



Art and Design

Coins in the
Classroom

Fact File

Reverse Design Facts

Coins with the definitive shield reverse designs entered circulation in 2008. The original decimal designs had been in circulation for almost 40 years and it was felt they needed to be refreshed.

The competition to design the coins was a public one and The Royal Mint received more than 4,000 designs from 526 people – the largest ever response to a public competition of this type in Britain. The £1 coin was not originally part of the design brief. A first sift of the drawings was made by three members of The Royal Mint Advisory Committee and 4,000 drawings were reduced to 418 designs. The 418 designs represented 52 series of coins. This was then whittled down to 18 designs representing three series. The designs chosen had to be not just pictures but symbols of the nation. It was decided that the heraldry on some designs was ‘too Hogwarts’ or ‘Narnia-like’ or it was ‘too gothic and overbearing’.

It was said by The Royal Mint Advisory Committee that the winning entry broke ‘the mould in an exciting way’ and ‘is a truly modern series at last.’



2008 Shield Design by Matt Dent

Matt Dent
The winner of the competition, with the pseudonym Designer Z (as all coin design competitions are anonymous), turned out to be a young graphic designer called Matt Dent, who trained at Coleg Menai in Wales and the University of Brighton. He said about his design that “the piecing together of the elements of the Royal Arms to form one design had a satisfying symbolism – that of unity, four countries of Britain under a single monarch.”

UK Coin Design



Technology



Crown and symbols of the United Kingdom



Britannia



Tudor Rose



English Lion



Scottish Thistle



Prince of Wales Feathers



Portcullis

A Penny For Your Thoughts

The United Kingdom 1p coin was one of three new coins that joined the 5p, 10p and 50p in general circulation on 15 February 1971 when the United Kingdom adopted a new decimal currency system.

The other two new coins were the ½p and 2p coins. To avoid confusion between the old and new coinage, all three coins had the word 'NEW' incorporated into the reverse design but this was later removed in 1982. The ½p was removed from circulation in 1984.

The first copper-plated steel ½p coins were struck in 1992. The reason for this change was the increase in the price of metals on the world markets. The coins have a mild steel core and are electroplated with copper – consequently they are magnetic.

All the new (1971) decimal reverse designs were the work of Christopher Ironside, apart from the Tudor Rose on the 20p introduced in 1982, which was designed by William Gardner. Christopher Ironside won a public competition where 83 entrants submitted 900 designs.

Britannia

Britannia was first portrayed on coins by the Romans and has been used to symbolise Britain ever since. On the first 50p coin, Britannia sits beside a lion, holding a trident in her hand to show our proud maritime history and island status. In her other hand is an olive branch which symbolises peace. You can find out more about the history of Britannia by visiting www.royalmint.com and following: Discover Britannia.



Commemorative 50 Pence

The Royal Mint has been making commemorative 50 pence pieces since 1973. The designs are released into circulation and are also made in Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) quality. BU coins go through a slightly different process to make sure that they are not scratched. Coins in circulation are mass produced and made of mostly recycled metal. A list of all commemorative 50 pence coin designs can be found here on The Royal Mint Museum’s website. To find out more about commemorative coins, please take a look at our lesson ‘Designing Commemorative Coins.’

Coin Design at The Royal Mint

The Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the Design of Coins, Medals, Seals and Decorations (RMAC for short) was formally established by George V in 1922 to help decide on new coin designs and raise the standard of numismatic (coin) art. The Committee is independent of The Royal Mint and is made up of sculptors, numismatic, heraldic and lettering specialists and other artists. His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was President of the Committee from 1952 until 1999.

When a new British coin is required, artists and designers are asked by the RMAC to submit designs for a competition. Only sometimes are these competitions made open to the public, like the 2008 definitive coins reverse design competition and the London 2012 50p Sports Collection competitions. The Royal Mint has an in-house team of coin designers and engravers who are also encouraged to submit designs. Coin designs are submitted to the RMAC anonymously and then a decision is made as to which one the RMAC will recommend. Once a design has been chosen, approval must be gained from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and finally Her Majesty The Queen. Only then can the coin go into production.

Royal Heraldry

Although the Royal Arms has told many stories over the centuries, what it now records is political union between kingdoms. Whether this is the best way to represent the modern United Kingdom is debated and doubted by some. Wales is absent because it was incorporated into England by Henry VIII in 1536, rather than being made a kingdom in its own right as Ireland was five years later. Wales is now represented heraldically on the full Coat of Arms of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. The old Welsh badge of the red dragon on a grassy mound was used by Henry VII to mark his descent from Cadwaladr. Today, the dragon is much better known as the flag of Wales. The dragon features along with The Prince of Wales' other badge of three ostrich feathers.



The full Royal Arms is made up of not just a shield but supporters (the lion and unicorn who support the shield), a crest (a crowned lion on top of the helmet), and the words 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' ('Shame upon him who thinks evil upon it') on the garter belt. There are in fact two versions of the Royal Coat of Arms; one used by England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a slightly different one used by Scotland.

The Royal Arms belongs to the Crown. However, rather than representing the monarch, the modern shield has come to represent the political make-up of the United Kingdom and now fulfills the role of national symbol. That our national symbol should belong to The Queen is part and parcel of living in a monarchy.

(Source: K. Clancy (ed) 'Designing Change' The Royal Mint 2008)

Coin Design Links

You might like to use the following to extend your work on coins and art through elements of literacy. Below are some verses that refer to the design of coins. As a class you could analyse the poem and then encourage pupils to write their own – either about coin design in general or about their piece of work on identity.

Verses from Punch 26th February 1893

*Art will now adorn our purses
Hitherto an artless place;
More than pictures, songs or verses,
This should elevate the race.*

*Will the cabman now be willing,
After driving half a mile,
To accept a high-art shilling,
Not with oaths, but with a smile?*

*Will the porter at the station
While his thanks pause on his lip,
Gaze in silent admiration
At the beauty of his tip?*

*'Music hath', so Congreve stated,
'Charms to soothe the savage breast';
Numismatic art is fated
Maybe to be likewise blest.*

Source: K. Clancy (ed) 'Designing Change' The Royal Mint 2008
(Chapter by Sir Christopher Frayling)

Further information can be found at:

www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk
www.royalmint.com

Can you solve the puzzle?



1



3



2



4



6



5



Here are some of the designs you can find on the reverses of UK coins.



Why do you think these designs have been chosen? What do they mean?

The United Kingdom

There are 65.6 million people living in the UK.

They come from many different cultures and religions and each person has a different identity.



How do we represent them all on our coins?



One way of solving the problem

Coin designers will often use images or symbols on their coins that are familiar to lots of people. They hope that people will recognise the images and feel that the coins represent them.

One thing to remember is that coins are very small and so the artists have a real challenge – how do they represent a big nation with a tiny design?

The Queen has had five portraits during her reign



The Queen's portrait represents the nation in a different way. How is this?

The Royal Coat of Arms

The shield design is based on the Royal Coat of Arms. Can you spot the design below?

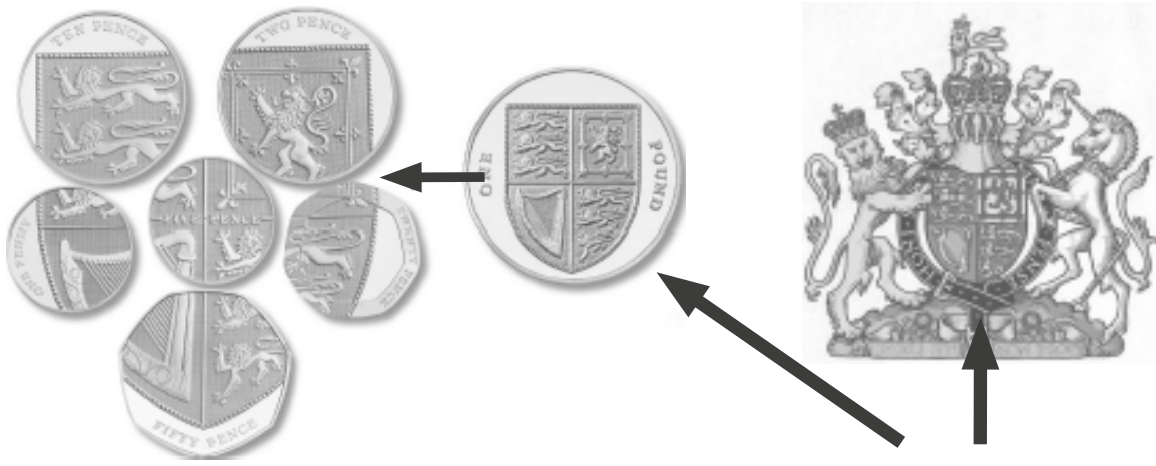


Wales is not represented on this shield but is instead represented on the Coat of Arms of The Prince of Wales.

The Heraldic Shield

The Heraldic Shield coin design by Matt Dent

The reverses on UK coins, introduced in 2008, solve the problem of representing the UK in another way ...



The Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom since 1837

This design has been on UK coins since 2008 and features the Royal Arms (the shield used by the Royal Family). Since the thirteenth century, arms have been used by monarchs of the British Isles to show the coming together of kingdoms. The two Acts of Union that created the modern United Kingdom brought the shields of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland together to form one. Wales is not represented in the Royal Arms because it is a principality rather than a country in its own right.

What do you think about this way of representing the identity of the nation? Do you think it is a good idea? Why?

Now that we have looked at how coin designers try to represent the nation on their coins in the next lesson you will start to think about how you can represent your own identity.

Shield design

Last time, we looked at the 2008 coin design by Matt Dent, known as the Shield or Broken Shield design.



What can you remember about the designs on the back of coins?

Pablo Picasso



Pablo Picasso, 1962

Picasso was a great painter but he was also one of the first artists to use collage.

Picasso used collage and paint at the same time to create his artwork.

Links

[Picasso at the Guggenheim](#)

[Picasso at the Tate](#)

David Mach

David Mach is a modern artist and sculptor who also works with collage.



Photo collage



Postcard collage

Some of Mach's collages are **circular**, for example his 'Four Seasons' series.

In these collages, he uses photographs to create scenes. You could use magazines.



David Mach

Mach uses all the space available and builds background as well as foreground into his pictures.



You can fit a lot of detail into a circle!



Britannia by David Mach

David Mach is also a coin designer.

Spot the difference

What similarities and differences can you find between the collages of David Mach and Pablo Picasso?

Similarities	Differences



royalmint.com/kids