

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, being charged on behalf of HM Treasury and other government departments with the recommendation of new designs for United Kingdom coins, official medals and seals. 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).

There were four meetings during the year, all taking place in London. In addition, there was one meeting of the Sub-Committee on the selection of themes for new United Kingdom coins.

William Shakespeare

Writers have been commemorated on the British coinage on previous occasions, most notably Samuel Johnson, Robert Burns and Charles Dickens. It seemed wholly appropriate that the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, who is widely regarded as the nation's greatest writer, should be honoured with the issue of new United Kingdom coins.

With such a vast spectrum of work, and with the high regard in which he is still held in Britain and throughout the world, it was a challenge to resolve how best to approach the subject let alone choose the designs. After some reflection it was decided to issue three circulating £2 coins which would take as their theme the division of Shakespeare's plays into tragedies, comedies and histories with, in addition, a further coin to commemorate Shakespeare himself. The experienced coin and medal designer John Bergdahl provided the treatment of the subject matter most strongly supported by the Committee,

securing along the way the unusual honour of being responsible for designing the first United Kingdom coin to depict a human skull. At the higher-value end of the spectrum, a design for a five-ounce coin was commissioned from Tom Phillips RA. Shakespeare has provided the inspiration behind the paintings of sculptures of Mr Phillips for many years and in the playful yet highly scholarly manner of his work. In his design he reminds us of the important role money, and particularly coinage, played in the works of Shakespeare by surrounding the famous portrait of the playwright with the quotation from *Othello* 'Put money in thy purse'.

Beatrix Potter

Coins commemorating another celebrated British writer of a very different nature, Beatrix Potter, were recommended by the Committee over the course of a number of meetings. Royal Mint coin designer Emma Noble won a limited competition with her series of designs depicting a range of characters from the famous children's books, which included Peter Rabbit, Mrs. Tiggly-Winkle, Jemima Puddle-Duck and Squirrel Nutkin. There was, in addition, a further 50p piece in the series commissioned to commemorate the author herself. Arriving at likenesses of the characters in the form they have come to be remembered and loved was a challenge; this was aided by incorporating pad printing into precious metal versions of the coins. Since their release the coins have proven to be hugely popular with collectors.

First World War

In 2014 The Royal Mint initiated its programme of coins to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War. The intention was to not only honour the servicemen and women who lost their lives during the conflict but also to acknowledge the wider impact of the war on society, technology and culture. Extending over the five years of commemoration, the programme will run through to the end of 2018 and designs

have continued to be examined by the Committee. Its work has benefited enormously from the help of Professor Sir Hew Strachan, a respected historian of the First World War, who has continued to give of his time generously in advising on the content of the programme and the detail of the designs presented. As well as £2 coins which will enter circulation over the five-year period on the theme of the Armed Forces, and a crown piece series directed at telling the story of the broader impact of the war, a series of five-ounce and kilo coins will also be issued as part of the programme.

The Queen's Beasts

Heraldic beasts have pedigrees stretching back over many centuries but a series of them was brought together in sculptural form at the time of the coronation of Her Majesty The Queen in 1953 and has since come to be known as The Queen's Beasts. It includes the griffin, the unicorn, as well as several others, and in initiating a new series designed with the international bullion market very much in mind, it was decided to start with the lion.

From over 30 designs submitted by several artists Royal Mint coin designer Jody Clark was selected by the Committee in view of the spirited manner in which he had captured the character of the lion. He will now go on to prepare designs for the other creatures in the series over the coming years.

Commemorative coins

Designs for several other commemorative coins to be issued in 2016 and 2017 were presented to the Committee but have yet to enter the public domain. The increased number of projects that have come before the Committee has been handled with the same degree of care and attention to detail as ever.

Medals

The remit of the Committee includes making recommendations to a range of government departments on the design of official medals and seals. Projects arise with less frequency than for the coinage but are nonetheless a fairly regular element of the Committee's work.

Designs for a new medal for those serving in the National Crime Agency came before the Committee during the year and the successful outcome of the design process also led to the creation of a Crown Badge for the organisation. In addition, designs for a new General Service Medal were examined and a recommendation was made to the Ministry of Defence, along with advice being offered on the design of clasps for territories not previously covered by the medal.

Sub-Committee on the Selection of Themes

The Sub-Committee examines proposals for the programme of commemorative coins to be issued in forthcoming years, making recommendations through the main Committee to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the year there was one meeting of the Sub-Committee, the focus of attention being the programme for 2018 but consideration was also given to themes stretching out several years from now.

Membership

This year saw the retirement of Tim Knox, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, who had served on the Committee since 2008. His broad cultural awareness and knowledge of artists enabled him to make a balanced and perceptive contribution to the deliberations of the Committee. Due to the pressures of his role as Director of the Fitzwilliam it proved difficult for him to continue as a member and a recruitment process was initiated early in 2016 to find a replacement.

The lettering artist Stephen Raw retired last year having served the maximum ten-year term on the Committee. His role of offering specialist advice on lettering has been taken up by Phil Baines, a lettering and graphic designer who teaches at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.

Members give 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 that the Chairman, in particular, has been able to give to the work of the Committee has not gone unrecognised.

Membership of the Committee at 31 March 2016 (with dates of appointment)

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill
Chairman
(January 2011; renewed January 2016)

Mr Phil Baines
Lettering and graphic designer
(May 2016)

Mrs Blondel Cluff
Chair, Heritage Lottery Fund London
(March 2014)

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

Mr Hughie O'Donoghue RA
Painter
(January 2015)

Professor Jane Ridley
Historian
(January 2015)

Mr Edmund de Waal OBE
Ceramic artist and writer
(April 2012)

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

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Vernon
Secretary, Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood
(September 2014)

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 Advisor to the Committee