

Neil McCormick

(1944-2019)

Eulogy to the Late Friend by Dr John F. Rainey

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I consider it a very great honour to have been asked to deliver this eulogy to Neil McCormick.

First, I must thank Yvonne Clark and John Jackson for helping me prepare.

I only wish Neil was (or is it were?) still here to check my grammar and add the punctuation marks where necessary.

Today we are here to celebrate a life well lived.

Neil was born in Belfast on 21st September 1944. He attended Orangefield Primary and then Grosvenor Grammar School.

He joined the Civil Service when he left school, eventually ending up in the audit office. His many talents with computers were often called upon.

Neil met Margaret at St. Donard's Tennis Club one evening and left with her even though she had arrived with a different boyfriend.

A bit of a dark horse it seems.

After a few years they married and moved to Lynn Avenue in Bangor.

Life continued in Bangor with the family eventually ending up in Tennyson Avenue. It was here that Margaret and Neil brought up their daughter, Catherine.

The family enjoyed many caravanning holidays in Britain and the continent with many different friends.

Catherine was their dearly loved, talented daughter who was cruelly taken from them in 2002.

(PAUSE)

Neil took early retirement and then followed some of his many interests including languages and numismatics. Following Margaret's retirement Neil and she bought a second home in central France where Neil thoroughly enjoyed conversing with the locals. Such was his talent that the French sometimes mistook him for a Belgian.

Neil had two great passions in life outside the family.

The Newtownards Lions Club and the Numismatic Society of Ireland (Northern Branch).

But If you needed help with some calligraphy or a translation or transliteration (don't ask me the difference) then you knew you were again dealing with an expert. Not only did he have the expertise but he was prepared to devote the time to even the most tedious exercises.

Neil had a very long relationship with Newtownards Lions Club, lasting in excess of 30 years.

During this time he held every position within the club except for treasurer. As usual for Neil, he threw himself into everything with gusto, and was deeply involved in all Club projects. Of particular mention would be the Talking News for people with vision impairment in the Ards Area, and also the Ards Lions Five Mile Challenge, which without his input in the early years would not have become the major fundraiser that it currently is.

Neil was also Zone Chairman for Lions, and a member of Head Office Cabinet, and was highly regarded in the wider world of Lions right throughout all parts of Ireland, North and South.

The motto of Lions is "We Serve", and that can truly be applied to the life of Neil McCormick.

It was as a numismatist that I first met Neil.

My daughter recently sent me a belated birthday present, a Red Bubble coffee mug on which it says:-

NUMISMATIST

(NOUN) :

An insane person
Who pays money
For other pieces of money

So now you know. We are coin collectors and there are many of us here today to pay our respects to one of the best.

When Neil joined The Numismatic Society of Ireland (Northern Branch) I was still a young school boy with much to learn but I soon realised it would not be from Neil. Because (can you start a sentence with "because"?) Because he had taken up the challenge of Yugoslavian coinage, a subject I could not relate to. (ending a sentence with a preposition!)

Neil's remarkable aptitude for languages enabled him to decipher the hieroglyphics and derive real pleasure from such an obscure subject.

While we really had little in common in terms of collecting interests as membership numbers in the society started to decline we all became much closer friends in such a tight knit group.

Neil was an enthusiastic member and took his responsibilities as treasurer and other duties very seriously.

When I moved to Bangor in 1976 we travelled to our meetings together and I learned much about Yugoslavia and the neighbouring countries with Neil fluent of course in most of their languages.

Neil was meticulous in everything he did.

He was proud of the title PEDENT (maybe he invented it) and I am sure he was deliberately trying to annoy us in correcting any slight slip of the tongue. Apparently, there is some distinction between "oral" and "verbal".

In all seriousness this was an important contribution to our society as I shared his view that everything we did and published had to be perfect. One of my regrets is that I was nearly 50 before I became aware of the British Association of Numismatic Societies.

When we were invited to host the 2002 Congress in Belfast, Alan Dunlop, Neil and I decided that we would need to find out what was expected and the three musketeers carried out reconnaissance missions to the BANS Congresses in 2000 and 2001.

Little did we know what we had taken on.

Of course Ulster pride meant this had to be the best Congress ever, and it was. But not before an enormous effort with weekly meetings round my dining room table fuelled by substantial supplies of cheese, cold meats and other hors d'oeuvres (See the way I brought a bit of French in!). This was a valuable experience when we worked together again on the 50th Anniversary of our Northern Branch of the society complete with Belfast's second Coin Fair.

And we hosted a second congress in Belfast in 2015.

None of this would have been possible without Neil's considerable organisational and administrative skills.

Alan, Neil and I had been inseparable friends and BANS Congresses allowed us to expand our circle of friends nationally and internationally and I think it is fair to say we became a popular focus at the end of the day.

As the evenings progressed and others opted for an early night we joined forces with our friends from Dublin and other serious numismatists because we realised that the real research starts when everyone else is in bed. Marvellous theories were debated. If only we could remember what we were talking about in the morning.

Neil was one of the most pleasant and agreeable people I have ever met. I can't believe we will not be sharing his company at our next BANS Congress in the Isle of Man next month.

He is a great loss to numismatics but of course much more to you Margaret and indeed to us all as a friend.



John Rainey (left) and Neil McCormick (right), attending the BANS Spring Conference 2018, while Alan Dunlop is taking the photograph

Neil McCormick

(1944 - 2019)

A Good Friend and a Fellow Hobbyist with Passion and Wit

by Dr Alexey Shitov (NSI-NB)

It was sad news we learned recently of the untimely passing of our good friend and the long-time treasurer of the Numismatic Society of Ireland (Northern Branch) Neil McCormick on Tuesday 5th March 2019. As it always occurs in such circumstances, I, among the others, suddenly realised that there would be no other chance to send Neil those belated season greetings or a copy of our recent papers for proofreading. At such moments I stop to marvel at the pitiless flow time that parts us from everything and everyone we like and love.

I met Neil for the first time when I joined the Society some ten years ago. Paying the meeting levy and my first membership fee, I was suddenly spoken to in Serbian, which vaguely resembles my native Russian. Apparently, Neil was a keen collector of the modern Yugoslavian coins and banknotes - the interest he developed while travelling to the country in the past. Since that time, we used to fire Russian and Yugoslavian words and phrases at each other, enjoying being caught in a tangle of linguistic specialities served under the dressing of mutual jokes and laughter. Nobody would escape the pincers of his sharp wit, especially when it came to reading past meeting minutes, and that was a pure joy to watch Neil and Michael teasing each other over the notes and details.

Among many of Neil's numismatic interests, the medieval feudal of the County of La Marche stands out as a major topic. This area in France is the place where Neil used to spend time on holidays with his wife Margaret, and he read extensively on the history and coinage of the region. Thanks to his fluent French and knowledge of the references available only in French, I also learned many interesting details about my pitiful collection of four French deniers of Count Hugh X of La Marche, which Neil liked nevertheless and hoped that I would develop my interest further.

Certainly worth a mention is Neil's long-lasting interest in the history and coinage of the Latin Monetary Union (1865-1927) - a 19th-century system that unified several European currencies in the era of silver and gold, and a pre-requisite of the modern Euro coinage. Neil was particularly fond of the crown-size French silver five-franc coins of Napoleon I and Louis XVIII in their many varieties and mints that he knew intimately. His last Society presentation concerned the Irish bank cheques and merchant scrips from his private collection, the core of which was formed by the cheques he picked up during his work, with addition of few older pieces acquired at the internet sales. I am sure he had plenty of other interests in coins and medals and my list of the topics above is far from being complete.

Neil played a key role in the Society proceedings. He was dealing with the Society merchandise and finances. He did a great deal of proofreading our members' papers, some of which subsequently received the awards and distinctions. His inquisitive mind learned and adopted many modern hi-tech tools and technologies to ensure efficient planning and flawless funding of all NSI-NB activities, ranging from Saturday's coin club meetings in the Linenhall Library to the BANS Congress in Belfast in 2015. Beyond that, he was, indisputably, The Quiz Master of the Society, "merciless" in making many of us embarrass ourselves while grappling with his witty numismatic questions. At the end, we did learn a lot from our flaws of basic knowledge of the world history and coinage.

Whenever he travelled for job or joy of the holidays, Neil used to pick up local coins and notes for his collection and in doing so, he unveiled history and made friends. Now, staring at the printed NSI-NB Programme of 1974/5 I pause, with a lump in my throat, at the name of Hon. Treasurer J.N. McCormick and I ask myself once and again if this is how it all ends? I dare to say no, it is not, for the light that Neil shone on the Society and hobby at large still dwells in many hearts and, when our time comes, it will make a break for the open, joining the other rays lightening the Universe and making it one marvellous place to live, to love and to miss ever after.

