

Eric Clements

English Designer and Educator

By Kenneth Quickenden



Fig 1 Eric Clements *Insignia News* 1974,

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The Telegraph made an announcement of the death of Eric George Clements [Fig 1] the English designer and educator who died aged 94, on 22 November 2019.¹

Clements belonged to an important and innovative generation of designer-silversmiths, which included Gerald Benney, Robert Welch and David Mellor. In 1962 Mary Noble, writing in *The Director* included all four amongst a small group who were responsible for what she regarded as a contemporary 'bursting of design and craftsmanship in silver...'.² The four are now all dead, but Clements alone has not received an obituary in the English national press.³ While not exactly regarding this as a travesty of justice, this obituary is written on behalf of those associated with the School of Jewellery, now in Birmingham City University, where Clements once worked, who wish to remind others of his considerable achievements.⁴

¹ <http://announcements.telegraph.co.uk/deaths> [accessed 15.7.2020].

² Quoted in John Andrew and Derek Styles, *Designer British Silver from studios established 1930-1985*, Woodbridge, 2015, p. 96 (hereafter Andrew and Styles).

³ *Ibid*, p. 542.

⁴ Gerald Whiles, formerly Head of the School of Jewellery (email 2. 4.2020) and Terry Hunt, formerly Deputy Head (email 30.3.2020).

⁵ Graham Hughes, 'Eric Clements', in *Eric Clements Silver and Design 1950-2000*, ed. Martin Ellis, Birmingham, 2001, pp.7-13 (pp.7-8), hereafter Ellis (ed.) and Hughes 'Eric Clements'.

⁶ Tanya Harrod's interview (2) with Eric Clements, Birmingham, 2000. British Library, National Life Story Collection, Craft Lives (<https://sounds.bl.uk/OralHistory/Crafts,2000>) [accessed 16.7.2020] (hereafter Harrod).

Clements was born in 1925, in Rugby, and his later successes were made against a background which did not provide an auspicious start. His father was a warehouseman, who provided a home low on both income and affection. Eric's determination to overcome, led him of his own volition, to seek a place at Lawrence Sheriff Grammar School at the age of thirteen. He progressed to Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts in 1942, enrolling for an National Diploma in Design (NDD) course. But war and army intervened; he appreciated military precision, acquired some teaching experience and achieved the rank of Warrant Officer.⁵ On the basis of his military service Clements later reflected that it was sometimes good for people to be told what to do.⁶

He resumed his course at Birmingham after leaving the army in 1947. The choice of silversmithing, an elitist specialization, seems rather surprising given his left-wing political sympathies at the time but it was a choice he later said that was made 'almost by chance'.⁷ He studied at Margaret Street, and teaching included technical instruction, as well as drawing from life and the study of anatomy, the antique and the history of architecture.⁸ Here an Arts and Crafts ethos survived where Cyril Shiner used crafts methods and preserved the ideal of being a designer maker, at least until World War 11,⁹ while Clements' other main tutor Ralph Baxendale, also a superb craftsman, maintained at least into the 1960s a hostility towards the machine in favor of the joy of craftsmanship.¹⁰ Clements would have been aware of a range of styles used there as the school slowly moved away from the medievalising and nature-based ornament of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the decorative geometry of Art Deco,[Fig 2] towards a greater degree of simplicity¹¹ influenced by Modernism introduced into England c1930 from the Continent. That Modernism included a strong Scandinavian influence, which demonstrated a fondness for simplicity, smooth surfaces, organic curves¹² and a social commitment to achieve functional, attractive design, at a reasonable price.¹³ Linked to that was a strong commitment to designers working for industry.¹⁴ Clements used a travel scholarship in 1948 to travel to Scandinavia where he was inspired by Sigurd Persson in Stockholm, and in Copenhagen by Hans Hansen and Henning Koppel, the latter operating at Jensen, a major producer of modern silver.¹⁵ [Fig 3] Clements was thus provided with a broad range of influences but he was dissatisfied with what seemed to him to be both excessive regimentation in teaching and where success depended on closely following the work of tutors. Clements failed his NDD. At this stage his conviction that he was not much good at anything¹⁶ seems to have been entirely justified.

Undaunted, Clements applied to the Royal College of Art (RCA) and by passing the entrance exam in 1949,



Fig 2 Cyril Shiner, Box, 1936, silver, jet and ivory, 5 cm high. Collection: The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths



Fig 3 Henning Koppel, maker Jensen, Bowl, 1956, silver. Collection: The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths

⁷ Harrod, interview (2).

⁸ Harrod, interview (1).

⁹ Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *Birmingham Gold and Silver 1773-1973*, Birmingham, 1973, section on Cyril Shiner (hereafter BMAG).

¹⁰ 'Philosophy of a Craftsman' by Ralph Gordon Baxendale (1966), in *Finely Taught, Finely Wrought, The Birmingham School of Jewellery, 1890-1990*, ed. Terry Hunt, Birmingham, 1990, pp.59-62 (hereafter Hunt (ed.))

¹¹ BMAG, 'Between the Wars'.

¹² Fiona MacCarthy, *A History of British Design 1830-1970*, London, 1979, pp. 53-58, (hereafter MacCarthy)

¹³ Dag Widman, 'The Swedish Art Industry, 1917-75' in *The Swedish Institute, Design in Sweden*, Stockholm, 1977, pp. 5-8.

¹⁴ Gillian Naylor, 'Eric Clements and Industrial Design, Learning to be Particular' in Ellis (ed.) pp.18-21, (p.18), (hereafter Naylor, 'Eric Clements').

¹⁵ Hughes, 'Eric Clements', pp.8-9.

¹⁶ Harrod, interview (2).



Fig 4 Eric Clements, Design for a Silver Tea Service, 1950, pencil, watercolor and body color on grey paper, Clements' Archive



Fig 5 Eric Clements, Sauce Pot and Ladle, Sauce Boat, Salt and Spoon, 1951, silver, partly gilt, sauce boat 112 mm high, private collection

¹⁷ Hughes, 'Eric Clements', p.9

¹⁸ MacCarthy, p.79.

¹⁹ Harrod, interview (3).

²⁰ Conversation with the author, 22.6.2020.

²¹ Quoted in Hughes, 'Eric Clements' p. 9.

²² Reeded panels occur in a glass bowl of 1939 by Keith Murray (Arts Council of Great Britain and the Victoria & Albert Museum, *Thirties British art and design before the war*, [exh. Cata. Hayward Gallery], 1980, .p.134) and a Fishing Trophy, 1937, by Leslie Durbin in the Goldsmiths' Company collection, has a reeded band around the base (Andrew and Styles, p.188)

²³ Ellis (ed.) catalogue text [by Rebecca Holland], p.28 (hereafter Holland).

²⁴ Silvano Levy, 'Maddox, the Melvilles and Morris: Birmingham Surrealists' in Tessa Sidey (ed.), *Surrealism in Birmingham 1935-1954*, Birmingham, 2000, pp.23-36. Zoomorphic forms occur in Desmond Morris's 'The Courtship' (1948). Information supplied by Vicky Ley.

²⁵ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], p.103.

²⁶ Harrod, interview (3).

²⁷ Naylor, 'Eric Clements,' p.19

entered the School of Silversmithing and Jewellery, under Professor Robert Goodden.¹⁷ Clements arrived at a time when the reputation of the college was low¹⁸ and this corresponded with Clements' experience, feeling that the staff were 'not very good'. He received little teaching, and now found himself to be grateful for the technical instruction he had earlier received in Birmingham, as well as the lectures there on such things as symbolism and heraldry, not then taught at the RCA. Clements felt that one was expected to get on with things on one's own¹⁹ and according to one contemporary, John Hopgood, he did, working hard and taking advantage of the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁰ According to another contemporary at the RCA, Gerald Benney, 'We [RCA students] thought he [Clements] was God.'²¹ Clements' efforts and emerging talents were rewarded: in the 1949/50 National Design Competition he entered five categories, winning first prize in two. One was for a silver tea-service [Fig 4] where its general simplicity is relieved by narrow bands of reeded decoration, a popular Art Deco motif used by one of his tutors at the RCA, Leslie Durbin.²² Clements other first prize was for a trophy cup. He also won a Certificate of Merit for an electro plated nickel silver (EPNS) tea service.²³ Some other work was very adventurous [Fig.5]; apart from the smooth Scandinavian organic curves, his sauce pot and sauce boat provide whimsical zoomorphic shapes—a bird and an egg—and handles which ingeniously also provide supports and even tails. This betrays the influence of Surrealism, which he was almost certainly in contact with earlier in Birmingham where in the late 1940s a Surrealist group indulged in very public displays. Their art included examples of zoomorphic forms. Such influences were anathema to his tutors there²⁴ but his new regime was more liberal. Clements used his own craft skills, with some assistance, to make pieces,²⁵ gaining a silver medal and Des RCA in 1952²⁶ but stayed an extra term to undertake a placement at Firmin and Sons Birmingham, manufacturers of buttons and badges, which included designing livery buttons for Queen Elizabeth 11, and taught him industrial principles.²⁷

That placement was consistent with recent RCA changes. In the year before Clements went to the RCA, Robin

Darwin had been appointed the new Principal and was charged with pushing courses in an industrial direction, the result of a wider determination from government, anxious to revitalize industrial production, to improve the economy and exports following World War 11. The Board of Trade in 1944 initiated the Council of Industrial Design, with the purpose of encouraging good design in British industry, later defined as 'comprising good materials and workmanship, fitness for purpose and pleasure in use', similar in aim to the democratic aims of Scandinavian designers. Darwin was the Council's Education Officer, and in 1946 he wrote a report highlighting the need for training designers for industry and set about implementing that policy at the RCA.²⁸ This industrial ethos, in time, became increasingly true of Clements' practice, and he styled himself as a designer, rather than a designer-maker and it is thought that he only ever made about a dozen pieces to his own designs.²⁹ He always insisted that some others could make better than himself,³⁰ and although much of his later work required skilled craft, it increasingly involved large companies and industrial methods. This was in harmony with an international trend and led to a far greater appreciation of design and designers and led also to designer's names being used in advertising and on the products they designed.³¹

The era saw a large number of important exhibitions which included silversmithing. It was Clements' good fortune that these exhibitions heavily involved the Goldsmiths' Company, whose clerk, George Ravensworth Hughes, and later his son Graham Hughes, first as Art Secretary and later as Art Director, were major promoters of modern silver. Hughes Senior was a familiar visitor to RCA's Silversmithing and Jewellery Department (and he provided Clements' first commission, a chalice and patten for St Michael's at Litlington, Sussex, in 1949). RCA students were invited by the Goldsmiths' Company to help with their exhibitions at the annual British Industries Fairs, which Clements enjoyed, and G. R. Hughes organized an exhibition at Goldsmiths' Hall as its contribution to the Festival of Britain in 1951.³² Impressively, Clements, a student still, contributed three pieces while only three others out of the 111 contributors contributed more.³³ Clements' show led to the commissioning of important pieces such as The Merton Bowl and Cover for Merton College Oxford in 1951, a commission that introduced him to a rarified world and celebrity that he had not previously experienced and which he adjusted to with difficulty.³⁴

Despite these early contacts and signs of success, Clements, already married in 1950, wanted the security of a teaching job, which he always felt was a likely benefit from a RCA qualification.³⁵ This contrasted with his peers Gerald Benney, Robert Welch and David Mellor, who set up workshops and businesses.³⁶ Clements taught in 1953 at Drayton Secondary Modern School in Ealing, West London.³⁷ In the following year he moved back to the Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts, as a Senior Lecturer, not to Margaret street, but to

²⁸ MacCarthy, pp.73-92.

²⁹ Andrew and Styles, p.130.

³⁰ Harrod, interview (7)

³¹ MacCarthy, p.66.

³² Hughes, 'Eric Clements', p.9.

³³ Goldsmiths' Co., *British Silverwork Including Ceremonial Plate by Contemporary Craftsmen*, London, 1951, pp.17-18.

³⁴ Hughes, 'Eric Clements', pp.10-11

³⁵ Harrod, interview (4).

³⁶ Harrod interview (7).

³⁷ Naylor, 'Eric Clements', p.19.



Fig 6 Eric Clements, Design for a Tea Bureau Tea Set, 1954, pencil, chalk and body color, whereabouts unknown.



Fig 7 Joseph Hancock attribution, Coffee Pot , c. 1760, Old Sheffield Plate, 21 cm. Photo and collection Gordon Crosskey.

Vittoria Street, whose trade courses had existed outside the college, but by now had been joined to it, and as a consequence the silversmithing staff and facilities formerly at Margaret Street had been moved there. Clements made a strong impact: the Scandinavian influences he brought with him were unsettling for many, he disapproved of both the school's heavy reliance on drawing rather than 3D prototypes and encouraging students to emulate tutors' work. His tutorial style was unusual, being based not so much on informing, but on drawing out students' thoughts and encouraging personal development -- though ideas had to be based on a thorough technical grounding.³⁸ Here Clements self-confessed technical limitations could make him vulnerable to ridicule, especially after the mistake of once saying that 'a designer cannot expect a craftsman to do what he cannot himself do'; knowing this, Gerald Whiles, another member of staff, challenged Clements to prove his point in the workshop, with damaging results to a water carafe being made by a young Martyn Pugh.³⁹

Alongside his teaching, Clements developed his design practice.⁴⁰ In 1955, the Goldsmiths' Company organized a competition for a tea service, which Clements won. It became part of a touring exhibition which showed at a prominent venue, the Tea Centre in Regent Street, London. His design [Fig 6] shows functionality in the wide openings for easy cleaning, and a broad-based teapot which encouraged the wide dispersal of tea leaves.⁴¹ The profile of a milk jug (top left) suggests that he was looking at eighteenth century prototypes, the sloping sides leading to the sharply undercut body, [Fig 7] though the plain surfaces

³⁸ Ellis (ed.) Gerald Whiles, 'Eric Clements: The Contribution as an educator within the field of Design and more Particularly that of Jewellery and Silversmithing', pp.22-4 (hereafter Whiles 'Eric Clements').

³⁹ E-mail from Martyn Pugh, 22.5.2020.

⁴⁰ Harrod, interview (4).

⁴¹ Harrod, interview (6).



Fig 8 Eric Clements, Leonard Burt maker, Clock, 1955, silver-gilt, 12 cm high, Collection: The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths



Fig 9 Eric Clements, Padgett and Braham maker, Mayoral Jewel, 1955 gold, enamel, rubies, diamonds and pearls, 127 mm x 67 m. © Bolton Council. From the collections of Bolton Town Hall

betray modern Scandinavian influence. After seeing the exhibition and Clements' service, the Head of Sheffield College of Art declared that this was better than work from his own college.⁴² Clements' work subsequently appeared in the Company's collection, an example being a clock with thin form-defining lines [Fig 8] an Art Deco touch found in the work of his former tutor, Shiner [Fig 2]. Clements appeared in many Company exhibitions, Hughes frequently recommended Clements to patrons⁴³ and Clements acknowledged that 'almost all' of his silver commissions came from Company recommendations.⁴⁴ Hughes involvement in judging entries for a Mayoral Jewel for Bolton in 1955 was persuasive in gaining Clements the commission [Fig 9] against local opposition.⁴⁵ The jewel, exquisitely made by the London firm of Padgett and Braham, one of Clements favored makers, is rich with rubies, diamonds and pearls and what was then thought to be the largest expanse of stones ever to be set in invisible settings, with an iconography including the elephant and castle of the Bolton Crest, and the arrows, shuttle and shield of the Bolton arms, with an enameled border including eight green gold symbols of the eight constituent areas which together created the city.⁴⁶ In 1959 a Goldsmiths' Company publication included 74 pieces by 23 makers; the highest number by an individual, 20, was by Gerald Benney and the second highest, 11, was by Clements.⁴⁷ Clements was a major force in Hughes' efforts to promote modern silver, and he felt that Clements was unrivalled in his appreciation of fine workmanship, which he ensured in the execution of such designs.⁴⁸

Clements also gained significantly because of the quality of his designs, and although he was inclined to be modest about his drawing skill, Hughes felt that the poetic quality of his style, 'far in advance of that of his contemporaries' was much responsible for his success [Fig 6].⁴⁹ Under the government's Assistance to Craftsman Scheme, which started in 1947, up to six hand-made pieces of silver, made from each approved design - which had to be original and of high quality - qualified for exemption from punitive purchase tax, which was initially 125%, and from

⁴² Hunt (ed.), Graham Hughes, 'Designer/Silversmiths of Birmingham', pp.47-52, p.51.

⁴³ Hughes, 'Eric Clements', pp.10-11.

⁴⁴ Harrod, interview (3)

⁴⁵ Graham Hughes, 'Eric Clements', p.12.

⁴⁶ Ellis (ed), catalogue text [by Holland], p.52.

⁴⁷ Andrew and Styles, p.30.

⁴⁸ Hughes 'Eric Clements' p.12

⁴⁹ Hughes, 'Eric Clements', p.12.

1950, 100%, until the scheme came to an end in 1962. Peter Payne, of Oxford, who was ahead of other provincial retailers in commissioning modern silver, rather than reproductions of earlier styles, commissioned at least twenty-two pieces under the scheme, including the Bolton Mayoral Jewel,⁵⁰ and a hand-made coffee pot⁵¹ by Clements' other favored maker Wakely and Wheeler of London [Fig 10]. The design is based on a traditional baluster form, though the curve in Clements' design is slightly flattened [Fig 11] The design became popular being used, with small changes, for a gift to Clement Attlee, when he received the Freedom of the City of Oxford, and when the Queen commissioned a service for the King and Queen of Denmark on the occasion of her visit to Denmark in 1957.⁵²

Confidence in Clements led to further important commissions for overseas. He was asked by H.M. Government to design gifts for three newly independent Commonwealth countries, centerpieces for Cyprus and Barbados, and electroliers for Jamaica, made between 1962 and 1971.⁵³ But his largest commission came from Massey College in the University of Toronto, in 1962, which after seeing designs by Clements, selected him from a list of eight English silversmiths - which included Benney, Mellor and Welch - supplied by The Council of Industrial Design. They required silver holloware and EPNS flatware and condiments for the Fellows' dining room [Fig 12] and EPNS holloware and flatware for the students' dining room.⁵⁴ Clements' designs were finalized during a visit to Canada with his wife, Muriel, and children, Ann and David, in consultation with the architect of the college's new building.⁵⁵ The Café au Lait [Fig 13] departs from his earlier organic designs but its cone-like shape basically continues a long tradition for coffee pots, [Fig 14] though overall it shows Clements responding to a general shift in craft and design towards angular forms.⁵⁶ The commission included 'The Founders' Cup' [Fig 15], a modernized cup and cover, with a strikingly high stem, presented to the college with good wishes for its future from the Chairman and trustees of the Massey Foundation; the Massey bull appears at the pinnacle and appears again in the engraving below with the Massey crest and feathers together with the inscription 'Sapere Aude'.⁵⁷

During the 1960s, and after, Clements' designs for special silver commissions declined,⁵⁸ as the Assistance to Craftsmen Scheme came to an end, and Clements later reflected that there was, to him, something uncomfortably 'exclusive' about silversmithing.⁵⁹

A steep change in his career was marked by his appointment as consultant to Mappin and Webb, when instead of receiving modest fees for individual designs he now gained £1000 per annum as a consultant plus further fees and expenses. The Clements Tea Service, 1960, named after him, was made in silver and EPNS,

⁵⁰ Email from Judy Payne, 15.8.2020.

⁵¹ Conversation with Judy Payne, 12.8.2020

⁵² *Oxford Mail*, 25.5. 1957, supplied by Judy Payne 19.5.2020.

⁵³ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], p.70.

⁵⁴ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], p.76.

⁵⁵ Harrod interview (5) and Ellis (ed.) catalogue text [by Holland], p.76

⁵⁶ Naylor, 'Eric Clements', p.20.

⁵⁷ Email from Greg Cerson, Massey College, University of Toronto.

⁵⁸ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], pp.103 -106.

⁵⁹ Harrod, interview (10).



Fig 10 Eric Clements, Wakely & Wheeler maker, Coffee Pot, 1953, silver and fruitwood, 260 mm x 218 mm, courtesy Goldsmiths Company.



Fig 11 Hoyland & Co., Coffee Pot, early 1760s, Old Sheffield Plate, 10 1/4 ins, photo and collection Gordon Crosskey.



Fig 12 Eric Clements, Table Setting, 1962-3, silver made by Wakely & Wheeler and EPNS by British Silverware Ltd, collection and courtesy Massey College in the University of Toronto, photo Greg Cerson.



Fig 13 Eric Clements designer, made by Wakely and Wheeler, Café au Lait, 1962-3, silver, 24 cm, collection Massey College in the University of Toronto, photo Stanley Holland.



Fig 14 Matthew Boulton Plate Co., Coffee Pots, 1830-1, silver and ivory, and Old Sheffield Plate, 21 cm, private collection, image courtesy Leonard Joel.



Fig 15 Eric Clements, 'The Founders' Cup', 1962-3, made by Stan Holland of Wakely & Wheeler, silver, 482 mm, collection and courtesy Massey College in the University of Toronto, photo Greg Cerson.



and a coffee pot was also available [Fig 16]. Clements signature appeared on the underside and that appeared on all items designed by him for the firm. [Fig 17] The hollowware were blown into two-part molds, and the design was well conceived for a wide market, remaining in production into the 1990s.⁶⁰

Fig 16 Clements, Mappin and Webb maker, The Clements Tea Service, 1960, EPNS, black molded handles, teapot 150mm, jug 195 mm, private collection, photograph Anthony Evans.



Fig 17 Clements, signature on the Clements Tea Service made by Mappin and Webb, Fig 16

Nevertheless, there was increasing dismay over the selling of modern silver via retailers, and demand for silver wares generally was in decline, so that as Graham Hughes, champion of modern silver agonizingly noted in articles in *The Studio* magazine in 1960, Clements had moved into the haven of teaching while other prominent silversmiths such as Benney, Mellor and Welch had moved, substantially, in an industrial direction and were venturing into new materials and products for which there was large demand.⁶¹ The industrial emphasis was gradually becoming true of Clements. As early as 1955 he had designed aluminum trays for Samuel Groves & Co. of Hockley, Birmingham and in 1957 door and window furniture for Tonks (Birmingham) Ltd.⁶² His principal new material was stainless steel, invented in 1913, later popularized for a wide range of products, some as cheaper substitutes for silver or EPNS. J. R. Bramah of Sheffield which had made components for jet engines, commissioned over forty projects from Clements between 1958 and 1965 for sanitary wares, dishes, and other table wares including tea wares, where the hollowware were formed in a mold under

⁶⁰ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], p.66.

⁶¹ Andrew and Styles, p.46.

⁶² Ellis (ed.) catalogue text [by Holland], p.106



Fig 18 Eric Clements designer, J. R. Bramah maker, Tea wares, 1958, stainless steel advertisement.



Fig 19 Eric Clements, Mappin & Webb Ltd maker, *Prelude*, flatware, 1961, stainless steel, courtesy Mappin & Webb.

pressure.⁶³ [Fig 18] Clements also produced five flatware designs that were put into production as part of his consultancy for Mappin and Webb; these were made in various materials, including stainless steel [Fig 19] They were made at a time when British manufacturers were trying to compete with Scandinavian and German imports when stainless steel flatware was relatively new; Clements' *Prelude* avoided the criticisms levelled by J. Beresford-Evans and Bruce Archer of a Mellor and Welch design for Walker & Hall (the 'Spring' range) and J. & J. Wiggin (the 'Camden' range) of 1958 where the spoons for different purposes were held to lack differentiation, and where the tines made cleaning difficult; all used the newly popular design for knife blades, angled to bring more of the blade in contact with food, but Clements' design in its slimness and elegance came closer to some Continental designs,⁶⁴ though his sharp point to handle-ends was rather ill-advised.

Clements' external activities involved the School in various ways. Clements' familiarity with many businesses facilitated factory visits, though as Tony Evans - in 1955 a

⁶³ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], p.58.

⁶⁴ J. Beresford-Evans and Bruce Archer, 'Design Analysis 8 : stainless steel cutlery and flatware', *Design*, no. 114, June 1958, pp.39-44.

student on the City and Guilds for Silversmithing and Design course - recently observed, some were obligingly organized following specific student requests.⁶⁵ Clements' experiences were built into his teaching, and involved more emphasis on a wide range of materials than was then commonly the case in such schools.⁶⁶ There was sometimes resentment by colleagues with Clements' external activities⁶⁷ and when staff in the school were involved as makers, things could be uncomfortable: Stephen Fisher, asked to forge a silver paper knife, received three drawings of different angles, but found that the dimensions on each did not match up.⁶⁸ However, the Open University (OU) Mace of 1970-2 [Fig 20] was a triumph of collaboration, involving contributions by Phil Moody, David Evans, Sid Perkins and Hamish Bowie, working with Imperial Metal Industries, who commissioned the mace, produced the titanium and contributed their expertise to cast the titanium which was carried out in an inert atmosphere, as the metal is highly reactive to oxygen. Titanium is light, which made such a large sculptural piece, with its axe-like head - which harked back to the mace's medieval origins and was not entirely well-received - practicable.⁶⁹ The metal became attractive to decorative artists — and Birmingham was pioneering in the 1960s -- since it was light and new, only having become commercially available since the 1950s, and could be variously colored, here by first etching the chosen areas with various acids, including the bright blue and gold of the OU badge, and then by anodizing with varying depths of protective oxide layers by electrolysis, each layer creating the interference of light which alters the colors. Some of the anodizing was by IMI and some by Bowie.⁷⁰



Fig 20, Eric Clements, makers Imperial Metal Industries and staff at the School of Silversmithing and Jewellery, Birmingham Polytechnic, Open University mace, 1970-2, titanium, photograph Lynne Bartlett.

Before the OU commission, Clements had moved, in 1964, from the School of Silversmithing and Jewellery, to become the Head of the School of Industrial Design, at the same college.⁷¹ This he regarded as a natural consequence of his development as a designer,⁷² but his understanding of industrial design and education had been enhanced by winning a Ford Foundation Scholarship in 1958 that led to eleven weeks in the USA where he visited styling studios of Ford and General Motors, and the industrial design course at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn.⁷³ Clements' teaching at his new school included substantial collaboration with industry.⁷⁴ His outside design activity

⁶⁵ Email from Tony Evans, 26.5.2020.

⁶⁶ Whiles 'Eric Clements', p. 23.

⁶⁷ Harrod, interview (7).

⁶⁸ Email from Stephen Fisher, 27.5.2020.

⁶⁹ Email from Terry Hunt, 18.8.2020.

⁷⁰ Emails from Hamish Bowie, 29.06.2020, 14.08.2020, 16.8.2020.

⁷¹ Whiles, 'Eric Clements', p. 23.

⁷² Harrod, interview (8).

⁷³ Harrod, interview (7).

⁷⁴ Harrod, interview (8).

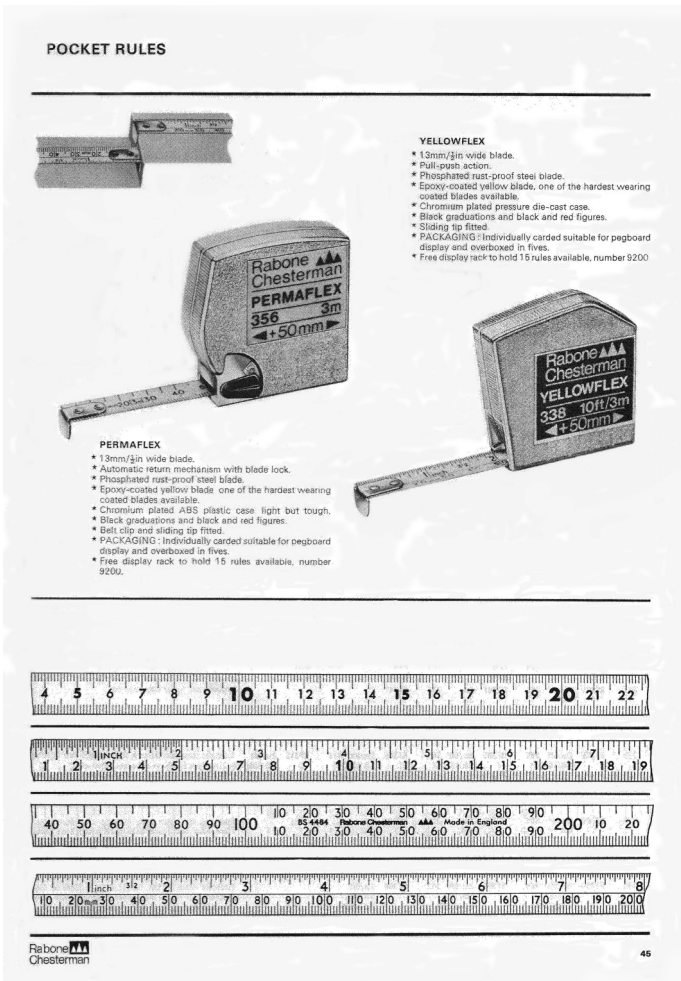


Fig 21 Eric Clements, designer, Pocket Rules, 1974, Rabone Chesterman Ltd., Catalogue, 1972, courtesy Ken Hawley Collection Trust, Sheffield.

remained strong; he was well-known as a designer of ceremonial pieces, such as the Badges of Office for the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress of Swansea Borough Council in 1969, and contract production, such as table wares for Cunard's Queen Elizabeth II, in 1966, as a continuation of his consultancy with Mappin and Webb, by now part of British Silverware. His range became wider, involving Rabone Chesterman Ltd, for whom he designed spirit levels, and pocket rules [Fig 21] and in 1972 marine fittings, including bollards and rigging screws for F. Mountford Ltd.⁷⁵

Somewhat at odds with management in Birmingham, Clements left and became simultaneously the Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design and Assistant Director of Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1973.⁷⁶ Wolverhampton became recognized as a leading center in the introduction of modularity, and had some highly regarded courses, especially glass, following a merger with Stourbridge College of Art.⁷⁷ As Dean, Clements was regarded as efficient, fair and hard-working,⁷⁸ but it was a challenging job: money was short, a colleague, Roger Newport recalls Clements painting markings in the car-park one summer vacation, after funds were refused;⁷⁹ staff – student ratios were rising, and art and design was regarded as what Clements called a 'Cinderella' subject area. It was not a happy time and he retired early in 1985.⁸⁰

Clements' expertise led to various external activities, apart from designing. He was a moderator for courses validated by the Business and Technical Education Council. He became involved with the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), visiting other academic institutions to validate courses and offer constructive criticism. His involvement extended to the role of External Examiner for many courses validated by the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, and later the CNAA. Much of this activity was not unusual for senior academics in Polytechnics, but as Gerald Whiles has suggested, it

⁷⁵ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland], pp.105-6.

⁷⁶ Email from Roger Newport, 7.4.2020.

⁷⁷ Conversation with former colleague David Knight, 22.6.2020.

⁷⁸ Conversation with former colleague John Hopgood, 22.6.2020.

⁷⁹ Email from Roger Newport, 7.4.2020.

⁸⁰ Harrod interview (9).

was exceptional for anyone to be appointed as External Examiner to the majority of the jewelry and silversmithing courses in the UK and for some courses on more than one occasion.⁸¹ Clemence was meticulous in this role as Rod Kelly recalls with his vivat with Clements, returning to what was now Birmingham Polytechnic in 1979:

The interview I had with him was definitely not a formality. He had quite a presence. It was not long before he made me feel very comfortable and we discussed my work in detail with Eric asking lots of difficult questions. I must have made a good impression. I gained a 1st Class Hons [degree] with his blessing.⁸²

Following his appointment at Wolverhampton, Clements' design activity virtually stopped, and it was never to return to the level of the 1950s and 1960s. There were a few craft pieces, such as a verge for a local church St Nicholas, King's Norton in 1996 in memory of his first wife, Muriel.⁸³ His last silver commission was The Agincourt Cup in 2005 [Fig 22] made for John Keatley, whose ancestor fought at the Battle of Agincourt. The overall design is based on an ascending rhythm, from the base, with its spiral of England's decisive arrows, past the vital defensive stakes around the cup, with Henry V's arms, to the man-at-arms at the summit.⁸⁴ The whole is based on a vertical Gothic rhythm to be found on some medieval cup and covers, such as [Fig 23], which Clements here uses, but more powerfully, to celebrate triumph over France in 1415.

Over time, Clements' importance compared with his peers Benney, Mellor and Welch has diminished somewhat, because their businesses, with their names to the fore, were more conspicuous and long-lasting than Clements' design activity, and more visible than his work in education. The design and businesses of Benney, Mellor and Welch,



Fig 22, Eric Clements, designer, The Agincourt Cup, 2005, silver and gilding, 49 cm, courtesy The Keatley Trust.



Fig. 23 The Lacock Cup, 15th century, silver and gilding, 33cm, courtesy The British Museum

⁸¹ Whiles, 'Eric Clements', p.24.

⁸² Email from Rod Kelly, 12.5 2020.

⁸³ Ellis (ed.), catalogue text [by Holland,] pp.105-6.

⁸⁴ Andrew and Styles, p.134.

including their work on silver, has led to their inclusion in some general literature on the history of design, where Clements has been omitted.⁸⁵

Yet Clements' achievements were substantial. Some national recognition came with a series of interviews by Tanya Harrod in the National Life Story Collection in 2000.⁸⁶ There was a major retrospective at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2002, and a linked book *Eric Clements Silver & Design 1950-2000*.⁸⁷ In that book Gerald Whiles, once a student and colleague in the School of Jewellery in Birmingham, wrote that Clements was 'one of the top four or five silversmithing designers of his generation'⁸⁸ and his importance was later recognized in John Andrew and Derek Styles *Designer British Silver...of 2015*.⁸⁹ Less lauded, but important, were his wide-ranging activity as an industrial designer and his long career in education as an innovative teacher who inspired many successful careers and who became an important figure in educational management, consultancy and examining.⁹⁰

Eric Clements, Doctor of Science, Des RCA, FSIA, FRSA, Liveryman of the Goldsmiths' Company, is survived by his second wife Gertrud, and his children Anne and David, as well as grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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⁸⁵ MacCarthy, p.91, lists Benney, Welch and Mellor, but not Clements.. The same applies to Judith Miller, *20th Century Design: The Definitive Illustrated Source-book*, London, 2009, pp.198-9.

⁸⁶ See note 6

⁸⁷ See note 5.

⁸⁸ Whiles, 'Eric Clements', pp.23-4.

⁸⁹ Andrew and Styles, pp.128-135.

⁹⁰ Whiles, 'Eric Clements', pp.23-24

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