

## ***Three Remarkable Tablespoons from Edinburgh (1719/20)***

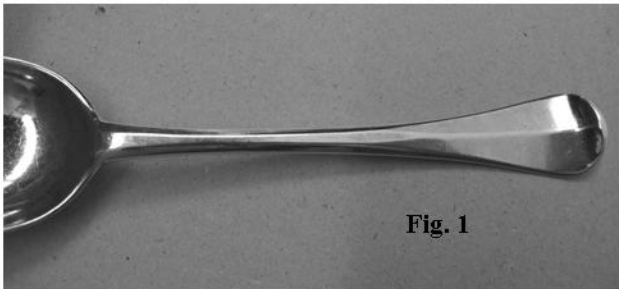
By Kevin Brown

**D**uring the reign of Queen Anne Scotland joined other countries in northwestern Europe in adopting a version of the silver flatware pattern described in England as 'Hanoverian'. However, Scottish Hanoverian flatware sometimes exhibits marked differences from English examples.

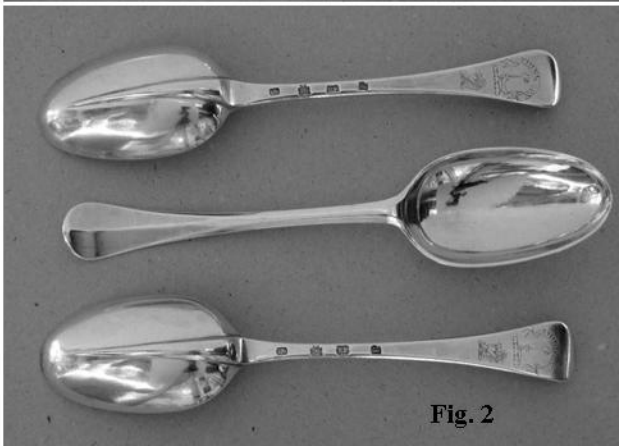
Three tablespoons made by the noted Edinburgh goldsmith James Mitchelson in 1719/20 are instructive (author's

collection). These spoons have two remarkable features. First, there are chamfers running along both sides of the upper stem from the bowl to the handle. These chamfers create a form of geometrical faceting on the handles that prefigures 20<sup>th</sup> century approaches to design (Fig. 1). Ian Finlay commented on the proto-modernism of the 'golden age' of Edinburgh silver, with specific reference to spheroid teapots '.....between 1714 and 1730. [Edinburgh goldsmiths] achieved a perfection of design based on functional considerations which had to be discovered all over again by the Bauhaus and its contemporary movements'.<sup>1</sup>

Other recorded examples also with chamfered stems include six spoons from the Woolley and Wallis 'How of Edinburgh' sale (lot 246) made by the Edinburgh goldsmith Kenneth MacKenzie in 1715/16.<sup>2</sup> A similar tablespoon also by MacKenzie is catalogued in the Colin Ticktum collection and dates to 1714/15.<sup>3</sup> There are no recorded English examples.



**Fig. 1**



**Fig. 2**

Secondly, at three ounces each, these spoons are amazingly heavy. While English and Scottish tablespoons of the George 1 period are often massive, sometimes weighing up to two and a half ounces each, these spoons are in a class of their own (Fig. 2).

For comparably heavy spoons, one must again turn to the 'How of Edinburgh' sale to find a similar example - only one - also Scottish. Lot 247, eight tablespoons made by the Edinburgh goldsmith Lawrence Oliphant in 1738/39 weighed in at twenty-four ounces, or three ounces each.

Finlay wrote of the dining practices of upper class Scots in the early eighteenth century:

[Menus were] 'perhaps more substantial than discriminating. One can understand how Lauder of Fountainhall, when in France, greeted the substitution of frogs' legs for pullets with 'such damned cheats be all the French!' But gross though the feeding may often have been, one must assume certain habits of display if not of elegance at table'.<sup>4</sup>

The extraordinary weight of the Mitchelson tablespoons convey a sense of the 'gross feeding' they must have abetted when they first saw service, in contrast to the politer practices that followed later in the eighteenth century.

Two crests are engraved on these spoons only one of which is contemporary. This crest, blazoned with the motto 'Think On', belongs to the Maclellans of Barclay. The other crest is of the later eighteenth century and demonstrates how subsequent owners also treasured these unusual spoons (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

According to Dr. Rodney R. Dietert, coauthor of *The Scottish Silver Compendium II* and a leading authority on Scottish silver, 'these spoons are absolutely exceptional with a form and weight only seen when Edinburgh's very best makers were working for discerning clients.'<sup>5</sup>

They were bought at the auction of the estate of the late Jane Penrice How held by Woolley and Wallis in October 2007 (lot 252). Mrs. How, of the famous silver-dealing firm How of Edinburgh, had been the partner (in the fullest sense of that word) and later widow to the legendary silver scholar Commander G.E.P. How. Together the two researched and wrote the landmark work, *English and Scottish Silver Spoons and Pre-Elizabethan Hallmarks on English Plate*, which published in three massive folio volumes between 1954 and 1957.



Fig. 4: Deeply struck and remarkably clear hallmarks, IM (James Mitchelson, maker), castle for Edinburgh, EP (Edward Penman, assay master), and letter 'P' for 1719/1720

According to her obituary in the *Times of London* Mrs. How, after the decease of the Commander, 'was universally acknowledged to be the greatest expert on English spoons and one of the very foremost authorities on all other forms of early English and Scottish silver.'<sup>6</sup>

The recent sale and dispersal of her estate marked the end of an era in silver scholarship. It was also one of a rare few and now vanishing opportunities to acquire examples of fine early Scottish silver.

#### Endnotes

1. Ian Finlay, *Scottish Crafts*, George R. Harrap & Co. (1948) p. 73
2. *How of Edinburgh*, Woolley and Wallis sale catalogue, Oct 30, 2007. Lot 247.
3. *The Ticktum Collection*, Colin Ticktum, Norwich, 2001, p 350.
4. Ian Finlay, *Scottish Gold and Silver Work*, Pelican Publishing (1991) p 129.
5. Rodney R. Dietert, personal communication, Nov 26, 2007.
6. *Times of London*, July 31, 2004,

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