

Chesterfield Peace Medal and a Ten Shilling Fine – by Simon Wilson

Many cities and towns produced Peace medallions to give to school children as a memento of the First World War, and a celebration of the return of Peace. Even more bought ready-made medallions which, unfortunately, have no mention of which town presented them. Some, in the interests of economy suspended them from printed ribbons or suspenders with the town name on them, and they have become detached over the years. They are distinct from the tribute medals that some places presented to returning servicemen, which are usually better quality and rarer. These medals were quite ordinary, and many town medals don't seem to get a mention in the local papers. However, the Chesterfield medallion appears in the press several times.



It is a modest white metal medallion with a diameter of 39mm. The obverse (*left*), is a standard design from Arthur Fenwick of Birmingham, bearing a chain circle around the outer edge with the names of allied countries, and three shields inside the chain, two bearing the emblems of the allies and the Empire, and one having the union flag on it. On the left side are the floral emblems of the home nations (rose, shamrock, thistle and daffodil) and on the right a spray of laurel and some indeterminate leaves which could be a palm. The medal has been pierced for a suspension ring and the word "TO" has been obliterated. At the base of the shields are clasped hands and a scroll saying "UNITED IN THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY". The words

REG NO and the number 665632 appear under the scroll.



The reverse design (*left*), consists of a pomegranate plant and, in a ring around it, "SIGILLVM COMMUNE BVRGI CESTREFELD" - the Seal of the town of Chesterfield. Outside that ring is further lettering "TO COMMEMORATE THE TERMINATION OF THE GREAT WORLD WAR: COMMENCED 4 AUG-ARMISTICE 11 NOV 1918-PEACE 28 JUNE 1919".

The first mention of the medal is in the *Courier* on 12 July discussing plans for the celebration and mentioning that the response from the ex-servicemen of the town had "not been up to expectations". I suppose that after serving in the army the last thing you wanted to

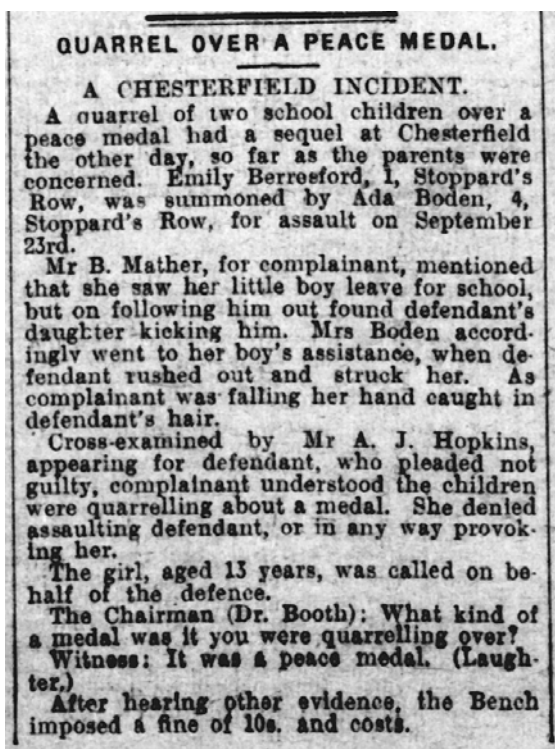
do to celebrate peace would be to form up, be shouted at and march round town, even if a free lunch

was on offer. The same report said that a commemorative medal is being designed with the Borough arms and would be given at a later date.

The next week's edition mentioned the tank (a tank and two field guns were presented to the town by the War Trophies Committee in recognition of its efforts during the war) and details the special arrangements being made for disabled servicemen and widows at the event. This was in line with the celebrations in London, where Lord Curzon ensured they were not left out – a lot of thought had gone into the national celebrations to ensure that they were not offensively triumphal – this was a day to celebrate peace and remember the sacrifices that had made it possible.

The next mention of the medals is in the *Derbyshire Times* 13 September 1919 when the costs for the celebration were itemised – the cost for 8,100 children, which included a good quality meal (the bread being specifically mentioned as having butter rather than margarine – food shortages and wartime inflation had affected many families) was £739 3s 0d (1s 10d each), which, according to the paper was a price “including medals”.

The third mention is from the *Derbyshire Times* 4 October 1919. G A Eastwood, the Chairman of the Chesterfield Education Committee, made a speech and gave out medals, with red, white and blue ribbons, at the Central Secondary School. Medals were given to class monitors, who were to distribute them to classmates. Pupils who left between January and June of that year were also to receive them, as were the Belgian refugees who had attended the school during the war. Mr Eastwood was presented with one of the medals by a pupil.



He reminded them all of the importance of what the medals represented, and the sacrifices made by the thousands of soldiers, now buried in France and Flanders, who had died fighting for their country.

The final mention of the medals comes in a court case in the *Belper News* 10 October 1919 (*left*). An argument between two children in Chesterfield had escalated to involve the mothers as a 13-year-old-girl had tried to take a medal off a younger boy, the girl's mother assaulting the boy's mother and being taken to court, where the following exchange took place:

The Chairman (Dr Booth): What kind of a medal was it you were quarrelling over?

Witness: It was a Peace Medal (Laughter.)

The defendant was fined 10s and costs.