

Curling medals with miniature stones

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a small group of exuberantly designed and skilfully executed medals which were produced between 1842 and 1858 as trophies in the game of curling. For much of the 19th century, the main trophy of the game was the medal, which was competed for annually, or as frequently as the weather permitted. The winner, or winners then held the medal until the date of the next contest. These medals were not designed to be worn; they were to be displayed and admired rather like small works of art. This group is very unusual, in that miniature stones and various other implements of the game are set upon the obverse.

INTRODUCTION

Curling was such an important part of the social life of Scotland by the fourth decade of the 19th century that in 1838 a national association was formed for the purpose of regulating the game. No similar association existed in Scotland for any other sport. The Grand Caledonian Curling Club was instituted on 25 July 1838 in the Waterloo Hotel in Edinburgh at a meeting summoned by interested parties through newspaper advertisements. The Club's formation is dealt with at length in Kerr (1890, 229–306) and Smith (1981, 113–18).

The idea was that local clubs should join the national club, although individuals were also permitted to join. One purpose of the club was to remove local differences in the rules; by joining, local clubs had to conform to the Grand Club rules. In order to promote competition according to their rules, the Club instituted prizes in the form of medals 'to be competed for by Local Clubs and Districts'. By 1842, the Club had appointed a medallist as one of its office-bearers. In the same year the club sought and was granted royal patronage; and from 1843 it was known as the Royal Caledonian Curling Club.

In choosing to provide medals, the Club was conforming to an already established custom in the sport: the trophy was a medal that was competed for annually, held by the winners until played for again, and then passed to the new victors. An extreme example of the complexity of the rules for gaining and holding a medal can be found in the instructions for Sir Alexander Boswell's medal. The following description appeared in the *Ayrshire Express*, 1 January 1870:

On one side, on a shield, in the centre, is the figure of a sturdy Caledonian, partially robed, with a stout club in his right hand, surmounted with a knight's helmet and crown, over which is written in old English letters, 'Old King Coil', and, above all, is the motto, 'Non Timet Hostiles Jam Lapis Istemenas'.¹ Underneath the figure, in a garter, are the words, 'Kyle for a Man', surrounded with a wreath of thistles and oak leaves, &c. On the other side are the following instructions: 'This medal may be challenged for by any curlers of Kyle, and shall be played for by single matches, each playing six stones, and allowed a person to direct the game. Twenty one the game, and the distance forty yards from brough to brough. The winner not to be obliged to play more than one match with the same person, nor five matches, in

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whole, in one year. The man who challenges must stake a crown, the holder of the medal nothing. A contest for the medal not to be construed into a parish play, and all the matches to be played on the 'Whirr Loch' in the parish of Auchinleck.^{1,2}

It is dangerous, perhaps, to deduce too much from the number of medals of which evidence survives from each decade, but their volume may provide evidence of the growing popularity of the medal as trophy. The figures come from my research, in which I have recorded surviving medals, and notices from sources, such as minute books and newspapers, of medals which have not.

From the decade 1797–1807 there are two; from 1808–17, four; from 1818–27, ten; from 1828–37, 32; from 1838–47, 66; from 1848–57, 78. Whether the large increase after the institution of the Grand Club is evidence of its direct influence on the medal tradition or whether it is the indirect result of the Club's increasing the popularity of the game (and therefore the number of clubs) is not clear, but it can be seen that in the three decades after the institution of the Grand Club many more medals are noted.

The first medal chosen by the Grand/Royal Club was of a curling scene, struck to a design by Robert Sclater.³ Curiously, struck medals, apart from those awarded by the GCCC and RCCC, were never so common as engraved medals. Some engraved medals merely bore words of donation and lists of winners; others were embellished with finely engraved representations of curling paraphernalia and scenes of curlers at play (Smith 1981, 180–5; Smith 1990 'Medals of Curling – Scotland's Ain Game', *The Medal* 16, 38–47).

The group of medals discussed in this paper is small, and circumscribed geographically and temporally. The earliest was made in 1842, the last in 1858, and all were made for clubs in Perthshire and Clackmannanshire. They are distinguished by their large size, oval shape and complicated, ornate borders;⁴ on the obverse

is set one or more miniature curling stones of silver or hardstone, as well as brooms and other paraphernalia of the game. They are the most ornate and sophisticated medals in the history of the game; indeed, one might regard them as miniature sculptures.

THE MEDALS

Each of the medals is described here in temporal order.

ST JOHN'S (PERTH), 1842 (ILLUS 1)

The medal is made of silver, and is oval with a border of separately made thistles and thistle leaves soldered onto a wire. It was made by 'RMcG', that is, Robert McGregor, Perth.

On the obverse, above the presentation inscription, is a miniature silver curling stone, with an L-shaped handle.⁵ The inscription is as follows.



ILLUS 1 St John's Curling Club, Perth, 1842

Obv. Engraved: PRESENTED/ TO / THE ST. JOHN'S
CURLING CLUB./ BY/ SIR THOMAS MONCREIFFE/ of
Moncreiffe, Baronet./ PATRON./ 1842

Rev. blank.

The marks on the obverse are, from left to right: RMcG (maker's mark of Robert McGregor, Perth); queen's head (duty mark); thistle (standard mark); castle (Edinburgh); 'S' (date letter for 1838–9). It is 13.5cm × 9cm.

The club was instituted in 1841 and joined the Grand/RCCC the same year. The medal is in the possession of Dewar's Rinks, Perth.

ALLOA, 1844 (ILLUS 2)

The medal is made of silver, and is oval, with a border of thistles and thistle leaves made in the same way as the St John's medal. There is



ILLUS 2 Alloa Curling Club, 1844

a suspension of a winged spur. It was made by Robert McGregor, Perth.

On the obverse are set four hardstone miniature curling stones, two of bloodstone with L-shaped silver handles, and two of reddish stone with double silver handles,⁶ set within crossed brooms of silver set above a small silver tee-marker,⁷ all within the donation inscription. The brooms are made of twisted wire. The inscription is as follows.

Obv. Engraved: *GIVEN TO THE ALLOA CURLING
CLUB * BY JAMES JOHNSTONE ESQUIRE OF ALVA
PATRON/ 1844

Rev. WON/ BY [and winners' names from 1844
to 1872]

The marks on the reverse are, from left to right: RMcG (maker's mark); castle (Edinburgh); thistle (standard mark); 'M' (date letter for 1843–4); queen's head (duty mark). It is 12.5cm × 8.2cm.

The club was founded in 1827 and joined the RCCC in 1838. The medal is in NMS, H.1959.935. The purchase is recorded in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 93 (1959–60), 257.

FINGASK, 1844 (ILLUS 3)

The medal is made of silver and is oval, with a border of thistles and thistle leaves made in the same way as the St John's medal. It was made by Robert McGregor, Perth.

On the obverse are set two bloodstone miniature curling stones with L-shaped handles of gold placed below a tee-marker above which is a broom, constructed of twisted wire.⁸ The inscription is as follows.

Obv. Engraved: * Presented to the Fingask Curling
Club* By Lady Murray Threipland Patroness/
1844

Rev. Gained by/ [followed by winners' names and
dates from 1854 to 1869]

The marks on the reverse are, from left to right: RMcG (maker's mark); queen's head



ILLUS 3 Fingask Curling Club, 1844

(duty mark); thistle (standard mark); castle (Edinburgh); 'M' (date letter for 1843–4). It is 12.5cm × 8cm.

The club was founded in 1843 and joined the RCCC the same year. The medal is in the possession of Fingask Curling Club.

DELVINE, 1846 (ILLUS 4)

The medal is made of silver and is oval, with a border of thistles on the obverse, and a border of bay, or laurel, on the reverse. It was made by JAMcN.

Four miniature silver curling stones with L-shaped handles are on the obverse, set within a pair of crossed brooms, made of twisted wire, above which is a tee-marker and a measuring device in the form of large compasses. The inscription is as follows.

Obv. No engraving.

Rev. Presented/ By the/ YOUNG LADIES/
CONNECTED WITH THE DELVINE CURLING CLUB,

AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT/ WON BY/1846 [followed by winners' names from 1846 to 1862]

The marks on the obverse are: JAMcN (maker's mark); castle (Edinburgh); thistle (standard mark); 'O' (date letter for 1845–6); queen's head (duty mark); JAMcN (maker's mark). It is 12.5cm by 8cm.

The club was instituted in 1732 and joined the RCCC in 1842. The medal is in the possession of Delvine Curling Club.



ILLUS 4 Delvine Curling Club, 1846

ALVA, 1853 (ILLUS 5)

The medal is of silver and is oval, with a cast border of thistles, roses and shamrocks. It was made by JR.

On the obverse four miniature curling stones of silver with L-shaped handles are set within a pair of crossed brooms.⁹ The inscription is as follows.

Obv. No engraving.

Rev. Presented/ BY THE/ LADIES OF ALVA/ TO THE/ ALVA CURLING CLUB/ AS A TOKEN/ OF THEIR RESPECT/ 6TH January/ 1853

The marks on the obverse are: queen's head (duty mark); thistle (standard mark); JR (maker's mark); castle (Edinburgh); 'U' (date mark for 1852–3). It is 12.5cm × 8cm.

The club was formed in 1848 and joined the RCCC the following year. The medal is in the author's collection.



ILLUS 5 Alva Curling Club, 1853

DRUMMOND CASTLE, 1853 (ILLUS 6)

The medal is made of silver and is oval, with a border of thistles and thistle leaves made in the same way as the St John's medal. It was made by JS.

On the obverse are four miniature curling stones of silver, with L-shaped handles set

within crossed brooms made of twisted wire, and a tee-marker. Within the border on a garter is the presentation inscription. The inscription is as follows.

Obv. On a garter set within the border letters in fretwork: PRESENTED BY THE HON^{BLE} LORD WILLOUGHBY D^E ERESBY

Rev. On the reverse of the garter, letters in fretwork: TO THE DRUMMOND CASTLE CURLING CLUB, and engraved: GAINED/ BY/ [and rest blank]

The marks on the obverse are: queen's head (duty mark); thistle (standard mark); JS (maker's mark); castle (Edinburgh); 'W' (date letter for 1853–4). It is 12.5cm × 8cm. The medal is in the author's collection.



ILLUS 6 Drummond Castle Curling Club, 1853

DRUMMOND CASTLE, 1854 (ILLUS 7)

The medal is of silver and is oval, with a border of thistles made in the same way as the St John's

medal. It was made by Magdalene McGregor, Perth.

On the obverse are two pairs of miniature curling stones, two of bloodstone and two of reddish coloured hardstone, with L-shaped handles (one of which is partially missing) within two crossed brooms. Within the border on a garter is the presentation inscription.

Obv. On a garter set within the border letters in fretwork: PRESENTED BY GILBERT HEATHCOTES

Rev. On the reverse of the garter letters in fretwork: TO THE DRUMMOND CASTLE CURLING CLUB *1854 */ WON BY/ [and winners' names from 1855 to 1867]

The marks on the obverse are: queen's head (duty mark); thistle (standard mark); RMcG (maker's mark of Robert McGregor, used by Magdalene McGregor, his widow); castle

(Edinburgh); 'X' (date letter for 1854–5). It is 12cm × 8.5cm.

The club was formed in 1848 and joined the RCCC in 1849. The medal is in Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

COUPAR ANGUS, 1858 (ILLUS 8)

The medal is of silver and is oval, with a border of thistles and thistle leaves made in the same way as the St John's medal. It was made by Magdalene MacGregor.

On the obverse is a band of gold recording the donation, within which are set two pairs of miniature curling stones: one pair of bloodstone with double handles of gold, and the other of granitic stone (said to be from the walls of Sebastopol)¹⁰ with L-shaped handles of gold, with crossed brooms of gold, and a gold tee-marker. The inscription is as follows.



ILLUS 7 Drummond Castle Curling Club, 1854



ILLUS 8 Coupar Angus Curling Club, 1858

Obv. On a band of gold set within the border engraved in high relief * PRESENTED TO THE COUPAR ANGUS CURLING CLUB * BY M^{RS} COLLINS WOOD OF KEITHICK 1858

Rev. WON BY [followed by winners' names from 1858 to 1893]

The marks on the reverse are: queen's head (duty mark); thistle (standard mark); RMcG (maker's mark); castle (Edinburgh); and 'A' (date letter for 1857–8). It is 13.5cm × 8.5cm.

The club was founded in 1772 and joined the RCCC in 1842. The medal is in the possession of Coupar Angus and Kettins Curling Club.

CONCLUSION

The latest date at which a curling medal was made with elements set upon its surface appears to be 1858. Thereafter, when a medallist wished to incorporate any implements or paraphernalia of the game into the decoration, it was usual for him to use them as part of the suspension for the medal. It became quite common to create a suspension of crossed brooms. Sometimes added to this was a curling stone either fixed to the circumference of the medal or suspended from the crossed brooms. Such miniature stones were made of silver or hardstone. Sometimes a miniature curling stone was suspended from the bottom of the medal.

The Coupar Angus medal represents the apogee and end of this short-lived medallic tradition. It seems that it was Robert McGregor of Perth whose idea it was to place curling stones upon the obverse of a medal – a tradition followed by his wife and only two other silversmiths.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to John Burnett of the National Museums of Scotland for this reference. The Latin quotation comes from Martial, Epigrams, Book vi, lxxvi, an epigram intended to be from the tomb of Cornelius Fuscus, a former captain of the emperor's praetorian guard at Rome. The lapis is

the tombstone. The words 'iste' and 'minas' should be separate. A simpler set of instructions appears on a silver medal of 1831 of Old Cumnock Curlers Society in the author's collection. The obverse is engraved:

At 2 days notice play for me
Or delivered up I must be
To the rink that challenges for me.

And on the reverse:

Whoever plays for me
Must of this Parish be
Forty five yards from tee to tee.

- 2 The loch was one of several in the policies of Auchinleck House.
- 3 Robert Sclater, who designed the first GCCC medal, was a founding member of the Grand Club in 1838. In 1835 he had joined and in 1840–1 he was president of Merchiston CC, and again in 1850. From the web, his addresses are: St Leonard's Street, 1809–10; Foot Monteith's Close, 1811; 32 Parliament Square, 1812–18; 153 High Street, 1819–26; and as Robert Sclater & Son, 11 South Bridge Street, 1827–37; *And button makers same address, 1838–43; Die and stamp cutters and wood and brass engravers same address, 1844; Die and stamp cutters 63 North Bridge, 1845–62; 26 St James Square, 1863–6; 56 Clerk Street, 1867.*
- 4 Such borders were sometimes cast but in other cases constructed from separate components, such as thistle flowers and thistle leaves soldered onto a wire.
- 5 Curling stones of this period were usually single-soled. That is, they were designed to run on one side only. The handle was usually permanently fixed to the stone by the insertion of part of the handle into an eccentrically placed hole, or it was attached to a permanently fixed iron post by means of a screw.
- 6 The double handle, that is, a handle set into the top of the stone and fixed in two places, was favoured by some curlers in Perthshire.
- 7 A tee-marker was an implement usually made of turned wood to indicate the tee in the middle of the house. The tee is the mark in the ice to which stones were thrown; it was surrounded by concentric circles, the largest of which latterly was six feet in diameter, measured from the tee. The area within the circles, or broughs, was and remains 'the house'.

8 In the case of this medal, the minute book of the club records the donation more fully than was usual: ‘The Medal is of large dimensions, of an elliptical form, surrounded by Wreaths of Thistles in frost work. On the one side smoothly polished, a broom, also in silver frosted work, lies across the rink – behind it the tee – and near to both are two Curling stones in Miniature of beautiful blood stone with gold handles – Around these is elegantly engraved the Inscription – “Presented to the Fingask Curling Club by Lady Murray Threipland, Patroness 1844” . . . The whole is very elegant.’

9 On 12 January 1853, *The Scotsman* reported the presentation of this medal thus:

‘ALVA CURLERS’ BALL. A LADY ORATOR.

On the evening of Thursday last, the Curling Club of Alva, of which Mr James Johnstone of Alva, M.P., is the patron, gave a splendid ball in the Johnstone Arms Hotel, the rooms, lobbies, and staircases of which were tastefully decorated with evergreens, in honour of the occasion. In the course of the evening considerable interest was occasioned by the presentation to Mr. John McLaren, Burnside, the President of the Club, by Miss Norton, on behalf of the ladies of Alva, of a splendid medal, bearing on one side an appropriate inscription, and on the other four curling stones in silver, with cross brooms. Miss Norton, the entire company standing, delivered the testimonial in a neat address, to which Mr McLaren appropriately replied. –*Alloa Advertiser*.’

10 There is a tradition within the club that one of the miniature pairs of stones is made of stone from Sebastopol. That the tradition is perfectly

possible, is evidenced by the survival (in a private collection) of a pair of stones in a box, on which is a silver plaque with the engraving ‘GRANITE from the Docks at Sebastopol OAK Part of the main top Rail OF THE RUSSIAN SHIP Grand duke Constantine’; and a report from *The Ayr Advertiser* of 15 January 1857: ‘The Earl of Eglinton having intimated his intention to present the curlers of Irvine with a pair of Curling-Stones, made of blocks procured from the ruined walls of Sebastopol, a meeting was convened . . .’

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