

The History of the REME Cap Badge

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The history of our cap badge is well documented in *Craftsmen of the Army Volume 1* and in an article, 'The History of the REME Cap Badge' by Major D. J. Wright REME, which appeared in *The REME Journal* in 1982. This article is a 'potted' version giving the key facts about the history and development of the basic REME Cap Badge.*

Much of the detailed planning for forming REME, including the purely domestic details, was the responsibility of the Adjutant General of the time, General Sir Ronald Adam. In April 1942 he set up a committee to deal with the potential administrative or 'A' problems and other implications of the decision to form the Corps. The end product of this committee's work was Army Council Instruction (ACI) 1605 of 1942, published on 1 August 1942. The Chairman of the committee was Major General Oliver Edgcumbe (late Royal Signals) who was the Director of Organisation (later redesignated Director of Manning).

The Director of Mechanical Maintenance (DMM) – the immediate forerunner of the first Director of Mechanical Engineering (DME) – took the initiative by insisting that the new Corps should have a badge that was an expression of its purpose and invited suggestions from all Commands. More than 100 designs eventually arrived and these were set out in a large room of the War Office for inspection. DMM invited three senior and three junior officers to join the members of the Edgcumbe Committee to

* This article only describes the three approved basic Corps badges and not the many variants (e.g. the use of the 'calliper' type 'collar dogs' on side hats; the use of current 'collar dogs' as an inset in the badge for the Corps Band; and the many cloth badges. Indeed in *The REME Journal* 1982 article, 25 different badges were identified!



First Corps cap badge manufactured in Bakelite.

make a choice. One of the junior officers recollected that, after long study, there was no agreement; eventually DMM called the selection team together, briefly discussed the various opinions, and said: 'It is evident we have not found what we want here, but I believe I know the sort of thing you are looking for. Has anyone got any paper?'

Nobody had, so he took a cigarette packet and drew on it a simple design that satisfied everyone! The simple design selected was part of the coat of arms of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and was described as 'a pair of callipers surrounded by a laurel wreath bearing the letters REME emblazoned on four separate shields and surmounted by the Royal Crown'. Although the badge gained royal approval it was evident that HM the King did not think much of it – of which more later! The pattern was sealed on 22 June 1942.

The details of the new badge were published in ACI 1605 of 1942 (i.e. only two months before the date scheduled for the formation of the Corps) – without the badge pattern. The delay in the provision of the authorized badge pattern led to some fascinating designs, examples of which can be seen in the REME Museum. However, most theatres managed to get hold of patterns of the badge and were able to manufacture them locally. The Corps history describes the position in North Africa:

As the formation date of 1 October 1942 approached, there was concern that supplies of the eagerly awaited badges of the new Corps would not arrive in time. Eventually a few arrived by air and, to everyone's disappointment, they were moulded in brown Bakelite. However, Brigadier Howard-Jones persuaded the base workshop in Alexandria to cast brass badges for the Eighth Army and these were worn polished. If there was initial disappointment that the badge was lacking in quality and heraldic merit it served at least as the visible symbol of a new-found independence, here in the desert as elsewhere, and it was proudly worn.

Bakelite badges were introduced across the British Army, for all regiments and corps, in early 1942. At that time, householders had been asked to surrender all unwanted metal for the manufacture of tanks and aircraft. As the major user of all this metal, the Army had to play its part in economies and cap badges were an obvious candidate. Bakelite badges were produced coloured silver-grey, light-bronze, chocolate-brown and black. The REME 'calliper' design badges were produced in chocolate-brown only.

Once metal was made available for the use of badges, they were die-stamped. The other ranks' badge was in gilding metal and two types of officers' badges were issued: a gilt badge was worn bright while the more generally worn badge was in bronze with a blackened surface.

As noted earlier in this article, King George VI did not think much of the 'calliper' design and, soon after the end of the war, commanded that a new badge be designed. DME again asked all Commands at home and overseas to propose suitable designs. The ensuing selection process was described in the July 1947 edition of the *REME Magazine*:

Instructions were received from higher authority that the present REME badge should be abolished and a new badge designed. In consequence, DME asked Home Commands and Theatres abroad to submit suggestions for a new badge. Approximately 300 were received, the main theme being some form of engineering

tool, stress and strain diagrams, recovery vehicle, armament etc. The badge makers were consulted and they advised that a satisfactory design could not be made using any of the subjects, chiefly due to the small size of the badge.

The REME Dress Committee was then convened to decide whether the motif for the badge should be based on the working tools used by the Corps; on conventional military lines; or be of a heraldic nature. The Committee chose the last option and Mr Stephen Gooden CBE, the Royal Academician, was commissioned to produce suitable designs. Two were received and the more suitable selected.

The final design was approved by HM the King and the pattern was sealed on 14 August 1947. The new badge was described officially as:

Upon a lightning flash, a horse forcene gorged with a coronet of four fleur-de-llys, a chain reflexed over its back and standing on a globe. Above, a crown upon a scroll bearing the letters REME. Lighting flash, scroll and crown to be gilt; horse and globe to be silver.

The horse forcene and chain were symbolic of power under control and the lightning flash of electrical engineering. The horse forcene also formed part of the crest of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and, together with the lightning flash, was intended to mark the close relationship that existed between the electrical and mechanical engineers in both Army and civilian life. The globe was indicative of the impact of engineering on the world generally. A description of the new badge in the July 1947 edition of the *REME Magazine* stated that when reproduced on signs or shields 'the horse should give the impression of energy, vitality and strength' – clearly, judging by some of the examples in the REME Museum, this advice was not always adhered to!

The badge was produced in silver and gilt for officers and in gilding and white metal for other ranks.

Shortly after the accession of Queen Elizabeth II in 1952, the crown of the REME badge, in common with other regiments and corps, was changed to the King Edward's Crown. This is the badge that is worn today. The officers' badge was again silver and gilt and the other ranks' gilding and white metal.

SS Engadine – Advanced Base Workshop (Light) (Floating) REME

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This article gives an example of the Corps' ingenuity in difficult circumstances during World War II.

Early in 1945, it became evident that the 4th echelon workshop facilities required to support the forward areas in South East Asia Command (SEAC) were inadequate, due to the exceptionally long lines of communication that had to be



'King's Crown' cap badge approved by the King in 1947.



Current 'King Edward's Crown' cap badge approved in 1952.