THE CORNISH MEDAL

THE ROYAL CORNWALL POLYTECHNIC SOCIETY MEDAL AWARDS

THE POLY

ARTS HISTORY SCIENCE

The new Poly medals

Introduction

This booklet accompanies the relaunch of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society's (RCPS) medal awards in April 2023. The inspiration to reinstate the medals, first awarded in the 1830s, came from a lecture in 2017 at The Poly by historian Dr James Ryan of the Research Department at the V&A, about the pioneering photographer and chemist Robert Hunt (1807–1887). Hunt was Secretary of the RCPS from 1840 until 1845, and was highly influential in Cornish and national circles of science and art. At the RCPS he was fully engaged with the exhibitions and medal awards.

The award of medals mentioned in Ryan's lecture, and some of the distinguished people who were awarded them, sparked the idea to recognise the very best Cornwall is offering now in the fields of science, industry and the arts. The silver medal awarded to Alfred Nobel in 1865 encouraged the ambition that the new medal should aspire to that status and distinction, and be a badge of pride for recipients.

The proposal for the reinstated medal was approved by The Poly's Board but was then stalled by the pandemic. Subsequently, sponsorship was secured and distinguished individuals in science, industry and the arts appointed to lead each of the groups considering nominations for the award of a medal, and to assess the quality of the work.

The process involves the use of broad criteria to make judgements, including originality, outputs or practice, significance and rigour. Contenders must be working in or have a strong recent connection with Cornwall. A shortlist of three or four in each category is drawn up, and this is then considered by the group leaders and sponsors. One nominee in each category will receive a medal; however, all the other shortlisted nominees will be recognised for their achievements by the RCPS with the award of a certificate. Awards will be to the very best, befitting what we believe is Cornwall's 'Nobel' Medal.

Prof. Mike Jenks, former President, RCPS

Foreword

As Michael Carver points out in his informative essay, RCPS medals played a pivotal role in the early years of The Poly's history. Encouraging the submission of prototypes, inventions and art works to the annual exhibitions, they stimulated innovation. The relaunch of the medal awards in 2023, almost 200 years since The Poly's founding, recognises and celebrates the range of exciting innovative practice taking place in Cornwall today across the arts, science and industry. While showcasing potentially good ideas, the original exhibitions and medals fostered community interest in the arts and technology. The new awards promote outstanding achievement and future promise. But, importantly, they also provide opportunities to engage diverse groups with Falmouth's illustrious history, *"to draw out in the community a love of Science and Art."* (RCPS President Earl Mount Edgcumbe, 1882.)

We'd like to thank those who initiated the relaunch of the medal awards and made it possible through their generous sponsorship, notably Professor Mike Jenks, Professor David Hosken, Dr. Adrian Spalding and the late Lord Myners, as well as Kim Conchie DL and Louis Turner. Lucie Nottingham of the Tanner Phoenix Trust has also generously funded the production of this commemorative booklet, as well as a series of related events and activities. Finally, we are grateful to artist Lucy Willow for her beautiful and thoughtful reimagining of The Poly medal itself, and Matthew Holland at Bigbury Mint for his collaboration with her in its remaking, as well as support for this project.

Dr. Virginia Button, Chair, The Poly (RCPS)

Sponsor's note

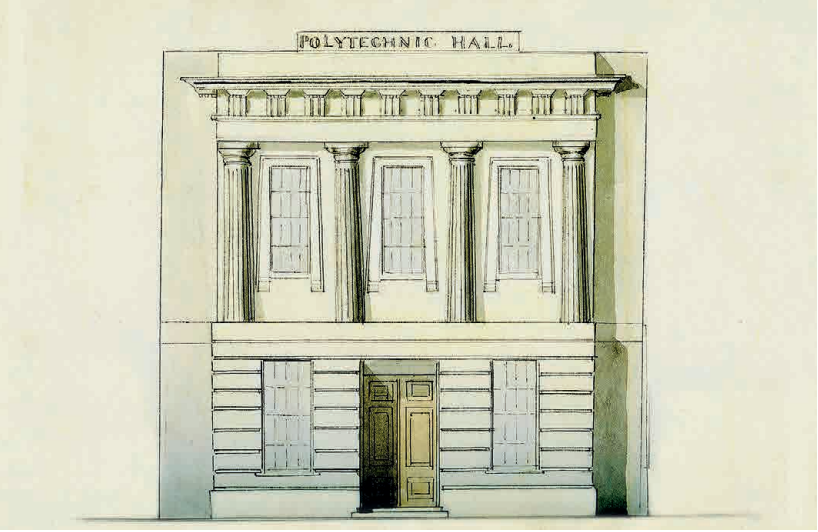
The launch of the new medal initiative at The Poly is an exciting event, Janus-like, looking backwards towards the founding principles of The Poly, and forwards to reinvention in a modern idiom, but retaining always the core aims of the polymath Poly. The re-establishment of the medal, with a specially commissioned and newly minted medal for recipients recognising their expertise in arts and science, brings these fields neatly together, and this commemorative booklet puts the whole into historical context.

The former Tanner Trust, now springing into a new existence as the Tanner Phoenix Trust under the auspices of the Cornwall Community Foundation, has supported a number of initiatives at The Poly over many years. It is very pleasing to support this commemorative booklet, a timely reminder of the variety and depth of The Poly's influence in the cultural and scientific life of Cornwall and beyond for nearly 200 years.

Lucie Nottingham, Tanner Phoenix Trust

The Society and its medals

The Polytechnic Hall in Falmouth was built in 1835 for a single purpose - to exhibit and promote new inventions, principally for the mining industry. Mechanisation had allowed the Cornish copper and tin mines to descend to unprecedented depths, but only by de-watering them with great beam engines pumping ceaselessly, and very expensively, powered by coal imported from Wales. Any improvement in efficiency would be welcomed by Cornwall's most important industry.



Polytechnic Hall

Some years before the founding of the RCPS, James Watt had invented a greatly improved pumping engine which allowed work to proceed at much deeper levels than ever before and increased threefold the efficiency of the old atmospheric engines - possibly the single most important invention of the 18th century.

To encourage such inventive development, the Society decided to award medals at the annual exhibitions and chose James Watt's profile as their image.

Medals were not reserved for the mining industry alone; the Society existed to encourage all forms of novelty and ingenuity in the arts and sciences, as well as for exceptional assistance and loyalty in supporting the Society and its aims.

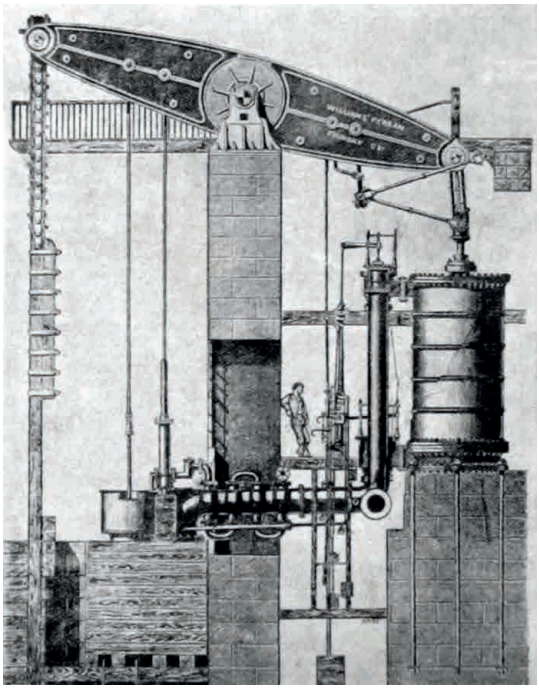
James Watt's image on a Poly medal

Falmouth, Penryn and Flushing, c1850s

Evolution of the Society and its awards

1830, or thereabouts: Falmouth was the busiest and most profitable town in Cornwall. This was partly because it sat on the Carrick Roads, England's most westerly deep-water harbour and home port of the Packet Service; and partly because Falmouth was the home of the Fox family, who had interests in many businesses in Cornwall – shipping, mining, fisheries, railways, timber, gunpowder and the Perran Iron Foundry at Perranarworthal to supply the needs of the mining industry in Cornwall and worldwide.

The senior member of the family was Robert Were Fox, polymath, natural philosopher, inventor, and staunch promoter of a new society, proposed in 1832 by his daughters Anna Maria (17) and Caroline (14).



One of the biggest beam engines ever built, cast at the Perran Iron Foundry

Robert Were Fox defined its purpose in the Prospectus:

"The object of this society is the encouragement of the arts, and particularly of any new and useful inventions. An exhibition to be held once a year… when prizes will be awarded…"

It is significant that while *"new and useful inventions"* were the most commercially important of the Society's objects, *"encouragement of the arts"* preceded it in the Prospectus, which may have been due to Anna Maria's influence. New inventions may be admirable, but the arts are enjoyable and became an increasingly important and popular feature of the exhibitions.

1833: The first trial exhibition, held just before Christmas in the Falmouth Classical School, was very well attended. The cost of sundries for prizes awarded to each of over 50 exhibitors amounted to £8-5-0 (eight pounds, five shillings and nought pence). The best exhibits were awarded First Prizes, showing that prizes were not intended to reward only the very best exhibits but to encourage general involvement. There cannot be a First without a Second.

1835: The Cornwall Polytechnic Society was granted royal patronage by King William IV, and at this point the prizes consisted of cash "premiums" and medals, designed by the chief engraver at the Royal Mint, Mr William Wyon, considered the finest medallist of the time. The obverse showed the profile of James Watt, while the reverse carried the words **Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society** with the class of medal. Around the rim were engraved the name of the winner, the nature of the invention and the date. These were a remarkably expensive form of reward and show the RCPS Committee's enthusiasm and confidence in the future of the Society.

Obverse and reverse of the RCPS medal

The immediate popularity of these early medals and premiums confirmed the decision to award them as prizes at all future exhibitions. But why should rewards be so important at an exhibition of the arts and new inventions?

One of the first inventions, and perhaps the most valuable of the hundreds that appeared at the RCPS over the next 90 years, was promoted in 1835 when Charles Fox offered a "premium" of £10 for *"the best improvement in the method of ascending and descending mines."*

The Fox family were Quakers and there was a strong element of philanthropy in this offer, but it also made good business sense. G.C.Fox & Co were involved in such a variety of mining interests that any such investment should pay dividends.

Man Engine at Dolcoath Mine, 1000 metres at its deepest

The winner of the premium was Michael Loam, a mine Captain, who was awarded a Bronze medal instead of a Silver, possibly because Charles Fox knew such a device was already in use in the Harz mountains in Germany.

Loam's invention came to be called the Man Engine, and it all boiled down to ladders.

The ladders the miners had to climb - in their own time - at the beginning and end of their shifts, sometimes thousands of feet, were among the hazards that were killing them. The average life expectancy for a miner was 37.

In a mine with a near-vertical shaft, the Man Engine would lower men until they reached their worksite, and raise them again to the surface, in twelve-foot stages, using rods attached to the mine's pumping engine.

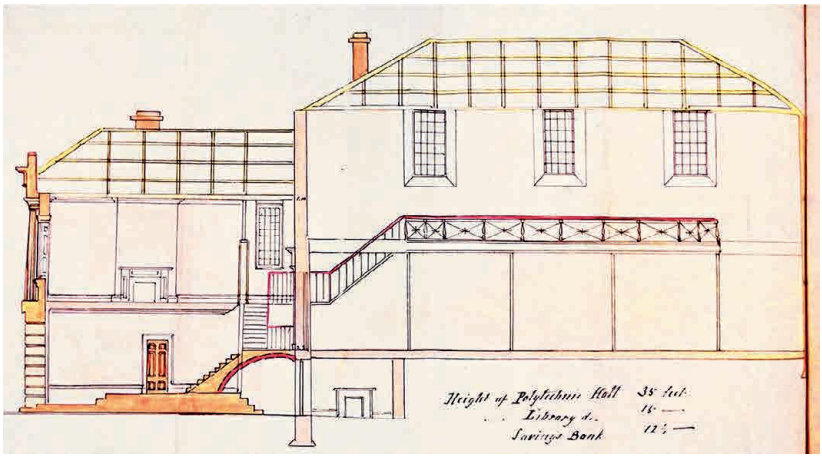
Adventurers at Tresavean mine showed interest but were reluctant to invest in such a revolutionary machine, until members of the RCPS Committee subsidised early trials to the tune of £580.

In 1842 the first Man Engine was installed. At first, the men called it *"an engine to kill people"*, but two years later they wrote a letter of thanks to the RCPS: *"No machine could be better for the purpose. To us, it is of more importance than we can find language to express."*

Wherever it was installed the man engine improved conditions and life expectancy for the miners, who could work longer hours, for more money, and in better health.

It also proved most satisfactory for the owners. An analysis found the cost per man worked out at less than a penny a day, as opposed to up to sixpence in lost labour before the installation.

1835: The third successful exhibition at the Classical School convinced the Committee that the RCPS must have its own home, and the Polytechnic Hall, designed by George Wightwick, was built in the heart of Falmouth in time for the next year's exhibition.



Transverse section of Polytechnic Hall

The Society's finances did not allow ownership of the whole building and for many years two of the front rooms were owned by the Cornwall Savings Bank and the other two by the Falmouth Hospital, which sublet one of them as a subscription library. The RCPS owned only the great hall, which was reserved solely for the annual exhibitions, and was empty and unused for a large part of the year.

1837: This restricted use led to disagreement among members, and a motion was agreed at a Special General Meeting to permit use of the hall *"for charitable purposes, and any object connected with Art and Sciences or Literature",* though not for general use or *"theatricals"*.

1861: The argument continued until it was resolved that the hall might be hired *"for any purposes which are according to the law"*; but it was another 28 years before the *"No theatricals"* clause was withdrawn, despite the reluctance of the Quaker Fox family. The RCPS was beginning to change its nature.

RCPS Silver medal

Medals and their winners

The medals were awarded in four classes: First Silver - Second Silver - First Bronze - Second Bronze.

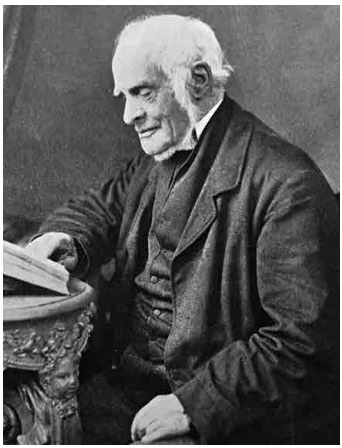
It was decided that for exhibits of supreme skill and inventiveness, or exceptional service to the Society, Gold medals would be awarded. In fact, only four Golds were ever presented.

Sir Charles Lemon was the first President of the RCPS, a position he held for 34 years. His influence, loyalty and generosity were invaluable, and without his unfailing help, it is doubtful whether the RCPS would have survived. The Committee awarded him a Gold medal *"as a token of their gratitude and attachment."*

Sir Charles Lemon

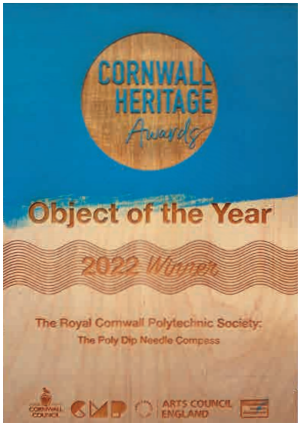
RCPS Bronze medal

1834: The first person to win a First Silver was Robert Were Fox II, the father of the Society, and the award was for *"Mechanical and Scientific Inventions, etc"*. He invented the most accurate and reliable dip needle compass, the navy's premier choice for magnetic survey work in the 1839 "Magnetic Crusade" to solve the most urgent scientific problem of the mid-19th century: how did the Earth's mysterious magnetic forces operate?



Robert Were Fox II

As a Quaker, a "dissenter", Fox had been excluded from the scientific elites of London and the universities, but his accomplishments succeeded in creating a very close connection between Cornwall and the metropolis. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. His work was published by the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall, the Royal Society, and the British Association for the Advancement of Science.



Fox's Dip Needle Compass, in Lisbon during its 2021 voyage, and its Cornwall Heritage Award

The RCPS owns a probably unique working model of this invention. In 2021 it was tested for accuracy on a voyage halfway round the world and won the Cornwall Heritage Award as Object of the Year 2022.

1835: Another very early winner of a First Silver, in the same year as Loam's Man Engine won its Bronze medal, was a 16-year-old boy, Neville Northey Burnard, son of a mason in Altarnun. His slate bas relief, taken from a drawing in the Penny Magazine, is of the Laocoön statue, unearthed in Rome in 1506 and now in the Vatican.

Laocoön, a priest of Neptune, had angered the sea god by failing to remain celibate, and was destroyed by serpents, together with his sons. Burnard had carved this treasure with chisel-edged tools fashioned from six-inch nails.

At the age of 13 Burnard had already carved a small Head of Homer, also with nail chisels and in slate, polished until it gleamed like silver.

With Sir Charles Lemon's support Burnard went to London where he enjoyed a very successful career. For some 30 years he had many dealings with the Society, being awarded another six medals, including a second First Silver. His greatest success was to fashion in marble a bust of the young Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. This bust and the two slate carvings are still owned by the RCPS.

Laocoön and his Sons, bas relief by N.N.Burnard

Head of Homer, bas relief by N.N.Burnard

The young Prince of Wales, by N.N.Burnard

1838: Anna Maria Fox was the founder of the new society but her First Silver was awarded for a watercolour: *Amphitheatre at Nimes*. She was a fine painter and organised the art section of the exhibitions, serving as a judge for these until her very late years. Her constant interest led to the formation of the Falmouth School of Art, now Falmouth University.

Anna Maria Fox

When Anna Maria died aged 81, the 1897 Annual Report read:

"The duty devolves upon us of recording the death of the venerable lady who was our virtual founder, and who has outlived all that noble band of patriotic Cornishmen and Cornishwomen who helped to make her dream a reality."

These unique watercolours are thought to be by Anna Maria Fox and are bound into a volume of her father's Annual Reports. The second painting shows Grove Hill, one of the Falmouth houses owned by the Fox family.

William Pennington Cocks

1849: William Pennington Cocks won First Silver medals for his many articles on *"The Fauna and Flora of Falmouth"*. A prolific naturalist, Cocks was a Victorian gentleman with the time and the means to pursue a wide range of interests amid the scientific and political turmoil of the 19th century, the age of electoral reform and Darwinian science. Year after year, Cocks' learned papers on the fauna of his adopted town appeared in the Society's Annual Reports.

Entomologist F.A.Turk wrote: *"Grasshoppers and geese, fishes and rats, dogs and cats, pigeons and leeches all came alike to this local Linnaeus."*

As zoologist Stella Turk observed: *"Our present… professional attitudes in biology could not have come about were it not for the few highly articulate… amateurs who helped to lay the foundations of modern natural history."*

Black Rat, by W.P.Cocks

Cyclopterus Lumpus, by W.P.Cocks

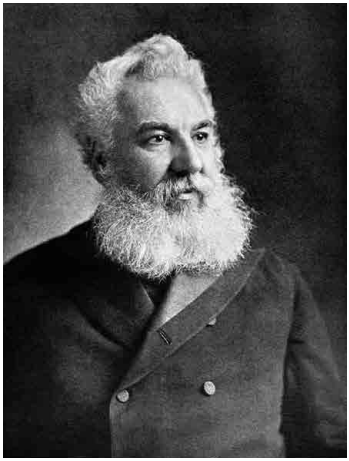
Every Annual Report contained a number of such papers on an endless variety of topics by the Society's learned members. The RCPS exchanged its publications with 48 other such institutions across the country as well as with others in Canada and the United States.

Alfred Nobel

1865: Alfred Nobel was awarded a First Silver *in absentia*. For miners, one of the many hazards was the unpredictability of gunpowder - without reliable fuses, many men were injured and blinded by mistimed explosions. Nobel's nitro-glycerine was considered safer, though still enormously effective.

At the docks in Falmouth the RCPS organised one of the first public demonstrations of the explosive power of nitro-glycerine. The audience *"… saw a wrought-iron anvil, of about three hundredweight, blown to pieces with a charge of less than an ounce; and with a charge of four pounds, from forty to fifty tons of rock were completely scattered and the surrounding rock rent in all directions."*

1877: Alexander Graham Bell was awarded a First Silver for inventing *"The Telephone"*. The Annual Report declared: *"The Mechanical Department included the Telephone, for which the Society is indebted to Professor Graham Bell… through whose kindness this Society was enabled to bring that highly valuable instrument for the first time before the general public in this County.*



Alexander Graham Bell

The instrument was worked in the Hall for three days, and communication was held with Penryn Post Office, a distance of over two miles."

In the 1882 Jubilee exhibition, the Polytechnic Hall was connected by telephone with the Drill Hall on the other side of Falmouth. Members of the public were encouraged to experiment with Bell's five-year-old invention.

Development of the awards

1837: Medals quickly proved very popular, and the Committee's rapid decision to offer cash instead of medals came as a surprise.

"It should be optional with any person who may hereafter obtain a medal as a prize either to keep the medal or to take a sum of money in lieu of it according to the following scale - First Silver £7, Second Silver £5, First Bronze £3, Second Bronze £1.10.0."

It was hoped that this astonishingly generous offer would encourage "working men" to compete. To a miner who might earn £40 for a year's work, £7 was a very substantial sum, but working men had little time or opportunity to submit new inventions. However, the offer was taken up with enthusiasm by artists, scientists, sculptors, mechanics, architects and many others. It certainly encouraged exhibitors, but it nearly bankrupted the Society.

The Committee now found that the original success that had propelled the RCPS could change very rapidly. An early exhibition coincided with an outbreak of cholera, drastically reducing attendance at the exhibitions. In 1850 Falmouth lost its position as headquarters of the Packet Service. Unemployment rose, leading to a decline in population, and a general deterioration in the condition of Falmouth. The importance of Cornish copper shrank due to exploitation of richer foreign deposits.

To control the outflow of cash, new conditions for the award were introduced. Inventions carrying a patent might be exhibited, and they would be eligible for medals, but not convertible for money; new mechanical inventions fell off. Professional artists were invited to exhibit, though they would not be eligible for prizes.

Nonetheless, the number of exhibits continued to grow, the judges proved reluctant to award fewer prizes, and medals were still distributed generously.

1866: The number of medals as well as the cash equivalent were reduced:
First Silver: £5-0-0; Second Silver: £3-10-0; First Bronze: £2-0-0; Second Bronze: £1-5-0.

1869: Further attempts were made to control the prizes, and the Society's subscription, which had always been *"At least five shillings"*, was increased to *"Gentlemen 10/-; Ladies 5/-"*. It was hoped that this would keep membership affordable for working men and women, whereas the sub for the other royal societies in Cornwall, the Royal Institution in Truro and the Royal Geological Society in Penzance, was a gentrified guinea.

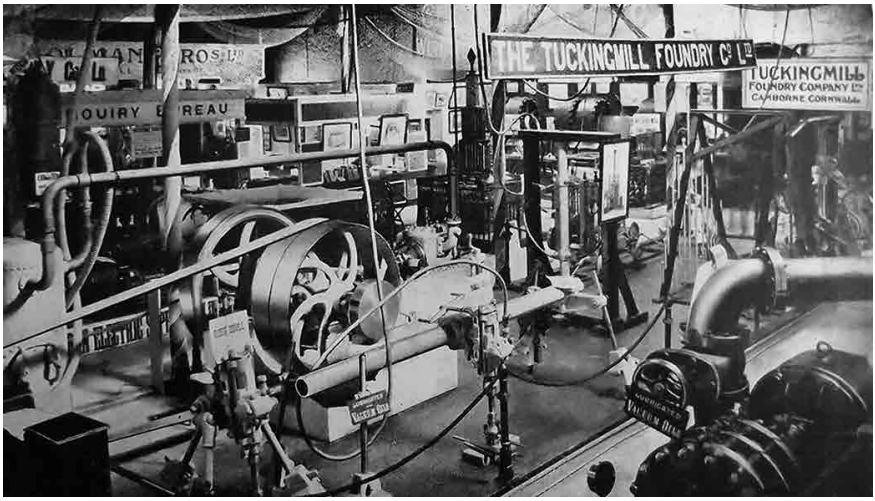
Yet now, just 36 years after the Society's founding, Charles Fox reported: *"Nearly 1000 silver and bronze medals, with money to the extent of £4000, have been awarded as prizes."* That is a truly astonishing figure, and certainly did not come from members' subs. The RCPS had generous patrons and members who responded loyally when appeals were made, but the Society had almost no other source of funding.

1882 Meeting of Committee and judges

1882: The RCPS Jubilee year. The Committee and members were determined that this exhibition should be the most lavish and adventurous the Society had ever held, *"and that it should be of such a character as to convince the public that the Polytechnic is neither weakened by age, nor spent by labour."*

The President, Earl Mount Edgcumbe, stated: *"The Polytechnic has not sought to give education directly; but rather to draw out in the community a love of Science and Art… in the hope that genius may be fostered and brought to light."*

The hall was lit by Swan electric lamps, just one day after Thomas Edison illuminated the Times building in New York. The Drill Hall was hired for machinery, and some 80 mechanical inventions were installed there. Tangye Ltd were awarded a special Jubilee Gold Medal, having exhibited nearly 30 entries, *"where machines that could not be set in motion, illustrated their working by a series of exquisitely-made models."*



Heavy machinery in the Drill Hall

The Polytechnic Hall was devoted to the arts and the results were remarkable - the walls were covered with paintings; all sorts of work was displayed in categories including Fine Arts and Sculpture, Needlework and Lace, Fancy Work and Hand Crafts of all sorts were displayed; 110 items were exhibited under Meteorology; and Photography earned a great deal of interest and many prizes.

In the Annual Reports, the appraisal given for each exhibit was always explained in detail, the judges being carefully chosen, well qualified, and never adjudicating singly. For the Mechanics section, twelve judges were appointed, including Nathaniel Fox who in 1909 was awarded a First Silver medal for 46 faithful years as a judge in this most important section.

The exhibition lasted for eleven days, visitors came in their hundreds, and the receipts allowed the Society to buy the two front rooms owned by the Cornwall Savings Bank. It really was a huge success, and medals were awarded as generously as ever.

The Jubilee success should have brought a new period of prosperity; but although the exhibitions continued, they failed to achieve their past popularity. The Society continued its normal pattern of activities until 1898, when the deteriorating financial position made it necessary to either reduce expenditure or increase income.

PRIZES AWARDED.

Mechanics.

15 Model for giving Sliding Motion to Shafting while revolving, J. Tangye ... ... Second Bronze Medal
W. Teague, Jun., ... First Silver Medal for Collection
33 Model of Warming Apparatus for Warming Rooms, Saml. Terrel ... ... First Bronze Medal
34 Roasting Machine in connection with kitchens, Saml. Terrell ... ... Second Bronze Medal
39 Model of Engine ... J. Jobson ... ... £1 for Workmanship
43 Model of Drawing Appliances showing discharge and separation of stuff as working in West Peevor Mine, W. T. White First Bronze Medal
44 Model of Skip Road as working in East Pool Mine, C. Bishop ... ... Second Bronze Medal
45 Cornish Rock Drill, Holman Brothers .. .. First Silver Medal
53 No. 10 Sewing Machine ... Wheeler, Wilson & Co. ... First Bronze Medal
56 Case of Wire Rope ... ... J. Stephens & Son First Bronze Medal for new flexible Rope
58 Patent Nautilus Grate ... J. B. Petter ... ... First Bronze Medal
63 Locks—"Shrewsbury" Patent Springless. Wm. White First Bronze Medal
64 Model of Railway Car showing the Parker Smith Automatic Brake, W. P. Smith ... ... Second Silver Medal
66 New Pumping Engine Indicator, E. T. Newton First Bronze Medal
67 Miners' Dial, J. Henderson ... ... First Bronze Medal
70 Improved Theodolite & Miners' Dial, John T. Letcher First Bronze Medal
71 Model of Self-acting Rag Frames, J. Hendra .. £1 for Workmanship
72 Specimens of Improved Concrete showing increased Tensile Strength, H. Faija ... ... First Bronze Medal
73 Model "Acme" portable Horse Rake, Davey, Sleep & Co. First Bronze Medal for Collection
75 Machine for testing relative qualities of Road Metalling, Thomas Clarke ... ... Second Bronze Medal
80 Patent Cotton Belting, Maurice Gandy ... ... First Bronze Medal
81 "The Withers" ½ H.P., Gas Engine, J. C. Stark & Co., First Bronze Medal
84 Navisphere for determining a Ship's course by the Stars without calculation .. .. First Silver Medal
Tangyes Limited ... ... Special Gold Medal for collection
122 Meanock's patent Lubricator Galwey, Bainbridge & Co., Second Bronze Medal
123 Attwood's patent Steel in Bars, Cast Steel, Striking Hammers, and Crucible Steel Casting, for mining purposes, Stanners Closes Steel Co. ... ... Second Silver Medal
125 ½-h.p. "Otto" Silent Gas Engine, driving Siemen's Dynamo Machine and Swan's Incandescent Lights, Benjamin Perry, Second Silver Medal
127 Stephens' Rock Drill, Richard Stephens .. First Bronze Medal
131 Self-starting Syphon, Frederick Sara ... ... First Bronze Medal
132 Water Waste Preventer, or Flush Cistern, Wright & Stephens Second Bronze Medal
134 Specimens of Graining, Light Oak, Pollard Oak, Maple and Pitch pine, Wm Curtis ... ... 10s.
137 The "Shrewsbury" W.C. Wm. White ... Second Bronze Medal
138 Patent Porte-Knapsack, Wm. White ... Second Bronze Medal
141 Model Engine ... W. H. Andrewartha ... 10s. for Workmanship

Naval Architecture and Fishery.

203 Model "Lady Vogel"
204 " Pilot Boat
205 " Twin Yacht
} Edward Haly ... ... Second Bronze Medal

Some of the prizes awarded for Mechanics in 1882

The first cinema in Falmouth

1910: The exhibition this year was held in Truro, and the regulations were revised by reducing the number of money prizes. The following month the committee agreed to lease the hall for "Cinematograph Shows". The Committee cannot have had any idea that this one-month lease would be extended *sine die* and become the saving of the RCPS.

1914: Exhibitions were cancelled for the period of the war. Financial problems affecting the Society and the depressed state of the county led R.B. Fox to propose that the exhibitions should be discontinued for the time being.

1928: A Special General Meeting was called to approve the new rules which spelled out the Society's aims and objectives in greater detail than before: *"To promote the advancement of Science and of the Fine and Industrial Arts and Technical and General Education in relation to the County of Cornwall, by holding periodical Exhibitions and the provision of awards consisting of medals, diplomas, certificates of merit or where considered desirable, money prizes."*

The "well", with busts of Lord Falmouth and N.N.Burnard's Prince of Wales

1932: The Society agreed to provide space for the Falmouth Museum, which had outgrown its one room in the Town Hall. To accommodate it, a new mezzanine floor was built, with a "well" to provide light to the floor below. This meant that exhibitions had to be mounted in the old subscription library, which now came to be called the Little Hall.

The Museum was never successful, and in 1950 it was closed and the "well" filled in. It had been a very expensive experiment. Yet without that extra floor, for how long would a huge empty hall with a 35-foot ceiling remain unoccupied before it was knocked down?

What had appeared to be a bad mistake became another decision that saved the Society.

1935: It was suggested that exhibitions be again 'migrated' to other towns, and Liskeard, Camborne and Penzance were invited to host the experiment. Penzance accepted, and it was declared *"disastrous"*. The Committee decided that the exhibition would not be held next year, and that in future it would become a biennial event.

With fewer exhibitions, fewer medals and prizes were awarded. The medal makers warned the Society that the medals' dies needed repair and renovation. A less expensive source of medals was sought, and a firm in Birmingham quoted Silver: 15/-; Bronze: 6/-; and Electroplate: 7/6.

1945: World War One had certainly affected the Society, but World War Two almost destroyed it. Serious argument was given to closing the hall and dissolving the Society, but sterner voices prevailed. The RCPS owned the hall outright and had already survived many difficulties - now was not the time to surrender.

Exhibitions were held, without medals, and the Society's records show no further reference to medals until 1948, when the Secretary reported that *"medals were required for the years 1943 - 44 - 45 - 46 - 47."* The medal makers were asked to *"forward one of the electroplate medals for the Committee's inspection, and if satisfactory could be substituted for the silver one."*

The Secretary provided the last word on the subject:

"It was explained that the Secretary hopes to resume the presentation of the medals awarded in this, as in previous years, as soon as medals can again be obtained from the makers."

The era of medals at the Polytechnic seemed to have ended.

Michael Carver, Archive Volunteer, The Poly

Precious medals

Design for the blue plaque outside The Poly commemorating its founders, Anna Maria and Caroline Fox

The new medal

The new medal has been designed by Cornwall-based artist and award-winning medallist Lucy Willow. In 2018 she received the British Art Medal Society's (BAMS) prestigious Marsh Award for the Encouragement of Medallic Art in recognition of her success supporting Falmouth University students in the BAMS annual medal competition.

Lucy's design centres on an unfurling fern, its suggestion of new beginnings, vitality and growth making it relevant to all three categories celebrated by the RCPS Medal Awards. The fern is emblematic of morphogenesis, the patterns of growth in nature as explained by bio-mathematician, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860-1948) in his influential book *On Growth and Form* (1917) and echoes the golden spiral or Fibonacci Spiral, exemplified by the Nautilus shell, on which the RCPS's current logo is based. It also links to the horticultural interests of The Poly's founders - gardens created by the Fox family include those at Trebah, Penjerrick, and Fox Rosehill, Cornwall's first Mediterranean-style garden.

Dies hand-carved and cut by Matthew Holland and his team

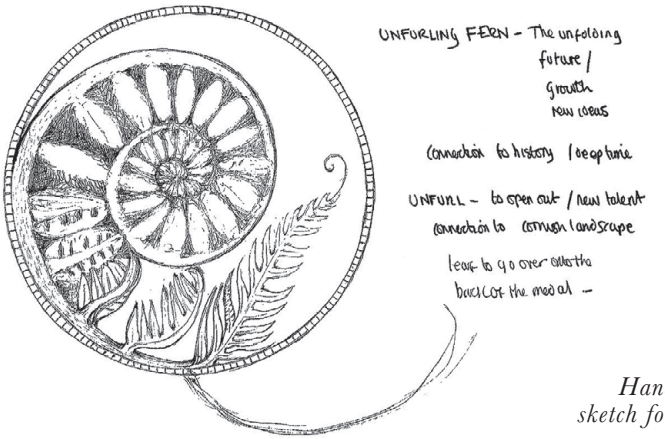
Lucy worked closely with Matthew Holland, Managing Director at Bigbury Mint, professional medal makers based in Devon. Through an iterative and collaborative process, beginning with moulding, carving and engraving 3-D models from Lucy's original artwork, Matthew and his team cut high-quality dies that allow the subtlety and refinement of the artist's design to be reproduced repeatedly in the manufacturing process.

Our hope is that art, science and industry in Cornwall, acknowledged and publicly applauded by the new RCPS Medal Awards, will - like the unfurling fern - continue to flourish and grow.

Dr. Virginia Button, Chair, The Poly (RCPS)

Hand-polishing the medals

Finished medal in presentation box



Hand-drawn development sketch for the new Poly medal

Unfurling fern

The unfurling fern spreads outwards to meet the wind, the elements and the insects in the garden. Much of my work as an artist comes from observing small details in my garden and using these as a metaphor to make drawings or sculptural works. There is something so joyful and celebratory about the "fiddlehead", the new growth on a fern. It became the perfect metaphor to use for the design on one side of the medal.

As an ancient plant species, the fern reaches back into deep time (360 million years), yet it also celebrates new beginnings in the present as it unfurls its foliage towards the future. Capturing a fern leaf in a moment of this process of unfurling on its way to full growth felt worth casting in bronze. The bronze medal is an ode to this creative, industrious and scientific process, mirroring the award for achievement in these areas.

I hope that to hold the medal in your hand brings with it a sense of intimacy like the nurturing of a seed, an idea, and the watching of it as it starts to grow, spread and thrive. I worked through several ideas relating to geology, time, the ocean and the Cornish landscape before finding my way back to the garden. The solitude and deep connection to observing the behaviour of ferns through drawing was where the idea for the medal settled.

Lucy Willow

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David Peters
Jonathan, Bill, and Elizabeth Fox
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