

THE COINAGE OF 1893

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1. The need for a new coinage

THE origins of the coinage designs of 1893 essentially stemmed from dissatisfaction with the Jubilee coinage of 1887. The prime target of criticism had been Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm's effigy of Queen Victoria which showed her wearing what was widely regarded as an absurdly small crown, in danger of slipping off the back of her head (Pl. 7, 1).¹ The reverse designs were also unpopular because of their failure to specify values. Accordingly, there was widespread demand for a replacement coinage as soon as expediency permitted. In January 1888, scarcely six months after the Jubilee coinage had appeared, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Goschen, submitted a pattern coin with a new design to Queen Victoria. This was accompanied by a memorandum from Charles Fremantle, Deputy Master of the Royal Mint, 'with a view to the production of a more satisfactory coin than was attained in the Jubilee issue'.² Before proceeding further, the Queen's approval was necessary. The absence of documentation suggests this was not forthcoming; memories of derisive cartoons in *Punch* and *Fun*, especially the latter's obverse inscription, 'Victoria Disgraceful', doubtless still rankled.³ In his next recorded letter on the subject in September 1889, Goschen stated 'As the general discussion on the Jubilee coinage had subsided, and the public appeared to have got used to the new coin, I thought that it might possibly be best to let the matter rest for a while.'⁴ Now he felt that it was time to readdress the question. Queen Victoria left him in no doubt about her attitude: 'The Queen dislikes the new coinage very much, and wishes the old one could still be used and the new one gradually disused, and then a new one struck.'⁵ In reply, Goschen conveyed the difficulty of reverting to the old coinage but promised action: 'I will confer with the Mint authorities whether if we cannot go back we should not go forward with the fresh design.'⁶

Goschen and the Mint chose to 'go forward' through the appointment in February 1891 of an advisory committee of experts representing financial, numismatic and artistic interests, known as the Committee on the Design of Coins.⁷ The membership of the Committee comprised the following: the chairman, Sir John Lubbock, Liberal MP, banker, archaeologist and naturalist; David Powell, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England; Richard Blaney Wade, Chairman of the National Provincial Bank; Sir Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy; Sir John Evans, President of the Numismatic Society; and Fremantle, representing the Royal Mint. The secretary was George F. Glennie, Deputy Secretary of the Bank of England.

Documents in the Royal Archives are quoted by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen. The author is very grateful to Graham Dyer for his advice and comments.

¹ G. P. Dyer and Mark Stocker, 'Edgar Boehm and the Jubilee Coinage', *BNJ* 54, (1984), 274-88.

² Royal Archives B39/76, Goschen to Queen Victoria, 8 January 1888.

³ *Punch*, 9 July 1887; *Fun*, 6 July 1887.

⁴ RA B41/102, Goschen to Sir Henry Ponsonby, 4 September 1889.

⁵ *The Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd. series. A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1886 and 1901. I, 1886-90*, edited by G. E. Buckle (London, 1930), p. 530.

⁶ RA B41/103-104, Goschen to Ponsonby, 12 September 1889.

⁷ Public Record Office, MINT 7/44, Fremantle to Sir John Lubbock, 5 February 1891.

Both the timing and the motive behind the appointment of the Committee were significant. It was established within six weeks of Boehm's sudden death in December 1890. His power over the Mint authorities as the Queen's favourite sculptor and his likely distress over a rapid replacement for his Jubilee effigy might well have delayed the launch of a new design. Now, without seeming indecorous, there was nothing to restrain the Committee. It could fulfil its aims both positively and negatively: the former by providing an artistically successful replacement for the Jubilee coinage and the latter by limiting the damage. No individual, Goschen, Fremantle or indeed the Queen, wanted to carry the blame for a repetition of 1887. The Committee would help prevent that possibility. What *The Times* described as 'a strong Commission' was now in charge.⁸ The welcome presence of Leighton and Evans on the Committee ensured that artistic standards would not be disregarded. Leighton, who was the most significant President of the Royal Academy since its founder, Sir Joshua Reynolds, was to prove himself especially valuable, both in his artistic opinions and as a 'go-between', carrying the respect of the prospective designers and the Committee alike.

The Committee's brief was 'to examine the designs on the various coins put into circulation in the year 1887, and the improvements in those designs since suggested, and to make such recommendations on the subject as might seem desirable, and to report what coins, if any, should have values expressed on them in words and figures'.⁹ The absence of any values inscribed on coins of a shilling and over caused greater public annoyance than Boehm's unpopular effigy. From the release of the Jubilee coinage onwards, demands were made in Parliament for the situation to be remedied. The Liberal MPs, R.K. Causton and W.P. Sinclair, were persistent in their lobbying; in August 1890 Sinclair presented Goschen with a Memorial demanding that all gold and silver coins should have their face value clearly marked.¹⁰ Another source of complaint was the double-florin or four-shilling piece, introduced in 1887. In attacking this coin, the *Daily Telegraph* played Portia: 'It blessed neither him who gave nor him who took. It was for all practical purposes a hypocritical substitute for the old crown.'¹¹ This was forcefully impressed on Goschen in March 1890 when his bland pronouncement in Parliament that 'there can hardly be said to be any similarity between the double florin and the crown' met with cries of 'Oh!'¹² The withdrawal of the double-florin was unanimously agreed by the Committee in its first meeting on 12 February 1891 and was announced in Parliament by Goschen on 25 May.¹³

The question of new designs, as distinct from inscriptions, was of less importance to Parliament. H.H. Fowler expressed concern that the Committee on the Design of Coins would give priority to artistic rather than functional considerations.¹⁴ Understandably, discussion of artistic designs occupied more of the Committee's time than did incorporation of values. Glennie's minute of the second meeting of the Committee on 27 February 1891 records the question of who would be invited to submit designs. Lubbock recommended an open competition; as a meritocratic Liberal he considered it 'invidious to exclude'. Leighton disagreed and carried the day when he argued that 'a number not exceeding eight should be asked to compete. If more asked good men would not compete'.¹⁵ Leighton had evidently absorbed the arguments of the article 'New Coins for Old', published in the 1887 *Magazine of Art*:

⁸ *The Times*, 31 January 1893.

⁹ PRO MINT 7/44, Clinton E. Dawkins to Fremantle, n.d. (c. 10 February 1891).

¹⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd. series, 348, (6–18 August 1890), 8 August 1890, p. 256.

¹¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1893. See G. P. Dyer, 'Gold, Silver and the Double Florin', *BNJ* 64, (1995), 114–25.

¹² *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd. series, 342, (5–26 March

1890), 14 March 1890, p. 874.

¹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd. series, 353, (4 May–8 June 1891), 25 May 1891, p. 969.

¹⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, 354, (9–30 June 1891), 11 June 1891, pp. 152–3.

¹⁵ PRO MINT 7/55, Glennie, Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins.

It has been suggested that a national memorial should have been put up to national competition. But competition in art has proved so persistently a failure, that one must be sanguine indeed to anticipate good results from it. It is doubtful, too, whether even in a thing of national importance the best men would compete. A plebiscite of sculptors might have answered, and they would possibly have been pretty much of one mind in this instance.¹⁶

The author was the designer and critic Lewis F. Day, one of the most intelligent but still underrated figures associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹⁷ The influence of Day's article is indicated by Fremantle's production of a copy at the 12 February meeting. He subsequently offered it as an aid to participants in the coinage design competition.¹⁸

The list of prospective artists was headed by Alfred Gilbert, described as 'a friend of Boehm's – *persona grata* with the Queen'. Also listed were Edward Onslow Ford, Albert Bruce Joy, John H. Pinches, Edward John Poynter, Hamo Thornycroft and Allan Wyon. The names of Henry Armstead, C.B. Birch, Thomas Brock and Thomas Woolner were subsequently added, and those of Bruce Joy, Pinches and Wyon were deleted. The list now consisted exclusively of members and associate members of the Royal Academy. All were sculptors except for Poynter, who was a painter and medallist.¹⁹ Bruce Joy was dropped as he was not an Academician, but Pinches and Wyon probably suffered for different reasons. Fremantle implicitly condemned them when he was later quoted as believing that 'the art of engraving has died out'.²⁰ The most surprising omission from the final list is Alphonse Legros, who in prowess and output as a medallist certainly surpassed all others, Poynter included. There are two reasons for this; he was not an Academician and, although long settled in London, he was a Frenchman. Day had complained of Boehm that 'the favoured artist bears not even an English name'.²¹ However, it would be wrong to suspect the Committee of narrow academicism or chauvinism. In the 1890s, the movement known as the New Sculpture, which amounted to little short of an artistic revolution, was in its heyday. It was reflected in the work of the invited artists, especially Gilbert, Thornycroft, Ford and, to a lesser extent, Brock and Armstead. Day acknowledged this when he referred to 'the eminence of the artists chosen', their work displaying 'the spirit of modernity, to which our latest sculpture owes so much'.²²

At Fremantle's insistence, competitors were asked to design at least two portraits of Queen Victoria, both looking to the left. It was proposed that coins bearing one or the other of these heads would circulate together, with the florin bearing a different head from the half-crown, so as to be easily distinguishable. Reverse designs were required for denominations from the sovereign to the shilling. Indication of the value on the coin was left optional, with the exception again of the florin where it was to be expressed. This may appear surprising in view of public opinion. Fremantle, however, believed that if the differences in the designs of coins were pronounced, that would avoid the necessity of expressing their values.²³ Competitors were required to submit at least two models of their designs; the rest could be pen drawings. This was later described by Day as 'sheer perversity' when all entrants but Poynter were sculptors 'whose natural method of expressing themselves would be in clay or wax – which would also be the medium best representing the effect of actual coins'.²⁴ Day seems justified, especially as the quality of the submissions reveals that, Poynter and Armstead apart, the

¹⁶ *Magazine of Art*, (1887), 420.

¹⁷ For Day, see Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: a study of its sources, ideals and influence on design theory*, (London, 1971), pp. 120–1.

¹⁸ PRO MINT 7/47, Henry Hugh Armstead to Fremantle, 17 April 1891.

¹⁹ PRO MINT 7/55, Glennie, Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins. For Poynter, see Alison Inglis, 'The Medals of Edward Poynter', *The Medal*, (Winter 1985), 17–31.

²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1893.

²¹ *Magazine of Art*, (1887), 420. For Legros, see Philip Attwood, 'The Medals of Alphonse Legros', *The Medal* (September 1984), 7–23.

²² *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 279. See also Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture*, (New Haven, 1983).

²³ Fremantle's dislike of values on coins was long-standing. See *Eighth Annual Report of the Deputy Master of the Mint 1877*, (London, 1878), p. 27.

²⁴ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 275.

entrants were clearly happier to model than to draw. Entrants were offered a fee of £150, which the *Illustrated London News* considered 'totally inadequate remuneration for the time and labour and materials' involved.²⁵

Two artists declined to compete. Woolner asked Glennie who was judging the competition and when told, wrote a graceful refusal.²⁶ Gilbert did not reply to his invitation. When pressed he wrote 'as I never enter into a competition of any description I thought it would be unnecessary to trouble you with a letter to say so' but went on to express his regrets.²⁷ Leighton was 'much concerned' by Gilbert's decision, to the extent of writing to him to think again: 'He is *entre nous*, far and away the best man for the work, or would be if he could bend himself to it.'²⁸ Art historical opinion would endorse Leighton's view; Gilbert's was the outstanding talent of the New Sculpture. Queen Victoria is said to have considered his Golden Jubilee portrait for the Art Union 'the best likeness of her on a medal'.²⁹ Yet temperamentally, Gilbert was a romantic's romantic. Given the exigencies of working for a committee and meeting Mint deadlines, designs from Gilbert, if selected, would have led to disaster. Despite these refusals, Lubbock and Fremantle considered it unnecessary to invite others in their place.

At least two further artists applied to submit designs: the minor sculptor, Conrad Dressler and, more importantly, Allan Wyon, whose name had been deleted from the original list. As Engraver of the Royal Seals and the sole practising member of Britain's most distinguished dynasty of medallists, it was not surprising that Wyon should approach the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

The high merit of the great silver coinage of 1817 and that of the subsequent coinages brought out by the late William Wyon RA, and the consequently popular approval which they received, was no doubt owing to the fact of their having been designed and executed by artists who were technically acquainted with the preparation of medals and coins. It is as one thus qualified that I now venture to offer my services ...³⁰

Fremantle, whose regard for Wyon's abilities as a designer was not high, told Glennie that the application 'is what we might have expected'. Although Wyon was told that the artists requested to submit designs had been selected, 'note was made of his offer to engrave the dies which may eventually be required'.³¹ Wyon's solicitations proved self-destructive, however, when exception was taken to his 'getting batches of irresponsible MPs to write about him to the Chancellor of the Exchequer'.³²

With the deadline for the competition set for 31 October 1891, there were no committee meetings between March and November. The establishment of the committee and its membership were announced by Goschen in reply to a Parliamentary question from Causton in April.³³ In a subsequent answer to Causton in May, Goschen revealed that eight artists had been invited to compete but, in accordance with Fremantle's wishes, they were not identified. Fremantle believed that although at first sight it seemed the 'natural and proper thing' to go public –

²⁵ *Illustrated London News*, 4 March 1893.

²⁶ PRO MINT 7/46, Woolner to Glennie, 7 April 1891.

²⁷ PRO MINT 7/46, Gilbert to Glennie, 14 April 1891.

²⁸ PRO MINT 7/44, Leighton to Glennie, 17 April 1891.

²⁹ Mark Stocker, review of Richard Dormont, *Alfred Gilbert, The Medal*, (Winter 1985), 58.

³⁰ PRO MINT 7/44, Wyon to Goschen, 7 April 1891.

³¹ PRO MINT 7/44, Fremantle to Glennie, 8 April 1891. Fremantle had written several years earlier to Robert Hunt of the Sydney Mint: 'I am sorry to say there is, in my opinion, no really good English Engraver now living. Our Mint "Modeller

and Engraver", Mr. Leonard C. Wyon, for whom I have the highest regard & who is a man of taste and cultivation, is certainly the best.' This admiration did not extend to Allan Wyon. (Quoted in Dyer and Stocker, 'Edgar Boehm and the Jubilee Coinage', *BNJ* 54, (1984), 282, n.61).

³² PRO MINT 7/44, F. Parry to Fremantle, 18 April 1891 and Fremantle to Glennie, 18 April 1891. The only letter forwarded by an 'irresponsible' M. P. in the Mint file is by G. E. Hine to W. H. Smith, 10 April 1891.

³³ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd. series, 352, (7 April–1 May 1891), 9 April 1891, pp 123–4.

in these days of interviewing and general publication of the details of everybody's business, the Artists themselves might, if their names were not [*sic*] known, be importuned to give particulars as to their work & views on the subject & so placed in a disagreeable position. It is probable also that our selection would be criticised. Gilbert's abstention commented on, &c.³⁴

It was not until April 1892, on the eve of the Committee's report, that the participants' names were revealed by the newspaper that specialised in such 'exclusives', the *Pall Mall Gazette*.³⁵

In June 1891 further Parliamentary questions were asked about the inclusion of values on the coins, with Sinclair asking Goschen to reconsider the instructions to competitors. Although the Chancellor refused to be drawn, branch agents of the Bank of England were canvassed for their opinions on the matter. They displayed little enthusiasm for gold coins bearing their value but were virtually unanimous in believing that silver should do so.³⁶ Public involvement in the issue is indicated in the correspondence sent to the Committee by self-appointed monetary reformers and lateral thinkers such as John Coryton, Colonel B.W. Melville and A. Hardeman. According to its inventor, 'The Coryton system of Coinage' made its value 'recognisable at a glance or by a touch', this through 'making each coin of a special form' and by protecting gold coins by 'a band of phosphor bronze or other substance of great endurance'.³⁷ In October 1891 the Edinburgh medallist Alexander Kirkwood sent the committee unsolicited samples of his coinage designs in low relief in silver. Evans commented tersely that they 'speak for themselves'.³⁸

2. The Committee chooses

The first meeting of the Committee after entries had closed was held at the Bank of England on 27 November. The designs were placed on temporary screens in the Secretary's office. Glennie's summary states that a provisional selection was made at this meeting. Brock's two designs were selected for the obverses, one design for the florin and the other for remaining denominations. Benedetto Pistrucchi's St George and the Dragon reverse was retained for the sovereign and crown and was introduced for the half-sovereign. For the half-crown reverse the Committee selected the design that Brock had originally intended for the florin. At this stage there was still no plan to mark the denomination on this coin. For the florin, Poynter's model was selected, marked 'with the VRs suppressed'; for the shilling Poynter's 'smaller' badge design; and for the sixpence, Brock's reverse design for the shilling.³⁹ Beyond this, there is a disappointing dearth of material to indicate what members of the Committee might have thought and why. Explanations for their decisions and details of any discussion in arriving at them were probably never put in writing. Goschen later stated that 'Fremantle told me that Leighton's influence predominated in the artistic part of the question. The Committee I know took immense trouble in selecting the designs'.⁴⁰ The latter point is amply confirmed in subsequent correspondence between the selected designers and the Committee. Most of the designs were discussed and illustrated in two near-identical articles by Day in the *Magazine of Art* of May 1896 and in Spink's *Numismatic Circular* of March 1898. These articles, together with the complete set of photographs among the Committee papers deposited in the Public

³⁴ PRO MINT 7/44, Fremantle to Glennie, 18 April 1891.

³⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 April 1892. The same account correctly stated that designs by Brock and Poynter had been chosen but inaccurately added 'Mr. Brock's "St. George and the Dragon" for a second reverse has also been accepted'.

³⁶ PRO MINT 7/44, typed transcripts from G. W. Moultrie, Frank A. Agnew, Geo Lempriere and others to the Bank of England, 15–17 June 1891.

³⁷ PRO MINT 7/44, Coryton to Fremantle, 11 June and 18 July 1891.

³⁸ PRO MINT 7/44, Evans to Fremantle, n.d. (October 1891).

³⁹ PRO MINT 7/55, Glennie, *Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins*.

⁴⁰ RA L16/51, Goschen to Ponsonby, 18 March 1892.

Record Office, make it possible to test Day's belief 'that a happier selection might have been made'.⁴¹

Of all the competitors, Henry Armstead showed most enthusiasm for his task and this is reflected in his designs. He alone took the trouble to obtain detailed information from Fremantle, telling him 'the study of coins and coinage is most fascinating'.⁴² He submitted eighteen different designs, six models and twelve drawings, far outnumbering those of his rivals who were content to employ identical designs for different denominations. Clearly he felt that 'the new coinage' should be just that; in short, he showed a readiness to take risks. Unfortunately for Armstead's sake, they did not pay off. While the Committee was willing to consider innovation, this was balanced by caution, convention and conservatism after the Jubilee coinage fiasco. Day was disappointed but hardly surprised by Armstead's rejection: 'Out of Mr Armstead's designs alone a series of coins might have been chosen which would have had at least a decorative merit lacking in our present coinage.'⁴³ In his obverse designs, Armstead's emphasis on artistic imagination rather than dutiful realism is evident. His design for the crown illustrates Day's point that he 'goes nearest to giving us a head designed as a medallion'.⁴⁴ The echoing motifs of the dolphins and the veil folds excellently illustrate what H.W. Janson admired in Armstead's relief sculpture: 'a remarkable rhythmic flow through the use of Neo-Baroque curvilinear shapes and a sense of drama' (Pl. 7, 6).⁴⁵ The design would have been too dramatic for public opinion accustomed to few changes in coinage design; and it would have been a gift to cartoonists who would have gleefully exploited the juxtaposition of the dolphins and the Queen's low-cut dress. The sovereign obverse is of equal originality; as Armstead stated, the Queen is shown 'not quite in profile', in a pose recalling the portrait medallions of David d'Angers (Pl. 7, 7). Day commented: 'He places the head too far forward in the coin; but in style and treatment – in design, in short – the most important of his contributions attains pre-eminently that dignity which becomes the subject.'⁴⁶ Armstead's reverses ranged from the ship, 'The Resolute', intended for the sovereign (Pl. 7, 8), to the more obscure 'Britannia directing the foundation of a colony' for the crown (Pl. 7, 9a–b). He also produced a variation on the theme of St George for the florin, showing the saint binding together a bundle of sticks, an allusion to 'the sustaining and strengthening character of England's government of her colonial empire' (Pl. 7, 10).⁴⁷ Day called this design 'at once significant, original and decorative'. However, he realised that the themes of Armstead's reverses were often in conflict with the popular purpose of a coin, where 'it is essential that the meaning of it ... should be obvious' and 'to suggest subtly is only to perplex'.⁴⁸

No such problems arose with the designs of C.B. Birch. Indeed, they seem plain to the point of being perfunctory. His obverses fail to recapture the physically frail and yet decisive Queen Victoria of his Blackfriars Bridge statue (1896). Especially unfortunate is the design of the Queen wearing a crown still tinier than Boehm's, surmounting what looks more like a doily than a veil (Pl. 7, 11a–b). However, Birch alone should not be singled out for retaining the small crown that had attracted so much criticism. Brock and, to a lesser extent, Poynter did the

⁴¹ 'The Coin of the Realm', *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 275–9; *NCirc* (1898), 2619–25.

⁴² *PRO MINT* 7/47, Armstead to Fremantle, 17 April 1891.

⁴³ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 279.

⁴⁴ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), p. 275.

⁴⁵ *Nineteenth-Century Sculpture*, (London, 1985), pp. 165–6.

⁴⁶ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 275.

⁴⁷ *MINT* 7/47, Armstead's descriptive list of coinage designs, 31 October 1891. Further reverse designs by Armstead include 'Britannia directing her children to sow and reap in her colonies throughout the world', (crown model); 'St.

George victorious and prostrate dragon', (florin model); 'Science, Commerce and Art flourishing under the olive tree (Peace)', (half-crown drawing); "'Victorious Britannia'" suggested by [Thomas] Campbell's verse: 'Britain needs no bulwarks/ No towers along the steep/ Her march is o'er the mountain waves/ Her home is on the deep', (half-crown drawing); Britannia freeing African slaves and subduing Anarchy', (half-crown drawing); and 'Britannia directing the circumnavigation of the world', (half-crown drawing).

⁴⁸ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 277.

same in their unadopted designs. No doubt the familiarity of the crown, which the Queen liked to wear, and which was encountered on authorised images from statues to photographs, made it difficult to dislodge. Birch's reverses show little imagination. His sovereign and half-sovereign are a gothic adaptation of Pistrucci's St George and the Dragon, with near-identical poses (**Pl. 7, 12a–b**). Although Day was not referring specifically to Birch's heraldic reverses for the half-crown and florin (**Pl. 7, 13**), his strictures on the subject are relevant:

Heraldry would have fared better in the hands of artists who had presumably not now for the first time turned their thoughts to it ... So little of this kind of work falls to the sculptor of the present day that when it does he is at a disadvantage. An art which is despised of the aristocracy of art sinks naturally into the hands of the plebeian craftsman. In the case of heraldry it has sunk indeed very low – practically, one may say, to the depths of trade; although it would not be impossible to find journeymen ... unknown even by name within the precincts of Burlington House, who know that trade better than to have turned out anything so unfeeling as the harder and more mechanical devices here shown.⁴⁹

Thomas Brock's designs strike a happy medium between those of Armstead and Birch – more simple, sober and sensible than the former and more refined and assured than the latter. There seems little doubt that they would have impressed the Committee as being both dignified and distinctive. It is significant that neither of the two obverse designs initially submitted by Brock were, in the event, adopted, although they were provisionally selected by the Committee at the 27 November meeting. One design portrays Queen Victoria wearing a crown not appreciably larger than that of Boehm's effigy, a veil, her widow's peak and a laurel wreath. Despite this apparent overcrowding, when Brock's model was reduced to the size of a crown piece, the effect was surprisingly successful. Frederick Parkes Weber called it 'perhaps the prettiest obverse design offered'.⁵⁰ Brock later used it for the obverse of the Imperial Institute Medal (1893), which belatedly commemorated the Golden Jubilee (**Pl. 8, 14**). His other design is similar but more simplified, the peak and wreath are eliminated and the Queen wears a broader-rimmed crown and a necklace (**Pl. 8, 15a–b**). This design, after minor changes, was submitted to Queen Victoria in March 1892. Brock's most ambitious reverse designs took the form of a seated Britannia for the sovereign (**Pl. 8, 16**) and a standing figure of St George for the crown (**Pl. 8, 17**). Neither was illustrated by Day but, unlike Armstead's designs, readers missed little; they were unexceptionable but represented no improvement on Pistrucci. For the half-crown, Brock initially submitted not the eventually adopted design but an ornate gothic quatrefoil pattern (**Pl. 8, 18**). A possible reason for its rejection was Leighton's belief that a gothic and a classical coinage should not circulate concurrently.⁵¹ Brock's florin reverse, bearing the ensigns armorial of the United Kingdom contained in a shield, was selected by the Committee for adoption as the half-crown reverse and was also later submitted in slightly modified form to the Queen (**Pl. 7, 2**).

Edward Onslow Ford, like Armstead, suffered for the originality of his designs. His two obverses come closer than any others to fulfilling the standard definition of the New Sculpture as a 'reverent observation of nature' (**Pl. 8, 19–20**).⁵² Although no entrant was given a sitting by the Queen, Day praised Ford for coming closest to conveying a study from the life and daring to make her look old. He implicitly compared Ford with Brock when he wrote: 'Give us the real Queen or the ideal; but never take the aged face and smooth out of it the lines of age, on which its character and dignity depend.'⁵³ According to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the

⁴⁹ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 278.

⁵⁰ Frederick Parkes Weber, unpublished notes accompanying the British Museum specimen of this medal.

⁵¹ PRO MINT 7/55, Glennie, Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins.

⁵² The phrase was used by the critic Edmund Gosse, who

gave the New Sculpture its name. See Edmund Gosse, 'The New Sculpture', *Art Journal*, (1894), 138–42, 199–203, 277–82, 306–11, and also Mark Stocker, 'Edmund Gosse on Sculpture', *University of Leeds Review*, 28, (1985–6), 283–310.

⁵³ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 276.

Committee 'universally admired' Ford's half-sovereign reverse, which portrays an Elizabethan galleon (Pl. 8, 21). However, 'numismatists thought that the delicate detail would too soon wear down in use'.⁵⁴ His crown design was described by Day as a 'beautiful medallion' (Pl. 9, 22). Again, more than other designs, it shows Ford's commitment to the New Sculpture aesthetic. St George stands in elegant *contrapposto*, a realistic yet sensuous nude figure, evoking in miniature the qualities of Alfred Gilbert's statuettes, such as *Perseus Arming* (1882) and *Icarus* (1884). Accomplished, too, is the way St George's wings envelop the field of the coin. The Committee's satisfaction with Pistrucci's existing reverse probably explains the rejection of Ford's design.

As a painter, Edward Poynter faced problems different from those of his rivals. He complained to Fremantle: 'I am so hampered & handicapped by my inexperience in the technicalities of modelling that every kind of unforeseen difficulty has delayed my work. I have been nearly three weeks over one design which I might have drawn in so many days & I am not out of the wood yet.'⁵⁵ He was late for the deadline but was allowed to replace his sketches with finished drawings. Poynter's obverse designs for the half-crown and florin (Pl. 9, 23–24) were later regarded by Leonard Forrer as too reminiscent of the Jubilee effigy, an ironical charge since Poynter had been one of its most articulate critics.⁵⁶ While Poynter compressed the portrait by shortening the incongruously youthful neck, he nevertheless retained a disconcertingly small crown. His other obverse for the sovereign and half-sovereign uses a large, double-arched crown. Both portraits have in common the problem diagnosed by Day, that of artificially smoothing out the lines of age. The *pièce de résistance* of Poynter's reverse designs is his version of St George and the Dragon, intended for the sovereign, half-sovereign and crown (Pl. 9, 25). In 1887 Poynter had complimented the authorities for at least showing enough sense to retain Pistrucci's version. Now he attempted to beat Pistrucci at his own game. Although Pistrucci won, the result was far from humiliating for Poynter. The new design bears out Poynter's reputation for technical excellence of draftsmanship, unmatched even by Leighton. Poynter's other reverses take the form of armorial bearings and emblems. The shield of arms with supporters (Pl. 9, 26), not illustrated by Day, was intended as an alternative to the St George. Another shield of arms was offered for the half-sovereign and the shields of the three kingdoms was for the florin. The last design, after some modifications, was submitted to Queen Victoria and adopted in 1893. For the shilling, Poynter executed two similar designs showing the rose, shamrock and thistle emblems, one with a large rose, the other with a smaller one and having a longer, beribboned stem (Pl. 9, 27a–b). The former design was provisionally selected by the Committee and was later submitted to the Queen. These heraldic designs certainly withstand Day's criticisms better than most. Rather than being 'unfeeling' or 'hard', they aim at a greater decorative richness of effect than their Jubilee coinage precedents. They are also more legible; Day praised Poynter's lettering for its 'careful consideration' in being 'proportioned to the picture it encloses'. Of the Committee members, John Evans would also have approved the modification of the 'absurdly small' lettering of the Jubilee coinage.⁵⁷

The most disappointing entries were by Hamo Thornycroft. A more consistent artist than Gilbert, Thornycroft's contribution to the New Sculpture was arguably as great.⁵⁸ There is little to indicate this in his coinage designs, although extenuating circumstances may have

⁵⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 April 1892.

⁵⁵ PRO MINT 7/48, Poynter to Fremantle, 26 October 1891.

⁵⁶ L. Forrer, *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists*, 4, (London, 1909), p. 679. For Poynter's criticisms of the Jubilee coinage, see Dyer and Stocker, 'Edgar Boehm and the Jubilee Coinage', *BNJ* 54, (1984), 281–2.

⁵⁷ PRO MINT 7/55, Glennie, Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins.

⁵⁸ For Thornycroft, see Elfrida Manning, *Marble & Bronze: The Art and Life of Hamo Thornycroft*, (London, 1982).

existed. Day added a footnote in his revised article for Spink's *Numismatic Circular* to say that 'Mr Thornycroft is not fairly represented by the rough sketches illustrating his designs', a point overlooked by the late H.W.A. Linecar in his more recent, scathing assessment.⁵⁹ Day also stated that 'Mr Thornycroft and Mr Ford both belong to that race of delicately sensitive artists who are never happiest, if ever happy, in competition'.⁶⁰ Thornycroft's heart was almost certainly not in his work. He had refused at least two invitations to make statues of Queen Victoria for the Golden Jubilee, partly because of pressure of other commissions. This remained an important factor in 1891, when his diary records that he was forced to concentrate most of his work on the coinage within a hectic 70-hour period between 27 October and the deadline four days later.⁶¹ A more telling explanation, however, is in his diary of 1887: 'our good monarch does not inspire me'.⁶² This lack of inspiration is apparent in the obverse drawings (PI. 9, 28a–b). Although her crown is enlarged, the youthful-looking Queen bears much resemblance to Boehm's Jubilee effigy. Thornycroft's reverses are no happier; the half-crown shows, as Linecar put it, 'St. George killing some monster no larger than a snake surrounded by four shields' (PI. 9, 29). The clash between the shield held by St George and that bearing the arms of England is particularly unhappy.

3. Modifying the designs

The provisional selection of designs having been made, it was decided at the next Committee meeting, on 23 December 1891, that Leighton would visit Brock to ask him to make changes to his designs with a view to their adoption. The 'small crown' design admired by Weber was now rejected, because the presence of both crown and wreath were objected to.⁶³ Instead, Brock was asked to prepare a fresh obverse 'somewhat after that of the Ashanti medal', an example of which Fremantle sent him. This design, by Leonard Charles Wyon, dating from 1874, showed Queen Victoria wearing a tiara and veil (PI. 9, 30). A design 'somewhat after' the medal meant precisely that. The format was changed from a head to a bust; modification was made to the Queen's features to denote an older woman, although not to the extent that Day would have liked; the tiara was embellished with crosses and fleurs-de-lis; and the Queen was shown wearing pearl-drop earrings, the Koh-i-noor and the Garter Star. In short, the Ashanti Medal was fused with Brock's pre-existing design to create the 'Old Head (PI. 9, 31)'. The other obverse design selected by the Committee, showing the Queen wearing the broad-rimmed crown, was to be left essentially unchanged. However, Brock was asked to bring the effigy more into the centre of the coin and to disconnect it from the border at the base of the design. Leighton also asked Brock on the Committee's behalf to adapt his florin reverse design to the half-crown, omitting the dolphin. The Committee's provisional selection of Brock's shilling reverse to be used for the sixpence was now marked 'in abeyance'.⁶⁴ At their meeting, Leighton explained fully to Brock the views of the Committee and secured the latter's willingness to act on its suggestions. While no firm decision was confirmed to Brock, doubtless his selection was intimated to the satisfaction of both men. Leighton's association with Brock was friendly and long-standing, Brock having assisted him with the New Sculpture masterpiece, *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python* (1874–77).⁶⁵

⁵⁹ *NCire* (1898), 2621, n. 1; H.W.A. Linecar, *British Coins and Designers*, (London, 1977), p. 120.

⁶⁰ *Magazine of Art*, (1896), 279.

⁶¹ Leeds City Art Gallery, Thornycroft Archive, J6, f.89. Diary entry, 31 October 1891.

⁶² Quoted in Elisabeth Darby, *Statues of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert: A Study in Commemorative and Portrait*

Statuary, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, (1983), p. 385.

⁶³ Weber, unpublished notes, as in n.50.

⁶⁴ PRO MINT 7/55, Gleanie, Minutes of the Committee on the Design of Coins.

⁶⁵ *Frederic Leighton 1830–1896*, Royal Academy exhibition catalogue, (London, 1996), pp. 85–6, 182.

Within a few weeks Brock had completed and submitted the new effigy design. Following the meeting on 10 February, Leighton informed a 'delighted' Brock that the Committee had selected his two effigies and his half-crown reverse.⁶⁶ Leighton also contacted Poynter to convey the Committee's views on his reverse designs. There is less documentation than for Brock, but a letter from Glennie indicates that Poynter had made an altered cast for the florin design, with the rose, shamrock and thistle replacing the 'VR' initials. Poynter was also requested to make a slight but unspecified alteration to his shilling reverse. He provided this by the time of the final formal Committee meeting on 11 March. Both reverses were then approved.

The Committee encountered a new problem over the inscription. The original requirement was for each obverse to be inscribed 'Victoria Dei Gratia Regina Britanniae Fidei Defensor', abbreviated if necessary. However, in February 1892, the Cabinet considered the question of inserting 'Indiæ Imperatrix' in addition, in recognition of the Queen's well-known devotion to her role and title as Empress of India. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, told her:

Your Majesty's Servants are of opinion that the title of Empress of India, indicating, as it does, Your Majesty's relation to far the larger portion of Your subjects, ought to appear on the coin, in the shape of the letters 'Ind Imp' or 'I.I.' or some such abbreviation.⁶⁷

The Imperial Titles Act of 1876 restricted instruments exclusively operating in the United Kingdom to the ancient title. However, as the coinage would circulate within the Empire, the Cabinet advised that the abbreviations of the title 'Empress of India' were included in the new coinage designs regardless of any anti-imperialist objections. The Committee was unable to complete its report until the position was resolved. When the Chancellor directed the insertion of the title, Brock hurriedly made the necessary change on the crowned obverse model in time for the Queen to see it before her departure for the continent. The report was printed on 12 March and on the same day Goschen wrote to Sir Henry Ponsonby, the Queen's private secretary, stressing the immense pains taken by the Committee and expressing the sincere hope that the coins suggested would please her.⁶⁸

They did not. She 'strongly objected' to Brock's crowned obverse, disliking both the way that the crown was put on and 'the arrangement of the head-dress'. Far more to her liking was the 'Old Head', to which she lent her approval, although she found the nose too pointed. She asked why the Committee required a different head for the florin: 'No-one will distinguish the florin from the Half Crown by the head. The distinction must depend on the size and on the design on the reverse'. She went on to criticise the reverses more harshly:

Is it likely that the Coat-of-Arms smothered in vegetables on the Half Crown would be preferred to the very pretty coat of arms on the Half Crown last adopted? The nosegay of Mr. Poynter's design for the reverse is like a Beef-Eater's breast-plate, whereas the present Coat of Arms for the Shilling is very pretty.⁶⁹

Brock was asked to execute a fresh design for the half-crown reverse and Poynter for the shilling.⁷⁰ The 'Old Head' obverse, with the necessary modifications, could proceed and Poynter's florin reverse was left unscathed. The absence of any further correspondence from Brock until June indicated that he was happy to make the necessary changes. Poynter reacted differently. Proud professionalism and a streak of the prima donna commingle:

⁶⁶ PRO MINT 7/48, Brock to Fremantle, 13 February 1892.

⁶⁷ RA A68/107, Salisbury to Queen Victoria, 12 February 1892.

⁶⁸ RA L16/50, Goschen to Ponsonby, 12 March 1892.

⁶⁹ PRO MINT 7/54, Fremantle, 'Observations on the new Designs for the Coinage, Windsor Castle', 18 March 1892.

⁷⁰ PRO MINT 7/54, Glennie, summary of informal meeting of the Committee on the Design of Coins, 24 March 1892.

... I should have touched on a rather important question with reference to making another design for the shilling and that is the question of payment for it; on which point you said nothing. But the fact is that to make a new design, especially of the rather elaborate character of the 'four shields' & model it, is not a matter of two or three days' work, but will take a serious amount of time, and I do not think I ought to be expected to do it for nothing. I was willing, as I suppose we all were, to make the series required for the competition on the terms proposed, in the hope of the honour & glory of success in a national concern, but it naturally was not a paying one; & to do more than this seems to me not 'in the bond'.⁷¹

Poynter was disappointed by the Queen's reaction to his shilling reverse and believed that had she seen it as a relief and not as a drawing she would have responded differently: 'I feel strongly tempted to make a relief of it with some alteration to satisfy her criticism in the hope that she may approve.' Poynter favoured a fresh reverse of three shields. He claimed 'The public will know nothing of the shilling having been accepted by the Committee and rejected by the Queen, and will simply accuse me of a poverty-stricken want of invention in copying an old pattern'.⁷¹

Fremantle discussed Poynter's demand with Lubbock and Glennie. All agreed that the Committee was not justified in recommending extra payment to any one competitor. Brock, who was in an identical position, had made no such claim. A modification of the shilling reverse would still be required. 'I will be sorry if you give it up', wrote Fremantle.⁷² Poynter immediately yielded and produced four new heraldic designs within two weeks. However, he still regretted the Queen's reaction to his earlier design:

I understand that I am supposed to have copied it from the beekeepers' badge. If I had known that the beekeepers wear such a badge I shd. certainly have gone out of my way to do something different but I was quite unaware of it. It is impossible to be strikingly original in so worked-out a matter as the reverse of a coin, but I shd. certainly never knowingly copy any design.⁷³

All four of Poynter's new designs combined the English, Scottish and Irish shields. Having ruled out 'the 17th century design of the four shields in the form of a cross', Poynter decided on a new treatment, 'in conformity with the already accepted design for the florin'.⁷³ In the adopted design, the rose, thistle and shamrock emblems were inserted between the three shields and surrounded by the Garter. At the same time Brock revised his half-crown reverse, the Queen's comments having necessitated a fresh design. He retained the main motif of the ensigns armorial contained in the shield, but simplified the ornamentation to remove any suggestion of smothering vegetables by replacing the rose, thistle and shamrock with the collar of the Garter. The crown was enlarged and a miniature St George and the Dragon resembling Pistrucchi's was inserted at the base. Revisions were also made to the inscription. In its draft Report of 11 March, the Committee proposed the inclusion of the value on all coins from the florin to the threepence. This was now extended to the half-crown. Goschen announced the decision to the House of Commons on 23 May and, doubtless to his relief, no protests were made about the failure of the Committee to recommend putting the denomination on gold coins or the crown.⁷⁴

With the publication of its report on 17 May, the work of the Committee was over; initiative now passed to the Mint. Surviving correspondence indicates that while progress on translating the relief models to punches, matrices and dies inevitably posed problems, a sound working relationship was established between the Mint and both artists. Brock's letters to Fremantle and to Edward Rigg, chief clerk of the Mint, record the progress of his designs between June 1892 and January 1893. Their terse and workmanlike content contrasts with Poynter's more gossipy and fretful correspondence.

⁷¹ PRO 7/52, Poynter to Fremantle, 6 April 1892.

⁷² PRO 7/52, Fremantle to Poynter, 26 April 1892.

⁷³ PRO 7/52, Poynter to Glennie, 9 May 1892.

⁷⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th. series, 4, (3–26 May 1892), 23 May 1892, p. 1523.

In July Brock's model of the half-crown reverse was almost complete and ready for electrotyping by Robert Ready of the British Museum. Brock then gave the effigy renewed attention, producing in September 'a new head of the Queen much larger than the one submitted to the coinage committee'. He delayed doing much to it until he had received the experimental coin Fremantle was 'engaged upon from the model selected' and which would be struck as a guide for modelling the larger version.⁷⁵ Also in September, Brock received duplicate casts of obverse designs from Ready and began alterations at once. Brock's letter of 3 October contains the first reference to the principal engraver of the coinage, George William De Saulles, whom he described as 'the die engraver I had in view. It is satisfactory to know he has been recommended by Pinches'.⁷⁶ By mid-October Brock had received an obverse electrotype from Ready, and asked Rigg whether the punches for the legend were made. The half-crown obverse punch was ready by early November, with Brock asking Rigg for a die to be made from it. On 6 December Brock requested an experimental die for the crown obverse: 'the master die is ready for lettering and I wish to have the experimental one as a guide'. Problems existed with the sovereign die which De Saulles told Brock was 'useless as it will not face'.⁷⁷ On 13 December Brock informed Rigg that he had discovered a flaw in the steel of the half-crown reverse: 'if it stands the process of hardening, would you kindly have a punch made from it as quickly as possible'.⁷⁸ In the same letter Brock mentioned receiving impressions of the crown piece from Pinches. Brock saw Pinches the following week and told him to remove the 'REG:' characters from the experimental crown die and to repunch them a little nearer the centre of the bust, a more satisfactory option than altering the line of the portrait. Letters for the crown master die were now being inserted. On 20 December Brock sent Rigg impressions by Pinches of the half-crown obverse. His letter to Fremantle of 11 January 1893 indicates that progress was behind schedule: 'I fully understand your position and will do my utmost to expedite matters.'⁷⁹ Brock telegraphed De Saulles for immediate assistance. Dies for both obverse and reverse of the half-crown were now on the eve of completion and the sovereign was ready to be taken in hand. Several weeks previously, Brock had instructed Pinches to make letter punches for the sovereign to avoid delay. By 21 January, the subject of correspondence moved to Brock's fees, indicating that his side of the work was effectively over. Brock reminded Fremantle of the alterations to the two original obverses and the modelling of the third, adopted design; of alterations in the lettering 'involving much work in plaster before the casts were sent to Windsor'; of remodelling the head in lower relief for reductions; and of modifications in the half-crown reverse, culminating in 'an entirely new design and model'.⁸⁰ Brock was granted his request for £200, which, together with Poynter's request for £160 for his side of the work was described by Fremantle as 'very moderate'.⁸¹

There was less correspondence on the progress of Poynter's designs. This is not surprising since Brock scrutinised all obverse, as well as the half-crown reverse, dies whereas Poynter's role was limited to his two reverses. In June and July 1892 Poynter worked on his models for electrotyping. In October Fremantle wrote to him hoping to have steel reductions ready for Poynter's approval. Little further was said until 2 February 1893, when Fremantle was anxious to have approval of the final florin and shilling reverse dies, which De Saulles had engraved. The following day, Poynter told Fremantle that the florin was 'much improved'. However, he found the circle of dots around the garter 'too heavy – the dots are too big and consequently

⁷⁵ PRO MINT 7/48, Brock to Fremantle, 2 September 1892.

⁷⁶ PRO MINT 7/48, Brock to Rigg, 3 October 1892. Brock was working in conjunction with Pinches at about this time on the Imperial Institute Golden Jubilee Medal; the reverse design was by the latter.

⁷⁷ PRO MINT 7/48, 6 December 1892.

⁷⁸ PRO MINT 7/48, 13 December 1892.

⁷⁹ PRO MINT 7/48, Brock to Fremantle, 11 January 1893.

⁸⁰ PRO MINT 7/48, 21 January 1893.

⁸¹ PRO T1/8723B 1893-3322, Fremantle to R. E. Welby, 24 February 1893.

too crowded together & also in too high relief'. The lion in the Scottish shield 'seems to have lost some of his ruggedness; he wants more hair on his legs and paws'.⁸² On 21 February Poynter examined the shilling die. The Scottish lion was 'rather clumsy – shd. be thinner in the flanks'. Clumsy too was 'the female on the harp ... make her altogether more slender & the head smaller. She wants fining down considerably. See the harp on Simon's Charles II coins'.⁸³ The same problem applied to the florin. He was still unhappy about the circle of dots on both coins and wanted small alterations made to the shamrock and rose, and the removal of the latter's stalk. By 2 March the harps were better and Poynter was pleased that the circle of dots on the shilling was 'much improved by having the single large dot in the inscription instead of the confusing pattern I had first put'. However, there were many further details that needed rectifying, which Poynter listed on postcards:

They are small matters: but everything depends on delicacy of detail ... I think the Roses on each coin are the least satisfactory part. The stalk must be added again to the Florin. Perhaps two small leaves might be added if it can be done without crowding.⁸⁴

Poynter's postcard notes ask for a more sharply defined fleur-de-lis on the Scottish shield of the shilling. The thistle needed to be more ovular; and the rose needed better definition in its centre and to be made smaller, more in keeping with Poynter's model 'in which the proportion to the rest is I think better'. The globes and crosses at the top of the crown needed better definition; the end of the garter buckle was placed crooked, 'too much to the left'; and the 'NI' characters of 'HONI' were not quite equal in height. More serious corrections were necessary for the florin rose which was also 'wanting in definition' in its modelling –

Work shd. be much cleaner. It is not satisfactory as it is. It would be better really to put it higher up, nearly touching the base of the Crown, and to make it slightly smaller; there would then be room to add a small leaf on each side. Stalk shd. be mere thread with thorns, sharp & fine.⁸⁴

On 3 March Fremantle told Poynter that he would send an impression of the shilling, altered as suggested. Alterations to the florin were much more serious and would take some ten days to complete, as they involved starting afresh from the original reduction. He hoped they would prove satisfactory, as the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Harcourt, was 'not unnaturally getting very impatient to get all the new coins out'.⁸⁵ Poynter apologised for the delay but believed that there was no alternative to making the alteration.⁸⁶ By 13 March, both the shilling and florin appeared to Poynter –

quite right (always excepting the uneven ground in the shilling, which must be due to the electrotype being uneven) for my model has quite a flat ground. So, I suppose, they may now be considered ready for issuing for public use. The new Rose in the Florin is an immense improvement.⁸⁷

Much of Poynter's surviving correspondence from June 1892 to early 1893 deals with newspaper reporting of the coinage. The *Pall Mall Gazette* had leaked the identity of the successful designers as early as 20 April 1892, nearly a month prior to the Committee report. In September, Poynter asked Fremantle:

Would it not be better to send to some one of the newspapers a paragraph stating exactly what had been done with regard to the new coinage? Wrong statements are constantly appearing. In the last which I saw ... it was said that the designs for the new coinage had been entrusted to Mr. Brock. An authoritative paragraph would set it right once and for all.⁸⁸

⁸² PRO MINT 7/52, Poynter to Fremantle, 3 February 1893.

⁸³ PRO MINT 7/52, 21 February 1893.

⁸⁴ PRO MINT 7/52, 2 March 1893.

⁸⁵ PRO MINT 7/52, Fremantle to Poynter, 3 March 1893.

⁸⁶ PRO MINT 7/52, Poynter to Fremantle, 5 March 1893.

⁸⁷ PRO MINT 7/52, 13 March 1893.

⁸⁸ PRO MINT 7/52, 7 September 1892.

Fremantle, however, insisted on confidentiality and patience. He resisted calls from artists or the press to publish or exhibit any designs, claiming 'If one were published, it would certainly be necessary to publish the rest, and I need not tell you what a Babel of different opinions this will give rise. As regards the accepted designs, the public will see them in due course'.⁸⁹ Goschen took a similar line in Parliament, refusing to exhibit the approved designs or to disclose the date of issue. He neatly read the mood of the 'silent majority', stating in May 1892: 'To put the designs before the House would probably lead to criticisms being expressed by a few, the great majority of those in favour of the designs not expressing any opinion at all.'⁹⁰ Harcourt maintained this policy when he succeeded Goschen as Chancellor.

4. An 'entirely acceptable' coinage?

As with its 'exclusive' disclosure of the names of the competitors, the *Pall Mall Gazette* was first to report on 30 December 1892 'we have reason to believe that the new coinage will be put into circulation early in the coming year'.⁹¹ At the time Fremantle was making careful arrangements for supplying the press with information. He had learnt from the mistake of 1887 when the Jubilee coinage 'burst' on a public that proved far less enraptured than he anticipated. He had no illusions about the responsibility of the press and pursued a policy of confidentiality, as explained to Poynter. It was so effective that Onslow Ford wrote as late as December 1892, asking for results of the competition. Only when the work was in its final stages and only when a trusted opinion such as that of David Powell of the Bank of England assured Fremantle that 'the head should be a great success', could he afford to relax.⁹² Following the Royal Proclamation of 30 January announcing the issue of the new coinage, Fremantle laid his coins on the table for the press to inspect (**Pl. 9, 31–34**).

The ploy was brilliantly successful. Monday 30 January 1893 was, according to the *Globe*, 'a gay day at the Mint'.⁹⁴ Reactions were as favourable towards the new coinage as they had been hostile in 1887. In some cases they were little short of ecstatic; the *Christian World* sang in adoration: 'Apelles would have approved it'.⁹⁵ The *Standard* averred: 'Nothing of such excellence has been produced since the work of Simon, in the time of Charles II'.⁹⁶ Agreement that the coinage was an immense improvement on its predecessor was unanimous. Fremantle seemed positively garrulous, enthusing in an interview with the *Illustrated London News* about Brock's effigy, which he considered 'infinitely artistic ... almost the popular portrait of the Queen'. At a stroke it abolished 'that ridiculously ill-balanced crown which caused the old coin to rise up in a point and to look so very ugly'.⁹⁷

Brock's effigy monopolised attention. Many accounts rightly saw it as a careful attempt to learn from earlier mistakes. The critic M.H. Spielmann wrote: 'Not only have better artists than Sir Edgar Boehm employed their talents ... but they have profited by the misfortune of their predecessor. They have seen what more obvious faults were to be avoided.'⁹⁸ *The Times* praised Brock for avoiding the 'elementary blunder' of elongation on a coin:

He has got rid of the crown and of the unduly long neck, with a result that cannot but be regarded as a great

⁸⁹ PRO MINT 7/52, Fremantle to Poynter, 12 October 1892.

⁹⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th. series, 4, (3–26 May 1892), 23 May 1892, p. 1523.

⁹¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 December 1892.

⁹² PRO MINT 7/44, Poynter to Glennie, 18 April 1891.

⁹³ PRO MINT 7/51, Ford to Fremantle, 7 December 1892; PRO MINT 7/44, Powell to Fremantle, 15 November 1892 and 5 January 1893.

⁹⁴ *Globe*, 31 December 1893.

⁹⁵ *Christian World*, 2 February 1893.

⁹⁶ *Standard*, 31 January 1893.

⁹⁷ Max Pemberton, 'Some New Coins at the Mint: A Chat with Sir Charles Fremantle, C.B.', *Illustrated London News*, 4 February 1893. The same article was reprinted in *NCirc.* (1893), 115–6.

⁹⁸ M. H. S. (M. H. Spielmann), 'The Artistic Aspect of the New Coinage', *Westminster Budget*, 2 February 1893.

improvement ... The likeness is good, and, as was to be expected from so scholarly a sculptor as Mr. Brock, the modelling is excellent.⁹⁹

Applauded too was the replacement of the small crown with the tiara, 'the hinder part of which is concealed by a graceful drapery which falls, not backward as in the Jubilee coins, but sideways towards the spectator'. The ample bosom was seen by Spielmann as 'emphasising, perhaps, her Majesty's years'. Other accounts praised the effigy for portraying the Queen as 'mother of her people', and for embodying 'English homeliness', 'matronly features' and a 'genial expression'. Spielmann summed up the consensus: 'Mr. Brock's work, in short, is entirely acceptable as a work of art.'¹⁰⁰

The 'Ind: Imp' inscription on the obverse did not provoke as much discussion as anticipated.¹⁰¹ It was probably a reflection more of the popularity of Queen Victoria than of imperialism that this was so. The Radical weekly, *Truth*, was virtually alone in considering the inscription a violation of Disraeli's pledge in 1876 that the imperial title would not be used within the limits of the United Kingdom: 'The violation is all the more flagrant, as India has a coinage of her own, and has no more to do with our coinage than China'.¹⁰² Rather more common was the jingoistic tone of the *St. James's Gazette* which believed that the inscription would 'commend itself to most people as a very proper development of "Imperialism"'.¹⁰³

Brock's and Poynter's reverse designs inevitably received less attention. Enthusiasm for them was relatively muted, with Brock's half-crown (Pl. 9, 32) emerging more successfully than Poynter's florin and shilling (Pl. 9, 33–34). The *Daily News* commented of the half-crown: 'The large, free treatment of the collar of the Garter ... is sure to be admired. In the Jubilee half-crown the collar and the garter, placed in concentric circles, were, to use a colloquialism, too crowded.'¹⁰⁴ Brock's design was elsewhere described as 'simple, clear and bold' and 'bold, striking and perfectly appropriate'. Spielmann considered the half-crown –

perhaps a trifle more formal and conventional than the reverses that have gone before in recent years; but the balance is true and just, the spade shield of fine proportion and the collar of the Garter simply treated, combined with admirable decorative effect.¹⁰⁵

Queen Victoria's insistence that Brock thinned out his 'vegetables' was clearly vindicated.

Any praise for Poynter's reverses tended to be bland, with references to the 'fine device of three shields' and 'a very pretty and artistic design'. These platitudes were, however, balanced by criticism such as that of the *Daily Graphic*:

it will appear to many that Mr. Poynter's designs, intended as they are for the smaller coins, are a little too crowded and indistinct. They are attractive, but on the shilling it is not quite certain that the right design is in the right place.¹⁰⁶

The *St. James's Gazette* commented that the 'treatment of the royal arms is not altogether agreeable, since the shields appear to be running away from one another; but all the same, the design is passable'.¹⁰⁷ Surprisingly, there was no immediate criticism of the excessive size of the inscription on the shilling either in relation to the cramped design or to the obverse inscription. The clear indication of value counted for more; as Fremantle told the *Illustrated London News*: 'It is an effective coin – perhaps the most effective of the silver'.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 31 January 1893.

¹⁰⁰ *Westminster Budget*, 2 February 1893.

¹⁰¹ Spielmann, *Westminster Budget*, wrongly predicted 'that this addition will give rise to considerable discussion can hardly be doubted'.

¹⁰² *Truth*, 9 March 1893.

¹⁰³ *St. James's Gazette*, 31 January 1893.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily News*, 31 January 1893.

¹⁰⁵ *Westminster Budget*, 2 February 1893.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Graphic*, 31 January 1893.

¹⁰⁷ *St. James's Gazette*, 31 January 1893.

¹⁰⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 4 February 1893.

Although Brock and Poynter monopolised critical praise, De Saulles emerged from many accounts as the unsung hero of the designs. Spielmann, for example, said 'On the whole, it must be pronounced that the engraver employed by Sir Charles Fremantle has been highly successful'.¹⁰⁹ De Saulles was living proof that Fremantle was unduly pessimistic in claiming that 'the art of engraving has died out ... Pistrucci and Wyon have had no successors in England ... The difficulty is to put the design in steel without destroying the artistic effect'.¹¹⁰ The illustrated weekly *Black and White* believed that Fremantle's thoughts were rather more grey: 'Sir Charles Fremantle is cherishing, as yet somewhat timorously, the hope that a worthy successor to these great lights has, perhaps, arisen. Time will show'.¹¹¹ Praise extended to the Mint itself, with the *Globe* enthusing: 'Everything is well done at the Mint, where every department is in the best of order',¹¹² while the *St. James's Gazette* thanked the artists and authorities of the Mint 'for saving us from a repetition of the Jubilee outrage'.¹¹³

The first sour note sounded on 7 February in a letter from 'an artist' to the *St. James's Gazette*. After damning the reverses for their 'singular puerility', the correspondent drew attention to 'the unfair withholding from public view of the competing designs' which was the result of 'ignorant officialism, which has so often marred our public undertakings in art'.¹¹⁴ This was seized upon by Spielmann in his 'Artistic Causerie' for the *Graphic*. While Brock and Poynter had performed admirably, 'How about those designs of theirs that were not adopted? And, still more – what of those by the distinguished artists whose work was not successful in the competition?'¹¹⁵ Since November 1891 Spielmann had persistently asked Fremantle for permission to publish all the designs, but to no avail. Now he had the artists themselves on his side.

The failure to notify unsuccessful participants of the results of the competition caused irritation. This was compounded when Fremantle told the artists that both Harcourt and Leighton would deprecate 'any special publication or exhibition' of their designs.¹¹⁶ Nor did the Mint propose to return the artists their models and drawings. As a concession, Leighton approved of the entries being exhibited at the forthcoming Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. However, this did not satisfy Birch, who was sufficiently incensed to write straight to Harcourt:

I have never received an *official* communication as to ... rejection. I cannot help thinking that it would have been an act of courtesy on the part of the authorities to have informed me of their decision before the public statement in the papers.¹¹⁷

Fremantle forwarded Birch's letter to Leighton, reminding him that the Committee 'thought it preferable that the Artists should be informed of their decision through you rather than by a dry indication that their designs had or had not been accepted, and you no doubt told Mr. Birch what had happened'.¹¹⁸ Leighton replied:

I own I am much annoyed at Birch's letter, which, *entre nous*, seems to be ill-conditioned or, to speak quite plainly, underbred. On the other hand, I have no sort of recollection of ever having been asked by the Committee to communicate with the unsuccessful competitors who, I think, have a grievance if they were not informed.¹¹⁹

It was easy for Leighton, from his 'Olympian' heights as the most fashionable Neo-classical painter of the time and President of the Royal Academy, to damn Birch, a struggling and

¹⁰⁹ *Westminster Budget*, 2 February 1893.

¹¹⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1893.

¹¹¹ *Black and White*, 4 February 1893.

¹¹² *Globe*, 31 January 1893.

¹¹³ *St. James's Gazette*, 31 January 1893.

¹¹⁴ *St. James's Gazette*, 7 February 1893.

¹¹⁵ *Graphic*, 11 February 1893.

¹¹⁶ PRO MINT 7/53, Fremantle to Armstead, Birch, Brock, Ford, Poynter and Thornycroft, undated draft (February 1893).

¹¹⁷ PRO MINT 7/49, Birch to Harcourt, 23 February 1893.

¹¹⁸ PRO MINT 7/49, Fremantle to Leighton, 28 February 1893.

¹¹⁹ PRO MINT 7/49, Leighton to Fremantle, 1 March 1893.

impoverished Associate member.¹²⁰ In belated response, a letter was sent to the competitors, regretting that 'owing to a misapprehension' they had not been directly informed as to the result of the competition.¹²¹

The other artists felt much as Birch did, even if they showed better breeding! Ironically, Leighton's suggestion that the designs should be exhibited at the Royal Academy posed problems that the President himself had overlooked. The number of items any one member could exhibit was limited to eight; with individual artists submitting anything up to eighteen designs, exhibition at the Academy was impossible. All six artists signed a joint letter to Fremantle:

We the undersigned feel that there are two ways of dealing with the competitive designs ... The first – to return the non-accepted models and drawings to their authors – which we think the proper course to pursue – the competition now being over and then the artists can exhibit them or not – as they please. The second – If a public exhibition as suggested by you, be decided on – that the Exhibits should include all the designs sent to the Mint. We feel that in justice to us as artists the whole of our designs should be shown intact, and we should feel compelled to protest against a partial exhibition.¹²²

An indication of the strength of feeling is reflected in a letter from Armstead to Thornycroft, saying 'Evidence as to the legal opinion is fast coming in. Birch has consulted legal opinion'.¹²³ In the event, the authorities backed down. The designs were returned to the artists and the second plan proposed in the joint letter was adopted. According to Glennie's notes, all the designs were put on temporary view at the South Kensington Museum in the following autumn. By 1896, the dust had sufficiently settled for Day to publish his article illustrating most of them in the *Magazine of Art*.

In the longer term, critical reaction to the coinage was perhaps not surprisingly cooler than it had been on Fremantle's open day. A 'numismatist' in the *Sunday Times* described the arrangement as a 'clever ruse' which 'secured in advance a favourable verdict before going public'.¹²⁴ Reactions to the actual coinage took second place to the question of whether the artists should be allowed to publish or exhibit their designs, for which they received unanimous support. Latent Welsh nationalism surfaced in response to the reverse designs. The exclusion of Welsh heraldic symbols from the royal shield prompted demands for design changes to incorporate a red dragon or a leek (**Pl. 10, 35**). John Leighton of the Society of Antiquaries ruefully commented that he found the leek 'far from decorative and as difficult to conventionalise as a carrot'.¹²⁵ Instead, in suggested design alterations to both the coinage and the Royal Standard, he proposed four lions guardant passant.

The artistic qualities of the coinage inspired a gently humorous poem in *Punch*:

¹²⁰ Birch died seven months later, on 16 October 1893, leaving estate valued at £277. The *Magazine of Art* commented: 'These are parlous times for sculptors not in the fashion... those who could top Westmacott, Chantrey and Nollekens in artistic worth must die worth as many units as they possessed hundreds.' (1894, xii).

¹²¹ PRO MINT 7/44. Glennie to Armstead, Birch, Ford and Thornycroft, 10 March 1893.

¹²² PRO MINT 7/53. Armstead, Birch, Brock, Ford, Poynter and Thornycroft to Fremantle, n.d. (received 12 March 1893). Initially Poynter only consented to sign the first proposal. In a letter to Fremantle of 8 March 1892, he considered 'the second plan rather objectless, as it is evidently of no use proposing to

you that we should exhibit the whole of our designs unless we are agreed to do so. I think the best plan will be as proposed in the first paragraph to let us have our designs and exhibit such of them as we please.' (PRO MINT 7/52). However, by 17 March Poynter agreed to support both proposals.

¹²³ Leeds City Art Gallery, Thornycroft Archive C48. Armstead to Thornycroft, 24 February 1893.

¹²⁴ *Sunday Times*, 5 March 1893.

¹²⁵ *Daily Graphic*, 1 March 1893. Illustrations of the suggested alterations in the coinage reverse and the Royal Standard accompany Leighton's letter to the *Daily Graphic*, 8 March 1893.

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

Is it safe to be prophetic?
 Will the miser, once abused,
 Be considered quite aesthetic,
 With the connoisseur confused?

... 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
 May be to be likewise blest.¹²⁶

No such blessings came from Harcourt. A consummate politician, he expressed to Queen Victoria 'his entire concurrence in Your Majesty's View that the Queen's head in the new coinage leaves much to be desired both in likeness and execution'.¹²⁷ This would seem to disprove rumours spread by the *Pall Mall Gazette* that 'The Queen, who is hard to please in these matters was, it is whispered, greatly delighted with the final sketch submitted to her'.¹²⁸ In Parliament, the subject of the coinage was used by Harcourt and the Liberal Unionist MP, Parker Smith, as an opportunity to air their numismatic erudition. Smith gave the House a potted history of coinage design, linking style and society: 'It was not until one came to the period of decadence, from Constantine downward, that one found in the Roman coins the wonderful elaboration which was indulged in nowadays.' While he conceded that the bust on the new coins was much more dignified than that on the Jubilee issue, 'he did not think anyone who was conversant with coins would be quite satisfied with it. A great deal too much was attempted to be crowded into the design.' The sovereign reminded him of the whist counters one bought at twenty for 2d. 'As an Imperialist', however, Smith was 'very glad to see the development in feeling which now accepted, with scarcely a word of protest', the 'Ind. Imp.' legend.¹²⁹ Harcourt passed over these political allusions but concurred in Smith's views on the quality of design:

It seems to me as if the numismatic art were a lost art. If we remember the fine medals and coins that were produced by the nations of Europe at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries, and how all the great events of the time were commemorated on the splendid medals of France, Holland and England, we must admit that our progress since then has been in a backward direction.¹³⁰

A further comparison on these lines came in the *Art Journal* from the painter, Philip Wilson Steer. He too agreed that the new design was a great improvement on that of the Jubilee coinage but felt that the proliferation of 'ear-rings, necklaces and orders' gave it 'a certain

¹²⁶ 'The New Coinage', *Punch*, 26 February 1893.

¹²⁷ RA B45/61, Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 1 February 1893.

¹²⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 December 1892.

¹²⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th. series, 10, (14 March–4 April 1893), 14 March 1893, pp. 40–1.

¹³⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, p. 42.

tawdry look'. In comparison, the bust on the coins of Queen Anne had a more dignified aspect by enveloping the shoulders in drapery, 'largely designed'. Less was more, and would better convey 'the idea of Majesty in the abstract'. Poynter's reverses he found 'petty' and 'cramped' – he alone commented on the disproportionate size of the shilling inscription. Steer concluded his assessment by adopting an 'Arts and Crafts' anti-mechanical tone. Compared with the crude vigour of a Charles I coin or the Thomas Simon petition crown of Charles II –

the present series will be found sadly wanting – not indeed in mechanical excellency – that alas is present in too great a degree. It fails where perfected mechanism in Art always fails, in qualities of effect and grandeur of design ... In a word, the modern coin represents the apotheosis of machinery and the almost extinction of Art.¹³¹

Fremantle might have replied that Steer's arguments represented the apotheosis of aesthetically sensitive, Arts and Crafts Movement integrity and the 'almost extinction' of common sense.

There is little recorded of the reaction of those most closely involved in the designs. The *Daily News* claimed that 'Among the warmest admirers of Mr. Brock's work are his professional brethren', confirmed for one by Thornycroft who told Fremantle: 'I think the head of the Queen is capital.'¹³² Brock himself was less than satisfied with the sovereign and shilling coins, which he found –

'in each case unsatisfactory ... there is such a marked difference in the appearance of the head even in coins of the same value that I fear some change must occur when making the working dies. This added to the imperfections inherent in a hastily produced matrix brings about a result that is sometimes too shocking.'¹³³

There is no record of Fremantle's reply and negative evidence would seem to indicate that Brock's disquiet was not widely felt. Indeed, reporting on De Saulles' development on 1 January 1894, Fremantle noted the engraver's part in bringing about 'the favourable reception of coins both by experts and by the public generally'.¹³⁴ As the new Engraver to the Mint, De Saulles translated Brock's designs and engraved a new Britannia for the bronze coinage of 1895.

More recent accounts have endorsed the view that the coinage of 1893 was a considerable improvement on that of 1887, even if the overall reaction might be rendered as 'two cheers'. Writing in 1916, Forrer called the obverse 'a splendid portrait of the Queen by that scholarly sculptor, Sir Thomas Brock', whereas he found Poynter's reverses 'not very satisfactory'.¹³⁵ Sir Charles Oman concurred, describing Brock's obverse as 'a very great improvement – but as much can hardly be said for the new reverses of the florin and shilling'. Brock's half-crown reverse he believed, however, was 'good ... far better than those of 1839 or 1887'.¹³⁶ Much later, Brock's design was reproduced for the cover of the paperback version of Elizabeth Longford's *Victoria, R.I.* (1964). This surely lent weight to Fremantle's belief that Brock's was 'almost the popular portrait of the Queen'.

¹³¹ 'The New Coinage', *Art Journal*, (1893), 71–2.

¹³² PRO MINT 7/51, Thornycroft to Fremantle, 25 March 1893.

¹³³ PRO MINT 7/48, Brock to Fremantle, 6 April 1893.

¹³⁴ PRO T1/8798A 1894–60, Fremantle to Welby, 1 January 1894.

¹³⁵ Forrer, *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists*, 6, (1916), pp. 594–5. Brock's interview 'on the mode of producing coin dies' is reprinted here. For Poynter, see Forrer, 4, (1909), p. 679.

¹³⁶ Charles Oman, *The Coinage of England*, (Oxford, 1938), p. 379.

1. Jubilee coinage half-crown (obverse).
2. Brock: design for florin reverse.
- 3a-b. Poynter: designs for florin reverse.
4. Poynter: 'smaller badge' design.
5. Brock: design for shilling reverse.
6. Armstead: design for crown reverse.
7. Armstead: design for sovereign obverse.
8. Armstead: design for sovereign reverse.
- 9a-b. Armstead: design for crown reverse.
10. Armstead: design for florin reverse.
- 11a-b. Birch: obverse designs.
- 12a-b. Birch: designs for crown reverse.
13. Birch: design for half-crown reverse.
14. Brock: Imperial Institute medal (1893), obverse.
- 15a-b. Brock: obverse designs.
16. Brock: design for sovereign reverse.
17. Brock: design for crown reverse.
18. Brock: design for half-crown reverse.
19. Ford: obverse design (1).
20. Ford: obverse design (2).
21. Ford: design for half-sovereign reverse.
22. Ford: design for crown reverse (Royal Mint medallion).
23. Poynter: design for half-crown obverse.
24. Poynter: design for florin obverse.
25. Poynter: reverse design for sovereign, half-sovereign and crown (St. George).
26. Poynter: reverse design (shield of arms).
- 27a-b. Poynter: designs for shilling reverse.
- 28a-b. Thornycroft: obverse designs.
29. Thornycroft: design for half-crown reverse.
30. Wyon: Ashanti Medal (obverse).
31. Brock: approved obverse design.
32. Brock: approved half-crown reverse design.
33. Poynter: approved florin reverse design.
34. Poynter: approved shilling design.
35. Cartoon from the 'Evening Express', 23 February 1893.



1



2



3a



3b



4



5



6



9a



7



8



9b



10



11a



11b



12a



12b



13

PLATE 8



14



15a



15b



16



17



18



19



21



20



22



23



24



25



26



27a



27b



28a



28b



29



31



33



30



32



34

SNUBBED.



RED DRAGON : What a blooming shame. My people must be asleep. There are two lots of English Lions, one Scotch Lion, and the Irish Harp on the new coinage, and I'm not there at all!