember) and these are strikingly noticeable for their grey-flecked hair. Because of the depicted youthfulness of the vast majority of the mummy portraits, it had been thought that these were especially commissioned by an individual whilst alive. However, C.A.T. scans on some of the mummies have revealed that the ages of the skeletons are closely similar to the depiction of the deceased. This, and the fact that there are many mummy portraits of children, suggest that they were actually painted after death, indicating that to die young was not uncommon. The healthy, attractive, strong faces therefore belie the truth of their low life-expectancy. The aim of mummification was to enable eternal life and resurrection. After looking upon the serene faces of these people, it is very pleasing to know that, in a sense, they have now achieved their own immortality.

Jacqueline Pegg

## All You Ever Wanted To Know About Money: the new British Museum Money Gallery

THE NEW HSBC Money gallery in the British Museum opened at the end of January after several years' preparation. The gallery has a spacious modern feel whilst retaining the elegance characteristic of the museum as a whole. All objects are well displayed and clearly labelled with adequately detailed information. The emphasis is on education which makes this both an ideal port of call for school parties, possibly with the national curriculum syllabus in mind, and anyone who is interested in extending their knowledge of currencies and the varying ways which they have been used by societies both ancient and modern. At one end of the gallery the visitor works his or her way through the earliest known currencies such as Chinese cowries dating to c. 2500 BC and sword money of the 18th century BC. The layout progressively guides the visitor through successive chronological periods which are each covered in depth until one arrives at the opposite end of the gallery where the most modern forms of plastic money are displayed.

The specific regions in which the money of a particular period was used are described in detail with relevant maps and examples. The iconography of coins and their use as bearers of propaganda by past societies is illustrated. The actual manufacture of coins is well described with the aid of punches and dies, and a marvellous geometric lathe from New Jersey c. 1960. Various interesting calculating machines and counting boards are also exhibited. The past relationships of various metals and denominations in both metal and paper are explained. A hoard of 126 gold Roman *aureii* from Oxfordshire attracts the eye, although sensationalism is carefully avoided when it is rightly pointed out that the reasons for burial of a hoard are rarely clear. Another complete hoard containing mainly silver English coins of the later 16th century is displayed with the original leather and cloth bags in which it had been stored by the Court of Chancery in London in connection with a legal case of around 1700. Other items include 17th century storage chests, gambling tokens and lottery tickets and fascinating cheque books and paper money issued by the Hong Kong Bank of Hell for use in the next world. This gallery successfully encompasses all possible aspects of money in a clear and comprehensive way which is at once intelligible to the young child and stimulating to even the best informed of adults.

Wendy Toomey