

# ST HELENA COINAGE

by Trevor W. Hearl

Since 3rd January this year, St Helena and Ascension Island have had their own distinctive coinage in denominations of £1 (in nickel-brass), 50p, 10p, 5p (all in cupro-nickel), 2p, and 1p. (both in bronze). Members who keenly follow the philatelic fortunes of these islands may well be interested in the \$10 (£5.95) memento of this first issue - an uncirculated six-coin set in special display pack - to be produced this summer by the Royal Mint (address below). Proof sets in a folding leatherette display case labelled "St Helena and Ascension First Coinage 1984" - a limited edition of 2,500 worldwide - are already on sale at \$29 (£19.55).

The £1 coin, which features the Sooty Tern or Wideawake - so dubbed from the sound of its call, and after which Ascension airfield was named - is unusual in having an edge-inscription, reading "Colony of St Helena." The other designs show the Ascension Island green turtle (on the heptagonal 50p piece), the St Helena arum lily (10p), the unique, indigenous St Helena wirebird (5p), a St Helena donkey typically laden with firewood (2p), and the islands' commonest and most popular eating fish, the yellow fin tuna (1p). The obverse of all coins have the now ubiquitous portrait of the Queen created by Arnold Machin.

It was eight years ago, on 2nd February 1976, that St Helena's currency notes, in values of £10, £5, £1, and 50p first went into circulation and some islanders who, according to the St Helena News Review (XV/2298, 20th January 1984), particularly dislike the new £1 coin, wonder why their paper money is apparently being replaced. "The answer," replied a Treasury spokesman in Jamestown, "is cost, durability, and revenue." In addition, it was reported:

"The production cost of the £1 coin is £51 per thousand coins. The coin is expected to last at least 40 years. The replacement £10 note (and a £1 note the same) now on order is likely to cost us £188 per 1000. The notes will last one to three years. They are also many more coin collectors ... "

And for those collectors, special silver versions of the controversial £1 coin have been struck, 10,000 in silver proof (at £18.50) and 2,500 in silver piedfort (i.e. twice the normal thickness and weight) at £34.95.

There are no doubt purists who will point out that, strictly speaking, this is not the first St Helena currency. The East India Company issued a copper bar currency for the island in 1683 (though no example has survived into modern times) and minted a St Helena coinage in 1714 and 1821 - the first halfpenny most frequently found - with a further elegant issue under contract at the time of the government's appropriation of St Helena from the Company in 1833. In addition, between ap-

proximately 1821 and 1834, Solomon, Dickson, and Taylor issued the commonly found copper St Helena token.

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