



Title 74

Many medals were struck to commemorate **Apollo 11**, but I found this French Medal, coloured enamel on bronze, of man's first foot steps on the Moon, 20-21 July 1969, the most beautiful. Struck by the Paris Mint, its diameter is 120 mm, excluding the orbits. *Photograph Courtesy Ronan Picture Library.*

It must have been in the 1950s that one of the antique dealers in Portobello Road came up to me and said "As you collect old scientific things, would you like this medal?" "I looked at it, saw the face of Newton and the date 1726, the year of his death, and I asked the dealer "How much is it?" He soon replied, "Half-a Crown" (one-eighth of a £ sterling). I bought it, and thus began the third of my major collections. The bronze medal was then more than 200 years old, in very good condition and the price ridiculously small.

I had no idea how to collect other medals showing either scientists or engineers or their achievements, but argued correctly that if one such medal exists, there must be others. Fortunately I soon found Baldwin's shop in 11 Adelphi Terrace, the Strand, London's oldest dealers in rare coins, established in 1872. On my naive question, "Have you any scientific medals?" the present Mr Baldwin just pointed to a very large open wooden box, full of all sorts of medals, and said "You can look through those!" It must have contained 1000 old medals, and my task of looking through them began. To follow one's scientific Temper is not always easy!

I found a great many, as no-one had ever before looked for scientific medals. In a later lecture I defined them:

Numismatic items which have a direct relationship to science, recording and commemorating scientists and their achievements, whether of pure or applied, physical, biological or social nature.

It took less than 10 years to accumulate several hundred medals, not all from Baldwin, but also from many other sources. Friends who happened to come across any, a few more from Portobello Road, all helped to increase the collection and London proved ideal for collecting. Housing them was not easy, a beautiful wooden cabinet collapsed from their weight, and a steel cabinet with shallow draws was the answer.

My first discovery was the great variety of materials from which they had been made. From jasper (Wedgewood cameos), porcelain (Dresden) and German silver, through bronze, copper, titanium, silver, gold to platinum and even lava, I had specimen of each material, except platinum which I knew existed, but could not afford to buy. Then I discovered that the number of coins which had the portray of a scientist was extremely small, only Auer von Welsbach (Austria 1958), Santos Dumont (Brazil ND), Zeppelin (Germany 1930), Newton (England 1793), Copernicus (Poland 1959), Planck (Germany 1958), and Franklin (USA 1951) was all I could collect. These coins were of course struck in an edition of many millions, whereas a scientific medal would only reach few tens and very rarely perhaps 100. When I reached the age of 75 in 1991, American friends gave me as a present the means and the inspiration to design my own medal and have it struck by the Paris Mint. [See Title 439A]

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