THE FOTHERGILLIAN MEDAL OF THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY

MARK JONES

THE Fothergillian Medal of the Royal Humane Society is one of the most beautiful and technically accomplished of all nineteenth-century medals (Plate 1, No. 1). The long and complicated process that finally gave it birth is worthy of study: first, because it gives us new insight into the careers and working methods of the most famous medallists working in Britain in the nineteenth century, Benedetto Pistrucci and William Wyon; second, because it provides information about the contemporary reputations both of these artists and of Thomas Wyon Jnr., Bain and Scipio Clint; third, because it tells us something about the nature of the early-nineteenth-century passion for prize giving; and, finally, because it provides a useful warning against confusing impressiveness of form with value of function – the medal was the triumphant result of one of the longest labours endured in the production of any work of art, but it was rapidly shown to be without any useful function at all.

In a will dated 7 September 1810 Dr Fothergill, himself a gold medallist of the Royal Humane Society, left £500 to the Society ‘the produce of which is to constitute an annual or biennial medal for the best essay or discovery on the following subjects:
1. “on the prevention of shipwreck”
2. “on the preservation of Shipwrecked Mariners or other circumstances left to the Society’s discretion”.

Dr Fothergill died in 1813, but the bequest was not received until 1821-22 and it was only in November 1824 that James Bandinall wrote to Rundell, Bridge and Rundell as “the persons in this town employing the most celebrated artists, and being at the same time most respectable tradesmen” enquiring whether they would engage to let the Humane Society have for one hundred guineas two dies complete of the size of their coronation medal, every expense included, for a medal for that society, three proofs whereof to be included in the price, one in copper, one in silver and one in gold, the metal to be furnished by the Society. The design and execution of the very first degree of excellence to be approved of as the work goes on, by a Select Committee of gentlemen appointed by the Society. The subject of one side of the medal to be Leucothea and Ulysses from Homer’s Odyssey, with an appropriate inscription from thence. The subject of the other side to be the head of Fothergill with an appropriate inscription.

Rundell, Bridge and Rundell wrote back enclosing a letter from the superintendent of their works.

A pair of dies the size of the coronation medal designed, modelled and engraved by the first artists cannot be made for the sum you mention, viz £100, even if there was no risk attending the dies. It is quite uncertain whether they may not break [at] the first blow as was the case with the Ionian medal and should it so happen the engraving of new dies must be repeated which would be a serious loss – these accidents so often occur they prevent us ensuring the dies – as no allowance is made by the engraver for any failure. If I were to undertake this medal I should apply to Mr Bain, but to insure the dies he would expect a much greater sum.

1 The Royal Humane Society, (RHS) whose archives are at the Society’s offices at Brettenham House, Lancaster Place, London, WC2, was founded by Dr Hawes and Dr Cogan in 1774 to finance the practice and propagation of the resuscitation of the apparently drowned. Dr Fothergill was awarded his medal in 1794 for an essay on the restoration of life to the apparently drowned. He also wrote an essay on the ‘Preservation of Shipwrecked Mariners’.  
2 MSS note in the RHS archives  
3 In November 1821 £500 was received. ‘Sundry deduction’ reduced this to £417. 18s. 9d. which was spent on £534. 13s. 2d. of 3 per cent consols. On 15 June 1822 a further £131. 18s. 3d. was received.  
4 So described in a letter from Bandinall to Benjamin Hawes, 20 November 1824, RHS Archives.  
5 An undated copy in the RHS Archives.
from me or any person in the trade, than he would if employed by a Society for whom the medals were intended. In this case he would use all his energy as he would look both to pay and fame."

James Bandinall then called upon Rundell, Bridge and Rundell who said that ‘since the death of Mr Wyon’ they would feel apprehension that the execution might not reach the degree of excellence expected unless they should apply to Mr Pissutti. They stated that Mr Pissutti would ask for 250 to 300 guineas for the work and would not even for that price ensure the dies to them’. Bandinall went on to report that ‘Messrs Rundell have advised that Mr Pissutti or whoever the engraver approved of should be, should be applied to by the Society, for whom he would be likely to take more pains at a less price, than the medal would come to if it was executed by him for the Trade’.

The Society therefore approached Pissutti, both for a design for the Fothergill medal and for replacements for the original dies for the Society’s existing medal (Plate 2 No. 2), engraved by Lewis Pingo from Dr Watkinson’s design in 1775 and now reaching the end of their useful life. James Bandinall reported, on behalf of the Fothergillian Committee in August 1825:

"In accordance with the desire expressed by the Royal Humane Society, that the Select Committee, appointed on the Fothergillian Medal, should undertake also the reformation of the Dyes now in use for the ordinary Medal of the Society. We have the honour to acquaint you, that we have applied to Mr Pissutti, and have asked him for what price and in what time he would execute the two Dyes necessary for striking the medal in question, one of which, as now used, we sent to him as a Model. In his estimate he was desired to specify the particular time, and the particular sum, every expense included, of the Dyes, and of three Medals, one of which he was to strike in Gold, one in Silver and one in Copper, the metal for the same being furnished by the Society.

He replies by a letter of which we send to you a copy and a translation, that, every expense included, he undertakes the matter for 135 Guineas – that he binds himself to complete it in three months from the day on which he may receive the order, unless he breaks the Dyes – If he breaks the Dyes the time will be longer, but the expense not greater as he will undergo the increase of expense himself – We beg to observe that we learn that the Dyes often break in the first operation of striking, and that the operators will not in general submit to bear themselves the risk. This condition on the part of M. Pistrucci and which is therefore not usual, is to be considered as favourable to the Society rather than otherwise, because it makes the boundary of our expense certain.

He asks whether, keeping to the subject, he may alter the treating of it as far as respects the position of the Infant, or whether he must keep to the treating of it, only bettering the figures, if he can. He wishes to be permitted the first mentioned alteration. He asks for the shade of Dr Fothergill with other particulars – in reference to the Fothergillian Medal. But prior to the receipt of his Letter we had sent to him the shade and other particulars in reference to the Fothergillian Medal: – and when we shall receive his acknowledgement of our communication on the subject, we shall trouble the Society with the result.

In the meantime we request that you will lay the letter and its enclosures before the Royal Humane Society, and ask them whether we shall accede to the proposal of M. Pistrucci as to the ordinary medal, and desire him to undertake it – and whether we shall make him keep to the present method of treating the subject, still keeping to the subject itself. We think it would be advisable to employ M. Pistrucci on the terms he mentions – because his execution is incontestably good and his terms appear not unreasonable. We would let him better, if he can, the figure on the Medal, but we would be cautious of his altering the method of treating the subject.

We request to be honoured, as soon as possible with a definite decision of the Society on these heads, in fulfillment of the wishes that no time may be lost in a Reformation of the Dyes for their own peculiar medal."

Where the existing medal was concerned all went reasonably smoothly, though it took rather longer than the three months originally envisaged. On 24 August 1830 Berkley Westropp, the new Secretary of the Society wrote to Pistrucci requesting ‘a proof of their
medals if the dies have been finished" and on 9 September he was able to thank him 'for the proof medals' adding 'when the dies are finished I will send for them'. The Mint records show that between March 1831 and November 1837 Pistrucci received eight orders from the Humane Society for a total of 145 medals.

This subsidiary commission is of some interest both because it adds a hitherto little known medal to Pistrucci's oeuvre and because it demonstrates that his views about copying other artists' work were by no means as inflexible as he sometimes made them appear. It also allows us to identify two wax models (Plate 2, Nos. 3 and 4) now in the collection of the Rome Mint, which must have been done for the Royal Humane Society. The second of them, which was adopted for the replacement medal, radically alters the role played by the drapery in the composition and subtly alters the stance of the boy. The final medal (Plate 2 No. 5) also exhibits modifications to the placing and spacing of the legends and a much livelier wreath on the reverse. Since Pistrucci signed the medal in full in the obverse exergue he must have been happy with the outcome.

Progress on the Fothergill medal was slower still. On 6 December 1824 the public were informed that a gold prize medal, worth fifty guineas would be awarded for the best discovery 'on the prevention of ship wreck and the preservation of shipwrecked mariners' submitted to the Society before 1 August 1825. The entries were forthcoming but the medal was not. In his letter to Pistrucci in August 1830 Westropp noted that the committee of the RHS 'would also feel much obliged if you would send them your device for the Fothergillian Medal, or let them know in what state of progress it may be' and in September requested that 'you will favour them with the device you propose for the medal which they will inspect at their next meeting, when the inscription will also come under their consideration'.

A year later the Society was still waiting. In October 1831 Westropp wrote 'I am requested by the Committee . . . to request that you will favour them with your design for the Fothergillian Medal, as they are alone waiting for that to call a meeting of the Medal Committee'. In November a model was delivered, but its arrival does not seem to have galvanised the committee into action. In December 1833 the Fothergillian Committee was reactivated and the Secretary calculated that, had the entire Fothergillian fund been invested 3 per cent consols, it would now amount to £2016. 16s. 4d. This was more than enough to allow the Society to abandon the penny pinching approach which had characterised its earlier negotiations with Rundell, Bridge and Rundell and Pistrucci. However, no progress was made, and perhaps the medal would never have appeared had it not been for the constant badgering of the Society by Captain Manby, who had already received numerous medals for his life saving activities and was determined to add the Fothergillian medal to his collection.

On 15 March 1837 the Committee of the Society resolved to add three members to the Fothergillian Committee and asked the Secretary to summon it. When it met on 8 May the
members examined ‘the models in wax furnished by Pistrucci of Leucothea and Ulysses and the shipwreck of St Paul, as also the head of Dr Fothergill’. It was then resolved that it is the unanimous opinion of the Sub-committee that the medal should comprise the Head of Dr Fothergill on the obverse side with a suitable inscription in Latin and on the reverse side, the Boy blowing the torch, already known as the emblem of the Institution for its ordinary medallions.

That the Fothergillian medal be the size of the model in wax of Doctor Fothergill’s head as furnished by Pistrucci.

That Pistrucci should be written to for his terms of executing both dies, and that he be the Artist employed, provided his charges be approved of.\textsuperscript{22}

The wax models mentioned here, like those for the Society’s own medal, are now in the Rome Mint. There is ‘a portrait of an unknown man’ (Plate 3, No. 6) which is likely to be Pistrucci’s interpretation of the profile portrait of Anthony Fothergill which survives in the British Museum (Plate 3, No. 7). Since this is no more than 43mm in diameter it is evident that the Society’s ambitions for the Fothergill medal were considerably more modest than they later became. There are also two sketch models and three finished models for Leucothea and Ulysses and one large model of the ship wreck of St Paul (Plates 3–4, Nos. 8–13). Why none of them found favour is unclear. Even if it is true that they fall well short of Pistrucci’s highest standards the Society’s next step is scarcely explicable as a search for higher quality.

Apparently ignoring the clear decision of the Committee, Berkley Westropp now seems to have taken a private initiative to replace Pistrucci by Scipio Clint. At its meeting on 30 January 1838 the Committee decided to adopt ‘an allegorical design . . . for this medal in accordance with the motto “Navigantibus praesidium naufragis salus” of which the Revd Edward Rice is the author’. They also decided that the ‘design of Mr Clint, submitted by Mr Westropp the Secretary, be made the foundation of the device of the medal, and that that artist be consulted as to whether it may be susceptible of further improvement . . . That the boy blowing the torch known as the emblem of the institution, with the motto attached thereto, be on the reverse side of the medal’ and that ‘the inscription “Ex Munere Antonii Fothergill MDCCCX” be in raised characters upon the rim’.\textsuperscript{23}

On 21 February 1838 Clint brought his design to show the committee who approved it ‘provided “Ex Munere Antonii Fothergill” be upon the face of the medal underneath the design instead of being in raised characters round the rim’.\textsuperscript{24} All was well until Westropp took Clint’s model to Pistrucci at the Royal Mint. His account of what happened was laid before the Fothergillian Sub-committee on 26 and 28 March.

The Secretary of the Royal Humane Society called on Mr Pistrucci at the Royal Mint on Monday the 19 last with a model of a design for the Fothergillian Medal, furnished by Mr Clint Jnr and adopted by the Sub-committee to whom that duty was entrusted.

The Secretary was received by Mr Pistrucci in a public work shop in the Mint, and when the model was laid before him he disapproved of it with a look of contemptuous scorn, observing – “that it might do well enough for the fifteenth century, or for a picture; but that it would not do for a medal”. The Secretary observed that he felt quite sure that the Committee would very thankfully give every possible attention to any suggestion Mr Pistrucci might favour them with. Mr Pistrucci said “that he would not execute that design or any other design but his own” and asked who did the model. The Secretary explained “Mr Clint Jnr”. Mr Pistrucci then lost his temper – was exceedingly angry, and exclaimed in a rage “that he would not do any design but his own”. The Secretary then observed to Mr Pistrucci, that when he had last the pleasure of conversing with him on the subject, he expressed himself willing to execute any design the Committee might furnish him with, whereupon Mr Pistrucci replied – “it’s false – I never said any such thing”.

The Secretary calmly observed, that he was sorry to see Mr Pistrucci lose his temper – that his language was such as he, the Secretary, had never been accustomed to, that he called on him on the part of the Royal Humane Society, and that it certainly was his impression, that Mr Pistrucci had expressed himself willing to execute any design furnished him by the Committee. Mr Pistrucci again furiously reiterated “it’s false – I will

\textsuperscript{22} RHS Committee Minutes, 8 May, 1837.
\textsuperscript{23} RHS Committee Minutes, 30 January, 1838.
\textsuperscript{24} RHS Committee Minutes, 21 February, 1838.
not execute any design but my own. I don't care for you, or for the Treasurer, or the Chairman or the Committee or the President of the Humane Society altogether. They may do as they please, but they should either employ him or - emphatically slapping his trousers pocket, he would make them pay him for his medals. That he was not afraid of the Humane Society or any other society - or him, the Secretary - or any person in the world -

The Secretary then observed in the same calm tone of voice, and the same quietness of demeanour - "not even Mr Wyon" - Mr Pistrucci's rage was then un governable, he approached the Secretary in a menacing manner, pulled open the door, and ordered him to quit the room. The Secretary refused to do so, observing, that he was sorry to see Mr Pistrucci lose his temper and forget himself in the manner he had done. Mr Pistrucci, disregarding the mild expostulation of the Secretary, persevered in a loud, angry, threatening, tone of voice, in ordering the Secretary to go out of the room.

The Secretary refused to leave the room unless Mr Pistrucci requested him to do so in a Gentlemanlike manner. Mr Pistrucci then came up to the Secretary in a menacing attitude. The Secretary dared Mr Pistrucci to lay a hand on him. Mr Pistrucci, finding the Secretary determined not to leave, yet very quiet in his demeanour - sent for the warden: and upon his arrival, Mr Pistrucci ordered him to turn the Secretary out of the Mint and on receiving the warden's order, the Secretary quietly left the room and the door was slammed to.

Pistrucci's friend William Hamilton was, as usual, ready to spring to his defence. In a letter dated 21 March he noted that

Mr Pistrucci complains exceedingly of the long delays which have occurred in the final instructions for the subject of the medal, which might have been finished long ago, but for these changes, and the hints from time to time made to him that your funds were not in a state to incur the expense and now when your Secretary told him that it was your wish that he should not act upon your first instructions of having the medal engraved from a medal of his own, and that you expected him to copy the model of another artist (Mr Clint I believe) he at once declined to do so, and observed that you would of course not deviate from your original engagement of accepting one of his models - prepared for you at your request, and at a great cost to him of time and labour.

Hamilton reported that Pistrucci believed Westropp to have been 'purposely offensive' and in another letter, dated 24 March, enlarged on the nature of the offense 'Mr Westropp's observation "That he was only afraid of Mr Wyon" ... could only be used towards him by some one acquainted with the difference existing between him (Mr Pistrucci) and Mr Wyon and who purposely made use of such allusion to excite him to some act of violence'. This is obviously true and provides interesting evidence of the extent to which the quarrel between Pistrucci and Wyon had entered the public consciousness. Hamilton went on to say that 'since my letter of the 21 Mr Pistrucci has shown me five original models in a tray, of his own design for the medal of the Society - three, I think, with the subject of Ulysses and Leucothoe, one of St Paul - one of the figure of Hope - besides the portrait of Dr Fothergill'. After further exchanges between Hamilton and the Committee in which the former demanded and the latter refused an apology it was resolved that in consequence of Mr Pistrucci's uncalled for and offensive conduct towards the Secretary ... your Committee feel that they would have been under the necessity of communicating to Mr Pistrucci their intention of withholding all further communication with him, upon the subject of the Fothergillian medal, had they not been happily relieved from such a proceeding by Mr Pistrucci's declared determination not to execute any other than his own design. Your Committee therefore recommend that steps be immediately taken to procure the assistance of some other artist: and that Mr Pistrucci be requested to state what claim he considers he has on the Society for the time and labour he may have devoted to the subject of the Fothergillian Medal.

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25 RHS Committee Minutes, 18 April, 1838.
26 William Richard Hamilton (1777-1859), Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs 1809-22, Minister at Naples 1822-5, Vice President of the Society of Antiquaries.
27 As copied into the minutes of the Committee of 18 April 1838.
28 RHS Committee Minutes, 18 April 1838.
29 I have not been able to identify this figure in the Rome Mint Collection.
30 RHS Committee Minutes, 18 April, 1838.
Pistrucci asked £105 for his labours. Westropp agreed that this sum would be paid when the models were delivered to the Society. 31 Pistrucci refused to let the Society have the models and, surprisingly meekly, the committee agreed to pay anyway. 32 On 19 August the sorry episode was concluded with a payment to Pistrucci of '£105 for executing Fothergillian models', a sum greater than the Society had initially been prepared to pay for the entire execution of the medal. 33

Left without a die engraver Westropp now turned back to Clint. On 18 August 1838 he wrote 'the committee again asked me on Wednesday night whether I was prepared to make any Report respecting the Fothergillian Medal. I made the best excuse I could, but I must positively be prepared by the next meeting and will therefore hope to hear from you without further delay'. 34 Later in the month Westropp wrote again, to thank Clint for sending 'specimens of your medal engraving'. He goes on with reference to the . . . passage in your letter . . . “if I can have a fair price and sufficient time” – will you give me leave to ask you what you would deem a fair price and the shortest time you would require? These questions are, as my request for specimens of your work was, between ourselves. I believe you are already aware that our fund, available for the purpose, is rather limited and the more so from our having paid Mr Pistrucci very recently for the several models which he from time to time executed. 35

Things did not go any more smoothly with Clint than they had with Pistrucci. In October Westropp wrote to ask whether 'Sir Francis Chantry consents to your proposition', finishing 'I can no longer procrastinate the affair’. 36 This mention of Sir Francis Chantry, the leading contemporary portrait sculptor, suggests that Clint had gone to him for a model for the obverse portrait, of Dr Fothergill, but there is no evidence that this was ever executed. 37 After this relations with Clint took a turn for the worse. On 5 November the Fothergillian Committee decided to go elsewhere and Clint was informed that his services were no longer required. His bill ‘for “modelling a design in wax for the Fothergillian Medal” and requesting its early settlement’ arrived by return of post. The relationship ended with a note from Westropp regretting 'the ungentlemanly tone’ of Clint’s last letter and enclosing a cheque. 38

The Royal Humane Society's fourth attempt to find a medallist who would execute the Fothergillian Medal was eventually to end in success. On 5 November 1838 the committee were 'summoned to select an artist to execute the dies' and it was resolved ‘that a communication be made to Mr William Wyon for the purpose of striking a medal for presentation according to the will of Dr Fothergill . . . within . . . a twelvemonth’, and that ‘Mr Clint’s model be sent to Mr Wyon, telling him that the Society have it in contemplation to select the Head of Dr Fothergill of the boy blowing the torch, known as the ordinary emblem of the Society for the reverse side, or the leaving perfectly plain for an inscription’. 39

It may be doubted whether Wyon was any more pleased than Pistrucci at the prospect of copying the work, and if we may judge from the rest of Clint’s medals (e.g. Plate 5, No. 15) inferior work, of a younger and less well known artist. Certainly the Committee which he attended on 22 November decided ‘after carefully taking into consideration the model of Mr Clint which was proposed as the basis of a design for the Fothergillian Medal’ to reject it in favour of ‘the present classical and beautiful symbol of the Society’, a decision 'in

31 RHS Committee Minutes, 20 June 1838.
32 RHS Committee Minutes, 25 August 1838.
33 Mss Note in the RHS archives.
34 RHS Letter book, 18 August 1838.
35 Headed 'Private', dated 29 August and addressed to Scipio Clint, Greek Street.
36 RHS Letter book, 18 October 1838.
37 Chantry had done models for a number of other medals – Pistrucci, in fact, had refused to copy his models for the
Coronation medal of William IV and Adelaide – and Clint had relied on another artist for the portrait on his most recent medal, of William Roscoe (Plate 5, No. 14).
38 For £21 – Clint’s services were clearly not highly valued. RHS Letter book, 5 January 1838.
39 Minutes of the Fothergillian Committee, 5 November 1838. In this context it is interesting to note that Wyon had already done a medal of Leucothea and Ulysses (ill. 14).
which Mr Wyon perfectly concurred’. The Committee went on to resolve that the head of
the donor should appear on the obverse and that the medal should be the size of ‘the medal
executed by Mr Wyon commemorative of the Queen’s visit to the Guildhall’ (Plate 5, No.
16). Finally, it was recorded that ‘in conversation . . . as to time and expense – Mr Wyon
led the Sub-committee to suppose that it would not materially exceed a year and that the
expense for executing both dies would not exceed £200’.

The note of caution apparent in these minutes was to be fully justified by events. The
medal was to take nearly ten years to complete and cost nearly double the estimate. Ten
months later, in September 1839, the Secretary reported ‘having called on Mr Wyon as to
the progress made in the Forthergillian Medal and that he has modelled the Head of Dr
Fothergill for approval of the Sub-Committee’. Then, in August 1840, Wyon attended a
meeting of the Forthergillian Medal Committee ‘and exhibited a model of the Boy blowing
the Torch for the Forthergillian’. One or two slight alterations were suggested and the
design was approved of. Something rather curious then occurred.

After the adjournment of this meeting Mr Wyon showed the Secretary another model of shipwrecked
seamen in an exhausted state upon a raft with relief appearing in the person of the seaman waving a flag in
the back ground. Mr Wyon had brought this model for the express purpose of laying it before the committee
but could not find it until after the departure of the members. The Secretary considered that the model from
its appropriate design for the Fothergillian Medal should be laid before the members of that committee and
Mr Wyon left it in his charge for that purpose.

The story of the mislaid model is hard to believe. It seems more likely that Wyon, having
Got rid of Clint’s model was anxious to substitute one of his own and had decided that he
would stand a better chance of achieving this if he tackled the Secretary on his own before
presenting it to the full committee. On 7 September the Fothergillian Committee met
again; Mr Briscoe recorded his ‘unqualified admiration of the design’ (a view subsequently
endorsed by Messrs Hawes and Baldwin) and Wyon, who was present, asked for a further
£100 for his labour. The matter was referred to the main committee, but Wyon was
impatient. On 19 September he wrote

I have been applied to by the Liverpool Society and urged very strongly for the design for their medal. Now I
am really very anxious to know if the Humane Society have positively adopted the design. As neither Mr
Baldwin nor Mr Hawes attended the committee I am anxious to know if I am to consider the affair as settled
because if it is not I should certainly give the design to the Society for which it was intended. Pray do me the
favour to answer this as soon as possible or I shall get into a scrape with the other Society. I must make
another design without loss of time for Liverpool. I also wish to know the size of the medal for your Society.
Certainly I confess on reflection I should not like to cramp this design into the small size originally intended
for the Boy. I have worked a great deal upon the model since I saw you and I am still desirous to get to the
engraving as soon as possible.

In a postscript he added ‘the difficulty of increasing the size of the medal is with the head of
Dr Fothergill which is so far advanced at the size originally intended’.

Westropp replied on 21 September that the Society definitely wanted the design and
‘that it had better be of the size originally agreed to viz – that of the City Medal’. His
decision was confirmed by the Committee of the Royal Humane Society on 23 September
and it was also agreed that Wyon should be paid £100 extra for his pains. In December
Wyon left a piece of paper at the Society’s offices, on which he had drawn a circle
representing the size of the medal and giving the price of a single example in gold – fifty

49 Minutes of the Fothergillian Committee, 22 November
1838.
51 RHS Committee Minutes, 18 September 1839.
52 Minutes of the Fothergillian Committee, 21 August
1840.
53 The meeting is recorded in the RHS Committee Min-
utes for 23 September 1840.
54 Letter in the archives of the RHS.
55 Noted on Wyon’s letter.
56 RHS Committee Minutes, 23 September 1840.
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The size given, 72 mm, is considerably larger than that of the City medal, so, given Wyon's remarks about the half completed Fothergill's die, it is not surprising that we next read in the minutes that 'Mr Wyon after having partly executed the Head of the Testator from a shade which was obtained from Mr Pettigrew of Saville Row, has discovered another likeness of the Doctor which he considers more classical and more desirable for the medal – but that the additional work of executing it would cost fifty pounds more than the amounts agreed upon'. Nor is it surprising that the Committee decided 'that the Head which has been partly engraved by Mr Wyon will fully answer the purpose intended'.

Wyon was not, however, prepared to give up. Given that he claimed to have both a half finished portrait die and another, better, likeness his next move was extraordinarily bold. On 20 December 1843 he wrote

I regret to say that after a good deal of search I have been unable to find a portrait of Doctor Fothergill that I can rely upon – and on consideration I do not think it so important a work I am justified in recommending to the Society the adoption of an ideal portrait calling it that of the Testator. Although I have made considerable progress in the die for the obverse I do not feel the same confidence in submitting it to the Committee as I hope to do the Reverse when it is finished. I therefore venture to suggest the propriety of substituting for the Obverse of the Medal the beautiful allegory of the Boy blowing the Torch so well known as the emblem of the Society – a model of which I have already prepared, instead of an ideal Portrait of the Testator. This would fully identify the medal with the Royal Humane Society and a suitable inscription in the exergue of the medal would record the name and intention of the Testator.

At their next meeting, on 2 February 1844, the main committee of the Society recommended Wyon's proposal to the Fothergillian committee which duly decided that the suggestion of Mr Wyon “that the Boy blowing the Torch” be substituted for the obverse of the medal be adopted and that the inscription on the exergue be “Ex munere Antoni Fothergill MD 1810”, that the motto round the boy be the motto of the Institution “Lateat Scintillula Forsan” . . . that in consideration of the difficulty stated in Mr Wyon’s letter as to obtaining a correct Portrait of Doctor Anthony Fothergill, and the additional trouble he will have in executing the die according to the suggestion now adopted, the sum of fifty pounds to be added to the amount originally agreed upon to be given to Mr Wyon.

Even the prospect of the additional payment failed to spur Wyon to immediate activity. In December 1844 a new Secretary, Joseph Charlier, reported ‘having seen Mr Wyon at the Mint . . . when he showed him an impression from the die for the Fothergillian Medal yet in an unfinished state; but Mr Wyon promised as soon as he had finished some other works which he had begun previous to his recent indisposition, that he would devote his whole time and energies in fulfilling his engagement with his Society’. Two years later ‘the Secretary reported . . . that Mr Wyon had sent to the office two impressions from the dies of the Fothergillian Medal which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy. But since that period one of the dies (ie. the Boy) was fractured in the process of hardening. Mr Wyon was however making great progress in the engraving of another die.’ Then in December

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47 RHS archives.
48 On 20 December Wyon wrote to Westropp to ask whether the size had been approved. He also asked for the return of ‘the model, which is the labour of some months and as it is in a perishable material I am afraid of an accident’.
49 RHS Committee Minutes, October 1841.
50 RHS Committee Minutes, October 1841.
51 Letter in the RHS archives. Another portrait of Fothergill was available on the Fothergillian medal of the London Medical Society.
52 RHS Committee Minutes, 2 February 1844.
53 RHS Committee Minutes, 2 February 1844.
54 On 23 December Charlier wrote to Wyon, ‘by desire of the Committee of the RHS I have the honor of requesting you will have the goodness to acquaint me for the information of the GC which will assemble on the 14 of next months, the earliest possible period when the Society's new Fothergillian medal can be completed. I am at the same time to express to you the very great disappointment felt by the Committee at their being unable for the want of that desirable medallion to carry out a new feature in the objects of their institution agreeably with the wishes of the late Dr Fothergill’ RHS Letter book, p. 184.
55 RHS Committee Minutes, 16 September 1846. Impressions from the unhardened dies were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1846 (cat. No. 1387) and the medal itself was shown in 1848 (cat. No. 1295).
Wyon wrote that he had ‘had to commence another die for the Fothergillian Medal, owing to the faulty nature of the metal of that just finished’. 55

In February 1847 the Committee of the Society finally lost patience. They resolved ‘that this Committee regret to find that the Fothergillian Medal is not yet finished, notwithstanding that it has been in Mr Wyon’s hand for several years and that many other works of his which have been undertaken subsequently to the Society’s medal, have been completed by him. That Mr Wyon be therefore informed by the Secretary that this Committee expects that it will be delivered previously to their next meeting which will be on the 17 proximo’. 56 This approach had a satisfactory result and the next meeting was informed that Wyon had written to announce ‘that he had now finished both dies for the Fothergillian Medal’. 57

Finally, on 21 April 1847, thirty-seven years after Fothergill’s will and after a more or less continuous struggle lasting twenty-five years, ‘the Secretary . . . laid before the Committee one of the Fothergillian Gold Medals just completed by Mr Wyon RA and . . . reported that the second medal was likewise struck, but only wanting glasses and the gold rim being attached thereto’. The Committee resolved that the medals be advertised to be seen at this office by the Governors of the Society during one month from this date and then presented to Dr J.P. Kay (now J.P. Kay Shuttleworth Esq.) and John Erichsen Esq. Surgeon, as awarded them at the General Council held in January 1845. It was further resolved that an impression in silver of the Fothergillian Medal be presented to the Treasurer Benj Hawes Esq as a Tribute of respect by the Committee. 58

When Wyon died, a few years later, Charlier was quick to write to the Mint asking after the fate of the medal dies 59. Leonard Wyon’s reply was sufficient to persuade the Committee that ‘as you are anxious of striking any medals that may be required, and of the custody of the Dies of the Fothergill Medals executed by your late father, the Committee will have no objection thereto, with the clear understanding that you take every possible care of the said dies and produce them when called for’. 60 This was not to prove a profitable charge. Only one further medal was struck, for presentation to Dr Henry Sylvester in 1882, and in 1885 it was decided that ‘the Society’s useful activities in this field were exhausted’. 61 One of the longest, most time consuming, ambitious and elaborate quests for a medal ever undertaken ended with the transfer of the income from the Fothergill fund to a poorly subscribed swimming competition for minor public schools.

55 RHS Committee Minutes, 18 December 1846.
56 RHS Committee Minutes, 17 February 1847.
57 RHS Committee Minutes, 17 March 1847.
58 RHS Committee Minutes, 21 April 1847.
60 RHS Letter book December 1851. The dies are now preserved in the RHS Collection.
61 Typescript copy of a letter from the RHS to the Charity Commissioners 21 March 1951.

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1. The Fothergillian Medal
   British Museum, gold, 72 mm.

2. Lewis Pingo
   Medal of the Royal Humane Society, 1775
   British Museum, silver, 51.5 mm

3. Benedetto Pistrucci
   Model for a new version of the Royal Humane Society medal
   Rome Mint, wax.

4. Benedetto Pistrucci
   Model for a new version of the Royal Humane Society medal
   Rome Mint, wax.

5. Benedetto Pistrucci
   Medal of the Royal Humane Society, 1831
   British Museum, silver, 51 mm.

6. Benedetto Pistrucci
   Dr A Fothergill

7. Silhouette of Dr A Fothergill,
   British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings

8-13. Benedetto Pistrucci
   Models for the Fothergillian medal,
   Rome Mint, wax.

14. William Wyon
   Ulysses and Leucothea, 1837
   British Museum, bronze, 73 mm.

15. Scipio Clint, after J. Gibson
    William Roscoe
    British Museum, bronze

16. William Wyon
    Queen Victoria’s visit to the City of London, 1838
    British Museum, silver, 55 mm.
PLATE 1

1

THE FOTHERGILLIAN MEDAL
THE FOTHERGILLIAN MEDAL

PLATE 3

A. Fothergill M.D.

Images of various designs and engravings are shown.
THE FOTHERGILLIAN MEDAL
PLATE 4