

Holburne's Trafalgar Medal

In *The Pewterer*, volume 6.1 (2015) we started what will become a whole series of articles about pewter in art. The first article took, with permission, a small part of a larger painting (attributed to Cornelius de Bryer.) and the whole of a Still Life, Circle of Jan van Kessel, both on display at the Holburne Museum in Bath. The paintings are magnificent, but I concentrated on the representation of pewter ([See volume 6.1](#)).

Recently, Catrin Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Museum, told me that there was one actual pewter object on display at the Museum - Sir William Holburne's Trafalgar Medal.

The Museum's website says: *William seemed destined for a naval career but, following the death of his elder brother, Francis, he inherited the family title and a modest fortune. He left the navy and embarked on an eighteen-month Grand Tour of Europe, visiting Italy, the Alps and the Netherlands.*



This sparked a life-long interest in art and his enthusiasm for collecting. He particularly loved bronze sculptures, silver, porcelain and Dutch landscapes.

Sir William (1793-1874) created his fine collection, but it was actually his sister, Mary Ann Barbara, who left it to the City of Bath, and this was the start of the Museum which carries his name.

But the medal? This dates from the time of William Holburne's naval career. The Museum website again: *William was proud to have fought at the Battle of Trafalgar on board HMS Orion. His Trafalgar medal is one of 17,264 medals made independently by the pioneering industrialist Matthew Boulton for distribution to the veterans of Trafalgar as a mark of gratitude.*

Boulton seems to have produced a number of medals (all apparently to a design by Conrad Heinrich K uchler) using different metals: bronze, silver, white metal and 'tin'. The Holburne Museum's copy is, Catrin Jones says, catalogued as pewter!

The British Museum's Trafalgar Medal is described on their site as being made of silver.

The National Maritime Museum's copy of the medal is described on their site as being made of 'tin'.

The Fitzwilliam Museum says of the medals: *After Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805 the prominent Birmingham industrialist Matthew Boulton distributed about 15,000 Trafalgar Medals at his own expense to participants in the battle. These medals were all in white metal, but subsequent years saw a number of presentation issues in other metals.*

The Trafalgar Medal. The Pewterer, volume 8.2. May 2017

'White metal'?

David Hall, the Archivist at the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, and a member of the Pewter Society, has commented (generally, not in response to this article):

"The term white metal means different things to different people. Historically you find people recorded, described as 'white smiths' rather than 'black smiths'. There have been arguments about what a white smith did but I prefer Ron Homer's West Midland definition – somebody who worked a cold iron rather than hot iron. A saw maker or a file maker who did not forge his products but cut, filed and ground them.

"Another use of white metal is by auctioneers to describe what is believed to be silver but is not hallmarked, for example Continental silver. People buying at auction essentially understand white metal in this sense."

There is also a definition in Wikipedia, but it is specifically qualified as one not citing sources:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_metal

Does anyone else have a Trafalgar Medal; and if so, of which metal is it made?

The description of this medal:

Front: image of ships in the Battle of Trafalgar, above the inscription "T.W. Holburne Mid. H.M.S. Orion", inscribed at the base "TRAFALGAR OCT 21 1805" and around the upper edge "ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY"

Reverse: cast profile head of Nelson in uniform, around the edge "HORATIO VISCOUNT NELSON K.B. DUKE OF BRONTE"

Around the edge is inscribed "TO THE HEROES OF TRAFALGAR FROM M. BOULTON"

Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), a Birmingham man and successful industrialist, became a business partner of James Watt and that partnership produced the Boulton & Watt steam engines. Boulton later became interested in improving the poor state of Britain's coinage, and in 1797 won the contract to strike the large copper penny which stayed in circulation until 1971 and decimalisation. His image appears with that of James Watt on the Bank of England's new £50 note!

Alan Williams

Photos of the medals: courtesy of the Holburne Museum
Photo of Mathew Boulton: Wikipedia

Thanks to Catrin Jones for providing the information that started this article, and for her contribution to it. Any remaining errors in the article are, of course, mine and mine alone.

The Holburne Museum: <http://www.holburne.org>
Link to the Collections Online website: (<http://collections.holburne.org/object-j106>).

The British Museum: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=948533&partId=1

The National Maritime Museum: <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/203904.html#GxguIVX24YSIXGhM.99>

The Fitzwilliam Museum: <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/coins/collection/watson/page49.html>



The Pewterer, Volume 8, number 2. May 2017.

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Published by Alan Williams, 14 Dandridge House, 31 Lamb Street, Spitalfields, London E1 6ED and endorsed by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, Pewterers' Hall, Oat Lane, London EC2V 7DE

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