

THOSE ELUSIVE BADGES

BY

W E DAVEY

Newsletter No 1 contained some enquiries about early badges and trimmings and a mysterious shako plate of 1855-61 about which we know little. It seems that in all our efforts to bring life to the past, we meet the same wall of silence and insufficient records, and, even though no doubt there is a clue somewhere, we can rarely find it.

No doubt small happenings seem at the time not worth writing about and on that basis I have one or two oddments likely to become interesting a few decades hence.

The Last Royal Marine Artillery Cap Badge

Whilst serving in a mixed detachment in the Mediterranean Fleet in 1923, the RMA grenade cap badges were withdrawn or replaced by a Globe and Laurel surmounted by a grenade. This short-lived badge vanished almost at once on the amalgamation of the RMA and the RMLI. But, although I have failed to trace one to date, I know photographs were taken which, some time in the future, may take their place in the queue of unsolved mysteries. At the time uniforms of the post-amalgamation pattern percolated to the fleet in bits and pieces and for a short time I for one was wearing one of these last RMA cap badges in a broderick with the RMA piping removed, Globe and Laurel collar badges in a serve tunic with RMA buttons, finished off with a pair of RMLI trousers.

The Portsmouth Band Cap Badge

Usually a controversy starts from an old drawing or photograph and sometimes from the re-discovery of an actual article. But I doubt very much is a specimen of the actual badge will ever turn up in this instance. This is an example of the kind of "gaff" which should never happen but sometimes does; it would set a pretty problem if a photograph turned up in the distant future. It might even then rank with that elusive shako plate!

This happened in 1936, just after HM King George VI has acceded the throne.

The Royal Cypher GRV in silver, awarded to the RM Artillery Band for its services to that monarch on his visit to India in 1911 and inherited by the Portsmouth Divisional Band, was supplied as a separate item, a dainty filigree affair about the size of a sixpenny piece, for fixing to the helmet plate. There was, in 1946, much overhauling and furbishing in readiness for the forthcoming Coronation celebrations and as usual the stock of some items quickly vanished; among these was the GRV in silver.

Further supplies were ordered urgently and arrived almost at zero hour. A few were quickly rushed to those musicians in urgent need and all was again well. The band, every man wearing his distinctive Royal Cypher, was all set to go when someone took another look at the tiny new GRV Cyphers - and could hardly believe his eyes. For there it was - GRVI in silver!

The matter was hastily rectified and I doubt if any of the offending Cyphers got away, but there may well have been photographs.

Here was a case of someone with insufficient knowledge hurriedly trying to amend existing specifications for badges and buttons and just "bringing up to date" everything in sight. Lucky he didn't have to handly a contract for new colours!

The RM Police Buttonhole Badge

On a number of occasions I have been shown a small nickel silver Globe and Laurel, about the size of a halfpenny piece, with an oblong label below bearing the letters RMP, the whole mounted on a stud on the reverse for wear in a button-hole. Its purpose is rarely known.

Actually, this buttonhole badge was issued to members of the Royal Marine Police during the 1939-45 war for wear in plain clothes.

Its necessity is hardly apparent since it could obviously have no special value in proving that the wearer was a police officer - his warrant card would be the proper vehicle for that. The need may have been based at the time on the fact that, during that war, there were many official civilian groups in existence - air raid wardens, first aid and rescue parties, fire watchers and the like, even in its infancy the Home Guard itself which had no regular uniform or means of identity other than some sort of label. There could no doubt be the need to establish the wearer's right to go about his business during an air raid when all non-essential civilians were expected to take cover.

The badge may have served some other purpose - for instance, trainees and others not yet kitted up for whom no doubt it would be of value, since they would not have warrant cards.

It must also be remembered that the RM Police Force was part of the Armed Forces of the Crown, for whom plain clothes were not normally permissible during the war. The badge would indicate the bona fide of the wearer.

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MORE ELUSIVE BADGES

BY

A J DONALD

The article submitted by Mr W E Davey "Those Elusive Badges" has reminded me of a further "Unofficial amendment to the specification" for the Portsmouth Group Band badge.

Shortly after HM The Queen came to the throne a further stock of badges was required. When these were delivered it was noticed that the crown over the "GVR" had been changed to a St Edwards crown. Luckily no badges were issued, although we do have an example of this error in the Museum.

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