

The Royal Mint Advisory Committee 2011-12

The Committee, which operates independently of the Royal Mint and whose full title is the Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the Design of Coins, Medals, Seals and Decorations, was established in 1922 with the personal approval of King George V.

Its original purpose was to raise the standard of numismatic art and that remains its primary concern, being charged on behalf of HM Treasury and other government departments with the recommendation of new designs for UK coins, official medals and seals. The Committee is designated a Non-Departmental Public Body and its membership is regulated by the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA).

There were four meetings in the last year, all taking place in London, two at Buckingham Palace, one at Cutlers' Hall and one at the Art Workers' Guild. In addition, there were meetings of the working group on the design of coins for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and of the Sub-Committee on the selection of themes for new UK coins.

Programme for London 2012

Work began on designing coins for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in the months immediately following the announcement of London's successful bid. It has been the single largest programme of UK coins to date and resolving what has amounted to more than 60 individual designs has taken a great deal of time and energy.

The final elements of the programme were examined by the Committee during 2012 and amongst them were the UK's first kilo and five ounce coins. Three Royal Academicians, Sir Anthony Caro, Tom Phillips and Christopher Le Brun (the current President of the Academy), were commissioned to work on these high-status precious metal coins but, beyond the important matter of design, a new Act of Parliament, in the shape of a Private Members' Bill supported by Mark Lancaster MP, was required to allow the Royal Mint to produce UK coins weighing as much as a kilo. Working firmly within their own styles, the three artists have developed contrasting responses to the sporting theme and, seen together, the designs demonstrate with some conviction the flexibility with which coinage design can be approached.

Commemorative Coins

The Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen is an event of considerable historical significance and one of the most prominent ways in which it will be commemorated through public art will be on the nation's coinage. Crown pieces issued by the Royal Mint will form part of the official symbolism of the Jubilee and, true to the strength of his track record as one of the most gifted numismatic artists of his generation, Ian Rank-Broadley has created designs of great sensitivity and dignity.

The idea of issuing kilo and five ounce coins for the Diamond Jubilee as well as for the Olympic Games, prompted the thought of approaching Mr Rank-Broadley again with a request to prepare what would become a suite of designs by him to celebrate the Jubilee. His low-relief sculpture for the kilo took many weeks but it is, even by his own high standards, an accomplished piece of work.

There are very few other themes that could hope to compete with the Olympic Games and the Diamond Jubilee but as one of the most beloved of authors Charles Dickens has himself become something of a national treasure. The 200th anniversary of his birth falls in 2012 and the Committee examined a varied selection of responses to the brief. Conventional portraits and pictorial scenes were included but it was the idea of a writer being defined, quite literally, by his own words that captured the imagination of the Committee. Having designed a 50 pence piece on the subject of the WWF in 2011 it was again Matt Dent who came through with a characteristically intelligent solution for the two-pound coin by constructing a profile silhouette of Dickens using the titles of his books.



Designs for the Diamond Jubilee UK £5 coin were unveiled in October 2011. The portrait of Her Majesty The Queen created especially for Diamond Jubilee commemorative coins is the work of the distinguished sculptor Ian Rank-Broadley FRBS.

Sub-Committee on the Selection of Themes

In line with changes to the Committee's terms of reference in the summer of 2009, there were two meetings of the Sub-Committee on the Selection of Themes for UK Coins. At the meeting in June 2011 themes for new coins to be issued in 2013, with their associated denominations, were agreed and have subsequently received Ministerial and Royal approval. At the meeting in March 2012 themes for 2014 were discussed and, with a view to establishing a longer-term perspective, preliminary research was presented on a plan extending over the next five years.

Membership

Having been reviewed, the terms of three members, John Maine, Sir David Cannadine and Stephen Raw, were extended by a further three years. Approaching the subject matter of discussions from very different perspectives, each has provided the Committee with invaluable advice. As artist members, Mr Maine and Mr Raw have not only been able to suggest new artists and designers, they have also shaped the outcome of discussions with a grounded creative input.

Sir David Cannadine has always delivered insightful judgements on the designs presented to the Committee but, in bringing to bear his formidable historical knowledge on the question of future themes for the UK coinage, he has become increasingly influential.

There have been no retirements during the year but, with MaryAnne Stevens' term in office coming to an end a month following the end of the reporting year and the recruitment for her successor at an advanced stage, it seems appropriate to pay tribute to her now. Her contribution to the work of the Committee has been hugely important, demonstrating a remarkable commitment in time and energy to its fundamental cause of raising the standard of numismatic art in Britain.

She embraced with enthusiasm the challenge of judging designs for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, no small undertaking in time and forbearance. Her deep knowledge of art history, and the authority with which she speaks to the finer points of art and design, will be missed, as indeed will her acute awareness of the qualities of artists at work in Britain today and, in particular, of Academicians.

Members give of their time freely and, for HM Treasury and other government departments who draw upon the Committee's advice, there is a deep sense of gratitude for the care and expertise they devote to their deliberations.

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To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee the 2012 Sovereign features a new treatment of St George and the Dragon.



Members of the Committee
At 31 March 2012
(with dates appointment)

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill
Chairman (January 2011)

Miss MaryAnne Stevens
Director for Academic Affairs, Royal Academy of Arts
(April 2001, re-appointed April 2008)

Professor Sir David Cannadine
Historian
(September 2004, re-appointed September 2011)

Mr John Maine RA
Sculptor (September 2004, re-appointed September 2011)

Mr Stephen Raw
Lettering artist (January 2005, re-appointed January 2012)

The Rt Hon. The Earl Peel GCVO DL
Lord Chamberlain (March 2007)

Mrs Jana Khayat
Businesswoman (February 2008)

Mr Tim Knox
Director of Sir John Soane's Museum (February 2008)

Mr Thomas Woodcock CVO DL
Garter King of Arms (January 2010)

Professor Nick Mayhew
Numismatic Consultant to the Committee

Mr Adam Lawrence
Chief Executive of The Royal Mint Limited

Dr Kevin Clancy
Secretary to the Committee

Mr Gordon Summers
Technical Adviser to the Committee



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The design for the new Welsh government seal was commissioned from the sculptor John Bergdahl.