

## THE SERVICE MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN

The first mention of the Service Medal is found in St. John Ambulance Brigade General Regulations for 1895 where, at para. 11 it is stated :

By command of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Grand Prior of the Order, the Council of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England intimate that Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to authorise the issue of Service Medals to reward Distinguished Services and to encourage efficiency and long service in the various Departments of the Order.

Members of the Brigade who have performed distinguished services, or have served honourably and efficiently for a period of not less than fifteen consecutive years, will be eligible for this medal.

Matters progressed slowly and a great deal of discussion about eligibility and design took place before the first list of recipients was approved in November, 1898. The actual medal was not issued until the following year.

### DESCRIPTION

With one small exception, the design of the Service Medal has remained constant throughout its history. The obverse features the head of Queen Victoria, modelled from a bust carved by H.R.H. The Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, together with the legend VICTORIA + D + G + BRITT + REG + F + D + IND + IMP. Originally this legend and that on the reverse were in ornamental gothic script but, since 1960, the current die uses upright seriffed capitals as printed. The Service Medal is the only British medal to retain the head of Queen Victoria on a current issue. The reverse of the medal, between sprigs of St. John's wort, contains five circles showing the Imperial Crown, the Royal Arms, the arms of the Prince of Wales as first Grand Prior under the Charter of 1888, the crest of the Prince of Wales and the pre 1926 Arms of the Order. Around the edge appears the legend MAGNUS · PRIORATUS · ORDINIS · HOSPITALIS · SANCTI · JOHANNIS · JERUSALEM · IN · ANGLIA. (*Grand Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England.*) From its inception until 1942, when issue ceased for the duration of the war, the medal was manufactured in silver. Upon resumption in 1947 until 1960 alternatives involving base metal and silvering were employed. Between 1960 and 1966 the medals were silvered cupro-nickel and since 1966 they have been cupro-nickel, rhodium plated.

From its inception until 1942, the medal was named centrally with the medal number, rank and name of recipient, unit and year of award. For example: 1234 D/Supt. L.A. JONES NORWOOD DIVN. No. 1 DIST. 1934. Post war this practice was abandoned except by a few Districts that made their own arrangements for a few years. As far as is known, the only medals currently being named are those issued in New Zealand, which show a number, initials and name, for example: NZ.1234 J. BLOGGS.

Bars are available for wear on the ribbon of the Service Medal to indicate further service. From 1911 until 1924, these consisted of a rectangular silver slip-over bar bearing the words FIVE YEARS SERVICE. In the latter year the design was changed to show a central eight-pointed cross bordered by sprigs of St. John's wort.

Two top suspender bars were issued to those who qualified. They are in silver, rectangular and bear, under a central crown, the letters M.H.R. or V.A.D. They were issued to St. John members of either the Military Hospitals Reserve or the Voluntary Aid Detachments after 12 years satisfactory service. These bars were introduced in 1932 but discontinued after the Second World War. They are not common.

The ribbon of the medal is one and a half inches wide and consists of five equal stripes, two white and three black. The original suspension was by means of a ring but this was changed to a straight suspender shortly after the introduction of bars in 1911.

### **QUALIFICATION**

The Medal is the Service Medal of the Order and should not be referred to as the Long Service Medal. Throughout its history it has been awarded for conspicuous service of different kinds to the Order and not merely for length of service. Its usual use, however, is to reward long service in St. John Ambulance and the normal qualification was 15 years efficient service in the United Kingdom and 12 years in the Priories of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. In any other overseas territory it is 10 years. The qualification period in the UK was reduced to 12 years in 1990.

Each additional 5 years of service is recognised by the award of a silver bar to be worn on the ribbon and, for a long period, it was possible to achieve a large number of these bars, which made them difficult to fit on the ribbon. This problem was solved by the introduction of gilt bars. When 20 years additional service has been performed the three silver bars are removed and a single gilt bar substituted. Additional periods of 5 years service are recognised by further gilt bars.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The Museum cannot often provide further information on recipients of the Service Medal. Most named medals would have been issued prior to 1942 and information about recipients is provided by the naming detail on the edge, which gives rank, initials and name, unit and District. Subtracting 15 years from the date of award will provide the year of enrolment as a member of St. John Ambulance.



Service Medal of the Order of  
St. John



Reverse of the Service Medal