

A Badge For a Baronet

February 11, 2015 by Joanne Thomas

Early in 2013 The Royal Mint received an order for a **baronet's badge** from **Sir Michael Nairn**, the 4th baronet of the Nairn family, a well-known name in the flooring industry, based in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. Sir Michael and his two sons, Andrew and Alex, belong to the prestigious Royal Company of Archers that functions as the sovereign's '**Body Guard in Scotland**'. All three were invited to attend a **Royal Garden Party** in Edinburgh in July 2013.

Being aware of his entitlement to wear a baronet's badge, Sir Michael naturally wished to wear it for this very special occasion. So he contacted the Medals department of The Royal Mint, requesting – '**could one be made in time**'? That immediately set in motion craftsmanship and skills that, although infrequently called upon, are still available here.

History and Design of the Baronet's Badge

The baronetcy was created in 1611 by James I who honoured 200 English 'gentlemen of good birth' with the title of 'Sir', with the intention of bridging the gap between peers of the realm and knights. **Scottish** baronets were granted a badge by Charles I in **1629**. Three hundred years later, George V agreed in 1929 that **all** baronets might wear a similar badge. Initial design sketches for this new badge, by the artist George Kruger Gray, had been under consideration by The Royal Mint Advisory Committee since December 1928.

What eventually emerged was a design associated with that created for Scottish baronets by Charles I. This has the **red hand of Ulster** as its central motif, surrounded by an oval border of roses for **England**; shamrocks for **Ireland**; roses and thistles for **Great Britain** and roses, thistles and shamrocks for **United Kingdom** baronets. No new design was created for Scottish baronets because it was assumed that they would not wish to abandon their ancient design.



First Choice – Silver or Gold?

A **baronet's badge** probably ranks as one of the most **complicated** items made by The Royal Mint and from start to finish the process can take nearly **five months**. Depending on the wishes of the baronet, the badge can be made of sterling **silver**, or of nine, 18 or 22 carat **gold**. However, all badges have a uniform finish due to the **final gilding** of the metal. Sir Michael's United Kingdom design was made in silver.



Silver base

First Impressions and Pressings

In the **first stage**, two pieces of similar metal are taken for each badge. The piece intended for the **front** of the badge is placed in a medal press where a die bearing the intricate design makes a first impression. **Four blows** of this press follow, to ensure the detail is faithfully transferred. The **second** piece of metal for the **back** of the badge, receives **three blows** from a plain domed die. **Both** pieces are then temporarily joined and given a **final blow** to ensure they will eventually fit together.



First stage – front plate

Front and Back

A trained **silversmith** cuts out the still solid design of the front by drilling as many as **80 holes** in it to insert a saw to cut out the surplus material. The back is trimmed and drilled with **four holes** corresponding to the position of four hollow rivets soldered to the inside of the front.



Second stage – front plate

A small ring is soldered to the front and a **loop** made for the **ribbon** to eventually pass through.



The ribbon loop is added

Hallmarked, Enamelled and Engraved

Now almost complete, the badge is sent to the London Assay Office to receive its **hallmark**, for assurance of its metal content. On returning to The Royal Mint it is again sent away for **enamelling**, after which the back is **engraved** with the **name and title** of the baronet.



The Name and Title are engraved on the reverse

The separated front and back are **gilded** with great care to ensure the enamel is not cracked.



Its final assembly follows, when the front and back are fitted together and a **yellow ribbon** edged with **blue** is attached.



The neck ribbon

Proud Presentation

The badge is now ready for **presentation** to the baronet. We are pleased to confirm that the whole process was **completed in time** for **Sir Michael Nairn** to wear it proudly at the **Royal Garden Party** in July 2013.



Sir Michael Nairn Bart (centre) and sons Alex (l) and Andrew (r) – Palace of Holyroodhouse 2013

In an age of mass production and machinery, we are also **proud** that baronets' badges continue to be made here **by hand**, as when they were first instituted by George V in 1929; showcasing the **skills** still available at **The Royal Mint**. Experts in the field of medallic art, craftsmen at The Royal Mint have been creating medals, including military decorations and gallantry awards, for centuries.



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JOANNE THOMAS Mod • 4 years ago

Many thanks for your comments, rivett. We thought it was about time we revealed something of this lesser-known work of The Royal Mint, glad you enjoyed it. That's a good idea for a further article, which I will explore. Please keep watching!

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rivett • 4 years ago

Thanks for this fascinating article Joanne. Very interesting. I had no idea that the Royal Mint still used craftsmanship on this scale - I thought these medals were just stamped out! Keep the articles coming. How about something on the work of the RM Advisory Committee in selecting the new effigy of Her Majesty?

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