

Edinburgh-born Hero's gallantry medal sold

A rare bravery medal awarded to a Scots hero who rescued a crashed RAF pilot from the burning wreckage of his bi-plane has fetched £6,000 at auction.

The Empire Gallantry Medal (EGM.) was awarded to Eric "Jock" Bonar in 1932 after he fought through 30-foot-high flames to drag the injured airman free from his crashed Siskin at Barton airfield in Manchester.

Edinburgh-born Bonar, chief flying instructor at the site and a Flight Sergeant in the Royal Air Force Reserve, was honoured with the medal for his "conspicuous courage" during the incident.

The crashed pilot, Sergeant Jack Treadwell, an old friend of Bonar's who was undertaking a training flight, would later succumb to his injuries.

Bonar's medal went under the hammer at Noonans auctioneers in London together with a bronze medal from the Society for the Protection of Life from Fire, presented for the same incident. They were bought by a private collector.

The Medal of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for Gallantry, known as the Empire Gallantry Medal (EGM), was established by King George V in 1922.

The highest gallantry award for civilians, it could also be awarded to military personnel in some circumstances, for acts

not in the face of the enemy.

Only 130 EGMs were awarded from 1922-40, when it was superseded by the newly established George Cross and holders of the EGM were required to exchange their medal.

Although Bonar received his new George Cross medal, he was unable to return his EGM after he used it to settle an outstanding bill at a garage, making its existence even rarer.

Mark Quayle, Medal Specialist and Associate Director of Noonans, said after the sale: "Bonar's medals were keenly contested between four different bidders, the end hammer price being reflective of their rarity."

Bonar, born in Edinburgh in 1899, volunteered for service with the 7th Battalion Cameron Highlanders aged 16 during the First World War but was sent home after his mother informed the Army he was underage.

He later joined the Royal Navy and served in minesweepers before being demobilised in 1919.

Bonar was also a skilful pilot, and would recall how he had been "flying since God was a boy".

A friend of Lawrence of Arabia, Bonar enlisted in the RAF and was employed as a development pilot for the Merlin Engine, which was to power Hurricanes and Spitfires and as Chief Test Pilot for Napier, testing the Sabre Engine for Typhoons and Tempests.

Bonar's EGM citation in the London Gazette of 5 August 1932 read: "For an act of conspicuous courage in rescuing the pilot of a burning aeroplane of the Royal Air Force at Barton in May last.

"Under the protection of an asbestos blanket he unfastened the straps binding the pilot, released him from his parachute harness, and with assistance dragged him from the burning

wreckage.

“He gave first aid to the airman, who was then conveyed to hospital but died about a fortnight later.”

Bonar, whose flying skills became legendary, was selected for the Gloster Grebes' aerobatic display team. During one display King George V ordered the team by radio telephone to loop the loop, and afterwards Bonar was presented to the King.

Bonar died in 1991, aged 91. Until his death he was the oldest surviving holder of the George Cross.



The Empire Gallantry Medal (EGM) awarded to Scottish hero Eric “Jock” Bonar for pulling an RAF pilot from the burning

wreckage of a crashed plane in 1932, which fetched £6000 at auction. Also Bonar's bronze medal of the Society for the Protection of Life from Fire for the same event. PHOTO Noonan's



Scottish hero Eric "Jock" Bonar, whose Empire Gallantry Medal (EGM) awarded in 1932 for pulling an RAF pilot from the burning wreckage of a crashed plane, fetched £6000 at auction. PHOTO Noonans