

A Living Collection

Numismatic holdings of the Royal Mint
by Graham Dyer

This fully illustrated article on the Royal Mint Museum was published by the American coin magazine *Coin World* in September 1988. Written by the then Curator, Graham Dyer, this article describes in detail the history of the Museum.



The Royal Mint maintains a coin collection of international importance. Numismatists throughout the world have long since realised the enormous significance of its innumerable treasures, while the Mint itself has become increasingly aware of its responsibility to make the collection accessible to the numismatic and academic world. But what makes the collection so special is that it is more than a mere accumulation of historic objects. It is a living and working collection, reflecting the practical needs of succeeding generations of Mint officers and slowly capturing for posterity the evolution of a great British institution whose roots are to be found in the scattered moneyers' workshops of Anglo-Saxon England.

William Wellesley Pole, Master of the Royal Mint from 1814 to 1823, was responsible for founding the Royal Mint Museum in February 1816.



Founding father

William Wellesley Pole, an elder brother of the Duke of Wellington, was appointed Master of the Royal Mint in 1814, taking control of an ancient institution which had recently vacated its cramped traditional home within the walls of the Tower of London and established itself in specially designed buildings on nearby Tower Hill.

It was a fortunate appointment. Pole was a man of energy, ability and influence, and he arrived at the Mint just as important decisions were about to be taken on the future of the British coinage. Within months, the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 brought peace to Europe and, in its wake, the British government seized the opportunity to undertake a major reform of the gold and silver coinage. Pole's administration of this massive recoinage earned him praise from his colleagues and also from Sir Joseph Banks, a prominent member of the Privy Council Committee on Coin, who described him as 'the most efficient Master I ever heard of or read of'. At the same time, Pole also embarked upon a major reorganisation of the Mint establishment, initiating a critical and detailed inquiry into the internal workings of the Mint in order to promote efficiency and reduce costs. His proposals were approved and incorporated in new indentures of August 1815 and February 1817.

But Pole was more than just an efficient administrator. There was also an artistic sensitivity which prompted him to ensure that the Royal Mint

'may not have to boast of the most beautiful and correct Mint machinery in the world, but that we may stand equally unrivalled for the perfect form and exquisite taste of our several coins'. To this end Pole obtained designs for the coinage from the brilliant Italian engraver, Benedetto Pistrucci, neglecting certain British artists, among them William Wyon, perhaps the most talented member of a family which dominated the Engraving Department of the Mint in the nineteenth century. The Italian's work was not to the liking of the patriotic British press, which rebuked Pole for his 'persevering disposition to shew an utter disregard of public taste and public opinion'. Popular criticism was also provoked by the insertion of Pole's initials on the coins, and there were some who professed to see in a portrait of George III the features of Pole himself. Nevertheless, it is largely due to Pole's patronage of the difficult and mercurial Pistrucci that the famous George and Dragon design, still used on British gold coins, came to be adopted.

Establishment of the Royal Mint Museum

Another important consequence of Pole's personal commitment to fostering the artistic excellence of the British coinage was his establishment of the Royal Mint Museum as a reference collection to assist engravers in the designing of coins. His memorandum of 12 February 1816 begins dramatically: 'the Master of the Mint has observed with pain that not only there is no Collection of British Coins in His Majesty's Mint, but that there is not a single Proof Coin or a single serviceable Matrix

One of the first coins to be set aside for the collection was this proof specimen of Pistrucci's sovereign of 1817.



or Puncheon preserved in the office; and that there is no Book of Entry of any Coinage so arranged as to ascertain under whose direction or by whose hands any of the Coins of the Realm have from time to time been fabricated'.

It was indeed a matter for very considerable regret that the Royal Mint, despite having been in more or less continuous operation for something like 1000 years, had not set aside a representative collection of the coins which it had struck. For what a collection it would have been, encompassing the full range of English coinage from the silver pennies of the Anglo-Saxons, through the majestic gold sovereigns of the Tudors, to the famous guinea of Pole's day.

But that collection had not been made and Pole instead could only seek to establish a system which would ensure that examples of current and future issues were preserved, trusting that 'it is possible to establish, from the present moment a system which shall insure a regular Deposit in the Office of His Majesty's Mint, of a Proof Impression of every Coin and of every Medal which, from this time forth, shall be struck at the Royal Mint; and which may also secure a Deposit of all original Matrixes and Puncheons, and an Entry of the Coins and Medals struck; distinguishing the Names of the Modellers and Engravers, and of the Principal Officers of the Mint at the time the several pieces were fabricated'. The Mint officers took immediate steps to implement Pole's wishes. As well as instituting a system for the

future, they proposed using old dies to strike certain coins of the last few years since the most appropriate starting point for the collection appeared to be 1801, when the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland had been united. The cabinets containing the coins, the dies and the few available medals were to be located in the Board Room. They were to have numbered drawers for ease of reference and, in common with practice elsewhere in the Mint, the presence of several officers, each with his own key, was to be necessary in order to open them. Where Pole had ordered that a single register be established for both coins and medals the officers opted instead to keep separate records.

Earlier initiatives

Momentous as it was, it would be wrong to think of Pole's initiative as a wholly novel departure. Indeed, in the summer of 1806 a previous Master, Lord Charles Spencer, had suggested that 'a public Collection of Coins & Medals should be made & preserved at the New Mint Office'. Spencer and his colleagues believed that the Earl of Pembroke's collection was to become available and that it would form a suitable basis for a Mint museum, but although the proposal got as far as the Privy Council Committee on Coin, and may even have reached government ministers, in the end nothing came of it. Again, in 1811 another Master, Earl Bathurst, had contemplated that there might one day be a collection, writing to the Clerk of the Committee on Coin that the Mint's Great Room was 'intended for any general meeting of the Officers, for



The Royal Mint Museum's benefactor, Sir Joseph Banks, had sailed as a young botanist aboard Captain Cook's ship 'Endeavour'.

The original vellum books in which details of the coins and medals in the collection were to be entered.



depositing the Old Account Books which are very numerous, and (if their Lordships should at any time deem it expedient), for preserving a Collection of Coins'.

That it was the determined Pole who was successful in establishing a museum in the Mint is a reflection of his effectiveness and, no doubt, of the need which he felt to provide the engravers with an inspirational source of material to which they could refer when preparing designs for new coins. Whatever the reason, it is Pole's achievement to have established a system for the preservation of specimens of coins, medals and dies produced in the Mint and one which remains in operation to this day.

The Banks' gifts

Pole, with good reason, had lamented the absence of old coins in the Royal Mint and he clearly felt that there was little hope of retrieving the situation: 'to remedy this evil by any retrospective arrangements, he fears is impossible; as the means do not exist for collecting any regular series of our Coins; and all the serviceable Matrixes, Dyes and Puncheons, used in the several Coinages, have been destroyed, with the exception perhaps of a very few of the Works of the last three or four years, preserved by the present Chief Engraver of the Mint'. Yet it was again through Pole, though this time indirectly rather than directly, that even this deficiency was to be largely rectified. Pole's position as Master of the Mint had brought him into close contact with Sir Joseph Banks, a fellow

member of the influential Privy Council Committee on Coin and a man who had not always been particularly sympathetic towards the Mint. An astute judge of character, Banks had come greatly to admire Pole's efficiency and drive, and in particular he shared Pole's wish to set up an historical collection, for as he told Pole the desirability of the Mint's having such a collection 'is not to me a matter of doubt'. Consequently, in August 1818 he donated to the Mint the small private collection of 100 or so coins and medals, together with some books, which he had built up as a member of the Committee on Coin. Pole was understandably delighted by the gift, telling Banks that 'they will form an excellent foundation for the Mint to build upon – and I trust they may be the cause of rescuing the Department from the melancholy state of Deficiency in which I am sorry to say it now stands'.

Even better was to come later in the year, following the death of Sir Joseph's sister. Sarah Sophia Banks had been an avid collector of items of natural history, coins and books, and in her will she bequeathed her collection to Lady Banks. Whether or not Sir Joseph had to twist his wife's arm, Lady Banks did not long retain her inheritance, for in October 1818 Sir Joseph wrote to the Mint: 'in compliance with the wish of Lady Banks I send with this a Collection of Books of Coins and Medals, which were bequeathed to her by my late Sister, Mrs Banks, and I have to request that the Collection may be preserved in His Majesty's Mint, as a Gift from Lady Banks'.



Thomas Rawlins' Oxford crown is extremely rare and the Museum was indeed fortunate to receive this specimen from Lady Banks.

Thomas Simon's famous Petition crown of 1663, perhaps the highlight of the Banks' gift.



Extent of the Banks' gifts

There were coins and medals as well, and the immediacy of the Deputy Master's response of 30 October spoke for his delight. The books would make 'an admirable library of rare and valuable works', while the Mint's coin and medal cabinets, 'which are poverty itself', would now be enriched by 'many scarce and beautiful specimens, forming a Collection worthy of the Institution of the Royal Mint'. For an expression of Pole's gratitude Sir Joseph had to wait until January 1819, but it was warm enough when it came. The gifts would enable the Mint to be 'rescued from the disgrace of having neither specimens of British Coins, or works upon Coins and Medals to guide it in its operations or to stimulate it to exertion or improvement'. And he announced his determination that 'to the latest time our obligations to you and Lady Banks may be recorded'.

Lady Banks' gift was a handsome one and it still forms the basis of the pre-1800 part of the Mint collection. Comprising a wide-ranging selection of well over 2000 coins and medals, it spanned the whole period from ancient British to contemporary milled coins. Numerous pieces from overseas were included, among them Rosa Americana twopences, pence and halfpence, and the whole collection was supplemented by a very fine array of numismatic books, pamphlets and manuscripts. The coins were of very high quality and several rank as major rarities, notably Thomas Rawlins' Oxford crown of Charles I and Thomas Simon's Petition crown of 1663, with its

magnificent portrait of Charles II. It is difficult to see how else the Mint could ever have hoped to acquire such pieces, and certainly in monetary terms the gift was of exceptional value.

The coins and medals did not come to the Mint at once, being first sent to the British Museum, where certain pieces not already present in the cabinets of the Museum were selected for retention. Towards the end of 1819 the coins reached the Mint but pending arrival of a detailed catalogue from the British Museum the Mint officers hesitated to unpack them from their boxes. A polite reminder in February 1820 appears to have secured the catalogue, and on 24 February the Banks' coins were placed by Pole's order under the care and inspection of Pistrucchi. Such an arrangement was entirely consistent with Pole's ideas about why the Mint needed a collection, but it reckoned without the wayward behaviour of the temperamental Italian.

Two years later, with Pistrucchi reported to be in financial difficulty, Pole directed the Mint officers to prevent access to the cabinets of any person other than those whom they had approved. The following year, 1823, a new Master went even further and ordered the cabinets to be transferred from Pistrucchi's quarters to the Deputy Master's room. And it was there that they were still to be found in July 1850, the cabinets being contained within three iron boxes or cases in a large room which also had space for the Library.

The obverse die for the Cromwell crown of 1658 was among a small group of dies for the portrait coinage of Oliver Cromwell purchased by Isaac Newton in 1700.



The collection contains a curious pair of large dies into which have been incorporated individual dies for the obverse and reverse of sovereigns, crowns, half-crowns and shillings of 1819.



Survival of old dies

Between them, the two Banks' gifts went a long way towards supplying the 'retrospective arrangements' which Pole had feared would not be possible. And fortunately there was another respect in which Pole's fears were not to be realised. When writing his memorandum of February 1816, he had been under the impression that old coining tools had been destroyed, with the exception of a very small number preserved by the Chief Engraver. Had this really been the case, the collection would today be very much poorer but, apparently unknown to Pole, steps had been taken for more than a hundred years to transfer obsolete tools to the safe custody of the Mint Warden or the Mint Office. In fact more than 500 tools had survived, providing a representative selection of all the major coin types since the mechanisation of the minting processes at the beginning of the reign of Charles II.

Their importance was immense and they were now placed in the Board Room, the Clerk of Irons and Thomas Wyon junior being given instructions to 'arrange the Matrixes, Puncheons and Dyes for the Cabinets'. Included amongst them was a small group of punches and dies produced by Thomas Simon for the portrait coinage of Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s, tools which had come to light outside the Mint. They had been acquired from Elizabeth Winter by Sir Isaac Newton, Master of the Mint, who reported to the Mint Board on 9 November 1700 that 'he had bought according to ye Direction of the Board Ten puncheons & Nine Dies graven by Mr Simonds a famous Graver

in ye time of Ol Cromwell for 14 Guineas'. They included the dies for the portrait crown, the obverse showing the famous crack extending across the base of the bust, and according to the Mint accounts they had been purchased 'for our Gravers to copy after'.

The retention of all these tools is not explained in the Mint records, and it may be suspected that the officers of the Mint were not motivated by the future interest of numismatists. But of course it is numismatists who now reap the benefit, for these original tools provide fascinating evidence of the skill of engravers like Simon, the Roettiers, John Croker and John Tanner. Not only that, they also contribute to a deeper knowledge of the minting processes following the mechanisation of the Mint in the middle of the seventeenth century. By studying the tools, it is possible to arrive at a more firmly based understanding of the working of the early coining presses and of why eighteenth-century coins look the way they do.

In due course these early dies were supplemented by dies of George IV and William IV as they became obsolete, but not before they had been painted with an identifying inscription by Charles Goodwin, the foreman in the Die Department. No catalogue existed and in 1835 the Clerk of the Irons offered his services in superintending the re-arrangement, cleaning and cataloguing of the dies. The Board preferred instead to ask William Wyon, the Chief Engraver, but in the end it fell to the less busy Goodwin to undertake the task. Wyon and the Clerk of the Irons were, however,



The first medal to be placed in the collection was the Waterloo Medal of 1815, awarded to the troops who took part in the battle.

An early addition to the collection was this extremely rare five-pound piece of 1820, struck shortly after the death of George III.



at one in wanting the public to be able to see the dies, which Wyon hoped would form ‘a nucleus for a public collection worthy of the Country’.

In 1841 the dies were at last moved from the Board Room in the main building to a large room in the reconstructed Die Department, providing ‘facilities towards their proper arrangement & classification’. The dies were placed in cases and the Clerk of the Irons sought and received permission to take sulphur impressions from some of them for the purpose of illustrating the collection, the impressions also being placed in cases in the Die Department. Cataloguing continued and a completed volume, compiled by Goodwin and describing some 1300 items down to the end of William IV’s reign, was laid before the Mint Board in January 1845.

Additions to Museum

By 1818, little more than two years after Pole had written his memorandum, the collection was already firmly established. Proof specimens of the coins being struck by the Mint began to be added and the pages of the vellum book recording their acquisition began to fill. There were examples of the new silver coins of 1816 and 1817, the sovereign and half-sovereign of 1817, the new crown piece of 1818, on which Pole and Pistrucci had lavished such care, and then the first gold and silver coins of George IV. Even more spectacular from a numismatic point of view were the specimens of the five-pound piece and two-pound piece of 1820, extremely rare coins struck only for a handful of institutional collections and private

collectors. Many of these early proof coins were made privately by the Mint engravers and had to be purchased from them for the collection. A receipt survives, for instance, for the purchase of two sets of William IV coins from William Wyon in 1831 and later, in 1842, there is a payment to him of £6 6s 0d for a specimen of his Una and the Lion five-pound piece of 1839. But then as now it required vigilance to ensure that the requirements of the collection were not overlooked, and an inspection by senior officers in 1837 revealed gaps since 1822 which had to be filled by restrikes. The book ends about 1850 with the acquisition of specimens of the copper tokens for the Bank of Upper Canada.

By contrast the vellum book intended for medals fell into disuse almost immediately, recording the arrival of just five medals. The first of these was an example of the campaign medal awarded to the victorious troops who had fought at Waterloo. This was followed by the small silver medal struck in 1817 for the Prince Regent to distribute at the opening of Waterloo Bridge on 18 June 1817, the second anniversary of the Battle. The final three medals were examples in gold, silver and copper of Pistrucci’s Coronation Medal for George IV in 1821. The medal book lapsed at this point, no doubt in consequence of the fact that the bulk of the medal work undertaken within the Mint took the form of private commissions for the engravers and was not covered by Pole’s memorandum. It was presumably to remedy this that in 1835 the Mint Board approved a suggestion from the Clerk of the Irons that the engravers should



William Wyon's pattern Una and the Lion five-pound piece is considered by many to be the most beautiful of all British coins. There are no fewer than 13, in various metals, in the collection.

Too large to harden at more than 5 inches in diameter, Pistrucci's magnificent Waterloo Medal dies still reside in their wooden box.

be asked to supply specimens in bronze of all the medals struck in the Mint, to be placed in an empty cabinet in the Board Room.

Pride of place among the medals, however, belongs to Pistrucci's dies for his magnificent Waterloo medal, originally conceived as a gold presentation piece to be given 'to each of the Sovereigns in Alliance with the Prince Regent, to their Ministers and Generals'. Pistrucci commenced work on the dies in 1819 and continued to work on them for the next thirty years, while collectors waited patiently for the opportunity to purchase specimens of the 'coming wonder' in silver and bronze. When the dies were at last delivered in 1849, they were considered to be too large to risk hardening and no medals could be

struck. In 1855, on the death of Pistrucci, the editor of the Art Journal was driven to complain that 'the medallist himself is now gone, but yet we hear nothing of his final and chief work'. The dies themselves, undoubtedly among the finest examples of the engraver's art, have fortunately survived, still soft and unused in their original wooden box.

Acquisition of items from numismatists and others

Items were not being acquired solely from the Mint itself. In 1829 came an unusual donation from E. Roberts, apparently the father of the late Barré Charles Roberts whose collection had been purchased by the British Museum in 1810. The gift consisted of six ancient dies for hammered coins and was



The Mint made sure that it obtained coins from the great Viking hoard found at Cuerdale in 1840.



described by Roberts, with characteristic English understatement, as ‘not undeserving of attention’. No contemporary list survives, but the tools apparently included a reverse die for gold half nobles of Edward III (1327-77), as well as obverse and reverse dies for silver coins. It was an important, if somewhat curious, gift and those doubts normally entertained about the authenticity of dies in private possession seem not to apply in this case.

In 1831 it was the turn of Thomas Harris to present about thirty coins of Elizabeth I and James I, together with a fragment of a testoon of Edward VI, which had been found in the neighbourhood of Bath. Two gold nobles and a Scottish gold coin, ‘lately found in the Cathedral at Glasgow’, were added to the collection in January 1838. Rather more substantial was the selection of coins from the great Viking treasure of coins and ornaments found in 1840 in a leaden chest close by the banks of the river Ribble at Cuerdale in Lancashire. The Mint sought to be among the recipients of coins from the hoard and in January 1842 duly received twenty pennies of the St Edmund memorial type, sixteen other coins, and some ingots (though sadly the ingots have not survived). The incident showed clearly the prevailing view within the Mint that ‘it is very desirable to add Specimens for the improvement of the Collection whenever an opportunity for so doing may occur’.

Such an attitude is perhaps not surprising in the Royal Mint of the 1830s and 1840s, for no fewer than

seven members of the staff had joined the newly-formed Numismatic Society of London by 1840. William Wyon had taken part in the discussions which led to the formation of the Society in 1836, and four of his colleagues were also among the original members: James William Morrison, the long-serving Deputy Master who had been in the Mint for more than forty years; Henry Bingley, who succeeded his father as King’s Assay Master in 1836; Henry William Field, another assayer and, incidentally, a descendant of Oliver Cromwell; and finally John Field, employed as an inspector of counterfeit coin and probably the most interested numismatist of them all. In 1838 they were joined in the society by William Hampson Morrison, a cousin of James William Morrison and one of the clerks in the Mint Office, while the seventh member was the Deputy Comptroller, William Henry Barton, another who had succeeded his father in post.

Members of the Mint staff, indeed, occasionally provided interesting additions to the collection. A Board minute of 26 June 1839, for instance, records that Jasper Atkinson, one of the moneyers, had in his possession a portrait medal in gold of the Earl of Effingham, who had been Master of the Mint from 1784 to 1789. This he offered for sale ‘for the Mint Cabinet, at the intrinsic Value of the Gold’. The year before, an eighteenth-century Mint seal had been acquired from another Mint officer. The seal had been taken from the Mint by a retiring Deputy Warden, probably in 1817, and had been rediscovered in a pawnbroker’s shop, where it had been purchased by John Field for £4 10s 0d.



The gold trial plate of 1542, one of the series received from the Pyx Chapel in 1837. The little bow stamped on the plate alludes to Sir Martin Bowes, who masterminded the debasement of the coinage during the final years of the reign of Henry VIII.

A pair of extremely rare Proof eagles of 1859, from the double-set of U.S. coins presented to the Mint by Professor Alexander in 1859.



Transfer to Royal Mint Museum of historic trial plates

In truth this was a period of welcome but, in a way, fortuitous growth in the Mint's historic holdings. It was highlighted in 1837 by the transfer of a series of trial plates from the Pyx Chapel in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. The chapel had long been used as a secure store by the Exchequer and it contained many ancient relics, including old dies. The plates, in gold and silver, had played a vital role in the Trial of the Pyx, which for many centuries had provided an independent check of the accuracy of the coins struck at the Mint. Forming a virtually unbroken series from 1477, they included the gold trial plate of 1707 which had been the cause of a dispute at the Trial of the Pyx in 1710. The plate had in fact been made too fine and, to the anger of Sir Isaac Newton, the jury had reported the gold coins to be below standard. Newton was able eventually to secure withdrawal of the offending plate and a return to the 1688 plate, of which only a tiny fragment was to be found among the plates transferred in 1837.

In January 1843 there was a further transfer of material from the Pyx Chapel. This included an unusual silver ingot of 1278 or 1279, which has sometimes been described as the earliest surviving trial plate, and various gold and silver assay pieces which have long since disappeared from the collection. Also present were three medieval coining dies. Two of these, a pile and a trussel, were too illegible to be attributable, while the third was eventually identified as a reverse die for York Mint

pennies of Edward III. Added to the six early tools presented a few years before by Mr Roberts, the Mint now possessed a small group of dies for hammered coins to supplement its much larger collection of tools from the seventeenth century and later.

For an American audience, however, perhaps the most spectacular addition to the collection in this period came in 1859 with the presentation of a double set of United States proof coins, ranging from the cent to the splendid gold eagle. Well might this 'highly prized' collection be accepted by the Master of the Mint 'with the greatest pleasure'. The set had come from Professor John Alexander of Baltimore, who had recently been in the United Kingdom as Commissioner from the United States on International Coinage. Indeed, in presenting the coins, Professor Alexander expressed the hope that 'the time is not far distant when the coins of the two Countries will not differ otherwise than in the effigies which may be necessary to identify their respective sources'. In the collection the double set joined the attractive proof Gobrecht plain edge dollar of 1836, presented by the United States Mint through Franklin Peale in 1837.

Rationalisation and reform

In 1870 the day-to-day running of the Royal Mint passed permanently into the hands of the Deputy Master. For the future the post of Master was to be held ex officio by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a senior government minister with responsibility for financial matters and whose role as Master was to be



This uniface pattern two-pound piece of 1841 was especially struck for the collection in the early 1870s.

William Wyon's model for the Great Exhibition medals of 1851, probably the earliest plaster model in the collection.



largely formal. The first of the new-style Deputy Masters was Sir Charles Fremantle, an able and efficient civil servant. He set about reforming and re-equipping the Mint, organising it on sound administrative principles which were to survive in their essentials for the next hundred years.

Fremantle had inherited a major numismatic collection. It was a collection, unfortunately, which remained somewhat dispersed, with the Banks' coins being held on the first floor of the main building, the dies in the Die Department and the trial plates in a third place. The situation was made worse by the development of a separate collection of coins and medals in the Die Department and by the absence of a comprehensive catalogue of all the coins and medals held within the Mint. Fremantle, with typical efficiency, quickly took matters in hand.

In November 1871 he received Treasury authority to employ a London coin dealer, William Webster, to arrange and catalogue the coins, the Mint being without a member of staff possessing the appropriate breadth of knowledge. Coins and dies were united and in his Annual Report for 1873 Fremantle was able to say that the whole collection was now open to the inspection of the public in the Museum attached to the Die Department.

During the course of his labours, Webster took it upon himself to identify duplicate coins in the Banks gift and to indicate what he regarded as conspicuous

gaps among the modern coins of George III, George IV, William IV and Victoria. The duplicate coins he offered to buy and Fremantle received Treasury authority both to sell these coins and to produce restrikes from old dies in order to fill the gaps to which Webster had drawn attention. It was in many ways an unsatisfactory arrangement, for it also permitted the melting down of items which were said to be of no numismatic value, such as examples of the old silver coins withdrawn in 1817. No doubt some of Webster's duplicates would not now be so considered and their departure from the collection may be regretted, but Fremantle at least took the wise precaution of consulting the British Museum before making his recommendation to the Treasury. As for using the old dies to provide restrikes, this too now seems regrettable, though it added to the collection a series of pattern florins of 1848 and two unusual Victorian two-pound pieces, one undated and the other dated 1841. Rather more praiseworthy was the publication in 1874 of a printed catalogue, listing and describing almost 2000 coins, and at the same time a new register was started for recording additions to the collection.

Growth and expansion

By now the Mint clearly held one of the major numismatic collections in the United Kingdom, and its position was soon strengthened by a period of rapid growth and expansion. An active policy was pursued which went far beyond the mere retention of examples of the coins and medals being struck in the Mint, and from 1877 Fremantle took pride in giving

One of the coins of King Stephen (1135-1154) acquired from Jonathan Rasleigh in 1888.



In 1885 the Mint purchased a pair of Scottish sword and sceptre pieces from a hoard at Horncastle in Lincolnshire.

details in his Annual Report of the new items acquired each year for the collection. The Reports for 1889 and 1890 illustrate the variety of sources from which material was being obtained. They record a gold unite of James I from a find at Chesham; Chinese coins from Ralph Heaton of the famous Heaton Mint in Birmingham; a Shanghai tael of 1867, struck at the Hong Kong Mint and presented by W. J. Webster, son of the man who had arranged and catalogued the collection; a silver penny of Henry III from W. Jones; a set of five Chinese silver coins, sent by the Foreign Office; Swedish coins and medals, presented by the Mint in Stockholm; a medal presented by the corporation of the City of London; and, finally, two bronze medals, received from the branch mint at Melbourne, Australia.

The list rightly indicates the importance of friendly relations with other mints, with coin dealers, and with numismatists. It was to the collector Jonathan Rashleigh, for instance, that the Mint appears to owe all but one of its coins of Stephen (1135-54). These forty-five or so pennies, typically crude and blundered, were presented by Rashleigh in 1888, and the surviving correspondence shows that he was rather apologetic about sending such inferior pieces to what he described as 'the region of perfect mintage'. But, like the drunk at a temperance meeting, he wrote, they could claim to be there as 'the awful example'.

Also increasingly important was the acquisition of coins from newly-discovered hoards, enabling the collection of older coins to be supplemented and improved. In this way, two guineas and a half guinea of Charles II, together with a half-crown of Charles I, were purchased in 1882, while 1885 was even more productive, providing seven gold coins from Horncastle in Lincolnshire, thirty-five medieval silver coins from a discovery near Carlisle, ten silver pennies found in the churchyard at Stockland in Devon, and no fewer than thirty-five gold coins and eleven silver coins from a large hoard of Tudor and Stuart coins discovered at Long Crendon in Buckinghamshire. A little earlier, in 1877, the Mint had acquired forty-five pennies of William I and William II from a hoard of some 300 Norman pennies found at Tamworth in Staffordshire.

Visitors on guided tours of the Mint were allowed the opportunity to view the treasures in the collection. In 1893, for example, a lively description was published by the Westminster Budget on 24 February: 'the visitor is taken to view the Museum. This is a sight to make envious the most meek and lukewarm collector of coins, for the rarest of coins and medals repose in glass cases in this carefully-locked room'. The reporter, his enthusiasm aroused, then proceeded to recreate a vivid pen-portrait of the Museum, describing two items which had particularly caught his eye. These were the Petition crown of Thomas Simon, its value 'reckoned by the hundred pounds',

and a lump of white metal 'with half-crowns sticking in it, like so many plums in a pudding', the tangible remains of a counterfeiting gang's efforts to destroy the evidence of their crime by flinging it onto the fire. The Mint's collection of dies was rightly given special attention by the reporter: 'in cases ranged round the Museum are preserved the steel dies of many hundred of coins and medals. The rarest coin could be produced from them tomorrow, if need or fancy dictated. There is a vision to make the collector's heart fail him!'. Although he felt that the probability of the dies being used in this way was 'exceedingly remote', it perhaps needs to be said that Fremantle continued to indulge in the production of restrikes. These were not always destined for important national collections but found their way into private hands or, sad to say, into the collections of members of the Mint staff.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Royal Mint had in its possession one of the most important numismatic collections in the United Kingdom. Through the regular flow of coins and medals from the Mint's expanding range of output, and through an active policy of acquiring coins and medals from elsewhere, the collection had grown considerably since its organisation by Webster a generation before.

Re-arrangement of the Museum

What it now needed was a major overhaul that would review its holdings. The man chosen for the task, unlike Webster, came from within the Mint itself, for William John Hocking had entered the Mint in July

1883 at the age of 19. He began as a clerk in the Mint Office but subsequently transferred to the Operative Department, which was responsible for the actual production of coins and medals. Here he made rapid progress and by 1899 he was one of the assistant superintendents, just one rank below the superintendent who controlled the department. It was accordingly a position of responsibility and one which can have left him little free time during the course of his working day. Nevertheless, he took on the additional task of bringing order to the collection, and it can only be supposed that his occupation of apartments within the Mint enabled him to devote some of his private time to this work.

Not only was he fortunate in his evident enthusiasm for the task, but also in the opportunity presented by a period of rebuilding as the Mint endeavoured to cope with an output that had virtually quadrupled since 1870. The Museum had likewise outgrown its premises and when, at the turn of the century, a new building was constructed for the Die and Medal Department it was decided to set aside for the Museum a large room with a floor area of more than 1300 square feet. This necessarily required a wholesale re-arrangement of the collection and Hocking had to busy himself classifying and labelling the exhibits. In this task he was assisted by F. W. Lincoln, a London coin dealer, for whom a payment of five shillings an hour was approved by the Treasury in 1902. The new Museum was opened to the public in October 1904. Coins, medals and seals were displayed



Original sketches in the collection include this 19th century design by Sir Edward Poynter for the Ashanti Medal.

The colonial and foreign coins obtained by Hocking from The Mint, Birmingham, Limited included proof specimens of the 50-cent piece issued in 1900 by Rajah Charles J Brooke of Sarawak.



in no fewer than twenty-five large cases, a substantial increase on the nine which had been used in Webster's day. More than 5000 items were placed in the cases, with numerous others being stored in a cabinet for reference, but the dies had to be excluded for the moment while Hocking completed their classification. The array of coins was described in the Mint's Annual Report for 1904: 'a continuous series of types from Ancient British times to the present day, including Roman coins struck in Britain, Anglo-Gallic and Anglo-Hanoverian coins, Scottish and Irish coins, a selection of tradesmen's tokens, and a complete series of Colonial coins from the reign of Queen Elizabeth. One showcase is reserved for various foreign coins'. This rather dull, factual description does less than justice to the rare and beautiful items, gathered together in almost bewildering profusion.

Hocking's work on the collection went well beyond simply preparing it for display to the constant stream of visitors who toured the Mint to see the operations of coining. While re-arranging the items, he had become aware of certain gaps and deficiencies and these he had set about filling, making use of his contacts with various official and private organisations. With the help of the British Museum he acquired electrotype copies of rare British coins missing from the Banks' gifts and which were considered essential if the collection were to illustrate comprehensively the development of coinage in Britain. From The Mint, Birmingham, Limited, formerly Heaton's and a mint with whom the

Royal Mint had enjoyed a friendly working relationship for some fifty years, Hocking was able to acquire most of the colonial and foreign coins struck in Birmingham in recent years.

And through the War Office, the India Office, and other bodies he managed to fill gaps in the medal collection, obtaining amongst other things examples of two of the Empire's most coveted gallantry awards, the Victoria Cross and the New Zealand Cross. Curiously, however, the Mint chose in 1902 to turn down an opportunity to acquire wax models by Pistrucci on the apparently foolish grounds that the Museum 'already contains models of many of Benedetto Pistrucci's chief works'.

Hocking's catalogue

The outcome of his labours was the publication of a two-volume catalogue of the collection, the first volume of which, devoted to the coins and tokens, was published in 1906. As well as descriptions of the coins, it included historical notes and appendices to make it a coherent account of the British coinage, elevating it to a status far exceeding that of a mere listing of items. In its compilation Hocking had evidently taken great pains, consulting such authorities as Professor Edward Rapson, Percy Webb, F. A. Walters, Sir John Evans, Dr S. W. Bushell, and H. A. Grueber of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. The second volume, dealing with dies, medals and seals, was published in 1910 and acknowledged only the assistance of H. A. Grueber.



The Royal Mint Museum in 1904.

The Francis Fowke medal is the work of George T Morgan. It was Fremantle who recommended Morgan for the post of Assistant Engraver at the U.S. Mint.



A third volume, cataloguing the contents of the Library, was intended but defeated the industry of even the hard-working Hocking.

It is perhaps tempting today to look a little askance at Hocking's catalogue. The failure to provide provenances for the coins and the inclusion of not a single illustration are major omissions, while in his description of some of the early tools he failed to understand their purpose and unwisely made alterations from the earlier manuscript listing completed in 1845. But these are criticisms which can be made with the benefit of hindsight, for numismatics is a developing science and it is in fact a sign of health and intellectual vigour that we should set higher standards for ourselves than our predecessors. What we must remember to do is to judge Hocking's contribution against the standards of his own day, and on this basis he emerges with credit.

Certainly he was well regarded by his numismatic contemporaries. Not only did he become a Fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society but subsequently he was elected to serve on its council. His numismatic knowledge deepened and he was widely consulted by numismatists of the stature of Henry Symonds and Helen Farquhar. A lengthy paper of his on the dies of Thomas Simon and the introduction of coining machinery was published in the *Numismatic Chronicle* in 1909. Six years later he catalogued and published an interesting and important group of some 150 Scottish dies, primarily of the second half

of the seventeenth century and in the possession of the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. These papers, too, may be regarded as significantly flawed but Hocking undoubtedly deserves praise for achieving so much while at the same time continuing to carry out full-time duties in the Operative Department.

Under the supervision of such an enthusiastic numismatist, the Mint collection developed and flourished. Now formally designated Librarian and Curator and with a special allowance from 1913 of up to £100 a year, Hocking saw to it that the collection continued to expand. In 1914 and 1915, for instance, more than 100 coins were acquired from hoards while, rather more unusually, an even greater number were purchased from Lincoln & Son, the London coin dealers. Here the intention appears to have been to improve the holdings of coins of the Tudors and Stuarts, and the purchases included some examples of Mestrell's handsome milled coins of Elizabeth I. Books on economics and economic history were also being acquired and, all in all, Hocking's period coincides with a time when the Mint was perfectly happy with the notion that it should be more than just a busy factory. As the Annual Report for 1913 puts it, 'the importance of maintaining a well-ordered Museum and Library in connection with the Mint is obvious, students of coining operations and currency questions, both at home and abroad, naturally expecting to find at the Mint adequate materials for their researches'. Obvious it may have been, but not

obvious enough for a frustrated Hocking to be able to persuade the Public Record Office to transfer to the Mint its large holding of medieval coining tools.

Succession of Barrett

The next Librarian and Curator was Charles Frederick Barrett, who had joined the Mint at the age of 18 in February 1899. Barrett did not pretend to be a numismatist, but his years in the Mint Office had given him a broad knowledge of the Mint. He was in any case a well read and literate man, the true author, in fact, of the beautifully written Mint Annual Reports of the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, he enjoyed a close relationship with Sir Robert Johnson, the strong-minded Deputy Master who guided the fortunes of the Mint during the difficult years from 1922 to 1938.

If Barrett was not a scholarly numismatist, he nevertheless maintained friendly contact with many who were. Prominent among these was Laurie Asher Lawrence, an American-born surgeon who as a boy had crossed the Atlantic and settled in the United Kingdom in the early 1870s. A founder member and first director of the British Numismatic Society, he was a keen collector of all manner of things, being, as Christopher Blunt has described him, 'a bit of a magpie'. After he retired from medicine, he devoted many years to working as a more or less honorary Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. The Mint also had

cause to value both his knowledge and his occasional gifts, among them an interesting silver denarius of the Roman Republic illustrating the coining tools of an ancient moneyer.

In return Lawrence received coins from the Mint and it is no coincidence that when part of his collection was sold in November 1951 it was found to contain in a mixed lot of pennies a specimen of the elusive 1933 penny. This is one of the outstanding rarities of the modern British coinage, almost equivalent perhaps to a United States Liberty Head nickel of 1913. The exact mintage, though certainly no more than a handful, is not known, Barrett believing in May 1934 that only seven had been struck but adding somewhat cryptically that 'the 7th. is not traceable at the moment'. Whatever the precise number, the Annual Report for 1933 rightly suggested that if a collector 'happens upon a specimen, it will indeed be a rarity!'.

Throughout the 1930s the Mint co-operated with Lawrence in furnishing Harold Mattingly of the British Museum with data on the composition and crystalline microstructure of a variety of ancient coins. In many cases this examination involved damaging or destroying good examples of early coinage and, in order to maintain a record of these coins, electrotype copies were made for the Mint collection.

The Mint, to its credit, had long followed a policy of assisting scholars and numismatists in their



Efforts to abandon the heraldic tradition of British coin design in the 1920s and 1930s proved largely unsuccessful. This pattern florin of 1926 was one such attempt.

A rare uniface pattern for the Australian commemorative florin of 1927 was retained by the Royal Mint. It portrays George V wearing a double-arched crown, quite unlike that used on the approved coin.



researches, and many years earlier the Mint's distinguished Chemist and Assayer, Sir William Chandler Roberts-Austen, had carried out tests of the metallic composition of artifacts from the ancient city of Troy. In 1933 the Mint even went so far as to produce replica dies for a tetradrachm of Alexander the Great, probably in order to determine how it had been possible for ancient moneyers to strike coins in such high relief. More recently, but in continuation of this well established tradition, the Mint undertook practical experiments to assist Dr Peter Gaspar of Washington University, St Louis, in his study of the methods by which proof and pattern coins were struck in the eighteenth century.

In Barrett's care the collection continued to expand, though the purchase of old coins became rather less frequent than it had been under Hocking. The close links which had been built up with other mints remained productive, and in 1922 and 1923, for instance, some twenty-six coins were acquired from the mint at Philadelphia. The Mint, indeed, gradually accumulated a small collection of American commemorative half dollars, and it may have been in part the Deputy Master's familiarity with them which prompted him to contemplate the possibility of commemorative coins for the United Kingdom, concluding in his Annual Report for 1934 that there was indeed something to be said for their issue on 'very special occasions'.

Missed additions

Barrett was not always successful in obtaining for the collection all the proof, pattern and experimental pieces that were being struck by the Mint in the 1920s and 1930s. This arose in part from the interpretation of Pole's original requirement that a proof specimen of every coin and medal struck by the Mint should be set aside for the collection. From the start this had been taken to mean that specimens were required only when there was a substantial change of design, as in the adoption of a new portrait of the monarch. Sadly, a simple change of date was not thought to be sufficient to justify the striking of a proof record copy for the Museum, with the result that the collection lacks long runs of dates between changes of type. This was perhaps understandable in the light of conventional numismatic attitudes in the nineteenth century, but it has left the collection rather short of Victorian material; and by persisting well into the present century, it also means that there are serious deficiencies as late as the reign of George V.

Pole's instruction is also responsible for another shortcoming of the collection. By specifying that the coins taken should be of proof standard, he had clearly wanted the collection to reflect the artistic excellence which he sought for the coins struck by the Mint. This was admirable enough, had coins of normal production standard been preserved as well. But generally proofs only were saved, and the present curator has been heard to complain that the collection is full of rare and unusual items but lacks the

Gold specimens of the Jubilee crown of 1925 are very rare. Only 25 were offered for sale to the public, with a further five being reserved for the national collections.



The collection charts the evolution of the Defence Medal for the War of 1939-1945, containing among other things a brass pattern of Percy Metcalfe's rejected.

ordinary pieces which would provide a surer guide to the standards of production and quality achieved by the Mint at various times since 1816.

In Barrett's time, proof record copies were struck on a rather more regular basis than before, as Harry Spencer has shown in two helpful articles in *The Numismatist*. Specimens were not, however, always retained for the Mint collection and on occasion the Mint looked after the interests of other institutions, such as the British Museum or the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and sometimes even private numismatists, rather better than it looked after itself.

An extremely rare pattern crown of 1926, for example, with its plaintive plea of GIVE PEACE IN OUR TIME O LORD, slipped through the net, and the gap was not filled until about fifteen years ago, when a specimen was received from the son of the famous numismatist, Sir Charles Oman. Barrett, who died in 1939, may perhaps have been more interested in the books, for it was presumably he who prepared about 1936 a useful catalogue of the Library arranged by author. Nevertheless, many unusual and significant pieces were set aside for the collection, and in particular the Deputy Master and Barrett saw to it that one of the thirty gold specimens of the Silver Jubilee commemorative crown was reserved for the Mint collection.

Dismantling of the Museum

The collection, sadly, had not been left to enjoy the spacious room constructed for it at the turn of the century. In 1922 the room had to be vacated in order to accommodate an expansion of the Medal Department, leaving only a rather splendid doorway as a reminder of the original purpose of the room. The collection itself disappeared into temporary store in the main administrative building, and for a time there were plans to adapt rooms in this building to house the collection. But this was not to be and in 1927 a number of the showcases were relocated in the Operative Department in a room used for the toning and lacquering of medals. Conditions cannot have been ideal, as is clearly implied by the Deputy Master's expressed hope in his Annual Report of 1928 that 'time may be found to allow for a more comprehensive and interesting arrangement'.

Time unfortunately contrived the opposite. The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 led to the dismantling of the Museum and the transfer of the collection to a safe and secure location within the Mint. It was a wise move, for with the Mint being so close to the London docks, it could not hope to escape the Blitz unscathed. It was hit by several high-explosive and incendiary bombs which caused damage to the buildings and which, tragically, killed three members of the staff in December 1940. The main building, however, suffered only superficial damage.

Visitors to the museum were sometimes briefly allowed to hold the legendary 1933 penny.



The collection includes this richly elaborate pattern crown. The design had to be simplified before it could be used on the reverse of the Coronation crown of 1953.

Restoration of the Museum

It was to a room on the first floor of this building, at the top of the main staircase, that the collection was restored in 1949. The serried ranks of coins which had been a feature of Hocking's museum were abandoned, as was any attempt to provide a totally comprehensive display of all aspects of the collection. Instead only English and British coins were placed on show, 'arranged in varying geometrical designs, which make patent the divisions into which the coins naturally fall'. Running along two sides of the room were glass-fronted bookcases to hold part of the Mint Library, leaving many of the older books to add to the Victorian splendour of the Deputy Master's office next door. Many of the dies were also elsewhere, remaining in their boxes in the basement, but the showcases did at least include seals, which had become an important element in the collection since the appointment of the Deputy Master as ex officio Engraver of His Majesty's Seals in 1901. Even so, the most spectacular of the seals, a series of Royal seals from the time of Offa, lined the walls of the hall downstairs.

Being on the first floor, the Museum was not part of the regular public tour of the Mint. It was, of course, shown to special visitors, and it was not unknown for a showcase to be opened and a lucky person allowed to hold for a moment the famous 1933 penny. The Mint, too, remained willing to help serious numismatists and scholars, and though the collection itself was looked after by a succession of part-time curators the Mint nevertheless again contained

on its staff a man of some numismatic distinction in its chief clerk, H. G. Stride.

The Museum was still in these prestigious quarters, with two windows providing a privileged view of the Tower of London across the road, when I became Curator in 1963. But unfortunately this happy state of affairs did not last long. The Mint had entered a period of rapid expansion, a more vigorous attitude towards the striking of coins for overseas governments bringing about a tripling of output between 1957 and 1966. Such a vast increase required a much greater staff which, in turn, demanded more office accommodation; space had to be found where it could and the Museum proved an inevitable casualty. The large wooden showcases were disposed of and the coins were stored away in an office, while the dies remained in the basement.

It was hardly convenient and Howard Linecar in one of his books has painted a depressing picture of a visit to the basement: 'we descended the narrow wooden backstairs of Smirke's famous building and, passing through several locked doors arrived at last in the basement, to a room filled with rusty metal boxes, with framed impressions of seals and of coins and medals of inestimable numismatic interest lumped together on the floor, with dies of historic importance on every side'.

This dished experimental piece pairs Arnold Machin's portrait of the Queen with a 19th century representation of St George and the Dragon. The Mint's interest in dishing stemmed in large part from the successful Israeli commemorative coins, first issued in the late 1950s.



A period of uncertainty

The Mint was unsure that it even needed to retain the collection, and uncertainty was increased by the announcement in April 1967 that an entirely new mint was to be built at Llantrisant in South Wales. By 1970 the Mint was seriously contemplating the loan of part of the collection to the Birmingham City Museum, a not altogether inappropriate destination in view of the links between the Mint on the one hand and Matthew Boulton and the Heaton's on the other. It would also have placed the collection in the sure hands of the late Antony Gunstone, a very fine numismatist and an efficient administrator.

The situation was transformed by the arrival of a new Deputy Master, Harold Glover, who was keen that the Mint should maintain its occupation of the dignified Smirke building at Tower Hill. He saw the collection as an important element in this continuing presence and the Mint accordingly withdrew from discussions with the authorities in Birmingham. In 1971 a small but attractive display of modern coins and medals was re-established in the old museum room on the first floor, intended primarily for the benefit of official and business visitors. The historic coins and dies remained safely stored away, but in the new climate it was possible to purchase proper coin cabinets and steel racking for the dies so that the collection could at least be housed in a manner befitting a national treasure.

But nothing lasts for ever. In 1974 Glover left the Mint and with the closure of production at Tower Hill the

following year the future of the whole site came under consideration. As for the collection, there seemed to be three possibilities: to leave it in splendid isolation at Tower Hill, to transfer it to the new mint at Llantrisant, or to place it in the custody of some other appropriate institution. Eventually the choice was made to send it to Llantrisant, and in 1980 the collection and its Curator left Tower Hill for South Wales.

Transfer from Tower Hill

It was in many ways a painful upheaval. Yet the Mint's abandonment of Tower Hill provided a unique opportunity for the Museum to acquire material from both the factory and the offices of retiring members of the staff. The plaster stronghold, dank and reeking, yielded a rich hoard of artists' plaster models dating back to the turn of the century. From the reducing room came a few hundred electrotypes, which had been grown from plaster models for use on the reducing machines in order to produce punches from which dies could be made. The die stronghold in turn provided hundreds of old matrices, punches and dies, among them, quite unexpectedly, the edge lettering segments for William Wyon's Una and the Lion five-pound piece of 1839 and his Gothic Crown of 1847.

Several officers had kept their own small coin collections to assist them in their work. From these cabinets came a useful assortment of trial and experimental pieces, several of them relating to the preparations for the introduction of decimal coinage in the United Kingdom in 1971. The Assay

Department, through E. G. V. Newman, was particularly helpful, supplying many counterfeit gold coins as well as a brass piedfort Canadian fifty-cent piece of 1937 and a pair of uniface reverse patterns for the proposed coinage of Edward VIII.

None of these treasures, however, could compare with the spectacular addition made in 1970 following the retirement of Sir Jack James from the post of Deputy Master. In his safe was discovered a cardboard box, its wax seals still intact, containing no fewer than

forty-nine of the legendary pattern coins of Edward VIII. The patterns, long one of the great mysteries of modern British coinage, ranged from farthings to breathtaking five-pound pieces in gold. Until then there had been no specimens of these sensitive items in the main collection but it was widely rumoured that there were some in the Deputy Master's safe. Their acquisition enormously enriched the collection and helped to make possible the publication in 1973 of an official account of these excessively rare coins.



Pattern half-crown of Edward VIII, who abdicated before coins with his portrait could be issued for circulation.

This curious experimental piece, showing how nine heads might be portrayed on a single coin, was made in connection with a possible order from an overseas country in 1959.



Arrival at Llantrisant

Even after its arrival at Llantrisant, the future of the collection remained uncertain. With the Mint now being required to operate as a commercial business, there were those who needed to be persuaded that the Mint should bear the cost of maintaining the Museum and its associated staff of three. For a time, indeed, it looked as if the collection were destined to return to London and become part of the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. Packing up of the collection commenced and it was only at the eleventh hour that the decision was reversed. With luck, a long period of uncertainty, beginning more than twenty years ago in the mid-1960s, has now come to an end and the Museum can at last look forward to a settled future.

Policy on additions

Despite the difficulties the collection continued to grow during this period, but mainly by the addition of specimens of the increasing variety of coins and medals being struck by the Mint. Since the end of the Second World War these had come forward in larger numbers because it had finally been realised that specimens should be saved not only when there was a change of design but also when there was a change of date. A little later, in the mid-1960s, there was another change of policy with the decision that in future the specimens preserved should not be specially-struck proofs but pieces of production standard.

Here two factors had applied. First, pieces of proof quality would in any case be coming into the

collection in view of the Mint's expanding output of proof coins for sale to collectors. And second, the striking of a handful of proof record copies had become potentially embarrassing as numismatic values soared. These special coins, used amongst other things as samples of the Mint's quality of workmanship, occasionally found their way onto the market and had become a source of concern.

Gifts from other mints and from central banks also continued to arrive, and if uncertainty affected the collection it was only in the purchase of material from outside sources. After all, it scarcely made sense, if the collection were to be transferred to other ownership, for the Mint so spend a great deal of money acquiring items by purchase. In consequence little has been bought in recent years and the Mint no longer seeks the opportunity to purchase items from newly-discovered hoards. But it needs to be remembered that the collection exists to illustrate the output of the Mint and the Mint's development as an institution. Its purpose is not to be a pale imitation of the British Museum.

For all the talk of its fabled contents, the collection remains small by the standards of major collections such as the British Museum or the Smithsonian Institution. The coins number only about 40,000, but what the collection lacks in quantity it more than makes up for in quality, for proofs, patterns and trial pieces are present in abundance. The number of medals is even more modest, but again they are valuable in providing a comprehensive selection of

The sense of history and tradition which is part of the Royal Mint is symbolised by its very fine collection. It is also captured in this dignified bronze medal, struck in 1986 to commemorate 1100 years in minting.



British service medals and of official commemorative medals to mark such occasions as royal coronations and jubilees. Seals are also well represented by a large group of copper counterparts of paper-embossing seals produced by the Mint during the present century. Other items include plaster models, electrotypes, balances, weights, old photographs and numerous original sketches by artists, among them Edward Poynter, Kruger Gray and Humphrey Paget.

Above all, perhaps, it now contains more than 10,000 obsolete dies, a collection whose importance is unrivalled in the United Kingdom. These dies form the most distinctive part of the Mint's holdings of historic material and by their presence they ensure that the Mint collection contains not just the finished item but the full range of tools used to produce that item.

Museum services

For numismatists the Mint collection accordingly represents a research tool of enormous potential. But it exists not primarily for this reason but because the Mint needs it and benefits from it. Within the Mint, the Marketing Department draws heavily upon the collection and the numismatic expertise of its staff to ensure that promotional literature is well illustrated and historically accurate. The Engraving Department frequently needs to borrow material, and old dies are also borrowed on occasion by the Medal Department for the purpose of striking replacement medals. Items are provided for displays mounted by the Marketing

Department at numismatic shows, such as the annual convention of the American Numismatic Association; and more ambitiously, a major exhibition celebrating the Mint's long history has recently completed a nationwide tour, during the course of which it was seen and enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors. Moreover, the collection still performs the inspirational function intended by William Wellesley Pole, for when new British coin designs are under consideration by the Royal Mint Advisory Committee at its meetings at Buckingham Palace appropriate coins and medals from the collection are very often on display.

The Museum also undertakes, free of charge, the examination and authentication of coins submitted by the Police, Customs & Excise, coin dealers, collectors and others. Here the collection is helpful in supplying genuine coins of known provenance to provide a reliable basis for comparison, and with rarer items such as five-pound pieces it may even have the original dies themselves. Examination tends to concentrate on the application of numismatic skills and the maintenance of detailed records, but there is of course access to the scientific resources of the Assay Department as and when required. The only restrictions are that the coins must be dated later than 1660 and must have been struck by the Royal Mint.



The collection, though not open to casual callers and only accessible by appointment, attracts visits from distinguished numismatists and in the 1960s there was even a royal visit from ex-King Umberto of Italy, who had inherited something of his father's passion for coins. In recent years its North American visitors have included Peter Gaspar, James Haxby, Robert Julian, Harry Manville, Eric Newman and Robert Willey. Both Gaspar and Newman have studied the surviving tools for the Virginia halfpenny of 1773, and Gaspar's discovery of the missing reverse punch, wrongly catalogued by Hocking as a punch for pattern guineas of George II, has been reported in the Museum Notes of the American Numismatic Society.

A national treasure

All this activity is surely right and proper for an institution with such a long and proud history. It is an institution which has changed dramatically since the time of Pole, developing into a large and well run factory containing some of the most sophisticated minting machinery available and capable of producing coins to delight collectors throughout the world. Pole can perhaps scarcely have imagined the uses to which his collection would be put in the ensuing 170 years, but many generations of Mint officers and numismatists now have cause to be grateful for his foresight.

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In broader terms, the modern Royal Mint is a major numismatic organisation which, through its sales of beautiful proof coins, seeks to maintain direct links with many thousands of collectors in the United Kingdom, North America and elsewhere. For those collectors it wants to provide as complete a service as possible, answering questions, providing information, and generally encouraging interest in the study of modern coins. In the course of each year the Museum receives hundreds of enquiries from the public and these are answered courteously, if not always as promptly as I should like. In addition, and also to promote interest in coins, public lectures are delivered to national and local numismatic societies, and the publication is undertaken of both scholarly papers for numismatic journals and booklets for the more general reader.



The Royal Mint Museum staff today.