

News story: First female chief appointed to Royal Mint in its one thousand year history

The Royal Mint today appointed Anne Jessopp as its new chief executive and Deputy Master of the Mint. She will lead work to provide Britain with its cutting-edge secure currency and will also develop the commemorative coin and bullion arm of the business.

On a visit to the Royal Mint, the Exchequer Secretary officially confirmed Anne Jessopp's appointment – the first female to take up the role in the Royal Mint's 1,100 year history.

Speaking of her new appointment, the Deputy Master of the Mint, Anne Jessopp said:

I am delighted to be appointed to lead this unique and important British organisation. The Royal Mint has an impressive history of over 1,100 years and its longevity is due to its ability to adapt as society changes. This was never truer than today, as we reinterpret The Royal Mint for the 21st century, building on the values that have been at the heart of the organisation throughout our history – authenticity, security, precious metals, craftsmanship and design.

I have had the privilege to work for The Royal Mint for almost 10 years and it is testament to the great colleagues and opportunities I have had, that I have been able to develop the skills that enable me to take on this role.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Robert Jenrick welcomed the appointment and said:

Anne Jessopp brings a wealth of expertise to this role. With her decade of experience at the Royal Mint, I am confident she will ensure the UK continues to have the most secure currency in the world, and our coins are loved and collected the world over.

It may have taken over 1,000 years but the Mint is now finally led by a woman, and I am certain Anne will do a great job.

What does the Deputy Master of the Mint do?

As chief executive of the Royal Mint, Anne will be tasked with running the Great British institution which produces up to 90 million coins every week. At the top of her in-tray will be overseeing the introduction of the new 50 pence coin, announced last week, to mark the centenary celebrations of women's suffrage.

Her official position as Deputy Master of the Mint is one that is steeped in history. Her first ceremonial role will be to lead the annual Trial of the Pyx.

First held in 1282, the Trial of the Pyx tests the integrity of the nation's coins, ensuring that they are the proper weight and size, and contain the right amount of precious metals. Every February, coins of each denomination struck by the Royal Mint are selected at random and locked away in the Pyx chests.

In a ceremony, which has not changed since before Henry VIII's reign, the Deputy Master of the Mint brings these chests to London's Goldsmiths' Hall, where the coins are checked by an independent jury. The Jury consists of leaders from the financial world and six assayers from the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths who, wearing traditional red robes, put the coins to the test.

After two months of rigorous testing, the trial reconvenes and the Queen's Remembrancer asks the Jury for its verdict. In May, this verdict will be given in the presence of the Deputy Master of The Royal Mint and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (or a representative).

Remarkably, the history books reveal that if the coins fail the test, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is the ceremonial Master of the Mint, risks losing a hand as punishment.

It should be made clear that in the trial's long history, 94 Minters have had their right hands cut off by order of the King. However, this has not happened for hundreds of years.

Notes to editors:

- One of the most famous Masters of the Mint, before it was made a political position was Sir Isaac Newton, who had previously held the position between 1700-27.