

Medals of honour

Following Stephen Oake's Gallantry award six years after his murder, Anthony Rae, chairman of the Police Roll of Honour Trust, looks at the 100 year history of posthumous police awards and examines how they are granted

On 14 January 2003, Stephen Oake, a special branch detective, and other officers arrested three men on suspicion of terrorism in a house in Manchester. One of the men, a wanted foreign terrorist, suddenly made a bid for freedom attacking the officers with a knife.

DC Oake, unarmed and without protective equipment, seized the knifeman and held onto him, preventing his escape. Despite being repeatedly stabbed he refused to let go and in doing so probably saved other lives but at the cost of his own. Three officers were wounded; Stephen Oake, 40, a married father of three, was stabbed eight times in the chest, including once through the heart and died.

On January 6, 2009, six years later, the *London Gazette* announced the posthumous award of the Queen's Gallantry Medal to Det Con Stephen Oake, Greater Manchester Police. This delay in the recognition of Stephen Oake's undeniable courage, coming after the highest honour of a George Cross, was denied and amidst controversy as to whether he should receive any award at all, seems inexcusable. But before we rush to judgement we should examine the history of gallantry awards and how they are granted.

On January 23, 2009, the Metropolitan Police commemorated the murder of PC William Tyler, 31, while he was on duty and of schoolboy Ralph Joscelyne, 10, shot dead by terrorists. The headlines: *Shooting Outrage, Terrorists Run Amok, Two Persons Murdered, Seventeen Wounded* sound all too horribly familiar today but incredibly relate back to the murder of PC Tyler a century ago.

On January 23, 1909, two foreign anarchists carried out an armed robbery in Tottenham; indiscriminately firing automatic weapons as they hijacked public transport and private vehicles pursued by both police and public. During a chase lasting over two hours, 200 rounds were fired before the gunmen were cornered and, as armed police moved in, committed suicide.

The bravery of PC Tyler and others led directly to the first and only Royal Warranted UK Police Medal for acts of gallantry, the King's Police Medal (KPM). The first awards went to three officers involved, although not PC Tyler.

The first posthumous awards came after members of the same terrorist organisation gunned down five unarmed City of London Police Officers, on December 16, 1910, at

Houndsditch, killing three and culminating in the infamous Sidney Street Siege, where the suspects again chose death before surrender. The KPM was awarded to the murdered officers, Sgt Charles Tucker, 46, Sgt Robert Bentley, 36, and PC Walter Choat, 34, and officially announced in the *London Gazette* on January 2, 1911, just 17 days later. So nothing really changes - except one remarkable aspect: the time taken to recognise an officer's courage, from 17 days a century ago to six years now.



King's Police Medal



George Cross

Posthumous gallantry awards to the police have always been rare. Over the last century there have been only 70 posthumous gallantry awards to UK officers, arising out of 64 incidents. The KPM was instituted by King Edward VII in 1909 for gallantry or distinguished service; there have only been 31 posthumous awards.

Wartime saw new civilian awards, starting in 1939 with the King's, later Queen's, Commendation for Brave Conduct, for acts which would otherwise not be recognised. Renamed the Queen's Commendation for Bravery in 1994, it is not a medal but an emblem of silver laurel leaves. There have been 27 posthumous awards.

In 1940, the George Cross (GC) and the George Medal (GM) were instituted, the George Cross being the highest civilian



Photography: James Jarche/Fox Photos/Getty Images

The Sidney Street Siege: Five unarmed officers were gunned down.



George Medal



Queen's Gallantry Medal

gallantry award. Only eight have gone to individual members of UK Police Forces, two posthumously. Firstly, Lancashire Supt Gerry Richardson, shot in 1971, and Roger Goad, an explosives officer in the Met killed in 1975. In 1999 a special George Cross award was made to a police force: "to recognise the collective courage and dedication to duty of all of those who have served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary."

In 1954 the KPM became the Queen's Police Medal (QPM) but now only awarded posthumously due to the 'equivalent' George Medal. Since then there have been only 18 Gallantry awards, the last to off duty PC Stephen Tibble, 21, shot dead attempting to arrest a terrorist in 1975. In 1974 the Queen's Gallantry Medal (QGM) was instituted

for bravery of a high order but below the standard of the George Medal. In 1977 the George Medal became a posthumous award, in effect making the QPM for Gallantry redundant. There has been one posthumous GM award to Metropolitan explosives officer Kenneth Howorth, killed in 1981; while there have been 9 posthumous QGM awards.

Qualification for Awards

In 1997 a Home Office Circular to chief officers advised "Gallantry awards are made in recognition of specific acts of bravery by individuals in saving, or attempting to save a life; the prevention of crime; and the arrest of dangerous criminals. Factors that should be taken into account include: the degree of the risk of death, knowledge or awareness of danger, preparedness, persistence, third party protection, saving life, injury, and physical surroundings."

There are currently four levels of awards available to the police, in order of precedence: -

The George Cross - granted only for acts of gallantry of the greatest heroism or the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger. The standard set for the George Cross should reflect a similar degree of heroism to the military award of the Victoria Cross. Degree of the risk of death - over 90 percent. The George Medal - granted for gallantry of an extremely high order, where the act was one of great bravery. Risk of death 50-90 percent. The Queen's Gallantry Medal - granted for gallantry of a high order, where the act was one of

exemplary bravery. Risk of death 20-50 percent. The Queen's Commendation for Bravery - granted for gallantry not up to the standards described above, but entailing risk to life and meriting national recognition. Risk of death below 20 percent.

Recent awards

Generally awards are given to officers killed attempting arrests of dangerous suspects. In the 1970s there were 16 posthumous awards granted, 12 in the 1980s and just seven in the 1990s. Since the 1960s HMIC Annual Reports included the names of all recipients of gallantry awards but



Above: The Queen's Commendation for Bravery
Below: PC Tyler's monument



this stopped in 1990 (except in Scotland). In the ten years following the 1997 Home Office Circular not a single posthumous award was granted.

It does appear all is not right with the recognition of police bravery but whether this lies with the police service or government, or is for reasons of politics, protocol or bureaucracy is unclear. The answer that police officers facing danger is just an occupational hazard does not explain the comprehensive awards system available to the military.

The last posthumous award before 2007 was to PC Lewis Fulton, Strathclyde, stabbed in 1994. Several officers since killed attempting arrests had no award including: 1995 Phillip Walters, Metropolitan, shot; 1997 Nina MacKay, Metropolitan, stabbed; 2001 Alison Armitage, GMP, stolen vehicle; 2003 Gerald Walker, Nottinghamshire, stolen vehicle; 2003 Ian Broadhurst, West Yorkshire, Shot.

There are some signs of improvement – the QGM in 2007 to West Midlands DC Michael Swindells, stabbed during an arrest in 2004; and with Stephen Oake in 2009, the Queen's Commendation to PC Richard Gray, shot dead rescuing officers from a gunman in 2007. Hopefully Jonathan Henry, Bedfordshire, stabbed in 2007 will also be granted an award.

At the 2008 Metropolitan Service of Remembrance, former commissioner Sir Ian Blair announced a new medal, the Commissioner's Award for Sacrifice, for officers killed in the execution of their duty. Whilst not a Sovereign's Award this initiative is to be applauded and we hope the entire police service will follow this lead towards national recognition for fallen officers.

The first Royal Warrant for the King's Police Medal stated the Medal shall be awarded foremost for "Conspicuous gallantry in saving life and property, or in preventing crime or arresting criminals; the risks incurred to be estimated with due regard to the obligations and duties of the officer concerned." The language is plain and the meaning clear. Whilst there are many QPM awards for Distinguished Police Service, it seems somewhat ironic and a little sad that this is no longer available, even posthumously, for the very acts of bravery by police officers for which it was initiated 100 years ago.

The reverse of the Medal depicts a guardian protecting a city from danger holding a shield bearing the legend "To Guard My People". Is it not within the power of those that rule this land and its police service to show they care for their guardians? Is it not time the special risks taken to protect our communities by the Police are once again recognised by a special award for the Police with the reinstatement of the Queen's Police Medal as it was intended - for Gallantry – and the introduction of a national award for fallen officers - Lest we Forget?

The Police Roll of Honour Trust is a registered charity dedicated to remembering all police officers killed on duty. To join the Trust, make a donation or for further information write to PO Box 999, Preston, PR4 5WW or visit www.policememorial.org.uk where details of all posthumous gallantry awards can be found.