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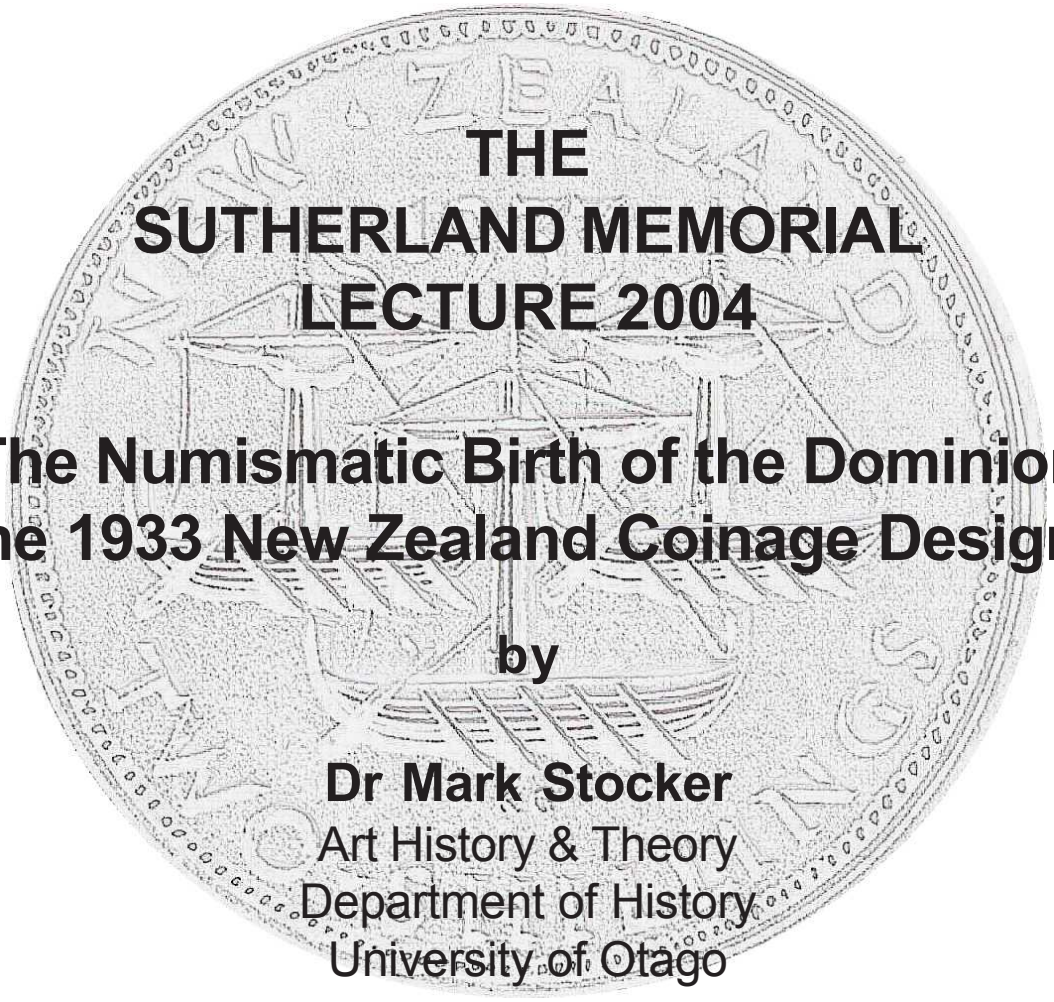

THE SUTHERLAND MEMORIAL LECTURE 2004

'The Numismatic Birth of the Dominion' The 1933 New Zealand Coinage Designs

by

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Dr Mark Stocker

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1969 P.P. O'Shea, *Captain James Cook, R.N., F.R.S., and his numismatic associations*.
Supplement to Journal no. 47 (1970)

1970 Dr L.K. Gluckman, *The Royal Touch in England, a theory of origin derived from observation in the New Zealand Maori.*
Supplement to Journal no. 49 (1971)

1973 J. Berry, *The Art Production of Coins and Medals. A treatise on Designs, Sculptures and Methods.*
Journal no. 54 (1975)

‘The Numismatic Birth of the Dominion’

The 1933 New Zealand Coinage Designs

(Presented at a combined meeting of the Royal Numismatic Society of NZ and the Wellington Coin Club, Turnbull House, Wellington, 31 August 2004)

New Zealand was the last Dominion to adopt her own coinage, which was phased in for silver denominations from the half-crown to the threepence between November 1933 and April 1934. **(Pl. 1-5)** The economic circumstances behind their introduction are well documented, but the history, design, iconography and critical reception of the coins have received surprisingly little numismatic and no art historical attention. This is partly due to the admirable summary in *Numismatic History of New Zealand* (1941), by Allan Sutherland, who was closely involved in the design selection process.[1] Certainly the 1933 designs aroused little of the intensely lively debate and media attention that would accompany their replacements, the 1967 decimal coinage reverses.

1-5: New Zealand reverses: George Kruger Gray, half-crown, florin, shilling, sixpence and threepence, circulating coinage designs used from 1933 (University of Otago)

Several factors help to explain this. Firstly, New Zealand was in the throes of the Great Depression, with a collapse in farm export prices and a decline in GDP by 16.6% between 1929 and 1931.[2] The celebrated quip of Robert Muldoon that ‘it doesn’t matter what’s on the coins so long as you have enough of them’ would have been far more appropriate in 1933 than when he made it in 1966.[3] Secondly, the adopted designs, by George Kruger Gray (1880-1943), possess an understated beauty, dignity and daintiness that dispelled potential artistic controversy. Their qualities were nicely summarised by George V, who considered them ‘a very satisfactory series.’[4] Unlike the decimal reverses, no attempt was made to consult the wider public about the proposed designs. On their release, the tone of their limited press coverage was respectfully descriptive rather than sharply critical. Thirdly, ‘drip feeding’ the new coins in separate denominations took several months to complete and probably encouraged their acceptance. Indeed, the affection that they subsequently earned from collectors and public alike led to calls for their retention and redeployment as decimal coins. This intensified when their proposed replacements appeared so unsatisfactory in comparison.[5]

Yet the adoption of the designs in their final form was in retrospect a surprisingly near run thing. Had Kruger Gray’s earlier set of coins, which had reached the stage of finished dies, been adopted instead, or had the alternative designs of Percy Metcalfe (1895-1970) been favoured, then the outcome would have been far more controversial. As it is, the

saga behind the emergence of the designs affords interesting insight into the power structures and personalities of the New Zealand Coalition government of 1931-5. A further ingredient that enlivened the process and progress of the coinage was the role played by the redoubtable Sir Robert Johnson. The lucid, forceful and short-fused Deputy Master of the Royal Mint found the New Zealand government 'extremely difficult to deal with' and complained of having to 'serve two masters'.[6] Hints of his frustrations emerge in the Mint's 1933 *Annual Report*, but even he appeared content with the eventual outcome.[7]

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A recent article by Ken Matthews, 'The Legal History of Money in New Zealand', regards the 'nationalisation' of the currency as 'driven by two main causes: economic factors and a growing feeling that New Zealand had matured to the point that it should now have its own major currency.'[8] Of these causes, the first was by far the more important; to stress the second exaggerates the significance of national identity to an extent never envisaged in the 1930s. As Sutherland observed, 'the introduction of a special coinage ... would probably not have been contemplated but for the coin-smuggling difficulties which were experienced between the years 1930-33 ...'.[9] Until then, there was little reason to move away from British Imperial coinage, which had been the assumed legal currency of New Zealand since 1840.[10] However, since their introduction in 1910, Australian coins had also been freely circulating although they were never legal tender. Following the devaluation of the Australian pound by 10% in 1930, this trickle became a flood: some 30% of the total coinage in circulation in 1931 was estimated to be Australian.

This situation prompted the government MP for Egmont, Charles Wilkinson, to introduce a private member's bill in July 1931 to establish a separate coinage. While New Zealand nationalism was not the prime concern, resentment towards the depreciated and endemic Australian coinage motivated considerable cross-party support. Wilkinson's arguments, while well intentioned and not uninformed, nevertheless revealed a naivety, both in sentimentalising colonial ties and in underestimating the technical complexities involved in minting. He stated that 'if we are going to favour any outside money at all, I would say that we should favour British rather than Australian. The Mother-country has always treated us well, and I think that in the retirement of the British silver she would treat us generously today.'[11] A New Zealand coinage would maximise minting profits for the government and would thereby give a valuable boost to the economy. Wilkinson believed that the coins could be made 'in the British Mint and made available with very little delay, and, as a matter of fact, they could easily be made in New Zealand - here in Wellington.'[12]

As the bill was an appropriation measure that required government initiation, it was ruled out of order by the Speaker. However, the debate generated sufficient interest for Sir Thomas Wilford, the New Zealand High Commissioner to Britain, to seek the Mint's opinions on the issue. Johnson was discouraging, saying that he hoped that the New Zealand government 'will decide not to press the question further at any rate for the present'. He stressed the inability of the British government to repatriate Imperial coin from New Zealand, especially in the present circumstances when there was 'generally a surplus of coin everywhere'.[13] Once he had studied the debate in detail, Johnson saw that the main problem was 'how to get rid of Australian coin which is already there.' Here too, he could afford little encouragement:

> ‘In the present situation, I am afraid that any attempts to negotiate an arrangement with Australia under which she would gradually buy back her own coin at face value would be bound to fail.’

The most he could offer was for the New Zealand government ‘to call in the Australian coins, paying for them, of course, to the Banks at face value and ship them home at her expense’, whereupon the Mint would ‘exchange them for the same face value of British coin.’[14]

Fourteen months later, in January 1933, the monetary situation took on a new and still more serious turn. To raise farm export credits, Gordon Coates, the new Minister of Finance, devalued the New Zealand pound at the rate of £125 to £100 sterling.[15] While this proved a wise economic move, the immediate consequence, as Coates’s Cabinet colleague Robert Masters put it, was ‘a serious drift of silver coin to the Old Country and Australia.’[16] Trafficking in silver was prohibited but this had little immediate deterrent effect on the outflow: ‘Gresham’s law proved too strong and the old adage “No law stands between the merchant and his profitte” again proved true.’[17] Sutherland noted the ingenuity of smugglers in secreting coins from the prying eyes of searchers:

> ‘The use of specially constructed gas cylinders, in which ... coins were supposedly secreted, was one method; other means adopted were to secrete gold coins in the oil sumps of old motor cars or motor cycles sent to Australia. The classic example, however, appears to have been the consignment of cases of silver coins as “frozen duck” and conveyed in refrigerators to England.’[18]

Four weeks after devaluation, Coates cabled the High Commission in London and outlined the urgent situation:

> ‘Only effective remedy appears to be establishment distinctive New Zealand silver coin and desire to have ... information from Royal Mint urgently as, if required, coin legalisation should be passed during the present parliament.’

Coates asked for the costs and time frame for supplying coinage denominations from the penny to half-crown inclusive ‘of the same dimensions and weight and fineness as present British minting but with distinctive New Zealand design.’[19] In response, Johnson told Athol Mackay of the High Commission finance office that such questions could ‘not be dealt with immediately’. He estimated that it would take some six months for any designs to reach the die stage.[20] Nevertheless, Johnson appreciated the urgent situation and, following consultation with the Treasury, told Wilford that all concerned realised the necessity for a separate coinage. The Mint would be prepared to undertake recoinage of all British Imperial or Australian silver coin in circulation up to a maximum of £2 million. No charge would be made for this work, other than for freight, the manufacture of dies and artist fees for the new designs.[21] The offer was based on acceptance of the .500 silver ‘quaternary’ alloy, used for Imperial coin since 1927. Any profits that derived from reminting the existing .925 standard silver coin would be credited to New Zealand. For bronze denominations, the

Mint was only authorised to accept coin bearing the pre-1895 uncrowned effigy of Queen Victoria. As this was a far less urgent priority than the silver coin, the New Zealand government decided to take no immediate action here.

Johnson assured Wilford that minting could immediately commence once designs and dies were approved by the High Commissioner on behalf of the New Zealand government. All being well, the six-month period from draft designs to finished dies might even be shortened. Johnson warned that 'if ... it is necessary to send the draft designs out to New Zealand, this will naturally very considerably prolong the preparatory period.'[22] Actual supply of the required coinage would take a further four months, 'but advance supplies could begin to be shipped after the final approval of the specimen coins within a month'. At the soonest, Johnson warned that supplies would probably not arrive in New Zealand till December 1933 or January 1934.[23] Although he assured the New Zealand government that no special legislation was required until the next parliamentary session in October 1933, Johnson was underestimating Coates's zealous energy. Within a few days, the latter had introduced before Parliament a clause in the Finance Bill empowering the Minister of Finance to arrange the issue of coinage with the Royal Mint. The introduction of 'a special silver coinage for New Zealand' would remove the incentive to use silver as a means of exchange. In his speech, Coates announced that talks were pending with the Royal Mint, 'to whom for years past we have looked for guidance on such matters .... Our negotiations have shown that we will experience little difficulty so far as the price is concerned.'[24]

New Zealand was given no choice for the obverse design. This would bear the effigy of George V, adapted by Metcalfe from its predecessor by Bertram Mackennal (1911), and first used for the Southern Rhodesia silver coinage of 1932. **(Pl. 6)** New Zealand would follow the dominion and colonial convention of using a crowned effigy, while the uncrowned head would be maintained for Imperial issue. Although minor controversy later erupted over the obverse inscription, discussed below, the unexceptionable yet dignified portrait effigy itself aroused remarkably few comments. Given freer rein, Metcalfe might well have subjected the effigy to modernistic simplification, but given the King's conservatism this was impossible. When the effigy first appeared on the new half-crown coin, Sutherland declared it 'an outstanding success, being carried out in good relief.'[25]

6. Percy Metcalfe after Bertram Mackennal, approved colonial and dominion effigy, 1932 (Royal Mint Library)

For the reverse designs, there was naturally greater creative scope. Johnson stated that Mint would appreciate 'early suggestions for suitable subjects, but they are of opinion that a fine series could be issued based, in so far as the larger coins are concerned, on some of the features in the Arms of New Zealand and, as regards the smaller coins, possibly of typical Maori designs.'[26] This was consistent with the recent precedents for South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, both designed by Kruger Gray. Johnson also recommended Wilford to examine Metcalfe's 1928 Irish Free State reverses:

> 'You will see that these are based upon the animals of Ireland, and it is just possible that New Zealand would like to have the animals of New Zealand instead of a mere treatment of Arms.'[27]

A request from the Association of New Zealand Art Societies 'to offer facilities to New Zealand artists ... to submit designs for coinage and prepare the dies for minting' was politely received by Coates in May.[28] However, the readier availability of experienced design talent in Britain and the likelihood of the successful competitor working in tandem with the Mint authorities within a tight timeframe effectively eliminated this possibility. From the outset, it appears that Kruger Gray and Metcalfe were the only prospective designers of the new coinage. Described by Johnson as 'two numismatic artists of repute', they enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the medium between the late 1920s and the mid 1930s.[29] It is hardly surprising, then, that Johnson did not look past them, telling the Royal Mint Advisory Committee that 'he knew of no "new" artist who could be entrusted with such work'.[30]

George Kruger Gray was a highly versatile artist, whose work in other mediums included stained glass, historical costumes and heraldic architectural decoration. His *Dictionary of National Biography* entry states that 'his success as a designer was securely based on his knowledge of heraldry and of the materials for which he worked ... he was able to maintain a high standard of excellence throughout ...'.[31] Kruger Gray hoped that his heraldic designs for coinage would evoke 'the best medieval spirit', yet have 'certain qualities which make them, as a whole, of our own day.'[32] His fellow competitor, Percy Metcalfe, was known affectionately by Johnson as 'our "bright-eyed boy" here' at the Mint.[33] Fourteen years younger than Kruger Gray, Metcalfe was more radical, experimental, modernistic and inconsistent. His work veered from the outstanding Irish Free State reverses to the banal, unadopted designs for the New Zealand denominations of 1940. The latter were early symptoms of the long decline in his work following Johnson's death in 1938.[34] The artistic and temperamental contrasts between these two figures would intriguingly emerge in their respective designs for the 1933 coinage.

While Kruger Gray and Metcalfe were at work, there was regular contact between the Mint, the High Commission and Coates. In May, Coates appointed a committee 'to assist in finalising a scheme for the issue of New Zealand coinage.'[35] Chaired by A. D. Park, Secretary to the Treasury, the Coinage Committee's members included representatives of banks, commerce, the Audit Department and, in Sutherland's case, the recently founded and thriving New Zealand Numismatic Society. The question of adopting decimal coinage was one of its main briefs, which Johnson welcomed: 'there would be nothing ... to prevent the adaptation of these designs to such a series.'[36] More disturbing for him was the ongoing question of whether the coinage would be minted locally, notwithstanding the

agreement with the Royal Mint now contained in the 1932-33 Finance Act. This reflected the effective lobbying from the New Zealand Manufacturers' Federation which, Sutherland later told Johnson, presented 'a fairly formidable case' on behalf of its members.[37] In Parliament, Walter Nash believed that 'if it can be maintained that a great deal of employment would be provided in the manufacture of the coins here', then he would support such a move.[38] This was reiterated in a *Dominion* editorial in May 1933 which stated: ' ...if we are to have a new coinage we could get it made cheaper in New Zealand than in Australia or England. Why not?'[39]

Such reasoning met a scathing response from Johnson:

> '...if there was ever an instance of economic nationalism run mad, it is any idea of a country with a comparatively small population like New Zealand either erecting a Mint of is own or going to local contractors for coinage which it can certainly get better and cheaper from London ... The offer of the Mint is to do the whole recoinage for no charge at all except for the freight and the artists' fee ... and in addition to credit New Zealand with anything that may be obtained from the sale of the surplus bullion.'[40]

He promptly compiled two tables estimating the respective profits of a custom-built Mint in New Zealand (£61,900) and by the Royal Mint (£181,900), concluding that 'The figures, I think, speak for themselves.' Indeed, Johnson was 'perfectly certain' that contracting the work to a private firm would lead to immense trouble and delay:

> ‘since the production of good silver coin is, after all, an expert matter and cannot be undertaken by any metallurgical, let alone purely machinery firm .... if New Zealand goes to a private firm, they will have to use nearly twice the amount of silver, since, as we know very well from sad experience here, the straight silver-copper alloy loses colour to such an extent that we are already beginning to withdraw these coins in Great Britain after 5-10 years in circulation, while the quaternary alloy, which we have now adopted here and are recommending to New Zealand, is so difficult in manufacture that no other Mint in the world has yet attempted it.’[41]

Johnson direly predicted a considerable loss of bullion in the process of manufacture by people who are ‘only beginners at the job.’ Moreover, the establishment of a New Zealand Mint would create ‘overheads for ever after the coinage was completed’ as ‘a minting staff once set up must remain in being, even if there is only a month’s work a year for it to do (with attendant salaries to pay).’ The Deputy Master added as his *coup de grace* an invitation to the Prime Minister, George Forbes, soon to arrive in London to attend the Monetary and Economic Conference:

> ‘if Mr Forbes thinks that it would help him to see me for a few minutes and get the facts into his head, I shall of course be entirely at his disposal.’[42]

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No specific information was indicated by the New Zealand government to the Royal Mint as to preferred subjects for designs. However, a mass of material in the form of illustrated books and photographs ‘concerning New Zealand in all its aspects’ was supplied, ‘the artists being left free to select their own subjects’.[43] The submitted designs nevertheless indicate that the artists followed Johnson’s advice to use heraldic imagery for the higher denominations and Maori motifs for the lower, while both depicted a kiwi on the shilling. Shortly after inviting Metcalfe to submit designs, Johnson advised him to ‘take great pains over your lettering and make it large and bold.’[44] He also advised Kruger Gray that ‘modelling gives a much better idea than sketches.’[45] Ironically, both pieces of advice would backfire during the selection process.

This occurred on 28 June 1933 when a New Zealand government delegation met the Royal Mint Advisory Committee in the Tapestry Room at St James’s Palace. The Advisory Committee members present comprised Johnson, the chairman; Oswald Barron, a heraldic specialist; Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, Surveyor of the King’s Works of Art; Sir Eric MacLagan, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Sir Frederick Ponsonby, Keeper of the Privy Purse; Robert Anning Bell, the painter and decorative artist; and the sculptors Charles Sargeant Jagger and Sir William Goscombe John. The New Zealand delegation, headed by Forbes, was accompanied by Robert Masters, Minister of Education, Industries and Commerce, and G. C. Rodda, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury; Wilford and Mackay from the High Commission were also present. Designs for the reverses of all five denominations were examined. Kruger Gray supplied for consideration five actual-size drawings and a model for only the half-crown, while Metcalfe submitted ten plaster models, comprising one half-crown, two florins, two shillings, three sixpences and two threepences.

Opinion came down ‘strongly in favour of Mr Kruger Gray’s style.’[46] Jagger, who had formerly employed Metcalfe, a fellow Yorkshireman, as his studio assistant, preferred the younger man’s designs ‘but thought Mr Gray’s treatment better’. Metcalfe evidently suffered for

following Johnson's advice to use large, bold lettering, only for it to be unflatteringly 'compared with the paste capitals often to be found in clear soup.'[47] Conversely, Kruger Gray's preponderance of drawings rather than models did him no disservice. Indeed, the refined sense of engraving conveyed in his work was preferred to Metcalfe's chunky modelling. Johnson did his best to support his 'bright-eyed boy', saying that he personally liked several Metcalfe designs, although he conceded their divergence from the so-called 'Empire style', seen in Kruger Gray's recent coinages for the United Kingdom, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. This was precisely what commended Kruger Gray's designs to the conservative Forbes, who 'desired that the coins should not exhibit too great a departure from the style of the British series with which the New Zealanders were familiar.'[48] Despite this, Metcalfe's designs were preferred for the florin and the threepence, causing Ponsonby to ask whether designs could be taken from each artist. Johnson agreed this was permissible but he believed that 'a measure of conformity in the series seemed desirable.'[49] Unfortunately for Metcalfe, this resulted in Kruger Gray being asked to modify his rival's designs.

The Committee examined designs for each denomination separately. Although there was no specific mention of Metcalfe's half-crown, Barron clearly disliked it. **(Pl. 7)** In heraldry, he said that 'Mr Gray's work was very much the better - he considered it a very good treatment of the Heralds' College drawing of the New Zealand Arms'.[50] Kruger Gray's design was approved subject to revision in the legend, correcting the awkward split in 'Zealand' created by the cross of the Crown. **(Pl. 8)** His rich bicultural fusion of 'native ornament' with Pakeha heraldry was barely mentioned. Nor, surprisingly, did this subsequently receive much attention when the eventual coin was circulated in New Zealand. It looked as a half-crown should, and in doing so it created relatively little room for critical comment. The ornament might perhaps be archeologically faulted for being an inaccurate, even crude, rendition of koururu (personified owl figures). The latter form a double heart motif not actually found in the original article. Yet Kruger Gray was an obvious newcomer to Maori carving, and was adapting it to a completely different medium and context. He had to strike a satisfactory formal balance with the heraldic core and fill the field; the end result was by no means unhappy.

7. Percy Metcalfe, half-crown design, 1933 (National Archives)
8. George Kruger Gray, half-crown design, 1933 (National Archives)

With the florin, artistic honours were more evenly divided. There was no mention of Metcalfe's stark design based on the Southern Cross mullet (star) and fleece quarterings of the New Zealand shield. On the other hand, his effective and economical triangular rearrangement of the quartering depicting lymphads (galleys) **(Pl. 9)** was 'definitely preferred' to Kruger Gray's rather crowded and confused design. The latter recycled the royal crest on his 1927 English shilling, adding a Union flag and Maori-inspired spiral motifs on either side of the lion statant guardant. **(Pl. 10)** It was therefore agreed to invite Kruger Gray to prepare a new design based on Metcalfe's lymphads. The heraldic objections of Barron, who believed that regrouping would 'create confusion with other Coats', did not influence the New Zealand representatives.[51]

9. Percy Metcalfe, florin design, 1933 (National Archives)
10. George Kruger Gray, florin design, 1933 (National Archives)

Metcalfe's Maori shilling was his most baffling and ineffective design. It shows a toki pou tangata (ceremonial hafted adze) together with a superimposed whakapakoko rakau (godstick) which a tohunga would use to communicate with the gods. **(Pl. 11)** The two objects have no obvious relationship with each other apart from their rarity and status.[52] Unlike Metcalfe's combination of the quarterings on his florin, the adze and godstick cannot even be said to work formally. The division in the 'shilling' inscription compounds the visual dislocation of the design, which was rejected without comment. Nor, unfortunately, was any discussion of Metcalfe's extraordinary kiwi shilling recorded. **(Pl. 12)** A boldly Art Deco creation, it is more clockwork toy than secretive nocturnal flightless bird, and makes no concessions to ornithological naturalism. At least this offers some consistency with Metcalfe's simplified and stylised heraldic designs. Moreover, the counterpoint between the curved back and the coin, together with the bold horizontal ground line creating the exergue for the date, indicates there was method in Metcalfe's madness. For years afterwards, the kiwi simply appeared outlandish, and the *New Zealand Numismatic Journal* dismissed it as 'hardly recognisable as such.'[53] Today, however, it looks remarkably timeless, stylish and funky.

11-12. Percy Metcalfe, shilling designs, 1933 (National Archives)

In comparison, the normally consistent Kruger Gray's kiwi and kowhaiwhai design looks ludicrously inept. **(Pl. 13)** At the Advisory Committee meeting, however, the latter was 'generally liked, the representation of the bird in particular being approved by the representatives of New Zealand.'[54] When he saw the design and its first revision several months later, Sutherland reacted very differently and described them as 'going from bad to worse. The carvings and ground representations did not improve the design and are better out of the way. The feathers are supposed to be spotted, but really look like fish-scales.'[55] In his *Numismatic History of New Zealand*, he likened Kruger Gray's kiwi to 'a pine-tree cone' and claimed that 'the average New Zealander would not accept this as an accurate representation of the national wingless bird.'[56] In mitigation, Sutherland recognised that the 'kiwi is not a handsome bird' and appreciated the challenges that its shape and proportions posed to 'non-Kiwi' designers.[57]

13. George Kruger Gray, shilling design, 1933 (National Archives)

Metcalfe's 'hammer and sickle' sixpence was a numismatic suicide note. **(Pl. 14)** He probably intended it to complement the Maori adze and godstick shilling, as both coins used superimposed motifs. Here, he featured two hammers, possibly a variant on the 'mining hammers in saltire' of the New Zealand shield quartering. Certainly there was little formal resemblance between his design and the USSR flag motif (1923). Yet their iconographic links were unmistakable and the Advisory Committee minutes are an indictment of Metcalfe's naivety:

> 'Mr Metcalfe's designs were disapproved - the composition of the hammers and sickle in particular being considered undesirable on account of its undesirable [sic] political associations.'[58]

14-16. Percy Metcalfe, sixpence designs, 1933 (National Archives)

His boldly modelled alternative sixpences were probably too austere, or even banal, to be acceptable. **(Pl. 15-16)** Kruger Gray's design was also 'much criticised'. It featured the heads of two crossed taiaha and closely echoed the design of his 1932 Southern Rhodesia threepence which represented Matabele spearheads. **(Pl. 17)** The objection came because 'a true aspect of the taiahas could not be represented on the coin owing to the length of the haft.'[59] Yet when Sutherland later saw this design, together with Kruger Gray's threepence depicting a kotiake (short-handled club) and crossed tewhatewha (long-handled clubs), he regretted that these 'very effective' possibilities had been discarded.[60] **(Pl. 18)** In the absence of an acceptable sixpence, Forbes suggested that Kruger Gray create a new design based on the fern frond.

17. George Kruger Gray, sixpence design, 1933 (National Archives)
18. George Kruger Gray, threepence design, 1933 (National Archives)

With the threepences, yet another remarkable Metcalfe design was rejected without comment. **(Pl. 19)** The three vertical motifs can be read as miniature pilasters and they share the same essential qualities as the monumental 'Stripped Classical' architecture of the interwar period. Metcalfe cleverly exploited the graphic possibilities of the numerals and capitals, and surely found satisfaction at how the 'N' becomes a 'Z' when rotated through 90 degrees. In the event, the Advisory Committee warmly approved Metcalfe's more conservative tiki design, which Wilford considered 'perfect' and familiar to 'everybody in New Zealand'.[61] **(Pl. 20)** It was agreed that Kruger Gray would modify this design, particularly in the lettering, to harmonise with the rest of the series.

19-20. Percy Metcalfe, threepence designs, 1933 (National Archives)

In retrospect, the preference for Kruger Gray's designs is hardly surprising. Bold innovation has rarely been encouraged for coin design, and the socially and culturally conservative, economically precarious New Zealand of 1933 was in no mood for stylistic experimentation. The stark yet elegant simplicity of Metcalfe's designs, reflecting familiarity with the recent, cutting-edge French Art Deco coin and medal designs of Pierre Turin, was probably only appreciated by Johnson and Jagger. Imparting such knowledge would have made little impact on the New Zealand delegation. For Forbes and his colleagues, consistency with the existent Imperial coinage and the 'Empire style' was paramount. Sutherland later echoed this when he told Johnson:

> 'I must confess that the designs submitted by Mr Kruger Gray are more acceptable to the New Zealand mind than those submitted by Mr Percy Metcalfe, although for my part I do appreciate Mr Metcalfe's work. It is, however, just a little in advance of what the New Zealander expects at the present time.'[62]

Some thirty years later, Paul Beadle's designs for the decimal reverses were rejected for similar reasons and constitute, like Metcalfe's, fascinating New Zealand numismatic 'might have beens'.[63]

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Kruger Gray was authorised by Johnson to take the approved designs to the next stage, for a fee of £350 on completion of the dies. He made brisk progress. The revised half-crown, with beading inserted and a modified legend, was approved by Wilford on 18 July. **(Pl. 21)** Next, the Mint received the adapted Metcalfe florin on 8 August. 'NZ' was now more gracefully rendered as 'New Zealand' and the lymphads were given greater nautical elegance and detail. **(Pl. 22)** Although Wilford personally approved of the design, Kruger Gray's initials, 'KG', touched a sensitive nerve:

> 'He asked whether the initial "G" would not be sufficient as the New Zealanders actively dislike the name "Kruger" with its South African associations which caused many bereavements in New Zealand.'[64]

21. George Kruger Gray, approved half-crown design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)
22. George Kruger Gray, florin design, 1933 (National Archives)

The initials were therefore shifted and made less prominent. On 18 August Johnson approved Kruger Gray's threepence plaster model based on Metcalfe's tiki, **(Pl. 23)** and within two weeks models for the sixpence and shilling were also ready. The sixpence, depicting the crossed fern fronds, was an innocuous and not unattractive design suitable for a lower denomination. **(Pl. 24)** In the shilling, however, Kruger Gray compounded rather than mitigated the faults of his first design by making the kiwi slightly more naturalistic, inserting defined nostrils that poked into the coin band. **(Pl. 25)** The feathers remained more heraldic than naturalistic, however. The areas of kowhaiwhai ornament were enlarged and the ground was curved. Yet except for the kiwi, the set of coin-sized prints delivered on 7 September 'for sending on to New Zealand' is a capable one.[65] Each denomination is distinctive and there is a certain consistency between the heraldic, fauna, flora and Maori designs in the descending denominations. But within a month Kruger Gray was urgently asked by the Mint to start work on a virtually new set of designs. Why did this happen?

The answer lies in Forbes's fundamentally weak premiership, which was buttressed during his stay in London by his former political ally, Wilford, but was countered in Wellington by Coates. Forbes and Coates had long been political opponents when in 1931 they formed an uneasy Coalition government under pressure from economists and businessmen. While Forbes was conciliatory, conservative and even complacent, Coates had a far more radical, dynamic and interventionist temperament. During Forbes's prolonged overseas absence

from May to September 1933, Coates was Acting (and a very active) Prime Minister. Nash described the balance of power best: 'Mr Coates ought not to pretend he is only Minister of Finance when he is really Prime Minister.'[66] Characteristically, Coates was not content to support Forbes's decisions overseas, particularly when they affected coinage matters. Rather, his personal endorsement of relevant committee recommendations would constitute government policy.

23. George Kruger Gray, threepence design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)
24. George Kruger Gray, sixpence design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)
25. George Kruger Gray, shilling design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)

The Coinage Committee deliberated through May and June over decimalisation and location of manufacture. Another major area of its responsibility, the design of the new coins, was deliberately postponed pending decisions on the other two issues. In the event, design would be the concern of the subsequent, so-called 'Coinage Designs Committee'.[67] The Coinage Committee reluctantly rejected decimalisation due to 'existing economic conditions'. As to local or overseas manufacture, Johnson's forceful economic and technical arguments carried the day and the committee recommended 'acceptance of the offer made by the Royal Mint in connection with the recoinage of the present issue of silver coin.'[68]

Despite his awareness of the committee and its brief to consider design, Forbes evidently disregarded it in 'the illustrious setting' of St James's Palace.[69] The Coinage Committee report, produced on 1 July, three days after the Advisory Committee meeting, noted that 'we are given to understand that the offer of the Royal Mint to have prepared suitable draft designs ... was accepted by the Government.' Before final approval was given to them, the report recommended that the 'description of the designs when received ... be submitted for the opinion of leading representatives of the New Zealand Numismatic Society and the New Zealand Association of Artists' Societies.'[70] The report gives no indication as to whether the Coinage Designs Committee, as it would become known, had yet been convened by Coates. Prompted by the description of the designs that he clearly disliked, this new body rapidly materialised and took over from where the now dissolved Coinage Committee left off. On 11 July, Wilford was obliged to forward Johnson a telegram from Coates containing a set of different designs that the new committee wanted.

The Coinage Designs Committee was, according to Sutherland, 'prepared to break new ground and to recommend truly distinctive designs which characterised the Dominion', even if this meant delaying their issue.[71] The preliminary requirements posed no problems:

high relief ‘within reason’ was essential for all coins, while lettering which denoted the Dominion, denomination and year was essential throughout. More radical was the elimination of ‘all native ornament’ on the reverses. This was desired because the committee members preferred ‘the more modern effect of the Southern Rhodesian coins, with simple figures, in high relief, on a perfectly plain ground.’[72] For the half-crown, preference was now for a complete and detailed New Zealand Coat of Arms, not the shield alone, with the ‘attitude of supporters to be made more vigorous’. The florin design with lymphads was rejected because they ‘did not suggest ships of the type used by Captain Cook, much less those used by early colonists.’[73] The kiwi would now appear on the coin instead, with ‘plain figures, no base, nostrils and feathers suitably defined.’ The shilling would be an entirely new coin: ‘nothing better could be chosen than a Maori warrior in an alert attitude, suggesting movement into action, carrying in correct fashion a taiaha.”[74] The Mint was referred to Allan Gairdner Wyon’s Hector Memorial Medal, awarded by the New Zealand Institute (1911), for guidance but its Maori figure would be reversed in the coin. **(Pl. 26)** Sutherland noted that the committee received specialist advice for the design from the Minister of Native Affairs, Sir Apirana Ngata. In London, Ngata’s close friend, Peter (later Sir Peter) Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) was also asked ‘to secure his assistance in obtaining the correct pose for the Maori figure.’[75] For the sixpence, the huia was required in preference to feathery fern fronds, as past experience indicated that these were difficult to reproduce convincingly on metal.[76] Finally, for the threepence, the committee wanted ‘two Maori panels crossed at right angles with figure 3d in clear space in centre.[77]

26. Allan Gairdner Wyon, Sir James Hector Memorial Medal, 1911 (University of Otago)

Johnson immediately contacted Wyon about the proposed new shilling. The two men strongly disliked each other. Wyon resented Johnson’s expansion of Mint activities in medal design and manufacture, which he saw as undercutting his own expertise and livelihood as a self-employed medallist.[78] In turn, Johnson’s attitude towards Wyon’s designs was one of barely concealed contempt. After the librarian and curator at the Mint, C. F. Barrett, tried to deal with Wyon, Johnson had to explain the situation about the coinage and requested the loan of the Hector medal, as the Mint had no copy:

> ‘As the Prime Minister of New Zealand is in this country at the present moment, he is naturally the person to make the final decision, and it is for this purpose that I am

> anxious to show him your medal. I need hardly assure you that, if he agrees to the Committee's recommendation, we shall certainly not just copy your design as it stands but make a design of our own.' [79]

Despite this attempt at reassurance, Wyon was wary of any incursions on his intellectual property, and told Johnson that 'as things stand there is no guarantee that my design would not be followed more closely than I should wish.'[80] The loan was therefore not forthcoming.

Meanwhile, an ailing Kruger Gray was alerted to the proposed design changes. He expressed understandable misgivings, and regretted the elimination of the native ornament, 'because it at once makes the coinage so characteristic of New Zealand and apart from existing colonial or Imperial coins'. Still more disturbing was the proposed 'complete achievement of arms' for the half-crown, as he believed there is '*far* too much in it to make this possible and even if it were done the result would be most unsatisfactory from both the artistic and practical points of view'. Kruger Gray was also reluctant to make naturalistic modifications to the kiwi, 'as this pattern is excellent for a die & is so decorative.' He did not have access to Wyon's Hector medal, but made the perceptive point, later echoed by Johnson, that 'if the human figure is to be used, it should be on the 2/- rather than the smaller coin.'[81] Crossed Maori panels for the threepence were a baffling prospect without the aid of relevant illustrations.

Two days later, a relieved Johnson assured 'My dear Kruger' that these revisions would not be necessary after all. After meeting Forbes again, he explained that the 'New Zealand Premier wishes to abide strictly by the decision which was arrived at by the Advisory Committee and proposes to disregard the observations of the local Committee'. The only exception was the kiwi, where Forbes agreed that the nostrils required definition. Small modifications needed making to the half-crown legend, while the sixpence New Zealand fern 'must be recognisable in terms of the Badge worn by their troops in the War'. Johnson urged Kruger Gray to proceed briskly 'since there is a regular currency famine in New Zealand'.[82]

Subsequent correspondence indicates Kruger Gray's progress. Barrett believed that the revised florin, with slightly smaller lymphads, would 'come out excellently' and that the new 'two shillings' inscription would give the coin 'perfect balance'.[83] **(Pl. 27)** Unfortunately for all concerned, 'perfect balance' was disturbed once again when Mackay forwarded another cable from Coates dated 18 August to say that the Coinage Designs Committee unanimously reiterated the requests made the previous month. Kruger Gray's half-crown alone was acceptable, probably because Coates appreciated the need for the rapid consignment of at least one higher value denomination to ease the coinage crisis. Further details were specified for the other coins, beginning with the shilling:

> 'centrally placed Maori figure carrying a Taiaha in proper war dance attitude or recognised stance in moving into battle and placed on plain ground. For reference only see also one Centavo 1925 Filipinas **(Pl. 28) ...** 6d as stated in my telegram of 6 July, 3d Mint suggestion Tiki not favoured by NZ Committee which will be prepared to accept Mere with string attached ... Hope no difficulty your having work proceeded with and expedited on foregoing basis.'[84]

27. George Kruger Gray, florin design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)
28. Philippines, one centavo, 1925 (University of Otago)

When he read this, Johnson objected vociferously:

> 'We cannot serve two masters in NZ and I think the [High Commissioner] will agree with me, that at our last meeting with the Premier and the other Ministers present, the Premier definitely decided that the Committee was going beyond its province in laying down the law about designs at all, and that in any case his decision was final.'[85]

Johnson then drafted a 'strongly worded' telegram for the High Commissioner to tell Coates:

> 'work on these lines is far advanced - and redesigning on lines suggested would involve 4 months' delay, which is impracticable in view of urgent currency situation. It is therefore proposed ... to adhere to Premier's decision. First issues will therefore be made accordingly, but Royal Mint point out that designs can if desired be changed for 1934 and thereafter ... In order to facilitate this suggest your Committee supply rough sketches of their present suggestions. Maori figure, however, which is suitable for a medal could not be satisfactorily represented on so small a piece as one shilling.'[86]

Johnson's decision to press on with the original designs was supported by Wilford and Mackay. They believed that Forbes's imminent return to New Zealand would act in their favour and the Mint should hold out till then. Barrett summarised the situation in a memorandum to Johnson:

> 'The Minister of Finance is acting Prime Minister and for the moment any cable would have to be sent to him, possibly with direful results so far as the work we have done is concerned. The High Commissioner does not propose, therefore, to take any action until after the arrival in New Zealand of Mr Forbes - on 20th September. Then the H.C. will cable the Prime Minister, and in this connection I have undertaken to let him have, in writing on the 19th, a statement of the full

> position with regard to the designs ... (The more advanced these are, the stronger the cable!) It will then be for the Prime Minister to decide matters on the spot.'[87]

Barrett reported that Wilford did not believe there was a high risk of Coates forcing his hand 'in the face of the Prime Minister's commitments over here'. Nevertheless, the possibility could not be eliminated. Meanwhile, Barrett concluded, 'our work is, so to speak, in the air. I told Sir Thomas, however, that we should proceed with the work and run the risk.'[88]

Wilford had underestimated Coates and the Coinage Designs Committee. On 13 September Coates cabled him to tell the Mint to 'please proceed without delay' on the designs as instructed in the July and August telegrams. Coates also said he was 'unable to understand' misgivings about the proposed new shilling as being too small for the Maori figure, but would arrange for sketches to be sent over to assist with the design.[89] Was Johnson using his misgivings as a delaying stratagem? This is possible, although he genuinely believed that the design was 'quite inappropriate'. By the end of September, it now seemed opportune for Wilford to cable the recently returned premier thus:

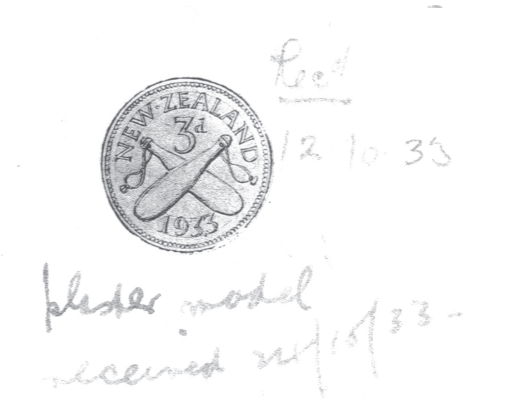
> 'Sir Robert Johnson before carrying out instructions draws urgent attention to fact that all dies based on designs approved in principle by yourself completed and ready striking coins which would be shipped in a few weeks. He advises that to adopt new designs necessary that sketches be supplied from NZ involving additional fees artists and approximately six months delay. If necessary new designs could be adopted subsequent issue. Kindly advise.'[90]

But Forbes had capitulated: 'Please carry out as a matter of urgency instructions issued by Minister of Finance'.[91] Short of overruling Coates and the Coinage Designs Committee, which ran the risk of his Coalition partner's resignation, there was probably little alternative. Kruger Gray was duly issued with instructions to proceed with the 'Designs approved by Mr Coates' as stipulated in the earlier telegrams. Rapidly he set to work, sending Johnson in mid-October what he modestly described as four 'very rough sketches'. They already bear a close resemblance to the adopted reverses.[92]

This is most remarkably evident in the shilling, where the crouching warrior, poised on a simply denoted escarpment, intently faces an invisible foe. **(Pl. 29)** He turns less abruptly away from the viewer than his counterpart in Wyon's Hector Medal, as there was no scope in the coin to depict a detailed landscape. Little over a month later, a relieved Johnson was able to tell Kruger Gray 'it seems clear that your design ... has been accepted, so will you please go ahead with the modelling as quickly as possible?'[93] For the sixpence huia design, Kruger Gray was lent a copy of Walter Buller's *History of the Birds of New Zealand* (1888). His design is not a direct transcription, however, of either of the birds illustrated in J. G. Keulemans' plate.[94] Kruger Gray depicted a female huia, as he saw the graphic potential of her distinctively curved bill. **(Pl. 30)** He defied instructions to have a 'plain field', protesting 'I do not see how one can use the Huia without a branch!'[95] For the threepence, Kruger Gray rejected any idea of depicting carved panels and adopted the alternative design, first suggested in Coates's August telegram, of a stringed mere. After trials, he concluded that a single weapon would look awkward. Following the precedent of the Shona axes on his Southern Rhodesia sixpence, he therefore crossed the mere to

create an effective design. **(Pl. 31-32)** Coates initially opposed even this modification, but changed his mind when Johnson argued that the result would otherwise be 'lopsided and for this reason difficult to strike, whereas crossed meres give a pleasing and technically satisfactory result.'[96]

29. George Kruger Gray, shilling design, 1933 (National Archives)
30. George Kruger Gray, sixpence design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)



31. George Kruger Gray, threepence design, 1933 (National Archives)
32. George Kruger Gray, Southern Rhodesia threepence, 1932 (Royal Mint Library)

Significant progress was also made with the florin. **(Pl. 33)** The Mint continued to advocate Kruger Gray's earlier design, and it was argued that elimination of the kowhaiwhai would disrupt consistency with the Maori motifs in the approved half-crown. Coates, who by now had seen a photograph of the proposed coin, was unforthcoming: 'Kiwi design originally suggested by Mint for 1/- ... not acceptable. Pending the receipt by you of sketchings, please see ... Oliver's New Zealand Birds ... Maori ornamentation to be eliminated.'[97] Kruger Gray sketched a kiwi related in stance to the large grey species depicted in the frontispiece of W. R. D. Oliver's book. Stylistically, this drawing represents a metamorphosis from the previous 'pine-tree cone' towards a noticeably more naturalistic rendition. The prominent decorative band around the coin was omitted and the bird was considerably enlarged. By late October, the transition towards the adopted coin was all but complete:

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Kruger Gray had switched to the North Island kiwi with lowered head and bill, a reverse copy of another photograph, traced from Oliver.[98] **(Pl. 34)** The design was further enhanced by the insertion of a horizontal ground-line - which contravened Coates's instructions - and by changes in the legend from 'two shillings' to 'one florin'. **(Pl. 35)** Johnson's only misgiving with the design in mid-November was the prominence of Kruger Gray's initials, which prompted one of his more memorable effusions:

> 'It is clear that the initials must come out, and I would be glad if you would suggest what kind of buzz-fuzz can go in to take its place. What about a New Zealand fern, very small, or something of that kind? I am afraid that, if you put a plain spot there, it would look as if the kiwi had just relieved nature, and moreover that he was suffering from so violent a need to do so that he had propelled the pellet out with considerable violence.'[99]

33. George Kruger Gray, florin design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)
34. George Kruger Gray, tracing from W. R. D. Oliver, *New Zealand Birds*, 1933. (National Archives)

35. George Kruger Gray, florin design, 1933 (Royal Mint Library)

In the eventual design, the initials were reduced considerably in scale and moved beside the date. No 'buzz-fuzz' took their place and result did not suffer.

Johnson also belatedly learned the New Zealand side of the story in a lengthy, confidential letter from Sutherland. This dated from 14 August, several weeks before Forbes's return, and expressed regret at how 'the delay over the designs ... has been costly to us'. Sutherland also confirmed that, even unseen, the designs chosen at the Royal Mint Advisory Committee meeting 'were not acceptable' to the Coinage Designs Committee. He argued that 'since we, in New Zealand, have to live with the coins we should at least be permitted to make the decisions as to the subjects - provided the artists can treat them satisfactorily and that is where co-operation should come in. So far it appears to me that that aspect has been neglected so far as the artists are concerned'. Sutherland was not to know that Kruger Gray was the last person to blame. As a committee member, he defended its decision to hold out for the coins Coates had stipulated and offered the first proper explanation to the Mint as to why:

> 'we consider it important that the kiwi should appear on the florin which is a decimal coin and a possible standard of value in a decimalised currency. This, of course, is looking into the future. The Maori tiki proposed by the artists [sic] for the 3d ... is not favoured by me as it is supposed to represent a human foetus, and is worn by native women - so we are told - to induce fertility ... It has a significance that is inappropriate in these times!'[100]

In his reply, Johnson graciously acknowledged Sutherland's points, assuring him that 'no one regrets more than I do the delay which has occurred in the issue of the new coinage.' As to the trouble over the designs, the Mint's main difficulty had been 'serving two masters', although he could now assure Sutherland that 'we are ... working on the basis of the [Design] Committee's suggestions'. A major problem had been that 'we were not originally instructed that New Zealand wished to select her own designs and that we should await cabled particulars before taking the first steps towards the manufacture of the dies'.[101] This also explained why importance had been vested in the decisions of the New Zealand delegation at the Advisory Committee Meeting.

Johnson enclosed a four-page memorandum, which summarised 'our story on this side of the water' from March 1933 to date. He recounted Forbes's attempt to reverse Coates's decision and complications such as Wyon's refusal to lend his Hector Memorial Medal, though one had been found elsewhere.[102] For the first time, Johnson properly explained why he considered the Maori figure so inappropriate for the shilling:

> 'The difficulty in adapting a design of this character, which is primarily a medal design, to a coin is that the amount required on the reverse to present the crouching figure adequately is so great that it cannot be taken up successfully with the single blow which is a necessary feature in ... coining, since the effigy of His Majesty on the obverse side already requires a considerable mass of metal on the other side.'[103]

Every attempt would, however, be made to surmount the difficulty, even if at this stage the Mint could not promise a well struck coin. After having being reproved by Sutherland for the delay, it was now Johnson's turn to strike back:

> 'I am afraid your Committee are rather inclined to think the making of a suitable design for a coin is a much simpler matter than it actually is and that all that is needed is to take a picture or engraving and splash it, without amendment, on to a piece of money.'[104]

He assured Sutherland that in Kruger Gray, 'they are dealing with a numismatic artist of considerable experience', and defended the latter's crossed mere: 'I really do think that this is a case in which a freer hand might have been given to the artist.' Johnson repeated the point about the difficulty of striking a satisfactory shilling, and added for good measure that 'we all consider here that, even as a medal, the Hector Research Medal fails in almost every essential of a good one.'[105]

In the final weeks of 1933, only relatively minor changes were made to the designs, although Johnson complained to Mackay in November about the continuing difficulty of dealing with Coates and the committee. The cause of this outburst was a sketch forwarded by Coates of a kiwi that Johnson found 'grotesque'.[106] Kruger Gray's design copied from Oliver was left defiantly unmodified. Small improvements were made to the huia's perch on the sixpence, and the design was promptly accepted by the New Zealand authorities. Slightly more problematic was the threepence, where the crossed mere were at last accepted in principle but needed to be inverted and have incised ornamentation applied. For this, Kruger Gray was lent Augustus Hamilton's *Maori Art* (1901). He followed Johnson's recommendation to copy a 'very old' patu (ornamented mere) that had belonged to Hemi Whero of the Ngaititumakori tribe and a similarly venerable club from near Lake Waikaremoana, now in the Otago Museum, Dunedin.[107] **(Pl. 36)** Once this was accomplished, Johnson told him, 'I really believe ... we shall have seen the end of our troubles!'

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36. George Kruger Gray, approved threepence design, 1933 (National Archives)

Coates gave the first public description of the new half-crown on 5 November. The shipment, with a face value of £250,000, was then en route to New Zealand. A reproduction of this 'attractive design ... the shield appropriately decorated with Maori design to fill the field' then appeared in the *Auckland Weekly News*.[108] In the same week, Coates steered the Coinage Bill through Parliament. The new law provided for a distinctive New Zealand coinage and removed the status of Imperial coin as legal tender from 1 February 1935. Passage was, Coates said, 'made urgent by reason of the fact that the new half-crown had almost reached our shores.'[109]

In the debate on the bill, political exchanges inevitably occupied more attention than the design of the new coins. Michael Joseph Savage said he 'could not understand the need for a metallic form of currency', while his colleague, John A. Lee, 'could not understand why we cannot mint our silver coin in New Zealand.' Lee welcomed the prospect of the new coinage and did not believe that it involved 'any disloyalty to Britain to adopt for our coinage ... something that expresses features of our own country ... There are wonderful parts of New Zealand that could be illustrated'. To this, the MP for Rotorua, Cecil Clinkard, responded 'A geyser rampant?'[110]

The question of national identity took on a more serious note when the MP for Southern Maori, Eruera Tirikatene, advocated that 'tattooed Maori figures or characters should be used in the designs for the coins'. In reply, Coates said that while he 'believed there should be indigenous designs, it was not desirable to have all Maori characters. They should be designs that represented New Zealand' and he 'hoped to have one Maori design.' Tirikatene responded 'That is all I ask'.[111] Sutherland's version of this exchange, as conveyed to Johnson, was far more colourful:

> 'when the Coinage Bill was going through the House of Representatives, a young Maori member of Parliament ... asked that a Maori figure be placed on one of the coins and when the Rt Hon Mr Coates (Minister of Finance) informed him that every effort was being made to do this, but that some difficulty was then being experienced in getting finality, the Maori member expressed his dissatisfaction and after an exchange of words ... the Maori member suggested the Finance Minister was frightened to press the matter, and being dissatisfied with the reply of the Minister threatened to "stoush" him there and then.'[112]

Although the misunderstanding was rapidly resolved, 'considerable prominence was given to the incident' and the design was 'naturally' awaited with interest.[113]

Within three weeks, the half-crowns had arrived and were put into circulation. Their press coverage was modest in column inches but certainly favourable in tenor. The *Dominion* admired 'the sharpness of the design and exquisite finish of the workmanship', while the *Evening Post* headline declared: 'Experts well-pleased'.[114] Sutherland spoke to the *Evening Post* in some detail about the half-crown design. He explained the symbolism of the quarterings and noted how the shield 'was slightly sunk in relation to the carved border ... this not only enhanced the appearance of the design but also protected the shield from wear.' He also believed that 'the inclusion of the Maori carvings was a happy blending of heraldic and native features and the result was quite pleasing'. With a magnifying glass, the intricacies of the designs were revealed 'and the mechanical perfection of the dies became apparent'.[115] Sutherland was franker in his verdict to Johnson: 'Personally I consider

the reverse design a little crowded, but otherwise the coin is a handsome one, and I have not stinted in the interview, as you can see.'[116]

The half-crown was, however, criticised in conservative quarters for its omission, even in abbreviated form, of 'Dei Gratia' on the obverse and 'Fidei Defensor' on the reverse, both of which remained on English coins. An Auckland Methodist clergyman, Rev. Percy Knight, objected that 'The New Zealand coin declares [George V] King without any reference to God at all'.[117] The *New Zealand Baptist* believed the omission of 'Dei Gratia' reflected atheistic New Zealand officialdom, while the Federation of New Zealand Justices urged the words be reinstated on the coins as soon as possible. These concerns caused the Government to cable the High Commission about the 'criticism locally concerning elimination of words Dei Gratia and Fidei Defensor. Please ascertain if any technical reasons for alterations'.[118] Johnson explained to Mackay that the Royal style and titles had been 'specifically approved by the King, together with the new effigy for all new coinages in the Dominions as well as in the Colonies' and reminded him that the New Zealand authorities had been informed of this in July.[119] Canada, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia had all adopted simplified titles to varying degrees, although Canada still retained 'DEI GRA'. Only the unpopular Australian coinage retained full style and titles in Latin. This reply was conveyed to the New Zealand press by Park. The Treasury Secretary added, not unhumorously, that 'There is no reason to suppose that the inclusion of Maori tikis in the [reverse] design is indicative of a lack of religious faith in New Zealand.'[120]

The tedious controversy was briefly rekindled in February 1934 by the elderly visiting English Conservative MP, Sir John Sandeman-Allen. At a public dinner in Christchurch, he asked:

> 'Why is not "Fid. Def.", the ancient title of His Majesty the King, mentioned on the New Zealand half-crown? It looks at first as if you want to cut the painter of tradition. Perhaps you have not noticed it, but I know from very good experience that you are inhabitants of an exceedingly bright, happy and loyal country'.[121]

Gratified applause ensued but matters rested there. Three years later, in September 1937, Sutherland addressed the issue at a meeting of the New Zealand Numismatic Society. He asserted that the absence of 'Fid. Def.' from the coin inscription did not indicate lack of recognition of the Christian faith and believed that only a tiny percentage of people knew what the 'cryptic' Latin abbreviations meant. In the search for an all-embracing inscription, the Royal Mint Advisory Committee had considered 'George V King Emperor' adequate. Sutherland believed that the omission 'would not give offence to the millions of non-Christian British subjects in India and elsewhere'. Indeed, it reflected a 'broad-minded spirit of tolerance on the part of the dominant Christian minority towards the majority ... in the British Empire'.[122] While Sutherland's terminology may appear quaintly dated today, it indicates a shift in thinking by the late 1930s away from a metropolitan Empire towards the concept of a more inclusive, proto-Commonwealth entity.

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The remaining coins arrived in New Zealand in the early months of 1934: sixpences in late January 1934, florins in mid-February, threepences in mid-March and, finally, shillings in early April. In early January, Sutherland delivered a mixed verdict to Johnson on the imminent coins. Of the florin he wrote: 'Mr Gray's efforts are disappointing.' Clearly he

had still not seen the revised design dating from late October, as he hoped that a superior coin, aided by Oliver's illustrations, would result. With the shilling, he was 'fairly well pleased', but believed there was 'an absence of youth, vigour and vitality' in what should be the Maori's warlike attitude. The sixpence, which had just gone into circulation, was, however, 'the masterpiece of the set'. Sutherland 'wholeheartedly' congratulated Kruger Gray for the coin: 'he has shown the hand of the master designer'. At this stage, Sutherland had not seen the final threepence design, with the mere modified into carved patu. In their unadorned form, Sutherland complained that they 'looked like a couple of bottles'. He regretted that the Design Committee had only recently been shown the photographs of Kruger Gray's earlier weaponry designs showing the taiaha, kotiake and tewhatewha, as one of these might well have been accepted instead.[123]

'What you say in your letter gives me good ground for hope that the two shillings, threepence and shilling will ... give satisfaction when they arrive,' replied the unruffled Johnson. He assured Sutherland that the 'fish scales' on the florin had been turned into 'something looking much more like feathers.' Although it was now too late, he believed that the kiwi would have looked more effective on the shilling and the crouching Maori figure on the florin: 'we ourselves should have suggested this had not our instructions ... been quite definitely to transfer the kiwi to the larger piece.' While Johnson assured Sutherland that the shilling would be successful, his earlier worries about the viability of a coin of such high relief on both sides had been partially vindicated. Striking the coin required a 'much harder blow' than normal and this led to a shorter lifespan of the dies, with attendant costs for the New Zealand government.[124]

In the same letter, Johnson also noted with relief how the need for new coin had evidently proved less 'desperately urgent' than he had previously understood: 'Had we realised at the time that New Zealand could hold out till ... the New Year as she has', the Mint would have gone more slowly and 'full consultation with New Zealand herself' could have taken place rather than hurried and conflicting exchanges.[125] Seizures of smuggled silver by the New Zealand customs authorities made some impact, reflected in a noticeable drop in Imperial coinage entering Australia. In addition, some £50,000 worth of the unpopular Australian coins, mostly florins, were imported by the Government as a stopgap measure in the winter of 1933, four months before the arrival of the first new half-crowns.[126]

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In April 1933, by which time all denominations were in circulation, a relieved and almost enthusiastic Sutherland could tell Johnson that the series had been 'very favourably received by the public. Our people are extremely critical in so far as stamp designs are concerned and I am surprised at the good reception so far given'. In his verdict on individual designs, Sutherland was 'very pleased indeed' with the final result of the shilling. Its expert treatment and high relief had created an attractive coin in both appearance and handling. Consistent with his earlier letter, the huia on the sixpence made it 'the most favoured' of the coins. The kiwi florin was also popular, not least with bank clerks who appreciated its complete visual contrast with the half-crown. Sutherland freely admitted that here Kruger Gray had 'made a very good effort, and he has given us our national bird in good relief, and that is what we wanted.'[127]

References in newspapers to the new designs confirmed Sutherland's views. The sixpence was praised for its 'fineness of workmanship', the florin for its 'sharp finish' and the shilling for its 'distinctive design'.[128] The instant popularity of the florin was reflected in its reproduction in advertisements for Atlantic Petrol.[129] **(Pl. 37)** The most comprehensive

discussion of the designs appeared in the *Dominion* in April 1934. Beneath the misleading headlines 'Warlike Shilling' and 'Ginger-beer Bottles on Threepenny Pieces', the newspaper reported an emphatically favourable verdict from members of the New Zealand Numismatic Society. The librarian and ethnologist Johannes Andersen admired the coins for being 'distinctively New Zealand in design', surely a tribute to Kruger Gray's intelligent use of his borrowed reference books as well as his artistic skill and versatility. Andersen singled out the florin for praise as 'particularly well designed' and clear-cut in appearance. He was less enthusiastic about the 'quite good' shilling, which would have been preferable had the Maori been depicted as less warlike and more watchful: closer, indeed, to Wyon's Hector Research Medal. The sixpence was 'dainty in the extreme'. Andersen noted that the patu of the threepence had been likened to ginger-beer bottles, 'but only by those who do not know what they are. Ignorance of the characteristics of the country in which they live does not give weight to the criticisms of such people.'[130] Sutherland summarised the coins thus: 'the subjects were well balanced, the relief was bold and effective, and the designs faithfully typified New Zealand'.[131]

37. Atlantic Petrol advertisement, 1934 (*New Zealand Herald*)

Johnson too appeared satisfied, and presented Mackay with a specimen coin set in gratitude for his hard work in the 'rather lengthy and difficult negotiations'.[132] In his 1933 *Annual Report*, the Deputy Master devoted two pages to the New Zealand coinage. This was inevitably couched more temperately than in his earlier memoranda, letters and draft telegrams. He outlined with relative tact the difficulties that had arisen over the conflicting instructions from Forbes and the Coinage Designs Committee and the 'considerable delay' that had ensued. He also implied some regret that the Advisory Committee ultimately 'had little to do' with the final designs. In a related point, Johnson also mentioned the technical difficulties that could arise from being obliged to follow 'designs which have not been prepared initially by those experienced in coin manufacture'. This was a clear reference to the revised shilling. In his best, paternalist manner, Johnson noted that 'my technical experts are not always too grateful for the labour involved' in making such designs coinable. Yet he acknowledged Sutherland's point that 'the users of the coin should have the principal say in their appearance' and he was, finally, 'very pleased that their reception in the Dominion has been so friendly'.[133] Or, as he told Sutherland, 'all's well that ends well'.[134]

Although numismatic uniformity, or to put it modishly, 'closure', only came to New Zealand with the introduction of the 1940 penny and halfpenny, the issue of a distinctive national coinage in 1933-34 certainly initiated this process. And while it was earlier argued that economic factors were more important than burgeoning national identity in analysing the history of that coinage, it would be churlish to dismiss the latter altogether. 'All numismatists would rejoice in the fact that at last New Zealand was to be placed on the numismatic map of the world' enthused the Rev. D. C. Bates, foundation president of the New Zealand Numismatic Society.[135] Even more excitedly, the Society's 1932-33 annual report announced 'The numismatic birth of the Dominion'.[136] Kruger Gray, Metcalfe, Johnson, Sutherland and Coates should be gratefully acknowledged as its midwives.

(Footnotes)

Acknowledgements
I am very grateful to Philip Attwood, Dr Kevin Clancy, Graham Dyer and Professor Roger Neich for their assistance with my research.

[1] Allan Sutherland, *Numismatic History of New Zealand: History Reflected in Money and Medals* (Wellington, 1941), pp. 266-79. See also R. P. Hargreaves, *From Beads to Bank Notes* (Dunedin, 1972), pp. 141-53.
[2] David Greasley and Les Oxley, 'Regime Shift and Fast Recovery on the Periphery: New Zealand in the 1930s', *Economic History Review*, 55, 4 (2002), esp. pp. 697-99.
[3] Quoted in Mark Stocker, '"Coins of the People": The 1967 New Zealand Decimal Coin Reverses', *British Numismatic Journal*, 70 (2000), p. 132.
[4] National Archives, PRO MINT 20/1266, D. Collis, Privy Purse Office, to Robert Johnson, 5 February 1934.
[5] Stocker, '"Coins of the People"', as in n. 3, pp. 124-5.
[6] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to H. W. F. Evans, 23 August 1933.
[7] *Sixty-fourth Annual Report of the Deputy Master and Comptroller of the Royal Mint 1933* (London, 1934), pp. 7-8.
[8] Ken Matthews, 'The Legal History of Money of New Zealand', *Reserve Bank of New Zealand Bulletin*, 66, 1 (2003), p. 47.
[9] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 266.
[10] Archives New Zealand, Wellington, Treasury T40/33/8 A. E. Currie, 'Coinage and Other Currency of New Zealand. Historical Survey', 1950. See also Matthews, 'Legal History', as in n. 8, pp. 40-49.
[11] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 228 (25 June - 31 July 1931), p. 923.
[12] Ibid.

[13] PRO MINT 20/217, Johnson to Thomas Wilford, 8 September 1931.
[14] PRO MINT 20/217, Johnson to Wilford, 5 November 1931.
[15] Michael Bassett, *Coates of Kaipara* (Auckland, 1995), esp. pp. 193-212. See also Greasley and Oxley, 'Regime Shift', as in n. 2, pp. 697-720.
[16] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 237 (1 November - 22 December 1933), p. 417.
[17] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 266.
[18] Ibid, p. 267.
[19] PRO MINT 20/1265, Coates to Wilford, 25 February 1933.
[20] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Athol Mackay, 27 February 1933.
[21] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 6 March 1933.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Dominion*, 8 March 1933.
[25] *Evening Post*, 4 December 1933.
[26] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 6 March 1933.
[27] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 7 March 1933.
[28] *Dominion*, 22 May 1933.
[29] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 21 March 1933.
[30] PRO MINT 25/2, Royal Mint Advisory Committee, 76th meeting, 13 March 1933.
[31] James Laver, 'George Edward Kruger Gray', *Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950* (London, 1959), p. 322.
[32] Royal Mint Library, unpublished notes by Kruger Gray, 12 October 1929.
[33] Royal Mint Library, Johnson to W. G. Constable, 5 May 1936 (copy).
[34] For Metcalfe's 1940 designs, see PRO MINT 20/1714.
[35] *Dominion*, 17 May 1933.
[36] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 8 June 1933.
[37] PRO MINT 20/1265, Sutherland to Johnson, 14 August 1933.
[38] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 235 (26 January - 10 March 1933), p. 1157.
[39] *Dominion*, 3 May 1933. 'John Citizen' claimed in a letter to the *Evening Post*, 30 May 1933, that the 'minting of the coins in New Zealand will mean work for the workless.' The ease of making silver coins was compared variously with milk tokens and jam tins. See Hargreaves, *Beads to Bank Notes*, as in n. 1, p. 145.
[40] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 14 June 1933.
[41] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Wilford, 15 June 1933. Johnson added that the mints at Paris and Budapest had experienced such 'immense trouble' in making such an alloy that they 'have vowed never to touch it again.'
[42] Ibid.
[43] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Sutherland, 13 October 1933.
[44] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Percy Metcalfe, 21 March 1933.
[45] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnston to George Kruger Gray, 19 June 1933.
[46] PRO MINT 25/2, Royal Mint Advisory Committee, 79th meeting, 28 June 1933.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Roger Neich to the author, 22 December 2003.
[53] 'Denarius', 'The Maori on the Shilling', *New Zealand Numismatic Journal*, 11(1966), p. 246.
[54] PRO MINT 25/2, RMAC, as in n. 46.
[55] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[56] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 274.
[57] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 11 April 1934.
[58] PRO MINT 25/2, RMAC, as in n. 46.
[59] Ibid.
[60] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[61] PRO MINT 25/2, RMAC, as in n. 46.
[62] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[63] Stocker, 'Coins of the People', as in n. 3, esp. pp. 127, 135.

[64] PRO MINT 20/1265, C. F. Barrett to Johnson, 1 September 1933.
[65] PRO MINT 7/43, Illustrated album of New Zealand coin designs, unpaginated.
[66] Bassett, *Coates of Kaipara*, as in n. 15, p. 195.
[67] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, pp. 269-74. The committee members comprised Coates (chairman); A. D. Park, Secretary to the Treasury; John Rankine Brown and Allan Sutherland, representing the New Zealand Numismatic Society; A. D. Carbery and Joseph Ellis, representing the New Zealand Society of Arts; and Nigel Connell, an artist and photographer. See also *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 237 (1 November - 22 December 1933), pp. 74-5.
[68] National Archives, Treasury T1 1/12/55, 'New Zealand Coinage: Report of Special Committee Appointed by the Government, 1933', 1933, p. 7. The report did, however, recommend 'that the question of allowing local firms to tender for the work be considered if and when additional coins are required in the future', ibid., p. 8.
[69] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 272.
[70] 'New Zealand Coinage', as in n. 68, p. 9.
[71] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 271.
[72] Alexander Turnbull Library, Gordon Coates Papers MS 1985-033, n.d. (July 1933).
[73] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, pp. 273-4. The Committee vetoed 'the three ships' as being 'quite out of keeping with the general idea of establishing modern designs.' (Alexander Turnbull Library, Gordon Coates Papers MS 1985-033, n.d [July 1933]).
[74] Alexander Turnbull Library, Gordon Coates Papers MS 1985-033, n.d. (July 1933).
[75] ibid.
[76] Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 273. The committee suggested that 'an excellent plate of the Huia from Buller's Hand List of N.Z. Birds was chosen as eminently suitable.' (Alexander Turnbull Library, Gordon Coates Papers, MS 1985-033, n.d. [July 1933]).
[77] PRO MINT 20/1265, Wilford to Johnson, 11 July 1933.
[78] Christopher Eimer, 'Sir Robert Johnson, The Mint and Medal Making in Inter-War Britain', *British Numismatic Journal*, 55 (1985), pp. 169-91.
[79] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Allan Wyon, 12 July 1933.
[80] PRO MINT 20/1265, Wyon to Johnson, 13 July 1933.
[81] PRO MINT 20/1265, Kruger Gray to Johnson, 16 July 1933.
[82] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Kruger Gray, 18 July 1933.
[83] PRO MINT 20/1265, C. F. Barrett to Mackay, 9 August 1933.
[84] PRO MINT 20/1265, Mackay to Johnson, 21 August 1933.
[85] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Evans, 23 August 1933.
[86] Ibid.
[87] PRO MINT 20/1265, Barrett to Johnson, 1 September 1933.
[88] Ibid.
[89] PRO MINT 20/1265, Charles Bunn to Evans, 15 September 1933.
[90] PRO MINT 20/1265, Wilford to George Forbes, 29 September 1933 (copy).
[91] PRO MINT 20/1265, Forbes to Wilford, 4 October 1933 (copy).

[92] PRO MINT 20/1265, Kruger Gray to Johnson, 9 October 1933. For the sketches see PRO MINT 7/43, Illustrated album of New Zealand coin designs, unpaginated.
[93] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Kruger Gray, 14 November 1933.
[94] Walter Buller, *History of the Birds of New Zealand* (London, 1888 ed.), v. 1, pl. II.
[95] PRO MINT 20/1265, Kruger Gray to Johnson, 9 October 1933.
[96] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Mackay, 13 October 1933.
[97] PRO MINT 20/1265, Coates to Wilford, 14 October 1933 (copy).
[98] W. R. D. Oliver, *New Zealand Birds* (Wellington, 1930), p. 56.
[99] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Kruger Gray, 14 November 1933.
[100] PRO MINT 20/1265, Sutherland to Johnson, 14 August - 7 September 1933. When he saw the tiki designs, he modified his opinion, and told Johnson 'In a measure I would have preferred the tiki to the mere. I liked Metcalfe's tiki best, as Mr Gray's (bottom half) looked like a cow's head!' (PRO MINT 20/1266, 5 January 1934). L. C. Mitchell's tiki design was used for the 1940 halfpenny.
[101] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Sutherland, 13 October 1933 (letter).
[102] Ibid. Following a request from the High Commission, Lord Rutherford lent his medal to the Mint. This was not returned until November 1934, as its case had been mislaid. See PRO MINT 20/1266, Barrett to Mackay, 1 November 1934.
[103] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Sutherland, 13 October 1933 (memorandum).
[104] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Sutherland, 13 October 1933 (letter). Sutherland replied: '... you give us a quiet "dig" by conveying the impression that our Committee had little appreciation of the difficulties confronting coin designers. I can assure you that this is not so.... The suggestion that our Committee seemed to imagine that any picture or engraving could be splashed on to a coin made me chuckle! ... The drawings or illustrations in standard works were cited by us merely as a simple method of conveying our opinions by cable.' (PRO MINT 20/1266, 5 January 1934).
[105] PRO MINT 20/1265, Johnson to Sutherland, 13 October 1933 (letter).
[106] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Mackay, 16 November 1933.
[107] Augustus Hamilton, *Maori Art*, Wellington, 1901, pp. 250, 363.
[108] *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 November 1935.
[109] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 237 (1 November - 22 December 1933), p. 74.
[110] *Evening Post*, 9 November 1933.
[111] Ibid.
[112] PRO 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[113] Ibid.
[114] *Dominion*, 28 November 1933; *Evening Post*, 4 December 1933.
[115] *Evening Post*, 4 December 1933.
[116] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[117] Quoted in Hargreaves, *Beads to Bank Notes*, as in n. 1, p. 148.
[118] PRO MINT 20/1266, Mackay to Johnson, 7 December 1933.
[119] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Mackay, 8 December 1933.
[120] *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 December 1933.
[121] *The Press*, 13 February 1934.
[122] *New Zealand Numismatic Journal*, 2 (1937), p. 36.
[123] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934.
[124] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Sutherland, 8 February 1934.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Hargreaves, *Beads to Bank Notes*, as in n. 1, pp. 144, 148; see also Sutherland, *Numismatic History*, as in n. 1, p. 290.
[127] PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 11 April 1934.
[128] *New Zealand Herald*, 26 January 1934; *Dominion*, 17 February 1934; *Dominion*, 13 March 1934.
[129] See for example *The Press*, 15 February 1934; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 February 1934.
[130] *Dominion*, 29 April 1934.
[131] Ibid.
[132] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Mackay, 15 February 1934.
[133] *Sixty-Fourth Annual Report*, as in n. 7, p. 8.
[134] PRO MINT 20/1266, Johnson to Sutherland, 8 February 1934.
[135] 'Proposed New Zealand Coinage', *New Zealand Numismatic Journal*, 1 (1933), unpaginated.
[136] 'New Zealand Numismatic Society: Second Annual Report', *New Zealand Numismatic Journal*, 1 (1933), unpaginated.

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