
The Royal Mint Advisory Committee

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 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, one at the Art Workers' Guild and three at Cutlers' Hall. In addition, there were two meetings of the Sub-Committee on the selection of themes for new United Kingdom coins.

Commemorative coins

The Coronation of Her Majesty the Queen in 1953 was marked at the time with the issue of a crown piece, the equestrian portrait of which was designed by the respected sculptor Gilbert Ledward RA. In seeking to celebrate the 60th anniversary of that important moment in British history, designs for a crown piece, a five-ounce coin and a kilo were commissioned by the Committee. Although in the end the work of three different artists was selected, the central ceremonial role of the crown jewels ties them together. In designing the crown piece, for Emma Noble the Imperial State Crown defined the occasion with considerable clarity and, embellishing his composition with the level of detail befitting the large canvas of a kilo coin, John Bergdahl placed the Imperial State Crown and sceptre within a celebratory arrangement of foliage and banners.

The setting of the ceremony itself in Westminster Abbey could not go unrecognised and in his design for the five-ounce coin silversmith Jonathan Olliffe captured beautifully the architectural splendour of the Abbey as a frame for the orb and sceptre. In the weeks leading up to the Coronation in June 1953 the first coins of the current reign started to enter circulation, bearing a portrait of the young Queen by the sculptor Mary Gillick.

Since then three other main coinage portraits of the Queen have been commissioned from Arnold Machin RA, Raphael Maklouf and Ian Rank-Broadley FRBS. Bringing together the story of her portrait over the course of her reign seemed wholly appropriate and, to act as an anchor for the series, designs taking the Royal Arms as the principal theme were commissioned by the Committee. The work of the distinguished sculptor James Butler RA was chosen and in his success there is a pleasing link with the Coronation itself since as a young sculptor he worked with Gilbert Ledward.

Each of these four artists had designed United Kingdom coins before but young sculptor Anthony Smith's artwork for the two-pound coin to mark the 350th anniversary of the first issue of the guinea was his first success. The commission for a pair of two-pound coins to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the London Underground elicited a very strong response from the graphic designers and artists invited to submit ideas. Having designed the bridge series of one pound coins some years ago Edwina Ellis prepared a brilliantly effective treatment of the famous roundel, while Ed Barber and Jay Osgerby, fresh from their success in designing the torch for the London 2012 Olympic Games, focused on the classic image of an underground train emerging from a tunnel.

For the 50 pence piece, the themes with which artists and the Committee had to wrestle were the 50th anniversary of the death of composer Benjamin Britten and the 100th anniversary of the birth of coin designer Christopher Ironside. It was perhaps no surprise that Tom Phillips RA CBE, himself a composer as well as an enormously talented artist, came through with a design for the Benjamin Britten coin centred on the inspirational nature of Britten's music. To honour Christopher Ironside, who gave Britain its first decimal coin designs, it seemed a fitting tribute to make use of an elegant version of the Royal Arms he prepared for the 50 pence in the late 1960s, which at the time did not quite make it through to final approval. The then President of the Committee, Prince Philip, commented that the design was so strong another use ought to be found for it and now, over 40 years later, those wishes have been realised.



The distinguished artist James Butler RA has designed a number of United Kingdom coins and his treatment of the Royal Arms for the reverse of the Portrait Collection, shown here as an unfinished plaster model, demonstrates the vigour and strength of his skill as a sculptor.

Medals and seals

The remit of the Committee includes making recommendations to a range of government departments on the design of official medals and seals. Projects come with less frequency but are nonetheless a reasonably regular element of the Committee's work. The design of a new Second World War Star, or at least agreement of the weight and positioning of the wording taken from existing Stars, was necessary in relation to the Arctic Convoy. The institution of the medal was the result of many years of campaigning and the first of the medals was awarded to surviving veterans before Easter.

Sub-Committee on the Selection of Themes

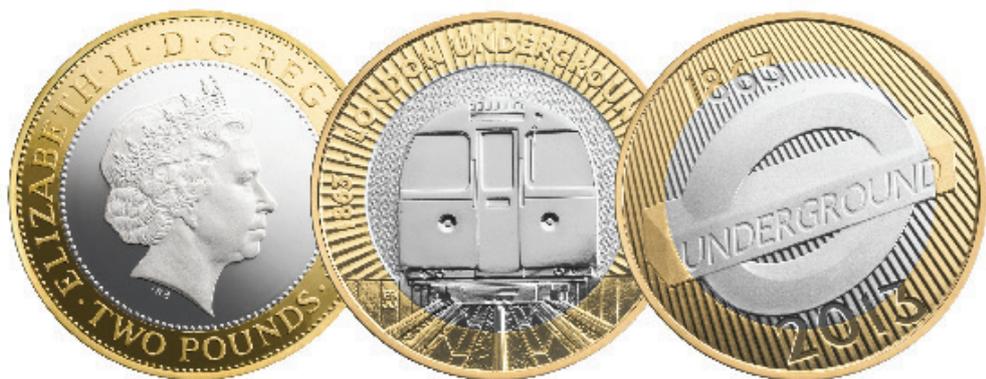
There were two meetings of the Sub-Committee on the Selection of Themes for United Kingdom Coins. The focus of attention of the Sub-Committee during the summer of 2012 was the forthcoming centenary of the First World War from 2014, an extensive programme which has since been approved by the Chancellor. The Sub-Committee could not have made the progress it did without the advice of the eminent war historian Professor Sir Hew Strachan of All Souls College Oxford. At a meeting in March 2013 the Sub-Committee discussed themes for 2015, as well as a number of other projects which will be publicised in the coming months.

Membership

Having been reviewed, the terms of two members, Jana Khayat and Tim Knox, were extended. The pressure of other commitments has meant that Mrs Khayat's term will not go beyond February 2014, while Mr Knox's time on the Committee will continue for a further three years. In their very different ways they have proven themselves to be influential members, providing not only well informed cultural perspectives but also more detailed insights that have enhanced the quality of designs recommended by the Committee.

The recruitment of a new member to replace MaryAnne Stevens, who retired in April last year, resulted in the appointment of the ceramic artist and writer Edmund de Waal OBE. He will bring to the deliberations of the Committee his own informed perspective as a practising artist and also his considerable knowledge of art history. The Chairman and other members look forward to working with him in the coming years.

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. The commitment in time and energy the Chairman, in particular, has been able to give to the work of the Committee has not gone unrecognised.



Members of the Committee
At 31 March 2013
(with dates of appointment)

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

Chairman
(January 2011)

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, re-appointed February 2013)

Mr Tim Knox

Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum
(February 2008, re-appointed February 2013)

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Matheson

Secretary, Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood
(April 2013)

Mr Edmund de Waal OBE

Ceramic artist and writer
(April 2012)

Mr Thomas Woodcock CVO DL

Garter King of Arms
(January 2010)

Professor Nick Mayhew

Numismatic Consultant to the Committee
(January 2010)

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