

Charles Boyton (1885-1958): An Underappreciated Silversmith

By Peter Kaellgren

My paper was inspired by the collection of over 100 examples from the London workshop of Charles Boyton that was bequeathed to the Royal Ontario Museum by J. A. Howson Brocklebank (1901 – 1984). Boyton's workshop was one of the few in Britain during the period between World War I and World War II to specialize almost exclusively in high quality silver articles in the modern style. There would seem to be few examples of his work in public collections in the UK. Only a routine Victorian era King's Pattern table spoon and fork from the Boyton family firm is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

In 1925, The Goldsmiths' Company demonstrated their interest and support for fine quality modern design and craftsmanship in British silver by commencing to collect contemporary examples. Today, their exceptional collection numbers some 3,718 objects. "These include a great variety of types, ranging from jewelry to vessels, cutlery, coins, medals and decorative pieces."¹ A goblet designed and made by Charles Boyton was acquired by the Goldsmiths in 1931. (Fig. 1) The goblet is struck with the Charles Boyton and Son Ltd. mark indicating it was made before the silversmith established his own separate studio. (Fig. 2)

I commend J. A. Howson Brocklebank and his father for their efforts to import and sell modern silver by Charles Boyton in post-World War II Canada. In the last decade of his life, "Brock" as he liked to be called was a committed and generous supporter of the Royal Ontario Museum. His main interest became glass paperweights. He bequeathed a significant collection of 130 late 20th-century glass paperweights along with an endowment to support further acquisitions. My colleague Brian Musselwhite, Assistant Curator in the European Department, was instrumental in processing all of Brock's bequests and in successfully applying for his Boyton silver to be certified as Cultural Property. All the artifacts with accession numbers beginning in 984.222. were donated by the J. A. Howson Brocklebank Estate to the Royal Ontario Museum and certified by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. (Figures 10, 11, 13-18, 20 and 21).

Before Brock's death, neither Brian nor I knew about the pending bequest of Boyton silver from his Estate. I was busy researching my doctoral dissertation in 1984 when the bequest came in. I also had my regular ROM duties including leading a World Civilization Tour to Spain and Portugal. The real importance of this collection of Boyton silver only dawned on me over the last couple of years.



Fig.1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1 Goblet, silver. English, London hallmarks for 1931, mark of Charles Boyton and Sons Ltd. Designed and made by Charles Boyton III. In the collection of Goldsmiths' Hall. Figures 1 and 2 reproduced courtesy The Goldsmiths' Company, 23 cm high.

Fig. 2 Mark of Charles Boyton and Sons Ltd. as struck on the goblet in Fig. 1. Record No. 770

1 Information on the collection of contemporary silver at Goldsmiths' Hall was kindly provided by Tanya Szrajber from the "Collections Data Base for objects made from 1925 to 2022." Email from Tanya Szrajber to the author as requested by Dora Thornton, Curator at Goldsmiths' Hall, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2022, 12:31 pm



Fig. 3 London hallmarks for 1847-48 and the mark of Charles Boyton II struck on the back of the upper handle of a teaspoon.



Fig. 4 Silver teaspoon with Charles Boyton II mark as shown in Fig. 3. Engraved family crest with the initial H. L. 14 cm (5 ½ in.) Private Collection. Photography for 3 and 4 courtesy Gwen Adams.

Information on the collection of Boyton silver in the Royal Ontario Museum (commonly referred to as the ROM) is presented as follows: a brief history of the family firm; a description of the pieces in the collection which would appear to represent a significant selection of his post-1930 models; a reconstruction of the possible circumstances under which Charles Boyton's silver came to be sold in Canada; and a discussion of how one might classify his work.

Charles Boyton: A Family Firm

Charles Boyton I (Charles Edward Boyton (1799-1860), the son of George Boyton of Braintree in the County of Essex was apprenticed on 4 November, 1807 to William Seaman, spoonmaker, of Hulls (?) St. Luke's, London, silversmith.² Boyton registered his first mark at Goldsmiths' Hall in 1825 as a spoon maker and was free in 1827. The mark was a simple uppercase CB in a rectangle. This remained the mark of the company throughout the 1800s, sometimes with a period between the letters. (Fig. 3) Charles opened his first workshop at 12 Europa Place, London. In 1830, he moved to Wellington Street, St. Luke's. Further marks were entered at Goldsmiths' Hall in 1830, 1833, 1834 and 1838. The typical mark appears on this this teaspoon with London hallmarks for 1847-48. (Fig. 4) Around 1849, Charles Boyton II (d.1899), son of the founder, re-located the workshop to Northampton Square, Clerkenwell where it remained until 1904. Charles Holman Boyton (d. 1904) assisted in the management.

In 1894, the name was changed to Charles Boyton & Son and later became Charles Boyton & Son Ltd., 1919-1933. In the last period, Charles Boyton III, the son of Charles Holman Boyton, acted as governing director. Charles Boyton & Son operated as a wholesale manufacturer of silver and electroplate in traditional Georgian and Victorian forms and styles. They also wholesaled and distributed the products of other silver manufacturers.³

The English silver scholar John Culme notes that Charles Boyton & Son was "listed as silver spoon and presentation plate and wholesale manufacturing silversmiths (1895), manufacturing silversmiths and manufacturers of sterilizing appliances and surgical instrument cases (1914), also manufacturers of metal goods in aluminium [sic], brass copper etc. (1916), also aeroplane [sic] propeller makers (1918)."⁴

² Arthur Grimwade, *London Goldsmiths 1697-1837: Their Marks and Lives*. Third Revised and Enlarged Edition. London: Faber and Faber, 1990, page 446.

³ A four-piece silver tea service bearing the mark of Charles Boyton & Son provides some idea of the wide range of silver that the firm wholesaled and retailed. It was made in India in the 1890s and bears the marks of Charles Boyton & Son, London, 1896, as well as Walker and Hall, Sheffield, 1898 (Accession no. 2008.93.1.1-1.5, ROM European Department). Oddly enough it was a wedding gift to Sigmund Samuel, the founder of the ROM Canadiana Department, and his wife c. 1900.

⁴ John Culme, *The Directory of Gold & Silversmiths Jewellers & Allied Trades 1838-1914 from the London Assay Office Registers*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Antique Collectors' Club Limited, 1987, Vol. 1, "The Biographies," page 55.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 5 Pair of Candlesticks, silver. London, 1930, mark of Charles Boyton & Sons Ltd. with Boyton's engraved signature. H. 16.2 cm. Waddington's, Toronto sale, Dec. 14, 2011, Lot 330. Reproduced courtesy Waddington's, Toronto, Canada.

Fig. 6 Small Potpourri Container, silver with an amber cabochon. London, 1930, mark of Charles Boyton & Sons Ltd. Boyton signature engraved under the base. H. 17 cm. Waddington's, Toronto, Dec. 14, 2011, Lot 331. Reproduced courtesy Waddington's, Toronto, Canada.

During World War I, English silversmiths were pressed into service to make parts for airplanes and other equipment for the troops. Their highly developed metalworking skills could be used to produce essential items in metals other than silver. Until the early 1920s, Charles Boyton & Son had three separate divisions including one in Dalston that executed fine cabinetmaking. Charles III notes this in a letter of 1940.

Like many manufacturers in Britain, it appears that Charles Boyton & Son encountered economic difficulties as a result of the Great Depression. In 1933, a new company was created under the name of Charles Boyton & Son Ltd. It continued to produce the traditional line of products at Wardour Street from 1936 to 1977. Charles Boyton III left the firm in 1934 to open his own business at 114 Marylebone Lane with retail premises at 98 Wigmore Street, London W1. Charles registered a new version of the simple CB mark and combined it with an engraved facsimile of his signature. This was likely to emphasize that the pieces were his original designs and made by hand.

Boyton's production was a continuation of designs he had introduced around 1930. (Fig. 5) These were inspired by the English Arts & Crafts movement and incorporated ideas from the Art Deco or modern style. Pieces from the 1930s include this pair of candlesticks hallmarked 1930 and (Fig. 6) a small conical container with a pierced cover which has been described as a potpourri, though it might also be possibly used as a sugar caster. The finial is set with a small amber cabochon and the hallmark is for 1930.

The diverse collection of Art Nouveau and Art Deco decorative arts donated to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1989 by Bernard and Sylvia Ostry included this lovely footed bowl from the Charles Boyton workshop. (Fig. 7) It is hallmarked 1936 and the handles are mounted cylinders of ivory. This piece very much resembles a "Sweet Dish" or bonbon or candy dish, model no. 222, illustrated in a promotional catalogue published by



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Fig. 7 Footed bowl in the "oak apple" pattern, silver with ivory handles. London, 1936, Charles Boyton. Diameter 23.8 cm. 989.313.42 The Bernard and Sylvia Ostry Collection, certified by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Fig. 8 Coffee Pot, pewter with carved walnut handle and finial. English, Sheffield, James Dixon & Sons, 1935. Originally designed to be made in silver by Charles Boyton III. Private Collection London. H. 19 cm. Photo: © Paul Carter Robinson FCR Gallery London. Reproduced courtesy ACC Art Books.

Fig. Covered Sugar Bowl matching Fig. 8, pewter with carved walnut handle and finial. English, James Dixon & Sons, Sheffield, 1935. Private Collection London. Width 16 cm. Photo: © Paul Carter Robinson FCR Gallery London. Reproduced courtesy ACC Art Books.

Boyton in 1946. The version in the catalogue appears to be a smaller size.

Brian Musselwhite recently discovered a pewter coffee pot designed by Charles Boyton c. 1935 which was produced by the well-known Sheffield manufacturers James Dixon & Sons.⁵ (Fig. 8) The matching pewter sugar bowl also displays the elegantly tapered walnut handles. (Fig. 9) This is one of the few times when English Arts & Crafts pewter does not look awkward and clunky. Oddly enough, a tea service in this pattern made in silver is illustrated in Boyton's 1946 catalogue. It is described as a "TEA AND COFFEE SERVICE AND HOT WATER JUG MADE FOR H.R.H. [THE] RANEE OF NEPAL." The pattern is characterized by a narrow, low-relief band of fruit and leaves which Boyton refers to as the "OAK APPLE PATTERN." This band is an evolution of similar wreaths and garlands used in the Italian Renaissance by the Della Robbia majolica workshop in Florence. Elsa Black who wrote the essay for the 1946 catalogue states that "Examples of his work are in the possession of Royalty in this and other countries." Charles Boyton was definitely aiming to attract clients at the top end of the market, much like his older contemporary Omar Ramsden.

In the period between 1934 and 1939/40, Charles Boyton enjoyed some success selling his silver, though business was slow with the lingering Depression. Following the declaration of war, his production staff were conscripted to work on the war effort. This meant that Charles was forced to close his "Shop & works" (showroom and workshop)⁶ in London and he decided to move his wife and son to Aldburgh in Suffolk. Writing to a friend named Osborne who was associated with The Goldsmiths' Company, he expresses cautious optimism about his future production:

"I have had to move all my Stock & patterns to a pl[ac]e of safety but I hope one day I shall have the chance to once again bring the Silver of which I was so proud back to the public if of course they have any money left for such luxuries."⁷

A later letter of November 26, 1940, also in the files at Goldsmiths' Hall, is addressed to George Ravensworth Hughes who served as Clerk at The Goldsmiths' Company until 1953. Boyton was helping with coal rationing in Aldburgh, and his wife was working with refugee children. He had put his name on the Central Register for war work and asked for Hughes' "advice & guidance" in being selected to do something more significant for the war effort. He pointed out to that "As I had in the last War, three Controlled works of my own making Munitions, Aircraft Components etc.,

⁵ Illustrated in Paul Carter Robinson, *20th Century Pewter Art Nouveau to Modernism* (Antique Collector's Club, 2010), plates 2.132 and 2.133.

⁶ Typewritten letter of October 1st, 1940, from Charles Boyton to Mr. Osborne, written from 19 King Street, Aldburgh, Suffolk. Osborne had some connection to The Goldsmiths' Company. Charles Boyton File, Library, Goldsmiths' Hall.

⁷ *Ibid.*



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 10 Candlestick in the Facet pattern, silver. (model 115) London, 1946, Charles Boyton. H. 16.8 cm. 984.222.1-2 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 11 Sauceboat and Ladle in the Facet pattern, silver. London, 1946, Charles Boyton. Length (sauceboat, model 114) 16 cm. 984.222.8.1-2 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

I feel that this coupled with my business experience should be of value in addition to which I have some considerable knowledge as a draftsman.”⁸

It is not known whether Charles Boyton found a more meaningful way of contributing to the war effort. In 1946, he was able to revive his business following the War. His promotional brochure⁹ notes that Export Enquiries may be made at Charles Boyton Ltd., Hanover House, 73-78 High Holborn, London, W.C. The silver was “Sold retail in London exclusively by: The Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Company, 6 Old Bond Street, W.1.” Royal Copenhagen porcelain was highly regarded at the time. The other prestigious Danish export was Georg Jensen silver. Having Charles Boyton silver displayed and retailed at The Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Company on Old Bond Street would have been an excellent way to connect with a well-off clientele.

Unfortunately, because of the luxury taxes levied in Great Britain following World War II, the shortage of currency and the scarcity of many essential goods and food, Boyton silver did not sell. By 1948, Charles Boyton had closed his workshop and ceased retail activity. So far as can be determined, he never resumed operations.

Silver by Charles Boyton III

In the curatorial files of the European Department at the ROM, there is a poor quality photocopy of a 10-page, illustrated promotional brochure entitled *Hand-Wrought English Silver by Charles Boyton*. “Charles Boyton” is rendered as a hand-written signature, just as it appears on the silver. This booklet was published by Charles Boyton Limited in London, England, likely about 1946-47 as a facsimile of the London hallmarks for that year is reproduced in the text. The illustrations are useful in assessing the work of Charles Boyton III and more particularly the group of examples in the ROM collection because they show the range of pieces and style his workshop produced.

The majority of the pieces are versions of standard types originating in the Victorian period that would have been employed regularly in an English household in the first half of the twentieth century. Many like this candlestick, model no. 115, have a band of raised reeds which Boyton refers to at the “Facet Pattern.” (Fig. 10) His workshop production included tea and coffee services (teapot, coffee pot, hot water jug, sugar bowl, cream jug and tray), toast racks, sugar dredgers, three-piece condiment sets (matching salt and pepper casters and a mustard pot with hinged cover, glass liner and small spoon), sauce boats with ladles (Fig. 11), bowls, napkin rings, sweet trays (i.e., candy dishes), porringers (a traditional English feeding bowl with cover),

⁸ Typewritten letter from Charles Boyton to G. R. Hughes. Esq. Goldsmiths’ Hall, November 26, 1940. Charles Boyton File, Goldsmiths’ Hall Library.

⁹ A photocopy of this brochure is preserved in the Brocklebank file in the European Department, Royal Ontario Museum. A number of the pieces in the ROM collection correspond to those illustrated in this brochure which also includes a photograph of Boyton himself.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Fig. 12 Porringer and Cover, silver. London, 1947, Charles Boyton III designed for presentation to Princess Margaret Rose, Queen Elizabeth II's sister. Width across handles 17.8 cm. 992.213.1.1-.2 Museum Purchase: J. A. H. Brocklebank Fund. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

13 Coffee Pot, Covered Sugar Bowl, Cream Jug and Tray in the Facet pattern, silver. London 1946 and 1947, Charles Boyton. H. (coffee pot) 26.5 cm. 984.222.4.2-.6 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

child's pap bowl (for serving soft/liquified baby foods like pablum), child's can (i.e., mug), tankards, table candlesticks, a face powder bowl with cover, hair and clothes brushes, ash trays, cigarette stands, cigarette boxes, and cigar boxes. The last page illustrates six examples of "Sport Trophies, Examples of fine, hand made trophies, designed and executed by Charles Boyton in solid silver and bronze. Designs and estimates submitted for any type of sporting trophy." A single illustration is devoted to a "PORRINGER AND COVER, No. 199/ Original in the possession of H.R.H. Princess Margaret Rose."

It shows a matching spoon of old English form with a rounded bowl and a trefoil handle finial with low-relief berry clusters. Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue, Director of the Royal Collection, was able to verify that Princess Margaret did indeed own a porringer like this one.¹⁰(Fig. 12)

Silver usage has changed greatly over the years. Most readers in the twenty-first century, especially if they are not British, may not be familiar with these standard forms. (Fig. 13) By the 1800s, the standard English tea service could include a low, bulbous teapot, a tall pot that could be used for additional hot water for brewing more tea or possibly coffee, a sugar bowl with or without cover, maybe tongs or a spoon for serving the sugar, a cream jug, and a tray.

Individual examples of these serving pieces might be acquired over a period of time. Sometimes they did not completely match. The coffee service in the ROM is in the Facet Pattern, silver with bakelite handles. Bakelite is a type of hard plastic (phenolformaldehyde resin) invented in 1909. It is usually brown or black, that was commonly used for handles in the period c. 1925-1955. The milk jug has a pair or handles at opposite sides, a form that was popular with both silver and pewter makers in the 1930s.

The three-piece condiment set, sometimes referred to as a "breakfast set" especially in the case of electroplate

¹⁰ "I have checked with Kensington Palace and Princess Margaret confirms that it is a replica of the bowl presented to her." Letter of April 1, 1993, from Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue, Director of the Royal Collection, Stable Yard House, St. James's Palace, London to Dr. Peter Kaellgren. Preserved in the hard copy curatorial file for 992.213.1-.2 in the European Department, ROM

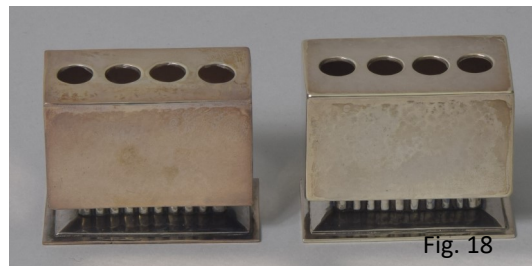
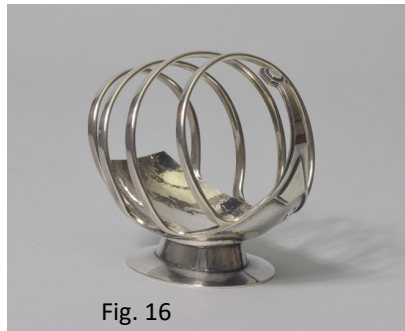
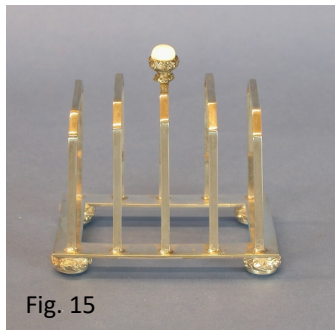


Fig. 14 Pepper and Salt Casters, silver. (Square pattern, model 136) London, 1946, Charles Boyton. H. 8.5 cm. 984.222.18.1-.2 and .3-.4 Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 15 Toast Rack in the "oak apple" pattern, silver with an ivory cabochon. London, 1948, Charles Boyton. Width 8.5 cm. 984.222.9 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 16 Toast Rack in the Facet pattern, silver. London, 1946, Charles Boyton. Length 10 cm. 984.222.10.1 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 17 Child's Can and Child's Pap Boat, silver with ivory disks. London, 1947, Charles Boyton. H. (can) 7.8 cm. Width (pap boat) 14.5 cm. 984.222.27.2 and .28.1 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 18 Two Cigarette Stands in the Facet pattern, silver. (model 110) London, 1946 and 1947, Charles Boyton. Length 5.1 cm. 984.222.5.1 and .2 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

versions made in Edwardian times, was an essential component of the breakfast and dining table. It became popular in the late 1800s when open salt cellars were going out of fashion because salt now was chemically treated so that it would flow from a caster or shaker even if the weather was damp. Again, from the ROM collection, this pepper caster and salt caster with a single hole are part of a square columnar set, model no. 136 in the catalogue. (Fig. 14) The ROM does not have the mustard pot which follows the form of a cube. From the early 1800s, silver or silverplate toast racks were commonly used at breakfast and on serving trays taken to the bedroom. (Figures 15 and 16)

The "child's can" and the "child's pap boat", models 203 and 202, were traditional gifts usually presented to a newborn by grandparents or godparents. (Fig. 17) This might be around the time of the christening. Silver was preferred but most people could afford only electroplate. The large number of post-war weddings and increased numbers of children in the late 1940s suggested that these would be items in demand.

Today's reader may take offense at the large number of items designed for cigarettes. Up to the 1960s, it was considered perfectly acceptable, if not desirable and fashionable, to smoke during a meal, even in the best restaurants. Some physicians suggested that smoking was good for health and digestion. It was only proper for the host and hostess to provide cigarettes and ash trays. Fresh cigarettes might be presented in small boxes, urn vases, or stands. (Fig. 18) It helped if these and the ash trays matched the silver or the ceramic dinner service. Wedgwood and other English potteries introduced a range of boxes and urns for fresh cigarettes and ash trays to match popular dinnerware patterns for the American market in the 1950s and 60s.

Ivory

A number of the models from the Boyton workshop incorporate small pieces of ivory into the overall form. (Figures 7 and 15) Up to the 1930s, carved ivory handles were sometimes used for tea pots and other silver vessels that were designed to hold hot liquids. Silver is ideal for conducting heat, but ivory, being an organic material, is a poor conductor and can serve as insulation. That provides protection for the person serving a hot beverage like tea or coffee. It was common for manufacturers to incorporate small sections of ivory dowels into the handles of silver and silverplate tea and coffee pots to keep the heat from radiating to where the handle was gripped. In the case of the ivory disks in the handles of Charles Boyton's child's can and pap boat, they appear to be more decorative than functional. (Fig. 17)

During the 1920s and 1930s, elephant ivory was not as costly as silver or bronze. It was a major export from the Belgian Congo. Carved ivory hands, faces and other details figured prominently in the small, decorative bronze Art Deco figures which remained popular up to World War II. The London dealer, Brian Catley, a leading expert on these figures, provides a useful perspective on its value in the period:

"The combination of ivory and bronze, with ivory representing exposed flesh and bronze clothing, had been well known for generations, but it was not until the 1920s and 1930s—the art deco period—that this combination was exploited to the full, mainly due to the surplus of ivory in the Belgian Congo which was available at very low cost and was considerably cheaper than bronze. The more ivory in a piece, the lower the cost – a fact which influenced some artists to produce work entirely of ivory which could be sold at less than £ 5."¹¹

After 1930, taste shifted away from the bright colors and dramatic patterns of the early Art Deco period. A smart aesthetic of simpler, classic lines and shiny silver combined with pure white and/or black was a preferred look. The desired shiny silver and stark white look could be created in silver by adding accents of ivory as handles or as part of the stem on a footed dish. This is what Charles Boyton did with some of his silver. Wood or Bakelite was also used for handles, especially on tea sets.

Today, the contrast between the shiny silver and the stark, opaque white of the ivory may not be as easy to perceive. In most cases, the ivory, being an organic material, has yellowed or even cracked and stained. I was once told by a wealthy lady who began buying Jensen silver in the 1930s that the Jensen store in New York at that time was willing to provide replacement ivory handles for its tea sets, should the ivory become discolored or cracked.¹²

Nowadays, customs officials and the general public become inflamed by the mere mention of ivory because elephant killing and poaching for ivory has become a serious problem in Africa and India. In the 1930s, ivory was treated with a certain degree of respect. Any of the minor chips and dust from turning or carving pieces was saved and converted into charcoal. This charcoal was used in making ivory black which was considered to be an ideal pigment for painting. It was among the water color and oil paint pigments that were available from Winsor and Newton, Ltd., Manufacturing Artists' Colourmen in London.¹³ Winsor & Newton were major suppliers internationally to all the best artists and art students.

¹¹ Brian Catley, *Art Deco and Other Figures*. Second Edition. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 2003, "Introduction," page 10.

¹²This was told to me by the late Norah Vaughan of Toronto about 1983. She bequeathed representative examples from her Jensen silver to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1993. These are displayed in the south wing of the Samuel European Galleries at the Royal Ontario Museum. From the 1920s to the 1950s, her husband, O. D. Vaughan, was in charge of Eaton's College Street, one of the most fashionable stores in downtown Toronto. Norah Vaughan had access to all the latest fashion and the best design. Her favorite colour was white which predominated in the interiors of the Vaughan home on Beaumont Avenue in Rosedale.

¹³See Winsor & Newton, Ltd., *Specimen Tints of Artist's Colours cojoined with Tables of Permanence* [promotional brochure: price 2 shillings] London: Winsor & Newton, c. 1925: Plate 1, "Specimen Tints of Artists' Water Colours," page 6, Class 1, Division 1, third row down, far left, "Ivory Black" and also Plate 7, "Specimen Tints of Artists' Oil Colours," Class 1, Division 1, "Ivory Black", lower right corner.

Retailing Imported Boyton Silver

Former European Assistant Curator Brian Musselwhite and I recall that J. A. Howson Brocklebank told us that he and his father had been involved with the war effort in England during World War II. Brock did not provide any information. Unfortunately, I have not been able to discover specific evidence of what exactly the two Canadians, William Edgar Brocklebank (1877-1954) and his son Brock, were actually doing. Possibly it was related to the production of airplanes. Another Canadian, William Maxwell ("Max") Aitken (1879-1964), 1st Baron Beaverbrook, the press baron, was put in charge of this production by Winston Churchill and ultimately in the period 1940 to April, 1941, increased the supply of fighter planes significantly. As fellow Canadians, born in Ontario, perhaps the Brocklebanks connected with Lord Beaverbrook. Many members of the Goldsmiths' Company and their skilled workmen were conscripted to help to produce parts of these airplanes. It is possible that may be how the two Brocklebanks met Charles Boyton III.

It would appear that W. E. and J. A. H. Brocklebank acquired the bulk of Charles Boyton's stock around 1948 and imported it into Canada. It seems probable that they purchased this silver as a way of taking their wartime earnings out of the UK. Post-War currency restrictions did not allow anyone to carry large sums of money out of the UK. To get around this, many people purchased antiques, art or other items and brought their money out in the form of goods. Dr. Glen of Montreal, who was a very prominent figure in the pharmaceutical industry in both England and Canada, brought his money to Montreal in the form of fine antique furniture, paintings and antique ceramics.

The Jewellery & Silverware Council, an organization that promoted these industries in Britain produced a "Special Canada Number" in December 1949. Imports to Canada from the UK were allowed in with lower Customs Duty or a British Preferred Tariff. In the case of "Articles consisting wholly or in part of sterling or other silverware, . . .", this was 17 ½ %.¹⁴ The normal customs duty might be as high as 50% or more on finished silver goods imported into Canada.

Following World War II, retailing a luxury product like imported English sterling silver in the most modern style in Canada would have posed a number of challenges. One of them was finding the best location to set up a business. Both Brian Musselwhite and I recalled that Brock had once said that he had owned a house on Bloor Street West near the ROM.

Evidence of a shop operated by the Brocklebanks appears late in 1948 in *The Toronto Star*. In the era before internet advertising and selling sites, Star Classified Advertisements were one of the most effective ways of selling surplus and used goods in Toronto. *The Star* was a newspaper for the masses while *The Globe and Mail* was considered more of a society newspaper on a level with *The Times* in London. On Tuesday, October 26, 1948, in *The Toronto Star*, classified advertising, there is an interesting entry in Category 46, "Articles for Sale," a "Sofa 6ft walnut \$125: [and a] walnut oval table 33 x 46 [inches] \$35: both English made. Perfect condition Brocklebanks 103 Bloor W. [tel.] KI 9541".¹⁵ These may have been furnishings that the Brocklebanks brought from England which did not fit into their premises at 103 Bloor Street West. The fact that they were English made would have had great appeal to many prospective buyers in Toronto at the time. The advertisement was published again on Wednesday and Saturday.

To determine the ownership of 103 Bloor Street West, I did some research in the Toronto City Archives. The Assessment Rolls which officially record the value of properties and list the owners or occupants/ tenants are

¹⁴Jewellery & Silverware Council, *Bulletin No. 3: Special Canada Number*, December, 1949, page 6 for silver duty. Located at 160 Cheapside, London, E.C. 2, the Jewellery and Silverware Council carefully investigated the potential to export silver, other metalwork and jewellery to Canada following World War II. This included having women from the Canadian diplomatic services in London review potential products and earlier on quickly organizing "A Jewellery Display at Toronto" as described in their *Bulletin No. 1*. Sophia Tobin, Deputy Librarian, The Goldsmiths' Company, kindly provided me with copies of relevant pages from both of these *Bulletins*.

¹⁵ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Toronto Star, Tues. Oct. 26, 1948, page 31; Wed. Oct. 27, 1948, p. 37; and Sat. Oct. 30, 1948, p. 35.



Fig. 19 Five piece Tea and Coffee Service in the Facet pattern, silver, (model 10) London, 1946 and 1947, Charles Boyton. L. (tray) 45.3 cm. 3976 grams (gross). Decorative Arts and Design Sale, July 15, 2021, Lot 31. Reproduced courtesy Waddington's, Toronto, Canada.

a useful source of information. Basic facts are recorded in simple and easily understood terms. 103 Bloor Street West was located in what was then Division 7, Ward 3, in 1949.¹⁶ In the information for the address, we find the J. A. Howson Brocklebank is recorded as the owner, a “merchant”, “P [Protestant for the purposes of school taxes]” and as selling “Silver & Antiques.” Mildred Brocklebank is listed as his wife. At that time, this section of Bloor Street was made up of late Victorian and Edwardian houses, many with fronts renovated to create shops at sidewalk level.¹⁷ The property occupied a standard Toronto house lot of the c. 1900 period, 15’ 6” wide x 95’ 8” deep. The rate of taxation was \$500.00 on a property valued at \$7,750.00 for the land and \$4,400.00 for the building(s) resulting in a total value of \$12,150.00.

The weeks preceding Christmas usually offer the best opportunities for retail sales. On

December 16, 1948, an advertisement for “Brocklebank’s The Little Shop with the Big Variety” appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, page 16. The advertisement indicates that the shop had just opened ten days earlier and that “Shipments [are] still arriving . . .” The merchandise included “BOYTON’S STERLING SILVER” in all of the forms noted earlier, “ENGLISH BONE CHINA,” “ENGLISH LEATHER GOODS” such as handbags and related articles, and “SEVERAL FRESH ARRIVALS of Antique China, Glass and Silver . . .” The shop was “OPEN EVENINGS” which was not always the case with Toronto retail outlets at the time.

Might’s Toronto City Directory, An Alphabetical List of Names (1949 and 1950) is a useful and generally reliable source of exact information. Neither of the Brocklebanks were listed in the 1948 *Directory*. This suggests that their business was established late in 1948. Both are listed individually along with their business on page 207 of the 1949 *Directory*.¹⁸ Businesses were usually placed at the end of the alphabetical list of people with the same surname. The last entry in the column is “Brocklebank’s (E W & J A H Brocklebank) Sterling silver & china 103 Bloor w[est] KI 9541.” It is interesting that the same phone number was listed as J A H Brocklebank’s home phone. This suggests that there were living quarters associated with their store. Imported English bone china was very popular at the time. Retail advertising, homemaking, and lifestyle magazines of the period c. 1900-1960 often promoted fine china and silver or silverplate together, especially as wedding gifts.

¹⁶Assessment Rolls, Ward 3, Division 7, year 1949 for 1950, microfilm roll 1084, page 269, lines 12 to 14. The assessment is dated April 28, 1949.

¹⁷Unfortunately, I was unable to locate any photographs c.1949 of the block of Bloor Street West running from St. Thomas Street to Queen’s Park/ Avenue Road. I had hoped to find a photograph of Brocklebanks at 103 Bloor Street West. The only evidence I could discover for the appearance of this section of Bloor Street dates from late April, 1929. See Photographic Views documenting the houses on “Bloor St West, opposite St. Thomas St., looking west, (Way Dept.) April 29, 1929, Fonds 16, Series 71, item 6756, and “Bloor St, looking west, at St. Thomas 11:12 am (Way Department) April 27, 1929, Fonds 16, Series 71, Item 6774. Both show older houses with store fronts

¹⁸*Might’s 1949 Toronto City Directory: An Alphabetical List of Names*, page 207, column 1, top, “[Brocklebank] J A H (Brocklebank’s) h[ome] 103 Bloor W [Telephone] KI 9541”; near bottom, “[Brocklebank] Edgar W (Brocklebanks) h[ome] 14 Mountview av [Tel.] LY 0603.”



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

20 Sugar Dredger (caster) in the Facet pattern, silver. London, 1946, Charles Boyton. H. 14 cm. 984.222.3.1-.2 Brocklebank Bequest. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

Fig. 21 Other Boyton Patterns. Cream Jug, Sugar Dredger, open Sugar Bowl and Spoon, silver. London, 1948, 1947, 1947 and 1948, Charles Boyton. H. (sugar dredger) 15.3 cm. 984.222.16, .13.1-.2, .11.1 and .11.3 Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

There were many weddings in the post-World War II era.

Because the weather is usually good and it is easier to travel, June was the preferred month for weddings at the time. To take advantage of this market, “Brocklebank’s The Little Shop with the Big Variety,” published an advertisement for Charles Boyton’s “Original Designs in Sterling Silver” on May 19, 1949, in *The Globe & Mail*, page 3. Being in the first section of the newspaper meant that it was in a prime space for advertising. The advertisement also notes that the shop is “(Opp[osite the] University Theatre)” This was a very popular movie theatre in the mid twentieth century, a place where engaged and dating couples might go to enjoy the latest film. Brocklebanks likely retailed this unusually complete tea and coffee service which an Ontario family sold at Waddington’s, Toronto, in 2021. (Fig. 19) Other pieces from the unsold Brocklebanks’ stock that were bequeathed to the Royal Ontario Museum include this sugar caster (Fig. 20) and a cream jug, conical sugar caster and bowl with ladle. (Fig. 21)

In the *Might’s 1950 Toronto City Directory*, page 177, column 3, there are three similar entries to 1949. The listing for the Brocklebank’s store now includes the wording “sterling silver & china importers,” perhaps suggesting that importing and wholesaling might have become a component of the business. Edgar W. Brocklebank, possibly retreating from the business, lists his residence as “Cooksville.” There are no listings for the Brocklebank father and son or their store in *Might’s 1951 Toronto City Directory*. This suggests that their business likely moved or closed down. Evidence is difficult to discover. Edgar W. Brocklebank may have been aging and in poor health: he died in 1954.

Edgar W. Brocklebank and J. A. H. Brocklebank apparently selected the address at 103 Bloor Street West because it was in an attractive retail strip close to the Royal Ontario Museum, the University of Toronto and the Park Plaza Hotel. As is the case today with all the designer stores along that section of Bloor Street West, it was an area that attracted a sophisticated and well-off clientele. Today, determining the exact location of 103 Bloor St. West is difficult, primarily because most of the boutiques on

the street do not have a number. It was located somewhere between Royal de Versailles Jewellers Inc., which gives its address as 101 Bloor St. W., and Dolce & Gabbana, which is listed at 111 Bloor St. W.

The *Toronto Directory 1944 Vol. 8 "Streets Be-La"* on page 68, column 1, lists 103 Bloor St. W as "Topper Hand Laundry Markowitz Irving [proprietor]." Not very promising, but likely affordable premises for the Brocklebanks to purchase. No. 105, next door, was listed as "Old Colony Shop Antiques [,proprietor] Johns [,] Phyllis Mrs." An antiques shop could attract suitable clientele to the neighborhood.

Even more interesting are the listings in the *1946 Toronto Directory*, Vol. 8, "Streets A -KE", page 69, column 1. Both Topper Hand Laundry and Mrs. Phyllis Johns antique shop are listed at the same addresses, but two doors down, at no. 109 Bloor Street West, "Bogo, Jules furs and tlrg [tailoring]" is listed on the first floor with "Fussell H B Andrew art metal worker" occupying the second floor. Metalwork of contemporary design was already being created on Bloor Street West even before Brocklebank's was set up in 1948. Fur coats and other accessories were part of the luxury trade and would have attracted rich and fashionable customers to the area. Jules Bogo and Andrew Fussell are again listed at 109 in the *Toronto Directory 1948*, Vol. 9, "Streets BE - LA", page 70, column 1. In the *Might's 1949 Combined Greater Toronto Street, Householder and Business Guide*, page 59, column 1, the Old Colony Shop Antiques and Andrew Fussell no longer appear at their previous addresses.

Perhaps the most interesting evidence for the significance of the Brocklebanks' choice of the 103 Bloor Street West address comes from the business that took it over in 1951. For some years, there has been a rumor among ROM curators and the local collecting fraternity that Spinks had operated a gallery on Bloor Street in the 1950s. Established in London in 1772, by the twentieth century, Spink & Company was a respected and prestigious dealer in antiquities, coins, medals, drawings, watercolors, paintings, silver, most importantly Chinese antiques, and other selected pieces of art. The *Toronto City Directory 1951*, Part 3, "Streets" page 60, column 1, at 103 Bloor Street West lists "Spink & Son (Can[ada]) Ltd/ art d[ea]lrs/ Ridley Wm. J." The *Toronto City Directory 1952* includes a similar listing. Like J. A. H. Brocklebank, William J. Ridley must have been residing on the premises because the gallery and he both have the same telephone number MI 6389. By April 22, 1952, William J. Ridley was writing to Gerard Brett, then the Director of the Royal Ontario Museum, to inform him that "We feel sure that you will be sorry to hear that we have decided to close our Show Rooms in Toronto, at any rate, for a time, in order to concentrate our objects in London." By this date, more collectors, dealers, and curators were able to travel to London. It was better to have the full range of stock there.

Evidence for Spink's subsidiary Company in Toronto survives in a file at the ROM Registration Department. Like many London dealers, Spink & son Ltd. decided to set up a branch gallery in North America just after World War II. Most of these branch operations were concentrated in New York City. Antiques and art were largely duty-free, especially if they were purchased for display by Canadian museum or gallery. Sales in North America brought much-needed currency to prominent dealers. On January 3, 1949, Spink & Son (Canada) Limited opened its original Toronto gallery in the Trafalgar Building (west corner), 780 Eglinton Avenue West. They sold a number of paintings relating to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham to Dr. Sigmund Samuel for the Canadian Collection at the ROM and several antiquities to the Museum. Spink's move to 103 Bloor St. West, 1951-1952, suggests that the company considered this a more advantageous location where they might attract even more business.

Assessing Charles Boyton's Contribution to 20th-Century British Silver

Today consumers often actively seek out designer products and pay premium prices for them. In Great Britain during the 1920s to 1950s, such an interest in designer decorative arts and products appears to have been selective and reserved largely for those who had money and taste. Certainly, named designers then played an important role in women's fashion and hats. In the course of my research, I discovered a very use-

ful book by George Ravensworth Hughes. His book, which provides insights into silver design in the period, is entitled *The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths as patrons of their craft 1919-1953*. As Assistant Clerk at The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, 1919-1939 and then Clerk, 1939-1953, Hughes was able to closely observe the craft of silversmithing, the industry and the market. His position involved travelling to exhibitions and studying silversmithing in other countries as well as organizing exhibitions at Goldsmiths' Hall.

Hughes fondly recalled visiting the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels in Paris in 1925. This is where the Art Deco style was launched and modern design came to the attention of the public. The British displays were insipid and barely noticed. However, Hughes was impressed by "the solid cubed furniture of Ruhlmann, the square undecorated silver of [Jean] Puiforcat and Tétard Freres; [and] the refined decorative silver of Jensen and the Swedes."¹⁹ In his opinion, the large manufacturers of silver and silverplate tended to concentrate on traditional period forms and decoration as "prototypes for domestic plate made in bulk at the large mass production factories, much of which was, in 1925, poorly designed, thin and cheap."²⁰

Hughes also notes that in the period c. 1920-1950, "It also paid to make copies of antiques, as Americans, in particular, thought of our [i.e., English] silver as a thing of the past and not of the present. What was new from the factories was all too often shoddy, to use an old Birmingham term."²¹ Hughes must have felt strongly about this opinion because he goes on to state that in the period covered by his book, "Antiques ruled the market and all the flood of propaganda was turned on to selling British antique plate or replicas. The retail trade were not interested in craftsmen as such."²² Even more damning is Hughes' assessment that in the 1920s and 30s "Perhaps the most difficult hurdle to get over arose from the trade practice of refusing to recognize by name individual craftsmen, however brilliant."²³

Oddly enough, Hughes' observations are borne out by the 1930s English silver in the Bernard and Sylvia Ostry Collection which was donated to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1989. The majority of the pieces are traditional, "old English" forms. Some of the more contemporary designs are machine-made of thin silver. Only a couple of the pieces stand out in terms of design and craftsmanship.

Charles Boyton had to work within this context. His silver was high quality and hand-wrought which made it costly and accessible only to the wealthy. With some of his designs based on cubes and four-sided forms, one sees a tendency toward the increasingly geometric approach to design appearing in the 1930s. Certain aspects of his designs are possibly not the most graceful or pleasing. Brian Musselwhite and I have always considered the stubby, three-sided spouts on his teapots to be ugly. Boyton did not carry his interest in simple geometric forms to the extremes that one occasionally sees in other English silversmiths of the period. It is challenging to produce a successful design following this inspiration. The hemispherical bowl created by

¹⁹ George Ravensworth Hughes, *The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths as patrons of their crafts 1919-1953*. London: The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, Goldsmiths' Hall, Foster Lane, 1953, page 6. G.R. Hughes seems to be one of the contemporaries best equipped to gather information from the trade and to critically evaluate the British silver industry and modern design. Note the reference to Hughes in Eric Turner's "English Silversmiths During the Wars: An Assessment," published in this volume of the *SSC Journal*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.



Fig. 22

Fig. 22 Bowl, silver. Chester, 1936, S. Blackensee & Son Ltd. Diameter 16.5 cm. 989.313.38 The Bernard and Sylvia Ostry Collection, certified as Cultural Property by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. Courtesy of ROM, Toronto, Canada © ROM

S. Blackensee and Son, with Exeter hallmarks for 1936 from the Ostry Collection at the ROM, is perhaps one of the few classics that succeeds in using this inspiration. (Fig. 22)

Boyton's style may best be assessed by the people who in recent years have shown a serious interest in his silver. Margo Grant Walsh, an American collector in New York City who is a highly successful interior architect with professional interests in architecture and design, assembled one of the most outstanding collections of 20th century silver that demonstrates the evolution of modern style. Her collection is documented in the exhibition catalogue *Collecting by Design: Silver & Metalwork of the Twentieth Century from the Margo Grant Walsh Collection* (Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, 2008). The Walsh Collection includes a Boyton tea service with

London hallmarks for 1947. It was possibly originally retailed through Brocklebanks in Toronto. Dorothea Burstyn informs me that the Walsh Collection was given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Hopefully its presence there will inspire exhibitions of modern 20th century silver.

In Canada, Francophones, particularly Quebecers, are often more receptive to new and innovative modern style. The Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board which certified the Brocklebank Bequest of Boyton silver as "Cultural Property" publishes an annual report of the art, artifacts, and other major donations it has reviewed during the course of the year. One of the few times the CPERB ever requested a photograph of a ROM acquisition for its annual report was in 1986 after the Boyton silver had been certified. The request for a photo and caption came from Daniel Giasson, Assistant Programme Manager, Moveable Cultural Property, a francophone on their staff. There are people who see something unique and innovative in Boyton's designs.

In closing, it may be useful to revisit the porringer and cover that Boyton designed for the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret Rose. (Fig. 12) Undoubtedly this was a creation that Boyton hoped would raise his profile and make his silver popular. One of Boyton's chief competitors for the carriage trade during the 1930s would have been Omar Ramsden, a confirmed Arts & Crafts silversmith, who died late in 1939. I have studied Ramsden's ledgers at Goldsmiths Hall: he was very active with many commissions in the 1930s.

Charles Boyton named this piece for a standard English form dating to the late 1600s. Looking more closely, one discerns that it resembles a traditional Scottish *quaich*, an everyday drinking vessel made of wood that originated in the Middle Ages. In creating the bowl, Boyton was giving in to the Arts & Crafts traditions championed by Ramsden. The decoration, especially the flowers soldered onto the surface of the bowl would have been technically difficult to achieve perfectly. The Scottish *quaich* did not come with a cover. In this case, Boyton has designed one that neatly complies with the form and has a realistic rose as a finial. Some people may feel the naturalistic rose is silly but there was a tendency in the 1940s/ early 1950s to use naturalistic floral motifs. And it does relate to the person to whom this model was dedicated. This bowl

was the only piece that was not included in J. A. H. Brocklebank's bequest. His wife Millie retained it until she died in 1992. The Royal Ontario Museum was only then able to purchase it at auction.

During his lifetime, Charles Boyton had to contend with a public who did not always appreciate his work and were seldom able to afford it. Still, he persisted and went on to create a body of work that is well crafted and worthy of closer study by later generations.

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Dr. Peter Kaellgren served as curator in the European Department at the Royal Ontario Museum from 1972 until the end of 2009. During his career, he worked on ceramics, furniture, design graphics, metalwork, and increasingly focussed on silver from 1984 onwards.

Dr. Kaellgren received a Ph.D. from the University of Delaware in 1987 with a doctoral dissertation on the evolution of the console table in England from the seventeenth century to c. 1800. He has lectured widely and taught courses on the history of European ceramics and glass at the University of Toronto. His articles have appeared in scholarly and popular publications. He is a member of the Silver Society (England) and a founding member of the Silver Society of Canada. Upon his retirement in 2009, he was granted Curator Emeritus by the Royal Ontario Museum. Since 2012, he and his partner, the photographer John Alexander, have become increasingly involved in searching for native orchids in Canada and in documenting them.