

TRADERS OR CRUSADERS?

How the IAPN helps collectors all over the world to collect more safely and more successfully.

By CHRIS RUDD

AT 6.00pm, 23 May, a polyglot party of traders will be sipping cocktails in the poshest hotel in sunny San Diego. They will be celebrating the opening of the 54th general assembly of the International Association of Professional Numismatists (IAPN), hosted by Carola and Richard Ponterio and their American colleagues. Three days of delights and deliberations, with the option of a trip to the Grand Canyon to follow.

Readers of *Australasian Coin and Banknote Magazine* may wonder if this Californian congress is just a jolly junket for jet-setting dealers and their wives. Or does it, and do they, also have a more serious purpose—one which serves the wider numismatic community? Yes, it has. Yes, they do. And I'll tell you what that purpose is.

In 1951 the world's leading international numismatic dealers were invited to a meeting in Geneva, Celtic capital of the Allobroges 'those of another country' and home of John Calvin, who made it the intellectual centre of 16th century protestant Europe. At this meeting the IAPN was born. There were 28 founder members. Today IAPN membership is held by 117 numismatic firms in 23

countries in the five continents. Like the League of Nations, which was also established in Geneva (US president Woodrow Wilson had the idea in 1917) the IAPN is a truly global organisation that carries a lot of clout.



Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Diego, venue of 2005 IAPN congress. Not all sun and fun. Work sessions begin as early as 7.15am.

What is the aim of the IAPN? In brief, to improve numismatics worldwide. Make no mistake, the IAPN is first and foremost a body of traders. Yet, at the same time, it is a crusading, campaigning, freedom fighting, corruption crushing force—a formidable force for numismatic integrity, international fraternity

and global free trade. Specifically, the IAPN strives to develop a healthy and prosperous numismatic market, to promote the highest standards of business ethics and commercial practice, to encourage scientific research, to propagate numismatics globally, and to create lasting and friendly relations among numismatists everywhere, irrespective of country, class or creed.

Though wholly and solely a trade association, representing only an elite minority of firms, the ethics of the IAPN and the work of the IAPN indirectly influence hundreds of other dealers and—more to the point—deliver tangible benefits to thousands of collectors all over the world, many of whom may never have even heard of the IAPN. Yes, it is you, dear readers of *Australasian Coin and Banknote Magazine*, who are among the chief beneficiaries of the benign

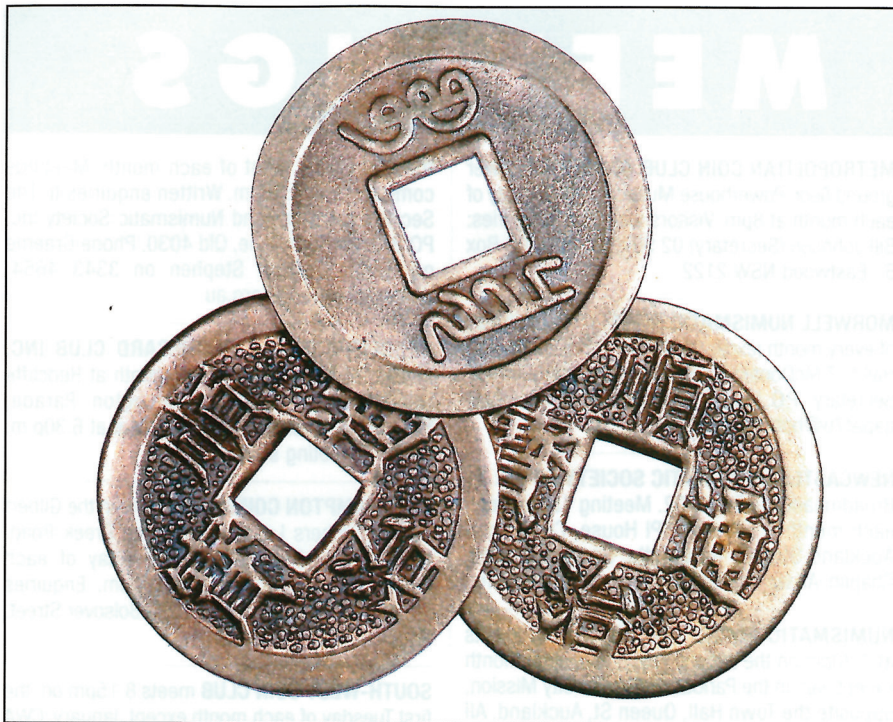
moral leadership of the IAPN. Without the cosmopolitan authority of the IAPN, the world of coin dealing could be a different marketplace, perhaps a sharper and shadier shop, than the one you know today.

So, what are these benefits? And how do you experience them? Firstly, you get good coins—genuine coins with a great guarantee behind them. In the unlikely event of an IAPN trader selling you a coin, medal or banknote that is later found to be counterfeit, you can return it and obtain a full refund and—here's the added advantage—the refund is given without regard to the date of purchase. In other words, you could still get your money back fifty years later, for example. Few firms are willing to give a lifetime warranty on their goods, which is why few firms belong to the IAPN. Guaranteeing authenticity in this way is a strict condition of IAPN membership. When you buy from an IAPN dealer you can buy with complete confidence, no matter how new you may be to collecting.

Secondly, you get good information with your coins and good advice too, if you want it—expert advice, advice you can trust. You see, before a dealer can join the IAPN he must demonstrate that he has



The IAPN defends the right of dealers to deal and collectors to collect. Since 510 BC the helmeted head of Athena on coins has symbolised wisdom in war, fecundity and free trade in peace. Woodcut of coin dealing in bank by Hans Burgkmair (1473-1531), Mansell Collection.



The Chinese government has recently asked the USA to restrict the import of any Chinese coins pre-dating 1911, including common Cash coinage and maybe even Trade Dollars. The IAPN vociferously opposes this and all other oppressive bureaucracy that seeks to suppress the harmless hobby of coin collecting.

a broad working knowledge of numismatics. He must understand the coin business as a whole, not just his speciality. When an IAPN dealer tells you something, you can be pretty sure that he knows what he's talking about and that he isn't blagging, bluffing or blarneying. Many members of the IAPN have authored or published important works of original numismatic scholarship. They are at the forefront of their profession and codswallop isn't acceptable either to them or to their customers.

Thirdly, you are offered the right books. Every IAPN dealer knows that the more you read about your favourite series of coins and the more you study them, the greater will be your understanding and appreciation of them. Every year, in order to boost the publication of books of specialist and general interest, the



The IAPN fights fraud, dishonest dealing and restrictive state legislation. It trumpets truthfulness in trade; education and communication in numismatics. Gold stater of Tasciovanos 'killer of badgers' and king of the Catuvellauni 'men good in battle', seen here with his war trumpet.

IAPN awards a prize for the best numismatic book of the year. In 1990 Robert Van Arsdell's *Celtic Coinage of Britain* won the IAPN book prize. Last year Christian Dekesel was awarded for his bibliographic work.

Fourthly, you can keep up to date, if you wish, with the latest news from abroad that may be relevant to your specialist interest. IAPN dealers are usually better informed about international numismatics than other coin traders. Because members of the IAPN send each other their catalogues, they all know who has got what for sale, where and when, and for how much. A single swift phone call to your IAPN dealer can often save you hours of surfing the net. Moreover, he can tell you (or find out) what modern fakes are currently circulating, not just locally, but in other countries too. In 1962 Marshall McLuhan described the world as a 'global village'. Whenever you talk to an IAPN dealer you are automatically wired into a unique global network of hot news and reliable data.

Fifthly, when you deal with an IAPN dealer, you get the benefit of a world-class level of numismatic experience, expertise and excellence. Membership of the IAPN isn't easily obtained. All applicants have to be sponsored by three established members and are rigorously vetted, which can sometimes take many months. Eventually, if a candidate fulfills all the criteria, his admittance is decided by a vote of the general assembly. If he doesn't win two-thirds of the vote, he doesn't get in. No firm, however big,



The IAPN fosters numismatic scholarship and numismatic publishing by giving an annual book prize of a certificate, silver medal and cash award of 3,500 Swiss francs.

can 'buy their way' into the IAPN. Membership is entirely dependent on merit, not credit.

Finally, you can be sure that your rights as a private collector are being vigorously upheld and defended. In 2003 the IAPN launched its Information Trade Committee, headed by Arturo Russo, to investigate and combat restrictive legislation which might curb, or even stop, the free trade in ancient coins. Speaking in Oxford last year for the IAPN, Dr Ursula Kampmann, secretary of the IAPN's IBSCC office, argued strongly for private collecting and international dealing. In answer to the question 'Who own objects?' she said, 'We all do. No one group has any monopoly in the ownership of the past, and no one group has the right to deprive others of the pleasure and knowledge that comes from an intimate relationship with the everyday object made thousands of years ago by our common ancestors.'

At first glance, members of the IAPN may look like traders. Indeed they are. Look closer and you'll see they are also crusaders—crusaders who are fighting not only for coin dealers, but for coin collectors all over the world, including readers of *Australasian Coin and Banknote Magazine*. That's not all. Every year, at their annual congress, members of the IAPN donate to a local charity. This year in San Diego they are contributing to a day centre for abused and homeless women.

Who belongs to the IAPN and who doesn't? Who has agreed to abide by their rigid rules of conduct and who hasn't? As a collector you are entitled to know what sort of dealers you're dealing with and how well qualified they are to help you. For a free list of IAPN members contact the general secretary: Jean-Luc Van der Schueren, 14 rue de la Bourse, B-1000 Bruxelles, Belgium. E-mail: iapnsecret@compuserve.com

Chris Rudd is a member of the IAPN who specialises in Celtic coins. He speaks for himself here, as a dealer and former collector.

☆ ☆ ☆