

Sir George Pollock

George Pollock, fourth son of Mr David Pollock, saddler to George III, was born on 4 June 1786. He went to school at Vauxhall and from there to Woolwich in January 1801. He left Woolwich two years later with a commission in the Bengal Artillery. He arrived in Calcutta in January 1804 and proceeded to Dum Dum. In November that year he took part in the battle of Dig between the infantry of General Lake's army and Holkar. He was next present at the siege of Bharatpur, January to February 1805. As a result of subsequent action he was first appointed quarter-master of one of the Dum-Dum battalions, and then adjutant and quarter-master to the artillery at Cawnpore. He obtained his captaincy on 1 March 1812, saw active service in Nepal 1814-16 and was promoted to major in 1819. He was then appointed assistant adjutant-general to the Artillery, a post he held until receiving his commission as lieut.-colonel in 1824. The next couple of years saw him campaigning successfully in Burma as Commanding Officer of Bengal Artillery. For his actions he was awarded the Companionship of the Bath. For health reasons he travelled home in 1827. In December 1829 he was promoted to brevet colonel. Returning to India in 1830, he took command of a battalion of artillery at Cawnpore until, early in 1838, he was nominated brigadier-general in command of the division at Dinapore. He was soon posted to the command of the Agra district and in June 1838 became a major-general.

In that same year a British army invaded Afghanistan and, after taking Ghazni, entered Kabul on 6 August 1839. Shah Shuja was proclaimed King and Dost Muhammad fled. As the war was considered at an end, the British army was broken up, with a force remaining to assist the Shah's troops. Towards the end of 1841 the British troops in Afghanistan were commanded by General Elphinstone,

and Sir William Macnaghten was the Minister of the Governor-General at the court of the Shah. The British were in cantonments outside the city about 2 miles from the Bala Hissar, a situation that was to lead to disaster for them. A bad disturbance broke out in the city when Sir Alexander Burnes and several other British officers were killed. Later that year Sir William Macnaghten was murdered in sight of the cantonment. No attempt was made either to rescue or avenge and the result was a treaty according to which all the posts in Afghanistan were to be evacuated and the British forces withdrawn from the country. The withdrawal was a total disaster for the British. Of the 16,500 men who had left Kabul, only one survived the attacks of the Afghans to reach Jalalabad on 13 January 1842. Some troops had been taken prisoner and hostages had been made of Lady Macnaghten, Lady Sales and other widows, wives and children. Major-General Pollock was appointed to command a force at Peshawar, which he reached on 5 February 1842. The main purpose of the force was to ensure the safe withdrawal of the garrison at Jalalabad, but Pollock urged a much bolder course, namely to advance beyond Jalalabad, inflict severe punishment on the enemy, effect the release of the prisoners and then withdraw safely back to India. Pollock's view eventually prevailed and there followed a vigorous and successful campaign with the aid of General Nott and his garrison that had been stationed at Kandahar. After many battles and skirmishes the British once again entered Kabul on 16 September 1842. The British captives had been removed to a fort in Bamiyan which they had subsequently managed to seize. With the Afghans defeated, they had decided to push on to Kabul and on 21 September they entered Pollock's camp to great rejoicing. On 12 October the British army

commenced its return march and reached Peshawar with minimal losses. In December the army crossed the Sutlej at Firuzpur and were met by the Governor-General with the army of reserve.

The thanks of both Houses of Parliament were voted to the Governor-General (Lord Ellenborough), Sir George Pollock, Sir William Nott, Sir John McCaskill, Sir Robert Sale and General England.

While Lord Ellenborough was raised to an earldom, Pollock, to whom, Lord Hardinge later wrote, "is due the whole merit of the advance from Jalalabad to Cabul", the liberation of the captives and the victories, was merely nominated a Grand Cross of the Bath without pension or other reward, and was relegated to the command of a division at Dinapore. In 1843, Pollock became political resident at Lucknow and, in 1844, was transferred to Calcutta as Military Member of the Supreme Council of India. He held this office until 1846 when he was compelled by illness to return to England. On his arrival, the East India Company awarded him a pension of £1,000 a year. The Corporation of London granted him the Freedom of the City, and several other public bodies did likewise. In 1851 he was promoted from Lieut. to General, and three years later he was appointed the senior of the three Government Directors of the East India Company by the President of the Board of Control. He retired from office in 1856 after 50 years service, was promoted general in 1859 and in 1861 was nominated Knight Grand Cross of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India. In 1870 he was appointed field marshal and the following year became Constable of the Tower of London. In March 1872 he was created Baronet, his name enrolled in the college of Heralds as "of the Khyber Pass". He died on 6 October 1872, aged 86, and lies buried in the nave of Westminster Abbey.



The Medal

On Sir George Pollock's arrival in Calcutta in 1844, the British inhabitants of that city raised a subscription of 11,000 rupees to perpetuate the memory of his great services by instituting a medal, to be presented twice a year to the most distinguished cadet at the East India Company's Military Seminary at Addiscombe, on passing the biennial examination for a commission. They sent him an address in which, after recapitulating the achievements of the army he commanded, they said: "We honour you for the reluctance you evinced to return to the provinces from Jalalabad, a return with that (i.e. the march to Kabul) unattempted - which by your perseverance was at last accomplished - would have left a stain upon your country that not time nor circumstance could ever have effaced ... your short but glorious career of service in Afghanistan now assumed a character of intense and painful interest, requiring the most cautious discretion combined with an energy and decision that seemed scarcely compatible with its exercise ... The courage and ability demanded and displayed were in the cause of humanity, a cause which was hallowed and approved by Heaven and those who, abandoned, had pined and sunk to an untimely grave, live to bless the name of him who restored them to freedom and to life." Pollock

replied: "I feel it impossible adequately to express my sense of the obligation you have conferred on me by the desire you have shown to perpetuate in my native country your too flattering estimation of my military services by the presentation of medals to students at Addiscombe. I concur most unreservedly in the very high respect and estimation justly bestowed on this Institution by public opinion. You have thus conferred on me a lasting distinction at once delicate, and far beyond my deserts".

The Court of Directors of the Honourable East India Company agreed to become trustees to the Pollock Prize Fund, and to add to its importance by pecuniary aid and by presenting the prize at Addiscombe.

The original medal was designed by General MacLeod and executed by Benjamin Wyon. It was struck in gold and bronze. The medals for presentation were the gold ones being described as "a very handsome medal, being 2 inches in diameter, 1/8" thick, weighing over 3 ounces and being valued at 16 guineas". No mention is made of the bronze specimens; they may have been struck as proofs. It is interesting to note that Laurence Brown, in his book *British Historical Medals 1837-1901* (Seaby, London 1987, p. 72) gives the gold medal a rarity rating of 'R' and the bronze medal one of 'RRR'!

The obverse (figure 4, bronze specimen is illustrated) has as its main feature a

uniformed bust of Sir George Pollock facing left. Immediately above the bust and arranged in an arc is the inscription: MAJOR GENERAL SIR GEORGE POLLOCK G.C.B. BENGAL ARTILLERY. At the top on a curved label is the inscription: TO COMMEMORATE EMINENT SERVICES. At the bottom: CABUL 1842. In two concentric lines around the bust is the inscription: TREACHERY AVENGED - BRITISH HONOUR VINDICATED - DISASTERS RETRIEVED - BRITISH CAPTIVES DELIVERED. / KYBER PASS FORCED - JELALABAD RELIEVED - VICTORIES OF MAMOO KHAIL - JUGDULLUCK - TEZEEN ISTALIF.

The reverse (figure 5) bears the following nine-line inscription in the field: PRESENTED BY / THE BRITISH INHABITANTS / OF CALCUTTA / AND AWARDED BY / THE COURT OF DIRECTORS / OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY / TO THE MOST DISTINGUISHED / CADET / OF THE SEASON. On a circular border above and below: ADDISCOMBE / POLLOCK PRIZE. Diameter 58 mm. Weight: bronze - 83.7 g (specimen previously in the author's collection), 59.4 g (Ashmolean specimen); gold - 'over 3 ounces'.

A print of a portrait of General Pollock, made in 1850 by G. Ford is illustrated in figure 6, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London.

The medal was first awarded in June 1848 and continued to be awarded in its original form until June 1861, soon after which the seminary was closed and activity transferred to the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich.

The very first medal awarded, that to Edward Charles Sparshott Williams (later General E. C. S. Williams, KCIE), came up for auction in the UK with a group of other medals awarded to General Williams, in March 1978. Its present whereabouts is not known.

Roll of Pollock Medallists at Addiscombe

Edward C S Williams	June 1848	Bengal Engineers
James J McLeod Innes	December 1848	
Thomas G Montgomerie	June 1849	
George A Craster	December 1849	
Patrick Steward	June 1850	
Frederick S Stanton	December 1850	
Henry Goodwyn	June 1851	
James P Bassevi	December 1851	
Arthur M Lang	June 1852	
Salisbury T Trevor	December 1852	
John U Champain	June 1853	
E B Holland	December 1853	Bombay Engineers
W Jeffreys	June 1854	Bengal Engineers
Aeneas R R Macdonald	December 1854	H.E.I.C.E.
Charles H Luard	June 1855	Bengal Engineers
John Eckford	December 1855	
John M McNeile	June 1856	
John Herschell	December 1856	
Keith A Jopp	June 1857	Bombay Engineers
Lewis Conway Gordon	December 1857	Bengal Engineers
William Maxwell Campbell	June 1858	Bombay Engineers
William H. Pierson	December 1858	Bengal Engineers
A W Elliot	June 1859	Not appointed
W Shepherd	December 1859	Bengal Engineers
A J C Cunninghame	June 1860	
Kellen C Pye	December 1860	
W J Williamson	June 1861	Bengal Infantry

Postscript

In 1861 the Secretary of State for India in Council, Sir Charles Wood, decided to cease the annual grant necessary to supplement the interest from the Prize Fund, of which he had become the trustee. This made it impossible to maintain the medal at its original value. Without apparently referring to Sir George Pollock, he asked Benjamin Wyon to prepare dies for a smaller medal. This smaller medal was presented at Woolwich from December 1861 to July 1893. Brown states that the value of this medal was 12 guineas, Vibart (see below) 10 guineas! An illustration of this gold medal can be found on page 30 of Robert Puddester's book *Catalogue of British India Historical Medals* (R.C. Senior Ltd., Butleigh 1987). This medal has a diameter of 45 mm and features on its obverse the bust of General Pollock facing left and the inscription 'POLLOCK CABUL 1842'. The reverse bears the following inscription in the field: FOUNDED BY THE/ BRITISH INHABITANTS/ OF CALCUTTA/ TO COMMEMORATE/ THE EMINENT SERVICES OF/ MAJOR GENERAL/ SIR GEORGE POLLOCK K.C.B. / AND AWARDED TO/ THE MOST DISTINGUISHED/ CADET OF THE SEASON. Above and below in a border inscription: POLLOCK PRIZE/ ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY.

Oddly enough, in this publication Puddester makes no mention of the original medal, while Brown in his catalogue refers to the Woolwich medal as being in bronze. In a subsequent publication, *Medals of British India*, Volume I, Spink, London 2002, Puddester includes an unillustrated description of the original medal.



6. Sir George Pollock, by G. Ford 1850. (National Army Museum, London)

Sources

Much of the historical information in this article has been derived from *Addiscombe - Its Heroes and Men of Note* by Colonel H. M. Vibart, Royal (Late Madras) Engineers, published by Archibald Constable and Co., Westminster 1894. Photographs, prints of Addiscombe House, staff and cadets can be found in the study library of the London Borough of Croydon. Various papers and documents relating to the college are deposited in the India Office Library (now in the British Library), London, as are many other East India Company reports, proceedings, minutes etc. A visit to the latter library did not, unfortunately, unearth any additional information about the medal, though some information may be contained in the lengthy minutes of the Court of the East India Company for the period 1842-48. The author has not seen a gold specimen of the original Pollock medal.