

The Life Saving Medal of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem

At the time of the institution of this medal, there was no state or national award available for bravery or lifesaving of civilians on land. Such awards as existed were provided by private philanthropic institutions and were mostly confined to a narrow range of activity. The Royal Humane Society concerned itself predominately with rescues in docks, harbours and rivers; the R.N.L.I., the Ship wrecked mariners and the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Societies operated around the coast and the Medal of the Society for The Protection of Life from Fire was of obvious application. For rescues in mines, quarries, factories and industry in general there was no public or private body to which application for recognition could be made.

The institution of the Life Saving Medal in 1874 was a response by the Chapter General of the Order to this perceived gap in the range of awards and the original discussions showed clearly an attempt to parallel the Royal Humane Society by confining awards of the medal to acts on land.

The description of the first pattern, which was awarded from its institution in 1874 until the first Royal Charter of 1888 is as follows:

The medal is circular and manufactured in bronze or silver and is of one and seven-sixteenth inches (37mm) diameter.

Obverse: In the centre the eight pointed cross of the Order without embellishment. Within a circular border the words AWARDED BY THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM IN ENGLAND in seriffed capitals.

Reverse: A sprig of St. John's wort bound with two ribbons, the upper bearing the words "JERUSALEM ACRE" and the lower bearing the words "CYPRUS RHODES MALTA". Within a circular border the words "FOR SERVICE IN THE CAUSE OF HUMANITY".

Ribbon: Unwatered black 1 ¼ inches suspended from a swivelling ring. Embroidered thereon in white the unembellished cross of the Order. On some later versions of the ribbon, the cross appears to have been printed on.

The dies were cut by Messrs. Wyon and the manufacture undertaken by Phillips Bros. and Son of Cockspur Street, London, who had been jewellers and insignia makers to the Order since 1858.

Very few of this first pattern medal exist, only 34 silver and 18 bronze awards having been made before it was necessary to change the dies to reflect the new designs of the Order's badge. The second pattern uses the same designs, but in a different combination.



Lifesaving Medal in silver, awarded to Edwin Ralphs, 1925

The medal is circular and manufactured in bronze or silver and is of one and seven-sixteenths inches (37mm) diameter. From 1907, a gold version was authorised.

Obverse: In the centre the eight pointed cross of the Order embellished with two lions and two unicorns in the interstices. Within a circular border the words "FOR SERVICE IN THE CAUSE OF HUMANITY" in serriffed capitals.

Reverse: A sprig of St. John's wort bound with a ribbon bearing the words "JERUSALEM ENGLAND". Within a circular border the words AWARDED BY THE GRAND PRIORY OF THE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM.

Ribbon: Watered black of one and one quarter inches suspended from a small ring. Later watered black of one and one half inches.

From 1980, the wording of the reverse was changed to read "AWARDED BY THE MOST VENERABLE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM." In 1950 a new ribbon was authorised, consisting of a black centre with white side stripes edged with red. In 1963, a bar to the Medal was instituted to recognise further acts. It has been awarded only twice in gold.

Medal Recipients

Great thought has always been given to the standard required for the award of this medal and it has never been authorised when it has been known that another organisation such as the Royal Humane Society was intending to make an award.

The first presentation of the Order's life-saving Medal were to two colliers, Elijah Hallam and Frederick Vickers. On the 6th September 1875, at imminent risk of their own lives, they saved six of their fellow workmen, who were suspended in a broken cage half-way down the shaft of a coal pit. Quite a few of the early awards were for incidents involving mining accidents because of the lack of safety legislation for miners at that time. Other early awards included:

The medal in bronze to Mr Thomas William Clover, a carter in the employment of the Corporation of Margate. 1895. *"For attempting to rescue a fellow workman, who had been overcome by foul air whilst engaged in emptying a cesspool in Margate."*

P.C. George Josiah Haylock, City Police. *"For great gallantry and presence of mind in stopping a runaway horse on 30th May 1896. The Horse attached to a Pentech-nicon bolted from Queen Victoria Street into Mansion House Street where the driver was thrown from his seat and fatally injured. Haylock succeeded in stopping the horse at imminent personal risk being dragged nearly 100 yds and very narrowly escaped being crushed by the van and a lamp post."*

Awards are still made. One of the most recent recipients was a St. John Ambulance Cadet, seventeen year old Paul Swift. Paul received a gold medal for rescuing a woman and her



child from the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. The Rt. Hon. The Lord Slynn of Hadley, Prior of England and the Islands of the Order of St. John, said: 'This prestigious medal is only awarded in exceptional circumstances. Paul's heroic actions in difficult conditions saved the lives of two people and deserve recognition of the highest level.'