



James Watt International Gold Medal

To commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of James Watt on 19 January 1736 – an event which was destined to bring about a revolution in the utilisation of power – the Institution of Mechanical Engineers of Great Britain decided to award every two years a Gold Medal to an engineer of any nationality who is deemed worthy of the highest award the Institution can bestow and that a mechanical engineer can receive. In making the award, the Institution has sought the co-operation and advice of engineering Institutions and Societies in all parts of the world.

In the long list of those who, by the practice of mechanical engineering, have added to the comfort, well-being and prosperity of mankind there is no man who holds a higher place in universal estimation than James Watt. He was not only the inventor of the separate condenser and many other parts of steam engines, but he was the first to study the steam engine scientifically and at his works in Soho, a district of Birmingham, he made distinguished contributions to the development of workshop practice. His scientific examination of the heat losses in engines led him to the recognition of the influence of latent heat on steam engine economy. His great predecessor, Smeaton, had been content to improve the mechanism of the Newcomen engine; Watt investigated the causes of the loss of heat energy in that type of engine and laid at any rate the foundation for the great principle which was to be enunciated later by Carnot and by Joule. He may certainly be regarded as the progenitor of the science of thermodynamics.

However, he was also the inventor of parallel motion, the basis of many machines. At the age of 72, he wrote to his son: "Though I am not over anxious about fame, yet I am more proud of the parallel motion than of any other mechanical invention I have made."

To be worthy to receive a medal struck in commemoration of one who was at one and the same time a scientist, an inventor and a producer, the recipient himself should be an engineer who has achieved international recognition both by his works as a mechanical engineer and by the ability with which he has applied science to the progress of mechanical engineering.