

# The History of the REME Cap Badge

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**T**HE history of the formation and development of REME has been well documented and recorded. Little, though, has been written about that most tangible manifestation of our corporate identity — our cap badge. 'What is there to write about?' many will ask. 'Surely we have only had two — the old caliper design and the present 'horse on the world'? This article describes over 20 different cap badges that have been worn by REME personnel and even this number may not be exhaustive. The author would welcome correspondence on the subject.

## THE DESIGN OF THE FIRST REME BADGE

The task of selecting a design for the first REME badge was given to the Edgcumbe Committee. Suggested designs, expressing the purpose of the new Corps, were invited from all Commands and over 100 were submitted. The outcome is described in the Corps history (1):

*After long study there was no general agreement; eventually the DMM called us together, briefly discussed the various opinions, and said something of this nature, "It is evident we have not found what we want here, but I believe I know the sort of thing you are looking for. Anyone got any paper?" Nobody had; so he took a cigarette packet and drew on it a simple design that satisfied us all.*

The design selected (Figure 1) was part of the coat of arms of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers — a pair of calipers — 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 is evident that King George VI did not think much of it — of which more later. The pattern was sealed on 22nd June 1942.

Details of the new badge were published in an Army Council Instruction dated 1st August 1942 (2)

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is that within Aviation REME are responsible for the maintenance as well as repair of the aircraft. Thus within the context of EHM, REME have full control over equipment documentation and recording of equipment usage which is essential if lives of components and their deterioration are to be measured. With other equipments there could be problems of co-ordination between the user and REME and each type of equipment would need to be carefully assessed to confirm that EHM would be cost effective. One couldn't imagine, for example, that helicopter type EHM would ever be worthwhile in a Land-Rover.

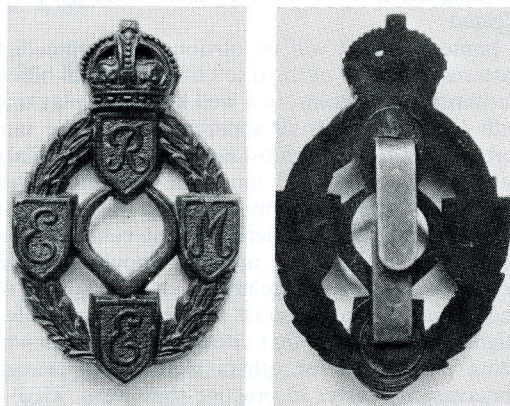


Fig. 1. Bakelite cap badges showing fasteners.

— only three months before the date scheduled for the formation of the Corps:

## UNIFORM, BADGES AND PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

(a) The REME will wear uniform of pattern prescribed for dismounted personnel. Personal arms and accoutrements will be on the same scale as for the RAOC.

(b) The following are the approved patterns of badges, buttons, etc., for the REME:

Cap badge	{	A laurel wreath surmounted by a crown; on the wreath, four shields bearing the letters "REME"; within the wreath, a pair of calipers.
Collar badge		
Button		

Shoulder titles for other ranks ..... REME

Arm of Service strip ..... Dark blue-yellow-red (with dark blue in front)

Backing rank badges ..... Dark blue

(c) Major generals, brigadiers and colonels of the REME will wear the scarlet band and Royal crest on the forage cap and the scarlet gorget patches on the jacket or blouse. Buttons for brigadiers and colonels will be of the pattern described in Dress Regulations, 1934, para. 266. Regimental buttons may be worn in accordance with ACI 1535 of 1942. Backing for badges of rank in battle dress for these officers will be red.

(d) Refund of expenses incurred by officers transferred to the REME is governed by ACI 1366 of 1942.

(e) Tradesmen's badges as now authorised for RAOC artisans, etc., will be worn by REME personnel pending further instructions.



(f) Collar badges and regimental buttons will not be issued to other ranks during the war.

(g) Indents for cap badges for other ranks will not be submitted until further instructions are issued.

### THE QUETTA BADGE

The delay in the provision of the authorised badge pattern led to the fascinating cap badge shown in Figure 2, an example of which is in the Corps Museum (3). This was designed and worn in Quetta, India, between October 1942 and February 1943 pending the arrival of the issue badges. Although a comparison of Figures 1 and 2 shows obvious differences there is no doubt that the Quetta badge is a faithful interpretation of the written description of the ACI! A visual example of the old story which begins 'send three and fourpence. . . '!



Fig. 2. The 'Quetta' badge.

### LOCAL MANUFACTURE

Other theatres had similar problems in obtaining badges but at least they managed to get patterns of the authorised design and there are no other local variations. The Corps history (4) describes the position in North Africa:

*As the formation date of 1st October 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 his Eighth Army personnel and these were worn polished. If there was initial dis-*

*appointment 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.*

Base workshops obviously did a roaring trade in the new badges. The Corps Museum has an example purchased in Iraq in 1943 which was locally manufactured in Base Workshop REME, Cairo (5). Can anyone remember how they were accounted for? Presumably the brass came from shell cases but who did the selling — and who kept the money?

### NON METALLIC BADGES

Composition badges were introduced into the British Army early in 1942 and most Regiments and Corps were provided with these. At the time, householders had been exhorted to surrender all unwanted metal for the manufacture of tanks and aircraft and many pots and pans and iron gates and railings were melted down for the cause. As the major user of all this metal the Army had to play its part in economies and cap badges were obvious candidates. With the impetus of war-time research many new materials were being produced, and cap badges were produced in bakelite coloured silver-grey, light-bronze, chocolate-brown and black (9). REME *caliper* design badges were produced in chocolate-brown only.

The fasteners on the reverse were two thin brass strips at the top and the bottom of the design (Figure 1). Badges were also made with strips mounted horizontally; said to be officer pattern although this has not been verified.

### THE FIRST METAL BADGES

The issue metal badges were die stamped and have a slider. 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 (6) (Figure 3). Locally manufactured badges were cast in brass and have two shanks mounted horizontally for securing by a split pin.

### COLLAR DOGS AS CAP BADGES

The desirability of a smaller sized badge for the coloured or drab side hats worn in some theatres led to the use of collar dogs for this purpose. An example of the coloured fore and aft cap with a gilt collar dog used as a cap badge (c. 1942) is in the Corps Museum (7). More usually the blackened bronze collar dog was worn and some of these were also manufactured locally (8) (Figure 3). It is assumed that when soldiers' collar dogs were issued after the war these were also sometimes worn on side hats.

### THE SECOND DESIGN

As noted earlier, King George VI did not think much of the *caliper* design, and soon after the end of the



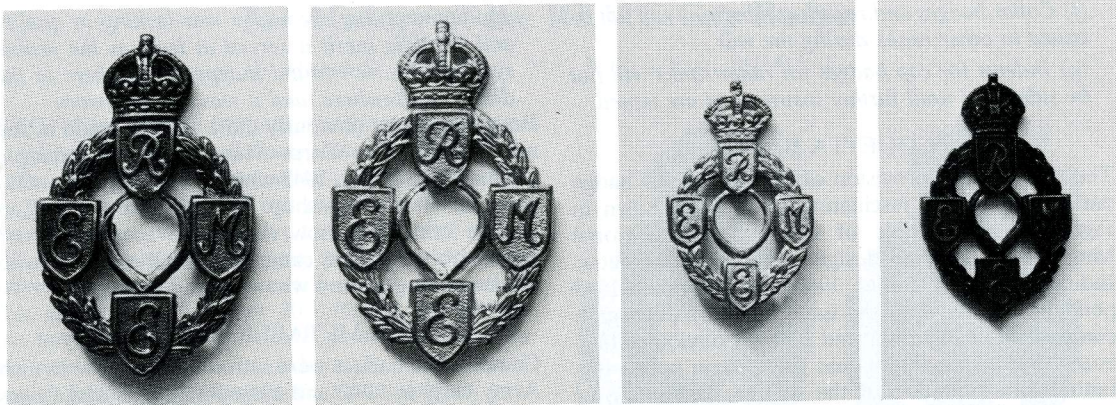


Fig. 3. Metal 'Caliper' badges. From the left: gilding metal, gilt, gilded 'dog' and blackened 'dog'.

War commanded that a new badge be designed. The DME asked all Commands at home and overseas to propose suitable designs and some 226 were examined (10). The main themes were some form of engineering tool, stress and strain diagram, recovery vehicle or armament and the REME Dress Committee met under General Sir Walter Venning, the then Colonel Commandant, to decide whether the motif for the badge should be based on:

- The working tools used by the Corps.
- Conventional military lines.
- or Heraldic principles.

They chose the latter and Mr. Stephen Gooden, CBE, RA, was commissioned to produce suitable designs. The 'RA' refers to the Royal Academy, not those other people! The design he submitted met with general approval and, after some discussion about the position of the scroll and whether this should bear a motto or the letters REME, the design was accepted. The badge was described officially as:

*Upon a lightning flash, a horse forcene gorged with a coronet of four fleur-de-lys, a chain reflexed over its back and standing on a globe. Above, a crown upon a scroll bearing the letters REME. Lightning*

*flash, scroll and crown to be gilt; horse and globe to be silver.*

This was approved by the King and the pattern was sealed on 14th August 1947.

The horse forcene and chain are symbolic of power under control and the lightning flash of electrical engineering. The horse forcene also forms part of the crest of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and, together with the lightning flash, is intended to mark the close relationship which exists between the electrical and mechanical engineers in the Army and civil life. The globe is indicative of the impact of engineering on the world generally. A description of the new badge in the REME magazine of the period notes that when reproduced on signs or shields *the horse should give the impression of energy, vitality and strength!*

The badge was produced in silver and gilt for officers and in gilding and white metal for other ranks (Figure 4). Kipling and King (9) claim that it was also produced anodised but this seems improbable.

#### THE PRESENT BADGE

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 we wear today.



Fig. 4. 'King's Crown' badges. Left: 'Other Ranks'. Right: 'Officers'.



Fig. 5. 'Queen's Crown' badges. Left: 'Other Ranks' bi-metal. Centre: 'Other Ranks' anodised. Right: 'Officers'.



The officers' badge was again silver and gilt and the other ranks' gilding and white metal. The latter was superseded in the 60s by the present anodised badge (Figure 5).

An interesting recent development is the return of the collar dog as a cap badge, though in a specialised field. The introduction of the new uniform for the REME Staff Band in 1979 included the adoption of a helmet. The badge is incorporated in the helmet plate which consists of four pieces:

- An anodised infantry pattern helmet plate.
- A circular, brass, garter mount bearing the Corps name in full.
- Red felt badge backing.
- Left-hand collar dog worn as badge.

The Director of Music uses the Officers' silver and gilt collar dog whereas the remainder of the band wear the issue anodised collar dog (Figure 6).

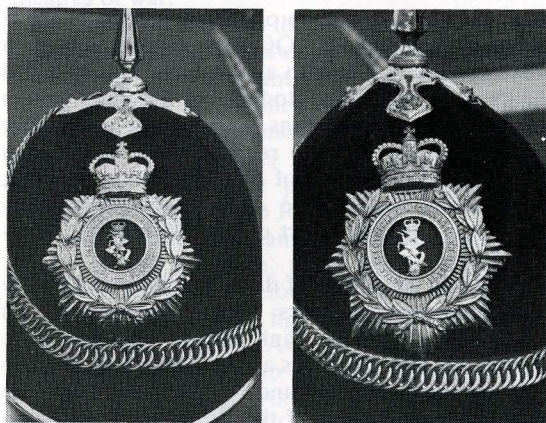


Fig. 6. Band badges. Left: Director of Music. Right: Bandsmen.

### CLOTH BADGES

Cloth badges deteriorate in use and so few of the earlier examples are extant. The museum has an unworn copy (not at present on display) of the 'Caliper' badge in gold wire. The background of the shields is yellow and the jewels of the crown are in blue, green and red. The badge has a khaki background and was presumably designed for wear on the khaki beret authorised for wear by REME officers up to about 1946.

On display in the museum is a 'King's Crown' embroidered badge on a red background and mounted on a REME side hat. It is not known if other cloth badges of this style, but with different backgrounds, were produced in the era up to 1952.

The current badge is produced on a variety of backing for wear by officers on different forms of headdress; red for the side hat, dark blue for the beret, maroon for the Parachute beret, green for the RM beret and a black square for the AAC beret.

### ANY MORE?

The foregoing identifies 25 different badges and this does not include different strikes of the same badge by different contractors. For the convenience of anyone interested in collecting copies there is a consolidated list below. If anyone has examples of any other REME badges or further information about the ones described the author would be most interested to have details. If sufficient information is forthcoming a supplement will be published to make this record complete.

### COLLECTORS' CHECK LIST

#### OTHER RANKS'

#### OFFICERS'

#### UNOFFICIAL BADGES

The 'Quetta' badge

#### CALIPER DESIGN

Gilding metal	Gilt
Gilding metal 'dog'	Blackened bronze
	Cast brass (local manufacture)
	Blackened bronze 'dog'
Bakelite (chocolate brown) with vertical fasteners	Bakelite with horizontal fasteners

#### 1947 'KING'S CROWN'

Gilding and white metal	Gilt and silver
Anodised (doubtful)	

#### 1952 'QUEEN'S CROWN'

Gilding and white metal	Gilt and silver
Anodised	Gilt and silver 'dog'
Anodised 'dog' (Staff Band)	(Director of Music)

### CLOTH CAP BADGES

- Caliper pattern (on khaki)
- King's Crown (on red)
- Queen's Crown (on red, blue, maroon, green and black)

### References:

1. Craftsmen of the Army, p. 162.
2. ACI 1605/42.
3. REME Museum accession no. 84/BAD. Presented by Major F. Dale.
4. *ibid*, p. 94.
5. Accession no. 221/CLO. Presented by Captain T. P. Ingram.
6. Accession no. 1320/CLO. Presented by Brigadier H. Macdonald-Smith who wore it in the Far East.
7. Accession no. 146/CLO. Presented by Lt. Col. D. H. A. Mackenzie, MBE. Illustrated in *Craftsmen of the Army*, Plate 27.
8. Accession no. 224/BAD. Made in Egypt.
9. *Head-Dress Badges of the British Army*, Vol. II by A. L. Kipling and H. L. King, published by Frederick Muller Ltd.
10. Minutes of REME Dress Committee Meeting, 8th January 1949.
11. REME Magazine, Vol. 2 No. 7, July 1947.