

## **Minutes of the 20th meeting held at the Royal Mint at 4 p.m. on Monday, 29th October 1923**

### **Present:**

- Mr. R. A. Johnson, C.B.E., Chairman
- The Earl of Crawford, K.T.
- Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, C.V.O.
- Mr. Oswald Barron
- Mr. G. F. Hill
- Mr. F. Derwent Wood, R.A.
- Mr. H. W. Manwell, Secretary

**1.** The minutes of the 19th meeting, which had been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**2.** After discussion, it was decided that the first and second prizes for the Plaquettes of London should be awarded among the first choice of designs made at the previous meeting, as follows:

- **1st — 100 guineas:** To Mr. Eric Bradbury for his two models:
  - (a) The National Gallery and St. Martin's Church
  - (b) Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament
- **2nd — Two prizes of 50 guineas each:**
  - (a) Mr. A. Howes — Tower of London
  - (b) Mr. Percy Metcalfe for his two models — Tower Bridge / Tower Bridge with Lion

The Committee then viewed the designs which had been set aside at the last meeting as the second choice and after full discussion it was decided that the three third prizes of 25 guineas each should be awarded as follows:

- (a) Mr. Kitchener — Figure holding ship with motto — "*Scattered yet increased*"
- (b) Mr. W. H. Dorey — Female figure standing on riverside
- (c) Mr. W. H. Cowan — Circular model with motto — "*Domina potentis imperii*"

At the suggestion of the Committee, Mr. Derwent Wood...

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...kindly agreed to see the designers of 2(b) and 3(a)+(c) for the purpose of discussing with them certain modifications which the Committee suggested would be improvements. It was agreed that the artists merely be informed in confidence that they had been awarded a prize, so that a detailed public announcement might be made when the remainder of the designs for Medals and Plaquettes in connection with the **British Empire Exhibition** had been received and adjudicated upon.

**3. Jersey Penny.** A sketch design prepared by Mr. G. Kruger Gray showing the mounted figure of Duke William in accordance with the suggestions made at the last meeting, together with a revision of the present heraldic shield by the same artist, were examined by the Committee and it was agreed that the Chairman should send both designs to the States of Jersey, and state that the Committee would recommend the Duke William.

**4. New Coinage for Latvia.** Revised designs prepared by Mr. G. Kruger Gray from photographs of the dies made in Latvia were examined.

**5. British Empire Order Medal.** The Chairman reported that the first issue of this medal in accordance with the design approved by the Committee at a meeting at which a representative of the Central Chancery was in attendance, had been returned as the inscription was incorrect, being "*For God + Empire*" instead of "*For God and the Empire*". The revised die was inspected and approved.

**6. Seals for the University Commissioners.** The Chairman reported that the Mint had been asked to prepare designs for seals for the Commissioners of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Mr. G. Kruger Gray had agreed to make the designs.

**7. Federation of British Industries.** The Committee noted...

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...with regret that the Federation had decided to obtain their new seal through trade channels on the grounds of a saving in expense.

**8. L.N.E. Railway Co. Seal.** The Chairman reported that the Company had decided to use a revised copy of their old badge and seal.

**9. Board of Trade Seal.** It was reported that this matter had now been submitted to His Majesty who had approved the use of the old William IV seal provided the inscription thereon was unaltered.

**10.** The Chairman made a statement regarding the position as to the projected new issue of the Imperial silver coinage and stated that the time was nearly ripe for considering how to proceed to obtain suggestions for a new series of designs.

The next meeting was arranged to be held at the Royal Mint at 3 p.m. on Tuesday 13th November, to interview Sir Neville Wilkinson regarding his model for the Ulster Seal and to consider the designs for the Medals and Commemorative Plaquettes for the British Empire Exhibition, which would then have been received.

**The Committee rose at 6:50 p.m.**

*(Signed)* **Robert A. Johnson**

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## Analysis & Commentary

These are the official minutes of the **20th meeting of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee (RMAC)**, a body established in 1922 to advise on the artistic quality of British coins, medals, and official seals. The meeting took place at the Royal Mint on **29 October 1923**.

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### The People Present

Name	Role/Significance
<b>R. A. Johnson, C.B.E.</b>	Chairman; senior Royal Mint official
<b>Earl of Crawford, K.T.</b>	David Lindsay, 27th Earl — prominent arts patron and politician
<b>Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, C.V.O.</b>	Director of the Victoria & Albert Museum 1909–1924
<b>Oswald Barron</b>	Noted heraldist and antiquary
<b>G. F. Hill</b>	George Francis Hill, Keeper of Coins & Medals at the British Museum; numismatic scholar
<b>F. Derwent Wood, R.A.</b>	Francis Derwent Wood — distinguished sculptor, Royal Academician
<b>H. W. Manwell</b>	Secretary to the Committee

This was a remarkably distinguished group — combining museum expertise, heraldic knowledge, artistic practice, and numismatic scholarship.

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## Key Business Items

**Item 2 — London Plaquette Competition** This was a major artistic competition for commemorative plaquettes of London landmarks, almost certainly connected with preparations for the **British Empire Exhibition at Wembley (1924)**. The prize structure reveals serious investment:

- 1st prize: **100 guineas** (~£7,000+ in today's money)
- 2nd prizes: **50 guineas each**
- 3rd prizes: **25 guineas each**

Notable winners include **Percy Metcalfe**, who would go on to design the famous Irish Free State coinage (1928) — one of the most celebrated coin series of the 20th century. **Eric Bradbury** was also an accomplished medallist.

The motto "*Domina potentis imperii*" (roughly "Mistress of a mighty empire") reflects the imperialist confidence of the era.

**Item 3 — Jersey Penny** The Committee was handling a new penny design for Jersey featuring **Duke William** (William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy — a historically resonant choice for the Channel Islands). The designer **G. Kruger Gray** was one of the most prolific and important British coin designers of the 20th century, later responsible for the reverse designs on British coins used from 1937 into the 1970s.

**Item 4 — Latvian Coinage** This is a fascinating detail — the newly independent Republic of Latvia (independent since 1918) was commissioning British expertise and design work for its national coinage, reflecting both British prestige in numismatic design and Latvia's post-WWI nation-building.

**Item 5 — British Empire Order Medal** A bureaucratic but revealing item: a medal had to be *recalled and re-struck* because the inscription read "**For God + Empire**" rather than "**For God and the Empire**". The use of "+" (a plus sign or cross) instead of the word "and" was deemed unacceptable — illustrating the exacting standards applied to official regalia.

**Item 6 — University Seals** Oxford and Cambridge commissioning new seals through the Royal Mint, again with Kruger Gray as designer, shows the breadth of the Mint's work beyond coinage.

**Items 7 & 8 — Commercial Seals** The Federation of British Industries bypassing the Royal Mint for cost reasons drew the Committee's "**regret**" — a polite but pointed note of institutional displeasure. The L.N.E. Railway (London and North Eastern Railway, formed only in January 1923) was adapting its predecessor's heraldry.

**Item 9 — Board of Trade Seal** Royal approval was required even for reusing a historical seal (William IV, r. 1830–1837), demonstrating how deeply the Crown was embedded in official symbolism.

**Item 10 — Imperial Silver Coinage** This is historically significant: the Chairman signals that a **new series of Imperial silver coin designs** is being contemplated. This foreshadows the eventual new coinage introduced in the late 1920s–1930s.

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## Broader Historical Context

These minutes sit at a fascinating moment:

- **Post-WWI imperial confidence** mingling with underlying economic strain
- The **British Empire Exhibition (Wembley, 1924)** looming as a grand statement of imperial unity
- Newly independent nations (Latvia, Irish Free State) navigating relationships with British institutions
- A **professionalization of design governance** — the RMAC represented a genuinely expert body replacing more ad hoc arrangements

The document is also a window into the **tight-knit world of British decorative arts** in the early 1920s, where a handful of designers

(especially Kruger Gray) handled an enormous range of official commissions.