

# COMPLETING THE CHANGE: THE NEW ZEALAND COIN REVERSES OF 1940

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## Introduction

At the turn of the year 1939–40, New Zealand issued three coins with new reverse designs: a silver commemorative half-crown, a bronze penny and a bronze halfpenny (Figs. 1–3).<sup>1</sup> The 1940 coinage brought the pre-decimal set of denominations to a state of completion, uniformity and maturity. Thus the excited hopes of the New Zealand Numismatic Society in 1933, that it was about to witness ‘the numismatic birth of the Dominion’, were at last fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> The first issue of coins, from the standard half-crown to the threepence (Fig. 4), had been hurriedly undertaken following the devaluation of the New Zealand pound in January 1933 and the chronic shortage of circulating silver coin that ensued.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the bronze coins of 1940 were not monetarily essential. Economically and socially, New Zealand could have managed adequately with the existing, regularly replenished supplies of Imperial coin. However, both numismatically and in terms of national identity – a constant cultural preoccupation of this small nation<sup>4</sup> – the realisation of a full set of coins was repeatedly deemed desirable. The year 1940 marked the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s foundational colonising event. This provided an opportune moment both to complete the coinage and to commemorate this significant anniversary with a special half-crown design for that year only. In addition, a commemorative centennial medal in silver and bronze, commissioned by the New Zealand Numismatic Society and with production costs subsidised by the government, would be issued (Fig. 5, p. 207).<sup>5</sup> The aim of this article is to reconstruct the immediate historical – and art historical – context of the coinage and its design process rather than to explore in detail the fascinating but complex question of identity. The latter will, however, be addressed particularly in relation to the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition of 1940, which coincided with the launch of the new designs.



Fig. 1. New Zealand, 1940 half-crown, obverse; Leonard Cornwall Mitchell, reverse.



Fig. 2. New Zealand, 1940 penny, reverse (Mitchell).



Fig. 3. New Zealand, 1940 halfpenny, reverse (Mitchell).

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<sup>1</sup> Pennies and halfpennies dated 1940 were already in circulation in mid-December 1939, and half-crowns in early January 1940. See *New Zealand Herald*, 14 December 1939; *Evening Post*, 10 January 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, Second Annual Report, 31 July 1933.

<sup>3</sup> Stocker 2005, 143–4.

<sup>4</sup> See for example King 2003, 360–2. For a broader consideration of the subject see Gilbert and Helleiner (eds.) 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Morel 1996, 101.



Fig. 4 a–e. New Zealand, 1933–4 reverses (George Kruger Gray).

Once the 1940 coinage was in circulation, it was largely ignored. It assumed the status of numismatic infill, receiving far less attention than either the 1933 or indeed the 1967 decimal designs. Moreover, with 100,800 half-crowns struck, the commemorative coin lacked the rarity value of the so-called ‘Waitangi Crown’ of 1935.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent discussion of the coinage, both in Allan Sutherland’s *Numismatic History of New Zealand* (1941)<sup>7</sup> and still more so in R.P. Hargreaves’s *From Beads to Banknotes: The History of Money in New Zealand* (1972), verges on the perfunctory,<sup>8</sup> while the *New Zealand Numismatic Journal* adds relatively little to these sources. Press coverage, inevitably dominated by the still recent outbreak of the Second World War, and locally by the immensely popular New Zealand Centennial Exhibition, yields several near-identical descriptions, sometimes illustrated.<sup>9</sup> The artist of all three coins, Leonard Cornwall Mitchell (1901–71), enjoyed a far lower profile than that of his friendly rival in the fields of coin and postage stamp design, James Berry (1906–80).<sup>10</sup> The process of selecting the designs was not held at the Royal Mint, as had applied in 1933, but was handled instead by the Department of Internal Affairs. Its files at Archives New Zealand, Wellington, contain few records of the coinage, while comparable Treasury holdings are likewise negligible. Even the Royal Mint files at National Archives, Kew, are somewhat disappointing. This must be partly attributable to the sudden and premature death of Sir Robert Johnson, Deputy Master of the Mint, in March 1938, five months before the design competition was announced. Johnson had played a characteristically ‘hands-on’ role with both the 1933 and 1935 coins, whereas his successor, J. McCutcheon (later Sir John) Craig, was altogether less flamboyant and opinionated. Had Johnson still been alive, the exchange of correspondence and opinions would have been far livelier. The Mint’s contribution was also probably diminished by the absence on sick leave of Charles Barrett, the Librarian and Curator, who had been Johnson’s right-hand man.<sup>11</sup> Allan Sutherland’s archive, lodged in the Auckland Central Library and an invaluable source for the 1933, 1935 and 1967 coinage alike, contains little material on that of 1940.<sup>12</sup> This historical reconstruction is thus necessarily a partial and conjectural one.

### A coinage for the Centennial?

In its report of July 1933, the Coinage Committee convened by the Finance Minister, Gordon Coates, stated that unlike silver, the issue of bronze coins was ‘not one of urgency and could be delayed until such time as the Government deems it necessary that such recoinage should

<sup>6</sup> This compares with the minting of 1128 Waitangi Crown pieces. See Stocker 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Sutherland 1941, 277–9.

<sup>8</sup> Hargreaves 1972, 154.

<sup>9</sup> *Dominion*, 9 January 1940; *Evening Post*, 10 January 1940.

<sup>10</sup> For Mitchell see Thompson 2003, 17, 132.

<sup>11</sup> For Craig see Dyer and Gaspar 1992, 578–9. Barrett died on 21 August 1939. I owe this information to Graham Dyer.

<sup>12</sup> Sutherland’s typed MS, (n.d.), ‘MATERIAL PAPERS STORED IN SHED’ (Allan Sutherland Papers, Special Collections, Auckland Central Library), lists ‘Centenary Coinage Committee 1940’ as being in ‘TIN TRUNK LARGE’, but these papers have not survived in the archive.

be proceeded with'. The committee struck a nationalistic note by recommending that 'when this work is undertaken ... artists in New Zealand be given an opportunity to prepare the proposed designs'.<sup>13</sup> Seven months later, when the silver coins were in the process of being released, Johnson had confirmed to Sutherland that 'as regards supplies of ... the Penny and Halfpenny, there is, of course, no sort of need for hurry from the fiscal point of view, and I suggest that we take plenty of time to evolve really satisfactory designs'.<sup>14</sup> In its third annual report in July 1934, the New Zealand Numismatic Society agreed that 'no problems confront the authorities at present so far as the bronze imperial coins are concerned but for reasons of uniformity it is to be hoped that the issue of bronze coins ... will not be too long delayed'.<sup>15</sup>

After this brief flurry of enthusiasm, little tangible progress occurred. Momentum had, however, gathered once more by the August 1936 meeting of the Society, when James Berry asked 'when New Zealand pennies and half-pennies would be issued to replace the Imperial bronze coins in use'. Several other members 'refrained from pressing for any change because in the event of the decimal system of coinage being adopted ... the penny and the halfpenny would be the only coins abolished, to be replaced by a cent', whereas the silver coins in circulation could be accommodated into a decimal currency. All present agreed that the matter 'would have to be settled before the centennial year'.<sup>16</sup> Three members ambitiously 'advocated the issue of a complete series of designs for the Centennial year', but the President, the eminent medical administrator Sir James Elliott,<sup>17</sup> pointed out that the existing designs had been carefully – and only very recently – chosen as 'emblematic of New Zealand'. He correctly assumed that they would 'long remain in use, with, perhaps, minor alterations'.

Agreement over a commemorative coin proved easier. Sutherland proposed the issue of a half-crown at face value as 'a popular means of commemorating the centennial; such coins would flow as currency and everyone would share in the commemoration, and be enabled to retain specimens as permanent mementoes of the show'.<sup>18</sup> The Waitangi Crown, released in the previous January, had been conspicuously unsuccessful and unpopular, partly because the price of loose coins at 7s. 6d. apiece represented a fifty per cent premium on the face value.<sup>19</sup> The Society agreed to make 'a definite recommendation to the Government' on the lines proposed by Sutherland.<sup>20</sup> Advising Joseph Heenan, Under-Secretary at the Department of Internal Affairs, of this resolution, Sutherland urged him to plan any future coins 'sufficiently far ahead to enable the best designers to compete and to enable the coin to be issued in good time for the Centennial celebrations'.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Sutherland made a friendly approach to George Kruger Gray, designer of the reverses of the 1933 coinage, informing him of the likely commemorative half-crown: 'The proposal is merely in the embryo stage at present. Some reference is made to the matter in the attached report of the New Zealand Numismatic Society'.<sup>22</sup> Tellingly, there is no record in the Sutherland archive of a letter to his more avant-garde rival, Percy Metcalfe, whose over-designed Waitangi Crown proved an uncomfortable numismatic bedfellow with Kruger Gray's earlier reverses.

The Society's sixth annual report, dating from May 1937, approvingly noted that the National Historical Committee, appointed by the government, 'proposes to co-operate freely with the suggested issue of a Centennial Commemorative coin and medal, and that a member of the Society [Sutherland] is to be appointed to a sub-committee of that body'. Besides this,

<sup>13</sup> Archives New Zealand, Treasury T1 1/12/55, 'New Zealand Coinage: Report of Special Committee Appointed by the Government, 1933', 1933, 8.

<sup>14</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 20/1266, Robert Johnson to Sutherland, 8 February 1934.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, Third Annual Report, 23 July 1934. Sutherland told his Australian Numismatic Society counterpart, C.J.V. Weaver, that 'we are also getting on with the proposal to call designs for our penny and halfpenny' (Allan Sutherland Papers, Sutherland to Weaver, 8 August 1934) (copy).

<sup>16</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 32<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 31 August 1936.

<sup>17</sup> For James Elliott see Wright-St Clair 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, as in n.16.

<sup>19</sup> Stocker 2010, 185.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, as in n.16.

<sup>21</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, Sutherland to Heenan, 12 September 1936 (copy).

<sup>22</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, Sutherland to George Kruger Gray, 8 September 1936 (copy).

opportunity should be taken to call for designs for the copper [*sic*] coins, yet to be issued, and the Crown piece which has not yet been given a standard design. The Society might also consider suggestions for minor improvements in the existing designs – alterations that could be made to the present dies at little cost – so that a complete series of coins could be issued for the Centennial Year, 1940.<sup>23</sup>

Only the first of these proposals would be adopted. Records of the first Coinage Sub-Committee of the National Historical Committee are sparse, but those of a crucial meeting on 13 October 1937 survive. Its members comprised Heenan, the chairman, Sutherland, George Charles Rodda, Secretary to the Treasury, and Eric McCormick, Secretary of the National Historical Committee. Heenan successfully moved that the government issue ‘a special Centennial commemorative half-crown for general circulation during 1940’. Rodda then furnished a cabled quotation from the Royal Mint about the issue of ‘New Zealand bronze pence and halfpence’, which showed that ‘a considerable seigniorage would accrue to the Government from such an issue’. This prompted Heenan to move, with Sutherland seconding, ‘that, if the government is considering the completion of the coinage issue, the penny and half-penny bearing a standard design be issued for the first time in 1940’.<sup>24</sup> Sutherland’s inquiry about a New Zealand crown for general circulation met with a negative response from Rodda, who told him, perhaps in the shadow of the Waitangi Crown, that such an issue was not contemplated. Likewise, a medal for schoolchildren – which Sutherland had informally suggested to Heenan the previous year<sup>25</sup> – was deemed inadvisable ‘in view of the possible issue of bronze coins’. The sub-committee proved more responsive, however, towards a commemorative medal. While it was agreed that ‘no such issue be made by the Government’, it was resolved that ‘the issue of a Centennial medal on the lines of the Waitangi-Bledisloe medal be placed in the hands of the New Zealand Numismatic Society, and that the Government be asked to make an appropriate grant to the Society for the production of the medal’.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Heenan stated that the National Historical Committee and the New Zealand Numismatic Society ‘would be glad to co-operate with the Treasury in the selection of an appropriate design for the Centennial half-crown’.<sup>27</sup> The mutual identity of interests between the government and the Society might appear cosy from a British vantage point, but it is important to note that New Zealand – with a population of little over one and a half million – necessarily possessed an extremely limited numismatically conversant critical mass capable of operating at the government level. The relationship between the more conservatively inclined Sutherland – whose day job was as chief reporter of the *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* – and the left-liberal Heenan – himself an active member of the Society – was founded on pragmatic and probably cordial co-operation.<sup>28</sup>

A few days after this meeting, a sub-committee of the Society was formed ‘to deal with proposals that may be referred to it in connection with the issue of coins and medals to commemorate the Centennial of New Zealand’. A leading member, the librarian and ethnologist Johannes Andersen, then proposed a motion stating that ‘in view of the confusion resulting from the similarity of the half-crown and the florin, and the fact that the florin is a decimal coin and a more convenient denomination’, the government should be asked to adopt the florin rather than the half-crown as the centennial commemorative coin.<sup>29</sup> Although this was carried, no further record appears of a commemorative florin. Heenan’s committee instead

<sup>23</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, Sixth Annual Report, 28 June 1937.

<sup>24</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, National Historical Committee, Meeting of Coinage Sub-committee, 13 October 1937.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, Heenan to Sutherland, 12 June 1936. ‘Medalet for Scl Children?’ [*sic*] is inscribed in Sutherland’s handwriting on this letter. He also wrote: ‘Apart from Commem coin in which the public as a whole will share, the event is of sufficient importance to warrant striking a medal (say bearing the head of Hobson (coin cannot bear two heads) for numismatic museums public institutions & as an enduring mark of the significance of the day & the part Gov Hobson played in the founding of this country’. For William Hobson’s figure on the Waitangi Crown see Stocker 2010.

<sup>26</sup> The New Zealand Numismatic Society received a grant of £100 from the Department of Internal Affairs towards production costs. (Allan Sutherland Papers, Joseph Heenan to Allan Sutherland, 18 March 1938). For James Berry’s Bledisloe Medal (1934) see Morel 1996, 98; Stocker 2010, 177.

<sup>27</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, as in n.24.

<sup>28</sup> For Heenan and government arts policies see King 2003, 419.

<sup>29</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 41<sup>st</sup> meeting, 18 October 1937.





Fig. 5. New Zealand Numismatic Society, 1940 New Zealand Centennial Medal, bronze, 38 mm. Obverse: Thomas Hugh Jenkin; Reverse: James Berry.

favoured the half-crown as the highest denomination and therefore the most appropriate one to function as a special coin.<sup>30</sup>

### The competing designs

Discussions of the proposed centennial medal took priority over the coinage at Society meetings between late 1937 and the first half of 1938. However, in the seventh annual report in June 1938, following a reference to the appearance of New Zealand silver coins bearing the effigy of the new king, George VI, it was once again ‘hoped that ... bronze coins will soon make their appearance in order to complete the series. The Government has in hand arrangements for the issue of a Centennial coin, and, in association with the Government, the Society is carrying out preliminary investigations in connection with the proposed Centennial Medal’. While the approaching centennial would probably ‘increase the work of the Society’, this was welcome since it would ‘further enlarge its sphere of usefulness and value’.<sup>31</sup> In June 1938, Coates’s successor as Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, appointed a second committee ‘to consider and report on designs to be submitted’ for the coinage.<sup>32</sup> It was chaired by the Treasury assistant secretary Athol Mackay who, when formerly posted at the New Zealand High Commission in London, had played an invaluable diplomatic role in negotiations between Johnson and Coates over the 1933 and 1935 designs. Mackay good-humouredly recalled this experience to William Perry, Chief Clerk at the Royal Mint: ‘My connection with your good self and other officials of the Royal Mint has given me the unwarranted status of a coin expert in local circles and it has fallen to my lot to handle the detail in connection with our new centennial coins’.<sup>33</sup> The other committee members were Sutherland, Elliott, Andersen, Heenan and Rodda.

While there are no surviving press accounts of the design competition, R.M. Sunley, Finance Officer at the High Commission, informed Perry in September 1938 that ‘competitive applications have been invited for suitable designs from some twenty designer/modellers resident in New Zealand. In view of the association of Messrs P. Metcalfe and G. Kruger Gray with the New Zealand coinage, they have also been invited to submit designs’.<sup>34</sup> The letter of invitation and conditions still survive. A modest ‘prize’ of £30 was offered for the successful half-crown entry, and £25 each for the designs of the standard penny and halfpenny ‘to complete the series of distinctive New Zealand coins’. Competitors were allowed to submit any number of designs in the brief timeframe available between the date of invitation, 22 August 1938, and the closing date of 30 September. Each entry needed to be of actual coin size but could be

<sup>30</sup> Sutherland had argued this case at the previous meeting and explained that the half-crown would be compatible with a crown-cent decimal system. (Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 40<sup>th</sup> meeting, 27 September 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, Seventh Annual Report, 27 June 1938.

<sup>32</sup> Sutherland 1941, 277–8.

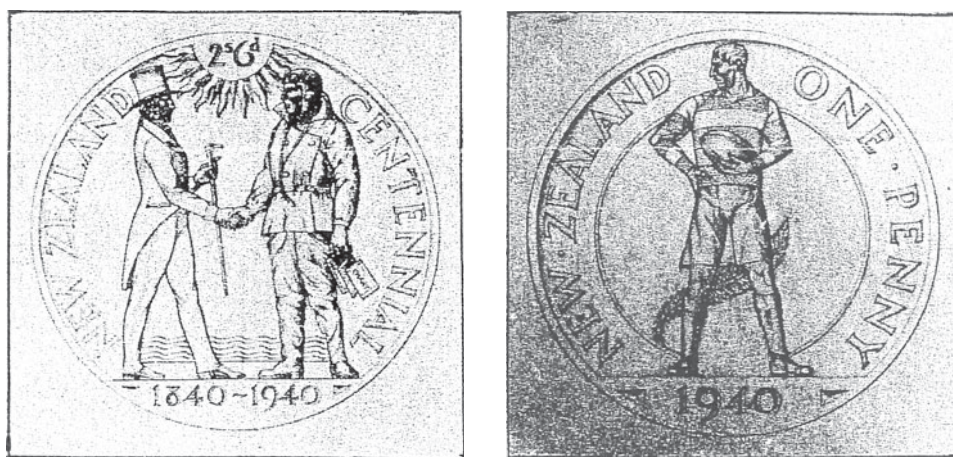
<sup>33</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 20/1714, Athol Mackay to William Perry, 16 February 1939.

<sup>34</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, R.M. Sunley to Perry, 12 September 1938.

supplemented by large-scale designs. No plaster models were required or perhaps even envisaged; indeed, the stipulation that ‘each design must be signed by a nom de plume only’ suggested that drawings alone were expected. The design of the half-crown ‘should be commemorative of the Centennial’ and inscribed ‘New Zealand Centennial: 1840–1940 Half-Crown’. In turn, the penny and halfpenny designs ‘should generally be distinctive of the Dominion or its associations and in keeping with the present series. The following lettering must be included: “New Zealand: One Penny (or half penny) 1940”’.<sup>35</sup>

The response rate is unknown, but surviving evidence suggests that at least five New Zealand-based artists entered the competition: James Berry, Thomas Hugh Jenkin, Leonard Cornwall Mitchell, H. Linley Richardson and Francis Shurrock, who were joined by Kruger Gray and Metcalfe in London. All the New Zealanders apart from Mitchell were first-generation migrants from England, while Jenkin, Richardson and Shurrock were experienced art instructors. Richardson, best known as a painter, had also designed several New Zealand stamps, including the acclaimed 1915 George V recess definitive set, which brought ‘a smack of the Penny Black and a foretaste of those pleasing Maori designs for border’.<sup>36</sup> In a letter to Sutherland written during sabbatical leave in London, Richardson stated that although he was too late – and inconveniently located – to meet the deadline for a centennial medal, he had ‘already submitted a design for the reverse of the halfcrown’. Sutherland and his fellow committee members would soon encounter it. The design ‘symbolised New Zealand as a virile youth, advancing over hills – surmounting difficulties – carrying a banner, with the words ‘New Zealand “Centennial 1840–1940”’. The sun and its rays shone in the background, ‘lightly modelled’. Richardson claimed that the figure was ‘very simply treated – the face is looking up’.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately his design was never published, but the verbal description suggests an ambitious, dramatically pictorial conception, which despite Richardson’s standing was evidently considered unsuitable for a successful coin design.

Two of Shurrock’s designs (Figs. 6–7), which survive as poor-quality photographs in a private collection, were reproduced in *Bench-Notes*, the newsletter of the New Zealand Contemporary Medallion Group, in 1998 and were incorrectly attributed to another Anglo-New Zealand artist, Christopher Perkins.<sup>38</sup> The half-crown design shows a top-hatted and frock-coated colonist of 1840 shaking hands with an aviator of 1940, beneath a stylised sun.



Figs. 6–7. Francis Shurrock, design for 1940 half-crown reverse and for 1940 penny reverse.

<sup>35</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, 22 August 1938. The invitation was issued by Mackay as ‘Secretary, N.Z. Centennial Coinage Committee’.

<sup>36</sup> Easton 1943, 226–7.

<sup>37</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, H. Linley Richardson to Sutherland, 2 October 1938.

<sup>38</sup> *Bench-Notes* 1998, 1.

The handshake motif provides an interesting variant on the Waitangi Crown, a surprising choice on Shurrock's part given the poor reception accorded to that coin. Equally remarkable is the penny design depicting a rugby player, with a large fern leaf motif pressed awkwardly against him. A near-identical figure would be replicated by Shurrock some twenty-six years later in his design for the 20 cent decimal reverse (Fig. 8). This design caused a public outcry when it was leaked to the press on the eve of its intended announcement in February 1966. A further design by Shurrock for the penny, depicting a full-length Maori *tekoteko* (human-like) figure, would again be recycled, not once but twice, for his 1949 Margaret Condliffe Memorial Award medal, as well as for another of the leaked decimal designs, the proposed 10 cent reverse.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 8 Francis Shurrock, Design for 20 cents reverse, 1965.

Although Jenkin and Berry were also unsuccessful as competitors for the coinage, their designs were adopted for the Numismatic Society of New Zealand Centennial Medal (Fig. 5). Despite a first prize of £20 being offered by the Society for the best design, according to Elliott the entries received were 'very disappointing' and lacked originality. However, the coinage design committee (on which Elliott sat), 'kindly consented to allow the Society ... to select one from those not being used by the Government'.<sup>40</sup> Jenkin benefited here, and was contacted by Sutherland who praised his design for the penny as 'a very attractive one'. It depicts the prow of a Maori *waka taua* (war canoe) manned by several warriors, and by the seashore stands a *punga* (tree-fern). Sutherland requested four alterations to be made, to the length of the *waka taua*, softer *punga* fronds, the substitution of 'CENTENNIAL' for 'ONE PENNY' and the rendition a 'rather more rugged' skyline.<sup>41</sup> These Jenkin provided, and his design was adopted for the obverse of the medal. For the reverse, a spirited design by Berry was used, depicting the 1938 ocean liner *QSMV Dominion Monarch*, 'the latest and most up-to-date of sea transport, on which the Dominion so much depends'. She was shown steaming out of port, together with a trans-Tasman Sea flying-boat overhead and tiny modern buildings in the background.<sup>42</sup> Central to the iconography of the medal was the theme of national progress, Jenkin's 'then' being answered by Berry's 'now'. This would be repeatedly highlighted in the forthcoming centennial celebrations.

No further coin designs by Jenkin were published, but Berry was luckier in having his 'trial' designs for the halfpenny, half-crown and penny reproduced in Sutherland's *Numismatic*

<sup>39</sup> Stocker 2000, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 50<sup>th</sup> meeting, 31 October 1938.

<sup>41</sup> Allan Sutherland Papers, Sutherland to T.H. Jenkin, 29 January 1939 (copy).

<sup>42</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 27 March 1939.

*History of New Zealand* (Figs. 9–11).<sup>43</sup> Reference was later made to them in J.R. Tye's lively monograph, *The Image Maker: The Art of James Berry* (1984), which states: 'In the design of these [coins] both James Berry and L.C. Mitchell were actively engaged, the honours all going to the latter. The rivalry between the two artists must have added a good deal of spice to the situation, and an incentive to produce their best work'.<sup>44</sup> Tye's reading surely flatters Berry. From the reproductions in Sutherland's book, the designs hardly seem like his 'best work'. The halfpenny fern-leaf appears a satisfactorily readable but uninteresting design; the half-crown, showing the Meeting House at Waitangi bisected by the Captain James Cook memorial obelisk at Gisborne, looks rather clumsy; while the penny, depicting Cook's *Endeavour*, is obviously derivative of Humphrey Paget's Imperial halfpenny reverse of 1937.



Figs. 9–11. James Berry, designs for 1940 halfpenny, half-crown and penny, 1940.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment proved to be the designs submitted by Kruger Gray and Metcalfe. Clearly the coinage committee felt similarly as neither artist – though vastly more experienced than any of their New Zealand-based competitors – was asked to resubmit designs for use on the centennial medal. Kruger Gray's commitment to the competition is evident in his letter to H.W.L. Evans, Superintendent at the Royal Mint, requesting confidential assistance for the photography of his designs, reduced to the actual coin size.<sup>45</sup> His proposed halfpenny (Fig. 12) depicts a geyser from the geothermal region of the central North Island, surely not the easiest object to render convincingly in relief. On either side of it are somewhat coy, miniaturised *hei-tiki* (ornamental greenstone pendants).<sup>46</sup> An alternative halfpenny depicts the head of a *taiaha*, a long-handled fighting staff, with dog-hair tassels. The eyes of the stylised head fail to convey any sense of fierce alertness; in turn, the inscription that bisects 'ZEA' and 'LAND' is decidedly awkward (Fig. 13). Somewhat more successful is the prow of a *waka taua* for Kruger Gray's proposed penny, although its *tauihu* (figure) collides a little uncomfortably with the inscription (Fig. 14). The motif was almost certainly a composite, derived from photographs of two different prows in Augustus Hamilton's *Maori Art* (1901).<sup>47</sup> Kruger Gray's best design is his half-crown map, which deftly incorporates the centenary dates and is impeccably rendered (Fig. 15). It nevertheless remains uninteresting and unenterprising, insufficiently celebratory of New Zealand's achievements.

While Kruger Gray's designs were perfunctory but competent, Metcalfe's were barely that. Very much the protégé of Johnson, his mentor's recent death severely impacted on Metcalfe's

<sup>43</sup> Sutherland 1941, 278.

<sup>44</sup> Tye 1984, 38.

<sup>45</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, George Kruger Gray to H.W.L. Evans, 12 October 1938.

<sup>46</sup> During the Parliamentary debate on the Coinage Bill in November 1933, C.H. Clinkard, the United Party MP for Rotorua, had facetiously suggested 'A geyser rampant' as a suitable reverse design (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 237 [1 November–22 December 1933], 74).

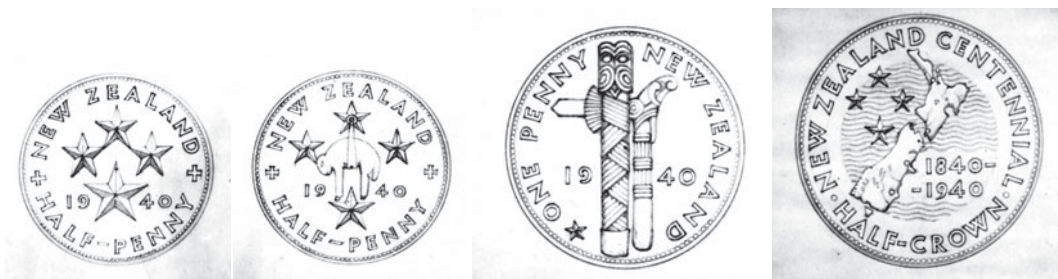
<sup>47</sup> Hamilton 1901, 48, pl. III. I owe this information to Roger Fyfe.





Figs. 12–15. Kruger Gray, two designs for 1940 halfpenny, design for 1940 penny and for 1940 half-crown.

creativity and inventiveness.<sup>48</sup> Only the previous year, evident from his George VI Coronation medal designs, Metcalfe had still been thriving. Now the numismatic stuffing had been knocked out of him; indeed, his biographer Philip Attwood describes his later work as ‘unfortunate’.<sup>49</sup> Metcalfe’s modernistic minimalism, so effective in his unadopted lower denomination designs for the 1933 coinage, looked decidedly banal in the 1939 Southern Cross halfpenny motif (Fig. 16). His alternative design bizarrely fuses the first and second quarters of the New Zealand coat of arms, the Southern Cross and the golden fleece (Fig. 17). The latter is suspended from the Gamma star and the outcome is not a coin for the squeamish. For the penny, Metcalfe unaccountably recycled what I have called ‘his most baffling and ineffective design’ for the 1933 coinage, originally a proposed shilling.<sup>50</sup> This shows a *toki pou tangata* (ceremonial hafted adze), together with a superimposed *whakapakoko rakau* (godstick), which a Maori *tohunga* (priest) would use to communicate with the gods (Fig. 18). The two objects have no obvious relationship with each other apart from their rarity and status. Finally, in the commemorative half-crown, like Kruger Gray, Metcalfe deployed a map design, but his is altogether busier, incorporating stylised waves (Fig. 19). The Southern Cross and dates are uncomfortably placed either side of the landforms, and the lettering is more crude and block-like than Kruger Gray’s. Despite this creative failure, technically Metcalfe still had much to offer and would play a crucial role in adapting and modelling Mitchell’s successful designs, as discussed below.



Figs. 16–19. Percy Metcalfe, two designs for 1940 halfpenny, design for 1940 penny and for 1940 half-crown.

### An embryonic halfpenny?

From the surviving entries, Mitchell’s appear the deserved winners. His halfpenny raises interesting reminders of the 1933 precedents by Metcalfe and Kruger Gray. Metcalfe had been the first to deploy the *hei-tiki* motif and Kruger Gray subsequently adapted it for trial designs of

<sup>48</sup> Forrester 2006, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Attwood 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Stocker 2005, 148.



Fig. 20. Kruger Gray, Model for proposed 1933 threepence.

the threepence (Fig. 20). Yet it was soon discarded: why? Opinions in 1933 had differed considerably about the appropriateness of the *hei-tiki*. Initially, it had been enthusiastically endorsed by Sir Thomas Wilford, the New Zealand High Commissioner in London. He considered it 'perfect' for a coin, stating that 'everybody in New Zealand knew the Tiki'.<sup>51</sup> This is confirmed not only in its traditional function as a neck ornament, but also by its use as a motif – what would later be called a logo – for a wide array of product labels, ranging from pale ale to casein to cigarettes.<sup>52</sup> Sutherland, however, had been firmly opposed to it, explaining to Johnson that 'The Maori tiki proposed by the artist ... 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 is worn as a charm. It has a significance that is inappropriate in these times!'<sup>53</sup> This had carried the day, with Coates forcefully telling Wilford: 'I desire to make it clear that the tiki is not approved'.<sup>54</sup> Sutherland's authority came from the first volume of Elsdon Best's monograph *The Maori* (1924), which variously likened the *hei-tiki* to a personified phallus, a 'fructifying symbol' and an embryo.<sup>55</sup> Such 'primitivist' interpretations enjoy less currency today, and instead the *hei-tiki* is more commonly regarded as a miniature memorial to ancestors – Tiki was the first man in Maori legend – or else as a generic distorted figure. Yet Sutherland's sensibilities are understandable, especially when the *hei-tiki* was being mooted for a coin design.<sup>56</sup>

When he actually saw the full range of submitted designs in late 1933, Sutherland was sufficiently pragmatic to recognise that the *hei-tiki* probably made a more successful coin than the crossed *mere* (hand clubs) adopted for the 1933 threepence. He admitted to Johnson that 'In a measure, I would have preferred the tiki to the mere' and even suggested that 'it is just possible that the tiki design, which was discarded, might attract the Minister [Coates] sufficiently' to be switched over 'for the balance of our threepenny pieces'.<sup>57</sup> Johnson understandably discouraged this, though the subsequent adoption of Mitchell's design for the halfpenny indicated the extent to which thinking had shifted. In his *Numismatic History of New Zealand*, Sutherland hedged his bets, saying that while its Maori associations made the *hei-tiki* 'a good characteristic design, ... the associative symbolism is doubtful. The *hei-tiki* has been variously described as a charm or symbol of fertility or vitality, and has been referred to as an embryo child which it resembles'. He concluded, somewhat ambiguously, that 'the half-penny is not a popular coin in New Zealand'.<sup>58</sup>

The coin itself (Fig. 3) bears a close resemblance to Mitchell's original large-scale coloured ink drawing, which had been submitted under the nom-de-plume of 'Taurus', the artist's star sign (Fig. 21). Minor improvements were, however, made by Metcalfe especially in the lettering and beading. When the design was shown to the Royal Mint Advisory Committee in June 1939, the latter suggested that it 'would be better if the Maori ornamentation on either side of the tiki were omitted or least rather reduced in strength of relief'. It is not clear whether the committee members inspected Mitchell's drawings, but they certainly saw Metcalfe's fresh rendition of them, a photograph of which was pasted into the Mint album (Fig. 22).<sup>59</sup> The chairman, Craig, undertook 'to consult with the artist' – presumably Metcalfe rather than

<sup>51</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 25/2, Royal Mint Advisory Committee, 79<sup>th</sup> meeting, 28 June 1933.

<sup>52</sup> Wolfe 1987, 41.

<sup>53</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 20/1265, Sutherland to Johnson, 14 August–7 September 1933.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Sutherland Papers, Gordon Coates to Thomas Wilford, 12 October 1933.

<sup>55</sup> Best 1924, I, 126, 294–6.

<sup>56</sup> For a recent discussion of *hei-tiki* see Beck 2010, 128–9. H.D. Skinner issued the first major challenge to Best in September 1932, a time very close to Sutherland's wavering opinions on the propriety of using the *hei-tiki* motif on a coin (Roger Fyfe, email to the author, 7 January 2011). However, in his *Numismatic History of New Zealand* (1941), Sutherland reiterated Best's embryonic interpretation. See Sutherland 1941, 279; Skinner 1932.

<sup>57</sup> PRO MINT 20/1266, Sutherland to Johnson, 5 January 1934 (copy).

<sup>58</sup> Sutherland 1941, 278–9.

<sup>59</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 7/43, 49.



Fig. 21. Mitchell, Drawing for 1940 halfpenny, 118 mm. PRO MINT 24/289.



Fig. 22. Metcalfe after Mitchell, 1940 penny and halfpenny. National Archives PRO MINT 7/43.

Mitchell – about the matter.<sup>60</sup> However, the New Zealand government order for 72,000 pieces that had been made four weeks previously was ‘urgent’, and this surely forestalled any last-minute changes.<sup>61</sup> Probably these were in any case aesthetically unnecessary, as the scroll-like patterning around the *hei-tiki* – a simplified form of *kowhaiwhai* (rafter pattern) of the *man-gopare* (hammerhead shark) design of no specific regional or tribal affiliation – successfully complements it, echoing the shape of the coin.<sup>62</sup> The design is neat, simple and direct, an effective and appropriate one for a coin of this denomination and scale. A *hei-tiki* minus the *kowhaiwhai*, as seen in Kruger Gray’s earlier trial, certainly suited a threepence but might have appeared somewhat stark on the larger halfpenny coin. The *hei-tiki* itself represents a marked refinement on Kruger Gray’s precedent, which has an uncomfortable head/body proportion. It probably reflects Mitchell’s greater familiarity with the motif as a Pakeha (European) New Zealander, although Elliott took some personal credit for improving it.<sup>63</sup> The figure is a very generic one, representing the common format with both hands placed on its thighs, as distinct from the rarer, older and probably less numismatically satisfactory type, with one hand to the mouth or chest, and the other to the thigh.

### The tui and the kowhai

Mitchell’s large-scale design for the penny reverse only survives as a pair of photographs in the Mint album. The subject is the tui, the much-loved New Zealand songbird, perched on a branch of a kowhai tree (Fig. 23). Like the *hei-tiki*, both bird and tree would have been instantly recognisable to most New Zealanders. Not only was such a theme suitable for a large coin of

<sup>60</sup> PRO MINT 25/2, RMAC, 104<sup>th</sup> meeting, 19 June 1939.

<sup>61</sup> PRO MINT 25/2, W.L. Whitaker, memorandum, 24 May 1939.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Neich, email to the author, 7 August 2006.

<sup>63</sup> When the coins were released, Elliott was reported as stating that the ‘tiki on the halfpenny [had] required some modification, and Sir James ... being a medical man ... was able to explain the symbolism of this design and to secure an accurate representation’ (*Dominion*, 9 January 1940). This does not necessarily contradict the Royal Mint Advisory Committee minutes of its meeting of 28 June 1939, which state that he was ‘very satisfied’ with the penny and halfpenny models. However, there is no reference in the Mint file to his earlier criticisms. (PRO MINT 25/2, as in n.58).





Fig. 23. Mitchell, Drawing for 1940 penny, 142 mm. National Archives PRO MINT 24/289 .

this denomination, but it also fitted the permutation of designs. Native birds featured on the proposed penny, the sixpence and the florin. These would alternate with Maori-related designs on the proposed halfpenny, the threepence, the shilling and, in its framing ornament, the standard half-crown. The original source of Mitchell's tui was almost certainly the illustration by J.G. Keulemans to the second edition of Walter Buller's classic *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* (1888), where a pair of them, a juvenile and adult, are depicted perching on a kowhai branch (Fig. 24).<sup>64</sup> The attitude of the adult is close to Mitchell's design. But a more immediate – and likely – source was *The 'Three Castles' Book of New Zealand Birds* (1930), whose illustrations were crude derivatives of Keulemans.<sup>65</sup> Sponsored by the tobacco manufacturers W.D. and H.O. Wills, this popular and low-priced pair of volumes was published by Coulls, Somerville and Wilkie. Coincidentally, Mitchell was successively employed as an artist by both of these companies during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>66</sup>

The main problem with Mitchell's design lay in its attractively pictorial qualities. It was more obviously an illustration than it was a coin. Mitchell was aware of this; on the back of one of the photographs he wrote: 'Have kept detail down as much as possible but if necessary further elimination could be made'.<sup>67</sup> Certainly the design posed a greater challenge for Metcalfe in its translation from an ink and gouache drawing into a successful model than the essentially flat and unproblematic halfpenny. Several years earlier, Johnson had warned against such hazards:

More exasperating still are the clients who insist upon naturalistic and even photographic exactitude in the reproduction of... the birds or beasts or flowers of their country ... To the naturalistic school belong also those who cannot understand how a drawing, picture or photograph in the flat ... cannot be exactly reproduced in relief upon a coin... often so small in diameter as to render the reproduction of minute details impossible.<sup>68</sup>

In October 1938, well before the outcome of the competition was known, Perry warned that:

A design which is attractive on paper may be quite unattractive on a coin, and specially so after ... wear. It is not always the case that an artist who draws an attractive design can also can produce that design satisfactorily in

<sup>64</sup> Buller 1888, 51–4, pl. X.

<sup>65</sup> *'Three Castles'* 1930, 1, pl. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Thompson 2003, 132.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives PRO MINT 24/289.

<sup>68</sup> *Annual Report* 1932, 13.





Fig. 24. J.G. Keulemans, *Tui*, in Walter Buller, *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* (London, 1888), pl. X.

the form of a plaster model ... Moreover there is likely to be some difficulty in the artist modeller interpreting in plaster another artist's design.<sup>69</sup>

When not a single model materialised, Perry surely felt vindicated:

As regards the design for the penny while the drawing is attractive there are certain points of difficulty which present themselves in interpreting the design in metal. The high lights particularly on the feathers in front of the neck of the bird could not be made to show up in metal in the same way as in a drawing. Then too the flimsiness of much of the foliage shown as a background to the bird cannot be reproduced with the same effect on a coin ... any attempt to do so would prevent that clear and sharp definition of detail which is so essential on all coins.<sup>70</sup>

The Advisory Committee echoed this, suggesting that 'the penny design might be improved by strengthening the feathers on the bird, particularly around the neck and on the wings'.<sup>71</sup> Metcalfe's adaptations of the drawing, scarcely apparent other than in the lettering of the halfpenny, are far more obvious in the penny (Fig. 22). The feathers are indeed more robust, yet their differing textures are remarkably true to Mitchell's conception. Metcalfe also rendered the foliage in far bolder relief than in Mitchell's delicate drawing. To the right of the tui, the

<sup>69</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Perry to Sunley, 27 October 1938 (copy).

<sup>70</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Perry to Sunley, 8 March 1939 (copy).

<sup>71</sup> PRO MINT 25/2, as in n.57.

twigs are simplified and the two clusters of blooms have been reduced to one. While Metcalfe's creativity might have declined, his technical proficiency remained outstanding. It was thus not surprising that the High Commissioner, William Jordan, took pleasure in approving the penny and halfpenny designs when they were submitted to him in late June 1939.<sup>72</sup>

### A progressive coin?

The design of the half-crown posed the greatest problems for Mackay and fellow committee members. Some four months after the competition closing date, he fast-forwarded photographs of the penny and halfpenny to the Mint, admitting that 'we are still having trouble with the half-crown'.<sup>73</sup> Mitchell's design only received signed approval from Michael Joseph Savage, Prime Minister of New Zealand, on 9 May,<sup>74</sup> and it would take several weeks to reach London. In late May, 100,800 pieces were ordered of a coin whose design was yet to be sighted at the Mint.<sup>75</sup> Perry warned Sunley that 'delivery of any of the coins will be impossible until long after November if it is necessary that specimens of the coins should first be sent to New Zealand for approval'.<sup>76</sup> The Royal Mint Advisory Committee was only in a position to give its verdicts on the penny and halfpenny, and it was not until 21 June, two days after the meeting, that the designs for the half-crown, taking the form of a large scale coloured drawing and a coin-sized reduction (the latter now lost) reached the Mint (Fig. 25).<sup>77</sup> Metcalfe was obliged to work hastily on the half-crown model, while the High Commission likewise needed to provide rapid endorsement were the coin to be minted and shipped over in time for its release early in the centenary year. No counsel was available from the Advisory Committee which had prorogued for the summer. Fortunately, help was at hand from Elliott, who was on a visit to London at the time. Metcalfe's model was inspected on 12 July, when Elliott 'expressed himself entirely satisfied with it except on one point'. He wished to have 'indication of the pattern in the design' made more evident 'on the skirt of the figure' [*sic*]. In response, Craig explained to Jordan that 'the modification of the skirt by the introduction of what in fact, would look like horizontal lines, would almost inevitably in the coin link up with the horizontals of the structures in the background, and produce the effect of the figure being severed in two. This would certainly reduce its boldness'.<sup>78</sup> In the event, Jordan sided with Elliott: 'I fully agree ... that if possible some indication of the pattern of the skirt should appear in the design as finally approved, while at the same time realising that it may not be practicable to give effect to that desire'. He was willing to approve the design, but on the understanding that the Mint 'would not proceed with the production of the coin until after the result of the proposed experiments ... have been submitted to Sir James and to me'.<sup>79</sup>

Plaster models of each denomination have been preserved in the Royal Mint Museum (Figs. 26–28). The penny and halfpenny correlate with the eventual coins, reflecting the fact that the sequence of master tool production was straightforward and required no last-minute alterations. The half-crown was another matter, and the model reveals the source of Jordan's and Elliott's evident dissatisfaction. The pattern of the *piupiu* (or 'skirt') is emphatically vertical, conveying an altogether more classical, fluted appearance that is alien to Maori precedent. Two days later, the Mint proceeded with two trial dies, the first to be 'reproduced exactly' from Metcalfe's model as a safeguard, while the second would have 'additional pattern on the skirt on the figure, as shown on the original drawing received from New Zealand'.<sup>80</sup> In mid-August,

<sup>72</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, William Jordan to J. McCutcheon Craig, 28 June 1939.

<sup>73</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, as in n.33.

<sup>74</sup> PRO MINT 24/289, 9 May 1939.

<sup>75</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, as in n.58.

<sup>76</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Perry to Sunley, 24 May 1939 (copy).

<sup>77</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Sunley to Perry, 20 June 1939.

<sup>78</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Craig to Jordan, 12 July 1939. The 'skirt' is properly a *piupiu* or flaxen kit with its fibre exposed, causing geometrical patterns to emerge. See Te Ara 2011, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/flax-and-flax-working/2> (accessed 5 January 2011).

<sup>79</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Jordan to Craig, 17 July 1939.



Fig. 25. Mitchell, Drawing for 1940 half-crown, 142 mm. National Archives PRO MINT 24/289.



Fig. 26. Metcalfe after Mitchell, plaster model for half-crown, 225 mm, Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant.



Fig. 27. Metcalfe after Mitchell, plaster model for penny, 220 mm, Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant.



Fig. 28. Metcalfe after Mitchell, plaster model for halfpenny, 225 mm, Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant.

Perry sent Metcalfe an electrotype made from the revised matrix of the half-crown, telling him that it had proved considerably easier to make the requested pattern modifications on the skirt using this in preference to the punch, from which the engraver can remove detail but not normally add anything new. He told Metcalfe: 'I have shown this impression to Mr Craig, and we all feel that the pattern has been done well and will probably be acceptable to the High Commissioner'.<sup>81</sup> After Metcalfe had cabled back confirmation that the pattern was excellent,

<sup>80</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Whitaker, Works Instruction, 19 July 1939.



Craig could now report to Elliott that ‘the steps taken to produce a pattern in the dress of the central figure ... appear to be successful’.<sup>82</sup> Elliott in turn expressed himself ‘very pleased indeed that the Maori design can now be shown on the *piu piu* or skirt of the Maori figure ... may I say how pleasing it was to see the trouble & skill employed by you and Mr Metcalf [*sic*] & others in this work’.<sup>83</sup> Authorising the Mint to proceed, Jordan offered his congratulations and thanks for ‘producing a result in accordance with the wishes of my Government’.<sup>84</sup>

Surviving visual evidence suggests that while the Mint probably overestimated the likely impairment of the design caused by the addition of horizontal banding, Elliott’s undoubtedly commendable role in the affair was almost certainly magnified in turn. In July 1941, he was thanked by Anderson, his successor as president of the New Zealand Numismatic Society, for his ‘assistance in the issue’ of the penny and halfpenny, while ‘the least that can be said’ for the half-crown is ‘that the design is better than it might have been had Sir James had no say in it’.<sup>85</sup> In a report published in the *New Zealand Numismatic Journal* of 1966, his role assumed a near heroic dimension:

In 1939, at the suggestion of the society, Sir James Elliott ... was given authority by the Treasury to discuss the designs with the Mint officials during a visit to England. He was able to explain to the Deputy Master that the changes made by the Mint not only changed the character of the designs, but that the new versions were not the designs which the New Zealand public wanted. In spite of protests that the original designs ‘could not be done’, the forceful and persuasive Sir James talked the Mint into trying. The results are well-known, and the Mint acknowledged that they had done what they had believed impossible.<sup>86</sup>

At almost every turn, this later account imparts an exaggerated ‘nationalism’ to the story. While Elliott had seen the models of the penny and halfpenny, according to the Advisory Committee minutes, he was ultimately ‘very satisfied with them’.<sup>87</sup> The only coin affected by alterations that caused any significant difference of opinion was the half-crown. However, the changed ‘character of the designs’ was, as we have seen, confined to the rendering of the banded *piupiu*; an enhancement if hardly a dramatic one. Elliott’s personality might well have been ‘forceful and persuasive’ (he and the ‘protesting’ Johnson would have been well matched!), yet the tone of the surviving documentation indicates the polite reasonableness of all concerned. Both parties were operating pragmatically in a tight timeframe on what turned out to be the eve of the outbreak of war. ‘The New Zealand public’ was not invoked in any surviving correspondence until the coins were released and even then its reaction, again mediated by wartime, appeared to be one of muted acceptance. Potential tensions between clients and the Mint had been addressed by Johnson in his Annual Report of 1932, and the differences in opinion encountered seven years later nicely confirm his point:

Difficulties ... naturally arise and the client, especially when he represents a great foreign country or a Dominion with strong national feelings and a critical public to appease, must, above all things, be suited. The various problems as they present themselves give zest to our work at the Mint and keep us up to the mark, and there is a real satisfaction in surmounting them.<sup>88</sup>

What then of the half-crown design itself? The Proclamation of 23 December 1939 provides the iconographic key: ‘... the figure of a Maori woman imposed upon a background showing the sun overhead with (a) a Maori Wharepuni [meeting house] and Puhara [look-out stage] on her right; (b) modern buildings on her left; (c) the inscription “New Zealand Centennial Half-crown” [*sic*] within the border; and (d) below on a scroll the dates “1840–1940”’.<sup>89</sup> The cabbage tree and native grass by the *wharepuni* were evidently too unimportant to be mentioned.

<sup>81</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Perry to Percy Metcalfe, 14 August 1939 (copy). Tin impressions of both designs were presented to Elliott, which he then conveyed to New Zealand Numismatic Society. The impressions were still recorded as being in the Society’s collection in 1966 but their present location is unknown (O’Shea 1966, 10).

<sup>82</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Craig to James Elliott, 17 August 1939 (copy).

<sup>83</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Elliott to Craig, 18 August 1939.

<sup>84</sup> PRO MINT 20/1714, Jordan to Craig, 23 August 1939.

<sup>85</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 71<sup>st</sup> meeting, 28 July 1941.

<sup>86</sup> O’Shea 1966, 10.

<sup>87</sup> PRO MINT 25/2, as in n.57.

<sup>88</sup> *Annual Report* 1932, 13.

<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Gazette* 1939, 3586. ‘Puhara’ is more usually rendered as ‘pourewa’.



Mitchell's artistic versatility is evident in his use of a similar central standing figure, the more Pakeha-looking if dark-haired national personification of 'Zealandia' in his New Zealand Centennial Exhibition certificate of attendance (Fig. 29),<sup>90</sup> together with the Maori female figure, arms fully raised, who dominates his exhibition poster and sticker.<sup>91</sup> In all three designs the backcloth of contemporary architecture looms large. Sunrays shine in the coin and the certificate, while floodlights fulfil that function in the poster and sticker. The half-crown is the most obviously Art Deco coin that New Zealand issued, both in its formal qualities – the symmetry and the sunrays are typical characteristics of the style – but also in its embodiment of progress and modernity.

The 1940 celebrations, at their height when the coin was issued, reflected much the same



Fig. 29. Mitchell, Certificate of Attendance, 1940 New Zealand Centennial Exhibition (© Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, MS-3044/009).

thing. Writing of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition, the historian Jock Phillips observed that 'pioneer hardships were to be displayed as much to show how far New Zealanders had travelled, as to imbue an admiration for the nation's forefathers and mothers. A Whiggish view of settlers conquering a "virgin" land with hard work and modern technology lay behind much of the centennial propagandas'.<sup>92</sup> Elliott himself published a historical novel, *The Hundred Years*, in late 1939, whose last page stated: 'The material progress of this country has been prodigious ... This Centenary celebration is a memorial of the past and an incentive for

<sup>90</sup> Renwick 2004, 20. The certificate is reproduced on p. 23 with no mention of Mitchell. See however 'Centennial Record: Artistic Certificates', *Evening Post*, 30 January 1940. Archbishop Giovanni Panico, the Roman Catholic Church Apostolic Delegate to Australia and New Zealand, enthused: 'I shall treasure the beautiful certificate of attendance as a constant reminder of the courteous kindness of the executive and officials and as a souvenir of a morning of absorbing interest' ('"Mirror of Progress": Legate's Impressions', *Evening Post*, 31 January 1940).

<sup>91</sup> An example of Mitchell's poster is in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

<sup>92</sup> Phillips 2004, 277.

the future. We face it with hope'.<sup>93</sup> Maori made their distinctive contributions to the centennial through the celebration of their traditional arts and culture and of their progress from a stone-age civilisation to modern New Zealanders. Mitchell's Maori woman, with her expansive body language, mirrors this. Her flaxen *piupiu*, rendered with its geometrical patterns at Elliott's insistence, appears traditional, but its close proximity to 1939 Pakeha hemlines makes it slightly too short for historical authenticity. She is reminiscent rather more of a performer for the pan-tribal Ngati Poneke Young Maori Club, founded in 1937, than she is of a traditional Maori maiden. Hitched to her waist is a pair of *poi*, balls attached to a plaited cord and used in the choreography. The *pari* (bodice) is surely a concession to Christian and colonial perceptions of modesty and civilisation.<sup>94</sup> With schoolboy humour, Andersen observed to Society members that 'the brassiere was as yet undreamed of by the Hinemoas of Aotearoa'.<sup>95</sup>

Was Andersen right to complain that the coin was 'not all that might be wished'? He himself appeared ambivalent. Initially he had greeted the half-crown as '... effective. The original design ... contained a plethora of detail, which has been progressively shorn away, and the final result was satisfactory'. It was, he implied, 'truly representative of the country'.<sup>96</sup> A year or two later, as we have seen, he was more damning. In a letter that he wrote to Craig in March 1940, he struck a tactful medium:

Every time I look at our tui penny, I compliment the Mint on the beauty of the coin: the half-penny is good too, and so is the half-crown, but personally I do not care so much for the design of that coin, though it was the best we could do with the designs submitted. I am afraid you must have thought us hard to please seeing the trouble we occasioned in the earlier issue of silver coins, but you made such a good job of those that we have never ceased admiring them, and we have heard no complaints from the public either.<sup>97</sup>

Press coverage of the half-crown is neutrally descriptive and closely depends on the wording of the Proclamation. However, the *Dominion* noted how 'Several people have, at first glance, mistaken the Maori watch-tower for the Exhibition tower, but this is a mistake likely to be made only through cursory examination'.<sup>98</sup> Sutherland struck a more critical note in his *Numismatic History of New Zealand*, when he claimed that 'The standing figure, facing, is usually unsuitable for a coin design. The result in this case illustrates the ability of the Royal Mint to adapt a design that in many respects contravenes the cardinal principles of an effective circulation coin design'.<sup>99</sup> Given the carefully detached and descriptive tone manifest elsewhere in his book, this seems harsh. During the difficult selection process, had Sutherland argued against Mitchell and in favour of the design by his friend Berry, subsequently reproduced in his volume?

When the drawing and the coin are compared, Sutherland's praise of the Mint's adaptation of the design does appear justified. The problems encountered with the illustrational qualities of the penny recurred in the half-crown, with architectural detail posing a far greater challenge than the kowhai branch in the need to convey accuracy. The amusing confusion between the *puhara* and Edmund Anscombe's exhibition tower reflects precisely this.<sup>100</sup> Yet what emerges is the careful fidelity to Mitchell's conception, and at the same time, the convincingly compressed perspective necessary for a successful coin. This applies particularly to the detail of the modern building nearest the figure, as well as to the lettering and its spacing. Mitchell must take credit for the word 'CENTENNIAL', centrally placed over the head of the figure.

<sup>93</sup> Elliott 1939, 320. The novel was favourably reviewed in the *Evening Post*, 20 January 1940.

<sup>94</sup> I owe these observations to Patricia Wallace.

<sup>95</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, as in n.81. For the legend of the beautiful maiden Hinemoa see Te Ara 2011, [www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/hinemoa-legend-of/1](http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/hinemoa-legend-of/1) (accessed 5 January 2011). 'Aotearoa', originally meaning the North Island only, is the most widely used Maori name for New Zealand.

<sup>96</sup> Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand 2005, 59<sup>th</sup> meeting, 30 October 1939.

<sup>97</sup> MINT 3887/37, Royal Mint Museum, Llantrisant, Johannes Andersen to Craig, 30 March 1940. Andersen went on to ask whether the tui and the kowhai ('our favourite bird and our favourite tree') on the penny might be rendered in higher relief. In his reply, Craig explained that 'a ghost or shadow' would be produced on the opposite side of a coin of this size were it given a higher relief. He also noted that the recent reverses 'were by no means easy designs to render in coin.' (PRO MINT 3887/37, Craig to Andersen, 24 May 1940).

<sup>98</sup> *Dominion*, 11 January 1940.

<sup>99</sup> Sutherland 1941, 278.

<sup>100</sup> For the architecture of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition see Toolmath 2004.

This, together with the dates on the ribbon below, admirably coheres, underscoring the commemorative significance of the coin. Less comfortable is the dislocation between the central, symmetrical figure and the Maori buildings, which appear to rise up to the left of the coin. The relationship between positive and negative space is likewise a little uneasy, the modern buildings appearing chock-a-block, whereas a fairly sizeable empty space appears on the left. Perhaps, though, this could convey the urgency of modern, urbanised New Zealand, contrasted with the romantic expanses of the Maori land of Aotearoa. The swift disappearance of the commemorative half-crown from circulation, already noted by Sutherland in 1941, further testifies to the coin's attractiveness to the public.<sup>101</sup> This contrasts with the unpopularity of the Waitangi Crown, even if this had been exacerbated by the cost premium on that coin.

## Conclusion

Although the centennial half-crown in particular appears a highly apposite signifier of an emblematic moment in New Zealand history, no mention is made of it – nor indeed of any other 1940 coin – in William Renwick's edited volume, *Creating A National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial* (2004).<sup>102</sup> As with the coinage, so with its artist. Mitchell's sole obituary notice in September 1971 carried the headline 'NZ's Top Stamp Designer Dies', again without reference to the coins.<sup>103</sup> Alan and Frank Mitchell, who were both schoolboys in 1940, primarily recall their father's designs of stamps and posters.<sup>104</sup> He did not make a point of talking about the coins, so they claim, and here he makes a graphic contrast to the lively, bumptious and entrepreneurial James Berry. Subsequent public demands for the retention of the 1940 penny and halfpenny designs when their proposed decimal replacements appeared so unsatisfactory surely constitute a tribute to Leonard Cornwall Mitchell and his role in completing the New Zealand change.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sutherland 1941, 278.

<sup>102</sup> Renwick, 2004. In his 'Afterword', Jock Phillips does however mention the centennial medal (Phillips 2004, 277).

<sup>103</sup> *Evening Post*, 23 September 1971.

<sup>104</sup> Alan Mitchell and Frank Mitchell, recorded interview with the author, Wellington, 21 May 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Stocker 2000, 124–5. For Mitchell's designs for the 1967 decimal coinage reverses see Stocker 2000, 132.

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