

Andrew Fussell, Canadian Silversmith

By: Joan Fussell



Fig. 1



Sterling chalice, date unknown

One bright morning in May, I received a surprising phone call from a Catholic priest of South Carolina who would celebrate the 40th anniversary of his ordination that very afternoon in Toronto. He wished to invite to the service Andrew Fussell, the silversmith who had made his sterling silver chalice for him in 1959 (see Fig. 1). Since my father was no longer living, I was honored to attend instead and learn of the priest's life and the significance of the chalice to him.

Born in 1904, Andrew Fussell grew up in England, the son of an English musician father and Belgian artist mother. With a young man's aspirations, he immigrated to Canada in 1926 under a land settlement program. The farmer he was assigned to considered him unfit, because he had caught a cold aboard ship, and sent him back to Toronto. With no prospects and very little education, he made his way as a construction labourer.

His artistic talents enjoyed expression in sculpture classes at Central Technical School. Night school eventually paid off when he was

hired as a draftsman for Toronto architects, Darling and Pearson. During the devastating Depression years, there were few opportunities to work and like many people, he was often hungry. Optimism, determination, luck and the generosity of others helped him survive.

A turning point in Fussell's life was learning pewter work under Rudy Renzius at Northern Vocational School. Renzius, a Swedish-born craftsman, influenced many aspiring metal smiths of his day. Apart from this initial training, Fussell was mostly self-taught. He began selling pewter hollowware and jewellery and established his business in 1932. Another turning point was World War II when he was not accepted for military service but continued metal work. For the duration of the war, pewter (Britannia metal) was unavailable to artists. This shortage inspired experimentation with aluminium and other metals. He worked with copper, brass, bronze, pewter, sterling and gold until the end of his career in the mid-1970s.

From early days, Fussell enjoyed teaching metal work and sharing his experience. Many summers, he gladly demonstrated for the Canadian Handicrafts Guild at the Canadian National Exhibition. He taught in his workshop at 109 Bloor Street West in the 1930s and 40s, then at 10 As-

quith Avenue. In the 1960s until the mid-70s when a stroke forced retirement, he taught at Central Technical School in the Art Program and adult evening classes. A few pupils became professional and many eagerly returned year after year to create gifts and objects for themselves. Apart from the necessary income, a benefit of teaching was the opportunity to socialise with pupils and fellow teachers. He met his wife, Margaret Mingay, when she took classes in the 1940s. Fussell, who worked alone, was an enthusiastic participant in the community of craftspeople. He willingly helped fellow metal smiths and supplied materials. He was an active member of the Metal Arts Guild, founded in 1946, and served as President.

Among the exhibitions in which he participated were the 1937 Exposition in Paris, France, and annual competitions at the Canadian National Exhibition where he won several prizes. The Metal Arts Guild awarded him the Steele Memorial Trophy in 1959 for an oval bronze bowl (see Fig. 2).

Andrew Fussell excelled at hollowware recognisable by simple, carefully hand-raised forms, even overall planishing, often with restrained chasing and repoussé decoration. Collectors are more likely to come across small pieces, characterised by those techniques, sometimes set with stones or

other decorative elements. These include jewellery, bracelets, trillium or maple leaf brooches with earrings, small bowls, and coffee spoons with provincial flower finials. These items were sold by The Guild Shop in Toronto and other craft outlets in Canada. Larger works were generally commissioned by individuals or institutions. Chalice, crosses, candlesticks, collection plates, fonts and vases remain in use in Canadian churches. He accepted commissions from architects and designers without necessarily executing his own designs.

In 1943, the Department of Trade and Commerce registered the trademark "*Fussell*" and issued the National Marks for sterling and gold objects (C with lion's head or crown respectively, shown on the inside front and back covers). Previously, he consistently identified work with an incised signature "*Fussell*", 2-digit date, and often "TORONTO". Later work was usually stamped with the trademark, national mark, "HANDMADE", identification of the metal, "TORONTO", and 4-digit date.

Andrew Fussell's professional legacies are an enduring body of work, the knowledge he passed to others and his infectious inspiration for working with metal.

The record of Andrew Fussell's work is incomplete. His daughter, Joan, is interested in seeing unusual pieces and photographing them. She can be contacted through the Silver Society of Canada.

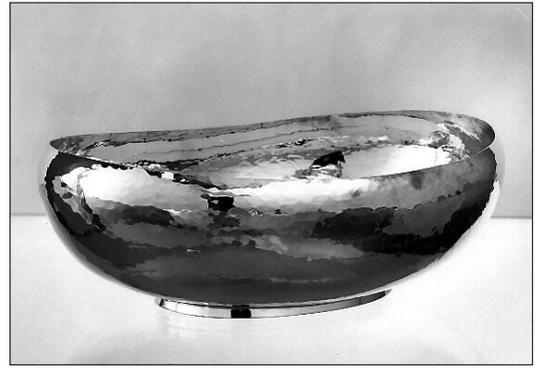


Fig. 2



Hand-raised sterling bowl with chased and repoussé foot, diameter: 25 cm, 1957



Hand-raised fluted copper bowl, diameter: 31 cm, 1941