

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 Gisela Stuart of Edgbaston.

During the year there were six meetings, all of which were held in person. In addition, there were two meetings of the Sub-Committee on the selection of themes for new United Kingdom coins, both of which were held in an online format. Over the course of the reporting year the Committee examined designs for 30 themes (2022–23: 32), a number of which were part of larger series requiring the selection of more than one design. It was also necessary during the year to hold a number of single-item agenda meetings, primarily to discuss design revisions to the definitive series of coins noted below.

DEFINITIVE DESIGNS FOR KING CHARLES III

The portrait of His Majesty King Charles III for the United Kingdom coinage was prepared by the sculptor Martin Jennings. As well as a new portrait there is also a requirement at the start of a new reign to prepare designs for the reverse side of the coins, from the penny to the two pounds, used in daily circulation. For the greater part of the last several hundred years, heraldry has provided the main route through which national British identity has been symbolised on the coinage. There are, though, exceptions. The wren on the pre-decimal farthing issued from 1937 and the series of national floral emblems on one pound coins of the 1980s provided an alternative approach. Aligning with the King's interest in the natural world, when it came to preparing a design brief for the new definitive coins of his reign, it was judged appropriate to commission artwork inspired by the flora and fauna of the United Kingdom.

The selection process for the Committee extended over several months and involved working closely with Buckingham Palace. A number of themes and approaches were explored before agreement was reached on a series which includes bees, a salmon, a dormouse, a puffin, a squirrel, a capercaillie, oak leaves and flowers of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom. At the launch of the eight designs in October 2023 they were extremely well received by the media and more generally. Attention was drawn to the historic break with the tradition of heraldry and it was acknowledged that they consciously spoke to the importance of conservation and climate change. A number of the animals chosen for the series had suffered declining numbers arising from threats to their habitats but campaigns have started to reverse this, all of which formed part of the story behind the new series.

COMMEMORATIVE COINS

The Committee typically examines designs about a year to 18 months in advance of their being issued which means, necessarily, a number of projects that came before the Committee during the reporting year relate to coins that will be released later in 2024 or 2025.

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.

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 films, designs for a series of coins celebrating the decades-long James Bond franchise were reviewed by the Committee, a process that involved employing imagery relating to the innovative technology and vehicles featured in the films. One objective was to capture something of the excitement and drama of the scenes and, as a background to each coin in the series, the titles of the films were reproduced in extremely small lettering. The selection process involved working with licensed assets, showing imagery from the films, and the challenge for the designers and members of the Committee was to work out how best these could be adapted to the format of a coin without losing the integrity of the original images.

The Committee is provided with summary details of publicity reports when a commemorative coin is launched which can provide welcome endorsement of designs selected by members and inform the decision-making process. A particularly notable instance of this arose with respect to the coin to celebrate the work of the late George Michael which formed part of the Music Legends series. It was evident how this coin had appealed to a diverse customer base and generated a substantial amount of media interest.

Cultural institutions help define what is important to a country and it is, therefore, a natural step to seek to commemorate them on the coinage. The bicentenary of the National Gallery fell in 2024, an occasion the Gallery itself harnessed to celebrate its history but also to look forward into its third century of bringing people and paintings together. But how to approach a theme about art through the art of coinage design? One solution would have been to focus on some of the most well-known paintings in the Gallery or to look back to some of the first works of art to have been acquired, but both these approaches ran into the difficulty of being too narrow in the context of the vast range of styles and periods on public display. The Gallery's location provided a solution. Overlooking Trafalgar Square, and as a result being one of the most prominent buildings in London, it was decided to direct artists to the fabric of the building itself and that way seek to encompass all that the Gallery represents. The wood engraver, Edwina Ellis, prepared the artwork incorporating the classical façade and distinctive dome, adding to her successful record as a freelance designer of United Kingdom coins.

Having such a long history, the British coinage has over many centuries been regarded with enduring affection. Guineas and threepences, shillings and Sovereigns were fondly regarded when in active circulation and the sixpence, too, can be included within these ranks. It acquired a wider significance beyond money when a silver sixpence started to be given as a gift to a bride on her wedding day and, in recognition of this, a few years ago a modern version of the pre-decimal sixpence was designed. For the new reign it was thought appropriate to update this and the result was an elegant intertwining of floral emblems, woven in and out of the lettering and date, with the crown of the new reign at its centre. It is the work of heraldic artist Quentin Peacock and, when it came before the Committee for consideration, it was regarded as one of the most well resolved and attractive designs seen in many years.

OFFICIAL MEDALS

The remit of the Committee includes making recommendations to a range of government departments on the design of official medals and seals.

During the reporting period, approval was granted for the award of an official medal to recognise military and civilian personnel who supported the United Kingdom's nuclear testing programme in the 1950s and 1960s. A design by Timothy Noad was approved which depicts a diagrammatic representation of an atomic nucleus surrounded by a wreath. Approval was also granted to institute a medal to be presented to the next of kin of those killed in the course of public service. It was again Timothy Noad who won through the selection process with a design focused on the inscription FOR A LIFE GIVEN IN SERVICE encircled by a wreath of rosemary and surmounted by a crown.

For its role in facilitating the design of coins and medals required for the new reign, and not least for the Coronation ceremony itself, the Chair and members of the Committee were awarded Coronation Medals. On behalf of the Committee, Baroness Stuart expressed her gratitude to His Majesty and also to Colonel Vernon for making the presentation.

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 two meetings of the Sub-Committee, the focus of attention being the programmes for 2024 and two to three years extending beyond. An important consideration for the Sub-Committee in selecting themes is that, where possible, they reflect modern British life, as well as celebrating the history and culture of the country.

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. Baroness Stuart, who in the reporting year completed 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. It would also not be possible for the Committee to operate as it does without the involvement of a team at The Royal Mint, encompassing market research, technical expertise and secretarial support.

A recruitment process for two new members reached its conclusion in November 2023 with the appointment of the art historian Alexandra Harris and the artist Adam Dant. They will serve for an initial term of five years, with the option being available for them to serve for a further five-year term, subject to Ministerial approval. Officials in HM Treasury provide essential support in ensuring all aspects of the appointment process conform to the relevant guidance and they are invaluable in securing Ministerial and Royal approvals.

In March 2024, the Committee learned of the death of Professor Phil Baines. He had been in declining health for a number of years, attending his last meeting as a member a year earlier. 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 valuably to discussions more generally on matters of composition.

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.

Membership of the Committee, and supporting advisors, at 31 March 2024
(with dates of appointment):

Rt Hon Baroness Gisela Stuart of Edgbaston

CHAIR

(March 2021)

Mrs Blondel Cluff CBE

CHAIR, WEST INDIA COMMITTEE

(March 2014)

Mr Adam Dant

ARTIST

(November 2023)

Ms Alexandra Harris

ART HISTORIAN

(November 2023)

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

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

Sean Jones

ACCOUNTING OFFICER

25 July 2024