

The history of the Calcutta Mint is not just about coin production; it also reflects the early power struggle in India and the evolution of the colonial authority. The English East India Company (EIC) came to India as traders but slowly transformed into a dominant political force. By 1690, when the EIC had firmly established its foothold in Bengal, they realized that control over currency was important for consolidating power and enabling smooth trade (Garg: 1990:383).

Depending on mints in Madras, Surat, or even distant Mughal mints led to delays and risks, and the Company recognized that setting up a mint in Calcutta was not just a convenience but a necessity. In 1698, the EIC sent Mr. Stanley to the Darbar of Prince Azim-us-Shan, grandson of Aurangzeb and the Governor of Bengal, to seek permission to establish a mint at Hugly. However, the mission did not yield any result. In 1708, Thomas Pitt wrote a letter to the Mughal Governor, Ziauddin, seeking permission, but this attempt also proved unsuccessful (Garg: 1990:383-384).

In 1714, the Company sent John Surman to Emperor Farrukhsiyar's court and secured permission to mint coins at Murshidabad Mint three days a week. Opposition from Murshid Quli Khan delayed the plan for twenty-five years. However, the EIC made multiple attempts to establish a mint, facing numerous challenges along the way. After persistent efforts, they finally succeeded in setting up a mint in Calcutta in 1757, with a treaty signed between the EIC and Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula on 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> February 1757 (H. Stagg: 1933:15, Garg: 1990:385-386). A few months earlier, in 1756, the Nawab of Bengal attacked and captured Calcutta, giving the city the epithet 'Alinagar' (Stevens 2012:1). During his brief rule he issued silver coins following the pattern of Mughal coinage, bearing legends in Persian and the regnal year of Emperor Alamgir II (1754-59) with the mint name - Alinagar.

The Persian inscriptions on these coins were as follows:

Fig.1

Obverse: *Sikka Mubarak Badshah Ghazi Alamgir*

(The auspicious coin of the victorious Emperor Alamgir)

Reverse: *Zarb Alinagar Sanah Julus Maimanat Manus*

(struck at Alinagar in the regnal year three of tranquil prosperity)

In response, the British sent an army and fleet to reclaim the city in January 1757. After regaining control, the British secured *parwana* (permission/ license) from the Nawab to establish a mint and began striking coins under the name Alinagar Kalkata, Fig.2, as the town was then called by the Nawab (Stevens 2012:1).



Fig.1 : Nawabs of Bengal, Rupee in the name of Alamgir II 'Alinagar, AH1169/Ry.3. Courtesy: www.zeno.ru : #275987



Fig.2 : Rupee in the name of Alamgir II, Mint Alinagar Kalkata  
 Courtesy: www.zeno.ru : #140882: E.I.C., Bengal Presidency., Rupee, Kalkata, AH - /Ry.4

However, following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the new Nawab allowed the EIC to mint coins under the name Kalkata, Fig.3. Coins issued with the mint name Calcutta were also minted with the name Alamgir II. Coins bearing the Kalkata mint name were struck during the fourth, fifth, and sixth regnal years of Emperor Alamgir II. However, these coins faced

resistance in the local markets, as the shroffs (money changers) imposed a heavy *batta* (discount), making it difficult to bring them into regular circulation. By the end of 1760, the EIC sought and received permission from the Nawab to issue coins bearing the mint name Murshidabad, Fig.4, though they were minted in the Calcutta Mint. These newly authorized coins were issued in the name of Emperor Alamgir II, dated 1174 Hijri and regnal year 6 (Stevens 2012:1). Subsequently, gold and silver coins were minted in the name of Shah Alam.

Historical records, however, differ on the exact timeline. Edgar Thurston, in his 1893 research 'Note on the History of the East India Company Coinage from 1753-1835' mentioned that the establishment of a mint at Calcutta finally took place in 1759 or 1760 when a *parwana* was obtained (Thurston 1893:54) after the treaty of 1757 with Siraj-ud-Daulah.



Fig.3 : The Coins of the Bengal Presidency, Baldwins. Courtesy: Stevens, Paul. 2012

It is believed that the first mint in Calcutta was located near the site of the Black Hole Tragedy, where the General Post Office stands today. However, in September 1757, Mr. Frankland and Mr. Boddam were appointed Joint Mint Masters, and the mint had swung into full operation (Stevens 2012:7).



Fig.4 : The Coins of the Bengal Presidency, Baldwins. Courtesy: Stevens, Paul. 2012.

The second Calcutta Mint, Figs.5&6, was established in 1790, with machinery brought from England to strike modern coins with milled edges. It was installed at the site of Gillett's Shipbuilding Establishment. In 1833, this site was taken over by the Stamp and Stationary Committee, and later on it was occupied by the Stationary Office



Fig.5 : Silver Old Mint, Strand Road, Kolkata

between Strand Road and Church Lane (Stagg 1933:15).

By 1818, it had become evident that the existing Calcutta Mint was unable to meet the increasing demand placed upon it. In response, the Mint Master Robert Saunders and the Assay Master Horace Hayman Wilson, were tasked with preparing a report recommending improvements. In 1819, they proposed that a steam-powered mint be procured from England.

Lieutenant Forbes was selected to travel to England and collaborate with the suppliers. He arrived there in 1820. The steam machinery comprised five steam engines, viz. two of 40 horsepower each, and three were of 24, 20 and 14 horsepower, respectively. The circular cutting presses, the milling and the coining apparatus supplied by the renowned firm Boulton & Watt, the rolling mills and fine rollers, the lathe-lap and clam for turning the rollers, and the triturating mills were by John Rennie; while the pouring machinery and furnaces of the gold, silver and copper melting rooms were constructed by Maudslay (JAS 1834:38). The machinery sent from England arrived at Calcutta in October 1823. A team of experienced workmen accompanied the machinery to Calcutta and played a vital role in its reconstruction. The new mint was completed by 1829–30 and production commenced in 1830, beginning with copper pice. The mint also produced silver rupees and gold muhars of the 19-sun sicca style, as well as Farukhabad rupees and Arkatrupees, intended for use in Madras. In 1831, a new design of copper annas and pice was minted.

However, by that time discussion around uniform coinage for the entire Indian subcontinent had gained significant momentum. As a result, no further changes were made to the Bengal coinage. In 1835, the new established Calcutta Mint played a leading role in launching this unified coinage system for India.

The construction of the third Calcutta Mint - known as the Silver Mint - at Strand Road was planned in 1819. Its foundation stone was laid in 31 March 1824, it was opened on 1 August 1829, and it began production of copper pice in 1830. The architect of the third mint was Major General William Nairn Forbes. He was also the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, and served as the Mint Master from 5 January 1836 to 23 January 1855. Before him, Robert Saunders served as Mint Master of the Calcutta Mint from 1815 to 1820 and from 1826 to 1836 (Stevens & Weir 2012:16). The mint building has massive foundations and goes down 26 feet below ground level, so that there is more brick work below the ground than above it. The cost of the third Calcutta Mint up to 30 April 1833, was 24 lakhs rupees, of which 11 lakhs were for the machinery and 13 lakhs for the buildings. The monthly expenditure, when work was in full swing, was stated to be around 18,000 rupees.

A marble bust in memory of Major General Forbes was prepared and transported from London to Calcutta in 1858. Presently, Forbes' bust is displayed in the Mint Museum, India Govt. Mint, Kolkata. The bust bears the following inscriptions:

The Honorable the Court of Directors of the East India Company have placed this bust in the new Mint of Calcutta (at Strand Road) to mark their sense of the eminent services of Major General William Nairn Forbes Bengal Engineers Master of that Mint who designed and constructed the noble building erected all the complicated machinery and directed the operations of the institution for upwards of Twenty Years with signal capacity and success. General Forbes commenced the construction of the New Mint on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1824 and completed the Building on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1829. As Architect, Superintendent of machinery and Mint Master he was connected with the institution from 1824 to 1855 or for 31 years. He was born on the third of April 1796 and died on the first of May 1855.

During the planning phase for the establishment of the Silver Mint, James Prinsep was appointed Assistant Assay Master of the Calcutta Mint in 1819 under H.H. Wilson, who was then Assay Master. James quickly proved to be a fast learner. Within a couple of months, Wilson was appointed as the Assay Master of the Banaras Mint. When the operations at the Banaras Mint were properly established, Wilson was called back to Calcutta, and his young assistant was chosen to succeed him as the Assay Master of the Banaras Mint. At the end of 1829, the Banaras Mint was abolished. When it was finally shut in January 1830, Prinsep returned to Calcutta Mint as Deputy Assay Master of the newly constructed mint at Strand Road. Two years later, in 1832, when Wilson was appointed the first Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, Prinsep succeeded him as Assay Master and as Secretary to the Calcutta Mint Committee.

It is important to highlight Prinsep's remarkable contributions to the mint as well as his pioneering work in the field of numismatics. His most significant achievement was in the area of currency reforms, where he played a central role in introducing a uniform coinage system across a large part of India in 1835. In 1833, he submitted a comprehensive proposal to the government for the reform of weights and measures. Prinsep was dedicated to his work as an Assay Master. He personally made a very precise balance with his own hands for the purpose of the assay, which could measure up to the 3000<sup>th</sup> part of a grain (Basu Majumdar: 2024:137). When he left for England in 1838, the government bought this balance for use in the Calcutta Mint.

Thought the third mint of Calcutta was known as the Silver Mint, gold coins were also struck there. In 1860, an annexe known as the 'Copper Mint', intended exclusively for copper coinage, was built to the north of the Silver Mint. Both mints were self-contained units, each comprising Departments of Melting, Cutting, Annealing, Stamping and Packing. The Bullion and General Offices, as well as workshops, stores, and other support facilities, were shared between the two mints. Prior to the Copper Mint, large quantities of copper coins were imported from England.

The architecture of the Silver Mint is Graeco-Doric with the façade built based on the dimension of the Temple of Minerva at Athens. The Graeco-Doric style is one of the three classical orders of ancient Greek architecture, known for its sturdy, fluted columns with simple capitals and no base, alongside the Ionic and Corinthian styles. This mint played an important role in India's coinage system by minting gold, silver, nickel, copper, cupro-nickel, nickel-brass and bronze coins. It produced coins for Australia, Great Britain, Egypt, Portuguese India, Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, Ceylon and Pakistan as well as the Straits Government or Straits Settlements (in 1826 the British settlements in Malaya were unified under a single Governor as the Straits Settlements) and the Imperial British East Africa Company, Mombasa (Rukhsana: 1992:369, IGMK Souvenir: 1977).

Under certain conditions, gold, silver and copper coins were minted for the native states under the Native States Coinage Act No. IX of 1876, the metal being supplied by the state itself. Coins for Alwar, Dhar and Dewas states were produced at the Calcutta Mint. During the reign of King Edward VII, the Calcutta Mint struck some quantity of quarter-anna coins in bronze for the native state of Sailana.

The Calcutta Mint was not only confined to producing coins. An important duty was the manufacture of medals and decorations. The earliest medal produced by the Calcutta Mint was the Ceylon Medal 1795-96, while other early medals included Seringapatam 1799; Egypt 1801; Rodrigues, Bourbon and Isle of France 1809-10; Java 1811; Nepal 1814-16; Coorg 1837; and a series of Afghanistan medals (including Ghuznee 1839, Jellalabad 1842, Candahar 1842, Ghuznee Cabul 1842, Gandahar Ghuznee Cabul 1842, and Cabul 1842), Gwalior Campaign 1843 (Mayo: 1897:121-268). The medal of the Simla Fine Arts Society 1928, bearing the figure of a bull, was copied from a seal found at Mohanjodaro (Puddester: 2002:318). Apart from the medals, the mint also produced decorations, commemorative pieces, delicate works for government departments, educational institutions, and noble families, and so on. The thrones used by the king and queen at the Delhi Darbar (1911) were cast in silver at the Calcutta Mint by melting 96,000 old silver rupees. Plaques for the Durbar monument at Delhi and several other memorials were also struck by the mint. Famous among these, and possibly the largest of this nature up to the year 1923-24, was the tablet cast in the memory of the Late Bishop Thoburn for the Thoburn Methodist Episcopal Church, Calcutta. The tablet measured 36" x 24" and was designed by Mr. Holt, artist-cum-engraver and manufacturer, in three sections.

### **Shift to Alipore**

Meanwhile, the need was felt by the Government of India as early as 1940 for the establishment of a new high-capacity mint in Alipore. Construction work for this began in 1941. By early 1942 the

foundation work had been completed and the erection of the super-structure of the factory was proceeding. In March 1942, Calcutta faced an increasing threat of Japanese invasion. Due to this fear, in 1943 it was decided that the new mint should be shifted to Lahore.

It was originally decided that after cessation of hostilities in World War II, and as soon as normal conditions returned, the mint at Lahore would be shifted back to its original site at Alipore. However, after the end of the war, the political scenario changed and it was confirmed that the Lahore Mint would have to remain in Pakistan. The Alipore Mint project was thus revived in 1948, and construction work was completed in 1951.

For the Alipore Mint, 26 acres of land had been taken over by the government from the Port Commissioner of Calcutta in 1941. The Alipore Mint building was designed by Shri H.A.N. Medd, Senior Architect to the Government of India, and was constructed under Major J.H. Partridge, a Royal Engineer who then served as first Mint Master. The Alipore Mint was opened by Finance Minister Chintaman Dwarkanath Deshmukh on 19 March 1952 after which all operations for coinage began in full swing with a coinage capacity of 12 lakh pieces per eight-hour shift. Deshmukh was an Indian Civil Servant, the first Indian to be appointed the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

A.A.J. Gomez was the first Indian to be appointed Master of the Mint.

It should be noted at the time of Independence on 15 August 1947, there was no immediate change in the coinage of India. The nickel rupee, half rupee, quarter rupee, cupro nickel, two anna, one anna, half anna, and the bronze single pice bearing King George VI's effigy, which were in circulation prior to Independence, continued to be struck at the mints even in the years following 1947.

On 15 August 1950, a new series of coins was issued in the following denominations: one rupee, half rupee, quarter rupee, two annas, one anna, half anna and single pice. They all had the 'lion capital' of Ashoka on the obverse. On the reverse, the rupee, half rupee and quarter rupee coins had two ears of corn; the two anna, one anna and half-anna coins had the figure of a bull; and the single pice had the figure of the horse. The Indian Coinage Act of 1906 was amended in September 1955, empowering the government to adopt a metric or decimal system in coinage. The Act came into force with effect from 1 April 1957. This was a landmark in the history of the country's coinage. According to the decimal system, the value of rupee divided into 100 paise and the smallest unit of one rupee became one paisa.

Apart from the circulative coins, the Alipore Mint currently also produces commemorative coins which are issued to celebrate special occasions/events or as a mark of respect towards distinguished individuals or monuments. In 1985, the mint for the first time issued commemorative coin sets of Rs. 100, Rs. 10 and Re. 1 on the occasion of International Youth Year. The mint manufactures medals for the Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, International Film Festival of India, National Film Award, World Philatelic Exhibition, Param Veer Chakra, Chakra awards, as well as medals for various academic and social institutions. It also provides medals for national and international sports events.

The India Government Mint, Alipore, Kolkata follows international quality standards, and has built credibility and trust for decades in the minting world.

**MINT MASTER OF CALCUTTA MINT FROM 1757 TO 1952  
(WORKED AS HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION)**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Name of Mint Master</b>	<b>Starting Date</b>
1	Mr. Frankland and Mr.Boddam	Sept. 1757
2	Mr. Frankland	Oct. 1757
3	Mr. Beaumont	Mar.1761
4	Mr. Middleton	Early 1764
5	Mr. Marriot (never took up the position)	Oct. 1764
6	Mr. Leycester	Nov. 1764
7	Mr. Campbell	Nov. 1764
8	Mr. Alexander	Dec.1767
9	Mr. Floyer	Before May 1769
10	Mr.Herbert Harris	Feb. 1771
11	Mr. Lloyd	Before Sep. 1773
12	Mr. Paxton	Before Jul.1778
13	Mr. Herbert Harris	Feb.1785
14	Mr. James Miller	Aug. 1792
15	Mr. Frank Mure	July 1799
16	Mr. Plowden	Jul. 1802
17	Mr. Forster	Aug. 1802
18	Dr. Davidson	1810
19	Mr. H. Wilson (acting)	1813
20	Mr. Malcom McLeod	1814
21	Mr. Robert Saunders	1815
22	Mr. J.M. McNabb (acting)	1820
23	Mr. Robert Saunders	7 April 1826–4 January 1836
24	Major General William Nair Forbes (Bengal Engineer)	5 January 1836–23 January 1855
25	Lt. Col. J.T. Smith	1855–56
26	Major J.H. Bell	1856–58
27	Col. R. Baird Smith, CB	1858–61
28	Col. H. Hyde	1861–76
29	Col. J.F.Tennant	1876–84
30	Col.R.V.Riddell	1884–89
31	Col. A.W. Baird	1889–97
32	Col. B. Scott,CIE	1897–1904
33	Col. G. M. Portar	1904–11
34	Lt. Col. W.G.R.Cordue, RE	1911–15
35	Lt. Col. A.L.C. McComick, CIE,RE	1915–26
36	Col. M. Stagg, OBE	1926–38
37	Major D.V. Deane, CIE,OBE, RE	1938–47
38	Major E.A. Wimberley, OBE, RE	1947–48
39	Major J.H. Patridge, RE (Retd) in Old and Alipore Mint	1948–52

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