

Left: The Queen addresses the assembled staff at the Bank of England in December 1952

From Bank to stamp

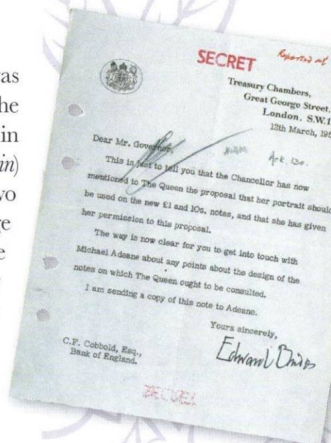
The history behind the Diamond Jubilee Definitives banknote portraiture, as explained by John Keyworth, Curator of the Bank of England Museum. Report by Kate Shaw

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE DEFINITIVES MINIATURE SHEET released last month was the first of a number of Royal Mail special issues designed to celebrate The Queen's sixtieth year on the throne. Alongside the new Diamond Blue Machin definitive, the Miniature Sheet (as previewed on page 136 in January *Bulletin*) brings together for the first time five official portraits of Her Majesty – from two coins, two banknotes and the first definitive of her reign. Last month (on page 179) Dr Kevin Clancy, Director of the Royal Mint Museum, discussed the coinage portraits. And here we turn our attention to the history and artistry behind the banknotes featured on the new stamps – the royal portraits on the £1 note that appeared in 1960 was designed by Robert Austin; and on the £5 note, issued in 1971 and designed by Harry Eccleston.

Connections between the Bank and the monarchy

Although Queen Elizabeth II was the first monarch to be shown on Bank of England notes, there is a long-standing connection between the Bank and the monarchy, as John Keyworth explains:

'All of the nation's banknotes have featured the royal portrait for more than 50 years, as a result of the historic connection between Bank and the ▶



Above: the letter of March 1956 informing the Bank of England that the Queen had given permission for her portrait to be used on banknotes



Above: Steel Master die for the Series C £1 banknote of 1960, showing in reverse the portrait featured on one of the new Jubilee definitives

monarchy. This connection began around 1694, in the first years of the formation of the institution of the Bank of England. The Bank's founding charter bears the Great Seal of King William III and Queen Mary, because these two joint monarchs headed the list of investors in what was then a revolutionary new project of establishing a national bank for England. That connection continues today. Since 1946 [when the Bank ceased to be a privately owned stock company and was nationalised], members of the Court of Directors, the Bank's governing body,

have been appointed by the monarch and the most significant symbol of that connection is the use of the royal portrait on banknotes.'

According to a centuries-old custom, the accession of the Queen Elizabeth II in February 1952 was proclaimed by the Lord Mayor of London from the steps of the Royal Exchange, situated opposite the Bank, which was specially illuminated and decorated for the occasion. A month later The Queen signed a royal warrant appointing members of the Bank's Court of Directors. And in the December the new young Queen visited the Bank for a lunch and gave a formal address to the assembled staff.

By the following year, the idea of placing The Queen's portrait on a bank note was already 'in the air' amid national celebrations of the Coronation:

'Following the Second World War and the austerity of the post-war years, the opportunity for a national celebration of the Coronation of the new young Queen in June 1953 was seized upon with enthusiasm— from street parties to new coinage, from bunting on official buildings to postage stamps – some said in the spirit of a second Elizabethan age.'

The Bank of England soon began to consider issuing the monarch's portrait on a banknote, but the idea was not new, as John Keyworth points out.

'In the early 19th century the idea of using a figurative engraving as an effective anti-forgery design was recorded at the suggestion of a Mr W Morgan who, in 1804 noted, "that a Portrait of the King, engraved in the line way, by the best Engraver, should be printed on all Bank Notes." Morgan's idea had not been adopted and had lain dormant for 150 years until revived in the mid 1950s.'

It was three years after the Coronation that the Governor of the Bank of England received the letter from the Treasury Chambers, as shown on previous page, conveying the Queen's permission to the proposal that her portrait should be used on the new £1 and ten-shilling notes.

The Robert Austin banknote portrait

Born in Leicester in 1885, Robert Sargent Austin RE, RWS, RA was an established artist, illustrator and engraver. He was already widely regarded as a leading printmaker, when he was commissioned to design The Queen's portrait for the first of the Bank of England's 'Series C' banknotes. His line engraving technique had reached a notable pinnacle in the 1930s and was considered in the art world to be of a level of perfection not seen since masterworks of Albrecht Dürer in the early 16th century. This artistic pedigree was perfectly suited to the commission for the banknote portraits, as the required design solution had to achieve the fineness and intricacy of line



Above: the Diamond Jubilee Definitive stamp showing the royal portrait by Robert Austin. The engraving was based on the sketch shown above the stamp – drawn in pencil on tracing paper and taken from a black and white photographic portrait

necessary to discourage forgery, as well as the beauty and authority befitting the first portrait of a monarch to be carried on a Bank of England note.

'The delicacy of line and meticulous cross-hatching on banknotes demands a great deal of experience and discipline,' John Keyworth comments. 'The frame for the engravers work is very small indeed and further restrictions are imposed on the design by the fact that it must be printed from an engraved plate – the master die – and with no points liable to wear when it is reproduced on high-speed printing machines. Notes that are printed in different years must look absolutely identical.'

Nowadays much of the engraving is created with the aid of computer technology, but in the 1950s the process would begin with a series of photographs from which Austin produced a tonal drawing, always bearing in mind the scale of the finished portrait and the contrasting tonal areas required for the engraving. Shown on the facing page is an early drawing by Austin for the 1960 royal portrait, in pencil on tracing paper. The tones of the drawing had to be translated into a linear engraving and then, working with a microscope and eye glass, transferred onto a steel plate from which the master die could be created.

This level of miniature detail, artistry and manual dexterity was a result of Austin's years of training and practice. As a teenager he attended the Leicester Municipal School of Art and went on to the Royal College of Art in London. His years as an art student and his early career were interrupted and no doubt influenced by World War One and Two. After the 1914-18 war he returned to the Royal College of Art to study etching under Sir Frank Short and gained a scholarship to study engraving in Italy. During the 1920s, regarded as the final decade of the etching revival, he worked in very fine detail on copper plates, in almost Pre-Raphaelite style. During the Second World War Austin worked as a war artist recording the work of women in the nursing services and the Royal Air Force. In 1945 he returned to England, again to the Royal College of Art, this time as Professor of Engraving.

The Austin portrait Series C £1 note was withdrawn on 31 May 1979. Since Austin's portrait of 1960 there have been four different royal portraits – Reynolds Stone's on the 1963 £5 note; Harry Eccleston's on the 1970 £20 note and the 1971 £5 note, and Roger Withington's on today's notes, showing a more mature portrait.

The Harry Eccleston banknote portrait

Robert Austin taught Harry Eccleston at the Royal College of Art and it was Austin who introduced him to the Bank of England in 1958. Eccleston became an artistic designer at the printing works and by 1967 the institution was sufficiently impressed to create for him the position of full-time banknote designer – a position he held until 1983. He then stayed on for three more years as a consultant until his retirement in 1986.

His royal portrait on the £5 note of 1971, as featured in the Diamond Jubilee Definitives Miniature Sheet, shows the Queen wearing the robes of the Order of the Garter, and was also used on the subsequent £1 note in 1978. Eccleston's meticulous preliminary drawings for the banknote portrait involved ▶



Above: the Diamond Jubilee Definitive stamp showing the royal portrait on the Series D £5 banknote, first issued in 1971, with the original drawing by Eccleston on which the engraving was based

several sittings with The Queen. (During the same period he produced preliminary drawings for the portrait of the Duke of Wellington, after the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence, for the reverse of the £5 note.)

'Eccleston's portrait is less girlish than Austin's,' notes John Keyworth, 'and, although the Queen wears the same crown on both notes, there is more fullness to the hair over the forehead in Eccleston's, in the style of the early 1970s. In Austin's portrait The Queen looks to her right, towards the centre of the banknote. In Eccleston's the high-necked robes add a gravitas to the Queen's direct gaze out of the note towards the viewer, while her shoulders remain angled toward the centre of the note, as is the tradition.

'There can be few adults alive in the UK who have not handled Eccleston's work on banknotes on a daily basis and seeing them on stamps gives us the opportunity to regard them with fresh eyes, as intricate works of art.'

During his 25 years at the Bank of England, Harry Eccleston was concerned with two main projects: firstly the development of a computer engraving system that would allow speedier production of banknotes; and secondly what was known as 'perception research' (working with Dr Ivor Stilitz), with the aim of developing ways of making it easier for the public to detect forgeries. Of his work with Stilitz, Eccleston said that he learned 'how instinctively wrong one could be'. It is also interesting to note that his personal artistic work moved towards a minimal, almost abstract austerity – concerned with what he called 'the nuts and bolts of seeing' – in contrast to the elaboration required of the banknote design for which Eccleston is likely to be best remembered.

More iconic portraits in store on stamps

The Diamond Jubilee Miniature Sheet (below) is the second of three stamp issues of 2012 celebrating The Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The first was The House of Windsor and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha issued on 2 February, which includes a 1954 portrait of The Queen. The next is a special eight-stamp issue issued on 31 May, featuring images of Her Majesty in the six decades of her reign ●

Original examples of the work of Robert Austin and Harry Eccleston are exhibited at The Bank of England Museum, Threadneedle St, London EC2R 8AH. Phone 020 7601 5545 for opening times or visit www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/museum



Right: the Diamond Jubilee Definitives Miniature Sheet was issued last month, bringing together iconic royal portraiture of banknotes, coinage and stamps