

# Collecting Enamel Badges

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## Introduction

The world of enamel badges offers a modestly priced and abundant collecting field for anyone interested in social history. Like postcards, enamel badges offer a powerful and nostalgic mnemonic that connects the past with ordinary people's lives. To a certain generation of men and women in Britain childhood was mapped out as a trajectory between the stations of Blue Peter, Cycling Proficiency and Prefect status. The award of a badge marked each one of these moments in a young life.

It is fair to say that until recently enamel badges have not received the attention they deserve. The exhibition of badges and publication of a catalogue, by Philip Attwood, at the British Museum during 2004 signal a small step towards the recognition of their status as cultural objects. These brief notes are an attempt to sketch out the terrain for would-be collectors. Within the available space the notes are necessarily broad brush and should be considered as an outline of work in progress.

Obviously, one of the key requirements for any potential collector of badges is the characteristic of caution. The field is so vast and the supply so abundant that the field should be considered carefully before one is overwhelmed with material. Ringfencing the collection by manufacturer, date, thematic unity or some other criteria makes the project more manageable. For the purposes of

this article I shall be looking at British enamel badges from the period 1918 through to about 1970. The period includes several key moments for any potential badge collector.

The purpose of this article is to attempt a brief introduction to the field and to point out where interesting items are likely to be found. I shall describe the how and the why of badge manufacture. Furthermore, I shall attempt to describe how these modest objects might qualify as historical evidence of the dramatic social changes that have affected Britain during the twentieth century.

My own interest is in the history of graphic design so I shall be emphasising the relations between badges, social groups and, what we would nowadays call, branding.

### **Makers**

The names associated with badge manufacture are those of Fattorini, Miller, Strattons and Gaunt. The first three of these firms were based in Birmingham, the last in London. It is not surprising that Birmingham should have become the centre of enamel badge making in Britain. The historical development of the city during the industrial revolution had made it a centre of metalware and jewellery manufacturing. The origins of the enamel badge are to be found in the metal lapel badge.

In Britain, the origins of the modern badge may be traced to William Willberforce's campaign against slavery. The campaign famously used

ceramic medallions by Wedgwood to promote its message and Willberforce commissioned a medallion for his supporters during the 1807 election. His opponents responded in kind and the propagandistic value of these symbols was established.

The development, during the 1840s, of die stamping technologies made the production of inexpensive metal badges possible. Clubs, societies, trades unions and charitable groups all began to provide badges for the executive and their membership. The coincidence between the emergence of the badge and the beginnings of a popular political consciousness, during the 1840s, should not be overlooked.

The design of nineteenth century badges draws heavily on the ornate and heraldic as sources of inspiration. It was only towards the end of the century that the use of coloured enamels and a more varied pictorial reference characterised the emergence of an object with authentically popular references.

Of course, the propaganda demands of WW1 transformed the status of the badge in both its flag-day and enamel variants. The scale of the propaganda effort required the mass production of badges and the Birmingham firms were ideally placed to out-source the various processes within the jewellery manufacturing district of the city.

The success of home-front propaganda during the war established the badge as an object of great popular appeal and significant commercial potential. In

the years after WW1 the badge was enthusiastically taken up as a means of advertising new products, political affiliation and cultural association.

The most famous name of enamel badge making is William Miller. Miller was born into the Birmingham silver trade in 1876. Trade directories list his firm from 1921. Miller's were famously associated with the Golly advertising of Robertson's Jam. Miller specialised in enamel badges and took their manufacture to new heights of sophistication including opaque and transparent enamel effects and the use of relief moulding in the metal beneath the enamel. These effects are usually found on more substantial items of jewellery. Their use, by Miller, on the modest badge, indicates an economy of scale only possible on large-scale volumes of production.

Throughout the interwar period Miller's produced a wide variety of badges associated with entertainment and popular culture. These badges were sold through the provincial retail jewellery trade and seem to have been purchased as keepsakes and mementos. It is worth emphasising that these kinds of badges were, whatever their associations, relatively high quality articles and priced accordingly. This aspect of badge production makes an interesting contrast with the rise of cheap costume jewellery or Clarrice Cliff china during the same period.

The most distinctive name associated with enamel badge manufacture was that of Fattorini. The family gave their name to two separate firms that were in competition until they merged in 1983. The firm of Thomas Fattorini was first established in 1827 and began by making presentation pieces and civic

regalia. The diversity of their production may well have contributed to their longevity. In 1915 they established a workshop in Birmingham which moved, in 1930, to their famous Regent Street premises. Thomas Fattorini made a wide variety of badges and seems to have been specialist makers for the Trades Union movement. This association is probably a legacy of their earlier work in civic regalia.

Fattorini and Sons were a goldsmiths company established in Bradford. The firm is listed from 1881 and was probably established some time before that date. In 1917 they established a Birmingham workshop named the Bradford Works before moving to Barr Street in the 1950s. Fattorini and Sons also has a workshop in Glasgow. Fattorini and Sons marks may be found on a very wide range of badges.

J R Gaunt were another big firm of enamel badge makers. The origins of the firm are as suppliers to the military and they retained close links with service organisations.

These big firms were the tip of a surprisingly large iceberg. John Manley, who is researching British enamel badge making, had an inventory of some 300 manufacturers.

## **History**

All this activity begs the question of why enamel badges should suddenly become popular during the 1920s. The primary condition for this was that the organisation required to meet the propaganda requirements of WW1 had

transformed the industry into a much more efficient and co-ordinated association of workshops able, through sub-contracting, to meet large orders promptly. At a certain level the popularity of badges is simply a reflection of the greater output of a more efficient process.

However, that is only part of the story. The popularity of badges was based on their effectiveness as publicity and propaganda material. In the years after WW1, the kinds of efficiency gains that were a consequence of war production carried over into all sorts of activities. This was especially true of consumer products.

(The classic example this process is the success of Montague Burton who began to mass-produce army uniforms during WW1. During the 1920s he was able to transfer his organisational and production processes to the making of inexpensive suits. In consequence, the suit became an everyday garment in addition to retaining its status as “Sunday best.” The 1920s was also a period when the organisation of industry changed radically as a consequence of the command structures developed during WW1. The “middle manager” emerged as an identifiable grade, between worker and director classes, within the organisation. The suit became the principal signifier of such status.)

The enamel badge quickly became part of a range of effective advertising material supporting the expansion of consumer society. The enamel badge was more permanent than the paper point-of-sale ephemera and conferred a special status on its wearer accordingly.

The status of belonging to a special group is absolutely central to the popularity of the badge. These ideas are still characteristic of the contemporary branding industry. The status and groups issue was also played out against a backdrop of political and social transformation.

The political establishment in Britain were, after WW1, conscious of two urgent requirements in their dealings with the British people. The first was that the political consciousness-raising experience of the war should not be able to manifest itself in demands for radical change at home. Accordingly, promises were made of “homes fit for heroes” in an attempt to disarm political agitators. Similarly, the newly enfranchised female vote required a specific address. These requirements went far beyond the scope of the methods of propaganda established during the war. However, the humble enamel badge was able to play a role in marking out the social and political (suburban) territories of post-war Britain.

In 1924 the Wembley Empire Exhibition addressed the issue of a post-war realignment of Imperial relations. The exhibition emblem, reproduced on many badges, became a popular symbol of support for this project.

In 1951 the Festival of Britain South Bank exhibition gave concrete expression to the integration of art, design and architecture as emblematic of the social transformations of post WW2 reconstruction. Again, the widespread use of the Festival emblem, designed by Abram Games, on many souvenir badges was a mark of the popular support attaching to this project.

## **Conclusion**

These brief notes are an attempt to show that enamel badges are a modest but interesting category of object that connect ordinary peoples' lives to the larger historical contexts of social and political change. The origins of the badge and its antecedents make it a category of object with a wide range of associations and symbolism. Its origins in the jewellery trade also guarantee a level a quality in its execution. This skill is also evident in the characteristics of graphic design associated with the enamel badge.

Enamel badges are may be found almost anywhere. The advent of internet sales has certainly made them more widely accessible.

## **References**

Attwood P (2004) **Badges** London, British Museum

Sequin K (1999) **The Graphic Art of the Enamel Badge**  
London, Thames and Hudson

Thanks also to the Badge Collectors Circle and their website

Paul Rennie

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2028 words



## **Illustrations (35)**

The Sandeman (trademark) GB

John Jameson (trademark) GB Jean Carlu

Skegness Butlins 1939 (holiday souvenir) GB John Hassall\

Hurrah it's Butlins (holiday souvenir) GB

Lubrication by Shell (trademark) GB 1930s McKnight Kauffer

Cobham (flying souvenir) GB 1930s

Champion Spark Plugs (trademark) GB

Dunlop for Golf (trademark) GB 1930s

Khanya Homemakers (trademark) GB?

Smith's Twister (salt) (trademark) GB

Power Ethyl (trademark) GB BP 1930s

Safety Committee (1940s) RoSPA GB

Labour Party League of Youth (GB) 1940s (politics)

Felix the Cat (1930s)

Dunlop (Golf) GB 1950s?

Nestle Hair products (trademark) GB 1930s

R Fox (GB) (trademark)

Bromford (trademark?) GB 1930s?

OK Sauce (trademark) GB 1930s

Mr Therm (trademark) GB 1940s Eric Fraser

The Hundred Club (Members Club) GB post war

Festival of Britain 1951 Abram Games

Amy (flying) GB 1930s

Odeon Children's Circle Club (GB) 1950s and 60s  
Windsor Water woollies (swimsuits) GB 1930s?  
Wembley Empire Exhibition (souvenir badge) GB 1924 designer?  
CND badge (politics) 1960s Ken Garland  
Victory V (politics and WW2) 1945  
Empire Exhibition Scotland 1938 (souvenir) GB  
Kodak Fellowship (owners club) GB 1930s  
BOAC (employees badge) GB 1950s  
Furniture Manufacturers Association (trade association) GB 1950s?  
The Freetoze League (consumers club) GB 1950s  
Arrow Liberal Victory (politics) GB 1930s?  
Phorpress (trademark cap badge) GB 1930s  
Actarc (trademark) GB 1950s  
Green Triangle (footwear) GB 1950s  
Esso Lub Man (stick pin) GB 1960s  
WW2 Allies (politics) 1945  
USSR 1959 New York (worlds Fair souvenir)  
Le Mont Dore Sancy (holiday souvenir) CH  
Ski badge (1950s) CH?  
World Press Conference 1950s Eastern Europe??  
Shetland (1950s) UK  
Robertson's Golly (1960s) UK

