

NAVAL ENGINEERS' GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL

BY

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Medals and marine engineers were separate novel features to be thrust upon the naval scene in the 1830s, and the next decade bore witness to rare awards of the former to the latter. This article tells the story of 'How' these new-fangled facets of naval life merged in 1842 to establish the short lived 'Naval Engineers' Good Conduct Medal', and gives a brief history of the seven awards as well as an explanation on an additional medal which is probably a fraud.

The concept of a benevolent Government awarding gratuities with attendant medals to servicemen for lengthy unblemished careers had commenced for the Royal Navy in July 1830 some eleven days before the Army. This reward was initially referred to simply as 'The Silver Medal' since no other breast adornment existed for officer or rating, but it soon earned the title of the 'Long Service and Good Conduct Medal' as we still know it today. It could only be awarded to ratings (and other ranks in the Royal Marines), and the rules defined that only those men who had completed the pensionable time of 21 years service over the age of 20 were eligible for selection. It was therefore usually presented when most recipients were at the point of their discharge, thus defeating part of its purpose as a visible symbol of worthy behaviour for others to emulate.

When this LS & GC medal was introduced in 1830 the Navy possessed only a dozen commissioned paddle-wheel steam-ships, in which the propulsion machinery and concomitant staff were superintended by a Chief/First Engineer of no officially recognized status, beyond that of being entered as a rating—of petty officer rank—on the ship's muster list. This incongruous state of affairs remained until July 1837 when the engineering branch as a recognizable entity was born, with engineers achieving warrant officer status to join the age-old triumvirate of 'standing officers'—the Boatswain, Gunner and Carpenter.

By the early 1840s the number of 'steamers' had increased considerably, but precious few engineers stayed in the Navy beyond one or two full commissions. The climate was therefore ripe for favours to engineers in the hope of inducing them to extend their time in the Navy. One such inducement was the creation of this medal which excites numismatists more today than ever it did engineers at that time. Once the grant of commissioned rank to engineers was brought into effect in February 1847, the irrelevance of the medal quickly faded from naval minds.

The story of the engineers' good conduct 'gong' commences at Woolwich Yard in 1842. This dockyard had been chosen in 1833 to be the centre for 'engineering' in the Royal Navy—where the men who minded the machinery were to be congregated, and expertise in operating and maintaining the new propulsion equipment could be advanced.

On 3 May 1842 the Captain Superintendent of Woolwich Yard (Captain Sir Francis A. Collier, Kt., C.B., K.C.H., R.N.) called for a routine report on the state of the engines, machinery, and personnel of H.M. Steam Vessel *Tartarus*, prior to her being 'paid off'. This inspection was carried out by the indefatigable seventy-six year old Mr. Peter Ewart (Chief Engineer and Inspector of Machinery), and his more youthful assistant John Kingston (Foreman of Engineers). Their comments combined with additional remarks by Captain Collier were to forge the instrument which eventually levered the new medal into existence. The vista of efficiency presented in their report might now appear quaint in

parts, but it is none the less remarkable if judged by modern standards—especially of ‘availability’.

The *Tartarus* had been 4½ years in commission, with nearly the whole of that time being actively employed in a tropical climate on the West Indies Station. Never during that period had she been detained one hour from service at any dockyard, for repair to either hull or machinery. Likewise, she had been of small expense to the Government in comparison with other steam vessels, proved by the use of only one half of the lubricating oil and one sixth the quantity of tallow allowed. Furthermore, the inspectors noted that *Tartarus* was better ventilated than any other steamer they had seen, which, combined with the extreme cleanliness and high state of discipline, contributed to the noticeably healthy and robust appearance of the stokers. Their final approbation alluded to the fact that ‘. . . *Tartarus* has only lost four men by death since she has been in commission.’

The inspectorate concluded by being decidedly of the opinion that extraordinary vigilance and care had been bestowed by Mr William Shaw, her First Engineer, on every part of the engines, boilers and paddle-wheels. A view also held by the Commanding Officer (Commander G. W. Smith) who had had ten years’ experience of ‘steamers’ to back his statement when speaking of Shaw ‘in the highest terms of praise’.

One day later, on 4 May 1842, this unusually excellent set of statements lay before the eyes of the Comptroller of Steam Machinery (Captain Sir William E. Parry, Kt. of Arctic exploration fame) at Somerset House. Captain Parry was the first officer to fill this new ‘post’ which he had taken up on 19 April 1837, a date which can be said to be the conceptual birth-day of the Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy.

That same evening (4 May) Parry let the Admiralty have his views in general on *Tartarus*, mentioning in particular the First Engineer in these terms:

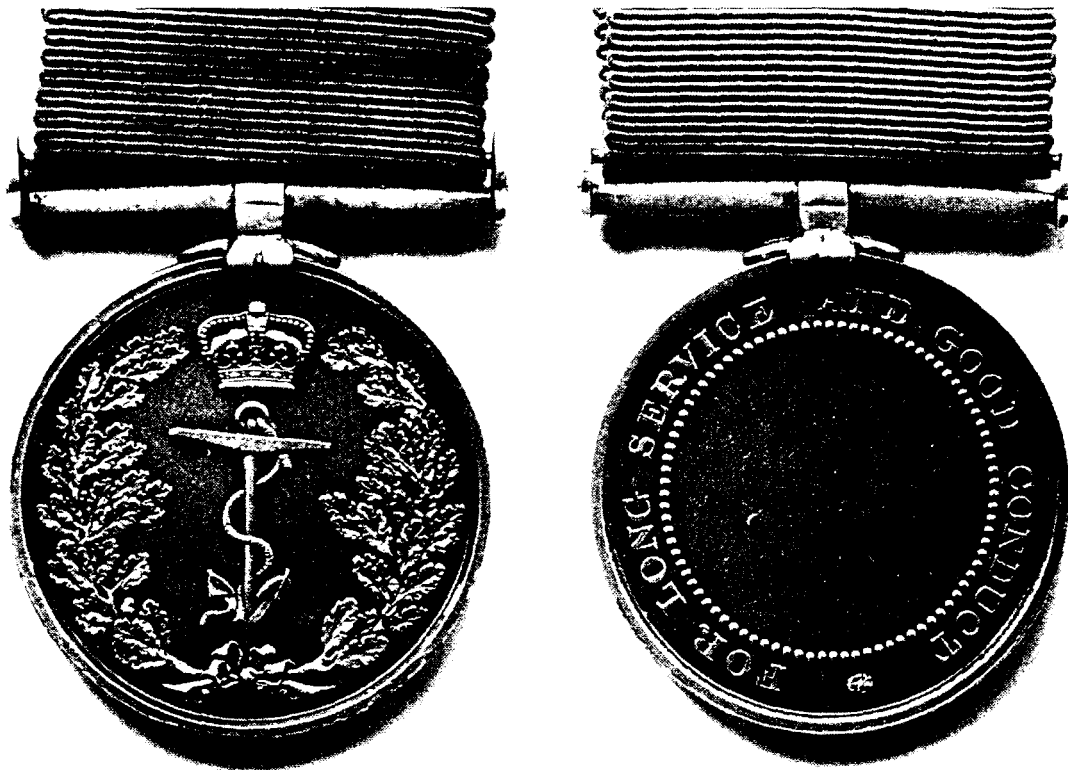
‘As Mr. Shaw is already a First Class Engineer and no opportunity may occur for years of giving him any shore appointment, I venture to suggest, for their Lordships’ consideration, whether some gratuity might not be given him to mark their Lordships’ sense of his good conduct.’

The Admiralty Board objected to the idea of giving a pecuniary award to an inferior officer for doing his duty, and asked Parry to point out some other way of rewarding Shaw, starting with their own initial suggestion that it might be by ‘. . . a good conduct medal which may be repeated to others for similar good service . . .’.

The idea of a medal appealed to Parry, who sought his staff’s assistance to educate himself on this novel method of reward. He soon found out that there was a medal given when ships ‘paid off’ from commissions in excess of three years duration, rationed in quantity to a total not exceeding one medal per hundred of the ship’s company, and only available thus on a lottery basis to men with very good character assessments for 21 years service or more above the age of twenty—the LS & GC medal.

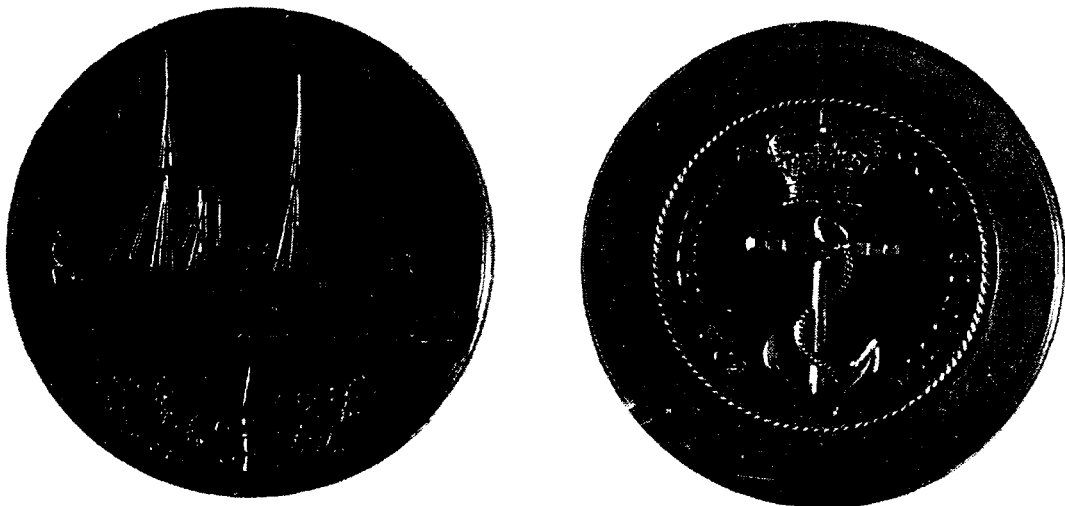
Since these ‘lower-deck’ rules, which excluded judgements on work skills, did not equate with the ideas Parry had in mind, he proposed that it would be well to have a different medal laying less stress on conduct (his exact words were curiously ‘. . . of lower rank (sic) for good conduct . . .’) with no reference to time of service, but based primarily on professional competence.

This philosophy proved acceptable and the design of the medal was placed surprisingly in the hands of an Admiralty Clerk 2nd Class (Mr. Waller Clifton who later claimed to be the 14th Baronet). This artist extraordinary prepared drawings for ‘. . . a suitable device . . .’, basing his composition undoubtedly on a revised and appropriate combination of the two sides of the existing LS & GC medal—known today as the ‘Anchor Type’ (1830–1847) shown at FIG. 1.



obverse

reverse

FIG. 1—NAVAL 'ANCHOR TYPE' (1830-1847) LS & GC MEDAL (SIZE $\times 1.5$)

obverse

reverse

FIG. 2—ORIGINAL DESIGN OF THE 'NAVAL ENGINEERS' GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL (SIZE $\times 1.5$)

Although none of Clifton's drawings have come to light, his original designs for the engineers' medal can be gleaned from the copper 'pattern' of this award which I recently unearthed. I am indebted to the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum for allowing me permission to print their copyright photographs—shown at FIG. 2—of the 'trial piece' which had hitherto lain unrecognized for its unique historical importance in numismatic terms. A glance at its 'reverse' reveals the plain surrounding circular space wherein the recipient's

details could be engraved. This area encompasses the chosen wording—FOR ABILITY AND GOOD CONDUCT—to succinctly describe the criteria for this warrant officers' award. The 'obverse' appropriately portrays a two masted paddle-wheel steam vessel with which engineers were acquainted at this time. The famous stern-to-stern tug of war between the victor *Rattler* (screw) and *Alecto* (paddle-wheel) took place two years later in 1844. The motif of the head of a trident surrounded by oak leaves 'in exergue' deserves special attention, since it forms part of new emerging history and because its portrayal has never previously been published anywhere.

Before this prototype was produced, there had been discussion on the finished metal and wearing method of the ultimate medals to adorn a few chosen Engineers. It was suggested that since this new medal was intended for warrant officers, it ought to present a superior appearance to the 'silver medal' awarded to seamen. The proposal to make it of 'silver and gilt' did not materialize because of the unacceptable additional cost of three shillings a medal to create the better golden ambience. For similar prideful reasons, it was mooted that the medal '... might be suspended by a ribbon round the neck ...', rather than at the third button-hole of the jacket as was the instruction to seamen holders of the LS & GC medal. At this stage Captain Parry slipped in his opinion that '... judging by the pride which I know Engineers take in their uniform, I should hope that a medal for good conduct would be highly appreciated by them ...', no doubt to set off their unwieldy regulation headgear at the time of a tall top hat! No mention of the colour of the ribbon appears to have been made, and it seems most likely that the plain 'Trafalgar Blue' worn by seamen with their award was adopted by engineers initially.

The man sought by the Admiralty to engrave the dies and produce the medals was Mr. William Wyon, the Chief Engraver at the Royal Mint since 1828. He was, however, contracted to do the work in his private capacity, since he had obtained some years earlier a personal treaty arrangement to design and supply medals and medallions for clients—including the British Government—with the use of the Great Press at the Royal Mint after working hours. In this instance he charged 25 guineas for the dies, and quoted on 24 May 1842 a price for each medal '... in fine silver to be about 12 to 14 shillings including the loop ...'. (To put these prices into perspective the monthly pay of a lieutenant R.N. and an able seaman was £14 and £1.14.0 respectively at this time.)

On 25 August 1842 the named award to Mr. William Shaw was handled personally by the First Sea Lord (Sir George Cockburn) at his desk. His first action was to approve the intended measure for the Captain Superintendent, Woolwich Yard (Sir Francis Collier) to present the medal, adding this eulogy:

'Acquaint William Shaw that in consideration of his good conduct and diligence during the long period he acted as Engineer of the *Tartarus*, their Lordships have been pleased as a mark of their approbation to bestow on him the enclosed medal.'

Admiral Cockburn's second memorandum displays his unexpected expertise on medallic design when he stipulated that:

'In future the Engineers' Medal be not frosted on that part of the margin which bears the name of the Engineer—only on the edge—the crown and anchor to remain frosted—the oak leaf to be taken away—the trident to remain.' Dated 25 August 1842.

William Wyon considered that the suggested alterations in the dies for the medal could be made without re-engraving them, but added that it would be necessary to soften one of the dies to remove the oak leaves round the trident. He concluded by mentioning that there was always a risk in hardening a die a second time, and trusted that no accident would occur.

On 17 September, Wyon received approval to make the alterations which proved successful and were in time for the second award, that to Mr. William Dunkin in November 1842. FIG. 3 shows both faces of Dunkin's medal which is in the author's collection.



FIG. 3—FINAL PRODUCTION DESIGN AWARDED TO MR. WILLIAM DUNKIN (SIZE $\times 1.5$)

Comparison of the 'obverse' designs (FIG. 3 with FIG. 2) shows that not only did Wyon remove the oak leaves, but he also substituted his own concept of a more efficient barbed trident in lieu of Clifton's simpler design. It will also be noticed that Dunkin's medal, which is believed to be one of a batch produced as stock for future awards, was not well 'struck up'. The rigging lines and pennant are barely visible; a rare lapse into poor workmanship by the elitist William Wyon, and no fault of the photographer. These faint 'finger prints' assume greater relevance later when assessment is made on the merit of a probable unofficial forgery.

Since none of the Wyon family papers or work books have survived, it is not possible to complete the story on the contemporary striking(s) of this medal, but some records have been found concerning the re-striking of this award some 30 years later for exhibition and other purposes.

The existence of this 'Engineers' Good Conduct Medal' (1842), and the rules for its award, were never brought to the notice of the Fleet via the normal channels of Admiralty Memorandum (forerunner of A.F.Os.), nor by a notice in the Appendix to the Navy List. It has to be assumed that its publicity was spread by word of mouth.

William Shaw received his medal (26 August) whilst he was serving in a tender (H.M.S. *Lightning*) to H.M. Yacht *William and Mary*, the Engineers'

Base vessel berthed in Woolwich Yard with Captain Collier wearing the twin hats of Commanding Officer and Captain Superintendent of the Yard. Less than three weeks later, H.M.S. *Gleaner* was inspected by the Woolwich team on 12 September 1842 as part of her 'paying off' process, and it seems likely that her Chief Engineer (Mr. William Dunkin) heard of the existence of the new medal during this probing period. But in the case of the next recipient of the medal (Dunkin), the manner in which it was obtained was very different from the unsolicited reward accorded to Shaw. This second award was self-induced as were numerous favours in this period, when it was perfectly normal for officers to ask for (or strenuously demand!) good appointments, promotion, and C.Bs. in 'Memorials'.

Dunkin was well aware of this time-honoured approach which was not considered insolent. Whilst on leave in his home at 64 Warwick Street, Woolwich, he wrote a letter on 20 September 1842 '... enclosing his certificates, and seeking one of the Medals which their Lordships have ordered to be struck for Chief Engineers of H.M. Naval Service, should they think me deserving of it.'

Captain Parry perused Dunkin's claims to distinction and adduced that at least one particular instance might merit this special award for an earlier endeavour. The performance for which he was now to receive just recognition had commenced five years previously in July 1837, when H.M. Steam Vessel *Alban* had been driven on shore in company with 29 other ships during a hurricane at Carlisle Bay, Barbados. *Alban* was one of only three vessels to survive the pounding, and when lightened of her stores and coals she was hauled off and made passage to English Harbour, Antigua under sail.

Extensive damage to her entire keel and hull called for the need to beach her and subsequent hauling-down to both port and starboard sides, which in turn meant that every piece of machinery had to be removed before any remedial measures could commence. At this early stage *Alban's* Chief Engineer went sick. This was when the neighbourly Chief Engineer of H.M.St.V. *Carron* (Mr. William Dunkin) stepped in as a volunteer to supervise the work of removing the boilers, main engine and ancillaries—never before attempted overseas. With the hull reconditioned and the ship upright, it took Dunkin and his crew just eight weeks to replace all the steam propulsion equipment—two weeks longer than the removal process. *Alban's* Commanding Officer (Lieutenant E. B. Tinling, R.N.) commended Dunkin in expansive terms at the time for his creditable work, reporting also that his vessel was '... as efficient as the first day she left England.'

All this Parry learnt from filed reports, but to confirm his intention he sought the views of Tinling, now (October 1842) to be found at Sheerness aboard H.M.S. *Camperdown* as her Commander in Command. Tinling replied approvingly by stating that he '... considered the conduct of Mr. Dunkin, on the occasion alluded to, such as to justify you in recommending him for the Medal lately established for skill and good conduct in Engineers. And that he is worthy of this high distinction.'

A month later, Mr. William Dunkin received his award whilst aboard the *William and Mary* on 30 November 1842, a few days prior to receipt of his Warrant to join H.M.S. *Gorgon* as her Chief Engineer. He was to be involved in her dramatic grounding on the mud flats in Monte Video harbour in 1844, an unfortunate circumstance which took five months of ingenuity to resolve—all of which is another story.

There were to be five more awards of this medal in the next four years, but no original document has been found on the subject of recommendation (or personal request) in any one case, simply because naval records for this period have been ruthlessly and indiscriminately 'weeded'. Nevertheless, in the case of the next two recipients, the Admiralty Digest book (1843), which contains a

precis of 'IN' and 'OUT' letters, provides some useful information. In a relevant place under the date of 11 February 1843 there is mention of approval for:

'Mr. John Langley and Mr. William Johnstone to have a medal each for exemplary conduct on the Niger Expedition'

These men were the First Class Engineers of H.M. Ships *Albert* and *Wilberforce* respectively, and were more than fortunate to survive the disastrous and fever (death) stricken expedition. Both these officers subsequently served in the Crimea, earning campaign medals and clasps, with Langley being amongst the first engineer officers to earn a foreign decoration—as Knight (5th Class) of the Imperial Order of the Legion of Honour—for services in that theatre of war.

Even less facts have surfaced on the three remaining recipients, and all that is known for certain is that the Comptroller of Steam Machinery approved the awards of medals as follows to:

First Class Engineer	J. P. Rundle	H.M.S. <i>Medea</i>	9 May 1845
First Class Engineer	George Roberts	H.M.S. <i>Alban</i>	16 Sept 1845
Actg. 2nd Class Engineer	Samuel B. Meredith	H.M.S. <i>Firebrand</i>	19 Oct 1846

Whilst searching the careers of these engineers, no outstanding achievement was found for Rundle or Roberts, discounting this little story about Roberts which might strike a sympathetic chord or two:

("IN" Letter dated 28 Dec. 1844) 1st Engineer George Roberts of *Alban* sends account of travelling expenses incurred in joining his ship.

("OUT" Letter dated 7 Jan. 1845) To be paid, deducting from the amount the difference between 1st and 2nd Class train by railway to Bristol, and Mr. Roberts to be informed that he should have joined in a 2nd Class carriage.

Meredith, on the other hand, had recently served as 3rd Engineer aboard H.M.S. *Firebrand*, and seen action up the River Parana at the Battle of Punta Obligado (Nov. 1845) when the heavy chain boom and covering batteries were successfully attacked by forces under his Commanding Officer (Captain James Hope, C.B.).

On 1 October 1846, Captain Parry approved Meredith's recommended promotion to Acting 2nd Class Engineer '. . . for conduct at Obligado . . .', and it is surely no disconnected coincidence that less than three weeks later Parry also gained for Meredith his good conduct medal. This final presentation shows that the award could be given to a junior engineer officer with overtones suggesting, in this instance, a use of the medal to honour valour in action, just as the LS & GC medal had occasionally been given for similar reasons to seamen and marines. Decorations (V.C., C.G.M. & D.C.M.) for acts of courage before the enemy were not to be instituted until the Crimean War a decade ahead.

No official statement has been found which cancelled the use of this Engineers' Good Conduct Medal, but there can be little doubt that it was the Order in Council dated 27 February 1847 which gave commissioned rank to engineers which caused its demise.

But this was not the end of the story of the Engineers' Medal, because this same year heralded the introduction of the Naval and Army General Service Medals retrospectively for the men who had survived the then 'Late Great World War' (1793–1815). It was this deluge of tens of thousands of named campaign medals which shortly led to the commencement of the medal-collecting hobby amongst a few enthusiastic men. By the early 1870s there were about fifteen collectors of repute with '. . . unrivalled pride of place . . .' accorded to the collection of Mr. K. Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth—who lacked, however, this particularly rare 'type' of Naval award.

On 6 January 1875, this Mr. Mackenzie wrote to the Admiralty asking

'... to be allowed to have the Engineers' Good Conduct Medal struck for him as he was interested in a collection of Naval Medals.' By chance there was another collector in the Admiralty Secretariat dealing with his request—a Mr. Edwin N. Swainson (Clerk of the First Class), and he too wanted a similar piece. The Royal Mint were approached for the provision of three specimens of the medal and, after some enquiry, found the dies in the possession of Messrs. J. B. & A. Wyon, of 287 Regent Street from whom they were borrowed. Unlike Dunkin's medal which appears to have been issued without a suspension loop, these specimens were to be prepared with a proper 'mount'.

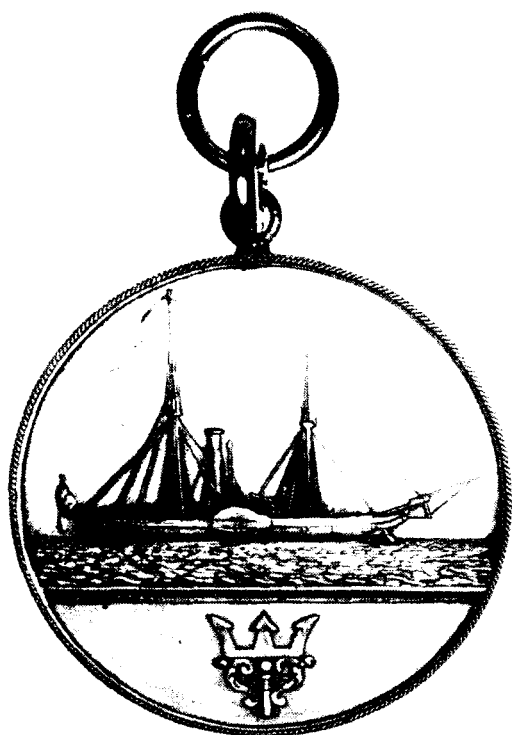


FIG. 4—OBVERSE OF RE-STRIKE SPECIMEN (1875) (SIZE $\times 1.5$)

specimens to grace the gap in their own cabinets. The Royal Mint would appear to have struck a further batch of no more than twenty judging by their availability today, selling them at ten shillings and sixpence to enquirers. The 'Obverse' of this well-produced specimen is shown at FIG. 4 with its functional treble ring suspension.

It was the existence of these specimens which led, in my opinion, to a forger taking one very clever advantage of the situation many years later. The temptation was great. In 1911 when Mr. William Shaw's medal was sold at auction for £76, an 'Anchor Type' LS & GC medal commanded the sum of one pound with TRAFALGAR-clasped Naval General Service Medals available for less than £3—these latter medals are priced now at about £275 and £800 respectively.

For a long time there has been a so-called 8th Engineers' Medal on the market, thought to be held for the last 25 years somewhere in Australia. This medal is named with suspiciously more details than other awards to:

'JAMES URQUHART. 1st ENGINEER. H.M.S.V. COLUMBIA. 1845.'

Although this name does not appear on an official list of recipients logged in 1875, there is an intriguing reason behind its more than mythical appearance.

In the 1845 Admiralty Digest Book (ADM 12/448. Cut 85.a.) there is an entry:

W. Urquhart. To have a medal for invention of Tide Gauge. 8 July. Lt.S.186

The question of the colour of the ribbon was raised without answer from within the Admiralty, which led to the need for such information being obtained from a surviving recipient. Langley, who by now was a retired Inspector of Machinery residing at Hillside, Newton Abbot, was approached. In his reply he stated '... that there was no distinguishing ribbon supplied with the medal which I received for the Niger Expedition. Captain Broke, through whom I received it, advised me to wear the Naval Ribbon—blue with white edges—which I have always done when wearing it with other medals.' His memory had played him false on a minor point. The white edged LS & GC (rating) ribbon did not replace the plain blue 'Anchor Type' material until five years after presentation of his award. His statement, however, remains useful as the only one yet known on the subject of the ribbon for the original Engineers' Medal.

Once other collectors heard of this initial re-striking, they asked for additional

This has always been read as proof of the 8th award, but the conclusion reached by former researchers has been arrived at from misinterpretation of the normal mode of making entries in this precis book. The initial (upper) remarks on a subject refer to the "IN" letter, which in this case is a *proposal* by the Commanding Officer of H.M. Steam Surveying Vessel *Columbia* (Lieutenant P. F. Shortland—whose letter No. 186 has been weeded from records) for his Engineer (Urquhart) to be considered as a worthy candidate for the Engineers' Good Conduct Medal. Normally the decision and an abbreviated version of the "OUT" letter is entered underneath the precis of the "IN" letter, but in this case there are no remarks at all. The separate alphabetical register of "IN" and "OUT"

letters does not show the despatch of a medal to Urquhart, as it does in this and other years for the seven Engineers already mentioned.

The reason why no attention was given to Shortland's recommendation for Urquhart, in July 1845, might well stem from the fact that the Admiralty Board had already honoured another man for a similar device. On 3 January 1845, a Mr. John Cawley, the 2nd Engineer of *Columbia*, had been given five pounds for making a tide gauge, with the Board additionally approving of his ingenuity and skill.

By a piece of good fortune, the doubtful medal to Urquhart was photographed and used as an example (?) of this rare award in a well-known reference book on medals. The 'obverse' is well struck up with pennant and rigging lines as plain to see as in the re-strike specimen (FIG. 4). It also has a fixed ring suspension similar to the specimen, but the most telling factor of surface differences to the rim cannot be discerned from the small reproduction of Urquhart's medal.

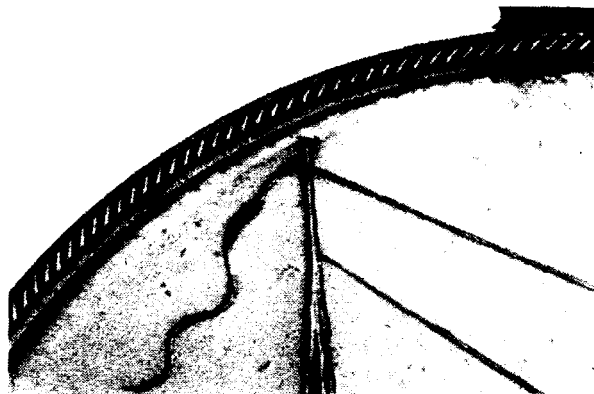


FIG. 5—(UPPER) ORIGINAL STRIKING (1842)
—GROOVED RIM
(LOWER) RE-STRIKE SPECIMEN (1875)
—DIAGONAL GRAINED RIM

Enlargements of the top quadrant of an original striking (Dunkin's 1842 medal) and from a re-strike specimen (1875) appear in FIG. 5. This previously unrecorded difference between the grooved raised rim (1842) and diagonal graining (1875) should classify Urquhart's medal once and for all time, if it ever appears again in public.

Caveat emptor

Acknowledgement

I record with gratitude my thanks to the Keeper of the Public Record Office for permission to publish facts taken from documents under his control.