

Important English silver at our House of Commons, Ottawa

By Dorothea Burstyn



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The House of Commons has important ceremonial silver in its collection. The oldest is the Esses Collar worn by the Sergeant-of-Arms. It has two groups of 37 S links divided by two middle pendants featuring the Royal crown, shamrock, rose and thistle and the motto “Dieu est mon droit”. The chain takes its name from its s-shaped links; this form of chain has a long tradition going back to the 14th century in England.

The Esses chain in the House of Commons was made in London, in 1859 by William Chapman. (Fig.1 /Fig. 2) The master mark shown is Chapman’s third mark, which he registered at Goldsmiths Hall on November 14, 1859.¹ William Chapman had taken over his father’s business and built up a reputable company specializing in the manufacture of the insignia of orders of knighthood, corporate bodies, presentation swords and boxes. In the 1851 census he is listed as employer of twelve men and four boys. He secured important orders. One example is a jewelled gold and enamel snuff box sold by Sotheby, Geneva. It was made by Chapman in 1865 and given by the Tsar of Russia to Henry F. Swan for his work constructing war vessels.²

Many important pieces perished in the horrible fire of the Parliament Building in 1916, but the Esses Collar was salvaged. However, the old Mace without which the House of Commons cannot convene was lost in the fire. Getting to know about the

¹Email by Eleni Bidi, Goldsmiths Hall, London June 26, 2019, and Kerry Barrow, curator, The House of Commons, same date.

²John Culme, *The Directory of Gold-and Silver-smiths, Jewellers & Allied Trades 1838-1914*, Antique Collectors’ Club, Suffolk, 1987,p.80



Fig. 3

destruction the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London immediately ordered a replacement. Before this replacement could be delivered a temporary Mace was used until March 1917. It was made of painted wood and metal by James Wilson & Company in 1916.

The new Mace was ordered from the prestigious Goldsmiths & Silversmiths Company Ltd of London. (Fig. 3) It is made of sterling silver with mercury gilding. In style it is very similar to the Mace used in the House of Commons at Westminster. The vase-shaped head has four sections – each one featuring a beaver and was originally decorated with the Royal Cypher GR for George V. As Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne the cypher was changed to “ER” also featuring the Royal Crown and the Harp representing Ireland. In 2016 the Mace underwent a thorough restoration. It was cleaned and polished. In over hundred years of use cracks had appeared which were stabilized, this all was accomplished over only five days in the lab of the Library of Parliament. Documentation of the restoration process is available.

When Canada celebrated the Centennial of the Confederation in 1967 gifts from many Commonwealth countries were received. A most glorious silver bowl made by Stuart Devlin (Fig. 4) was sent from the Warden of the Goldsmiths’ Company of London. The bowl measures 56.2 cm in diameter and has the enormous weight of 11 kg (350 ounces), it features two bowl joined together by a pierced pattern of 100 gilt maple leaves. The inner bowl is also silver gilt which contributes to its sumptuous appearance.



Fig. 4

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The outer bowl has a bilingual inscription around its rim.

“Given by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths of London to the Parliament of Canada to Mark the Centennial of Confederation 1967 – Don del la Vénérable corporation des orfèvres de Londres au Parlement du Canada à l’occasion du centenaire de la Confédération 1967”

Since 1967 the bowl has found a place of honor in the Library of the Parliament and the House of Commons Speaker’s Office. It was sent back to London twice, once for a retrospective exhibition of Stuart Devlin’s work at Goldsmiths’ Hall and once more in 2001 to Stuart Devlin’s studio for conservation.