



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

# 'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

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*What have you all been up to? Any chat, photos, news, recent acquisitions etc. by members for future issues please!*

## REMEMBER, REMEMBER . . .

**CERTAIN CALENDAR DATES** in the year are always remembered and celebrated with affection such as Christmas Day, New Year's Day and patron saints days. Although another is remembered and marked for a very different reason, that date is November 5th.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century there was still a deep religious divide between Protestants and Catholics and rumour and suspicion were rife. With the accession of King James I, who was a staunch Protestant, any hopes the Catholic community had of securing greater religious tolerance soon faded. This provoked a movement to replace James with his nine year old daughter Elizabeth as a Catholic head of state.

A plot was hatched to assassinate King James along with all his politicians and inner circle by blowing up Parliament when the King and his entourage were in attendance. The plotters, led by Robert Catesby, included a certain Guy Fawkes who was given responsibility for secretly placing explosives in the undercroft of the Palace of Westminster. The assassination attempt was revealed to Lord Monteagle in an anonymous letter received on October 26th 1605. During a subsequent search of the undercroft of the Government Chamber on the evening of November 4th, Fawkes was discovered guarding 36 barrels of gunpowder, which would have been enough to reduce the whole building to rubble. Fawkes was arrested. Most of the other conspirators fled from London once they learned of the plot's discovery. Some tried to enlist support and make a stand against the authorities at Holbeche House. After a short battle Robert Catesby was shot and killed. On January 27th 1606 the surviving plotters, including Guy Fawkes were tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

Of all the people initially involved in the conspiracy Guy Fawkes is the one remembered to this day. Fawkes (aka Guido Fawkes) was born and educated in York. He converted to Catholicism when he went to fight for Catholic Spain in the war against Protestant Dutch reformers in the Low Countries. Fawkes even travelled to Spain to seek support for a Catholic rebellion in England, without success. Ironically, immediately before his execution on January 31st 1606 he fell from the scaffold, where he was to be hanged, and broke his neck; thus saving him from the agony of his gruesome sentence. His name became synonymous with the 'Gunpowder Plot'; an event which has been commemorated in the UK almost every year with fireworks and a bonfire, since the foiling of the conspiracy on November 5th 1605.



James I sixpence dated 1605. Second coinage, i.m. Rose



Dutch silver medal (circa 1605) Commemorating the 'Gunpowder Plot' discovery and the expulsion of Jesuits from Holland



Medals in both silver and bronze were struck in Holland commemorating the discovery of the conspiracy in England and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Holland. The obverse depicts a snake amongst lilies and roses, symbolizing Jesuit intrigue. The reverse has the *tetragrammaton* (the name of God in Hebrew) in a circle of thorns, with the Latin inscription 'NON DORMISTI ANTISTES IACOBI (You, the keeper of James, have not slept). Silver coins of James I dated 1605 are popular for obvious reasons, yet are not particularly scarce. Shillings and smaller denominations, which are undated but with the initial mark of a lis or rose, can be dated to 1605/6. In 2005 the Royal Mint issued a commemorative £2 piece marking the 400th anniversary of the event.

## WILL THE NEW £20 NOTE BE KNOWN AS A 'TURNER'?

**Some months ago** the Governor of the Bank of England unveiled the new polymer £20 note featuring the artist J.M.W. Turner. This addition to the range of sophisticated polymer banknotes has advanced security features, making it the most counterfeit-proof banknote yet produced.



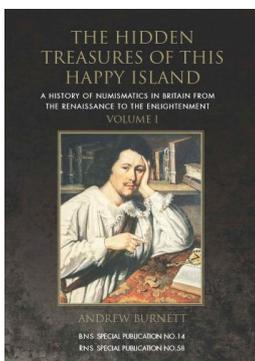
The note now has two clear windows and a two-colour foil, devices built in to prevent even the most skilled of forgers from making a really believable copy.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was one of England's greatest and most innovative artists, best known for his romantic landscapes and the almost expressionistic rendering of light, colour and atmosphere. The portrait of Turner chosen for the banknote is from a self portrait painted in 1799, when the artist was just 24 years of age.

With over 2 billion £20 notes already in circulation, replacing them will be no mean feat of production. The new polymer notes, if laid end-to-end, would stretch around the circumference of the world almost seven times and weigh 1,780 tonnes! Some other interesting facts about the new note are: The shape of the large window in the note is based on the shape of the fountains in Trafalgar Square and a smaller see-through window in the bottom corner of the note is based on Tintern Abbey. There is a metallic hologram, which changes between the words 'Twenty' and 'Pounds' when the note is tilted. Also a silver foil patch that has a three-dimensional image of the Coronation Crown.

This note is the first to have the signature of Sarah John, the Bank's current Chief Cashier. She is quoted as saying "Moving the £20 note to polymer marks a major step forward in our fight against counterfeiting. I am very grateful to everyone across the cash industry who has made this transition possible and I hope the public enjoy using their new Turner £20 notes. Ms John is also only the third woman to be promoted to the prestigious position of Chief Cashier in the Bank's history, the first being Merlyn Lowther, who signed £5 and £10 and £20 notes until 2003. The old paper £20 notes had, by comparison, a rather limited lifespan before they were withdrawn. The new polymer notes are almost indestructible by normal usage and circulation and the expected lifespan is predicted to be over double that of their paper counterparts.

Times and technology move on, but old habits die hard. Throughout our history denominations of money have earned affectionate epithets such as 'Tanner' for a sixpence, 'Bob' for a shilling and 'Joey' for a silver fourpence (later transferred to the threepence). Will we carry on this tradition by christening this new £20 a 'Turner'? Of course such a nickname, if it gained popularity, might be too easily confused with 'tenner' and could create problems. Polymer banknotes do have their pros and cons, especially with bank staff, but given the world's present viral pandemic the greatest problem posed by shiny-surface polymer is the proven fact that Coronavirus can stay live and contagious on such a surface far longer than on paper. So, will this new £20 note earn an affectionate nickname or one born out of grief? Only time will tell.



## RNS SPECIAL PUBLICATION No.58

The Royal Numismatic Society has now published its latest in a series of special publications. 'The Hidden Treasures of this Happy Island' by Andrew Burnett is a history of numismatics in Britain, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. The books provide for the first time a truly comprehensive account of the collecting and study of coins in Britain from 1500 to 1750. In 3 Volumes, hardback. RRP. £150. (£95 to RNS and BNS members). With a total of 380 illustrations and

over 1800 pages these three hefty volumes are worthy of any bookshelf. Available from Spink. ISBN: 0-901405-36-1.

## NOT FAKING IT

Graham Jones

Tracing the origins of a hobby or interest is seldom clear. I recall from a primary school age I had an interest in history and crafts. In an age when the internet did not exist and learning resources were limited there seemed more of a mystery to how and why things were made. Then, virtually every small town had an old antique or curiosity shop which was full of fascinating memorabilia. This quickly led to me collecting coins, stamps, medals and militaria etc. all items, which in those days, appeared to be thoroughly out of fashion and could be bought for pocket-money prices. Fast forward a few years; through teaching college and my own foreign travels, I alighted on a career in the Police. I spent time in various police departments, but was particularly drawn to work in the Fraud Department. Investigating how forgers how forgers worked and how items were faked necessitated forensics and this gave me a technical insight into this murky world. For example, looking at the work of the Bolton forger Shaun Greenhalgh; had he not turned to a life of crime could have been one of the best restorers in the business. Many of the tools and techniques employed in forgery, restoration and museum conservation are very similar and it wasn't long before I had learnt enough about these techniques to put them to good use in restoration projects. I first started work on my own collections and then progressed to helping other collectors and dealers with various restoration projects.

It's an interest where you never stop learning and the reward is when you manage to restore an item for the owner, who thought it was lost forever, or conserve something which will be enjoyed by future generations. Restoration and conservation is definitely not about faking it.

## COIN QUIZ No.7

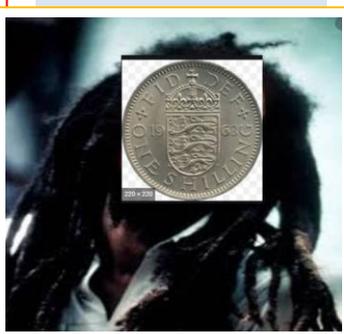
- QUESTION 1. What is meant by a 'Bale Mark' on E.I.C. coins?
- QUESTION 2. What is meant by the heraldic term 'Triquetra'?
- QUESTION 3. Which country issued 'Bullet' money?
- QUESTION 4. Which English silver coin was popularly used to play the game of Shovel-board?
- QUESTION 5. In what year was the Royal Numismatic Society founded?
- QUESTION 6. What deity is depicted on the reverse of an Indian 'Ramataka' temple token?
- QUESTION 7. What year was the British Numismatic Society founded?

### ANSWERS (Quiz No.6)

- Q1. A Spanish dollar (piece-of-eight) used in Australia. The centre being cut out to use as small change. Made official coin in 1813.
- Q2. The 'Galley Halfpence' minted originally in Genoa and imported by Italian merchants, known as Galley Men.
- Q3. A Pollard is a term used to describe a base silver Continental coin imitating a penny of Edward I, but with a bare head.
- Q4. Pinchbeck metal is a form of cheap brass, mainly of copper with a small proportion of zinc. It was invented by Christopher Pinchbeck in the eighteenth century.
- Q5. 'PLN' or PLON is an abbreviation of Pecunia Londinium (money of London).
- Q6. Coins issued by Lord Baltimore dated 1659 for use in his Maryland, America plantation.
- Q7. English hammered gold was officially demonetized in 1733.
- Q8. Hard Times tokens are American political medalets, issued as temporary currency from about 1832-1844
- Q9. The film is 'Sixth Sense' a famous supernatural psychological thriller (1999) starring Bruce Willis
- Q10. The famous Western film is 'A Fist Full of Dollars' a Spaghetti Western film (1964) starring Clint Eastwood.



QUESTION 8.  
Name the famous singer,  
(the coin is the clue)



QUESTION 9.  
Who designed the obverse of the famous 1821 and 1822 George IV 'George & Dragon' crowns?

## LATEST EBAY CAUTION

Ever since eBay started in the UK back in 1999 it has been plagued with fakes and forgeries being offered in all categories. Of course Graham Jones mentioned this in some detail in a previous article. He also mentioned the Forum Coins list of known offenders, but this is not finite, as forgers simply change their eBay callsign and continue operating. The latest culprits seem to be those based in Poland, Greece, Cyprus and Romania. They are specializing in extremely rare Anglo Saxon coins and Ancient Greek coins as well as sought-after Roman, such as the 'tribute penny' of the emperor Tiberius. Not forgetting the UK's homegrown fraudsters; be wary of bronze items with a bright emerald green patina and Celtic silver with an even grey/green colour. Caution as ever has to be the byword.

## ROYAL MINT SELLS SUPERB JAMES I GOLD SPUR RYAL

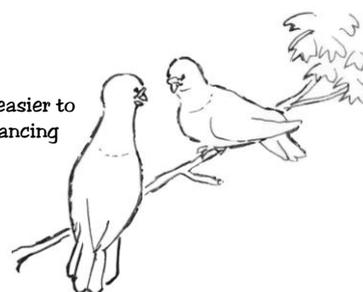
An extremely rare gold coin has been sold by the Royal Mint with an asking price of £162,750. The coin, a gold ryal, is known as a 'spur-ryal', after the radiant sun device on the reverse which resembles the spiked roundel on a horse spur. Fewer than twenty specimens of these magnificent coins are known to exist and the one offered is possibly the finest known example. It was issued circa 1620 during the reign of James I of England (1603-1625).



## USELESS COIN FACTS No.7

It is believed that some early form of porcelain coins or tokens were being used in Ptolemaic Egypt. Then from the 17th to the mid 18th century porcelain coins of various designs were in general use in Siam (Thailand). At the beginning of the 19th century some oval-shaped china tokens, marked at 5/-, 7/- etc. were made in England by pottery firms in Pinxton and Worcester. They were intended simply as collectors' curiosities and had no intrinsic monetary value. Today they are scarce items, eagerly sought by English porcelain collectors and connoisseurs.

"Humans were so much easier to hit before the social distancing rule came in."



## COINS FROM WRECKS

Peter Thompson

A **good provenance** adds both interest and authenticity to a coin, the main examples being hoards, find spots and well known collections. For this writer though coins from shipwrecks have a particular fascination and in this article I shall look briefly at two of them.

Our first example was a ship of the East India Company. When these ships were outward bound they usually carried substantial quantities of bullion to service the various settlements in the East so shipwreck could involve substantial loss. In these circumstances the Company often attempted or commissioned some sort of salvage and there are records of several such attempts. The rudimentary equipment available at the time though did not favour these efforts and in most cases modern search equipment has yielded further finds from these wrecks.

Perhaps the most famous East India wreck is that of the “Grosvenor” which was lost on the Pondoland coast of Southern African in August 1782. She was homeward bound from Calcutta and Madras with a rich cargo but would not have been carrying a large amount of Company bullion on the homeward voyage. The great celebrity of the wreck results from the subsequent hardships suffered by the survivors in an epic trek to the Cape and the persistent rumour that her passengers had been returning from the East with huge amounts of treasure.

The privations of the trek were certainly true – the distance they had to walk, carrying whatever they could, was closer to 400 miles than the Captain’s best estimate of 250. Only 18 of the original 123 survivors made it but the rumours of untold wealth at the wreck site would not go away. Locating the exact position of the wreck was not easy and the first attempt at discovering the rumoured riches was a private venture in 1880. This yielded some Indian coins and Venetian ducats (zecchinos) but no great wealth. Subsequent attempts have had similar meagre results so the rumoured riches, for the moment, continue to be just that – a rumour.

Nevertheless a recent Sedwick auction in the United States contained four Arcot rupees all of exactly similar style which came from the wreck site in the 1990s (Treasure Auction 27, lots 417 to 420). The East India Company had been striking these Arcot rupees at Madras since 1742 in large numbers so it is no surprise that some of these were present on the “Grosvenor”. Lot 421 in the same sale was a rather battered gold Venetian zecchino which also has a “Grosvenor” provenance.



Figure 1  
Arcot Rupee from the “Grosvenor” (Lot 417 in the auction)

Our second wreck is much later and sank in deep water some distance off the North West coast of Spain in April 1882. The Royal Mail Line steamship “Douro” was on passage from Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon to Southampton when she came into collision with the west bound Spanish vessel “Yrurac Bat” bound for Havana. Both ships sank with loss of life on each of them but the survivors were picked up quite swiftly and taken to Corunna. The cargo on board the “Douro” included some £53,000 in gold bullion in the form of Brazilian and Portuguese gold coins, sovereigns, gold dust and gold bars.

A ship lost in these circumstances in the 19th century was of course lost and gone forever with no hope of locating it or recovering anything from it. The marvels of modern technology though and the use of remotely operated submersible vehicles make detection, identification and access a possibility and in 1995, after a lengthy and difficult search, the “Douro” was located. Much of the bullion was recovered and the coins and some artefacts were sold by Spink at auction in November 1996.



Fig. 2  
Johannes (6400 reis) Rio de Janeiro mint 1771 (Lot 20 from the auction)

It is interesting that many of the Rio mint gold coins recovered, though in very nice condition, date to the 18th century and were more than a hundred years old at the time of loss. These had probably been in a bank vault since being struck and were only then (1882) being used for an overseas payment. The sovereigns on the “Douro” (nearly 28,000) are thought to have been shipped mainly at Lisbon.

A brief word of warning to those who may wish to add a “Douro” coin to their collection. This writer has seen sovereigns offered for sale with a “Douro” provenance with dates later than 1882. The dealer concerned removed the claim immediately it was brought to his attention but after the initial sale it is almost impossible to keep track of 28,000 sovereigns many of which were sold in bulk lots.

‘I never thought the phrase “I wouldn’t touch them with a barge pole!” would become a national policy’

“This is your pilot speaking – I shall be working from home today”

## IN PRAISE OF LESSER GRADE COINS

Alan Dawson

**Understandably, every collector** wants the best specimen of whatever series they collect. It makes sense, as high grade coins have proved to be the best investment – if that is your reason for forming a collection. The recent trend of encapsulating good coins in a Perspex tomb with a brief description and grade clearly printed in the baffling code of an American grading system seems to have taken hold. All very well, but the assigned grade is only one person’s professional opinion and, in some cases, is seriously open to question.

With so-called ‘slabbed’ coins the given grade seems to be based on the actual amount of wear the coin has suffered since it was made and often doesn’t take into account either the quality of the strike or the general appeal of the piece. Grading has always been a contentious subject, with opinions differing widely so probably better to draw a line under the subject and agree to differ. With ancient, hammered and early milled coins the actual amount of wear is only one factor in assessing the eye appeal of the coin. In my opinion, depth and evenness of the strike, surface toning and edge faults should all go some way to determining the overall grade of a coin. A weakly struck or badly toned specimen still seems to attract a grade alluding to the coin being ‘as struck’ or ‘mint state’ where in fact neither of these terms are actually a grade.

Whether it is milled, hammered or ancient, when a coin has seen some circulation it is subject to wear and tear, simply by being handled. A coin conservatively graded as GVF can often be far more appealing than a strictly ‘mint state’ specimen by virtue of the factors mentioned above. Of course, commercially a VF or GVF coin does not generally attract the same premium as a GEF one. Yet, especially with ancient and hammered, some coins left the die with visible defects, such as being off-centre, weakly struck on one edge, filled letters in the die, the die breaking up and so on. These coins still seem to be given a higher grade (and price) than perfectly acceptable and attractive slightly lesser grades.

An early milled coin with excessive ‘hay-marking’ streaks or uneven patchy toning is not an attractive specimen. Hammered coins are often weakly and unevenly struck and are more often than not struck off centre. Bearing this in mind, surely a well centred, fully struck and nicely toned coin, even if it has some visible wear, is far more appealing? After all, if the coin clearly shows all the salient features of its type it should tick most of the boxes required by the serious collector. I suppose it largely depends on your reasons for collecting. If you are doing it purely for investment and financial gain then going for only the top grades is understandable, as in the long term these will yield the highest prices. On the other hand if you are collecting out of interest for the series and study, then nicely selected lesser grades will still give the information sought, be pleasing to the eye and kinder to the wallet. There again, if you collect proof coins or copper and bronze with full lustre, then having them ‘slabbed’ is probably the best way to protect them from the elements or careless handling, although ‘slabs’ have been proven not to be air-tight.

Personally, I don’t really want a coin that can’t be carefully handled, as simply holding a coin from yesteryear or past civilizations can offer a tangible link with the past and afford an appreciation of the skill (or lack of it) that went into its design and production. It’s easy to lose sight and forget the underlying principle of coins; they are money, and as such were made to be handled and circulate.

## THE GREAT DEBASEMENT OF 1920

Chris Leather

There have been three periods in our history when the fineness of the silver coinage was seriously diminished. The first of these was in the 1540s, when the financial needs of King Henry VIII were felt to outweigh the benefits of sound money. It took his son Edward VI much effort and expense to repair the damage. The third event came in 1947 with the country in a state of near-bankruptcy following the Second World War, when silver was removed altogether from the circulating coinage – though as many change-checkers in the 1960s would find, the actual process of removal took twenty years or more to complete.

This present review is of the second major debasement which, again, resulted from the economic consequences of war – this time in 1919 and 1920, following the First World War. The economies of the majority of European states were devastated; the Latin Monetary Union based on the French franc collapsed, inflation was rampant, gold had been withdrawn from everyday use, and silver, too, in many countries. The price of everything rose sharply. Here, the ‘official’ Mint price of silver had been 62d per ounce from the early days of James I until the new coinage of George III in 1816. An unmanageable bimetallic standard was in use, with silver on an equal footing with gold; market variations in the gold and silver prices had meant that one or the other metal was almost always undervalued or overvalued. From 1816, gold was made the sole standard, and the silver coinage was specifically declared to be of a token nature, with a limit of £2 on its legal tender status, and an official Mint price of 66d per ounce.

Following the end of the first World War in 1918, inflation meant that the market price of silver began to exceed the Mint price, to the extent that by February 1920 a halfcrown of sterling silver standard was worth about 3s 4d rather than the 2s 6d which was its face value. This was an open invitation for large scale melting of sterling silver coins to profit from the much higher price of the silver as bullion.

Faced with a potential major shortage of coins, the Government considered its options: whether to issue paper replacements for shillings and halfcrowns, or to reduce the size of the coins, or to reduce the standard of silver. They chose the latter option, and decided on a reduction from 92.5% fine to 50% fine. This, they felt, would be the least worst solution. The initial alloy chosen for the debased coinage of 1920 was 50% silver, 40% copper and 10% nickel. The objective was to produce an alloy which would wear well in circulation – the added nickel being there for that purpose. Unfortunately, this mixture proved unsatisfactory as it tarnished unattractively with yellow streaks. So in 1922, the nickel component was removed, and a simple binary alloy of 50% silver and 50% copper substituted. This also did not prove satisfactory, wearing badly and discolouring – which is exactly what had happened when Henry VIII had introduced 50% silver coins in the 1540s, earning himself the nickname of ‘Old Coppernose’ and the chemistry remained the same!



Henry VIII posthumous groat



1920 halfcrown

This situation persisted until the new coinage of 1927. In the meantime considerable research had gone on to find an alloy which would wear well, and would tone attractively, and one was eventually found. The new mixture comprised 50% silver, 40% copper, 5% nickel and 5% zinc. Even so, problems remained, as the nickel and zinc and some of the copper had to be melted together first, before the resulting mixture was added to the other components. This alloy was used until the end of the silver coinage in 1946.

After all this grief, it transpired that the problem of overvalued silver was of relatively short duration; when the Irish Free State introduced their own silver coinage in 1928, they chose an alloy of 75% silver. But as with Henry VIII, the British Government of the 1920s had tasted the profits to be made from debasement, and no effort was ever made to try to restore a higher standard. And at the end of the day, the ‘silver’ coinage was only a token coinage; it didn’t really matter what it was made of, which undoubtedly explains how the cupro-nickel coins of 1947 were introduced with no grief at all.

## ME AND MY FIDDLE

David Lythgoe

Continuing the theme of members’ second interest (s) David Lythgoe reveals yet another ‘string to his bow’ with an account of a pursuit far removed from numismatics, yet still as fascinating.

“In 1966 I bought a tattered and dirty violin (with bow) from a jumble sale for the extravagant sum of 2/6d. At that time I had an ambition to learn to play the instrument, so I bought the appropriate strings and strung it up to pitch against my piano. It sounded terrible so I took it to the local violin man, John Holland, who told me that it lacked a sound post (between the belly and the back) and I was lucky that I hadn’t collapsed the belly under the strain of the tightened strings. He immediately released the pressure and offered me £5.00 if I wanted to sell it, but when I said I wanted to play it, he said he would clean it and set it up correctly. When I returned a week later, he asked me if I knew there was a name written inside (I did) and he told me it could be worth about £70.00. No doubt he knew that when he made his £5.00 offer! The inscribed name is Matthias Klotz and it is dated 1743 when Matthias would be aged over 90. His name is famous amongst a family of luthiers (violin makers) who worked in Mittenwald in Bavaria. In addition to teaching me to play, and despite his apparent attempt to rip me off, (though I like to think he may have been assessing my sincerity), John Holland and I became very good friends and he taught me a lot about violins.

Sadly, my violin has no provenance, but from over fifty years of study I have learnt that a genuine Klotz could be worth several thousand pounds. Some years ago I visited the Klotz museum in Mittenwald, the result being that I suspect it was made by one of his sons, either Sebastian or Aegidius, whose violins are today deemed to be more valuable than their father’s. In 1743, they would have used their father’s name to bring a better price. Aged 90, I doubt if Matthias was still working.



David's first violin made from scratch and (right) work in progress on number three

Having always had an interest in music, I wanted to know more about the Klotz family and requested, over the phone from Rushworth and Dreapers, a book about violin makers. I mustn’t have made myself clear because I received through the post a small book on ‘Violin Making’ costing 12/6d. I decided to keep the book, although nobody could possibly make a violin successfully from the scanty information that it contains. Six years later, having spent three of those years fashioning tools, carving moulds, shaping templates and buying tools that I couldn’t make myself, I completed my first violin using the same techniques that luthiers have been using for over 500 years. I was a little (!) annoyed when it was awarded second place in a handicraft competition, the winner being a superb and admittedly skilfully made satin quilt. The judging panel commented that the violin would have won if it hadn’t been made from a kit. How little they knew”.

## A VOYAGE TO REMEMBER

November 11th 2020 marks the end of the voyage of the *Mayflower* from England to the fledgling colony of America. The perilous journey by the Pilgrim Fathers was prompted by religious persecution at home and the hope of freedom to practice their beliefs in the New World. The Royal mint has commemorated this historic event by issuing a commemorative £2 coin. The piece features an image of this iconic vessel.



The next ‘Lockdown Newsletter’ will be the December issue