

Silver Tazzae by Mappin and Webb and attributed to Percy Metcalfe – designer of the “Thrift” Brass Threepence.

Graham Birch

On 12th July 2023, the Salisbury auction house Woolley & Wallis is holding one of their regular silver auctions. While much of the material offered is best classified as silver “bric-a-brac” there are two lots which might be of interest to numismatists – especially collectors of threepences. Lots 486 and 487 are silver “Tazza” dishes designed by Percy Metcalfe and manufactured by Mappin and Webb. The hallmark is for Sheffield 1936.

These items are of interest because they were made during 1936 and are therefore contemporary with the short reign of Edward VIII. The tazzas have been made to showcase Metcalfe’s innovative dodecagonal design for the brass threepence piece which was intended to be minted for Edward VIII.



The Royal Mint Museum notes that *“before his abdication, Edward had suggested a “modern coinage” for his reign, so the Royal Mint Advisory Committee prompted artists to produce “non-heraldic” designs for consideration. Inspiration for a wildlife theme was taken from the Irish Free State coinage of 1928, which was one of Metcalfe’s greatest numismatic triumphs”.*

In the event, Edward VIII’s abdication meant that Metcalfe’s distinctive art deco “thrift plant” design didn’t appear in circulation until 1937 under George VI.

The pair of tazzae in lot 486 are quite small with a diameter of 11.5 cm and a weight of 5 ounces. The tazza in lot 487 is larger at 21.5 cm with a weight of 10.5 ounces. The lots are estimated at £150-£200 + BP (lot 486) and £300-400 + BP (lot 487) – which seems inexpensive for such interesting objects.

Beyond noticing the catalogue entry, I haven’t researched these tazzae - so perhaps there is an interesting story behind their commissioning and manufacture. Good luck if you bid on them.