

BARBADOS – SOCIETY FOR ARTS

USEFUL ARTS PROMOTED

An Award Medal

‘ARE THERE ANY SURVIVORS?’

Ken Eckardt

The following notice appeared in the Spink Numismatic Circular, September 1955:

INFORMATION WANTED

BARBADOS SOCIETY OF ARTS

The Society was founded in 1781 and a die for a Medal to be awarded by the Society was prepared in London by one of the famous Pingo brothers – possibly it was John Pingo. The design for the medal comprised the figure of Mercury descending from a Cabbage Tree, with the words “Useful Arts Promoted - - Barbados 1781.” Six of the medals were struck in gold and twelve in silver. The name of the recipient of the medal was to be engraved on the reverse. Are any of the medals in existence?

E. M. Shilstone, Honorary Secretary

The notice from Mr Shilstone seems to indicate that the medals were produced, but as from September 1955 to date it would appear that not one in either gold or silver has been reported.

The next reference that came to my attention was from Christopher Eimer¹. The medal is listed as No. 220 and illustrated (Fig. 1) with a drawing prepared by the Barbados Society and now in the archives of the Royal Society of Arts (London). The drawing has a few notes regarding requested changes. Mention is made with respect to fifteen guineas that had been allocated for insurance to cover damage to the die². The listing also includes a notation that correspondence in the Royal Society of Arts indicates that *the medals in gold were produced and awarded, although an example has not been located in any metal*.

¹ Eimer, Christopher, *The Pingo Family & Medal Making in 18th Century Britain*, British Art Medal Trust, 1998

² *Ibid*, pg. 21

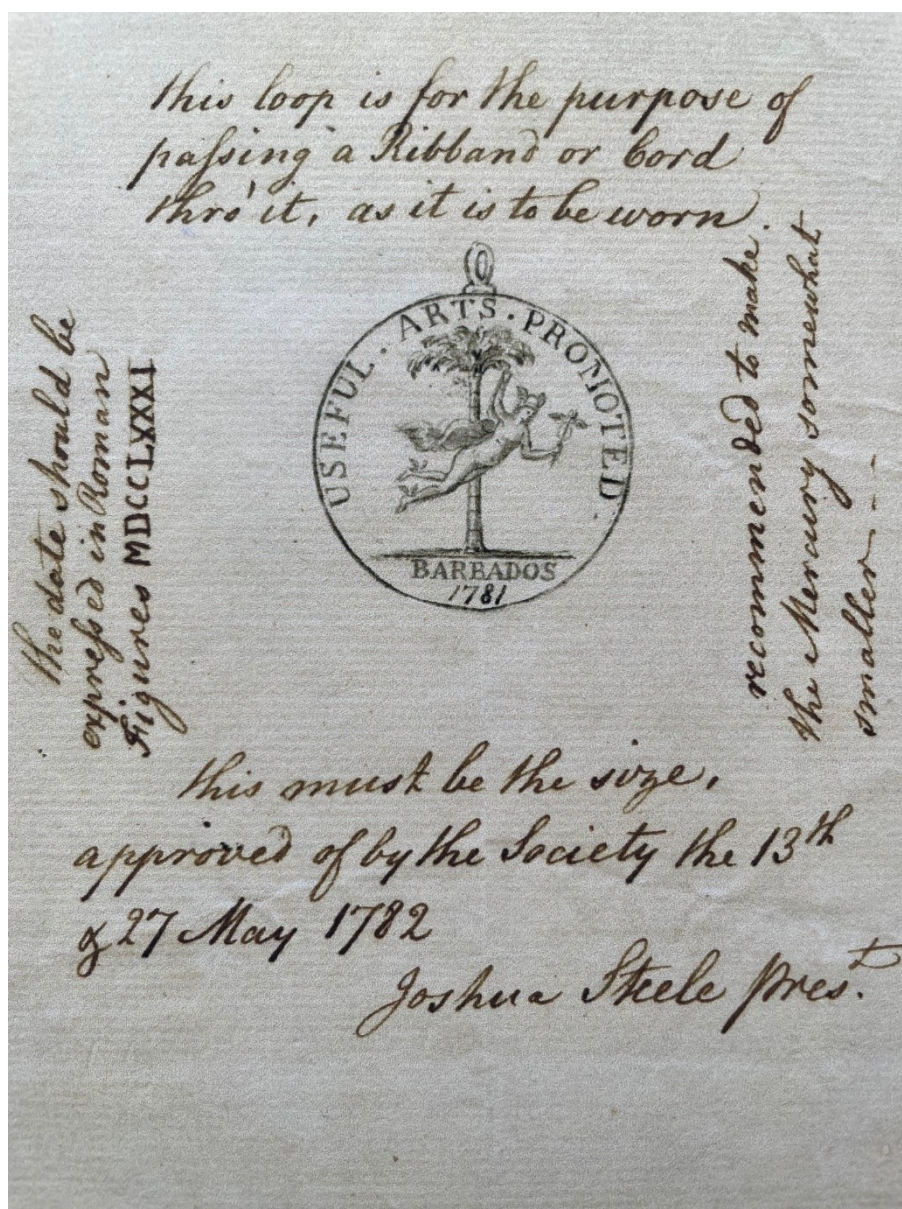


Fig 1

In May 1974 I had the good fortune to buy a specimen, in copper, from a Canadian Dealer (Fig. 2). The reverse is blank with no design other than a raised rim, as specified by the Barbados Society. The Society also specified a loop for suspension at the top of the medal. The diameter is 36 mm.



Fig. 2

It is my belief that this single copper example is a 'die trial' perhaps sent to the Barbados Society for approval prior to striking the gold and silver examples, or perhaps for the Pingos to approve their die work. The fact that the suspension loop was not installed offers support for this copper medal being a die trial.

The RSA archives contain a letter that Joshua Steele, President of the Barbados Society wrote to Mr Samuel More, Secretary of the Society of Arts at Adelphi, London, on June 5th 1782³. This is a lengthy letter covering a number of topics. It appears from this letter that an earlier letter was sent with respect to having a die made and gold and silver medals struck by the Pingos. This earlier letter was not available, but seemingly did not include enough detail for a quotation to be prepared. The letter of June 5th details the request along with commenting that the cost to the Society must be on the most favourable terms. The drawing (Fig. 1) detailing the design and size was approved by the Barbados Society in May 1782 and was included with the letter along with the specification that the gold medal be manufactured in 'Standard Gold' not to exceed the Sterling value of 50 shillings and the silver medals to be of the same diameter and weight, but these would be thicker than the gold medals.

Mr Steele again wrote a short letter to Mr More on June 6th 1783⁴ advising that Francis Ford, Esq., Treasurer of the Barbados Society, would be traveling to England in the next few weeks and he would bring funds to settle the account for the die and the medals.

On June 13th 1783 Mr Steele wrote Mr More a longer letter⁵ covering a range of topics, but advising that the Society approved the premium of 15 Guineas to ensure the die under the risk of breaking in striking the medals. He goes onto

³ RSA_PR_MC_104_10_241 001b, 002b, 003b, 004b, 005b, 006b

⁴ RSA_PR_MC_104_10_201 001, 002

⁵ RSA_PR_MC_104_10_200 001, 002, 003, 004

say after the medals have been struck the die must be safely stored for use in the future. Furthermore, he adds, Francis Ford will carry over the money or a Bill of Exchange to pay for the die and medals and he hopes that they will be ready for collection.

The following detail is from a Barbados Society document in the RSA archives that appears to be dated October 16th 1790:

“The Rev. W. Dent, a member of our Society has been presented with our Gold Medal for the discovery of a dye from a material native of this island.” The same document goes on to discuss the Minutes of meeting along with describing the dyeing process: “This minute was confirmed at the next meeting and was reported and approved of by the Society, when the Gold Medal was voted to Mr Dent, for his Discovery.”⁶

It could well be the case that later generations may have sold gold medals for bullion value during hard times. [As an aside I do know of one large gold medal that was presented to a Salvor Diver, c.1860, by the Merchants of Charlotte Amalie, on the island of St. Thomas in the Danish West Indies that the current family generation have confirmed this medal was indeed sold for bullion value many years ago⁷]. However, one would have thought that some of the silver medals would have survived.

The suggestion might be made that perhaps the silver medals were never struck. As the silver medals would have been thicker than the gold medals a different collar would have been needed to strike these and perhaps the Society did not provide the funding for the extra tooling.

I wrote to the Barbados Museum and Historical Society in the late 1970s and then again more recently. Sadly, I have not received a reply and can only assume that none of these medals has come to their attention.

I would like to acknowledge with grateful thanks the time and effort Eve Watson, Head of Archive, the RSA and her colleague Abby extended to me in letting me view the documents and providing copies for me to study in greater detail. I would also like to thank Charles Riley for his constructive comments after proof reading.



⁶ RSA_PR_MC_104_10_71 005, 006

⁷ Dix Noonan Webb, Auction 13 July 2011 ‘Commemorative Medals, Lot 1520, The Edward Roehrs Collection (a copper die trial of the gold medal presented to J. D. Murphy)