A Fine ‘Edward Medal Action’ Order of St. John Life Saving Pair to J. Blenkiron, Denaby Main Corps, St. John Ambulance Brigade, For Gallantry During the Denaby Colliery Disaster, 9.7.1912


£1,400-1,800

Order of St. John of Jerusalem Life Saving Medal: ‘A terrible disaster occurred on 9th July 1912, through an explosion in the south west portion of the Cadeby Main Pit, Denaby Colliery, and of 32 men at work there, all but two were killed. Later in the day, while a rescue party was exploring the workings, a series of further explosions took place, as a result of which the initial death toll was more than doubled. Many of the rescuers were subsequently gazetted for the King Edward Medal but as a number of deserving cases were not so recognised, at the instance of His Grace the Archbishop of York, Prelate of the Order, a small local committee instituted an enquiry, the result of which is the application of the bestowal of the Life Saving awards of the Order on the above mentioned men. Numbers 6-17 inclusive were concerned with the rescue work on the actual day of the disaster, while numbers 1-5 [Blenkiron was no.5] were included by the Committee because they felt that the work done subsequently during the recovery of the bodies of the victims was of great danger. No.10, The Rev. F.S. Hawkes, Vicar of Denaby Main, although warned of the danger of further explosions (which actually occurred at a later hour) descended the pit after the first explosion, administered spiritual consolation to many of the injured, and greatly assisted the two medical men in their efforts to relieve the sufferings of the victims. Nos. 8 and 9, Dr. James Forster and Dr. Dhun Feroze, in similar circumstances rendered medical aid to the victims. The rescue work was conducted in circumstances of great danger and difficulty owing to the poisonous atmosphere, the high temperature, the risk of fire, further explosions and falls of roof, while some of the victims being stupefied by the effects of the poisonous gases greatly impeded the work of the rescue parties by becoming almost unmanageable and struggling with their rescuers. The eventual death toll for the disaster totalled 88.’

Mr. Joseph Blenkiron was not employed by the Colliery, but volunteered for the rescue operations by virtue of being a member of the local St. John Ambulance Brigade. He was presented with his Order of St. John of Jerusalem Life Saving Medal by H.M. The King, 16.12.1913, the first time in the history of the Order that the medal had been bestowed by the reigning monarch.

2 Silver and 3 Bronze Edward Medals (Mines); and 17 Order of St. John of Jerusalem Life Saving Medals were awarded for the Denaby Colliery Disaster.