

The Royal Mint Advisory Committee

The Committee, which operates independently of The Royal Mint Limited, 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. It is charged on behalf of HM Treasury and other government departments with the recommendation of new designs for United Kingdom coins, official medals, seals and decorations. The Committee is designated a Non-Departmental Public Body (‘NDPB’) and its membership is regulated by the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (‘OCPA’). It is chaired by Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston.

During the year there were six meetings, five of which were held in person, one by conference call and the meeting in March 2023 was held at The Royal Mint. In addition, there were three meetings of the Sub-Committee on the selection of themes for new UK coins, all of which were held in an online format. Over the course of the reporting year the Committee examined designs for 32 themes (2021–22: 25), a number of which required the selection of more than one design.

DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The Committee examined a typically diverse range of themes but the single most important matter presented for consideration was in connection with memorial coins issued to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II and those prepared to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III. For the last 70 years, the work of the Advisory Committee, both in relation to coins and official medals, has been defined by images of Her Late Majesty and has been enriched through exploring the staging posts of her jubilees and other royal events. Her life and reign have provided opportunities for the nation to come together and the commonality of coinage has provided an accessible way through which these moments have been commemorated. In view of her unprecedented life of service, and the affection in which she was held, the death of Elizabeth II could not have gone unrecognised and so a small series of designs was commissioned deliberately aimed at providing a perspective over her long life. The design for the 50 pence was a case in point, making use as it did of the cruciform arrangement of shields, separated by national floral emblems, which had appeared on the reverse of the Coronation crown piece of 1953. Herald painter Edgar Fuller conceived the original design, which was subsequently modelled by Cecil Thomas, and referencing the beginning of her reign seemed to offer a symbolic way of honouring her life.

These were the first coins of the new reign and appropriately carried a portrait of King Charles III. How a monarch is depicted on their coinage is one of the most abiding of images and the task in this instance fell to the portrait sculptor Martin Jennings, known and respected for his public sculptures of Sir John Betjeman at St Pancras Station and of George Orwell at the entrance to Broadcasting House. The Committee was impressed by the balance he had achieved between conveying a regal grandeur and an accessible warmth of expression.

A defining moment at the start of the reign of any British monarch is the coronation. It is a significant national and international event and required the Committee to work at pace with external artists and the coin design team at The Royal Mint. The outcome across a number of denominations incorporated elements of the royal regalia used in the coronation on the crown piece by herald painter Timothy Noad, an ornate interpretation of the Royal Arms on higher

value coins by sculptor John Bergdahl, and on the 50 pence, a modern treatment of Westminster Abbey arching over the King’s cypher by Natasha Jenkins, who is a member of the Royal Mint Coin Design team. The whole programme of design work stretching over the period of transition to the new reign was demanding for the Committee but also rewarding, since the import of the judgements made was in no way lost on members.

COMMEMORATIVE COINS

The Committee typically examines designs about a year to 18 months in advance of their being issued, which means necessarily that a number of projects that came before the Committee during the reporting year 2022-23 relate to coins that will be released later in 2023 and 2024. The following examples provide a flavour of the range of themes that have been considered and some of the design challenges with which members grapple in making recommendations.

A recurring question for the Committee arises in relation to how national institutions should be symbolised or depicted. These organisations are by their nature often complex and when the theme of the 75th anniversary of the National Health Service was proposed it presented challenges for the artists who were invited to submit designs. There is no single building or discipline that can encompass the whole organisation, and focusing on an individual would have been invidious, so the solution adopted was to use words that captured the essence of what the NHS does and the affection in which it is held. Respect, dedication, pride, support, compassion, knowledge, gratitude, care, kindness, hope, dignity, life, empathy and duty were the words selected that seemed to sum up best what the NHS means to the nation. The designer Alice Lediard, of The Royal Mint Graphic Design team, succeeded in devising an engaging way in which to place the words surrounding the central reference to the anniversary itself.

The British coinage stands as a gallery of royal portraits stretching back to Anglo-Saxon times, but it was only from the reign of Henry VII that recognisably realistic portraits were created for the coinage. To draw attention to this rich legacy, a series has been developed by The Royal Mint that reproduces these classic coinage effigies. The series already includes Charles I, George I and Henry VIII and, while the input from the Committee on suggesting amendments to the original designs has been light-touch, it has provided an opportunity for members to become more familiar with this back-catalogue of excellent portraiture as a way of informing future decisions. The series has also provided a technical challenge for The Royal Mint in seeking to achieve a balance between retaining the look and feel of a coin design produced hundreds of years ago while operating in the setting of modern minting processes.

Celebrating modern British popular culture has formed a growing element in the programme of commemorative coins in recent years and, amongst other themes, this has encompassed literature, music, design and films. In the category of music, designs for a coin to honour The Rolling Stones were reviewed by the Committee, a process that involved employing imagery relating to the identity of the band while at the same time capturing something of the excitement of their live performances. In the confined canvass of a coin this presents design difficulties, but one with which the Committee, through experience, has become adept in overcoming.

OFFICIAL MEDALS

The remit of the Committee includes making recommendations to a range of government departments on the design of official medals and seals. Approval was granted for the award of an official Coronation medal, the tradition for which can be traced back over a number of reigns. Time was limited, but Martin Jennings was able to create a dignified conjoint portrait of King Charles and Queen Camilla for the obverse, while for the reverse the precedent of using the royal cypher and the date of the Coronation was followed.

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SELECTION OF THEMES

The Sub-Committee examines proposals for the programme of commemorative and circulating coins to be issued in forthcoming years, making recommendations through the main Committee to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the year there were four meetings of the Sub-Committee, the focus of attention being the programme for 2023 through to 2024. An important consideration for the Sub-Committee in selecting themes is that, where possible, they reflect the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

MEMBERSHIP

The variety and number of projects placed before the Committee has been handled with the same degree of care and attention to detail as ever.

Membership of the Committee, and supporting advisors, at 31 March 2023

(with dates of appointment)

Rt Hon Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston

CHAIR

(March 2021)

Professor Phil Baines

LETTERING AND GRAPHIC DESIGNER

(May 2016, reappointed March 2021)

Mrs Blondel Cluff CBE

CHAIR, NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

(March 2014)

The Rt Hon Lord Parker of Minsmere GCVO KCB

LORD CHAMBERLAIN

(April 2021)

Mr Hughie O’Donoghue RA

PAINTER

(January 2015)

Professor Jane Ridley

HISTORIAN

(January 2015)

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Vernon

COMPTROLLER OF THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S DEPARTMENT

(September 2014) Deputises for Lord Parker

Baroness Stuart, now entering her third year as Chair, has provided clear leadership over the Committee’s complex and sensitive deliberations, combining a collegiate spirit with an instinctive grasp of broader cultural and political considerations.

In March, Professor Phil Baines attended his last meeting of the Committee, having to retire before the end of his term of membership due to poor health. He was the Committee’s lettering expert and spoke to this brief with considerable authority derived from a long career as a teacher and writer. Not only was he able to improve the quality of designs through his remarkably attuned eye for detail but he also contributed to discussions more generally on matters of composition.

A recruitment process is ongoing to find new members to take the place of those who have retired in recent years.

Members of the Committee give of their time freely and a deserved note of appreciation is extended to them for the professionalism and imagination they bring to the Committee’s work. It has been a particularly busy and demanding year for Lieutenant Colonel Mike Vernon and for David White arising from their responsibilities relating to the transition to the new reign. An especial note of gratitude must extend to them for sustaining their regular attendance at meetings during this momentous time of change.

Mr David White

GARTER PRINCIPAL KING OF ARMS

(July 2021)

Dr Shailendra Bhandare

NUMISMATIC CONSULTANT TO THE COMMITTEE

(September 2021)

Mrs Anne Jessopp

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE ROYAL MINT LIMITED

Ms Nicola Howell

CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER OF THE ROYAL MINT LIMITED

Ms Caroline Webb

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER OF THE ROYAL MINT LIMITED

Dr Kevin Clancy

SECRETARY TO THE COMMITTEE

Mr Lee Jones

TECHNICAL ADVISER TO THE COMMITTEE