



THE LIFE SAVING MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

Background

The Life Saving Medal of the Order of St John ('the Life Saving Medal') was instituted in 1874, to enable the Order to honour those who saved, or attempted to save, the life of and another and who placed themselves at imminent personal risk in doing so.

The institution of the Life Saving Medal was a response by the Order to this perceived gap in the range of awards available as 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 RNLI, 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.

There are three conditions for the award of the Life Saving Medal, namely:

- the nominee must have performed 'a conspicuous act of bravery';
- in performing that act, the nominee must have endangered his or her own life; and
- the nominee must have performed the act in saving, or attempting to save the life of another or others.

The Life Saving Medal is awarded in Bronze, Silver and Gold (since 1907), depending on the circumstances of each case.

In 1963, a bar to the Medal was instituted to recognise further acts. It has been awarded only twice, in gold

Description – First Pattern

The first pattern was awarded from its institution in 1874 until the first Royal Charter of 1888.

The obverse features, in the centre, the eight pointed cross of the Order without embellishment surrounded by a circular border containing the words 'AWARDED BY THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM IN ENGLAND' in serif capitals.

On the 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', is surrounded by a circular border containing the words 'FOR SERVICE IN THE CAUSE OF HUMANITY'.

The ribbon is unwatered black silk, 1 ¼ inches wide, 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.

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.

Description – Second Pattern

The second pattern came into use following the granting of the Order's Royal Charter in 1888.

The obverse features, in the centre, the eight pointed cross of the Order embellished with two lions and two unicorns in the interstices, surrounded by a circular border containing the words 'FOR SERVICE IN THE CAUSE OF HUMANITY' in serif capitals.

On the reverse, a sprig of St John's wort bound with a ribbon bearing the words 'JERUSALEM ENGLAND' is surrounded by a circular border containing the words 'AWARDED BY THE GRAND PRIORY OF THE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM'. From 1980, the wording on the reverse was changed to read 'AWARDED BY THE MOST VENERABLE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM.'

The original ribbon was watered black silk of 1 ¼ inches suspended from a small ring. Later watered black of 1 ½ inches. In 1950 a new ribbon was authorised, consisting of a black centre with white side stripes edged with red.

Further information

If you need any further information, please contact the Priory Affairs Department.

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