THE KING’S POLICE MEDAL

Obverse of Medal George V
(Issue before 1916)

Reverse of Medal
(Type of medal issued prior to 1916)

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The Kings Police Medal was introduced by King Edward VIII and instituted by Royal Warrant on the 7th July 1909, for those "who performed acts of exceptional courage and skill or who have exhibited conspicuous devotion to duty."

Until that time apart from local recognition, there was no such award given to police officers in England and Wales. However in Ireland the Constabulary Medal (Ireland) had been in existence since 1842, but this was restricted to the Constabulary of Ireland (later to be known as the Royal Irish Constabulary).

The Kings Police Medal which was made of silver had on the reverse an effigy of King Edward and on the obverse a representation of a city with an armoured figure at its gate holding a huge sword and a shield. Beneath are the words: "To guard my people." On the rim of each medal is engraved the recipients name. The ribbon is dark blue with a narrow silver stripe at each edge. In 1916 a central silver stripe was added.

The medal could be withdrawn if the recipient was subsequently convicted of crime or disgraceful conduct.

From 1934 two distinct medals were issued "For Gallantry" and "For Distinguished Service". The first has the words FOR GALLANTRY in the space at the foot of the figure, while a thin red line was added in each white stripe of the ribbon. The old ribbon was retained for the medal for distinguished service which has the words FOR DISTINGUISHED POLICE SERVICE round the figure of the watchman on the reverse.

In 1940 the medal was renamed the King's Police and Fire Services medal, in recognition of the bravery of firemen during the Blitz, but there was no change made to the design of the medal itself.

After the war the number of awards of the medal for gallantry were reduced, partly due to the introduction of the George Cross and George Medal. From 1950, gallantry medals were only awarded posthumously and all medals were discontinued in 1954 when separate awards were established for the two services.

The Queen's Police Medal was instituted in 1954 and is awarded FOR GALLANTRY (posthumously) or DISTINGUISHED POLICE SERVICE. Some 700 K.P.M.'s have been awarded for gallantry, but only one, (in 1947) has been awarded to a woman officer.

The first regulations for the award of the medal stated that no more than one hundred and twenty should be awarded in any one year.
with only forty going to the United Kingdom, the remainder going to police officers in the HM Dominions and India.

The qualifications for the grant of the medal included for conspicuous gallantry in saving life or property; preventing crime; or arresting criminals; specially distinguished record in administrative or detective service; success in organising police forces; special services in dealing with serious and widespread outbreaks of crime or public order and valuable political or secret services.

One of the first recipients of the medal was Captain Edward McClean Showers, the Chief Constable of Essex, who was awarded the medal for 'a long and distinguished record of administrative service, marked by success in dealing with serious crime and in particular with several difficult murder cases.' He was awarded the medal in November 1909 and received it personally from King George V in July 1910.

The second award was made in 1913 to Superintendent Harry Laver (1877-1914), for 'thirtyfive years exemplary service distinguished by special merit and ability, particularly in dealing with prolonged outbreaks of public disorder.'

Only two awards for gallantry have been made to Essex Officers and both were awarded to officers serving in the Grays Division. The first was to Constable Robert Merchant who earned his award when he attempted to arrest the occupants of a stolen car at Grays, in the early hours of the 13th November, 1929 and the second was to Constable Bruce Frederick Howard, (1938-1964), who was awarded the medal in 1948 for the arrest of a man armed with a twelve bore shotgun.

Only two years after the murder of Pc Gutteridge at Stapleford Abbots, killed by the occupants of a stolen vehicle Pc Merchant also attempted to arrest the four occupants of a stolen motor car which had stopped. The irony of the situation was that Merchant had been posted to Stapleford Abbots soon after the murder of Gutteridge and would have been only too aware of the facts of the case. He was violently assaulted being struck in the face with a jack handle, by the men, who then ran off; but Pc Merchant was able to give chase and managed to arrest one of his assailants. Another was also arrested and found to be in possession of housebreaking implements. Both were subsequently convicted.

At the subsequent trial, the Chairman said of
Robert Merchant, “...the appreciation which everyone who heard his evidence must have in regard to his action in this case of boldness... The man might have suffered as other constables have suffered in the discharge of similar duty. He was in great danger, but in spite of the danger he persevered in his task alone, tackling these four men and I think his conduct is deserving of the highest commendation and of the public thanks...”

PC Merchant received his award from the King at an investiture at Buckingham Palace. At the same investiture the Chief Constable, Captain Unnett, DSO, received the KPM for distinguished service. Merchant retired from the force in 1950 and enjoyed more than thirtyseven years on pension before dying in 1987.

The second gallantry award went to a constable stationed at Tilbury. PC Howard was on patrol in Tilbury when he discovered one a burglary in progress at premises in Tilbury. Together with the night-watchman they commenced to search the premises when they heard the sound of breaking glass and saw two men climbing out of a window. One of the men ran off but the other remained outside the window and was seen to be holding a gun.

The man pointed the gun at PC Howard saying, “Stay where you are or I'll shoot.” PC Howard continued to walk towards the man. The man still pointing the gun at the officer walked towards the main gate. PC Howard threw his torch at the man, who responded by striking the officer with the gun, knocking him to the ground. The man ran off, pursued by Howard who eventually managed to overpower the man and arrest him. The man was subsequently convicted at Quarter Sessions and received four years penal servitude on three charges.

This incident occurred only two weeks after the brutal murder of a Metropolitan police officer, who had been shot whilst carrying out his duties.

Howard finished his career as a Sergeant on the River Section at Tilbury, retiring in 1964. Awards of the Kings Police and Fire Services Medal include those to Superintendent Orlando Knights (1941), and to Superintendent Ernest Marriage (1945), both for distinguished service during the war.

No medals were awarded to officers from either Southend or Colchester Borough police forces. In the case of Colchester, the Watch Committee minutes reveal that in 1917 the name of Superintendent Poole was put forward as a possible recipient of the KPM for distinguished service. This was followed in 1919 by a further request and in 1922 by a letter from the Mayor of Colchester to the Home Office demanding to know why Poole had not been awarded the medal. The reply is not known but Poole did not get his medal.

Footnote: The Coronation (Police) Medal 1911 was issued to police officers throughout the country in celebration of the Coronation of King George V. The picture shows those officers awarded the medal in Essex. Over 2500 medals were awarded to County and Borough Police Forces, with separate medals awarded to the Metropolitan and City of London Police.

Medals were also awarded to selected Essex officers in recognition of the 1935 King's Silver Jubilee, the 1937 and 1953 Coronations and the 1977 Queen's Jubilee (Civilian staff also received this medal).

Acknowledgments: Roger Appleby, Curator of the City of London Police Museum; Alan Endres, Essex Police.

The Essex Police Museum is open to visitors by appointment only. Contact should be made in the first instance with the Curator, Fred Feather on (01245) 491491, extension 50770.

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