

Left: Paul Lane takes a closer look at the old Wreck Tokens formerly used by The Board of Trade.



## Memory Lane

An air of mystery has always surrounded the Coastguard Wreck Token. Older serving Coastguard officers will remember them as part of the Stores Muster.

Tokens were made of bronze and were about the size of a penny. They were issued to assistants employed at a Wreck Service so that those who had been engaged by the officer in charge could be identified when claiming payment for their services. These were always kept in a canvas bag held in the C.R.E. house.

The first reference to the tokens was a letter of 30 January 1877 from the Marine Department of the Board of Trade to the deputy Master of the Mint. By the end of April the Mint was able to supply sample tokens in bronze, brass and dixon's metal. The Board of Trade selected the bronze token which was the thickness of the dixon's metal sample with a raised rim. The official letter has been endorsed to the effect that the tokens were delivered on 30 May 1877 and supply of 3,000 tokens is confirmed by a reference in the Deputy Master's annual report for that year. The first order of 3,000 cost the grand sum of £10.

A second order, this time for 1,000 tokens and again in bronze, was placed in July 1883. The endorsement shows that the tokens were delivered on 16 August 1883.

Confusion arose between the Royal

**Paul Lane, former Regional Controller of the West of Scotland and Northern Ireland Region, has always been interested in the history of the Coastguard. In this, his first history editorial for Coastguard Magazine, he explains how Wreck Tokens were used by the service.**

Mint and the Department of Trade as to whether these were badges to be worn by the men, and whether therefore, they would have to be engraved with the name of the recipient. The reply from the Board of Trade was: *'in the first place the badges are not to be worn by the men, but are merely to be given out as vouchers to be exchanged for 2/6d or 5 shillings, afterwards. They will not require engraving as they are all to be alike. As regards the material, dixon's metal is I believe a hard, white metal used for making tankards and so on which are intended to be silver plated. I think it will do very well indeed if they are made of Muntz's Metal or bronze, but it will, perhaps be as well that they should have a*

*one-sixteenth hole in the middle so that a number of them could be carried on a string by the Coastguard officer.'*

Final reply from the Royal Mint dated 30 April 1877 said: *'I now send you an official answer about the Rocket Apparatus tokens with specimens in bronze, dixon's metal and brass. I should recommend the selection of a bronze token, rather less thick than the one forwarded, as these could always be produced without delay, and would certainly wear and look the best. I hope you will not insist on the whole in the middle, as it will quite spoil the look of the tokens, which I submit could easily be carried by the Coastguard officer in a bag.'*

All existing tokens were recalled by the late Chief Coastguard John Douglas in 1972.

Examples of these can be seen at the Coastguard Museum at Bridlington and the Royal Mint at Llantrisant, Pontyclun.

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