

# Edward Medal for Local Railwayman

By

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The Edward Medal, named after King Edward VII, was a civilian decoration instituted by Royal Warrant on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1907. It was created at that time to be awarded to miners and quarrymen who placed their own lives in danger when rescuing a fellow worker. However this was amended on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1909 to include a separate section with a slightly different medal for those who worked in other industries and for a wider range of courageous acts. The medal for those in other industries was only awarded 188 times making it one of the rarest of British Gallantry Awards. The medal was discontinued in 1971 and surviving recipients were offered the opportunity to exchange their Edward Medal for a George Cross.

It was on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1912 that Gatekeeper/Porter Mr David Wheal, a railwayman at St Margarets station, was considered to have carried out an act of sufficient gallantry to be awarded the Edward Medal. This occurred while he was carrying out his railway duties at St Margarets Station at about half past eight in the morning. He was at the time carrying out the work of a porter attending to the trains. He had just completed the collection of tickets from those passengers who had left the 8.26 am train to Liverpool Street and was making his way down to the end of the platform in order to cross the line. He needed to do so in order to attend to a Hertford bound train that was fast approaching the station from Rye House. However he had to wait the near bottom of the platform ramp by the level crossing as the London bound train left, on its way to its next stop at Rye House.



*A London bound train departs St Margarets Station. Although taken in the 1950s it shows the boarded walk way between the platforms ends. This also provided a pathway between the wickets gates used by pedestrians on Station Road to cross the line. Mr Wheal was probably standing somewhere near the signal post waiting to cross as the London train left the station.*

As the end of the London train passed by he became aware of an elderly lady of about 80 years of age setting off to cross the line right behind the departing train. He had little time to act as the Hertford bound train, out of sight behind the London bound train, was rapidly approaching the level crossing at between 25 and 30 miles per hour. Mr Wheal at some great risk to himself leapt into action, running across the tracks and grasped the lady and carried her at speed towards the wicket gate on the opposite side of the tracks. It was later ascertained that the train was only about 10 yards away when he grabbed hold of the elderly lady. Both crashed heavily into the gate but thankfully clear of the train as it swept passed them into the platform. There was little doubt among those that witnessed this act of bravery that Mr Wheal had saved the elderly ladies life and had done so at some considerable risk to his own.



*This view shows the main railway gates as they appeared in the 1950s and the wicket gate which Mr Wheal and the elderly lady crashed into. The track this side of the main gates marks the spot where a tragedy might have occurred had Mr Wheal not acted so decisively.*

[It is not clear if the elderly lady was making her way along Station Road or had been a passenger on the London bound train crossing the railway line to make her way home in the direction of St Margarets or Great Amwell].



*A picture of Mr Wheal that was taken close to the time of the incident for which he was so rightly commended.*

As with all such incidents on the railway the Stationmaster made out his report and clearly praised Mr Wheal for his actions. Thus it was that David Wheal Gatekeeper / Porter at St Margarets found himself on the 7<sup>th</sup> June at Liverpool Street in front of the Directors of the Great Eastern Railway Company. The Chairman commended him for his courageous actions in saving a life in the course of his duties. He was given a gratuity from the Company of £10, a considerable sum in 1912. He was later to be awarded the Edward Medal by the King a fact proudly reported in the November edition of the Railway Companies monthly magazine. He found himself back in the Company's Boardroom on November the 8<sup>th</sup> where the Chairman of the Board presented him with a silver watch and chain suitable engraved. This magnificent watch had been gifted by the Carnegie Hero Trust Fund in recognition of his selfless act on the 15<sup>th</sup> May. Mr Wheal was to continue to work for many years at St Margarets Station and appears in a staff picture dating from 1922.

St. Margarets Station Staff 1922



*The Stationmaster sits rather grandly in the centre of this picture with Mr David Wheal sitting next to him [4<sup>th</sup> from left seated]. The gold on the peak of his cap suggests he has gained promotion in the previous ten years. It is thought this picture was taken to mark the arrival of a new Stationmaster, the appropriately named Mr Masters. He was to become well known for growing wonderful roses alongside the track opposite the Stationmaster's house in full view of the public, from the level crossing.*

*Note*

*The Carnegie Hero Fund was first formed in the USA in 1904 to "recognise persons who perform extraordinary acts of heroism in civilian life". It was introduced into Europe during 1908 when the British Carnegie Hero Fund was formed and subsequently expanded in to many European countries.*