

## THE ST. JOHN AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION RE-EXAMINATION MEDALLION

In 1879, two years after its foundation, St. John Ambulance Association introduced a medallion for award to those who had passed three of its examinations. At least two of the examinations had to be in First Aid to the Injured but the third could be in either Home Nursing or Home Hygiene. The First Aid examinations could not be taken at intervals of less than one year, and thus the medallion could be gained in either one or two years, according to the combination of subject taken.

The purpose of the medallion was to prove, when necessary, the competency of the holder to render first aid to the injured. As a measure of security, therefore, each example carried the medallion number and name of the recipient engraved on the plain reverse. It could be carried in the pocket or handbag or worn as an ornament, but **never worn as a decoration**. A favourite position was on the watch chain. Since its introduction the design of the medallion has undergone a number of changes, and unfortunately it is not possible to assign an exact date to each new



style. However, the following data has been obtained from a study of the examples in the Museum's collection and represent the main variants.

**FIRST ISSUE:** Flat. At the top the legend 'ST. JOHN' and at the bottom 'AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION'. In the centre, a plain cut out cross. On the top trefoil arm a flower of St. John's wort and on the remaining three arms a fleur-de-lys. Overall diameter is approximately 3.5

cm. Introduced in 1879 and only issued for a short period. The highest medallion number of this issue in the Museum is 2,586.

**SECOND ISSUE:** General design as for the first issue, but the plain cut out cross has been replaced by the eight-pointed St. John cross. The cross is plain on a ribbed background and there are no animals between the arms. Overall diameter is approximately 3.5 cm as before. The date of introduction would appear to be 1884 as an Association Report of the previous year refers to the plain cut-out cross



and the Association Report for 1884 shows a diagram with the eight-pointed cross. The earliest dated example in the collection is 1887 and the highest certificate number is 6,835.

**THIRD ISSUE:** Flat. The legend reads 'ST. JOHN AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION' as before, but now runs around the circumference rather than being divided into two parts. The lions and unicorns now appear in the

angles of the cross in a large size, almost filling the available space between the arms. On the trefoil ends of the arms the fleur-de-lys has been removed in favour of a flower of St. John's wort. Overall the diameter is approximately 3.5 cm. It is not known when this variation was introduced, but as the badge of the Order of St. John added the lions and unicorns after the Royal Charter of 1888, a date close to this would seem logical. The highest medallion number in the collection is 25,095.

**FOURTH ISSUE:** Of convex shape. Early examples are only slightly convex but medallions numbered above 100,000 are more markedly so. In the legend the word 'THE' appears before the words 'ST. JOHN'. The animals in the angles of the cross are of a smaller size; although this later tended to vary when new dies were cut. The surface of the centre is crosshatched. Overall diameter is slightly larger at between 3.7cm and 4cm. No date can be assigned to this variation, but it appears to have been before 1909 and there may have been some overlap between this issue and the previous one as the highest number of the third issue in the collection is 25,095 and the lowest number of the fourth issue recorded is 18,993. Those numbered in the 100,000s and the 300,000s are generally marked on



the reverse 'REGISTERED AT ST. JOHN'S GATE CLERKENWELL'. The highest medallion number in the collection is 366,022. The numbering system was changed, possibly around 1942, to include a prefix letter 'A'. Two of these in the collection are marked registered at London rather than Clerkenwell. The issue of the medallion finally ceased in 1992.



**MATERIALS:** Medallions were not presented but purchased by the recipient. The standard issue was bronze but the recipient could opt for silver or gold according to choice and means. Bronze specimens also exist which have been privately silvered or gold plated by the owner. Later issues were in base metal chromium plated and this type can be found hanging from a small rectangular chrome brooch decorated with St. John's wort. It is believed that this type was issued after 1962 when the issue of labels ceased. From 1914 each type was also made available in miniature. In 1905 the cost of each version was:

Bronze 2/- (10p)      Silver 7/6 (37½p)      18ct. Gold 50/- (£2.50)

Prices included the cost of engraving the name and registered number on the reverse and cases could be had for an additional 2/- (10p) each. At a time when the weekly wage of an ordinary working man was between 30/- (£1.50) and £2, it would take a considerable sacrifice to obtain this symbol of competency to render First Aid to a fellow human being in distress. It is a tribute to their pride in obtaining the qualification that so many ordinary men and women made that sacrifice.

**THE LABEL:** A label could be earned by a medallion holder for each successful re-examination at intervals of not less than 12 months after the third examination for the medallion. Introduced in 1905, each label carries on the front the year of the re-examination and the trefoil ends of the arms bear a flower of St. John's wort, although, in 1950, this was changed to the Order's eight-pointed cross. On the reverse appears engraved the registered number of the medallion to which the label was to be attached. Missing a year's re-examination did not prevent a label being earned the following year.



The Museum collection contains examples of medallions having upwards of 40 labels attached. Labels were manufactured in the same metals as the medallion and, in 1905, purchase prices were:

Bronze 6d (2½p)      Silver 1/6 (7½p)      18ct. Gold (52½p)

The issue of labels was suspended during the Second World War from late 1941 until 1946, when issue was resumed in bronze only.

**THE PENDANTS:** In 1916 additional specialist pendants were introduced for the first time for those who had successfully re-examined in subjects other than First Aid. These were Home Nursing, Home Hygiene, and Sanitation. The small 20mm pendants take the form of a quatrefoil edged with a twisted rope design having a small rectangular box in the middle bearing the initial letters of the specialist qualification. They have engraved on the reverse the year of qualification and the number of the Medallion to which they were to be attached. A course in Child Welfare was introduced in 1944 and a pendant for this qualification was introduced upon the resumption of issue. Other pendants bearing the letters N for Nursing and H for Hygiene are also known, making six varieties in all. Like the label, the issue of pendants was suspended during the Second World War from late 1941 until 1946 when issue was resumed in bronze only.



By 1945, the total issue of medallions, labels and pendants was as follows:

United Kingdom and Commonwealth	Wales	
Medallions	601,000	33,000
Labels	1,081,000	138,000
Pendants	160,000	9,000

The issue of labels and pendants ceased totally in 1962.

**THE PRIORY FOR WALES:** The Priory for Wales was formed in 1918 and one of its early decisions was to institute its own Medallion. Of the same basic shape, the wording is split into two parts with 'ORDER OF ST. JOHN' at the top and 'PRIORY FOR WALES' at the bottom. The ribbed background to the central cross has been cut away and the trefoil arms of the medallion show a dragon at the top, crossed daffodils at the bottom and leeks at each side. It is named on the reverse and the number has a WAS prefix. In common with the standard version, it ceased to be issued in 1992.



The Priory for Wales also produced its own design of label from 1920. Though similar to those described above, it bore a leek and dragon on the trefoil ends in preference to the St. John's wort. It ceased to be issued in 1962.

