

Northampton Christmas Dinner Fund 1914 – a Local Medallion – By Simon Wilson

In the late 19th century, and persisting into the early 20th, Northampton had a tradition of putting on Christmas dinners for the poor and infirm at Christmas. The weather on Christmas Day 1914 in Northampton was “delightful” according to the papers – crisp, frosty and fine. On that day 879 hampers were distributed to families, containing gifts for 2,449 poor children. A further 248 parcels were distributed to those known as “bedridden folk”.

This was 500 hampers fewer than in the previous year, as there was more employment due to the upturn in the market for military boots, though there were 36 more parcels given to the invalids.

The appeal had, this year, also included a Santa Claus Fund, providing gifts for children with parents or siblings in the forces. It was said that 2,914 children in Northampton were dependents of men serving in the forces, and 80 were the children of men posted killed or missing since the beginning of the war.

There were also 3,000 gifts (mainly clothing) provided by collectors in the USA and the town also provided gifts of chocolate and cigarettes to wounded men being treated in Northampton and the surrounding area. The American gifts included provision for Northampton's children and for 34 Belgian children living in town.

Apart from the normal volunteers who supervised the parcels, Boy Scouts were used to help with the American gifts and the Santa Claus Fund and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association compiled the necessary list of children with serving parents.

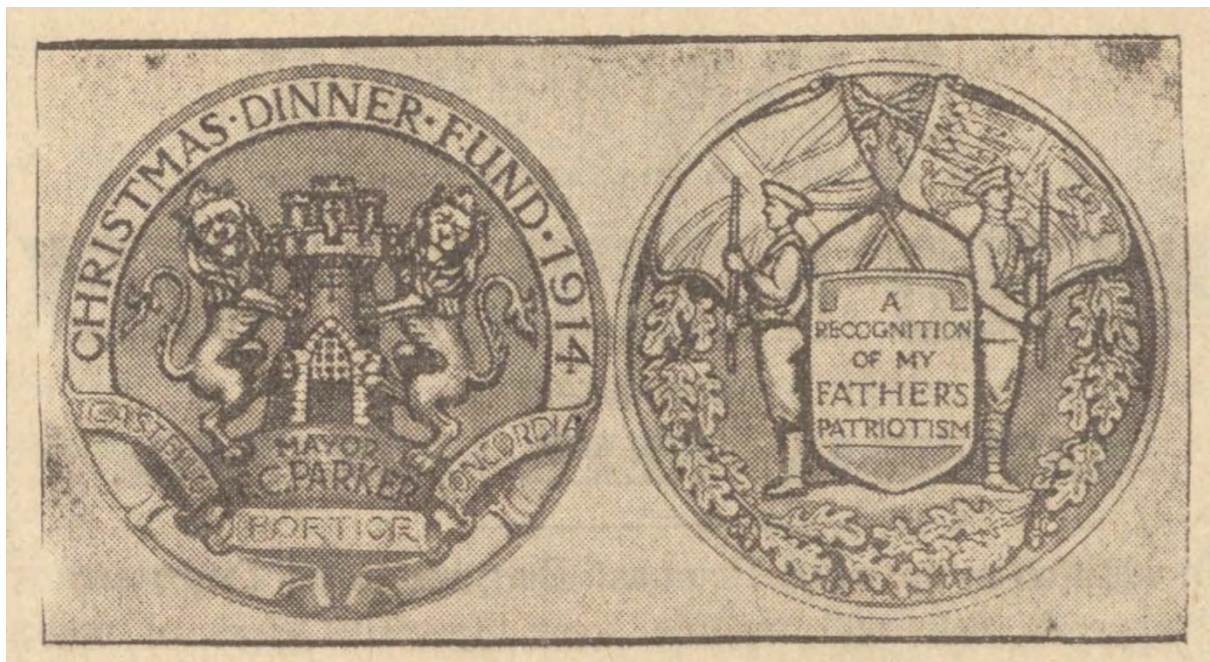


It was also announced that instead of toys, the children of Northampton would be given a commemorative war medal (above). This would be given to all children between the ages of 3 and 14 years who resided in a house where at least one member was serving in the forces. This was said to be “commemorative of the great struggle in which Britain is engaged”, though there was also a shortage of women to produce toys and dolls as they were performing other volunteer work in relation to the war.

The intention was for the medals to be distributed before the children broke up for the Christmas holiday, but the parcel of medallions was held up due to chaos on the railways. So many men were going on leave for Christmas, and so many parcels were being sent to servicemen that the system couldn't cope. The medallions were caught in the backlog and were eventually distributed on Tuesday 12 January 1915, after the return to school.

3,100 were supplied. One hundred were retained by the committee for distribution to children too young to go to school and the rest given out at school. Compared to the issue of 22,000 Coronation medals issued by Northampton in 1911, this is a very limited distribution.

The obverse bears the arms of Northampton with "CHRISTMAS DINNER FUND" above and "MAYOR/E. C. PARKER on a tablet below the castle and "CASTELLO FORTIOR CONCORDIA" on a scroll below.



The reverse has crossed flags (Union Flag and Royal Standard) with a soldier and sailor standing by a shield with the inscription "A/RECOGNITION/OF MY/FATHER'S/PATRIOTISM". The reverse is bordered by a wreath of oak leaves and has the makers name *Vaughton, Birm* outside the wreath at the bottom of the medal (below).



The medal is made of brass and is 32mm in diameter and a loop at the top for a pin suspender. It is very similar to the 1911 Northampton coronation medal from the same company.